Badiou's theory of the event and the politics of trauma recovery

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Abstract
There exists a conceptual parallel between psychological accounts of *psychic trauma* on the one hand, and French philosopher Alain Badiou's notion of *the event* on the other: both are defined by a relation of incommensurability or excessiveness with regard to the pre-existent context or system. Further development of this parallel, i.e., viewing trauma as an event in the Badiouian sense, enables us to pinpoint and clarify a logical fallacy at work in psychological theories of post-traumatic growth. By thinking of trauma recovery as a process of accommodating the pre-existent mental schemata to the "new trauma-related information," these theories risk taking as a given that which must first be constituted by the subject: the "content" (i.e., "information") of the trauma. By emphasizing the necessity of the activity of the subject for the development of a new context that allows the event to be "read," Badiou's theory of the subject offers a way around the aforementioned logical fallacy. In so doing, it re-introduces the essential yet generally neglected political dimension of trauma recovery. This is illustrated through the example of the speak-outs of the 1970s women's liberation movement.

Keywords
act, Badiou, event, Lacan, politics, psychoanalysis, psychological trauma, subjectivization, trauma recovery

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The starting point for this article is the observation of a striking parallel between psychic trauma as conceptualized in psychological theories on the one hand, and French philosopher Alain Badiou's notion of the event on the other: both are characterized by a relation of incommensurability with regard to the pre-existent context in which they emerge (Badiou, 2009a; Brewin & Holmes, 2003). Approaching trauma as an event in the Badiouian sense enables us to identify a point of inconsistency in contemporary psychological theories that approach trauma recovery as a process of either accommodation to or assimilation of the "new trauma-related information." We argue that the content or nature of this trauma-related information is by no means directly accessible for the traumatized person.[1] Rather, it needs to be constituted by him or her, which suggests that trauma recovery requires an additional, logically prior, and decisive step. Our opening question, then, is the following: how can the subject *know* what the trauma conveys?

In order to demonstrate the pertinence of this question and illuminate the mechanism by which the required additional step occurs, we take our cue from both Badiou's (2009a) theory of the subjectivization of the event and Slavoj Žižek's conceptually related elaboration of the Lacanian act. Our analysis results in the claim that the framework of the subjective or ethical act offers new and promising ways to think of the process of trauma recovery. One important characteristic of this type of act is that it is inherently intersubjective: it possesses an intrinsically transgressive quality that interpellates the social other, who cannot but respond to it. This type of act, then, can serve as a means for re-introducing the paramount but all-too-often neglected political dimension in thinking of the recovery from psychological trauma.

The feminist trauma theorist Judith Herman was amongst the first to insist, in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1997), on the necessity of a political movement alongside the practices of studying and treating psychological trauma: "advances in the field occur only when they are supported by a political movement powerful enough to legitimate an alliance between investigators and patients and to counteract the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial" (p. 9). In this sense, *Trauma and Recovery* is itself a political book: it starts from the controversial thesis that mechanisms on the social and individual level work together to deny or repress the truth of trauma, which is rendered literally unspeakable. That is to say, Herman argues that a lot of the problems that trauma sufferers endure are caused by society's unwillingness to confront the atrocities that it silently harbors in itself. She calls upon the traumatized—those who are oppressed and silenced—to break the taboo and to reveal their secrets. In this enterprise, she is driven by her experiences with the "speak outs" of the 1970s women's liberation movement. Herman observed that these public acts of speaking out simultaneously had a healing effect on the victims and brought to public awareness the widespread nature of violence against women. The intriguing thesis put forward in *Trauma and Recovery* is that the process of healing from trauma is essentially embedded in a wider socio-political framework that must always be taken into account.

However, psychological trauma research in general has not picked up the claim that recovery from trauma necessarily entails a political dimension. The eclipse of the politics of trauma recovery is reflected in the ubiquitous use of various treatment programs that focus on the intra-psychic processing of the traumatic experience without taking the

socio-political context into consideration. Indeed, it has been argued in recent years that the dominant Western framework for thinking trauma recovery, epitomized in the psychiatric construct of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), risks robbing the traumatized of their political agency rather than securing a place for it (Craps, 2013). This claim is related to a more general critique targeting the tendency in the disciplines of clinical psychology and psychiatry to render invisible the "true" external/social causes of human suffering. Western notions of psychopathology, heavily influenced by and embedded in a long-standing biomedical tradition, identify the individual as the locus for therapeutic intervention, rather than the social conditions associated with various forms of distress (McKinney, 2007; Pupavac, 2004; Summerfield, 1997). Furthermore, the fact that trauma theory has been strongly influenced by Freudian analysis "means that these theories have, from their very beginning, been framed in psychoanalytic terms and psychoanalysis is a necessarily individualizing practice" (Murray, 2009, p. 4). The basic psychotherapeutic stance, in the wake of Freud's talking cure, is to be wary of patients' attempts to externalize the causes of their suffering, as this enables them to avoid confronting the manner in which they are subjectively implicated in the problems they experience. As such, the individualizing, internalizing, and de-contextualizing trend captured in the often-criticized notions of "medicalization" and "psychologization" forms an antonymic pair with the called-for (re)politicization of various forms of human misery. When applied to PTSD, this tension-generating dichotomy becomes ever more pressing, since this particular type of psychopathology is regarded as primarily externally determined on the one hand (Rosen & Lilienfeld, 2008), while simultaneously treated as an intra-psychic disorder on the other (Young, 1995). Although it is acknowledged that in some cases the socio-political environment causes the subjective distress, "contextual considerations seldom fit into formal trauma-and-recovery paradigms" (Montiel, 2000, p. 96).

The central claim of this article is that the application of Badiou's theory of the event to the problem of trauma recovery offers a novel and productive way to revive the political dimension that is lost through an exclusive focus on the intra-psychic. Thus, we affiliate ourselves with an emerging project that attempts to relate the dimensions of the psychic and the social to one another in contexts of human suffering (Ian & Layton, 2003). The more familiar way of bridging the gap between models of the individual psyche and cultural and political phenomena, of which Žižek is perhaps the best-known contemporary representative, is to apply psychoanalytic understanding to social situations and group experiences (an endeavor already embarked upon by Freud himself in *Moses and Monotheism*, 1939). However, far fewer efforts have been made to interrogate the role of the socio-political in the clinical encounter itself (Samuels, 2003). We contend that Lacanian psychoanalysis, which had a determinative influence on the thought of both Badiou and Žižek, is in a privileged position to aid in overcoming the psychological/political divide as it incessantly emphasizes the inadequacy of the inside-versus-outside dichotomy. From a Lacanian perspective, there is no such thing as a strictly individual psychology: the individual is always, to a greater or lesser degree, *trans*-individual—which amounts to the rejection of a stable distinction between subjectivity and sociality. Both Badiou and Žižek expanded on Lacan's remarks about the absolute reciprocity of the part–whole relationship "between individual microcosm and collective macrocosm" (Johnston, 2009, p. 90), as they developed theoretical systems

that allowed them to think the conditions of possibility for novelty to surface within (political and other) situations. When we scrutinize psychological theories of PTSD through the lens of Badiou's theory of the event, it becomes clear that the former obscures precisely that dimension of trauma recovery which, as we will argue, has the potential to open the door towards political agency. Furthermore, Badiou's philosophical apparatus not only enables us to detect and delineate this elision in much psychological literature on PTSD, but also provides us with the tools to think through how personal healing and societal change sometimes intertwine.

