

## **Joyful Contingency**

An Affective Interpretation of the Conditions for Political Change

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Bachelor's thesis presented as a partial requirement for the conclusion of the Philosophy of a Specific Discipline programme, School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

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Student number: 651486  
Word count: 12.900

Rotterdam

2025

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## Introduction

To say that we live in tumultuous times is an understatement. Televised genocide, ethnic cleansing, coups d'état attempts in western countries, abrogation of minorities' rights, attack on everyone's civil rights, dismantling of public institutions and social safety nets, rampant industrial expansion despite the climate crisis—the list goes on. All of this, of course, does not go without resistance, but both the spontaneous and organised struggles we see emerging around us do not seem to be able to reach the radical change they aim at. The market stumbles here and there, but capital follows its course, unshaken. How come? Are we not engaged enough? Are we using the wrong tactics? Are we being heavily beaten by a way too powerful system? Are we accumulating political failures in preparation for the moment when we will finally win? All in all, what is the point of the struggles in which we are now engaged in?

Trying to address some of these anxieties and concerns, in this thesis I will explore the conditions under which radical political transformation becomes possible. I choose to do so through a post-foundationalist point of view, a position that I consider to be very powerful insofar as it argues that the potential of political change is always open, not as a mere possibility, but as an ontological feature of reality. Politically speaking, this means that political systems change because it is of their nature to do so, not due to a certain fault or incapacity of a specific system to ground itself—such political systems are necessarily temporary configurations, always exposed to competing claims and forces.

Change, however, is neither easy nor smooth; it is mediated by the configuration of the world, sustained by specific affective dispositions, which have the power to enable or hinder political transformation. A fundamental part of this configuration is its juridical aspect: law, understood here not primarily as a system of norms but as one of the means through which political order is maintained and naturalised. Even though I will not engage in legal analysis as such, I consider law an inescapable part of the terrain on which political struggles unfold—sometimes acting as a barrier, sometime offering tactical openings.

Noting that, we need a conceptual apparatus that allows us to comprehend how the realisation of the potential of political transformation is possible in the first place. Within the post-foundational framework, I turn to the work of Alain Badiou, who thinks about political change in terms of the *event*, that is, the dislocating and disruptive moment

in which foundations crumble, giving way to a radically different world configuration to be unfolded. This is where we will begin our journey, with an overview of Badiou's ontology, focusing on the way that he describes the radicality of an event as opposed to the *situation*, roughly understood as the status quo.

Our excursion through Badiou's event theory will provide us with the conceptual building blocks we need for a transcendental analysis of the event, understanding it not only in an analytical sense, but also at the situational elements in which the event is embedded in. It is important to understand the nature of the rupture brought about by the event—after all, this is the kind of political rupture that we pursue; however, since Badiou himself admits that the event can only emerge and have lasting effects under specific a conjuncture, it is equally important to grasp what can be understood of this pre-evental setting—because part of political struggle is also about making sure that these conditions are present.

At this point, I will suggest that our analysis of the pre-conditions of the event can be very fruitfully informed by affect theory. This is not only because affects are an inescapable part of our human experience of the world, but also because the kind of affects that circulate in a society can also serve as a catalyst (or inhibitor) for political change, giving a new dimension to the structural conditions for the event. Here, I will resort to Spinoza (and contemporary Spinozian readings), justified by the fact that the starting point of Spinoza's philosophy is—much like my own—an enquiry into the causes of servitude and human unhappiness. Specifically, Spinoza can give us the necessary vocabulary to the big endeavour of understanding the affective configuration of a pre-evental world.

By weaving together Badiou's ontology of rupture, pre-evental critique of Badiou, and Spinoza's politics of affects, I will attempt to think the conditions of political change not only in moments of revolutionary event, but also in the long, ambivalent meantime. In between the three chapters that follow, I will also briefly pull some threads that will situate law in the landscape of political change, suggesting that is the nature of its relationship with the situation and if (and how) it can be a *locus* of pre- and post- event political struggle.

### **Badiou's ontology: the event, the situation, and the state**

To understand how political transformation becomes possible within a post-foundational framework, we must first explore its ontological underpinnings, and we will do so by engaging with the work of Alain Badiou. For him, reality is a *multiplicity* that is presented in specific ways in different *situations*. Because the presentation never exhausts the multiplicity, there is always an excess, a part that is excluded. On rare occasions, the excess forces its presence, claiming visibility and disrupting the status quo. We are herein faced with an *event*, a disruption of normality to which we must commit in order to sustain in time its transformative effects.

Through his concepts of situation, state, void, and event, Badiou offers a philosophical account in which radical change is not only possible, but ontologically necessary. My aim here is not to challenge the sufficiency of Badiou's notion of the event (a point that has been raised by many of his readers) but to reconstruct how it operates within his broader ontology. This will allow us to think transformation as a structural feature of any political order, and to discuss the mechanisms through which the state, in an effort to maintain itself as a cohesive order, seeks to block the emergence of movements that could defy its primacy.

#### **The situation and how it is bound to be disrupted**

In Badiou's ontology, everything that composes a certain state of affairs is referred to, as a unity, as a *situation*. The situation is what structures our experience by the creation of a certain order (through a specific set of rules) that allows and disallows the presentation of specific elements of the multiplicity. To be *part* of the situation means to be both *counted* and *accounted for* by the structures of the situation; in Badiou's words, the situation "prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one" (Badiou 2005b, 24). The sum of these structures makes up what Badiou calls the *state*<sup>1</sup> of the situation, that is, the way in which elements are ordered within a situation, the 'structure of the structure.'

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<sup>1</sup> According to Peter Hallward, in his introduction to Badiou's *Ethics*, "Badiou's use of the term 'state' incorporates a classically Marxist understanding of the political state as much as it overlaps with a simple intuitive understanding of the 'status quo'" (2001, ix).

We should note that the situation determines more than just the way in which things appear; it determines the very *possibility* of appearance (Badiou 2005b, 52), acting as an aesthetic and intelligibility imperative.<sup>2</sup> It is so in such a way that whatever belongs to the situation is always necessarily consistent with its laws. Conversely, that which does not belong (which Badiou calls the *void*)<sup>3</sup> is inconsistent, in the sense that it is absolutely unrepresentable from the point of view of the situation (Badiou 2005b, 53). To not be counted as part is not to be forgotten or mistakenly miscounted; it is matter of design.

Importantly, *unrepresentability* is not non-existence. The void still ‘is’ in a sense, even though the situation does not acknowledge it. This is because the laws of the situation—the “procedure of counting or grouping that imposes some order on an otherwise inchoate since open-ended multiplicity” (Norris 2009, 40)—are neither necessary nor eternal; they are the consequence of a *decision* rather than an objective order. The situation is always “exposed to the potentially disturbing effect of that which finds no place in the existing *conceptual domain* since it exists as a ‘supernumerary’ element excluded from the count-as-one” (Norris 2009, 40, my highlight), an excess that remains confined, or ‘kettled,’ as it were, in the space of the excluded part, and that will eventually disrupt the situation.

