

FROM HISTORICAL CHANGE TO HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE: DIRECTIONS OF A NEW EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES¹

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ABSTRACT: The present paper endeavors to trace the sketch of a possible epistemology of the human sciences. In this sense it begins with the determination of the object of knowledge in the human sciences through a careful examination of the reality of history and of the human world. Then, considering the peculiarity of the domain of the human sciences the paper proceeds to show that their object of knowledge is best understood as “event” in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou. And, in the end, it circumscribes two modes of knowledge of this object of the human sciences understood as event.

KEYWORDS: knowledge in the human sciences, event, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou

1. The Basic Framework of the Epistemological Problem in the Human Sciences

The basic framework of any possible epistemological inquiry can be traced easily. The epistemological problem is anchored by the poles of the knower and the to-be-known and is posed in the space opened by the questions: “What is there to know?” and “How can one know what there is to know?”

Between the poles of the knower and the to-be-known though there is a profoundly dissymmetrical relation. If the knower can be a priori determined as subject, for only a subject can undertake a process of knowledge, the to-be-known remains completely undetermined (X). That is why any additional determination of the epistemological problem in this general form can be done only by posing it in a concrete manner, by saturating the X to-be-known in a determined epistemological context.

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Depending on how one determines the X to-be-known, though, the epistemological problem is subjected to certain modulations bringing along a variable distribution of the importance, the signification and logical order in which the questions constituting it are to be approached.

From the point of view of the natural sciences for which the X to be known presents itself as a substantial, material entity standing as an object in front of the subject, the first question – “What is there to know?” – becomes insignificant, the epistemological problem reducing itself to “How can we know what there is to know?”

From the point of view of the human sciences, on the other hand, we are confronted with the opposite situation. From this point of view the central question is “What is there to know?” From its answer one can derive more or less directly the answer of the other.

That in the human sciences or, following the German tradition, the sciences of the spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*) the epistemological problem gravitates around the object to be known is evident from the very beginning in that this is not an “object” *per se*. One might be tempted to say that it is actually a subject or, if we were to follow Hegel (in connection with whose thought the first systematic reflections in the domain of the human sciences have appeared), the spirit (*l'esprit, die Geist*). Of course, this temptation is one to which we should avoid falling prey. Suffice it to broaden our perspective for a moment to understand that the world of the humanities comprises also the worlds that have been but are not anymore. Otherwise put, the world researched by the human sciences is a world constituted also of the world of the past.

The world of the past though is never given in the present as pure spirit only inasmuch as it is handed down through oral transmission. Which confronts us with a simple alternative: either we accept that the only thing that can be handed down from the past is the oral tradition, or the understanding of the “object” of study of the human sciences simply as spirit is a reductive one and, due to this, unsustainable. Thus we will have to tie the spirit to a material basis thereby offering it an additional degree of objectivity.

Dilthey, the methodologist of the Historical School and, probably, the most important epistemologist of the human sciences of the 19th century recognizes this from the very first page of his *Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. He writes:

Besides the natural sciences, a group of conceptual cognitive results emerged naturally from the task of life itself. These results are linked to one another by their common object. History, political economy, the sciences of law and of the state, the study of religion, literature, poetry, architecture, music, of

philosophical world-views and systems, and finally, psychology are such sciences. All these sciences refer rather to the same grand fact: the human race – which they describe, narrate, and judge, and about which they form concepts and theories. What one customarily separates as physical is undivided in this fact of the human sciences. It contains the living nexus of both. We ourselves belong to nature, and nature is at work in us, unconsciously, in dark drives. States of consciousness are constantly expressed in gestures, looks, and words; and they have their objectivity in institutions, states, churches, and scientific institutes, History operates in these very contexts. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that the human sciences employ the distinction between the physical and the psychical whenever their purposes require it. But then they must remain conscious that they are working with abstractions, not with entities and that these abstractions are valid only within the limits of the point of view within which they are projected.²

By recognizing the dual constitution of the “object” of study of the human sciences – on the one hand, natural/ material and, on the other, spiritual – we are finally on the right track for determining the X to-be-known. But we have not reached our destination. For if we take another look at the sphere of history we will see, on the one hand, that the rapport between nature/matter and spirit constituting the X to-be-known is not as simple as it looks at first sight and, on the other, that the reality of history brings about the need for a more precise determination of the X to be known.