In what follows, we first attempt to reconstruct the general logic pertaining to psychological theories of PTSD and its treatment, limiting our scope for the sake of brevity to those discussed by Chris Brewin and Emily Holmes (2003) in their comprehensive review study. Next, we introduce Badiou's notion of the event and highlight its commonalities with these conceptions of trauma, as both deal with a form of excess. This subsequently allows us to identify a logical fallacy that must be addressed in thinking about trauma recovery. A brief discussion of Badiou's formal theory of the subjectivization of the event will then provide the background for thinking of trauma recovery as a process that requires a specific form of activity beyond a restricted focus on the intra-psychic processing of the trauma. Finally, we return to Herman's discussion of the speak outs in the 1970s and situate it within this theory of evental change.

Trauma as an excess

Brewin and Holmes (2003) provide a systematic overview of psychological theories of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that have been developed over the years, identifying three types of early theories and three influential recent theories. In this section the goal is not to delve into the many subtle differences between these various models, but only to give the reader a general sense of the dominant manner in which psychological trauma is contemporarily understood and how this influences treatment efforts.

In what follows, it is helpful to keep in mind that most contemporary psychological theories of trauma adopt a cognitivist perspective, in which human beings are believed to operate personally and socially on the basis of unconscious models and rules (called cognitive scripts or unconscious schemas) that order raw experience into coherent meaning (Bracken, 2002). Traumatic symptomatology, then, is hypothesized to be indicative of a failure in processing. This can happen for a number of reasons. For example, "the pre-existing schemata may have been inadequate or the information contained in the traumatic event may be overwhelming" (Bracken, 2002, p. 53). Hence, therapeutic approaches typically involve attempts to promote some sort of processing of the traumatic material (Berntsen, Rubin, & Bohni, 2008). Let us illustrate this with a brief characterization of some specific psychological trauma theories.

To begin with, the "stress response theory" (Brewin & Holmes, 2003, p. 346), one of the early theories of PTSD, emphasizes the difficulty of traumatized persons to "match their thoughts and memories of the trauma with the way that they represented meaning before the trauma," or to "assimilate the new trauma information with prior knowledge" (p. 346). Accordingly, therapy requires a "working-through" of the traumatic material, in the sense of adjusting the existent psychological structures so that they can be reconciled

with the new information force-fed by the trauma. Likewise, social-cognitive theories in general posit internal models or "assumptive worlds that, though they may be illusory, help to sustain people in their everyday lives and motivate them to overcome difficulties and plan for the future" (p. 347). In this view, trauma always involves a sudden traversing of these assumptions, which consequently requires that they be "updated" to the imposed new reality. Information-processing theories, the third type of early theories of trauma, focus on the particular way in which the traumatic event is represented in memory and stress the "need for information about the event to be integrated within the wider memory system" (p. 349). The discussed recent theories (the emotional processing theory; Foa & Rothbaum, 1998), the dual representation theory (Brewin, Dalgleish, & Joseph, 1996), and Ehlers and Clark's (2000) cognitive theory also emphasize the importance of "knowledge available prior to the trauma, during the trauma, and after the trauma" (Brewin & Holmes, 2003, p. 352) for explaining PTSD and argue that trauma memories are represented in a fundamentally distinct way in memory. The latter assumption, advocated most prominently by Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (1991), entails that pathological responses (such as vivid and uncontrollable re-experiencing of the traumatic event) arise "when trauma memories become dissociated from the ordinary memory system" and that "recovery involves transforming them into ordinary or narrative memories" (Brewin & Holmes, 2003, p. 356). In addition to this overview, we draw attention to the fact that psychoanalysis defines trauma as that which cannot be reduced to (Imaginary) identification or recuperated to a (Symbolic) system of signification (Eyers, 2012; Verhaeghe, 2001).

Notwithstanding many points of disagreement, this array of psychological theories of PTSD appears to have at least one thing in common: the trauma is viewed as a strange, intrusive element that cannot be assimilated into the pre-existing psychological systems. Whether it be, for example, in the form of a distinct type of traumatic memory that cannot be integrated into the normal, narrative memory, or in the form of a catastrophic appraisal of the event that cannot be matched with the person's former assumptions and knowledge about the world, what characterizes trauma is the absolute incommensurability between (the memory of) a horrible experience and the preceding psychological make-up of the affected person. Despite the varying terminologies and a plethora of minor and major divergences among the multitude of psychological trauma models, the minimal formal structure of a *radical split* is traceable in all of them. In fact, the specificity of each model derives from the manner in which this traumatic split is theorized. Nonetheless, it always involves the supposition of a pre-existent quasi-coherent system and the sudden emergence of an *excessive* element that falls beyond this system, that points to its failure, its incapacity, or its lack. Furthermore, the traumatic split is typically located *intra-individually*: for example, as a contingently produced dissociation between a conscious and an unconscious *psychic system* (as in one of the earliest trauma models that originated at the end of the 19th century, authored by Pierre Janet; Leys, 2000), or as a materialized opposition between different *brain systems* involved in ordinary, narrative memory and pathogenic, traumatic memory (as in contemporary neurobiological approaches).

If traumatic pathology is understood as reflective of an insuperable gap that resists closure and that is inaugurated by the emergence of an excessive element, the question

remains how this split can be theorized in a way that allows us to break free from the self-imposed confines of our tendency to psychologize—an inclination conditioned by long-standing scientific and clinical traditions (Bracken, 2002). It is precisely on this point that a turn towards philosophy offers an illuminative addition to the existent psychological conceptualizations. Badiou's philosophical system is particularly well-suited for this task, as it recurrently emphasizes figures of abrupt discontinuity (Hallward, 2003).