When this disruption occurs, we have an *event*: “the disruption of the order of the ontic, or, in Badiou’s words, the disruption of the state of the situation” (Marchart 2007, 117). An event is, ultimately, an encounter with contingency—the abrupt emergency of what could be, which was not—that opens a space to rethink reality from the standpoint of the inconsistent multiplicity. Viewed in this way, the event cannot be predicted, “as it constitutes a break with all available knowledge, procedures or calculation that could allow for a prediction” (Marchart 2007, 117). Had we had the capacity to predict and

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<sup>2</sup> In an interview for Artforum Magazine, conducted by Lauren Sedofsky, Badiou clarifies what he understands by *appearance*. On the relation between being and appearance, Badiou says “pure multiplicities, which can’t be laid out in any space because they are in the pure intelligibility of their mathematicity, necessarily manifest themselves in a place. My principal image, though, is [continues] localization. Appearance is being plus its place. That’s why it’s rather close to Hegel: being and being-there, or being and being in its place, a world. ‘World’ is the name that designates the superimposed set of being and its place. We can call this a ‘fiction’ or ‘fixion,’ in the sense that it fixes a place which, after all, is only an image. But you need a fiction or a vectorial scheme” (Badiou 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Badiou explains why he prefers the terminology *void* over *nothing*: “I say ‘void’ rather than ‘nothing’, because the ‘nothing’ is the name of the void correlative to the global effect of structure (everything is counted); it is more accurate to indicate that not-having-been-counted is also quite local in its occurrence, since it is not counted as one. ‘Void’ indicates the failure of the one, the not-one, in a more primordial sense than the not-of-the-whole” (Badiou 2005b, 56).

discuss an event before it even happened, it would not represent a break with the rules of the situation, but something that is already somehow prescribed by these rules.

For Badiou, an event initiates a truth-process—a sustained sequence through which subjects commit to unfolding the consequences of the event. A ‘truth’ is not a description of reality, but “an un-presented part of the situation” (Badiou 2005b, 396), a construction that challenges the structure of the situation from the standpoint of what was previously excluded.

### **Dotting the i's and crossing the t's: measuring the state power**

The relationship between the event and the situation is an odd one: it belongs and does not belong to the situation. It emerges from the non-counted part, challenging the situation and establishing a new order. At the same time, it also belongs to the situation because we can identify it once it has happened. The event itself is counted and recognisable, even though its individual elements are not: it is “a multiple ‘admitted’ into the count without having to result from ‘previous’ counts” (Badiou 2005b,175). The event is, simultaneously, “supplementary with respect to the situation *and* placed or situated within the situation” (Marchart 2007, 117).<sup>4</sup>

A supplement—like the event is to the situation—is, commonly speaking, seen as secondary, something extra, unnecessary except to enhance something that is already whole. Badiou flips this and argues that the need for a supplement reveals a fundamental lack or incompleteness in the thing itself. Put differently, if the original were truly complete, it would not need a supplement at all. This is the supplementary logic of the event, in which the void makes itself present and denounces the incompleteness of the situation.

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of supplementarity is used here to describe the relationship between the event and the situation and is reference to Derrida, who I quote at length: “But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [suppleant] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which takes-(the)-place [tient-lieu]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up of itself, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself” (Derrida 1997, 145). Derrida is talking about speech and symbols, and Badiou about the situation and the void, but the logic of the supplement applies, nonetheless.

A *political* event,<sup>5</sup> in particular, reveals something else about the situation: it gives size to its power, opening the path for political change. What does this mean? Let us get back to the definitions of *situation* and *state of the situation*. A situation, as briefly mentioned in the previous section, is one of the possible ways in which multiple things appear or are presented. In Badiou's ontology, it consists of elements, things that are, but it does not account for itself—it simply presents what is. We can say that the situation does not 'know' what it includes or how it is structured. This is precisely the role of the state of the situation: counting, organising, naming, categorising the elements of the situation. More specifically, "the state of the situation re-presents [sic] collective situations, whilst in the collective situations themselves, singularities are not re-presented but presented" (Badiou 2005, 144).

The situation *presents*, and state *represents*. Because the situation cannot account for itself, its consistency can only be maintained through the state representation: "the structure of the count [that is, of the situation] is reduplicated in order to verify itself, to vouch that its effects, for the entire duration of its exercise, are complete, and to unceasingly bring the one into being within the un-encounterable danger of the void" (Badiou 2005b, 94, bracketed text added). Badiou wants to emphasise that the situation must be reinforced, otherwise it would be too vulnerable to the interjection of that which does not belong to it (i.e., the void). In a needed but nonetheless 'nasty' move, what the state does is guarantee that we are not able to recognise anything besides the consistent multiple, as if nothing exists outside of the situation, *as if the situation is universal and true*. We can see how the state will always exceed the situation: the representational structure of the state creates more distinctions, categories, and control mechanisms than what is given by the situation. Because of this, the state also has more power in comparison to the situation (Badiou 2005, 144)—power is understood here not only as coercion or control, but also as the capacity to represent, classify, count, and manage a situation, to actually say what exists and what counts. This excess, however, cannot be measured, and is indeterminable as much as it is erratic (Badiou 2005, 144). We never *really* know how much the power of the state exceeds the one of the individual

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<sup>5</sup> I talk about political events specifically because Badiou identifies (in *Metapolitics*, for example, but also in other texts) four kinds of truth procedures, that are initiated by difference kinds of events: science, love, art and politics. The general description of the event applies to all of them, but they have their own specificities. An event will be political if it meets the following conditions (Badiou 2005, 141-145): (1) if its material is collective; (2) if it summons the infinity of the situation; and (3) if it assigns a measure to the power of the State of the situation. Only this last condition will be object of this text, in the context of my argument.

presentations. This does not stop us from relating to the state and we do it all the time, clueless of the actual size of the power that stands behind the bureaucracy we deal with in our daily life. Nonetheless, as Badiou reminds us, we are held hostages by the unassignable errancy of the state (Badiou 2005, 145): a truly effective state power is always and necessarily a shadowy kind of power, maintaining a “measureless enslavement of the parts of the situation” (Badiou 2005, 145). Adrian Johnston (2008, 104) illustrates the matter with the example of secret police, common in authoritarian regimes. The repression to political dissidence happens at night, in hidden places, out of the public eye, even though it is not at all a secret: the regime does not try to hide its actions out of guilt, and the people is usually well aware of the brutality of their situation. Rather,

the phenomenon of the secret police as an institutional feature of autocratic state power reflects an understanding that the direct and visible display of power in all its violent actuality somehow detracts from the intimidating allure of authority as a fearsome myth, as a force known about only at the level of rumor and speculation (after all, people’s imaginations are capable of concocting the most horrific of scenarios, so leaving them to their own imaginations is indeed a clever strategy). This institution is, in fact, an ingenious way actually to exercise power while, nonetheless, preserving the mysterious immeasurability associated with power-as-potentiality. The devil one doesn’t know is feared much more than the known devil. (Johnston 2008, 104-105)

What do the mechanisms of representation of the state tell us about the specificity of the political event? Once the event has happened, the material emergency of what had so far been excluded does more than simply breaking with the normality of the situation: it summons the power of the state and, by doing so, fixes its errancy and assign a measure to its power (Badiou 2005, 145). No process of political rupture goes without state repression, and this happens exactly because politics summons the power of the state and exposes it. The treat of disruption forces a reaction from the state, that has no other option but to show its true colours. Paradoxically, by showing itself, the state loses something in the eyes of those subjected to it: “power’s passage from potentiality to actuality—the actuality of its exercise is often taken as the essential proof of power’s potency—results in the diminution of this power itself” (Johnston 2008, 104).

Once the power of the state can be measured, it becomes possible for those committed to the event to maintain this distance from the state. We will return to this in the next section. For Badiou, “only then can the logic of the same, or the egalitarian maxim proper to every politics of emancipation, be set out” (2005, 148-149). In other

words: the state of the situation is the something that represents and classifies, operating by differentiation (who counts, who does not), not equality. However, once the power of the state is wide open, everyone becomes equally capable of—and this is the Badiouian egalitarian maxim—participating in the continuity of the event and in the task of politics.

