

The unpredictability of the pounce¹

Kate Foord²

One of the orienting questions for the 2015 *Method and Technique seminar* was: ‘What is the nature of poesis which psychoanalysis moves towards if it is not the production of a poet or poetry?’ The theme of the 2015 seminar, convened by Linda Clifton and David Pereira, Analysts of the Freudian School of Melbourne, was ‘The Aftermath of Love and the Poetics of Interpretation’. This paper is a response to the questions posed by the convenors regarding the relationship between interpretation and poetics in the context of the proposition that ‘interpretation is no longer addressed to the elucidation of meaning but to bringing about a change in discourse’. ‘Love, ... as the motor of interpretation, produces a change of discourse in shifting the speaker’s relation to their utterance; a function of poesis which is understood, not as the production of poetry or a poet, but as disturbance of individuality’. This paper is an attempt to work those ideas generated in the *Method and Technique seminar* through a particular cultural moment, the one in which Adam Goodes didn’t throw an imaginary spear into a football crowd: the footage of this moment can be found at the following website.

<http://www.indigenoustory.com.au/now/2015/goodes-135/>

Of this act Eddie McGuire said: ‘We should have been warned’.

Commentators on one of those morning shows with an even number of men and women presenters had a conversation that went something like this:

A: What’s all the fuss about?

B: I agree. It’s great that he has something individual, something of his own to express. And it’s great that it’s part of his Indigenous heritage as well.

C: I agree. It’s sad that Australia can’t accept that.

And Waleed Aly said:

Australia is generally a very tolerant society until its minorities demonstrate that they don’t know their place and at that moment, the minute someone in a minority position acts like they’re not a mere supplicant, then we lose our minds.

Eddie McGuire’s comment, ‘we should have been warned’, reminded me of hearing (if it’s true or not, I don’t know) that one Melbourne Steiner school excludes AFL as a sport because of ‘the unpredictability of the bounce’. It is a sport that structures

surprise into its play, but there is something particular about this surprise that has Eddie McGuire, amongst many others, gasping for air.

In this paper I am proposing that Goodes' 'war dance' functions as an event, in the sense that Badiou uses the term. For Badiou:

an event is the taking place of a pure rupture that nothing in the situation allows us to classify under a list of facts (strikes, demonstrations, etc.). Let us wager the following formulation: the event is that multiple which, presenting itself, exhibits the inconsistency underlying all situations, and in a flash throws into a panic, their constituted classifications. The novelty of an event is expressed in the fact that it interrupts the normal regime of the description of knowledge, that always rests on the classification of the well known, and imposes another kind of procedure on whomever admits that, right here in this place, something hitherto unnamed really and truly occurred.³

I will try to show how it is that Goodes' dance is such a point of rupture, in its generating of disturbance, its sudden disruption of meaning and defamiliarisation of the world, and the way it necessitates a registration of its imperative force.

An event, Badiou says, 'compels us to decide a *new* way of being'.⁴ Tina Weller presented us with the sound of this force in the German⁵ and then in various translations of Rainer Maria Rilke's sonnet "Archaic Torso of Apollo", in the imperative with which the poem ends: 'you must change your life'.⁶ Art and psychoanalysis share the capacity to present this moment, to make present this imperative force that Badiou names 'event'. For Badiou, event is linked to poetry and truth: art, including dance, is poetry, and poetry has a particular relation to truth. My proposition in this paper is that Adam Goodes' dance is art in Badiou's sense, a proposition that raises questions, too, about the difference between the analyst and the poet, between the act of interpretation of the analyst and the act of poiesis of the poet.

Seamus Heaney argues that the poet is one who doesn't think twice: 'once you think twice about a usage you have been displaced from it, and your right to it has been contested by the official linguistic censor with whom another part of you is secretly in league'.⁷ Goodes didn't think twice. He danced. And we lost our minds. By 'we' I mean that, whatever effects that event had on particular people (and clearly there were many of these), this disturbance registered as a collective event. The causes and justifications were immediately speculated on. So, for instance, because there was booing from the crowd just prior to Goodes' goal, this 'war dance' was interpreted as 'payback'; or, others said, Goodes was expressing himself and it's good that he has his Indigenous heritage to draw on to help him express himself. It was also described as a 'war dance' directed at the crowd but Goodes asked why would he direct a war dance to the part of the crowd full of his team's fans. As I was watching the footage

again, I registered as if hearing it for the first time, the exchange between the commentators that unfolded as Goodes' dance did:

A: There's a war cry from Adam here.

B: Down towards the Carlton fans I fancy.