As psychological trauma is typically understood as "the violent intrusion of something radically unexpected" (Žižek, 2008, p. 10) that cannot be integrated within the pre-existing psychological systems, treatment efforts tend to be directed at restoring the disrupted coherence of the psyche (Brewin & Holmes, 2003). In line with the assumptions of these models, this can only occur when "the new trauma-related information" (Joseph & Linley, 2006, p. 1045) is processed in one of two ways: either it must be *assimilated* within existing models of the world, or existing models of the world must be *accommodated* to fit it. Thus, as traumatic pathology is thought to derive from a tension-generating incongruence between the "trauma information" and the "existing models of the world," recovery necessitates the alleviation of this antinomy, which takes place through the modification of either the former element (assimilation) or the latter (accommodation). Whereas assimilation refers to the incorporation of the trauma information into the existent schemas through a re-appraisal of the event, accommodation points to the revision of the mental schemata to fit the new information. Therefore, the latter process is considered to be associated with "psychological growth" as it produces mental schemata that are viewed as more realistic, effective, functional, or adaptive compared to the pre-trauma schemata. The traumatized can thus "move beyond the pre-trauma baseline" in specific areas of their lives, such as relationships with friends and family, views of themselves, and life philosophy—a process referred to as adversarial or post-traumatic growth (Joseph & Linley, 2006, p. 1045; Linley & Joseph, 2004).

However, this line of reasoning is problematic because it elides the difficulty in discerning the actual nature and content of this new trauma-related information, which is by no means directly available to conscious thought or accessible via language or imagination. On the contrary, trauma is by definition something that evades a simple recuperation to any pre-existing meaning. Viewing trauma recovery as a process of adaptation to the trauma-related information skips an essential first step by taking as a given that which must first be constituted by the subject: the "meaning" or "content" of the trauma. Moreover, the notion of growth that is reflected in the words "going beyond the pre-trauma baseline" suggests that the traumatic event opens up a window on the world that provides a more realistic or adaptive outlook on the self and the world—again, in a manner that suggests a straightforward, unmediated understanding of what is seen through this window. Such a reading risks leading to a romanticization of trauma and/or the idea that surviving a trauma offers a route to some sort of privileged, intimate knowledge that is not accessible nor communicable to others (Kansteiner & Weilnböck, 2008). In the next section, we will develop the formal parallel between psychological notions of trauma and the Badiouian event to reassert that what appears in the window of the traumatic event is, by definition, without form and unintelligible, and cannot be understood from within the interpretative frame that preceded the trauma—contrary to what theories

of post-traumatic growth would have us believe. This will allow us to propose that recovery from trauma necessitates a specific form of subjective activity, beyond a focus on intra-psychic mentalization or verbalization.

The Badiouian event as excess

French philosopher Alain Badiou occupies a somewhat peculiar position relative to his contemporaries because his work draws upon both analytical and continental philosophical traditions. He surmises that this has contributed to the fact that his first groundbreaking book, *Being and Event*, was only translated into English 17 years after its original French publication (2005, pp. xi–xiv). The title of this work readily marks a dichotomy that is of interest in the context of our discussion of trauma: ontology or the science of "being-qua-being" versus the event—which is seen as a rupture in being, as that which is "not-being-qua-being" (Badiou, 2005, p. 173). It is through this opposition between being and event, grounded in a newly developed ontology based on Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, that Badiou attempts to address the two major questions that drive his philosophical project. First, how is it possible that radical change immanently arises out of specific "situations," rather than "being procured from some unspecified transcendent other place" (Johnston, 2009, p. 6)? And second, how can we reconcile the notion of a subject with (post-structuralist and constructivist) ontology (Badiou, 2003a, 2009a)? In the end, his philosophical project, which scrutinizes the tension between formalization/structure and disruption/novelty, is an attempt to elaborate a theory of change that allows for the development of an ethic. As we will see, Badiou argues that it is only through the gap between being and event that subjectivity (and concomitantly, ethics) becomes a possibility for human beings.

 The goal of this section is to introduce the dichotomous terms "world" and "event." The manner in which Badiou describes this antinomy is highly reminiscent of the aforementioned rupture between a pre-existent psychological meaning-making system and an irreducible, uncanny traumatic episode. In order to grasp the manner in which Badiou theorizes these concepts, it is necessary to underline the distinction between ontology, as the science of *being-qua-being* (or absolute being "in itself") on the one hand, and the order of presentation, as the "ontic" in a Heideggerian sense (which is concerned with specific "beings"), on the other. Badiou holds that pure being is "inconsistent multiplicity," whilst presentation requires that multiplicity is made consistent (Badiou, 2005, p. 25). Presentation or appearance, then, is always the result of a *count* or an operation, some kind of organizing activity. Importantly, there are infinite ways of counting the inconsistent multiple, and this under-determination gives rise to an inexhaustible multitude of worlds, each of which is co-existent with a specific "transcendental" (the name for such an organizing principle). This is why Badiou declares that "ontology is mathematics," and why he is so interested in set theory: because it is about ways of counting. For Badiou, set theory delineates the very laws of being itself, meaning the laws that pertain to the formation and organization of any group or any multiple—in total indifference to what it is that is being ordered. Ontology, then, is the study of the features shared by any order of presentation whatsoever, "which amounts to the same thing as saying that it studies the conversion of what there is of pure being into something consistent and

structured" (Pluth, 2010, p. 37). However, as ontology studies the laws of composition of *all* organized multiples, it can never become a study of any *particular* situation.

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou (2009a) expands the reach of his philosophy by formalizing the way that being-qua-being (and its supplements: event, subject, and truth) appears or exists within a specific world or situation. While existence is usually thought of as an ontological category, Badiou claims, in line with Lacan (1957), that it is rather a category of *appearing* (not of *being*). This has a major consequence: within this line of thought, it is possible for some things to "exist more" or "less" in a world than others, depending on their place in the world's transcendental. Furthermore, existence is always localized: to exist is to appear in some "there," with respect to other appearances. The transcendental measures the "degrees of identity or difference among a multiple and itself, or between a being-there and other beings" (Badiou, 2009a, p. 102). Each world or situation is thus characterized by a particular "transcendental structure" that indexes or organizes the interrelations between its various elements (as such, a world's transcendental does not have to be considered something separate from its world).

To conclude, the most crucial feature of a situation or world is the fact that it is a system of organization, a way of counting and structuring the pure multiple. Badiou argues that

> for any world, no matter how inhuman, the same principles of organization (the same "logics") adhere: there is a transcendental for that world, there are minimal and maximal degrees of appearing in it, there are relations of dependence, synthesis, and so on that can all be formalized. (Pluth, 2010, p. 75)

More concretely, *world* is the name for a general status quo ante characterized by an equilibrium. It refers not only to that which actually surrounds us, but more importantly to the ensemble of possibilities that are determined in it (what can and cannot appear). Importantly, worlds are characterized by their own internal tensions: within a world, not everything is clear and consonant. Each world has its own authorized ways of managing dissent and domesticating the unknown.