### **Political rupture as an opening that must be seized**

Unpredictable and incalculable, Badiou's event only exists in its own eclipse. It is of the nature of the event to disappear immediately after it has happened. What remains, and what will actually supplement the situation, is the *name* of the event, that is, the decision to identify the event as such. So the Badiouian event in fact involves two events: “event<sub>1</sub> as a first happening (i.e., an initial event appearing-and-disappearing) followed, after-the-fact, by event<sub>2</sub> as a second happening (i.e., a subsequent event in which it is decided that the past first happening is, in hindsight, to be recognized and baptized as an event per se)” (Johnston 2008, 120). The political rupture lies not in the moment itself, but in the choice to retroactively recognise the event and act accordingly.

From this decision, the task of *politics* starts, by giving consistency to the event and sustaining its effects. In this sense, “insofar as (Badiou emphasizes this point again and again) a true Event is not merely a negative gesture, but opens up a positive dimension of the New, an Event IS the imposition of a new world” (Žižek 2007). This imposition will be carried out by the political subject, which emerges through fidelity to the event: rather than being defined by identify or interest, they show a continuous commitment to the unfolding of the consequences of what has happened. This process of fidelity is marked by a series of decisive moment (also called *points*), where the subject must choose how to continue the truth (Badiou 2018, 341). These points are not given in advance; they are situations where the subject must actively intervene, deciding what the event demands in concrete terms. Whether a point can be treated depends not only on the subject's will, but on the structure of the world in which they act. From this point of view, we can say that the initial event is only an *opening*, which may or may not be seized. In fact, the event can only be recognised and followed through in very specific circumstances.

According to Badiou, for things to be otherwise and for some point to be treated, the following five conditions must be fulfilled: the world in which the event happens must be neither atonic, stable, inconsequential, inactive nor inorganic (Badiou 2018, 426). Badiou here distinguishes between several types of worlds. A tensed world in one charged

with intensity, where something matters; so an *atonic* world is dull, lacking affect or urgency. In Badiou's words, "atonic worlds are simply worlds which are so ramified and nuanced—or so quiescent and homogeneous—that no instance of the Two, and consequently no figure of decision, is capable of evaluating them" (2018, 361). Similarly, a *stable* world is too rigidly ordered, with no (visible) cracks or contradictions to be exploit, so that change appears unnecessary or impossible—no events arise, just facts or mere modifications (Badiou 2018, 426). An *inconsequential* world is one that refuses the material consequences of the event, and everything is absorbed or neutralised by the existing order (Badiou 2018, 426). An *inactive* world is inert, lacking collective engagement or movement, blocking the emergence of an event, not just its consequences (Badiou 2018, 426). And an *inorganic* world is one that lacks internal structure or organisation that could be reconfigured, because it is too chaotic or unformed to support a coherent truth-process (Badiou 2018, 426).

What Badiou is saying is that, for an event to happen, the world must be already alive and with conflict, significance and potential, even if those forces are not yet fully visible. The world must be *at risk*, not settled.

### ***Digression I: law and the state***

The state of the situation is *lawful*, and Badiou makes this very clear. Codes, regulations, ordinances, jurisprudence, police apparatus, courtrooms, penitentiaries. The law and the judicial system play important part in regulating, organising, classifying people and social relations within a situation, in a quite literal sense: the norm *literally* prescribes what is and is not allowed, and sanctions those who deviate from it. This is consistent with Badiou's Marxist background, as one of the main senses that 'law' acquires in Marx's work is that of a social relation inherent to the process of circulation of commodities, linked to the figure of the subject of rights, representative of the things to be exchanged (Pazello 2021, 3). This is why, in a situation within capitalism, taking part in the productive process grants one visibility, and those who—out of choice or not—do not adhere to the rules of the system as relegated to a marginal place. From another point of view, Marx's interpretation of law explains how it is used, often in very violent ways (as the example of the secret police shows us), to maintain social cohesion under the aegis of certain interests—the dominant interests of a given situation, economic or not. Law is at the same time a product of a given state of the situation (a reflection of other social relations), a system that reinforces this state (giving it legitimacy, for example), and an instrument that allows the state of the situation to affirm itself and disperse deviation.

Interestingly, Marx understanding of law also points to the *ontonegativity* of the legal form, that is, the legal form is intrinsically linked to capitalism, and the end of the capitalist system would necessarily lead to the end of law, which would be replaced by another form of social regulation compatible with the new mode of production. This somehow echoes in Badiou, for whom the interruption of a situation by an event necessarily puts into question the laws that governed the elements of this situation, since “the state is for the law, and you cannot have laws without state, and the state is the place where it is organised the change of [and not break with] the law” (Badiou in European Graduate School Video Lectures 2013, 00:00:29). An event, if taken to its last consequences, imposes a new world with its own rules of appearance and representation; an event means the end of *a* law and the imposition of another one.

### **A necessary change of course: toward a theory of pre-eventual affects**

So far, we delineated the way Badiou understands political change through the notion of the event, as opposed to the situation and to the state of the situation. The main characteristic of a political event, specifically, is that it gives a size to the power of the state. Once this power is measured and exposed, everyone is equally able to commit to the event—this is the egalitarian maxim at the core of politics, the activity that will try to give consistency to the event.

Politics, however, will only succeed in its task if it finds itself in a very specific conjuncture, one that allows for the emergency of events and that is dynamic and at the same time structured enough to sustain the work of politics. What Badiou’s ontology does is to secure the formal possibility of political change, by insisting that no situation is ever complete, giving a philosophical delineation to the political intuition that things can be different. We are able to think our world not only as the present situation but as the general availability of other possible configurations. The political stakes of this are clear: if the state of the situation prescribes and, mainly, proscribes certain kinds of existences, then the very appearance of excluded groups of in the public space poses a threat to the situation. Their presence can stir the question of the possibility of a different kind of society, in which those who are now excluded might be seen, named, and counted.

What stands out from Badiou’s framework, however, is the complete focus on the *post-evental* moment—what happens *after* the event. Indeed, Badiou prohibits the contemplation of preconditions for events (Johnston 2008, 105) because an event is, by definition, unpredictable, unfounded, and of incalculable consequences within the logic

of the situation in which it occurs. It is not the result of conditions, causes, or pre-existing structures, but exactly the opposite: it breaks with the logic of the situation. In this view, we—the political actors of the present—are given no role in the emergence of the event itself. Our job only starts afterwards, when we are given the chance to choose, retroactively, whether what just happened will or will not be named as an event, and if we will remain faithful to it in the political decisions to come.

But assuming that we are not currently living amidst an event, if radical political change seems out of reach, the question then becomes: what do political struggles mean in the meantime? Badiou's perspective makes it difficult to account for the political movements we see around us, that do not seem to result in revolutionary transformation, but that are clearly doing something. If such movements cannot produce an event, what is their role? Are they simple symbolic rehearsals, or do they shape the terrain on which future events become possible? Badiou's position risks a kind of political quietism, in which we wait for an unpredictable event without engaging in the conditions that influence on the world's receptivity to it.