Let’s tackle these matters in order. Earlier, when we were determining the “object” of the human sciences as a dual entity, constituted as nature/matter and spirit it seemed that, although necessary, the first term is rather a “frame” for the second. The past, though, shows us that things are not precisely so. For the spirit makes history, it leaves its traces upon the times to come, becoming thus worthy of interest for the historians to the same degree as nature. In such case, though, the spirit becomes the accessory term.

We find the best example in this sense in Michel Foucault’s *History of Madness*³ which shows that what brings about the “great confinement” and the transition from what Foucault calls the “Classical Age” (which is more or less identical to what traditional historiography calls “Modernity”) is the black plague sweeping Europe since the second half of the 14th century. A natural fact, the plague, restructures from the ground up the lives of the people, leading to the instauration of completely new relations between the individual and his peers and

² Wilhelm Dilthey, “The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences,” in *Selected Works. Vol. III*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 101–102.

³ See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 56–91.

a completely new rapport with the natural environment and with the transcendent. The plague will bring about new rules for the contact between people and will decide the appropriate contexts for such contact. It will impose strict rules for interacting with the domestic animals offering means of sustenance. And thirdly, it will restructure the self-understanding of the individual in relation to the divine, for the plague can be regarded both as a divine punishment among others and as the first moments of the Apocalypse.

This new manner of relating to peers, the environment and the transcendent gains the function of a model and is taken up once again almost spontaneously as soon as the social context (an economic crisis) requires it. Otherwise put, as soon as the social context requires it, on the one hand, the growth of the work force and of the productivity of labor and, on the other hand, the reduction of the social costs, the social rapports forged during the plague years are re-enacted once again. Just like the plagued from before, now the mad, the beggars, the petty thieves, the prostitutes, the pariah get thrown out of the cities and put in jail.

On the other hand, the fact that historical reality requires a more precise determination of the X to-be-known than as a dual entity constituted as nature/matter and spirit becomes apparent in the way in which historical research is done beginning with the second half of the 20th century.

Once again Foucault provides us with the privileged example. Already in the Introduction to *The Archeology of Knowledge* he observes:

For many years now historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events. [...] Beneath the rapidly changing history of governments, wars, and famines, there emerge other, apparently unmoving histories.⁴

About the same time, in the disciplines that we call the history of ideas, the history of science, the history of philosophy, the history of thought, and the history of literature (we can ignore their specificity for the moment), in those disciplines which, despite their names, evade very largely the work and methods of the historian, attention has been turned, on the contrary, away from vast

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London & New York: Rutledge, 2002), 3–4.

unities like 'periods' or 'centuries' to the phenomena of rupture and discontinuity.⁵

At first sight one could be tempted to see here the sign of a methodological superficiality of the historical disciplines. But, as Foucault shows, things are not that simple. For if beginning with the second half of the 20th century the past becomes a discontinuous series for the different particular histories while for the history as such a continuous flux this is the direct result of the endeavors of the researchers in this group of disciplines to question the document taken as the support of the X to-be-known in the sphere of history.

As Foucault remarks:

[The] document was always treated as the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace. Now, through a mutation that is not of recent origin, but which has still not come to an end, history has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and develop it: history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations.⁶

Of course, if the document can be ordered, redistributed, organized in series, etc. this is because the historical reality itself which it tries to describe can be treated so. The possibility of all these operations exists precisely because historical reality can present itself either as a continuous flux or a discontinuous series.

Hence the supplementary determination of the X to-be-known in the human sciences by the exigency to account for both continuity and discontinuity in the passing of time. With this though, the epistemological problem of the human sciences becomes more complicated than it was. For which concept applies to the X thus determined?

As an answer to this question *The Archeology of Knowledge* offers us the concept of statement:

[A] statement is always an event that neither the language (*langue*) nor the meaning can quite exhaust. It is certainly a strange event: first, because on the one hand it is linked to the gesture of writing or to the articulation of speech, and also on the other hand it opens up to itself a residual existence in the field of a memory, or in the materiality of manuscripts, books, or any other form of recording; secondly, because, like every event, it is unique, yet subject to

⁵ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 4.