It is tempting to equate this concept to that of the core schemas in cognitive psychology, which seem to have a similar function at the level of the individual psyche (i.e., rendering a confusing chaos consistent). However, as Ed Pluth (2010) reminds us, set theory is

> ultimately indifferent to the way in which human beings perceive and carve up the world conceptually or linguistically. It allows being qua being to be carved up in all sorts of different ways that have nothing to do with what we perceive and how we need to organize our experience. (p. 49)

Against this more or less consistent background which is called a world or a situation, Badiou's notion of the *event* designates the sudden, unexpected, and incomprehensible appearance of something that has no place in it. As Adrian Johnston puts it, the event is "a happening that isn't authorized either by the mathematical-ontological order of 'being qua being' (*l'être en tant qu'être*) or by the logical system of transcendental structures

regulating the play of appearances within circumstances in a given world" (2009, p. 10). Whereas Badiou (2005) first defined an event by focusing on its intrinsic properties, in *Logics of Worlds* and *Being and Event* he came to characterize it through the status of its effects in a world: *event* is the name for something that has the potential to dramatically change the world within which it surfaces. More specifically, Badiou (2009a) stipulates that the changes procured by an event (through the activity of a subject) include modifying the very manner in which appearances in that world are ordered: "evental changes redistribute the assignation of degrees of existence in a world, thereby creating another world through installing a different transcendental regime" (Johnston, 2009, p. 24). An event is the sudden appearance, with maximal intensity, of a previously inexistent element of a world. Therefore, it reveals the radical contingency of any way of ordering the multiple and has the potential to change all the other appearances and degrees of existence. In other words, the event announces the possibility for a new world to arise.

There are many ways to make the related concepts of world and event more tangible. For example, what constitutes an event can be conceptually distinguished from the more general notion of a fact (Pachoud, 2005). If the world is understood as a general transcendental regime that constitutes what is and what is not possible (i.e., what can and what cannot appear), then facts are occurrences that can be entirely explained from within the existent framework. They can be intelligibly located within the analyzable, foreseeable cause-and-effect chains unfolding themselves within the confines of a specified system. By contrast, the event cannot be understood on the basis of that which is already in place: it is the intrusion of a seemingly uncaused X that resists re-inscription back into these same chains. In short, the distinction between an event and a fact can be made through reference to the consequences (i.e., the degree of change) that it has for the world in which it takes place. In the same vein, a *modification* contrasts with an event because it only affects the appearances of its world, not its transcendental regime.

Additionally, Pachoud (2005) offers a phenomenological existential (and arguably, psychologizing) reading of the world/event dichotomy. He argues that the concept of world can be understood to designate the entirety of a person's subjective projects and goals, i.e., the orientation of his or her biographical narrative. In this way, the event is something that disturbs the axes and coordinates of the individual's existence, something that shakes the very ground of his or her identity. Needless to say, Pachoud's depiction of the event comes very close to the psychological accounts of trauma that we discussed in the previous section.

In conclusion, Badiou's philosophy of change offers a very detailed and powerful account of how to think of the dynamics of rupture—only this time situated on the macroscopic level between world and event, rather than limited to the microscopic level of the individualized psyche. The event is described as the unforeseen breakthrough of what was previously judged to be "impossible," i.e., a transgression of the regime of the pre-existing world. Just like trauma with regard to the preceding psychological build-up, the event can be said to be *excessive* with regard to the world in which it appears. The parallel between event and trauma thus appears to be, at a formal level, rather remarkable—to the point where one could wonder whether a reading of trauma through the lens of Badiou's theory is not superfluous. In what follows, we will argue to the contrary by touching upon several new ideas prompted by this juxtaposition.

There is no such thing as "trauma information"

What typifies a traumatic reaction, and what is re-asserted by this theory of the event, is that the traumatic event cannot be entirely grasped from within the interpretative background that is present at the moment of its occurrence. Badiou's event can only be comprehended retroactively, because any understanding of it can only take place on the basis of a new horizon of possibilities that is generated by the event.[2] In exactly the same way, the "traumatic truth" cannot be pinned down by the Symbolic/Imaginary framework (i.e., the mental schemata) that preceded it. What is opened up in the trauma is of an unimaginable nature, a some*thing* that is evoked but cannot be adequately situated or encapsulated from within the contemporary subjective structuring. The traumatic event renders both the background for understanding (in the sense of cognitive schemas) and the person's existential orientation (in Pachoud's phenomenological existential reading) inept. The consequences of this antagonism can hardly be overstated: a traumatic episode destroys the symbolic identity of the affected person, which is sometimes argued to amount to the death or erasure of the subject itself (Žižek, 2008).

Cognitive theories of PTSD that describe trauma recovery as a process of assimilation of or adaptation to the "new trauma-related information" thus presuppose as a given what can only be the result of an as-of-yet unspecified process. The information that a trauma supposedly delivers is basically unknowable from within the pre-existent world in which it emerges. Framed in this manner, the question becomes how "something that is nothing" (from the standpoint of the pre-evental situation) can have such profound effects on the world in which it surfaces.

As we have already hinted, Badiou's philosophy stipulates that "reading" the event requires the advent of a "new world" that is somehow instigated by this event. Likewise, we claim that recovery from trauma requires the production of a new interpretative background from which the trauma can be dealt with. However, we have not yet addressed the question where this new world, which is of capital importance for recovery, comes from. Following through with the parallel event/trauma, we will approach this issue through Badiou's elaboration of the "subjectivization of the event." The bulk of the rest of this article will concern itself with a sketch of this theory, which prepares the way for understanding the act that is involved in traumatic recovery.

The subject and the new present

Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* (2009a) formalizes the ways in which the subject appears in a world. We will primarily focus on the structure of the "faithful subject,"[3] as this particular subject-form is said to produce, through its procrastinated efforts, the new present that allows access to the meaning of the event (i.e., its "truth"; p. 53). According to Badiou, at the origin of each subject's appearance lies, as a necessary precondition, an event. In fact, the formal theory of the subject is a theory of "subjectivization": it deals with the advent of a subjectivity that is grounded in the situation it is part of. Badiou's subject is thus not a universal feature of structure as such, but a rarity, something which arises only in exceptional conditions when a Truth-Event disrupts the ordinary run of things (Žižek, 2012, p. 621). As explained above, the event is what appears only in its disappearance; it

has no reality or sense within the world as it stands; it is elusive and cannot be the object of factual knowledge, evidence, or proof. In terms of Badiou's philosophy: whether or not an event belongs to a certain world or situation (i.e., its status) is undecidable or pending. Hence, for the event to have any consequences (and for something new to come about), a response from within the original situation or world is required in the form of an "intervention," a term that denotes the declaration that an event *does* belong to its situation (Badiou, 2005, p. 202).