This tension becomes sharper when we recall Badiou's own description of the kinds of worlds in which events cannot be treated—atonal, stable, inconsequential, inactive and inorganic. There are not merely abstract conditions, but descriptions of environments in which people are unable to perceive ruptures as meaningful or to pursuing the consequences of these ruptures. If the world's configuration in the *present* hinders *future* political transformation, then a pre-evental analysis of these worlds is needed, even if it means reading Badiou against the grain. Here, I suggest that this analysis should not be only ideological or institutional, but also *affective*. Badiou does take note of the emotional stakes of commitment—evoking anxiety and courage, for example—but leaves aside the broader question of how affects shape in political life, and how the circulation of specific affects can enable or block the very emergence of an event. This will lead us to a different understanding of politics, one that will take place on the next chapter through a conversation with Spinoza.

### **Can we afford to wait for an event?**

As we have seen, Badiou argues that, for a truth to be treated, the world in which it emerges must not be atonal, stable, inconsequential, inactive, or inorganic. These are characteristics of worlds that cannot support political rupture. But what does it mean for

a world to be seen as such? Let's take atonality as an example. According to Badiou, "declaration of the atony of a world may be simply ideological" (2018, 362). The claim that no points exist—that is, that nothing in the current order invites a real decision or rupture—cannot be a declaration of a metaphysical fact, if only we recall that the situation is, by definition, incomplete. We are dealing instead with a political tactic: "under the cover of a programme of familial happiness devoid of history, of unreserved consumption and easy-listening euthanasia" (Badiou 2018, 326), the characterisation of the world as if there are not points worthy of being held to pre-emptively prevents an event (future or present) from unfolding, obscuring the presence of possible alternatives paths.

What sustains the image of a world without points is the operation of the state of the situation, responsible for maintaining the appearance of solidity and completeness of the situation, exactly because "it is necessary to prohibit that catastrophe of presentation which would be its encounter with its own void" (Badiou 2015b, 93). In other words, the work of statist ideology is to prevent the appearance of inconsistency—to make sure that the situation never appears as incomplete or susceptible to disruption.

Žižek (2007) takes on Badiou's idea of points and offers a complementary diagnosis. Besides *concealing* points, he argues that another one of ideology's key strategies is to *stage* false choices and impose false points. We can see this, for example, in the post-9/11 'war on terror,' and in one of its renewed contemporary versions carried out by Israel against Palestine and other Arab nations, in which the 'us or them' rhetoric and an allegedly defence of democracy and liberal values conceals, to say the least, economical and imperialistic aspirations. The same logic applies to the discourse of far-right political figures like Donald Trump (U.S.), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil) or Marie Le Pen (France), who claim to be on a (holy) crusade to save democracy, while at the same time acting to dismantle all the democratic structures that support the political arena. As put by Žižek,

when anyone who draws attention to the complexity and ambiguity of the situation, is sooner or later interrupted by a brutal voice telling him: "OK, enough of this muddle - we are in the middle of a difficult struggle in which the fate of our free world is at stake, so please, make it clear, where do you really stand: do you support freedom and democracy or not?" (Žižek 2007)

Žižek is echoing something that has been highlighted over and over by leftist movements: that many of the choices we are called to make are actually a blackmail between two fake opposites—democracy or terrorism? Human rights or barbarism?—at the cost of obliteration of radical emancipatory politics. The true lines of conflict (which, for both

Žižek and Badiou, happen in the anti-capitalist terrain) are replaced by fabricated oppositions that only serve to preserve the situation. Johnston (2007, 24) claims that the statist ideology goes even one step further and implodes the weight of points, not by portraying them as unremarkable features of the banal, everyday landscape, but by trying to make us see points *everywhere*, as if every minor modification signifies radical transformation.

In sum, the state ideological apparatus work both by erasing points and by simulating them, and these operations try to guarantee that potential political subjects are either numbed by the illusion of a world without tensions or paralysed by choices that lead nowhere. The result is the same: political subjects are left without real opportunities to materialise the consequences of an event, and political change is therefore interrupted.

Here, Badiou's refusal to theorise pre-evental times is certainly felt. If statist power already works to pre-emptively suppress rupture by declaring the world closed or by disguising genuine choices, then we cannot afford to wait for an event to deal with this situation. The world will not *become* atonal once an event has happened; the structure that generates atonality is already in place. The same equally applies to stable, inconsequential, inactive, and inorganic worlds—we can argue that they are all, in their own way, result of an active effort of the state of the situation to shelter the situation from pressure from those who are not part of it. Should a theory of change not include the work of building of a world that is capable of rupture in the first place?

The recognition of this situation occurs in the context of a broader critique of Badiou's work—as noted by Adrian Johnston (2007)—according to which a philosophy that so meaningfully insists on the possibility of entirely different worlds risks becoming unjustifiably blind to the political work that is happening at this very moment. In other words, a theory that arrogantly “refuses to dirty one's hands with the bargains and compromises unavoidable in the practice of *Realpolitik*” (Johnston 2007, 12).

I want to add to the discussion that one of the main political implications of Badiou's ontology (specially of the dynamic between the void and the state) is that we need to go beyond the simple observation that certain groups are excluded from the situation; we need to understand that, ontologically speaking, the oppression and exclusion of these groups is necessary within the dominant order—and this exclusion is what is rejected by an event. However, the radicality of this conclusion falls short the moment we are unable to attribute long-term importance to the articulation and denunciation of the nature of this oppression.

Think, for example, about the work of so many authors within feminist, black, and materialist philosophical traditions that, in the last century, helped us grasp and circumvent the nefarious effects of the rules of the situation. Silvia Federici and Angela David have shown how capitalism was built and depends on the free reproductive labour carried out by women, especially black women and women of colour. Denise Ferreira da Silva (who, like Badiou, also builds on Derrida's logic of the supplement) thoroughly displays how modern subjectivity could only be conceived with the invention of an Other, marked by a discourse on race produced by 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific practices. Dependence-theory authors from Latin-America (such as Ruy Mauro Marini and Vânia Bambirra) demystify the traditional idea of economic development by showing how the success of developed nations is only possible by maintaining other peripheric nations underdeveloped. The point is that, if we accept the clear and unbridgeable cut between pre- and post-evental contexts, we cannot recognise how these authors have actively worked *against* the attempts of the state to smooth out the situation. These works are 'counter-ideological,' so to speak, in the sense that they uncover the cracks in the situation that were covered by the statist ideology and help us to identify (and refuse) false points that we are called to decide upon.

### **The power of affects**

The conceptual landscape that we weaved together so far give us enough reason to stand behind the importance of pre-evental times, and the influence our current world has on the emergence and success of an event. We do not need to let go of the radicality of the event's break with the situation to admit that the pre- and the post-evental moments have some sort of connection. In other words, the disposition of the world (atonal or not, stable or not) has direct influence on how an event appears is carried on, and this does not mean that the event constitutes less of a break with the situation. Where Badiou tries to stablish a clean cut, we actually have a paradox: if transformation

is deep-seated enough, it might also transform the very criteria by which we could identify it, thus making it unintelligible to us. But if it is intelligible, it might be because the transformation was not radical enough. If we can talk about the change then it is not full blooded enough; but if it is full-blooded enough, it threatens to fall outside our comprehension. Change must presuppose continuity – a subject to whom the alteration occurs – if we are not to be left merely with two incommensurable states; but how can such

continuity be compatible with revolutionary upheaval? (Eagleton 2003, 246 quoted in Johnston 2007, 18)

Therefore, understanding political change requires that we touch on this paradox—as we have been doing—and also give proper attention to what comes before a political transformation. Otherwise, it is as if we were putting the cart before the horses: if the conditions of possibility of change are not there, then all the knowledge we have about what happens after a rupture will become largely useless—because without those conditions, change can only occur by chance.