⁶ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 7.

repetition, transformation and reactivation; thirdly, because it is linked not only to the situations that provoke it, and to the consequences that it gives rise to, but at the same time, and in accordance with a quite different modality, to the statements that precede and follow it.⁷

Foucault's concept of statement seems to be perfectly capable to account for both the continuity and discontinuity in the passing of time. But it remains completely silent when it comes to showing how are these articulated upon one another. Taking language as a starting point for determining the X to-be-known in the human sciences and maintaining himself within its domain Foucault does not ask himself either how do the ruptures in the flow of time come about or how they can instate new continuous fluxes. As the last passage quoted shows us, for him, the fact that the event is at the same time unique and repeatable is purely and simply given.

This is the second and last exigency with which we are confronted by historical reality in determining the X to-be-known in the human sciences, an exigency born out of a paradoxical experience, common to each and every one of us in everyday life. This exigency is the most difficult to satisfy. For each and every one of us sees how everything changes day by day, but despite this nothing ever happens. Just as we see that although nothing seems to be taking place, out of the sudden things are completely different than they were.

On the one hand, we are witnessing the monotonous succession to power of the different political parties, to the continuous worsening of the living conditions, the accelerated degrading of the environment and so many other causes and sufficient conditions for a break or what could be called a "cardinal change" in the course of history, yet nothing happens.

On the other hand, we see how the days, months and years go by "silently," all the changes taking place being what could be called "ordinal changes," changes caught up in the logic of things, completely foreseeable and stripped of any element of novelty. But, despite all these, out of the sudden a revolution, something like the "Arab Spring" or "Occupy Wall Street" is taking place.

Charles Péguy gets the point exactly:

For years and years, for ten, fifteen, twenty years, for thirty years you struggle with a certain problem and you cannot give any solution to it, and you struggle with a certain evil and you cannot bring any remedy. And an entire people struggles. And entire generations struggle. And out of the sudden one turns its back. And the face of the whole world changed. Neither the same problems are still posed (others will be), nor the same difficulties will present themselves, nor

⁷ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 31.

the same maladies are still considerable. Nothing has happened. Yet everything is different. Nothing has taken place. Yet everything is new. Nothing has taken place. And all that is old ceases to exist and all that is old has become foreign.⁸

There are thus three conditions to be satisfied by the concept of X to-be-known in the human sciences:

- (i) to refrain from attributing an ontological priority to any of its two constitutive elements. For the X isn't first and foremost either nature or spirit. As we have seen, history and through it, the human world can be made by both;
- (ii) to prove capable to account for both the continuity and the breaks in the flow of time;
- (iii) to prove capable to account for the way in which continuity and discontinuity get articulated with one another thus producing both ordinal and cardinal changes.

Armed with these three conditions it is high time to get back to our question: which concept can satisfy them?

2. The X To-be-known as Event

We would like to answer the above question straightforwardly by saying: if properly understood, the concept able to satisfy the exigencies imposed by the X to-be-known in the human sciences is the concept of event. When considered closely one can see that from the psychic to the economic and social processes, from the processuality of thinking to that of writing, otherwise put, from psychology to economy and sociology, from philosophy to the theory of literature – this entire group of disciplines deals exclusively with what takes place in its reflexive field, with events.

This answer can be discerned between the lines of Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*, right in the concept of statement proposed. For if we distance ourselves from the dimension of language, that which brings about the problem with the determination of the X to-be-known in the human sciences as statement, what we are left with is precisely the idea of event, unique but, at the same time, subject to repetition, transformation and reactivation, tied to the situations provoking it and the effects it itself provokes.

At the same time though, this concept has been anticipated by the philosophical hermeneutics of the 20th century initiated by Martin Heidegger and continued by Hans-Georg Gadamer. For Gadamer tradition is the true "object" of the human sciences and this is always given to us as an event.

⁸ Charles Péguy, *Clio*, 266. (Translation is mine.)