Subjectivization starts with a decision: yes, I acknowledge that an event has taken place, and I name it ε. This name of the event is called its *trace* (often denoted *ε*), and it is only through this act of naming that the event, which is inherently ephemeral, subsists in time as a mark *for* the subject. However, and this is a subtle yet essential twist, according to Badiou the subject is not so much the one who chooses and names, but rather that which emerges as a *result* of the act of naming—which dovetails with Lacan's (1967–68) description of the subject in the ethical act. In sum, it is through the "intervention" that something of the event itself ends up being presented in the situation or world: "the act of nomination of the event is what constitutes it" *for* the situation (Badiou, 2005, p. 203). By being named, an event attains some degree of efficacy, some minimal presence in a situation. The name becomes the stand-in for the event, and it is only thanks to this subsisting mark that the evanescent event can ever have any consequences on the multiples of the situation. As such, the notion of intervention attempts to construct a bridge between the non-being of an event and a situation or world as an order of presentation (Pluth, 2010).

The nature and status of this eventual name must be highlighted: both an event and its signifiers are indiscernible and undecidable from within the here and now of the yet-to-be-modified world. As far as the established knowledge-regime is concerned, the name of an event is nothing more than a gibberish "empty signifier" with no referent. Badiou argues that the name will only be assigned a referent or a signification in the future anterior, when the new world has been fully actualized. Subjectivization thus involves a counter-intuitive, paradoxal temporality: the names of an event amount to additions to the pre-eventual situation, and their correctness can only be judged from the perspective of the new world inaugurated by this event and produced through the prolonged efforts of the faithful subject.

To cut a very complex and multi-faceted account of the process of subjectivization short: after this instant of subjectivization (which refers to the flash of the intervention), a long and arduous process must take place in which this name is brought into relation to other multiples in the situation, "forcing" its presence in the situation. This could be called a "subject-process," which refers to the continuation, within a structure, of the disruption that began with the subjectivization. The faithful subject engages itself in a fidelity or truth procedure: it scrutinizes the multiples of the situation from the standpoint of its eventual supplement, considering which ones are affected by the event and which ones are not (Badiou, 2009a, pp. 50–54). Fidelity, in Badiou's philosophy, requires the performance of "a series of decisions about the elements of the situation in question, asking whether each one is modified by the event or not" (Pluth, 2010, p. 97). Through this process, a "truth" is gradually exposed, which groups together all the terms of the situation which are positively connected to the event. This, in turn, results

in the establishment of a new present: a new world governed by a different transcendental regime that changes the degrees of visibility (or existence) of its elements. As such, things that were previously unthinkable and *de jure* inexistent suddenly become represented in the (new) situation. Note that the event does not bring about a new world on its own; it is essential that this requires a series of acts (decisions which cannot rely on established knowledge to authorize themselves) in a particular situation. In the context of trauma, then, recovery is not the result of the direct verbalization of the undigested experience, but rather of the creation of a new context that allows for it to be read.

Forging a trace: From the event to the act

The articulation of the event with this specific notion of a subject shows that the motif of the abrupt cut is necessarily extended with the long-term endeavor to "force" one's circumstances to respond to the breaks in the default order of things (Johnston, 2009, p. 20). Importantly, this is not an enterprise that takes place entirely intra-psychically. Badiou's theory stipulates that this new present is produced through a series of subjective acts that concern the other—a form of activity which he attempts to capture in the "matheme of the faithful subject." In this modality of the subject, the trace of the event motivates and dictates the choices and actions one makes. Essentially, the faithful subject explores the consequences of what has happened in the event, engendering the expansion of the present and exposing, fragment by fragment, a truth (Badiou, 2009a, pp. 50–54).

But does this, then, not commit the same mistake that we are trying to fix? If recovery from trauma requires the installation of a new world that only comes about through a series of subjective acts under the auspices of the evental trace, how can one know how to act, considering that the trace is both a declaration that an event has taken place and the initial attempt to name it? As we have seen, from the standpoint of the pre-evental world, the name of the event is "non-sensical" as it does not have any referent in that situation. Furthermore, even if the trace could be accurately formulated and comprehended at that particular time, there persists an unbridgeable gap between the event's name, as a guiding principle, and its application in real-life decisions involving either yes or no. Suffice to say that promoting the activity of the faithful subject in order to generate a new present leads to a renewed paradox concerning the temporality at work in recovery: the trace of the event, just as the "new trauma-related information," is necessarily posited at a moment in chronological time where it cannot yet be surmised—due to the lacking interpretative framework that this requires at that particular moment. The act (of naming the event, for example) always seems to "run ahead" of what will retrospectively *have been* in light of the context that is created as its consequence, a feature that is called "anticipatory certitude" (Pluth & Hoens, 2004, p. 185). Thus, although the "principle derived from the trace" is said to drive and motivate the faithful subject, there is essentially no way to directly access the content of this principle any more than the aforementioned "new trauma-related information."

One possible solution to this problem is acknowledging that the trace of the event is not an objective reflection of the "true" nature of the event, but rather something that is *coined*, in the sense of a linguistic invention of an expression that is used for the first time. Indeed, Badiou (2003c, p. 114) acknowledges that there is always, in every truth

procedure, a poetic moment because we always have to find a new name for the event. Translating this into a more familiar, psychological frame of reference, we could say that, from a Lacanian point of view, the psychic system, to get a preliminary hold on the event, forces a signifier on what has happened. This signifier comes to simultaneously point to and obscure the (traumatic) event. It is a signifier that is stamped on the experience, deforming it in a sense and unavoidably reducing it, but rendering it within the realms of language and the symbolic (Bistoen, Vanheule, & Craps, 2014). This enigmatic left-over of the vanished event is sometimes referred to as its symptom or its mark (Roffe, 2006, p. 335). A trace is thus *forged* that comes to designate the event and stand in for it. Note that this obligatory passage of the event through the signifier is a *forgery*: to access the truth of the experience, it must be hit with a signifier that will inevitably miss it to a certain degree. There is no guarantor of truth in this attempt, just as there is no unmediated access to the traumatic truth as such. The forging of the trace is a subjective act *par excellence*: it produces something new *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, it should be clear that this sort of subjective act is not that of a deliberate, conscious subject. At the moment of the act, the subject is, as Alenka Zupančič (2000) observes, "'objectified' in this act: the subject passes over to the side of the object. … In an act, there is no 'divided subject': there is the 'it' (the Lacanian *ça*) and the subjective figure that arises from it" (p. 104). Another way of saying this is that there is no subject or "hero" of the act (at the time of its occurrence): it is only *after the act* that someone can find the subjective position from which to look back at and assume responsibility for it.