It is in this context that Johnston (2007; 2008) decides to turn to *affects*, exactly because they let him do something that Badiou's own framework largely forbids, that is, think the conditions of possibility that are in place before an event has erupted. More specifically, he can account for the experience of the subjects who exist *before* an eventual rupture, and yet somehow remain faithful to the possibility that something new *could* happen.

Affects are not without a place in Badiou's thought, but they do receive different kinds of treatment throughout his work—sometimes they are presented as basic human conditions pre-existing to an event, and other times as the result of events. In the latter case, Badiou describes two different groups of affects: on one hand, enthusiasm, pleasure, happiness, and joy, as the anthropological signs of the new relationship brought about by events of the political, art, love and science; on the other hand, terror, anxiety, courage, and justice as signs of the subjective engagement in any truth-process (Johnston 2008, 119).

It is very relevant to note Badiou's use of courage in the process of *forcing*, understood as the post-evental activity through which the political subject must *act as if* the unforeseeable consequences of the event are already present, *as if* the radical change has already taken place. The commitment to an event requires that we have confidence in a fiction of a world-to-come, anticipating its results. This is a powerful and necessary fiction, since it inspires courage in the political subjects, a courage that will enable “the subject-of-an-event to make choices whose calculability and outcomes aren't given in advance by the existent re/presentational order of the state-of-the-situation” (Johnston 2008, 109).

Despite the importance that courage seems to have in Badiou's project, and the part it plays in strengthening the conviction and consistency of a political subject, Badiou maintains the view of this and other affects as something that operates only in the

aftermath of the event (Johnston 2008, 122). More than that, Badiou tends to prioritize names over affects in the process of forcing (2008, 11). In the moments that a subject must decide what belongs to the truth of an event and what does not, this is done through naming: the subject names a new element or consequence that the old situation did not recognise as such. The naming is not only description, but it also has an ontological force: it transforms what is visible and sayable. So, the subject's primary function is to name what the event makes possible and to remain faithful to it. Affects would be only a consequence of the subject's fidelity to the event, not a central component of it.

Yet, taking into consideration what we have seen so far—the relation between the event and the situation, the conditions for an event to unfold, and the active attempt by the situation to block these conditions—are there not enough reasons for thinking differently about the status of affects, especially the role they play *before* the event and the process of subjectivation?

Could we not argue that courage is not just a feeling the subject has after naming an event, but what makes naming and forcing possible in the first place, as the affective condition that sustains the subject through uncertainty? We follow Johnston and go a step further, defending the existence of a “pre-evental form of forcing” (Johnston 2008, 5), that is, the willingness to believe in transformation in the absence of any guarantee that such change is possible—something that by itself would challenge the atonicity of a world, paving the way for transformation to *actually* happen. Reversely, we can also think of circumstances where affects can undermine political transformation: think of the anxiety of “non-evental claustrophobia, the agitated, nervous feeling of being trapped in the stasis of a system that seems to be highly resistant to extreme and extensive modifications” (Johnston 2008, 28). If we are stuck in such anxious state, the work of actively looking for tension points in the situation becomes hard and, once again, change becomes a matter of chance.

### ***Digression II: tactical use of law***

Recognising the intrinsic connection between law and the situation—or, more precisely, the state of the situation—we must reflect on how to relate to law without losing sight of its structural role within the situation. Here, we are in the pre-evental terrain, where law, due to its ontonegative character, has not yet being abolished by an event. Following the discussion of the previous chapter and echoing the tension between pre-evental construction and evental rupture, I suggest we ask: is there any way to interact with law that contributes to the

creation of a world susceptible to political change? Can law, despite being designed to reinforce the situation, contain fractures or ‘pockets’ that align with emancipatory politics?

An important distinction emerges between the strategic and tactical uses of law (Pazello 2021, 8), again in the Marxist tradition. A strategic use places faith in law as a means to reform society from within, relinquishing a revolutionary horizon. Yet, even if one does not abandon this horizon, it is important to recognise that a revolution (an event) will not immediately dissolve bourgeois social forms (including law), despite this being its theoretical endpoint. Therefore, the alternative to the strategic use of law cannot be wholesale abstention, since mercantile relations (and their legal codifications) will persist in the initial phases of revolutionary transformation. To use Badiou’s vocabulary, the realisation of the rupture initiated by an event depends on the fidelity of those who, point by point, give consistency to the consequences of the event. It would be deeply naïve to assume that law offers a linear path to dismantling the social relations of oppression and exploitation that define capitalist society (or, more generically, a situation). As it was said before, its fundamental structure remains one of reinforcement, not subversion, of dominant interests. At the same time, it is irresponsible to dismiss the law outright, especially when faced with concrete disputes, criminalisation, and repression.

This is why the law of a situation can be only *tactically* (and not *strategically*) appropriated. Think, for example, of the legislative victories of the workers’ movement that guarantee minimum wages or maximum working hours. Yes, it is true that these changes have not overthrown the capitalist system, and that the system has adapted around them; but the improvement in working conditions for part of the population is undeniable.<sup>6</sup> Another example of a politically relevant tactical use of law are the movements that, in many different ways, aim at democratising legal knowledge and expanding access to justice, which are often viewed as ‘dangerous’ or ‘subversive’ precisely because they destabilise the legal system’s opacity.<sup>7</sup> Keeping law cryptic and inaccessible facilitates its instrumentalisation and abuse by

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<sup>6</sup> Here, we can open the intersectional discussion about who benefits from these rights gains, since we know that the system is not experienced in the same way by everyone. We can see, for example, how the improvement in the quality of life of workers in the Global North has been achieved at the expense of the labour conditions of workers in the Global South - not because this was the conscious intention of the labour struggle in the North, but because this was the way the system adapted to be able to afford better working conditions in a specific part of the globe. This discussion calls for an analysis of race and gender, which will show us that people of colour and female bodies occupy a more adverse and undervalued position on this scale of labour precariousness, both globally and locally.

<sup>7</sup> Think, for example, about the Argentinian associations *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo) and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), that are organised in search of children and grandchildren who disappeared during the country’s dictatorship (1976-1983). Today, they are in constant dispute with the Argentine government over the cut in funding for reparation policies and for the National Genetic Data Bank, which is essential for identifying children of disappeared people who have been adopted illegally. We can also think of the example of Brazil, which has seen a huge number of murders of environmentalists in the last decade, especially in the Amazon region. Activists such as Chico Mendes, Dorothy Stang, Dom Phillips, and Bruno Pereira (to name a few of the figures whose deaths have had international repercussions) not only defended the conservation of the environment, but also the right of forest dwellers to their territory and traditional way of life.

the situation. On this, a crucial clarification: to speak meaningfully of ‘abuse of law’ would require a legal system that is not already shaped by the interests of the situation, which is not the case. The violence and arbitrariness of the legal order are not anomalies or misapplications; they are features of a legal system designed to reproduce the existing situation. Nonetheless, to insist on the tactical use of law is to engage in a pre-evental type of forcing that tries to uncover or create cracks in the situation without which political rupture cannot happen.