C: You can celebrate a goal however you want though really...provided its not, um, anything obscene...aaah, and that certainly wasn't. No. Enjoy the moment.

And so much of the response after that immediate exchange between the commentators lent its voice to this suspicion: that it was indeed an obscene act from which we should have had the option to avert our gaze.

Eddie McGuire's complaint about the lack of warning reminded me of an event in 1991, the year I began work at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) as a book editor. It was the Institute's Open Day, and a group of men, painted up, were dancing. I was seated, cross-legged on the grass somewhere front and centre in the audience. Now came a part of the dance where the men raised imagined spears and sprang/sidled sprang/sidled towards the audience. Just at the moment when the dancers might have released the spears the men dropped their arms and turned and walked as if there *was* no-one looking at them back to position. It was electrifying, shocking and confusing. The men performed this same series of steps again. And then again. Each time had an effect, but nothing like that first one of which I'd had no warning.

Almost 25 years later, like those dancers in Canberra, Adam Goodes didn't hurl his spear into the crowd. Watching him dance was ecstasy. Love. I thought about the movement itself, a series of seemingly identical sequences culminating in a moment of raising, arrest and dropping. A dance by a man with such extraordinary physical fluidity and control that he seemed to be running with, or perhaps as, water. And yet what was so striking was the punctuation in his movement and its sudden suspension or arrest. The movement that I was so astonished by in Canberra: not a hurling but a sudden disappearance – not a disappearance of a spear that was never there, but of something else far more shocking.

I am linking Goodes' dance to that dance at AIATSIS, and at the same time I am arguing that Goodes' dance is singular. Its singularity doesn't inhere in the fact that Goodes did it and no-one else did: that is, it is not singularity as a synonym for individuality. In the Method and Technique seminar this, Malcolm Morgan allowed us to hear in the poetry of John Clare and of Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*, a singularity which is particular to that poet's working of his voice and to which the poet remains awake despite the soporific effects of the conventions of discursive language:

The poet, says Heaney, must find a way to be at home in the vernacular of his particular linguistic stamping ground. And, although he will not be there alone, since this is the language of his inheritance, his “hearth speech” as he calls it, it is only there that he can speak with an utterly convincing voice – a voice that sounds like his own voice.⁸

It is the poet’s own voice inasmuch as it is his voice without thinking twice; it is instances of the history of the marks that language has made on his body and it will be his signature. Anybody would know it was him. This signature – its recognisability – tames the affect.

The voice, as non-recognisable, non-attributable, is a singularity, which Lacan conceptualised with reference to Paul Valéry’s poem ‘La Pythie’ – the voice that doesn’t sound like the voice of anyone. Here is the last verse of that poem:

Honneur des Hommes, Saint LANGAGE,
Discours prophétique et paré,
Belles chaînes en qui s’engage
Le dieu dans la chair égaré,
Illumination, largesse!
Voici parler une Sagesse
Et sonner cette auguste Voix
Qui se connaît quand elle sonne
N’être plus la voix de personne
Tant que des ondes et des bois!⁹

Honour of humanity, Sainted LANGUAGE,
Discourse prophetic and adorned,
Fair chains in which the god
Lost in the flesh binds himself,
Illumination, generosity!
Here speaks a Wisdom,
Here sounds that august voice
Which when it sounds
Knows itself to be no longer anyone’s voice
So much as that of the waves and the woods!¹⁰

‘It’s language Valéry is speaking of here’, says Lacan, ‘and shouldn’t we perhaps in the end recognise it, this voice, as *the voice of no one*’.¹¹ This voice is distinct inasmuch as it does away with a distinction between the voice and the effects of sound: it is the voice in which language resonates, through which language resounds in the body and affects as sound and silence.

As Heaney did with what he calls the ‘hearthspeech’ of his *Beowulf*, Goodes has *invented* something with his own dialect. There are elements common to Indigenous dance: the flat-footed punctuated intercourse with the earth (pounding, sidling, sliding, tip-toeing, still), the repeated movements, the hiatus, the dropping, the absence of a spectator). This is what I’m referring to as a dialect. To investigate Goodes’ act of invention, I’ll read it through Badiou’s *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, in particular through two different chapters, ‘What is a Poem?’ and ‘Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’.