The subjective act cannot ground itself on anything that is already in place in the symbolic order at the particular time of its occurrence. The trace, which appears to be the guiding principle that commands the acts and decisions of the faithful subject, should therefore not be taken as an assured, fail-safe compass that guarantees the desired outcome, for it is itself already essentially a product of the subject's activity.

The anticipated certainty of the subjective act

So far, we have excavated three essential features of the act, which are interrelated. First, the act brings something new into the world. Second, it is characterized by a logical temporality that is distinct from normal, chronological time. And third, the act appears to arise *ex nihilo*, without the possibility for it to ground itself in the knowledge that preceded it. To further our comprehension of this concept, we will now take our cue from a Žižekian reading of Lacan's subjective or ethical act. This type of act comes very close to the Badiouian concept of forcing, as "anticipatory certitude" is the hallmark of both (Pluth & Hoens, 2004, p. 185). However, for our intents and purposes, Lacan's conceptualization is preferable as it readily emphasizes the importance of this type of act in the context of the clinical encounter (Lacan, 1967–68).

In the previous section, we argued that the trace driving the subjective act is a creation rather than an objective reflection of the traumatic event. However, despite this apparently arbitrary and *ex nihilo* character, the subject does succeed in arriving at what can only be called a truth. With reference to Žižek (1991), we could thus say that the truth arises from misrecognition. Žižek alludes to the fact that truth, because of its epistemological and ontological status, can never be approached directly but always requires

some sort of detour through which it is created. For example, in order to produce the knowledge that we desire about the meaning of our symptoms, the process of psychoanalysis requires the (illusory) supposition by the analysand that this knowledge *already* exists—more precisely, it is thought to exist in the transferential person of the analyst (which is why Lacan introduces the concept of *sujet-supposé-savoir*, the subject-supposed-to-know). This misrecognition forms the impetus for the analysand to speak, and by doing so, he or she discovers that in the end the analyst was a figure of his or her imagination and obviously does not possess the truth concerning his or her very being. But also, through this process of dissolving the transference, he or she stumbles upon the meaning of his or her symptoms—almost by accident or as a side-effect, as it were. The latter is thus only obtained through the founding misconception that this knowledge already existed, in the analyst. As such, this knowledge is projected into a point in the future, from where it appears to return as the analysis produces the signifying frame that gives the symptoms a proper symbolic place and meaning: "Transference is then an illusion, but the point is that we cannot bypass it and reach directly for the truth. The truth itself is constituted through the illusion proper to the transference" (Žižek, 1991, p. 189). The analyst is thus someone who sustains the analysand's misrecognition and who even goes so far as to deceive him or her on this point. But ultimately, through this swindle, the analyst keeps his or her word as the analytic process produces the desired truth about the meaning of the symptoms. It is the symbolic elaboration in the analysis which decides retroactively what the symptoms will have been. Hence, there is a strange temporality at work in this instantiation of the truth: the subjective mistake, error, or misrecognition "arrives paradoxically before the truth in relation to which we are designating it as 'error', because this 'truth' itself becomes true only through—or, to use a Hegelian term, by mediation of—the error" (Žižek, 1991, pp. 190–191).

The same can be said of the subjective acts we are discussing. The temporal paradox at work in the recovery from trauma consists of this one thing: that one has to decide on what it is that has happened, at a time when the knowledge to do so is absolutely lacking. Moreover, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and Badiou's philosophy alike hold that the subject only appears in the midst of this very lack (Neill, 2011, p. 193). Recovery from trauma, then, essentially involves a decision as to what has happened. And, in line with Žižek, this decision cannot but be erroneous (more precisely, from the standpoint of the pre-evental world this proclamation is nonsensical). However, only through this (mis) recognition of what has happened, and by remaining faithful to it, can the subject finally arrive at the truth of the trauma. Thus, the first attempts to deal with the trauma are necessarily premature in that they always seem to come too early. Nevertheless, the appropriate moment cannot arise but through a series of premature or failed attempts.

These claims add an important dimension to the hackneyed notions of verbalization and mentalization in trauma recovery. Verbalizing the trauma, in our reading, is a subjective act of creation that is essentially without grounds, rather than the development of an understanding that correctly matches the "objective reality" of what has happened. It is precisely this dimension of the act—and, along with it, its political implications, as we will see—that is obscured when the "new trauma-related information" is taken as a given rather than as necessarily constituted. At the moment of the subjective act itself, there is no guarantee of its truthfulness. The act involves a wager and can never be the result of

mere calculation, as the latter relies solely on the pre-given that was rendered futile by the trauma.

It is at this juncture that Badiou's reliance on mathematics proves particularly useful. The concept of forcing (akin to the Lacanian act), which Badiou deploys to describe the activity of the faithful subject, actually refers to a technique in set theory invented by mathematician Paul Cohen. Basically, it addresses how the undecidable can be decided upon after all, and Cohen's accomplishment was to show that such a decision can be legitimate. We have seen that the names used in a truth procedure are "additions" to the pre-existent situation, whose correctness can only be settled in a future anterior sense. A statement that is undecidable in one situation may be veridical (or demonstrably false) in a new one. Forcing authorizes and legitimates claims about indiscernible multiples—not proving or verifying them, but giving them a status that is better described as suspended than as undecidable (Pluth, 2010). The faithful subject engaged in the labor of forcing thus operates as if the present situation were already completely reworked from the standpoint of the eventual truth. Whereas both the event and its signifiers are indiscernible in the here and now, they become verifiable (and, perhaps, veridical) in the light of the knowledge-regime of the new world. In Badiou's (2003b) own words:

> I call the anticipatory hypothesis of the generic being of a truth, a forcing. A forcing is the powerful fiction of a completed truth. Starting with such a fiction, I can force new bits of knowledge, without even verifying this knowledge. (p. 65)

Thus, although the *ex nihilo* character of the act might raise suspicions about the nature of what it produces (e.g., its arbitrary and/or constructionist character), forcing actually makes it possible to arrive at a "truth" that is separated from the specificities of the people involved in its production.