### **Joyful contingency: political affects in Spinoza**

By now, we took a tour through Badiou’s theory of the event and understood how political change is something that ontologically constitute our reality, but that only happens, or can have lasting effects, in very specific contexts—the ones in which our world is, somehow, at risk. Following Johnston and Žižek, we saw how the terrain that precedes such ruptures is already contested, shaped by ideological declarations of normality and by the affective atmospheres that sustain them. Reading Badiou against the grain we concluded that, if change can be blocked in advance by the works of the state of the situation, an adequate theory of the event must reach back to pre-evental times. By doing so, we can recognise the labour political movements perform in resisting the closure of the world to change and explain how subjects become attuned to a break that has not yet happened—which then give us a different perspective to think about political strategies in our non-evental conjecture.

As pointed out in the last chapter, one of the ways to access the pre-event time is by means of affect theory. This is, of course, only one of the possible entries; we could focus instead on exploring the cracks and inconsistencies of the situation, the groundwork laid by social movements (as suggested in *Digression II*), or even the quieter acts of resistance that prefigure an event rupture. Affects are centred on the political subject and give us material to think about how someone becomes open to the event in the first place. After all, even in the absence of an event, subjects are never neutral or unaffected—affects like anxiety, fear, hope, or frustration saturate pre- and post- evental life and can be politically mobilised, reinforcing the surface of stability of the situation or eroding it.

In this affective turn, I propose we look to Spinoza, who can provide us the vocabulary to discuss political affects. Firstly, because I believe that there is an interesting synchronicity between Badiou and Spinoza when it comes to their understanding of the place of contingency: for Badiou, contingency is ontological; as for Spinoza, although he

does not give contingency ontological status, believes that it is the inescapable way in which we, as finite modes of substance, experience the world.<sup>8</sup> Next to this, Badiou himself establishes a dialogue with Spinoza, but is mostly interested in the latter's methodological rigor—the *more geometrico*. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza provides a model for how philosophy can take on deductive, almost mathematical form, and Badiou sees himself as heir of this formality (Laerke 1999, 89, 91). Badiou's reading of Spinoza, however, "cannot account for the systematic internal function of a major part of the *Ethics*, namely the deduction of the passions" (Laerke 1999, 92), which concerns political affects. Having seen the marginal position that affects occupy in Badiou's theory, this is hardly a surprise; at the same time, if we are willing to grant more space to affects within the broader framework of the theory of the event, then turning to Spinoza—specially in the aspects Badiou overlooked—and some contemporary reading of his work seems fruitful.<sup>9</sup>

### Spinoza's affects and the power of action

Spinoza defines affects (*affectus*) as "affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the idea of these affections" (E III, D3). An affection (*affection*) happens to the body, and it corresponds, in the mind, with a certain idea. The ideas we have of an affection result, according to Spinoza, in a variation in our power of action (*potentia agendi*), also called

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<sup>8</sup> Marilena Chaui explains the place of contingency in Spinoza's philosophy: "Therefore, what is the possible and what is the contingent? A thing is said to be possible, Spinoza explains, when we understand that it will occur, but we do not know the true and necessary causes of its production. The possible is our ignorance regarding the cause of a thing. A thing is said to be contingent, the philosopher explains, when its nature is such that we believe it could either be or not be, for we do not know the essence of the thing and we do not know if it could be or not be. The contingent is our ignorance regarding the essence of a thing. The possible and the contingent are images and with them we forge the imaginary field of freedom." (2011b, 88).

<sup>9</sup> In this chapter, I will largely rely on the reception of Spinoza by Marilena Chaui and by Gilles Deleuze. I will use Deleuze despite the known criticism from Badiou towards him. Mogens Laerke in his article "The Voice and the Name: Spinoza in the Badiouian Critique of Deleuze" (1999) shows how the differences between Badiou and Spinoza somehow mirror their specific choice of use of Spinoza – while Badiou focuses on the *more geometrico* (which is somehow outside of the *Ethics*), Deleuze delves into the deduction of the passions (the third book of the *Ethics*). Since I am trying to incorporate the analysis of affects into Badiou's theory, I will make use of Deleuze because, of the two, he is the one who better discussed this part of Spinoza's *Ethics*. As for Chaui, her reading of Spinoza also does not focus on the *more geometrico*, making her a good pairing with Deleuze. In her own words, "The constellation is a mesh. We shall not seek out the Spinozian system, but rather, a certain mesh. In doing so, will we lose sight of the systematizing intention behind the *more geometrico*? Perhaps. But on a different level, we will recover the polemical intention in Spinoza that, if philosophy finds itself lacking, reduces that philosophy itself to a skeletal structure" (Chaui 1971, 129-130, quoted in Magno 2021, 3).

force of existing (*vis existendi*), the passing from one degree of perfection to another. This variation, which is continuous and perpetual, is called *affect* (Deleuze 1978, para. 17).

As specific modes, we are defined by our capacity of affecting and being affected by other bodies (E III, post. 1 and 2), whether this is a person, an institution, or an image. These encounters are ‘good’ when the other body enters in composition with our own, and ‘bad’ when it decomposes our body. In the first case, we experience a passage<sup>10</sup> to a greater perfection, or an increase of our power of acting, and this is an affect of *joy*; in the second case, when our power of acting is decreased, we experience an affect of *sadness* (Deleuze 1988, 50). Joy and sadness are not states of the mind, but ways of being or existing. Joyful affects can be either *passions* or *actions*, depending on their origin: they are *passive* when something acts upon us and our feelings are explained by the nature of the affecting body; on the contrary, they are *active* when we understand the cause of what we feel and act from our own power (E III, D1-3). Sad affects, on their turn, can only have external causes, because the force of existing that is characteristic of the human experience as finite (the *conatus*) strives to preserve its own existence and is averse to sadness (Chauí 2011a, 150); thus, sadness is always passive, never active. Action is freedom; passiveness, servitude (Chauí 2011a, 148).

We can draw two political consequences from the last two paragraphs. Firstly, we see how affects are markers of power. They are not ‘private feelings’ that arise from a neutral reality, but rather the result of interactions and indicators of where each of us stands in relation to each other. Extrapolating from the individual to the collective level, we can say that a society in which sad affects (such as fear and despair) circulate at large produces bodies with a diminished power of existence. In this sense, Deleuze (1978, para. 18) reminds us of how “inspiring sad passions is necessary for the exercise of power,” what, for Spinoza, connects the despot and the priest—they both need the sadness of their subjects to maintain their powerful position. Exactly from this, the second consequence follows: that political transformation is affective before it is cognitive. According to Spinoza, “an affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to,

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<sup>10</sup> The way Marilena Chauí explains this passage illustrates the difference between Badiou (and the larger post-foundationalism framework) and Spinoza on the nature of contingency, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In free translation from the Portuguese original, “Therefore, there is no passage from one perfection to another (greater or lesser), but rather an increase or decrease *of* perfection, that is, of the reality of an essence, so that the quantitative change (increase or decrease) is also qualitative. The notion of passage also indicates that the essence of a singular thing undergoes changes – there are changes *in the* essence – but it does not change into another – there is no change *in* essence” (Chauí 2016, 327, emphasis from the original). With Spinoza, we experience change and contingency, but, as finite modes of the one substance, we retain a single and immutable essence.

and stronger than, the affect to be restrained” (E IV, P7). If political submission depends on the circulation of sad affects to be sustained, then increasing the *potentia multitudinis*—that is, the arrangement of many individual *potentia agendi* (TP II, 13)—involves not so much rational persuasion, but the fostering of joyful encounters and, consequently, disarming of sad affections.

### **The fear-hope system and their political use**

Linking Spinoza’s notion of affects, passions, and action to the discussion we started in the last chapter, we may ask: which specific affects stabilise or destabilise worlds? Building on the general mechanics we just outlined, we can start by closely examining hope and fear, the two passions Spinoza names as the principal levers of political servitude.

