

Communal Identity and Individual Difference: Truth and Faciality in Philip Roth's “Eli, the Fanatic”

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ABSTRACT

Philip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic" explores the conflict between communal identity and individual difference. In the short story, a community of assimilated Jews in a New York suburb forces a group of newly arrived Hasidic immigrants to give up their traditional religious costumes, for fear that the newcomers' sartorial difference will threaten communal harmony. Reading the story in light of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concepts of the "abstract machine of faciality" and the "probe-head," as well as Alain Badiou's theory of "the generic truth," this paper argues that a community that is established through the mechanism of faciality propagates identity and reduces differences; in contrast, if the community is constituted through "the truth procedure," the differences among its members should be recognized yet traversed. In "Eli, the Fanatic," the conflict between the normalizing mechanism of faciality and the individualizing operation of the probe-head reaches a deadlock that can only be resolved in the generic procedure of truth.

KEY WORDS: Philip Roth, Deleuze, Guattari, Badiou, truth, faciality

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群體共同性與個體差異： 菲利浦羅斯短篇故事 〈宗教狂熱者艾利〉中之真理與面目性

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摘 要

菲利浦羅斯的短篇故事〈宗教狂熱者艾利〉描述群體共同性與個體差異性之間的衝突。故事中經過同化的紐約郊區猶太社群誘迫一群哈西德猶太教新移民拋棄傳統宗教服飾，並改穿現代主流服裝，以維護群體生活的和諧。本論文援引德勒茲與瓜達西的「面目性抽象機器」、「探針頭」，以及巴迪烏的「真理」概念以分析此故事，更進一步闡釋群體如何利用面目性機制來建立個體間的共同性並削減差異性，而「真理程序」所凝聚的社群又如何能夠同時承認卻跨越個體差異。在〈宗教狂熱者艾利〉故事中，面目性抽象機器生產出常規化社群，而探針頭則製造個體差異，此一衝突唯有在真理程序中才能獲得解決。

關鍵詞：菲利浦羅斯、德勒茲、瓜達西、巴迪烏、真理、面目性

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The conflict between communal identity and individual difference is a major topic in Philip Roth's oeuvre. Nowhere is this issue more wittily tackled than in his short story "Eli, the Fanatic." Set in the fictional New York suburb of Woodenton in 1948, "Eli, the Fanatic" tells the story of how a community of assimilated Jews tries to coerce a group of new immigrants, Hasidic Jewish Holocaust survivors, into communal conformity by forcing them to replace their traditional religious costumes with "clothing usually associated with American life in the 20th century" (262). The Orthodox Jewish garments, the assimilated Jews believe, connote religious fanaticism, which could threaten their secular American lifestyle.

The story raises questions regarding the politics of "community," such as "how does a community uphold its identity and minimize individual differences?" and "how should a community define itself without some form of commonality among its members?" To explore these questions, it is helpful to turn to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "the abstract machine of faciality" and Alain Badiou's theory of "the generic truth." The abstract machine of faciality is a mechanism that can be used to determine the face of a person and conceptualize individual differences as deviances from the normal face. The only way for an individual to elude the operation of this mechanism is to construct a probe-head, which frees the body from organization by the faciality machine. In Badiou's ontology, based on set theory in mathematics, individuals belonging to a situation are recognized as having different characteristics and are classified according to these differences. A commonality open to all can only be found in what Badiou calls "the generic procedure" of truth, which recognizes yet traverses individual differences (*Being* 391).

This paper argues that, in "Eli, the Fanatic," the community propagates the adoption of homogeneous identity through the use of the abstract machine of faciality, and that individuals assert their differences by constructing probe-heads. The clash between these two antagonistic forces can be resolved by the implementation of the theory of the generic procedure of truth, where individual differences are not just compatible but integral to communal identity. This paper is divided into two sections: the first section introduces Deleuze and Guattari's "abstract machine of faciality" and analyzes the story from this perspective, demonstrating the attempt by the central character's to release the probe-head and his suppression by the faciality machine; the

second part details Badiou's theory of how the production of truth traverses individual differences and interprets the denouement of "Eli, the Fanatic" as pointing to a conclusive solution to the conflict between individual difference and communal identity.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize the abstract machine of faciality as an organizational mechanism that serves as the "condition of possibility" for two semiotic regimes—"signifiante and subjectification"—and combines their functions (180, 167.).¹ The regime of signifiante is a "white wall" of signifiers for interpretation, whereas the system of subjectification is a "black hole" for the emergence of consciousness and interiority (167). The signifying regime delineates "zones of frequency or probability" to preclude or neutralize anything incompatible with a system of "appropriate significations" (168). Inasmuch as it prevents heterogeneity, the semiotic regime of signifiante is a "despotic . . . assemblage of power" (181). The subjective regime produces a psychological center that coordinates the "mental reality" according to a "dominant reality" (168). It is thus an "authoritarian" assemblage (180).

