

Alain Badiou and the Book of Acts

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Abstract

Although much scholarly attention has been paid to the work of Alain Badiou and the Apostle Paul, very little work has been done to extend the work of Badiou beyond the “authentic Pauline letters,” or even to other parts of the Bible and early Christianity. While Badiou dismisses the Book of Acts as “the rhetoric of Greek fables,” we suggest that the Book of Acts contains all the necessary elements of a formal truth procedure, and—using Badiou’s own categories—we offer an interpretation of Acts that is surprisingly coherent with the rest of his work on the Apostle Paul. The result of this examination offers a new perspective on the usefulness of Badiou for the general practice of biblical interpretation, and extends the scope of his work beyond the authentic Pauline letters.

Key words

Book of Acts; Badiou; New Testament; theory.

Introduction

Since the publication of *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Badiou 2003), much scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between French philosopher Alain Badiou and the Apostle Paul. This fresh work has, for some, reanimated the discourse of Pauline biblical studies, and thus attracted many (like ourselves) to explore a deeper connection between contemporary philosophy and Pauline biblical interpretation. However, few biblical scholars, theologians, and philosophers have attempted to extend Badiou’s framework into other domains, such as the Book of Acts, or other works which have been deemed by modern scholarship as “inauthentic Pauline material.”¹ Unfortunately, Badiou himself reinforces this narrow focus, in that he dismisses the Book of Acts as fable, even when he routinely cites Paul’s conversion in the Book of Acts as paradigmatic for our understanding of events and truth procedures. Badiou notes that the “narrative of the Acts of the Apostles is ... a retrospective construction whose intentions modern criticism has clearly brought to light, and whose form is frequently borrowed from the rhetoric of Greek fables” (2003, 18).² For this reason, Badiou

¹ The focus on Paul can be seen in Miller (2008); Caputo and Alcott (2009); Harink (2010); Critchley (2012); Blanton and De Vries (2013).

² Recent scholarship on the Book of Acts is divided on whether Acts is constructed according to ancient rhetorical guidelines, and challenges the notion that ancient rhetoricians saw any discernible difference between their rhetorical strategies and common Greek historiography. Ben Witherington suggests “if Luke wished for Theophilus to give ear to the case he was making, he would almost certainly have had to give attention to the rhetorical properties and potentialities of his composition” (1998, 42). Witherington sees the Book of Acts as contemporaneous to other ancient historical/rhetorical works, which often included rhetorical strategy as part of a greater historical framework (see Polybius, Thucydides, Xenophon, Josephus—all of whom were personally involved

focuses his attention primarily on those Pauline letters deemed “authentic,” Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and 1 Thessalonians. The authentic Pauline letters are enough, Badiou insists, “to establish certain major subjective traits and guarantee certain decisive episodes” in the Pauline construction of truth (2003, 18).

Perhaps Badiou has too casually dismissed the connection between Acts, Paul, and his own philosophical apparatus. Recent scholarship highlights the significant connection between Acts and the “authentic Paul,” and demands that we include Acts in the evaluation of Pauline subjectivity. In this regard, Craig Keener notes, “both the contrasts and the randomness of the correlations suggest that Luke was not simply deriving his Pauline information from Paul’s letters, but that both sources independently attest to the historical figure of Paul that stands behind them” (2012a, 221). We assume, quite simply, that Badiou’s conclusions on the basis of “modern criticism” are not the same conclusions held by contemporary scholars in the field of Acts, especially since the majority of scholars agree that the author of Acts was, most interestingly, a companion of Paul himself.³ The dismissal that Badiou offers (above) regarding the book of Acts is itself puzzling, in light of other features of his reading of Paul and his philosophy more generally.⁴ But more seriously, it artificially limits the scope and usefulness of his philosophy as a tool for critical analysis that can be applied beyond his own articulation of it. We seek, instead, to expand the parameters of his system, applying it to other, non-Pauline books of the Bible. Moreover, by showing that Badiou’s philosophy functions as a method for grasping the novelty in historical-cultural situations, we hope that this application will be applicable to other fields in religious studies more generally. In

in the historical accounts they fashioned). Quite simply, for Witherington, the appearance of rhetoric does not exclude the possibility of an authentic historical account. In contrast, Stanley Porter, suggests that “there is no such thing as a static conception of the ancient speech, either in handbooks, or in actual practice,” and that the category of ancient rhetoric does not provide a useful tool for understanding the relationship of Paul of Acts and Paul of the Letters (2000, 115). The oft-heated debate between Porter and Witherington reveals an interesting common ground—rhetorical or not, the Book of Acts is a useful source of early Christian history, and provides helpful information regarding Paul the Apostle. Others, like Richard Pervo, still see ancient rhetoric (particularly the “Progymnasmata”) as a useful category for understanding the Book of Acts, though not exhaustively, as Acts contains “a coherent story in conformity with a plan, and his subjects include historical persons, places and events” (2008, 15). At this point, we can only suggest that Badiou’s opinions on the rhetorical structure of the Book of Acts are mildly underdeveloped, and does not reflect a more recent engagement with the discourse of biblical studies on this particular issue.

³ Badiou’s insistence on the seven authentic Pauline letters, like his hesitancy to accept the Book of Acts, can, perhaps, be traced back to the skepticism of the Tübingen school of the nineteenth century, and the work of F.C. Baur (1845). As Porter notes however, the issue of Paul in Acts is not the item of serious contention that it once was; see Porter (2000, 187). The skepticism of the Tübingen school was countered by the work of W.M. Ramsey (1915), F.F. Bruce (1990), Rainer Riesner (1998), and Colin Hemer (1990). This is a significant point of interpretation of which Badiou himself should recognize: an increasing amount of biblical scholars would not agree with his contention that Acts is comprised in accordance with Greek fable. Instead, “(t)he Paul whose portrait Luke paints is the real Paul” (Bruce 1990, 59). See also the section “the Author of Luke-Acts,” in Keener (2012, 402).