In ‘What is a poem?’ Badiou begins with Plato’s idea that the poem is what must be excluded from the collective: collected humanity is only thinkable if the poem is excluded. This is the ancient discord Plato identifies between philosophy and poetry:

To what, within thought, is poetry opposed? Poetry is not directly opposed to the intellect, to the intuition of ideas. It is not opposed to dialectics, considered as the supreme form of the intelligible. Plato is very clear on this point: What poetry forbids is discursive thought, *dianoia*. Plato says that “he who lends an ear to it must be on his guard fearing for the polity of his soul.” *Dianoia* is the thought that traverses, the thought that links and deduces. The poem itself is affirmation and delectation – it does not traverse, it dwells on the threshold. The poem is not a rule-bound crossing, but rather an offering, a lawless proposition.¹²

The rule-bound crossing holds the subject through the work of discourse, linking, deducing, producing meaning effects or signifieds from the work of the signifier. The rules are those of grammar, of syntax, of the sentence, of discourse, where cuts or gaps coincide with the breaks of these linguistic structures and any crossing is governed by these rules. Here, the individual can dwell, preserving the polity of his soul, the oneself linked to others as member of the polity. The disturbance of individuality of which the poem is capable inheres in its lawless proposition, which disturbs the individual *as* member of the polity, as linked through thought, through discursive thought, to (like) others. The poem disturbs the foundation of individuality in the collective, or polity, isolating the ‘individual’ as an effect of language rather than enfolding him as its swaddled babe. One is suddenly alone *and* confused. Of this, Eddie wanted ‘ample’ warning: that there is a force *within* the polity that has the capacity to disrupt the sense of being one with the polity and that that force is active and present. It is without warning that one is taken to the threshold and confronted with the lawless proposition which, in this instance, was given the name ‘war dance’.

This lawless proposition is that on which poetry depends: in Seminar XXIV Lacan refers to it as a violence done to usage, in which meaning is rendered empty, replaced by sense effects.¹³ Goodes’ ‘war dance’ is such a sense effect, a ‘speech’ full of sense effects. ‘Full speech’¹⁴ is a violence of usage which throws out what usually prevails, in particular the uni-directionality of meaning effects. This isn’t to suggest that there

isn't any meaning; rather, that meaning loses its direction, its 'common sense' and its plugging capacity. The poetic act, rather than plugging a hole, points to its lack of coherence, of uni-directionality. The meaning of Goodes' dance is not sayable, despite the lively debate about it: the tone of this lively debate was itself disconcerted by the (non-Aboriginal) collective's incapacity to agree on precisely what it was that had happened. The event exceeded all and any attempts to pin it down to what exactly it was. No meaning would stick enough to kill the sense effects of Goodes' dance. This has the power to make us lose our minds.

Some of the discussion amongst commentators involved questioning whether this lawless act should be sanctioned, made lawful, as if we could somehow still banish it from the collective, make it unhappen. It could still be ruled out of order and Australian Rules reinstated (where the only unpredictability is that of the bounce). Unlike the tribunals that hear charges against the players, there is no legislation that would cover this event. The violence done to usage is outside the law; the violence done to each other is not—that violence is sanctioned through its naming, codifying and the apportioning of punishment, thereby confirmed as *not* obscene. Goodes' dance has happened and had its effect: it can't be banned because it will never happen again. Something else will happen that affects the polity of the soul, that has sense effects and hole effects – something of which, again, we will have no warning. If Goodes' act was of the order of poetry, it is something that might inspire psychoanalysts in our interventions.¹⁵ To pursue further the question of how it is that Goodes' act might inspire us, I'll continue to follow Badiou's discussion of art (poetry and dance) in *Inaesthetics*.

In the chapter 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', Badiou argues that what links dance with thought is Nietzsche's idea of thought as an intensification:

For Nietzsche, thought is not effectuated anywhere else than where it is given – thought is effectuated *in situ*, it is what... is intensified upon itself, or again, it is the movement of its own intensity.¹⁶

Badiou writes of Nietzsche's idea of movement:

... what Nietzsche sees in dance – both as an image of thought and as the Real of a body – is the theme of a mobility that is firmly fastened to itself, a mobility that is not inscribed within an external determination, but instead moves without detaching itself from its own center. This mobility is not imposed, it unfolds as if it were an expansion of its center.

...[D]ance corresponds to the Nietzschean idea of thought as active becoming, as active power. But this becoming is such that within it a *unique* affirmative interiority is released. Movement is neither a displacement nor a

transformation, but a course that traverses and sustains the eternal uniqueness of an affirmation.¹⁷

Movement so defined has the quality of the voice that doesn't sound like the voice of anyone. It is not the sound that emerges from finding an expression in discourse, in an imposed structure, but rather one that arises from difference itself. It doesn't become or blend with anything else, lending itself neither to identity or identification.

