

well-researched piece of history and an adequate introduction to the armchair intellectual, it will not offer much to those well versed in the relevant debates within the contemporary IPE literature.

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Timing the Event

Review of *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and Their Time* by Antonio Calcagno. London: Continuum, 2007, pp. 136, ISBN: 9780826496171, £70 (hbk.)

By Hannah Proctor

In contemporary continental philosophy, a rest, it seems, is never as good as a change. While continuity is lumbered with associations of conservatism, rupture and flux are by-words for political radicalism. This book, a paean to the Badiouian concept of the event, is a sober advocacy of decisive political intervention as a philosophical position. As its subtitle indicates, Antonio Calcagno's *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and Their Time* is not a general study of its eponymous philosophers, but an analysis of "the nature of and relationship between politics and time" (p. 1) in their writings – the phrase appears three times on the book's opening page. And for Calcagno, the Badiouian concept of the event, a temporal intervention that radically interrupts the existing situation, plays the leading role in this drama. Reversing the order of its title, the book is structured as two discrete chapters on Derrida and Badiou respectively, sandwiched between remarks outlining Calcagno's specific approach to their work. Calcagno's sympathies lie squarely in the Badiouian camp; he is, he states, "working within the framework of Badiouian ontology" (p. 104). Calcagno argues that Badiou's notion of the event provides a solution to the Derridean "aporia of the double bind" (p. 2) which, with its insistence that all possibility is coupled with impossibility, Calcagno finds insufficient in the face of concrete political activity.

So, other than to generate more results in library catalogue searches, why

include Derrida in this book at all? Calcagno gives two reasons for doing so: Derrida's work contains a significant consideration of politics and time, and this aspect of Derrida's work has not been closely analysed heretofore. Calcagno's reading of Derrida is focused on the philosopher's later writings, with an emphasis on the notion of 'democracy to come'. Calcagno, following Simon Critchley, observes that the term 'democracy to come' refers not to some ideal political configuration that might emerge in the future but to a structure whose temporality is "advent... arrival happening now" (p. 12, quoting Critchley). Crucially, this temporality is a constant – democracy is always 'to come' but never comes; it is always arriving but never fully present; it is a promise never quite kept. At this juncture Calcagno turns to Derrida's notion of *différance*, carefully attempting to unpick the knotty relationships between politics and time it contains, before expressing his own frustrations with it. *Différance* colours all experience, for Derrida, which, according to Calcagno, results in profound undecideability: meanings are never fixed, full presence is unattainable, traces are constantly being erased, the present is always deferred, the possible forever haunted by the impossible. Meanings float along in the stream of time but are simultaneously delayed by the currents of *différance*, which prevent them from ever washing up whole on the shore. If Derrida's argument that there is nothing outside the text is taken seriously, Calcagno argues, if we accept that *différance* structures everything, then political experience and action must also be characterised by undecideability. It is this 'aporia' or 'lacunae' that most frustrates Calcagno.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between thought and action, theory and practice, Calcagno stresses Derrida's personal political convictions and activist activities beyond his philosophical work, which he sees as running counter to the theories expressed on the page. If Derrida really believed that everything was undecideable, Calcagno asks, then why would he bother to vocally oppose capital punishment? Yet while this perhaps deliberately naïve line of argument might highlight the shortcomings of Derrida's position, it does not solve the problem: even when making concrete political demands, Derrida does so from the position of deconstruction. Calcagno characterises Derrida's work as a decisive intervention into the history of philosophy that despite asserting that everything is undecideable did paradoxically involve committing to a definite stance, an unshaking fidelity to flux: "the intervention of deconstruction over any other political way" (p. 56). Yet Derrida's philosophy, according to Calcagno, has no way of accounting for such an intervention. It is here that Calcagno turns to Badiou, whose notion of the event provides a theory for such a subjective interruption of the existing situation.

Calcagno walks the reader through the main landmarks of Badiou's theory, but his main focus is the event, in which politics and time converge. If time is intervention, the temporal rupturing that brings about radical change, then politics is the thinking through

that follows in the wake of events (p. 61). Although Badiou's ontology retains the Derridean vacillation between impossibility and possibility, Calcagno claims that Badiou overcomes the gaping aporia that Derrida opens up by introducing the event which allows for subjective intervention and fidelity that can treat multiplicity as unity by 'counting as one'.

What Calcagno brings to the table is an advocacy of 'kairos' – "a timely or appropriate strategy to be taken at a specific time, given certain circumstances" (p. 98) – as a supplement to Badiou's eventual temporality which, he claims, is overly dependent on the decisive action of an intelligent subject. Introducing this concept allows Calcagno to place an emphasis on the pre-political (that is, pre-evental) configuration of a situation that allows for an event to burst on the scene at a particular moment. The situation, for Calcagno *contra* Badiou, is therefore more than an indifferent multiplicity as it must be ripe for an event to occur. Calcagno's kairos thus waters down the Badiouian event: transforming it from a radical white-hot rupturing into more of a lukewarm gradual shift. This also plays down the very element of the event (subjective intervention) that Calcagno initially highlights as the element of Badiouian ontology that sets it apart from Derrida. Yet despite the minor innovation of the 'kairos', this book is more concerned with proselytising Badiou than with carving out its own philosophical approach.

This is not a book for the uninitiated. And with a cover price of £70 is hardly likely to attract a mass-readership. In the preface to the English translation of his magnum opus *Being and Event* (2005), Badiou immodestly claims that the almost 20 year delay between its publication in French and its eventual appearance in English only serves to underline its importance as a great work of philosophy. Badiou summons great writers at the behest of his own philosophical vision. The same could not be said for Calcagno. Despite his advocacy of concrete political action, this is not a rousing tract but an intricate subdued academic thesis. Calcagno's prose hardly crackles and fizzes with the energy of radical political conviction. For Badiou, philosophy is strictly speaking not one of the domains in which an event can occur; philosophy proceeds out of events in the realms of politics, love, poetry and mathematics. In a sense then Calcagno can only metaphorically speak of Derridean deconstruction in the Badiouian vocabulary of the event. But if I am permitted to indulge in the same indiscretion, Calcagno might be seen as being faithful to an event, but not intervening in such a way as to dramatically puncture the existing status quo. But perhaps it is precisely this kind of carefully considered fidelity that forms part of the thinking through of politics that Badiou himself advocates.

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