A "mixed semiotic of signifiante and subjectification," the "abstract machine of faciality" circumscribes what an individual can possibly be and do (Deleuze and Guattari 179, 168). A "white wall/black hole system," the face signifies a body's subjectivity, placing the individual within a grid of race, class, gender, and other categories, which make up the social hierarchy (167). What Deleuze and Guattari term "face" is by no means biological or empirical. The stratifying mechanism of faciality works to "crush all polyvocality, set up language as a form of exclusive expression, and operate by signifying biunivocalization and subjective binarization" (180). By selecting and structuring polysemic signs and affective energies, the faciality machine produces the signifying subject. Without the face to indicate the subject position of the speaker, the signifiante of any utterance cannot be determined. The faciality machine produces individual concrete faces formulated with subjectivities and signifiantes (168). The "volume-cavity system" of the body

¹ The term "signifiante" in the English translation of *A Thousand Plateaus* is borrowed from the French original. As Brian Massumi, translator of the book, explains, signifiante refers to the "syntagmatic . . . processes of language" (xviii). In *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Tamsin Lorraine explicates signifiante as "systems of signifiers and signifieds that interpreters interpret" (150). The word "signifiante" emphasizes the materials for interpretation and should not be confused with the English word "signification," whose usual definition emphasizes the act of signifying.

is thus decoded and then overcoded by the “surface-holes” system of the face. The faciality machine works not only on the head, but also “touches all other parts of the body, and even, if necessary, other objects without resemblance” to the face (170). Things attached to or surrounding the body, such as clothing and accessories, signify subjectivities no less than do eyes and mouths (181). Facialization turns bodies and their accoutrements into “signifying subjectivities” (171).

To qualify the abstract machine of faciality as a First World phenomenon, Deleuze and Guattari contrast it with the “nonsignifying, nonsubjective, essentially collective, polyvocal, and corporeal” semiotic of primitive societies (175). Unlike primitive tribes, who wear body paintings and tattoos to highlight the “multidimensionality of bodies” and masks to affirm the head as a part of the body, contemporary industrialized society uses garments and masks to facialize the body and the head (176). By no means universal, faciality exists mainly in the contemporary industrialized world (181).

The first function of the faciality machine is “the computation of normalities” (Deleuze and Guattari 178). The faciality machine combines facial elements according to a binary logic to create individual concrete faces. In this arborescent system, each individual face is a combination of subjective categories out of all possible combinations. If a face is “a rich woman,” it cannot be “a poor man.” An individual concrete face does not precede this formulation, but is born of it. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, “You don’t so much have a face as slide into one” (177).

The second role of the faciality machine is to operate as a “deviance detector” (Deleuze and Guattari 177-78). The faciality machine renders individual faces intelligible by comparing them to the majoritarian face type, and measures their degrees of deviance from this privileged face. This analysis of facial units demands a binary response: yes or no. When “given a concrete face, the machine judges whether it passes or not, whether it goes or not, on the basis of the elementary facial units” (177). Individual, concrete faces are subjected to this assessment and then assigned a place in a grid of varying degrees of normalcy and deviance. No face is left unrecognized, as the faces that conflate or elude binary qualifications will be classified as deviant. The faciality machine “rejects faces that do not conform, or seem suspicious,” but it also sets up “successive divergence-types of deviance” to

designate everything that thwarts binary categorization (ibid.). The deviant face is either rejected outright or tolerated, but it's never allowed to escape from the signifying system. In other words, the faciality grid refuses to reckon with its radical difference. The faciality machine regards a face outside the system of established categories as a variant on these categories. Therefore, there is not an "Other" to be excluded. Everything is a "Same" with a "degree of deviance" (178).

The faciality system has a fixed center: the "White Man" (Deleuze and Guattari 176). With the White Man as the majoritarian face, the abstract machine of faciality declares all alternatives to this face type abnormal and illegitimate. Here, the function of deviance detection develops into racism, which "never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out" (178). Those of a different race are not outsiders but inferior or false manifestations of one's own race. In racism, "there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be" (ibid.). By foreclosing any intrusion from the outside, the abstract machine of faciality ensures the homogeneity of the community. As Patricia MacCormack points out, the "majoritarian face is situational," varying with "social situations and structures, the parameters of power and signifying systems" (137). As different strains of racism have different standards of racial normalcy, the majoritarian face changes with the community concerned.