The forcing of new bits of knowledge invests the whole "pre-trauma world" with new meaning, as it becomes enmeshed in the textures of the new present. On a more psychological level, the faithful subject's acts are associated with the development of new subjective projects and goals, a new orientation of the person's biographical narrative. This is why Lacanian theory speaks of the post-traumatic subject as a subject that survives its own death: the desire that oriented the biographical narrative up to the moment of the trauma, as that which forms the core of the person's identity, is abolished, only to be reborn through the act. However, the desire that emerges out of the detritus of the trauma is not the same as the one before; it is a new desire, constituting a new subject, and drawing out radically different aims and trajectories.

Again, this new orientation of the desire is not something of which the effects are restricted to the psyche of the traumatized person; it is primarily directed outwards, where it addresses the other. Establishing a new present that allows for a subjective appropriation of the trauma is not limited to, for example, intra-psychically developing new schemata. Although an act is primarily an act for the subject, it is always something that, due to its transgressive nature, puts the other on the spot, so to speak. Zupančič (2000) says it best:

> The act differs from an "action" in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent). After an act, I am "not the same as before." In the act, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn

(or not); the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse of the subject. The act is therefore always a "crime," a "transgression"—of the limits of the symbolic community to which I belong. (p. 83)

We have to approach this designation of the act as a "transgression" or a "crime" with great care. What is meant by this is that the act has a formal structure to it that is foreign to the register constituted by the good/bad dichotomy, but nevertheless it may be perceived as "evil" or "bad" because it always represents a certain "overstepping" of the limits of the given symbolic order (or community) in which it takes place. As the act introduces a new present, it brings a change in "what is," and this always implies that the other cannot but react to the novelty that is introduced. This feature opens the door for a re-introduction of the political in trauma recovery, in the sense of "a collective mobilization guided by a general will … and not the business of bureaucratic administration or the socialized negotiation of interests" (Hallward, 2004, p. 3). We will attempt to illustrate this by returning to Herman (1997).

The act of speaking out

The speak outs of the 1970s women's liberation movement can be considered subjective acts in the sense described above. First of all, they undoubtedly brought something new into the world, that is, something that was obviously already happening but was unrecognized up to that point. As Herman (1997) writes:

> The real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life. … Women did not have a name for the tyranny of private life. … Betty Friedan called the woman question the "problem without a name." (p. 28)

As such, this problem could be called an "inexistent" from the standpoint of that world's transcendental. The acts of speaking out by the women's movement opened up a new time, in which public discussion of the common atrocities of sexual and domestic abuse had suddenly been made possible. Prior to these acts, speaking about these things was unthinkable and even impossible. It fell beyond the ensemble of possibilities that were determined in that particular world. Thus, the act of speaking out brought with it a new present, not only through the revelation of a part of the world that was formerly cloaked, but also by introducing new possibilities in the social field as to what can and cannot be uttered aloud. The speaking out literally changed the bond with the Other and ultimately the organization of this Other: that of which it was forbidden to speak now became that which should be spoken. What was previously invisible and inexistent suddenly appeared with maximal intensity. In this example, we recognize a pre-trauma world, where such a thing as domestic violence is hardly thinkable even as it occurs, simply because it is not represented in the world's knowledge-regime and there exists no name for it. As a consequence, it goes on and on.

Victims of sexual or domestic abuse are subjected to a series of experiences that open up a daunting abyss in which comprehension falls short. This string of experiences can be taken for the "event" in the sense that it constitutes *something* that exceeds and overthrows the symbolic framework that is in place at the moment of its occurrence. It insists

on the beyond of this framework, on its lack, its inadequacy. This is heightened by the fact that in the field of the symbolic Other there is no signifier to be found that designates this thing that they are subjected to. On the contrary, when looking for an answer, these women only found a prohibition to speak of these things. We have here, then, the world and the event that traverses it.

Haunted by these symptoms of a thing that does not exist, what are these women to do? Speak out, of course. This is the truth that their act has uncovered, but this was unknown to them at that time. There was no knowledge available that told them what to do; they were left behind in a vacuum. As we have seen, if the truth of the event is to be procured, this requires the generation of a trace that holds onto and stands in for the event. Did something really occur? Does such a thing really exist? These activist women answered affirmatively and proceeded to fight it: first of all by calling it into existence, by dragging it out of the shadows through what they called "consciousness-raising" (Herman, 1997, pp. 28–29). The technique of consciousness-raising took place in intimate and confidential groups of women where speaking the truth was imperative, and it was here that a trace was forged. As discussed above, the forging of a trace is a subjective act that runs ahead of the certainty that should have authorized it. Herman stresses that this uncovering of a formerly disavowed and therefore "inexistent" aspect of the world was only possible because women created their own, safe environment that enabled them to overcome the societal barriers of secrecy, denial, and shame. This naming of what was formerly unthinkable is an act that is faithful to the event, because it would rather sacrifice the old world than deny the reality of this thing that has yet to become what it will have been.

Once the trace was formed, a militant group of women organized itself around its truth. What actions should they take to safeguard and develop this fragile new present that is incommensurable with the old world, if this was indeed their decision? Activist women chose to organize a first speak out on rape in 1971, which approximately 300 people attended at St. Clement's Episcopal Church in New York (Matthews, 1994). Women would come to a speak out specifically to share their own experiences with an audience and to raise their voices, to literally speak out against sexual violence. It must be stressed that at the time of their act, there was no way of telling what the outcome might be. Although the feminists' speaking out may resemble the strategies utilized by other political pressure groups (for instance those applied in the campaign to end the Vietnam war), this did not by any means guarantee that their truth would be acknowledged. The decision to speak out involved a wager, a point of radical uncertainty that could not be settled by mere calculation. It was an act that could not authorize itself on anything but the desire of the subject in question.

From the perspective of the pre-trauma world in which it had absolutely no place, the act of speaking out came too soon, before the "objective conditions" for such a thing were in place. From society's point of view, there was a good reason why these unspeakable and unthinkable things were kept secret: bringing them into the light of day could destabilize the existent social order (which, eventually, it did). Consequently, this act was considered "evil" or "bad" by 1970s society: it was transgressive in that it broke the unspoken rules of social interaction and threatened to disrupt the social edifice. Here we see the act's transgressive, social and, ultimately, political dimension appear. The act puts the other on the spot: it asks a question that cannot be ignored. How will other women

who live through similar experiences react? Will they speak out or remain silent? How does society as a whole respond? Are the testimonies of these women to be taken seriously, or rather discredited and downplayed? The act always has an interpersonal dimension that is tantamount to the elaboration of the new present. It is, in part, through the changes brought about in the social field and the different perspective that this offers that one can come to grips with the traumatic event. Moreover, the reactions of others play an essential role in completing the *process* of the act: only through them does the anticipatory certitude receive some sort of "inter-subjective verification process," desubjectivizing the initial principle of the trace and providing objective evidence for it. The act essentially precedes the certainty that should have led up to the act (Pluth & Hoens, 2004, p. 189). It is the development of a new present that constitutes the context necessary to assess the traumatic experience and recover from it.