In Spinoza, both fear and hope must be thought simultaneously. Their origin in the uncertainty about the future: hope is the expectation of an uncertain good (E III, Def. Aff. 12), whilst fear is the apprehension of an uncertain evil (E III, Def. Aff. 13). Here, it is interesting to note the relationship between fear and hope and temporality, as done by Chaui (2016, 337): the persistence of an affection is independent of the time that exists between it and the thing that caused it (E III, P18). A past or future thing, when imagined affecting the body without any other image excluding it, is imagined as present and the body is affected by it as if it were in its presence. However, this temporal difference experienced through imagination causes the mind to feel the contingency of things, and consequently becomes uncertain about them (Chau, 2016, 337).

Hope and fear, both suspended in this same condition of doubt, rely on the imagination’s capacity to project possible outcomes without certainty about them. In this condition, one cannot exist without the other, in such a way that we can speak of a *hope-fear system*. From their own definition,

it follows that there is neither Hope without Fear, nor Fear without Hope. For he who is suspended in Hope and doubts a thing’s outcome is supposed to imagine something that excluded the existence of the future thing. And so to that extent he is saddened (by P19), and consequently, while he is suspended in Hope, he fears that the thing [he imagines] will happen. Conversely, he who is in Fear, i.e., who doubts the outcome of a thing he hates, also imagines something that excludes the existence of that thing. And so (by P20) he rejoices, and hence, to that extent has Hope that the thing will not take place. (E III, Def. Aff. 13, Exp)

They who fear, hope; and they who hope, fear. Ultimately, besides being passions and not actions (because caused by external things, even if imaginary and not present), both are expressions of our finite condition: if we cannot help but experience the world as contingent, time becomes something discontinuous and unpredictable, and the feeling of uncertainty grows to the extent that anything can be the cause of joy or sadness (it all depends, as we have seen, if the encounter we have composes or decomposes—in fact or in imagination—our body).

Knowing the operational logic of the hope-fear system allows us to think about their political use. In the preface of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza explains how *superstition* is born when people face phenomena that they do not comprehend and, moved by fear, come up with supernatural explanations for these experiences. Superstition is fed by imagination, not by reason—the same imagination that conceives freedom as the possession of a certain good, the greatest of which is the possession of another’s body and spirit (Chaui 2016, 155). According to Spinoza, we do not desire things because they are good; rather, we consider them good because we desire them (E III, P9S), and at the heart of this desire, there is uncertainty—not uncertainty about the fate of things, but about the things themselves, “the uncertainty surrounding the act of obtaining and maintaining the enjoyment of those good things, which is expressed through the simultaneity of fear and hope” (Magno 2021, 12). Consequently, this uncertainty, stemming from human desire and the hope and fear that this inspires, opens the door to superstition.

Hope and fear are, in this scenario, mobilised by those who aspire domination, who transform the imaginative explanations of reality into an *imaginary machine* at the service of oppression, thereby forcing the dominated to believe in the past images, even when they are contradicted or denied by events (Chaui 2016, 155). Spinoza denounces how religious and political leaders use superstition to keep people under control, dominating men by “reserving their fear, flattering them with rewards, castigating them with punishments” (Magno 2021, 10). This is how fear sustains domination: the oppressed fear nature, punishment suffered by dissidents (who are kept under control with small doses of hope, by the promise of stability, reform, or small gains), and losing regard for not complying, while the powerful fear disobedience, losing control, and rivals who can create more convincing illusions than theirs (Chaui 2016, 155–156). The result is paralysing:

If, on the side of those who have allowed themselves to be dominated or have been forced to do so, the inexplicable terrifies and paralyses all efforts at understanding and action, the established doctrinal machine, maintained by force or fallacious words, destroys all attempts at opposition. To the fear of things and men is added a new fear: fear of thought and action. (Chaui 2016, 156, free translation)

Superstition is therefore not an antique phenomenon, and Spinoza is talking about something more deep than religious interference in political affairs (as one could infer from the term alone): he calls our attention to the imbrication that “involves the invasion of a particular superstitious structure, that is, the incursion of a certain structuration of social life in the political arena formatted according to a ‘system of fear’ that both ruins that sphere while producing servitude” (Magno 2021, 15). Superstition, therefore, is a structural form of exercise of power through fear; a form of violence used as a resource in the political field. “It is, in sum, authoritarianism” (Magno 2021, 3). This system does operate through force, but (more interestingly) through the modulation of collective moods, as an affective machine (to use Chaui’s terminology) that manages the political body by adjusting its affective register.

This Spinozist insight also helps us understand the affective infrastructure that sustain Badiou’s stable or atonal worlds, manufactured worlds closed off to eventual rupture. Weaving the two theories together, in both stable and atonal words, fear and superstition work to block transformation. The very way in which Chaui describes superstition gives us this link: “the daughter of fear, born of it and by it, superstition is a desperate and delusional *attempt to find an imaginary unity*, capable of *covering and reconciling* a reality perceived as *fragmented* in space and time” (Chaui 2016, 162, free translation, my emphasis). Would that not be exactly what the state of the situation seeks to do through the ideological subterfuges we discussed earlier—a desperate attempt to avoid “that catastrophe of presentation which would be its encounter with its own void” (Badiou 2015b, 93)?

We can think of some ways in which fear supports the state of the situation in this endeavour. In stable worlds, which are so rigidly ordered that change appears unnecessary or impossible, the fear of disorder, exclusion or loss of possessions can be mobilised to push people not only to believe that nothing could or should change, but to actively defend the given situation, treating any transformation as a threat. In an atonal world, the connection with fear is more nuanced. As we have seen, the appearance of atonality can take different forms: the world can be made to seem as if nothing matters (no points), or

as if everything matters all the time (every modification is disguised as a point), or even be filled with false dichotomies (fake points). Here, it is not that subjects fear the decisions per se, or the lack of decisions to be made; it is more that people can be shaped by a background fear (of disorientation, uncertainty) that makes it easier to accept the given world (even if dull or incoherent) instead of questioning it. In an atonal world, fear will not stop us from seeing a point that is present but naturalises the idea that there is nothing to see, or that the (false) points available are all we can expect. In short, fear helps to naturalise atonality, ensuring that the world appears complete and that its limits go unquestioned.

With this, we reinforce the political consequences we took from Spinoza's deduction of affects, that political transformation is affective before it is cognitive. Rational argumentation is not enough to dismantle the fear that plays an important role in blocking events and their consequences; fear must be countered with stronger affects, preferably active ones, exactly because active affects increase our power of action and emerge from within, rather than being imposed from without. Important to note that "from within" refers to the adequacy of the ideas that form the affect and does not imply that the affect is produced by the individual in isolation—on the contrary, these affects are always political, because they are formed through collective processes. From this perspective, political resistance is first and foremost affective.

### **Security as a radical stance**

Once more: breaking with the fear-hope machine that secures superstition, which is part of the strategy of the situation to immunise the world from change, requires the nurturing of a different affective configuration. What comes after the modulation of fear and hope?

Since Spinoza pairs hope and fear together, the remedy for fear is obviously not to replace it with hope, despite hope being a joyful passion. It is important to stress this given how often hopeful thinking is proposed as a political solution (or tool) in moments of crisis. But for Spinoza, as we have seen, hope is not the opposite of fear, but its flip side, grounded in the same uncertainty and passivity. Together, they keep the subjects oscillating between two poles and, therefore, weak (in the Spinozian sense of the word). The real task is to break with this oscillation. We already know that fear and hope are unavoidable parts of the human existence and cannot be suppressed, so the question is not so much how to abolish fear, but how to make it weaker.