The abstract machine of faciality is employed by state power to enforce arborescent stratification for the purposes of signification and subjectification, but the stratification is not omnipotent. One can "escape the face" by creating "*probe-heads*" (Deleuze and Guattari 171, 190). Tools that effect "defacialization," *probe-heads* "dismantle the strata in their wake, break through the walls of signification, pour out of the holes of subjectivity, fell trees in favor of veritable rhizomes, and steer the flows down lines of positive deterritorialization or creative flight" (190). The "positive deterritorialization" produced by the use of *probe-heads* is contrary to the negative deterritorialization of the body in the process of facialization (190). The *probe-head* experiments with all possible connections between faciality traits or even traits of non-faces, such as landscape and music (189). The *probe-head* functions to enable one "to become imperceptible, to become clandestine," and to "make faciality traits themselves finally elude the

organization of the face” (171). One step ahead of the force of striation, individual faces created by the probe-head are “independently different,” rather than divergent from the majoritarian type (MacCormack 138).

As Simon O’Sullivan points out, probe-heads are “alternative modes of organization” (312). The utilization of the probe-head does not represent a return to the pre-signifying, pre-subjective primitive society (ibid.). For Deleuze and Guattari, such a return would simply be nostalgia and regression (190). Instead of looking back on the primitive “prefacial inhumanity,” they focus on something further ahead. “Beyond the face lies an altogether different inhumanity: no longer that of the primitive head, but of ‘probe-heads’; here, cutting edges of deterritorialization become operative and lines of deterritorialization positive and absolute, forming strange new becomings, new polyvocalities” (ibid.). The probe-head, which, in its original definition, refers to an instrument for exploring unseen space, suggests experimentality and the act of becoming in Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphoric use. In dismantling the face, the probe-head unbinds faciality traits, making each of them singular (187). The probe-head can be understood as any practice that “ruptures the dominant (faciality),” disrupts the conventional regime, and prepares for further deterritorializations of the body (O’Sullivan 313).

The concepts of “faciality” and “probe-head” help illuminate the conflict between communal identity and individual difference in terms of sartorial customs as depicted in the story “Eli, the Fanatic.” The assimilated Jews of Woodenton in “Eli, the Fanatic” are a community that values uniformity and seeks to reduce individual differences. The community uses “*the abstract machine of faciality*” to normalize its members, with the patriarch of the bourgeois family as its majoritarian face (Deleuze and Guattari 168). The Woodenton Jews are descendents of immigrants from European countries such as Poland, Russia, and Austria, who moved to the United States to escape the pogroms prevalent in the 19th century (Roth 279). In order to live in peace with Protestants, the Jewish immigrants replaced their traditional culture with that of the mainstream American lifestyle. At the expense of their traditions and customs, they managed to become integrated into the society of their adopted country.

At this juncture, a group of displaced German Hasidic Jews, a rabbi, his assistant, and eighteen boys, arrive in Woodenton. The Holocaust survivors

settle on a hill in the area and convert an old mansion into the “Yeshivah of Woodenton” (Roth 262). The story depicts the attempt by the assimilated Jews, represented by their lawyer, Eli Peck, to drive out the newcomers, who are deemed unfit for the community due to what is perceived as their “fanatic” religious practices. What aggrieves the Woodenton Jews most is the sight of the mute assistant of Rabbi Tzoref, the director of the Yeshivah. The assistant, or “the greenie,” as the townspeople call him, is always dressed in the long black gabardine, flowing beard, and “round-topped, wide-brimmed Talmudic hat” customary for Hasidic men, and he wears this full set of Hasidic costume when he comes into town to run errands for the Yeshivah (253).

The Hasids’ austere religious attire stands out among the modern secular outfits worn by the affluent business owners and professionals that make up the suburban town. The state power operative in Woodenton uses the abstract machine of faciality to found a unified semiology and a single-centered subjectivity to construct the concrete faces of the townspeople. Through the workings of the faciality machine, consumer capitalist ideology and white bourgeois heterosexual subjectivity become embodied in Eli. His wardrobe of tweed and flannel suits by up-market clothiers such as Brooks Brothers and J. Press and dress shirts of Oxford weave or exquisite batiste fabric—the mainstays of white upper-middle class white American menswear—constructs his face as majoritarian.

Proud of being a “modern community” living in “an age of science,” the acculturated Jews in Woodenton consider “common sense” to be the guiding principle of their lives. For them, Yiddish is a “dead language” and believing in the Bible is insane (Roth 278). Ted Heller, owner of a shoe store and leader of the expulsion effort, sees the Biblical Abraham as a horrifying madman and criminal. “This Abraham,” he tells Eli, “was going to kill his own son for a sacrifice. . . . You call that religion? Today a guy like that they’d lock him up” (277). The story’s spiritual message is so contrary to common sense that it gives Ted’s daughter “nightmares” (ibid.).