But if philosophical hermeneutics is able to anticipate this answer but not to arrive at it as such this is because it falls prey to the same trap Foucault fell in his *Archeology of Knowledge*, i.e., that of situating the event in the proximity of language and trying to think it in terms of language. For Gadamer the true event is the event of understanding, which is the exclusive performance of language. In *The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment* he writes explicitly:

[W]hen something encounters us within the tradition in such a way that we understand it, then that itself is an event. And something happens when one, so to speak, accepts a word from the tradition, when one allows a word to speak to him.⁹

Through this Gadamer and philosophical hermeneutics in general are confronted with the impossibility of recognizing what we have called cardinal change, that is any revolution happening in the course of history. This impossibility is clearly demonstrated by *Truth and Method*:

Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value.¹⁰

Precisely this is the reason why, at the beginning of this section when we were identifying the X to-be-known in the human sciences as event, we were formulating the precaution: “if properly understood.” We believe that we can find such a “proper” understanding of the concept of event in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou who are in complete accord in this regard, despite the distance that separates them, a distance carefully highlighted by Badiou in his *Deleuze. «La clameur de l’Être»*.¹¹

2.1. The Event in Deleuze – The Nomadic Systematization of Singularities

In developing his conception of the event Deleuze follows closely the basic insights of the materialist ontology of the Stoics. For the Stoics the event is situated in strict opposition to the concept of body.¹² As it is well known, for the

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment,” *Philosophy Today* 16., 3-4 (1972): 237.

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 282–283.

¹¹ See Alain Badiou, *Deleuze. «La clameur de l’Être»* (Paris: Fayard/Pluriel, 2010), especially 7–m 15.

¹² We will not insist here on the Deleuzian concept of event for we have already provided a careful treatment of it in Adrian Costache, “Real Events – Ideal Events: A Deleuzian Approach to the Concept of Historical Event,” *European Journal of Science and Theology* 8, 3 (2012).

Stoics only bodies exist, the universe being nothing else than a great mixture of bodies. In this mélange each body causes and is caused by all the others and so each body is at the same time active and passive by rapport to all the others. The events on the other hand are the incorporeal effects of this mélange on the surface of the bodies.

If only the bodies are properly said to exist, of the events we must say that they subsist. If bodies are active and passive, events are impassive. And whereas bodies exist in a time defined as Chronos, the time proper to the events is that species of eternity constituting itself through the ceaseless avoidance of the present the Greeks called Aion. Because of this Deleuze distinguishes between the event proper and its realization in a certain space at a particular time as between “two courses of events,” one of them “ideal” and the other one “real” and “accidental” (LS 53).

The strict identification of the bodies as causes and of the events as effects and the dichotomy instituted between them seems to prohibit the identification of Deleuze’s concept of event as the X to-be-known in the human sciences. For, on the one hand, it appears to be deprived of the power to leave any mark on the bodies that produce it, and, on the other, it proves incapable to determine other events in its turn. Although as incorporeal effects events can never become themselves causes *per se*, for Deleuze, they can become “quasi-causes” determining through counter-actualization both its spatio-temporal realization and other events.

In order to see how the quasi-causality and counter-actualization work we should turn our gaze toward what in *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze calls the “static ontological genesis”¹³ of the event. For Deleuze this genesis is tied to the emission of a series of remarkable points in a transcendental field and is the result of an “immanent principle of auto-unification through a nomadic distribution.”¹⁴ What this means to say is that from a static point of view the event is nothing else than arbitrary auto-unification and systematization of some of the points appearing in a transcendental field. By the transcendental field of the event Deleuze understands the pre-individual and impersonal plane on which something is given to somebody. The heterogeneous series of remarkable points is simply a series of punctual unities that can be remarked such as to green, to cool, to make noises, to count to five hundred, etc.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 109.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 102.

Deleuze though is a positivist in the same sense in which Foucault was declaring himself to be a “happy positivist”¹⁵ in the *Archeology of Knowledge*, i.e., someone who does not recognize negativity and negation. In *Difference and Repetition* he writes:

The negative is an epiphenomenon. Negation, like the ripples in a pond, is the effect of an affirmation which is too strong or too different. Perhaps two affirmations are necessary in order to produce the shadow of negation as *Nachfolge*.¹⁶

Negation is difference, but difference seen from its underside, seen from below. [...] Negation results from affirmation: this means that negation arises in the wake of affirmation or besides it, but only as the shadow of the more profound genetic element – of that power or ‘will’ which engenders the affirmation and the difference in the affirmation.¹⁷

Precisely this is why, for Deleuze, nothingness in the common metaphysical sense of this concept does not exist. Or, better put, nothingness cannot be thought in privative terms. For Deleuze too nature “abhors a void”:

There is a non-being, yet there is neither negative nor negation. There is a non-being which is by no means the being of the negative, but rather the being of the problematic.¹⁸

By not recognizing the negative and negation, though, and by reversing the old principle *omnis determinatio negatio* as *omnis determinatio affirmatio* we can understand that along with and through the auto-unification of some of the remarkable points of the series as this or that particular event, the other remarkable points in the transcendental field do not disappear into nothingness, but will be subjected in their turn to another arbitrary systematization thus bringing about a new event.