As Chaui reminds us (2016, 169), fear and hope are passions linked to the perception of contingency of things and events. From the perspective of passions and imagination, they are weak affects, because caused by something external and future (or past); on the other hand, we know that reason associated the stronger affects (actions) with internal and necessary causes. But we also know that reason alone cannot overcome passion, so that the transition from fear to hope must occur *in the field of passions itself*. It is important to understand why this is the case: we must remember that, for Spinoza, all affects, even passive ones like hope and fear, as part of the *conatus*, the striving for perseverance in one's being. Spinoza do not treat them as flaws, but as indicators of our current state of power or limitation and recognise that we often cannot jump straight from passion to reason (that is, to action), especially in political life. Therefore, even though the shift from fear to hope is not yet action (it occurs in the field of passion), it does mark a relative increase in power, since hope (as a joyful passion) is a *lesser form of servitude* than fear. Hope, on its turn, can only be overcome if paired with two other complementary joyful passions, security<sup>11</sup> and gladness. Once more, we are still within the realm of passions; even though, as we will see later on, a passion like security can also take an active form.

Because we are trying to understand the affective configuration that will allow for the emergence of a future event, we will focus only on security, as gladness refers to the past things only.<sup>12</sup> Spinoza defines security as “a Joy born of the idea of a future or past thing, concerning which the cause of doubting has been removed” (E III, Def. Aff. 14). If sadness arises instead of joy, we have despair (E III, Def. Aff. 15). Spinoza explains:

Confidence [security], therefore, is born of Hope and Despair of Fear, when the cause of doubt concerning the thing's outcome is removed. This happens because man imagines that the past or future thing is there, and regards it as present, or because he imagines other things, excluding the existence of the things that put him in doubt. For though we can never be certain of the outcome of singular things (by IIP31C), it can still happen that we do not doubt their outcome. As we have shown (see IIP49S), it is one thing not to doubt a thing, and another to be certain of it. (...). (E III, Def. Aff. 15, Exp., text between brackets added by me)

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<sup>11</sup> In Curley's edition of Spinoza's work, which I use here as the source for all Spinoza citations, the Latin term '*securitas*' is translated as 'confidence' instead of 'security'. However, I base my analysis of *securitas* on the work of Marilena Chaui, who translates the term as 'security'. Therefore, despite Curley's choice, I will use 'security' instead of 'confidence' throughout.

<sup>12</sup> “Gladness is a Joy, accompanied by the idea of a past thing that has turned out better than we had hope” (E III, Def. Aff. 16).

Doing away with doubt, the main effect of stabilising hope through security is, according to Chaui (2016, 169), that it allows us to begin to realise that the necessary things (i.e., the one over which we have no doubt) are stronger than the contingent ones, and this realisation takes us away from fear. To repeat what we saw in the first chapter, we are held hostages by the unassignable errancy of the state, and a truly effective state power is always and necessarily a shadowy kind of power, and Spinoza show us how this power is maintained by the structure of the superstition. This is why the passage from fear to hope, and its eventual overcoming by security, is politically useful, even when we are not yet dealing with active affects: fear causes other sad passions and superstition to proliferate, which keep us hostage to the state of the situation.

Security still marks only a transitional moment within this affective trajectory, not an endpoint. In principle, security is a passive affect—a state of reassurance that, while stabilising hope, reducing fear, and helping to break with superstition, is still based on external causes. But unlike hope, security has the *potential to shift into an active affect* once it is grounded in reason and an understanding of necessity. Hope, by its very nature, cannot make this shift, because it remains tied to an inadequate idea: it relies on the anticipation of an uncertain, contingent future or past, which keeps it in the realm of passivity. Hope can be displaced by rational joy (i.e., by an active affect) as one moves from imagination to reason, but it does not evolve into it. On the other hand, security, by replacing uncertainty with certainty and breaking with the fear-hope system, makes us capable of more passions of joy, increasing our power of action. If we remain on the realm of passions, then security is likely one of the most stable, joyful affect, but it is still passive: it is more a ceasing (or diminishing) of fear than an active state. However, security strengthens the *conatus* and, by doing so, enables our move from passivity to activity: the *conatus* can become the proper cause of the internal and external effects it produces, that is, of its affections, ideas and behaviours (Chaui 2016, 170). Being proper cause is, to use Chaui's words (2016, 170), to actively exercise self-determination.

Here we can begin to align this Spinozist reading with Johnston's notion of pre-vental forcing. Returning to what we discussed earlier, Badiou understands the event as a rupture in the order of the situation, while Johnston emphasises the subjective and collective labour that precedes and conditions the possibility of such rupture. This labour (the pre-vental forcing) involves acting *as if* transformation were already underway, wagering on change before it is guaranteed; or, in other words, *as if* the state, of which we do not know the size, were already diminished. In Spinozist terms, this wager

becomes possible precisely when the fear-hope system is displaced by security, that is, when the subject no longer imagines its future as determined by forces entirely external to its understanding. Even though the course of things remains uncertain, security marks a shift in how the subject relates to contingency: no longer paralysed by doubt, it becomes capable of anticipating and intervening in the unfolding of the situation.

In this sense, reaching security is not merely a preparatory state that precedes an event, but is in itself part of the transformation. It reconfigures the subject's affective experience by neutralising sad passion and reinforcing the *conatus*, thereby enabling a passage from passivity to activity. This is what Chauvi (2016, 170) means by self-determination: to become the adequate cause of one's own affections and ideas. The capacity to act 'pre-eventally,' to force the situation towards its limits, finding its cracks and inconsistencies and exposing the ideological structure of the state, is grounded in the strengthened *conatus* that emerges from the affective transition out of fear. It is here that we find a very practical link between security, self-determination, and the courage to act before transformation is manifest: security, by raising collective capacity and neutralising fear, to self-determination, which is fundamental part of the creation worlds open to change.

### **Conclusion**

By tracing the ontological conditions of political transformation through Badiou's theory of the event and supplementing it with Spinoza's account of affects, I hope to have shown that even though, from a post-foundational perspective, the possibility for political change is always present, it will only have long-lasting effects if it is given space to grow. This is because any situation is inherently incomplete (as Badiou suggests), and also because subjects are affected by and responsive to the worlds they inhabit (as Spinoza shows). Badiou provides us with the formal language to think political rupture, yet, as Johnston argues, his reluctance to theorise pre-evental conditions the political work already underway before rupture even happens and does not account for how the structures of the present can determine whether an event will be recognised, sustained, or fail. Following Johnston's critique and complementing it with Spinoza's theory of affects (especially through the interpretations of Chauvi and Deleuze), I insisted that the affective configurations of a world are decisive to determine how open this world is to change in the first place: affects like fear, hope and security can diminish or expand our power to

act, and are therefore central in the constitution or foreclosure of collective action, both before and after the event. Together, the analysis of these authors reveal that political change depends not only on the sudden appearance of the event, but also—and maybe mainly—on the prior work of resisting the closure of the situation and fostering the affects that can keep us open to the new.

On one hand, this points to a need to review our political tactics, keeping in mind that we must also pay attention to the need to build the conditions (mainly affective) for political change, and not just focus on the political trigger of rupture. On the other hand, I believe that, in a world managed more and more through fear and superstition, reclaiming joy, courage and collective action as necessary for transformation is a political act in its own.

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