⁴ Indeed, for us, it raises three important questions, the specific treatment of which are beyond the scope of this article: (1) If Acts is wholly unreliable for establishing subjective traits and decisive episodes, why does Badiou continually draw from Paul’s conversion in Acts to establish subjective traits and decisive episodes in *Saint Paul*? (2) Does it follow, then, that authentic Pauline material does not contain elements from the rhetoric of Greek fables and stories? (3) Why does Badiou’s most recent play *The Incident at Antioch* look remarkably similar to the book of Acts?

this sense, our focus on Acts not only expands Badiou's system but also the horizons of biblical interpretation and early Christian studies and, we hope, other disciplines.

While Badiou might disavow the general usefulness of the Book of Acts, we suggest this biblical book contains all the formal elements necessary for the establishment of a truth procedure: 1) truth as eventual; 2) truth as generic multiple; 3) truth as universal; and 4) truth as militant proclamation. In this sense, perhaps the Book of Acts *is a superior heuristic tool* for articulating Badiou's notion of truth as it proceeds from an event; for, it not only offers a window into the subject constituted by the event, but also the material effects of truth in established places of discourse (Jerusalem, Rome, Athens, Antioch, etc.).⁵ It is the book of Acts that creatively organizes the event of the resurrection, not in terms of philosophical speculation, but in terms of actual historical circumstances and sequences. Here, we should be clear: we are not arguing that Acts be considered by Badiou in terms of a formal truth (Badiou suggests there is no such thing as a Christian truth procedure), but rather, that Acts, like the rest of Paul, exhibits the basic features of the production of truth, as these are outlined throughout Badiou's philosophical system.

The paper will begin with an articulation of Badiou's theoretical apparatus as it relates to truths, specifically using his reading of Paul as an illustration. Although the discussion of the basic elements of Badiou's philosophical system may appear somewhat long, it is necessary to establish them as a means of orienting readers who may be unfamiliar with his system. As such, the discussion of Badiou's theoretical apparatus is essential to understanding the discussion of Acts that follows but also, we hope, useful in other contexts beyond the limited scope of this paper. We then apply his approach to understanding the function of eventual truth in the Book of Acts, and conclude with a brief appraisal of the usefulness of Badiou's method in the field of contemporary biblical interpretation. This approach is significantly different than many popular trends within biblical interpretation—trends that emphasize the cultural hybridity of early Christian identity, particularly as a dialectic between categories Jew and Greek.⁶ Such emphases, of course, have done much to contextualize early Christianity, but often at the price of grasping the novelty of its emergence. Although we leave it to the reader to ascribe value to this novelty, the addition of a fixed element (the event) to the discussion of identity aids in our ability to see the production of early Christian as something new or, at least, beyond the dialectical conditions of Jew and Greek.

Truth and Event

In what is commonly seen as a post-modern, post-ideological era, Badiou insists on the importance of truth, on the real existence of truths in the world. Yet contrary to

⁵ This does not mean that we are making a historicist argument for the historicity of Acts, but rather that Acts contains all the necessary elements of a truth procedure, and therefore should be considered alongside other authentic subjective accounts in the New Testament—in particular the authentic letters of Paul.

⁶ See Denise Kimber-Buell (2005); Stephen Wilson (1995); Daniel Boyarin (1994). These works are part of a greater trend in cultural studies, which, in seeking to avoid essentialist approaches to identity, suggest some type of dialectical relationship between Jew and Greek. For more general information on essentialism and cultural studies, consult Stephen Fuchs (2005); Baruch Brody (1980); Diana Fuss (1989).

philosophical approaches to the concept of truth based on a modernist subject/object distinction, or representational and phenomenological approaches which emphasize the situated-ness of the interpreter, Badiou articulates a theory of truth based on subjective fidelity to events.⁷ For Badiou, an event is a source of novelty for a situation; it is something that happens that carries within itself the potential to interrupt and radically alter a situation from within.⁸ An event is an immanent break, one that interrupts the continuity and repetition of the same, of the various laws and principles that determine what counts as knowledge in a situation. Badiou often describes an event as an unpredictable supplement to a situation, an incalculable excess that serves as the impetus for a new trajectory beyond the strictures of the context in which it occurs (2004a, 62). For this reason, Badiou suggests that an event is a “pure beginning,” something “absolutely new” (2003, 43-9). More specifically, for Badiou, events make possible the construction of truths in the world in contrast to the static knowledge that governs situations. Although the occurrence of an event does not necessarily entail that a truth occur, since the connection between events and truths is aleatory, all truths for Badiou are, in the end, evental: that is, truths have their origin in events and may, at times, recall that origin and its sense for their ongoing construction and extension.⁹ In what follows, we often use the term “evental truth” to mark Badiou’s particular understanding of truth in this sense, but it is important not to collapse event and truth into each other, as if the event contained its truth in an essential or, perhaps, revelatory manner.

Badiou’s notion of an event, and of truth as proceeding from an event, thus eschews the notion that truth is the result of philosophical speculation, as events and the truths that proceed from them always occur external to philosophical illumination in actual historical circumstances and sequences.¹⁰ This means that for Badiou, truth is neither structural nor legal; rather, a truth, driven by an event “breaks from the axiomatic principle that governs the situation and organizes its repetitive series” (2003, 11). Although the “situation” is the cultural context within which the event occurs (for example, Ancient Palestine, the Roman Empire, France before the Revolution), the event itself remains an indiscernible element of the situation itself, and because of this is not determined by the situation from which it has arisen.

⁷ To label truth “subjective” or to speak of subjects of truth procedures, is not to reduce the status of the subject to the individual. For Badiou, although subjects imply the activity of individuals, they cannot be reduced to individuals. Technically speaking, a subject for Badiou is “any local configuration of a generic procedure from which a truth is supported” (2005a: 391). Badiou’s subject, then, is a formal category that names the operation of truth procedure, and its constitution may vary depending on its status in relation to a given domain (art, science, politics, and love). When we speak of subjects, then, it is important to keep this distinction in mind, even if context often requires language that may imply otherwise, i.e. when Badiou speaks of militant subjects.

⁸ “Situation” is a technical term in Badiou’s ontology, which refers to “any presented multiplicity” (2005a, 24). A situation is “the place of taking-place, whatever the terms of the multiplicity in question” (ibid.). In this paper, “situation” primarily refers to a historical situation, which includes cultural and linguistic particularities.