The first event does not produce the second *per se*, but without the second event taking place would not have existed. Precisely the first auto-unification of the remarkable points of the series is what, to put it like this, forces a new exercise of the principle of nomadic distribution thus leading to the second event. The counter-effectuation Deleuze talks about is precisely this. And due to the fact that through it a new event occurs, we can say that it was quasi-caused by the first. Here is the exact way in which while maintaining their status of effects produced

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 141.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 54.

¹⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 55.

¹⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 202.

by the bodily causes the incorporeal events are able to mark the other events and the bodies producing them.

Before seeing whether this rather bizarre concept of event manages to satisfy the epistemological exigencies imposed by the X to-be-known in the human sciences we will have to see if it can really be applied to the historical world. If have to admit, the abstraction of Deleuze's concept of event seems completely estranged from the concreteness of the reality of history.

For this we will have to turn our eyes to the ontology of the multiple proposed by Alain Badiou in *Being and Event*. Even though at first sight this strategy might seem a detour from the course of our investigation the recourse to Badiou's work is justified by a number of reasons:

- (i) Badiou offers us a philosophy of the event based on an ontological doctrine similar to that of Deleuze;
- (ii) due to the structural identity between the two philosophers' conception of the event;
- (iii) because of the fact that, unlike Deleuze, Badiou approaches explicitly the problem of the correspondence between the abstract concept of event he proposes and the intuitive idea, i.e., the phenomenon as it is given to us in intuition.

2.2. The Event in Badiou – The Additional Signifier

Here too we will have to start with the ontological background of the concept. Just like for Deleuze everything begins with an emission of singular points, for Badiou the beginning is to be found in a multiple presenting itself. Such a multiple though – which is the generic form of presentation of being-qua-being or, otherwise put, the mode of being of what is -, is a pure multiple, constituted in its turn of other multiplicities. That is why, the one the Greeks were attributing first and foremost the status of being, strictly speaking is not. The one in merely an operation, the “count-as-one” through which the multiple is structured as a situation. In *Manifesto of Philosophy* Badiou writes:

In the interests of brevity, let us call ‘situation’ a state of things, any presented multiple whatsoever.¹⁹

And in *Being and Event* he adds:

Granted the effectiveness of presentation, a situation is the place of taking-place, whatever the terms of the multiplicity in question.²⁰

¹⁹ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto of Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany/New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 36.

A close look at this concept of situation introduced by Badiou shows that it is not only similar but, actually, structurally identical with the Deleuzian transcendental field. And this from two points of view: there is first of all a functional and, second of all, a structural identity between these two concepts.

The functional identity with the transcendental field comes to light through the very mode in which the concept of situation is defined. For, as we have seen, it too is nothing else than the “place” of the occurrence of the event. In its turn, the structural identity announces itself through the fact that both concepts share the same “aspect” in a two-fold sense. On the one hand due to the fact that both are a minimal structuring or systematization of a multiplicity. For, as we have seen, the transcendental field takes the form of a simple series of remarkable or singular points. And, on the other hand, due to the fact that the multiplicity constitutive to both is perfectly heterogeneous in its nature.

In *Being and Event* Badiou distinguishes between two types of multiplicities: (i) *natural multiplicities* which, given the homogeneity, come to be represented as subsets²¹ of the situation in which they are presented and thus, its constitutive elements. And (ii) *singular multiplicities* whose elements, due to their heterogeneity, cannot be organized as subsets and are never represented in the situation. For Badiou the first type of multiplicity is specific to natural situations, subject to the law of determination and in which nothing really happens, every change that appears being dictated and completely predictable starting from the prior states of the situation. On the other hand for Badiou, just like for Deleuze, singular multiplicities must be reserved to the situations open to the occurrence of what Badiou calls “evental sites” and, thus, to the happening of an event.