Badiou:

Consequently, dance designates the capacity of bodily impulse not so much to be projected onto a space outside of itself, but rather to be caught up in an affirmative attraction *that restrains it...*

[D]ance is what testifies to the force of restraint at the heart of...movements. Of course, this force of restraint will be manifested only in movement, but what counts is the potent legibility of the restraint.¹⁸

'At the summit of its art', writes Badiou, dance demonstrates:

. . . the equivalence not only between quickness and slowness, but also between gesture and nongesture. It would indicate that, even though movement has taken place, this taking place is indistinguishable from the virtual nonplace. Dance is composed of gestures that, haunted by their own restraint, remain in some sense undecided.¹⁹

These two qualities – the legibility of this restraint, its potent legibility, and the undecidability that it produces – makes dance an instance of the event of truth, where event is 'what remains undecided between the taking place and the non-place'.²⁰ The act of reading is highlighted here: it is not the spectacle of dance that is important but what is legible in it, and that is an experience of power, the particular form of power in which powerlessness is powerfully present.

I know that in 1991 I was amazed by the movement of sudden dropping. I was dropped as spectator in that moment, and that thud drew my attention in another way, which, reading Badiou, I can discern as the potent legibility of the point of powerlessness. This I also saw in Goodes' performance. The move to name what he did, as fast as possible, as a 'war dance' was, ironically, an attempt to disarm it of this, other, more shocking form of potency, a potency of the kind that Badiou names as that of truth, which is a power and at the same time a powerlessness, a powerlessness that Lacan named in calling truth that which can only be 'half-said':

For what truth has jurisdiction over cannot be a totality...

Whatever a truth may be a truth *of*, one cannot claim that it affects this thing ‘entirely’ or that it provides its integral exposition. The poem’s revelatory power turns around an enigma, so that marking out the very *point* of this enigma is the powerless Real of the power of the true. In this sense, ‘mystery in letters’ is a genuine imperative. When Mallarmé argues that ‘there must always be enigma in poetry’, he inaugurates an ethic of mystery founded on the respect, by the power of a truth, of its own point of powerlessness.

The mystery is, strictly speaking, that every poetic truth leaves at its own center what it does not have the power to bring into presence.

In a more general sense, a truth always encounters – in a point of what it has invested – the limit that proves that it is *this* singular truth, and not the self-consciousness of the whole.²¹

The singular, then, is not identifiable as a positive manifestation of something—a tone, a vocabulary, a stance – but rather is an event in which what is and what is not are indissoluble. The very specificity and uniqueness of what is brought into existence only emerges from the powerlessness to say it. Freud’s metaphor of interpretation – that the lion only pounces once²² – might describe the effect that such a moment has in an analysis, but the force of the movement Freud describes as a pounce might be closer to the power / lessness of Nietzsche’s dancer.

Mallarmé wrote that dance is a poem set free of any scribe’s apparatus.²³ This can be heard, too, in Lacan’s statement: ‘I am not a poet but a poem’.²⁴ How is it that psychoanalysis can be a poem in the way that dance is, given that it is a practice that depends on speech? In Seminar XXIV, Lacan speaks of poetry as the expression of the resonance of the body, which brings it close to what Nietzsche sees in dance – both as an image of thought and as the Real of a body. ‘It is quite certain’, Lacan says, ‘that writing is not that by which [such] poetry is expressed.’²⁵ Mallarmé’s idea of the freedom from the apparatus is apposite here. And again, the link between dance and poetry in Badiou’s work on the event provides a way of thinking this freedom. This freedom is what Badiou names ‘subtraction’:

Dance is a metaphor for thought precisely inasmuch as it indicates, by means of the body, that a thought, in the form of its evental surge, is subtracted from every pre-existence of knowledge.²⁶

Another way of thinking of psychoanalytic interpretation, after Badiou, is as ‘evental surge’:

... the ‘true’ dancer must never appear to *know* the dance she dances. Her knowledge (which is technical, immense and painfully acquired) is traversed, as null, by the pure emergence of her gesture . . . She does not execute the dance, but *is* this restrained intensity that manifests the gesture’s indecision. In

truth, the dancer abolishes every known dance because she disposes of her body as if it were *invented*. So that the spectacle of dance is the body subtracted from every knowledge of a body, the body as *disclosure*.²⁷

Badiou says that this poem free of its apparatus is the poem unburdened of the poem, subtracted from itself.

Adam Goodes is such a dancer; he danced as poem. He is not in the place that football and the culture more broadly offers to players: the one whom everyone wants to identify with, the one whom others want to substitute for, the one who can be substituted. Adam Goodes exploded out of this substitutability at the moment of this dance. His dance was one I read as 'Indigenous dance' and which at the same time subtracted itself from it, abolishing every known dance in this act of invention. The rush to name what he did so quickly as Indigenous was the rush to abolish its singularity, ironically, here, a repetition of that obscene Australian manoeuvre known as assimilation.