⁹ This notion of “recall” is discussed in *Being and Event* under the notion of “evental recurrence” in Meditation 20 (2005a, 201-11) and in *Logics of Worlds* under “resurrection” (2009, 45-78).

¹⁰ This is an essential point. Philosophy is, for Badiou, always concerned with truths, but it by no means produces the truths with which it is concerned. Badiou speaks of truths as “conditions” for philosophy (1999, 33-40). A more recent discussion of the role of philosophy with respect to truths can be found in Badiou (2011, 64-72).

The notion that events occur as exceptions to their structural framework helps us to see that events are not, for Badiou, dialectically bound to the cultural context in which they initially occur. This is not to say that all forms of dialectical thinking are absent from Badiou's thought.¹¹ Nevertheless, in this context, to say that events are not dialectically related to their situations means that they do not logically or necessarily flow from the latter, as we see, for instance, in certain aspects of Hegel's philosophy.¹² Events certainly occur within specific contexts, which, as discussed below, Badiou refers to as evental sites. Nevertheless, events are not reducible to their sites in terms of origination or result; an evental site is the precondition for an event occurring, but that is all. An event—if it is really an event—unhinges itself from the situation in which it originally occurred, which is a condition for its generic universality. Nor are events the result of illumination, a becoming-conscious of a previously concealed truth behind or in a situation. Instead, for Badiou, events and the truths they instantiate are contingent phenomena, the result of chance rather than rational necessity. This is why Badiou insists that, although we can think of the historicity of an event and its subsequent trajectory, we cannot think of it in terms of “a History” (2005a, 176).

The lack of any overarching sense to truth, for Badiou, entails multiplying the sites in which truths, in the plural, occur. In Badiou's philosophy, truths occur in four domains: art, science, politics, and love—meaning that we can speak of artistic truths, scientific truths, political truths, and amorous truths.¹³ To clarify again, these truth procedures do not *reflect* a positive engagement with a truth that remains an elusive object, nor do they provide access to truth as a fixed epistemological property that lay dormant within. Rather truth procedures always take the form of a subjective response to an event, which has occurred in its respective domain. For instance, the truth of art, or an artistic procedure, does not find its locus in a governing body beyond itself, in the representation of an object. The truth of art is, rather, of the order of the subject, meaning that it is both singular (it needs no external validation) and immanent (it establishes its own multiple). Badiou thus says that the truth of art is “nothing apart from its own existence. The only question is that of *encountering* this existence, that is, of thinking through a form of thought” (2005b, 9). Likewise, for Badiou, politics does not coincide with the State and the practice of government. A real political event, one that has the potential to establish a new political truth in a world, always subtracts itself from the State and its operations, meaning that it needs no external validation to establish its sequences via political subjects. Politics, or political truth, is, in this sense, the “truth

¹¹ Badiou's work prior to *Being and Event* is openly dialectical. Although many interpreters argue that the publication of *Being and Event* represents a decisive break from dialectical thinking, there is a significant amount of continuity. Indeed, in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou specifically refers to his thought as taking the form of a “materialist dialectic,” albeit with “much hesitation” (2009, 3). Perhaps the most visible proponent of a more dialectical reading of Badiou is Bruno Bosteels (2011).

¹² Hegel can certainly be read in other ways, but this view of Hegel is often advocated by Badiou himself, though not exclusively. It is a crucial component of Badiou's argument in *Saint Paul* for an anti-dialectical reading of the relationship between death and resurrection. There, Badiou argues for an affirmation of grace without prior negation, which he opposes its putative dissolution in an “auto-foundational and necessarily deployed rational protocol” (2003, 65).

¹³ Badiou discusses these four truth procedures, which function as conditions for philosophy, throughout his work. For what is, perhaps, the most concise overview of each, see Badiou (2009, 1-40).

of the collective as such” (Badiou 2004a, 70). It is “organized collective action, following certain principles, and aiming to develop in reality the consequences of a new possibility repressed by the dominant state of affairs” (Badiou 2008, 11). According to Badiou, the truth that results from an event is ultimately recognized in the subject it founds and in the sequences it establishes, meaning that truths are always inseparable from the subjects that bear them (2005a, 391-409).

In discussing Badiou’s theory of truth, we would be remiss in a paper devoted to unpacking the relationship between his philosophy and the Book of Acts if we failed to mention that religion is obviously not included among the four domains. Part of religion’s absence certainly has to do with Badiou’s general antipathy toward religion and his strident atheism. He notes that he takes the phrase “‘God is dead’ literally. It *has* happened . . . God is finished. And religion is finished too” (2006, 23). But Badiou also tends to view religion as a type of anti-philosophy that seeks truth in an otherworldly revelation or a private illumination, which, as we have discussed above, would exclude religion conceptually from his scheme.¹⁴ Indeed, even though Badiou has much appreciation for Paul, he separates the significance of Paul’s discourse from religion and the truth procedures. Because Paul’s intervention takes place within a “mythological context,” it has to do with the “laws of universality in general” rather than the production of actual truths (Badiou 2003, 108). The difficulty is, of course, that in antiquity, the separation between the domains of politics and religion, for instance, is quite permeable, such that they are nearly indistinguishable elements of the same thing. The close connection in antiquity between politics and religion is actually quite profound in the book of Acts, particularly in Jerusalem, where political authority is invested in the ruling party of Sadducees—an aristocratic group of Priests (Keener 2012b, 1127).

Although there is much to object to in Badiou’s understanding of religion, even if we accept it, the place of religion in his corpus and among the four truth procedures is far more complex than he himself and many of his interpreters let on. We cannot here provide a copious overview of all the issues involved, which are complex, but it is worth noting that some readers of Badiou, notably Simon Critchley and Slavoj Žižek, have identified religion—more specifically, Christianity—as something like a fifth truth procedure at work in Badiou’s philosophy, even if it goes unacknowledged.¹⁵ Indeed, Badiou himself notes in *Being and Event* that at a formal level Christianity contains “all the parameters of the doctrine of the event,” which means that if any religion comes “closest to the question of truth,” it is Christianity (2005a, 212).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the somewhat

¹⁴ See Hallward (2003, 15-28) for a good overview of this. “Anti-philosophy” functions as a technical term in Badiou’s philosophy and names, generally speaking, any discourse internal to philosophy that adopts modes of thought and argumentation that attempt to undermine philosophy’s attempt to provide a systematic account of truth. Although anti-philosophy cannot be reduced to religion, all anti-philosophy arguably contains a religious element, at least on Badiou’s terms. Hallward, for instance, states that “Anti-philosophy is religion in philosophical guise, argued on philosophical terrain” (2003, 20). See also Phelps (2013), for a discussion of the theological aspects of anti-philosophy, especially as these relate to Badiou’s philosophy as unacknowledged components.