It is rational to think the ab-normal or the anti-natural, that is, history, as an omnipresence of singularity – just as we have thought nature as an omnipresence of normality. The form-multiple of historicity is what lies entirely within the instability of the singular; it is that upon which the state’s metastructure has no hold.²²

I will term situation in which at least one evental site occurs *historical*. I have chosen the term ‘historical’ in opposition to the intrinsic stability of natural situations.²³

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 24.

²¹ In the mathematical sense of set theory to which Badiou sends constantly.

²² Badiou, *Being and Event*, 174.

²³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 177.

Given this functional and structural identity between the elements of genesis and the constitutive moments of the event in the two philosophers, the profound similarity that exists between the Badiou and the Deleuze's philosophy of the event should not surprise anyone.

In *Being and Event* Badiou defines the event in the following manner:

Take, in a historical situation, an evental site X.

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.

The inscription of a *matheme of the event* is not a luxury here. Say that S is the situation and $X \in S$ (X belongs to S, X is presented by S) the evental site. The event will be written e_x (to be read 'event of the site X'). My definition is then written as follows:

$e_x = \{x \in X, e_x\}$

That is, the event is a one-multiple made up of, on the one hand, all the multiples which belong to its site, and on the other hand, the event itself.²⁴

All this comes to say that the event is produced by the multiples presented in the historical situation but is completely different than it. It exists through these multiples but subsists independently of them. In a deliberate Deleuzian vocabulary, the event "hovers"²⁵ like a double over the evental site and the situation in which it occurs, being though completely indifferent to it and totally independent from it. For, as Badiou shows, this event constituted of the multiple of the evental site and itself has a supernumerary nature, appearing as a supplement to the situation given. A supplement that

... can neither be named, nor represented by referring to the resources of the situation (its structure, the established language naming its terms, etc.). It is inscribed by a singular naming, the bringing into play of an *additional signifier*.²⁶

Considering the paradoxical formulation the event receives in Badiou's thought the question whether it really finds a correspondent in historical reality becomes even more pressing than it was in Deleuze. For this possibility seems even more unsustainable. Maybe precisely this is the reason why, unlike Deleuze, Badiou approaches it explicitly in *Being and Event* immediately after defining the event in the above manner.

In order to answer this question Badiou will adopt an intuitive strategy. He will take recourse to a concrete historical event and will try to show that it can

²⁴ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 179.

²⁵ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 100.

²⁶ Badiou, *Manifesto of Philosophy*, 36.

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really be decomposed down to the fundamental terms of his conception of the event.

Take the syntagm 'the French Revolution.' What should be understood by these words? One could certainly say that the event 'the French Revolution' forms a one out of everything which makes up its site; that is, France between 1789 and, let's say, 1794. There you'll find the electors of the general Estates, the peasants of the Great Fear, the sans-culottes of the towns, the members of the Convention, the Jacobin clubs, the soldiers of the draft, but also, the price of subsistence, the guillotine, the effects of the tribunal, the massacres, the English spies, the Vendéans, the *assignats* (banknotes), the theatre, the Marseillaise, etc. The historian end up including in the event 'the French Revolution' everything delivered by the epoch as traces and facts. This approach, however – which is the inventory of all the elements of the site – may well lead to the one of the event being undone to the point of being no more than the forever infinite numbering of gestures, things and words that co-existed with it. The halting point for this dissemination is *the mode in which the Revolution is a central term of the Revolution itself*; that is, the manner in which the conscience of the times – and the retroactive intervention of our own – filters the entire site through the one of its eventual qualifications.²⁷

Obviously, any historical event can be decomposed into such a series of elements which, with enough perseverance, can be unfolded to infinity. That is why any historical event can be made of such a multiple only inasmuch as it is also made of itself.

Through the intuitive character of Badiou's concept of event we arrive at the intuitive character of Deleuze's concept. The structural identity between these terms shows that to the multiple constitutive of the event for Badiou it corresponds a series of emissions of singular points in a transcendental field. And to the auto-unification of the series as this or that event under the influence of the principle of nomadic distribution it corresponds the additional signifier given to the event and without which it could never become what it is.