In his introductory address to the *Method and Technique seminar* this year, David Pereira proposed that Lacan may not have gone far enough in declaring, 'I am not a poet but a poem'. Pereira proposed that he might have claimed both.²⁸ Malcolm Morgan drew our attention to Seamus Heaney's characterization of the poet as the one who must 'submit to the strain of bearing witness in his or her own life to the plane of consciousness represented in the poem'.²⁹ We might say, then, that the poet bears witness to the event that he is as poem, if we also say that there is no need to conceive of these entities as separate but conceive them rather in terms of function. If an analyst is a poet and a poem, this might signal the necessity not for the presence of an author but rather for the presence of the poet as witness. The function of the analyst as poet, then, could be seen as witness to the potent legibility of the poem as evental surge. And at this moment, the analyst is to be located not in a person but in the function of witness.

Notes

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice* seminar, The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, July 2015.

² Member of the School. The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

³ Meillassoux, Quentin in Alain Badiou, 'History and Event'. 2011. Tr. Thomas Nail. *Parrhesia* 12: 1–11.

⁴ Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Tr. Peter Hallward. London: Verso, 2002, 41.

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- ⁵ A reading of the poem in German can be found at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQehEmaydGA>
- ⁶ Weller, Tina. 'The aftermath of love and the poetics of interpretation'. Presented at the *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice* seminar, The Freudian School of Melbourne, May 2015.
- ⁷ Heaney, Seamus. *The Redress of Poetry*. Cited in Malcolm Morgan, 'The aftermath seldom or never equals the initial herbage (Marvell)'. Presented at the *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice* seminar, The Freudian School of Melbourne, June 2015.
- ⁸ Morgan, Malcolm. 'The aftermath seldom or never equals the initial herbage (Marvell)'. Presented at the *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice* seminar, The Freudian School of Melbourne, June 2015.
- ⁹ Valéry, Paul. Cited in Maulpoix Jean-Michel. 'Major Poems: The Voice of the Subject'. *Reading Paul Valéry: Universe in Mind*, Eds. Paul Gifford and Brian Stimpson. Cambridge Studies in French 58: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 180.
- ¹⁰ Cited in 'Bekaert, Geert, Le Réel du Discours: Eupalinos ou l'architecte'. *OASE* 75. Tr. David McKay, 2008: 231.
- ¹¹ Lacan, Jacques. The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II – *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 1954 -55. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Tr. Sylvana Tomaselli, New York: Norton, 1988, 55.
- ¹² Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 17.
- ¹³ Lacan, Jacques. *L'Insu Que Sait de L'une Bévüe*: The Seminar Of Jacques Lacan, XXIV, Lesson of 15 March 1977. Unpublished translation.
- ¹⁴ On full speech, see the section 'Empty speech and full speech in the psychoanalytic realization of desire', in Jacques Lacan. 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis'. *Ecrits*. Tr. Bruce Fink, New York: Norton, 206–220.
- ¹⁵ One of the orienting ideas for the 2015 *Method and Technique seminar* comes from Lacan's twenty-fourth seminar: *L'Insu Que Sait de L'une Bévüe*: 'Can the psychoanalyst possibly be inspired to make interventions as a psychoanalyst by something of the order of poetry? That's what you must be led towards...'
- ¹⁶ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 58.
- ¹⁷ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 59.
- ¹⁸ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 59–60.
- ¹⁹ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 61.
- ²⁰ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 61.
- ²¹ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 23.
- ²² Freud, Sigmund. 'Analysis terminable and interminable'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XXIII*. Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1958, 219.
- ²³ Cited in Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 65.
- ²⁴ This, also, was an orienting idea for the 2015 *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice* seminar, 2015.
- ²⁵ Lacan, Jacques. *L'Insu Que Sait de L'une Bévüe*: The Seminar Of Jacques Lacan, XXIV, Unpublished seminar. Session of 19 April 1977.
- ²⁶ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 66.

²⁷ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Tr. Alberto Toscano, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, 66.

²⁸ Pereira, David. Seminar convenor & Analyst of the School, *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice*: Seminar of February 7th, 2015.

²⁹ Heaney, Seamus. Quoted from *The Redress of Poetry*, p. 5. Malcolm Morgan, 'The aftermath seldom or never equals the initial herbage (Marvell)'. Presented at the *Method and Technique In Clinical Practice* seminar, The Freudian School of Melbourne, June 2015.