¹⁵ See Critchley (2005) and Žižek (1999). For a thorough overview of Badiou’s relationship to religion and Christianity, see Phelps (2013, 121-68).

¹⁶ Badiou, unfortunately, fails to interrogate other religious traditions in any serious way. Although we think that Badiou’s comments about Christianity illustrate the usefulness of his theory in a

ambiguous place of religion in Badiou's philosophy, along with the fact that he applies his theoretical apparatus to Saint Paul, seems enough to warrant a similar formal move on our part with respect to the Book of Acts.

Truth as Generic Multiple

Badiou borrows the term "generic" from the mathematician Paul Cohen, who used the term to designate non-constructible sets, that is, sets that are not discernible according to the normal properties of constructability in a set-theoretical model.¹⁷ Badiou uses the notion of the generic to indicate the manner in which events remain unrepresentable or undecidable according to the laws that govern a situation and, for this reason, the truths that emerge from them proceed without any external support or validation. Truth is generic, then, not in the sense that it is transcendent to its situation; rather, to call truth generic refers to the manner in which it is subtracted from the laws that govern its situation, which also means that a truth is always in excess of its situation. It is this generic or excessive quality of truth that allows it to displace established significations in a situation toward the establishment of something new (Badiou 2005a, 398).

Put in more concrete terms, Badiou notes the way in which a generic truth is always subtracted from the communitarian subsets in a situation. A generic procedure does not seek to disestablish communitarian particularities or enter into competition with them, since to do so would merely repeat the antagonistic structure of the situation. The procedure rather works diagonally relative to the subsets of a situation. Such is how Badiou interprets the generic "truth" of Christianity with respect to the antagonism between "Jew" and "Greek" (2003, 40-54).

The generic nature of truths implies that in debates between cultural antagonisms, it does not take sides, but constitutes an alternative discourse which renders previous communitarian markers indifferent, neither positive nor negative: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6)." Badiou has been criticized in his reading of Paul on this point.¹⁸ To separate events and the truths that may be drawn from them from the context in which they occur is, of course, to encourage an unnecessary ahistorical obscurantism. Recognizing this, Badiou insists that although events are not fashioned by pre-existing historical or cultural conditions in a determinist manner, all events do occur originally within an "evental site," which is the context that provides the necessary condition of being for an event (2005a, 179). In the case of the French Revolution, for instance, the

religious domain, we disagree with his Christian exclusivism. Note also that this modern distinction between politics and religion (which Badiou relies heavily upon) would, of course, be unfamiliar to the ancient mind; meaning that, in the ancient world, political "truths" are not separate from religious experience.

¹⁷ We cannot here discuss set theory in general or Badiou's idiosyncratic use of it in his ontology, but intuitively a set is simply a collection of objects according to clearly defined rules, of which collection itself constitutes an object. Badiou's discussion of the basic elements of set theory, as deployed in his ontology, can be found in *Being and Event*, especially Parts I and II. Badiou's discussion of the mathematics involved in the notion of the generic can be found in Badiou (2005, 327-87). For a helpful and readable overview of the development of set theory, see Tiles (1989).

¹⁸ See, for instance, the essays in the second part of Caputo and Alcock (2009, 61-160).

evental site may consist in the various features that make up France between 1789 and 1794. Or in the case of the Paul's articulation of the truth of the resurrection, the evental site is the Roman Empire in 35-55 CE. In such cases, the existence of an evental site functions as the precondition for the event and the consequences drawn from it, but that is not to say that it determines its result. Truth remains generic to the situation as an unrepresented, excessive element, and eludes the formal, representative grasp of the situation by forming a diagonal between established forms of discourse. Truth as generic is not a synthesis of established positions; instead, the truth procedure establishes what is unnamable (a novelty) within the pre-existing set, constituting its rupture (Badiou 2003, 43). This is what Badiou means when he defines the event formally in the following way: "*I term event of the site X a multiple such that it is composed of, on the one hand, elements of the site, and on the other hand itself*" (2005a, 179). It is this "itself" that constitutes the novelty of an event with respect to its situation, its genericity relative to established particularities.

Due to the generic nature of events, they cannot, then, be represented by the established discourses of either Law (Jew) or Philosophy (Greek), hence Badiou's maxim: truth is always illegal (2003, 40-54). The singular condition of an event indicates that the structure of the situation in which it occurs cannot account for its occurrence or the formation of truth from it, such that there can be no law of truth (Badiou 2003, 13). As truth is inscribed in a situation on the basis of a declaration that is wholly subjective, without external support, no preconstituted set or subset can support it. The subjective trajectory of truth remains "devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only 'proof' lies in its having been declared by a subject" (Badiou 2003, 5). Otherwise put, the authority of an event lies within the procedure of truth it itself institutes and not in any external, pre-established structure, identity, or law.

Truth procedures do not organize themselves as consciously antagonistic towards the various elements that govern the situation in which they occur, including the Law or the State. Rather, since they are subtracted from the organization of the situation and the laws that govern it, they remain *indifferent* to it. For the subject to be overtly antinomian would only reflect in a different domain the antagonisms of a previous situation (Jew versus Greek, Male versus Female, State versus Subject), and therefore would not constitute a novel thirding of the discourse, a thirding which is necessary for truth to maintain its universal element.