Now, in light of the intuitive character of Deleuze and Badiou's understanding of the event it becomes easier to see that it manages to satisfy all the exigencies imposed in order to be able to be taken as X to-be-known in the human sciences. The first exigency established was to be able to account for both nature/matter and spirit as agents of history and the human world and not to grant any of these terms an ontological priority over the other. Upon close inspection it becomes manifest that the Deleuzian concept of event satisfies this requirement *ab initio*. For, translating the matter in these terms, the Deleuzian event has an ideal,

²⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 180.

spiritual being resulting from material nature. But this requirement is not really a problem for Badiou's concept of event either. For, as we have seen through the example discussed, the elements of the multiple constituting the evental site are both spiritual and material.

But also the second and the third exigencies are just as easily satisfied. These exigencies were asking of the concept whereby the X to-be-known in the human sciences to be able to account for the occurrence of both the continuity and the discontinuity in the passing of time and the possibility of their articulation. Inasmuch as the event is defined as a minimal systematization or structuring of a given multiplicity or a multiple of multiplicities we can understand that its occurrence equals to the introduction of a discontinuity in a continuum of the series or the situation *and* the constitution of a continuity through discontinuation of the flow of the given series or situation.

The question that imposes itself upon us now, the last question to be asked in order for our sketch for a new epistemology of the human sciences to be complete is that adjacent to "What is there to know?" Namely, "How can one know the X determined as event?"

In order to answer this question Deleuze begins by noting that there are actually two modes of knowing an event.

In a great work of philosophy, Péguy explains that there are two ways of considering the event. One consists in going over the course of the event, in recording its effectuation in history, its conditioning and deterioration in history. But the other consists in reassembling the event, installing oneself in it as in a becoming, becoming young again and aging in it, both at the same time, going through all its components or singularities.²⁸

Of course, if there are two modes of considering the event this is because for Deleuze and Badiou, in a way, the event itself is given in two modes. As we have seen, in Deleuze we have, on the one hand, the event itself, in its impassive purity and, on the other hand, the event embodies through its spatio-temporal realization. In Badiou we have the event as the additional signifier of a situation and the multiple of the situation structured as event.

For Deleuze the first mode of considering the event is the historical one, the one peculiar to the science of history and the other historical human sciences because

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 111.

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What History grasps of the event is its effectuation in states of affairs or in lived experience, but the event in its becoming, in its specific consistency, in its self-positing as concept, escapes History.²⁹

In this latter mode of presenting itself the event opens itself up to philosophical knowledge.

... the object of philosophy is not to contemplate the eternal or to reflect history but to diagnose our actual becomings.³⁰

In historical knowledge, the ideal event, what can be thought from the singular points given in the transcendental field becomes the archeological principle guiding the digging out and the ordering of the traces left by the production of the event upon the bodies that produced it. Or, in Badiou's vocabulary, the event as additional signifier becomes the order word whereby the multiples presented in a situation start to signify something.

In philosophical knowledge on the other hand, quite the contrary, the spatio-temporal realizations of the event become just as many ramps for a leap towards what can be thought through the remarkable points given in the transcendental field, towards experimenting as many of their virtual combinations. As Deleuze shows,

To think is to experiment. [...] Without history experimentation would remain indeterminate and unconditioned, but experimentation is not historical. It is philosophical.³¹

As we can see, there is an ontological priority of the pure event and a chronological anteriority of its spatio-temporal realization in Deleuze. The pure event transforms itself and reaches its eternal truth with each and every one of its realizations and with all it is also better and better known.

At the end of our inquiry we would like to bring to light the profoundly revolutionary meaning of this view upon the matter of knowledge in the human sciences. In our opinion, in these dense passages we find two of the most important theses for the epistemology of the human sciences formulated in the second half of the 20th century.

The first is that historical and philosophical knowledge are in the end competing forms of knowledge, complementing each other and raising equal claims upon one and the same field of knowledge. With this philosophy is brought once again with its feet on the ground from its ivory tower. For the shared domain

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*, 110.

³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*, 111.

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*, 111.

and the overlapping explanations – the philosophical theories explaining different social phenomena, the psychological approach of philosophical questions, etc. – considered by classical epistemology as cases of transgression usually resolved through the exclusion of philosophy become the normal case and the common situation.

And the second thesis is that historical knowledge is not or, better put, should not let itself be guided by what is already known or what can already be thought about the event studied, but by what can be virtually thought about it. Historical knowledge is not grounded in tradition and is not acquired through the terms of an already given view of the world. Even though it is a science of the past history is grounded on the future.

With this we are as far away as possible from the classical epistemology of the human sciences.