This example illustrates the concepts that we have introduced, and demonstrates how the subjective acts of one or a few persons trying to deal with their trauma can introduce a new present that impacts society as a whole. The truth that is uncovered by the faithful subject's activity can be picked up by others, who also become a subject of this truth— working either towards its production, its denial, or its occultation. However, we do not mean to imply that recovery from trauma *always* necessitates some form of political activism on the part of the traumatized. The example of the 1970s women's movement magnifies one aspect of the transgressive nature of the act: that it allows for the gathering of a group of people around its trace, who work together to produce its consequences. The activity of this composite subject can produce huge socio-political upheavals that constitute a new world on a macro-level. The example, then, shows how recovery from trauma is not necessarily an exclusively intra-psychic process, but can have far-reaching societal ramifications. Nevertheless, the theory of the subjectivization of the event equally applies to acts that remain confined to the life of one individual who is traumatized and the others in his or her direct social network. As we have seen, the context or world can be understood in different ways, and so can the new present that provides the framework for coming to grips with the trauma. The strength of Badiou's theory of the subject is that it formalizes the structure that typifies both the act of the individual and the act of a group, which may or may not follow in the former's wake. An act is not necessarily addressed to society as a whole; it can equally occur in the privacy of the consultation room of a psychotherapist. What is essential is that the act cannot be derived from the knowledge that is already in place (including the knowledge concerning the treatment of trauma) and that it introduces something that is irreconcilable with the pre-trauma world. This can be limited, for example, to one person's subjective projects and goals and the orientation of his or her biographical narrative (in Pachoud's phenomenological reading); that is, to the precipitation of a new desire. However, the relevant others of this person are undoubtedly affected by such drastic changes and cannot but respond to them, which once again highlights the inter-subjective nature of such an act.

Conclusion

The benefit of developing the parallel between psychological trauma and Badiou's event is that it underscores the dimension of the subjective act in the process of recovering from

trauma. It is precisely the creative aspect in constituting the "trauma-related information" that is easily and frequently overlooked, perhaps out of a concern that this could once again shed doubt on the reliability and veracity of memories of traumatic episodes. However, the recognition of this subjective dimension opens a path to reintroduce the dimension of the political in trauma recovery. All of this can actually be deduced in a rather straightforward manner when we think through what it means that trauma is absolutely incommensurable to the pre-existing context. Even if the equation trauma/event is not justified (and Badiou himself would perhaps protest against such a move, given the contrast between the positive valence of his notion of the event and the detrimental nature of trauma), the formal characteristics of the pairs psyche/trauma and world/event are nevertheless the same. Therefore, we argue that the process of subjectivization that pertains to an event can rightfully be applied to trauma. As we have discussed, the act of "forcing" breaks free from the confines of the intra-psychic, as it puts the other on the spot.

However, there is another, much more radical way of applying Badiou's theory of the event to the discourse of trauma—in a way that actually dispenses with the medical psychiatric outlook in contexts of collective human suffering. It has been repeatedly argued that deploying the framework of PTSD in such situations reduces the people involved to passive spectators and powerless victims. The human rights discourse that dovetails with this conception of humanitarian aid is frequently and vehemently debunked by Alain Badiou himself (most thoroughly in his *Ethics*, 2001). Perhaps our understanding of situations characterized by generalized instability and precariousness might be furthered if we approached them as "evental sites," sites that harbor the possibility of radical political change, rather than only the threat of psychical destruction and victimization. Vincenzo Di Nicola (2012) makes a similar point, when he argues for the necessity of an "evental psychiatry": "where trauma psychiatry essentializes the atomized individual, a psychiatry of the event offers an opening outward, to bloom towards worlds and nature, towards community and others" (p. 5). Both trauma and the event are outside what is routine in life, they are predicated on a rupture of the continuity of life. An evental site opens the possibility of the event, and, through fidelity, the advent of a subject. By contrast, contemporary trauma discourse produces a closure of possibilities and threatens to eclipse the subject. This is not to say that trauma *is* an event, or even that events arise from trauma. The point is that both emerge in zones where rupture occurs, and that the dominance of the Western trauma framework short-circuits alternative, more empowering perspectives. However, approaching zones of human conflict as potential evental sites is not without its perils. Such a view can easily degenerate into a prescriptive injunction-to-action that imposes a new kind of alienating discourse on those who are affected by these terrors.

Finally, we could add an epilogue to our reading of the feminist speak outs. The nature of "speaking the unspeakable" has significantly evolved over the past 30 years, arguably through the procrastinated efforts of subjects faithful to a range of emancipatory political truths. Whereas events such as speak outs can be deemed radical and transgressive for 1970s society, contemporary Western culture typically condones and even promotes such disclosures. Indeed, it has been argued that we live in a culture of "emotional display" (Pupavac, 2004, p. 492). Speaking out has thus become part and parcel of the structure of our world, and this cannot but have significant effects on the power and efficacy of these practices. In short, what used to be an act, in the context of 1970s society, might

have become a mere action in the contemporary world (which has changed precisely because of the former acts). Additionally, when it becomes (prescriptive) shared knowledge, Herman's emphasis on the necessity to supplement private healing with the public duty to break the conspiracy of silence can lead to new ethical questions: the call to bear witness can, for instance, place a heavy burden on the shoulders of counsellors and their patients alike (McKinney, 2007).

Such is the fate of each and every truth: it brings about a new world, which amounts to saying that it somehow passes from the dimension of truth, with its relations to ethics and subjectivity, to the domain of knowledge. Hence, caution is called for when we apply accepted humanitarian formats and established "know-how" to process, at both an individual and a community level, a diversity of experiences of ruptures.

Funding

Notes

1. The same claim has been made in cultural trauma theories that call into question the linguistic rendition or narrativization of the traumatic memory/event (see, e.g., Caruth, 1995). These theories suggest that the process of Symbolic translation betrays the truth of the trauma. With Badiou (2009b), we could call this a "leftist" deviation that fails to take into account the manner in which truth is substantiated in a particular world.
2. And, as we will see, this new interpretative horizon only comes into being through the disciplined and protracted activity of the faithful subject.
3. Badiou's typology of the subject consists of the faithful subject, the reactive subject, and the obscure subject. They are characterized by a differential relation with regard to the truth of the event. The faithful subject works towards its production, the reactive subject towards its denial, and the obscure subject towards its occultation (Badiou, 2009a, p. 50–67).

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