Likewise, truth is generic insofar as it is not the result of popular or private philosophical illumination. This means, then, that philosophy itself does not produce truths; truths occur in positions external to philosophy (science, art, politics, love), in situations that are independent of philosophy as an institutionalized regime of discourse (Badiou 1999, 33-9). Badiou is particularly concerned with the way in which modern philosophy has tended to suture philosophy to one of the domains of truth: positivism sutured philosophy to its scientific condition; Marxism sutured philosophy to its political condition; psychoanalysis sutured philosophy to its amorous condition; and Heidegger sutured philosophy to its artistic/poetic condition (1999, 61-7). One of the effects of this suturing of philosophy is to falsely identify the collusion of authentic truth procedures (art, politics, science, love) with their institutionalized philosophical framework, such that they are seen as

indistinguishable elements of the same thing (thus no longer generic). Instead, truth procedures occur as a diagonal trajectory between the Law and Philosophy. Both figures of mastery (law and philosophy) are declared “sites of indifference” to the emergence of an event that breaks with the self-evident (legal and philosophical) principles that govern the situation (Badiou 2003, 11).

Truth as Universal Singularity

For Badiou, the irrelevance of communitarian identities and the indifferent manner in which truths proceed imply a generic universalism to truth, as the event and the consequences drawn from it cut a diagonal between institutionalized factions and local, identitarian interests (e.g. Jew versus Greek). It is this diagonal between communitarian identities which establishes the basis for universality, allowing for the emergence of previously unthought possibilities as new knowledge.

This universalist conviction maintains that ethnic or cultural differences are no longer relevant in discerning the real. The figures of distinction in discourse are terminated because the position of the real instituted by them is revealed, through the retroaction of the event, to be illusory (Badiou 2003, 57). For Badiou, universalism requires the destitution of established differences and the initiation of a subject divided in itself by the challenge of having nothing but the truth of the event to face up to (2003, 58). The proliferation of difference is that to which universality is addressed, yet it is these differences which must be traversed in order for universality to be immanently deployed in the world, or else it remains merely a private discourse of illumination (Badiou 2003, 98). In fact, in the search for new particularities to which the universal might be exposed, the subject fashioned by fidelity to the event is uncomfortably displaced beyond its eventual site, as the subject is challenged to articulate truth in a displaced historical, geographical, or social context (Badiou 2003, 99). The universal subject formed by the truth procedure is scattered into the world, and will at first be invisible, indiscernible to the pre-existing regimes of knowledge. Yet, as the universal subject is scattered, it establishes generic multiples, which cannot be located on the popular continuum of the day, allowing for the emergence of previously unthought possibilities as new knowledge (Badiou 2013, li).

It is the singularity of truths which allow the universal subject to think beyond the parameters of a given situation, and it is because truth is singular that it can establish universal multiples which exist beyond the grasp of communitarian politics and the endless repetition of axiomatic principles.

Proclamation as Militant Intervention

For Badiou, the universality of truth is never a private, esoteric feature of subjective illumination. Rather, the subject wrests the truth of the event from the particularity of the situation and pushes it towards the universal through public, militant proclamation. To use the language of Badiou’s *Being and Event*, the subject makes an “intervention”, which is a subjective decision to name the relationship between an event and its situation (2005a, 201-11).

Through fidelity to the event, the proclaiming subject situates the history of events on a continuum, mediating and representing sequences of truth, and establishing new multiples without exhausting the possibilities of the event itself.¹⁹ Proclamation or nomination occurs best, not as large philosophical treatises or complex legal arguments, but rather as minimal reports which group together the multiples connected to the event, mobilizing them in the production of a truth (Badiou 2003, 31). The nominated terms may circulate in the knowledge of the situation, but since these terms refer to the name of the event and the generic procedure, their sense undergoes an anticipatory shift—the meaning of these terms (Messiah, Resurrection, etc.) will have been presented in a new situation.²⁰ Badiou refers to this anticipatory shift as forcing, another term and concept that he borrows from Cohen. Forcing is one of the more difficult concepts in Badiou’s theoretical apparatus, especially for those unfamiliar with debates over the intricacies of set theory.²¹ Nevertheless, the basic idea is that the subject can use or “force” the pre-existing knowledge that circulates in a situation into the production of a new truth. Forcing anticipates what a truth will look like, given the terms of the situation from it proceeds as an illegal trajectory. To use a simple example, in Newtonian astronomy one can use mathematical calculation in reference to already known data to make claims about the existence of objects, even if these objects are unobserved and unaccounted for in the current situation. The knowledge of such objects, Badiou would say, is forced, and will be true or accurate retroactively to the extent that it is empirically verified in the future.²² As Badiou puts it, “Forcing is the point at which a truth, although incomplete, authorizes anticipations of knowledge concerning not what is but *what will have been if truth attains completion*” (2004, 127). It is thus through the acts of intervention, nomination, and forcing that the truth of an event can be made known in the world, for, in the words of Saint Paul “how can they believe if they have not heard?”²³

Badiou suggests that it is the essence of fidelity to publically declare itself, but because this public declaration cannot be supported by the established framework of discourse (either legal or philosophical) it is an illegal act. As the proclamation of the event relies on the indifference to previous discourses, there is a certain measure of subversion which necessitates a militant approach adopted by those who publically proclaim the truth of the event, even as minimal reports and scant recollections (Badiou 2003, 47). Militant proclamation is the emergence of an operator that is faithfully connected to the name of an event, and through proclamation, founds a new assemblage of truth in spite of being dismissed by pre-existing regimes of knowledge (Badiou 2005a, 393). The goal of militant proclamation is not intended to produce new institutional knowledge, but truths that create a hole in knowledge, a void in which the unrecognizable and unaccountable elements of culture become perceptible in the wake of an event (Badiou 2013, xxv). It is the task of the militant subject (one fashioned by the event), at least when the

¹⁹ For a discussion of this, see Phelps (2013, 162-8).

²⁰ This “anticipatory shift” is what Badiou, borrowing again from Cohen, calls the “forcing” of truth. See Badiou (2005a).

²¹ See Badiou (2005a, 391-430). Accessible discussions of forcing can also be found in Hallward (2003), Tiles (1989), and Gillespie (2008).

²² Badiou uses this example in *Being and Event* (2005a, 402).

²³ See Rom. 10:14.

subject overlaps with individuals, to establish other small militant groups, rallying a few anonymous companions who might also declare that what took place took place.

Evental Truth in the Book of Acts

Contrary to Badiou himself, we claim the Book of Acts, or Luke-Acts, is an excellent place to begin unpacking his notion of truth as event. In applying Badiou's notion of evental truth to the Book of Acts, we benefit from seeing the event lived out in connection with material phenomena and historical sequences, noting the effect of truth proclamation on pre-existing truth regimes, ideologies, and spatial arrangements. Conveniently, the narrative of Luke-Acts is structured in such a way that proclamation cannot exist outside of a reference to the event. Acts is literally connected at the hip to the event that Luke describes—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This feature—more than any other “authentic” account of the life of Paul—mobilizes minimal reports that group together the multiples connected to the event, which is a feature of universal subjective proclamation. In the Book of Acts, as it is connected to the resurrection in the Gospel of Luke, there is the unpredictable phenomenon of the event which constitutes for itself a new subject (a Christian, see Acts 11:26), operators (Apostles) who rule the procedure and institute truth in a particular context. In the Book of Acts, the resurrection event is a source of novelty to the pre-existing truth regimes (Jerusalem and Rome), and carries within itself the potential to radically alter the situation from within: “And as they (Peter and John) were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the Temple Guard (the politicians and the police) and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (Acts 4:1-2).” As Keener suggests, it is noteworthy that the language of the Apostles, here and elsewhere, does not represent a consciously-held antagonism against the Jewish authorities, or Rome—there are no visual threats of armed resistance—rather a generic proclamation of the event “Jesus has been resurrected” (2012a, 1123).

Since, in the Book of Acts, subjective proclamation to truth is driven by the event, it is neither structural, axiomatic nor legal; rather, it breaks from the axiomatic principle, which governs the situation and organizes its repetitive series (Badiou 2003, 11). In Acts, the resurrection of Jesus Christ (the event) does not occur in collegial dialogue with the teachers of the Law, nor does the event arise dialectically from the legal context in which it appears.²⁴ The event, which is proclaimed, does not engender a heightened religious-political consciousness, nor is it the result of a dialectical synthesis of established positions.²⁵ The universality of the event identifies the failure of Law and its priestly representatives to articulate

²⁴ This is a point that becomes all the more significant in light of the fact that this ruling council, headed by the group “Sadducees” did not, in fact, believe in resurrection of the dead. As such, the resurrection event in Acts serves to break with the axiomatic conditions that specifically govern this cultural set; see Bruce (1990, 148). James Dunn notes that in this case, the proclamation is not just “the sending of another prophet,” rather it is the recognition that the event “is a whole new category,” opening up a quite different prospect (1996, 50).

²⁵ Here, the approach of Badiou differs greatly from other dialogical, or consensus approaches to truth like that of Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (1991), or Hans Georg Gadamer *Truth and Method* (2004).

anything beyond their own axiomatic, or local, conditions. Throughout the Book of Acts, it is the *minimal report of the event*, which is consistently emphasized over and against the authority of the established regimes of discourse.²⁶ One should note, as Keener has, the brevity of proclamation in the Book of Acts (2012a, 259). Unlike the rhetorically sophisticated speech material of other ancient historians, proclamations of the resurrection in Acts are “much more compact” and generally used to “focus on the gospel message that his [Luke’s] protagonists are proclaiming throughout his account” (ibid.). In establishing the resurrection through minimal reports, the subjective proclamation of the Apostles (as operators) is not a result of their interaction with local authority, or popular philosophy. In this way, the proclamation of the event is a break from the axiomatic principles of the cultural situation, not a result of its own positive engagement with it. Here are a couple examples of such minimal reports:

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and caused him to be seen. (Acts 10:39-40)

In the past God overlooked such ignorance [philosophy is ignorance], but now he commands all people, everywhere [universality] to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead [the event]. (Acts 17:30-31)²⁷

In the Book of Acts, evental truth is recognized in the subject it founds, and the small multiple of adherents it establishes, bearing a new relationship between the universal subject and fidelity to the event of the resurrection of Jesus.

Truth as Generic Multiple in the Book of Acts

In the Book of Acts, truth is generic, not in the sense that truth is transcendent to the particular situation (Second Temple Judaism, Roman Empire, etc.), but rather the truth of the resurrection is an immutable excess of the situation itself, that which displaces established significations (Temple, Law, Philosophy) and leaves the initial referent void (Badiou 2005a, 398). Proclamation of the generic event is the manner

²⁶ As Conzelmann (1988, xli) notes, the author of Acts fails to report any significant biographical information, the appearance, virtues, or deaths of his main characters. Such minimal recollections are a rather unique feature of Acts, and separate the work in a minor way from common Greek historiography.

²⁷ In this speech, Paul is addressing a crowd comprised mostly of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Epicureans took their name from Epicurus (341-270 BCE), whose ethical system presented pleasure as the chief end of life (free from pain, disturbing passions, and fears). Epicureans conceived of the gods as “having nothing to do with the life of human beings,” and although material in essence, they existed only in intermundane spaces (Bruce 1990, 376). Stoics took their name from the *Stoa Poikile* (painted portico) in the Athenian *agora* where their founder Zeno taught. Stoics believed in a rationally ordered cosmos, where God was to the world, what the individual soul was to the body (Bruce 1990, 377). Stoics placed great emphasis on the supremacy of the rational faculty over the emotions, and on individual self-sufficiency (Bruce 1990, 377). Such a speech is hardly attempting to synthesize Christianity within the panorama of Greek deities, rather the speech is a “twofold protest: against the multiplication of deities as the proper expression of religiosity; and against the assumption that God can somehow be contained within humanly made shrines or images” (Dunn 1996, 230).

in which the specific terms (Jesus is resurrected) are presented in a new situation, thus subtracting the event from its communitarian grasp—the event is relevant for both Jew and Gentile alike, without distinction:

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts ones from every nation who fear him and do what is right”. (Acts 10:34)

He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:9)²⁸

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:4)

The Book of Acts, perhaps better than any other New Testament document, presents truth as an event that is diagonally relative to every communitarian subset, where its actors constitute an alternative discourse which makes previous communitarian markers indifferent to the new form of radical subjectivity. The universal subjects created by the event of resurrection in Luke-Acts cannot claim their authority from established positions of Law; instead, they suffer under Law as a prevailing regime of discourse (as no available legal generality can account for the event of resurrection): “Then the high priest and all his associates who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the Apostles and put them in the public jail” (Acts 5:17-18).²⁹

It is the generic nature of evental truth, which makes the universal subject indifferent to the organization of subsets provided by the Law (its legal representatives, Acts 4:19; food laws, Acts 10:13-15; circumcision laws, Acts 15:10). One should note that, in particular, it is Peter who is the agent of “universalist conviction” in Acts, and the chief reason for the decision regarding food laws and circumcision in Acts (Fitzmeyer 1964, 544). Unlike the impression Badiou gives of Peter in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Peter in the book of Acts is an opponent to those in Acts who seek to locate the truth of the event within the pre-existing site of faith. Unfortunately, by dismissing Acts as fable, Badiou overlooks the radical action of Peter as agent of universalist change, particularly in regards to food and circumcision in Acts. The event of the resurrection constitutes an alternative discourse, which makes the communitarian marker(s) of the Law irrelevant in light of the emergent generic condition of truth, and this is an insight that can (ironically) be attributed to Peter in the Book of Acts.

Likewise, in the Book of Acts, the event of the resurrection and the truth drawn from it displaces established philosophical significations (Epicurean, Stoic

²⁸ Here, it is important to note that Peter is not advocating for greater inclusion into the pre-existing cultural set; rather his recognition is that the cultural set *itself* is unable to contain the generic manner in which the event proceeds. This, of course, does not mean that Israel had no pre-existing language for God’s impartiality (see Deut. 10:17 and II Chron. 19:7); rather, perhaps, it remained a neglected feature within the evental site of second temple Judaism (Dunn 1996, 141). For more helpful information on patterns of Jewish universalism, see Donaldson (2007).

²⁹ Richard Pervo notes that it is specifically the Sadducees, who killed Jesus and do not believe in the resurrection, who wish to suppress the subjective proclamation of the resurrection event (2008, 141).

Philosophers), as it occurs in a position external to philosophy as a regime of discourse.³⁰ At worst, the Apostles are booed off stage (Acts 17:18); at best they are brought back to the Areopagus in Athens for another talk (Acts 17:32). It is the generic, public nature of eventual truth that mutually disrupts the communitarian subset of the Law and the private interior speculation of institutional philosophy: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Justin Martyr notes as much, when he suggests in *Apology* 39.3, “From Jerusalem there went out into the world men, twelve in number, and they uninstructed, unable to speak, but by the power of God they indicated to the whole human race that they had been sent by Christ to teach all men the word of God.”

For the truth to remain generic in its application, the Apostles must remain indifferent to the communitarian grasp of the Jewish Law, and know that the institutional philosophical discourse represented by Epicurean and Stoic philosophy is both “vanity” (ματαιῶν) and “ignorance” (ἀγνοίας) in light of the event of resurrection (see Acts 14:15 and 17:30).³¹

Truth as Universal Singularity in the Book of Acts

In the Book of Acts, the universality implied by the resurrection cuts a diagonal between the established discourses of Law and Philosophy, which allows for previous unthought possibilities as new knowledge: “what is this babblers trying to say?” (Acts 17:18). The regimes of truth represented by Law and Philosophy dialectically rely on each other for their internal sustenance (every law has its philosophical dance partner), yet the universalism implied by the event requires the destitution of the institutionalized figures of distinction. Perhaps this relationship between the fixed event and its implied universality is best summarized in Acts 17:30-1: “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

Given the universality implied by the resurrection event in Acts, it is no coincidence that the earliest Christians are spatially displaced from places of institutional discourse (Temples, Courts, Sanhedrin, Jerusalem, Rome), and are

³⁰ This is a significant claim, for it is Badiou himself who dismisses Acts as merely reflecting the style of common Greek rhetorical/philosophical convention (2013, 18). Here, the recent work of C. Kavin Rowe has demonstrated that although there are times where Paul appears to employ Greek rhetorical devices—like in the speech of Acts 17:16-34—such appearances should be placed in context of a book that views Greek philosophy as “ignorance” (Acts 17:30), merely highlighting Paul’s “skillfully articulated charge of adultery” in Acts 17 and elsewhere (Rowe 2009, 36).

³¹ Athens was a home to both Epicurean and Stoic philosophical schools, as both schools had subsidized teaching chairs in the city. As Witherington notes, Epicureans took their name from Epicurus (341-270 BCE), an advocated a lifestyle of pleasures, particularly pleasures of the mind. Stoics, following Zeno of Cyprus (340-265 BCE), were possibly more popular in the city of Athens than the Epicureans. Stoic philosophy advocated a divinely ordered, rational principle of living according to nature, and emphasized rationality over emotions as the highest good. See Witherington (1998, 514).

challenged to articulate its truth in a new historical, geographical, or social context: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the Apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria ... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). Barrett notes that the dispersion of the believers after this persecution is most likely the reason for Christians appearing in Antioch, and later on throughout the Roman province of Asia Minor (1994, 545). Keener also notes that the scattering of believers as a result of Stephen’s persecution “proved a major factor in spreading the Jesus movement” (2012b, 1485); this fits remarkably well with Badiou’s concept of the multiple emerging from its relationship to the event (2005a, 189). In the Book of Acts, the universality of the event is not universal in subjective disposition alone; the universality of the event is proclaimed in new spatial zones and territories across the Mediterranean. Universality, primarily represented in the Book of Acts as a diagonal between established discourses, is also represented by alternative spatial arrangements and geographically displaced “universal” subjects. The universalist conviction in the Book of Acts is not a violent destruction of ethnic or cultural differences; rather communitarian distinctions are no longer consistent with the universal character of the event, and are therefore indifferent. The apostles are not antagonistically opposed to the Law, or opposed to Philosophy; rather the particular nature of these regimes of truth, and the proliferation of difference which they prescribe, become irrelevant in light of the universal event (resurrection).³² This universalist conviction is perhaps most obvious in the “accidental” universality found in the Book of Acts—the scattering of generic multiples across the Roman Empire.

Proclamation as Militant Intervention in the Book of Acts

In the Book of Acts, the universality of eventual truth is never a private, esoteric feature of subjective illumination; instead, in fidelity to the event, the subject wrests the truth of the event from the particularity of the situation and pushes it towards the universal through public, militant proclamation: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you (law) rather than God, for we cannot help *speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:19-20).

The proclaiming militant (Peter in Acts 2, Stephen in Acts 7, Phillip in Acts 8, Paul in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13, Paul in Acts 17) situates the history of events on a continuum, and establishes new multiples without exhausting the possibilities of the event itself.³³ In particular, it is the proclamation of Stephen in Acts 7 that best

³² Here, the Apostles in Acts avoid reflecting the antagonism of a pre-existing cultural set. This mitigates against seeing Acts simply as vulgar ancient “anti-Imperial” material. Although incommensurable with Greek philosophy and the Jewish Law, “the Christian mission as narrated by Luke is not a counter-state. It does not, that is, seek to replace Rome, or to ‘take back’ Palestine, Asia, or Achaia” (Rowe 2009, 87).

³³ In Stephen’s speech the history of Israel is re-transcribed in light of the event and given an alternative rationality, a unique rationality that is categorically rejected by its representatives. Stephen’s speech is hardly a historical rejection of Israel; rather, the speech reflects comparable “biblical summaries of history,” like we might find in Deut. 6:20-4; 26:5-9; Josh. 24:2-13; Psalm 77; 104; 105; 135. All this suggests that, in Stephen’s case, the event occurs within what Badiou terms “an eventual site,” but as mentioned above, the meaning of history undergoes an anticipatory shift in light of the new implications of the event (Soards 1994, 57-70).

exemplifies Badiou's notion of intervention—organizing the history of Israel in light of the event of the resurrection and establishing a new historical sequence. Keener notes as much when he suggests with regard to Stephen's speech in Acts 7, "Early Christians understood the OT differently than their Jewish contemporaries, even though both shared interpretive technique (2012b, 1334). It is the speech of Stephen and others like it that put the event of the resurrection into circulation for the situation, making the resurrection susceptible to the unfolding of its consequences in the Greco-Roman world (Phelps 2013, 59). The terms of these proclamations obviously circulate within the knowledge of its current situation (the history of Israel, the failure of philosophy, etc.), but as they refer to the universality of the event (resurrection), their sense undergoes an anticipatory shift—the meaning of Israelite history will have been presented in a new situation. In Acts, it is the act of militant proclamation that makes the event of the resurrection known in the world.

As the public proclamation of a truth cannot be supported or endorsed by the established regimes of discourse in the Book of Acts (Law and Philosophy), proclamation functions primarily as an illegal act. As C. Kavin Rowe notes, this proclamation is not "peaceful philosophical dialogue," but rather due to the connection between religious and political life in the ancient world, the proclamation of the event entails the potential for outsiders to construe Christianity as sedition or treason (2007, 5). So, universal proclamation of the resurrection event in Acts results in incarceration, beatings, rioting, stoning, mob violence, and house arrest of their revolutionary leader Paul.³⁴ In Acts, there is a certain measure of subversion which necessitates a militant approach to those who publically proclaim the event of the resurrection, even as minimal reports or scant recollections.

Since the public declaration of the event cannot be supported by the dialectic of Law and Philosophy, universal truths rely on a militant subjectivity on behalf of those who report the event. The militant subject in Acts creates a void in the established discourses of knowledge, and in the illegal act of proclamation, establishes other small militant groups along their way—a few anonymous companions who might also declare the strange universality of the event: "At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others" (Acts 17:34).

Conclusion and Final Remarks

Throughout this essay, we have challenged Badiou's notion that the Book of Acts should be dismissed as irrelevant, that it contains little of value for understanding the evental nature of the production of truths. This is not to suggest that we have made another bland historicist argument for the historicity of Paul in Acts; rather we have suggested that all the elements necessary for the production of universal subjectivity (truth as evental, truth as generic multiple, truth as universal, truth as militant proclamation) are available in the Book of Acts itself. In fact, as these elements are lived out in the material conditions outlined by the Book of Acts, the subject formed by the event is entirely consistent with Badiou's own methodology.

³⁴ The sheer number of arrests should mitigate against the popular notion that Acts is seeking to draw nascent Christianity into a favorable relationship with Roman authorities (Rowe 2007, 4).

What makes Acts superior is that it is Luke-Acts—the universal proclamation pronounced in Acts is immediately corroborated by the event in Luke, and vice versa.

Still, Badiou’s notion of evental truth is a useful one, both for describing the formation of the universal subject in the Book of Acts, and for fashioning a universal singularity that questions the endless proliferation of identity both then and now. The singular, fixed manner in which the event proceeds in Acts is a reminder that not all identities are a negotiation of pre-existing cultural conditions, and though early Christian identity appears in a multiple, this multiple is related to the fixed conditions of the event. In Acts, truth is not a dialectical synthesis of cultural conditions; rather the event relativizes established discourses of knowledge in the production of a new “early Christian” subjectivity.

In this regard, the event in Acts cuts a diagonal between the particularities of communitarian identities, and affords the reader the opportunity to see beyond the categories of established discourse. The application of Badiou’s philosophy to Acts, then, allows us to grasp the novelty of nascent Christianity with respect to the situation out of which it emerged, without, however, lapsing into a theological paradigm that associates that novelty with revelation. Analyzing the narrative of Acts in light of Badiou’s system provides a window into the production of early Christian “truth,” into its irreducible novelty with respect to its conditions. That novelty, moreover, is dependent upon the form that it takes, and it is here that our discussion of Acts shows the relevance of Acts for Badiou’s own project but also the relevance of Badiou for biblical interpretation, early Christian studies, and religious studies more generally. Badiou’s articulation of the relationship among the event, truth, and the subject provides us with a way to understand the material production of the new, without reducing the latter to established discourses and identities, however important these may be in other contexts. Methodologically speaking, it allows us, in other words, to rigorously grasp the evental qualities that attend socio-cultural, religious, and subjective formations, in contradistinction to identitarian trends in contemporary scholarship that tend to reduce such qualities to historical and cultural particularities.

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