According to Janell Watson, faciality explains how Europe upholds “whiteness, reason, and secularised Christianity as the markers of human superiority” (208). Although Deleuze and Guattari’s “White Man” is a racial and sexual category, Watson asserts, the model of faciality also uses gesture, culture, and ethnicity for the purpose of hierarchization (209). The faciality machine operative in Woodenton renders Yiddish culture and the Hebrew

Bible as inferior faciality traits and relegates them to the margins of their society.

The majoritarian face of the Woodenton community is one of not only secularism but also sanity. Emotional disturbance is monitored and managed at the first sign of its emergence. Eli himself is a target of this form of normalization. Having had two nervous breakdowns in the past, the lawyer is closely monitored by his wife, Miriam, in order to prevent a third breakdown. Sending Eli to a psychiatrist and using Freudian theory herself to treat him, Miriam helps to uphold the suburban Woodenton norm of rationality. If “Miriam were . . . to see Eli upset, she would set about explaining his distress to him, understanding him, forgiving him, so as to get things back to Normal, for Normal was where they loved one another” (Roth 254). Only by maintaining the normal behavior of its members and by making sure that “there’s no fanatics, no crazy people” in the community can Woodenton claim to be a community of love and harmony (277).

The minoritarian face, that which fails to pass the test of normality, is embodied in “figures of unrest,” such as terrorists, illegal immigrant workers, and criminals who need to be managed and normalized to safeguard the community (Watson 210). The Woodenton Jews perceive their Hasidic new neighbors exactly as such threatening figures. They insist that the black-clad Hasids are not only anachronistic, but also “Goddam fanatics,” who do not belong to their “progressive suburban community” where “families live in comfort and beauty and serenity” (Roth 258, 261). They suspect the newcomers of demonic depravity and therefore commission Eli to negotiate with the Yeshivah to prevail upon them to move elsewhere. One neighbor complains to the lawyer: “We’re not just dealing with people—these are religious fanatics is what they are [sic]. Dressing like that. . . . It smells like a lot of hocus-pocus abracadabra to me” (276-77). The Jewish inhabitants also associate the religious attire with deformity. When Eli saw the Yeshivah director in the dim light of the latter’s office, he exclaimed inwardly, “The crown of his head was missing!” (250). Actually, the “black circle on the back of [Tzuref’s] head” is only the yarmulke worn by all Orthodox Jews (ibid.). The yarmulke is a faciality trait so alien to the majoritarian face of the assimilated Jews that Eli intuitively interprets it as constituting a defective face. The faciality machine prevents the recognition of the foreign by rendering the latter as inferior or faulty instances of the majoritarian face.

The rightful place for the Yeshivah, the Woodenton Jews believe, would be a neighborhood frequented by criminals such as Brownsville in New York City. As Eli's neighbor, Artie Berg, grunts, "Eli, in Woodenton, a Yeshivah! If I want to live in Brownsville, Eli, I'll live in Brownsville" (Roth 255). The practice of Orthodox Judaism is thus associated with anti-social activities that do not fit into the "peace and safety" of Woodenton (279). Moreover, the assimilated Jews fear that the Hasids' outward display of Jewish identity will ruin their efforts at gaining further acceptance into the Protestant environment of mainstream America.

Sympathetic to the suffering of the Holocaust survivors, Eli is reluctant to use the laws related to zoning to evict the Yeshivah. The lawyer devises a compromise in which the Yeshivah stays where it is on condition that the newcomers discontinue their "fanatic" practices, referring to the donning of Hasidic costumes. The change in attire, he tells Tzoref, is necessary for communal harmony. The amity between Protestants and Jews requires a mutual adjustment, in which "both Jews and Gentiles alike have had to give up some of their more extreme practices in order not to threaten or offend the other" (Roth 262). However, as Andrew Furman points out, what Eli calls "extreme practices" actually refer to "any outward display of Judaism" (212). The behavioral adjustment, Eileen H. Watts notes, is by no means equal between Jews and Protestants. The reality is "that Jews have offended and Gentiles have threatened" (163). The Protestants' adjustment involves opening some of their country clubs, neighborhoods, and universities to Jews, whereas the Jews' adjustment means not dressing or speaking like Jews anymore (163). In other words, only by becoming invisible as Jews did the earlier Jewish immigrants obtain acceptance into the Woodenton society. Now they want the new immigrants to do the same.

The abstract machine of faciality operates through clothes and accessories, so adopting the typical 20th-century American outfit means putting on the majoritarian face and discarding the Judaistic subjectivity. The granting of a majoritarian face to the Hasids equals a painful deprivation of their identity. Indeed, as Judith Oster notes, the greenie's traditional garment is "inseparable from his being" (73). Under the Nazi regime, he lost everything except the clothes he wears. When Eli asks Tzoref to have the greenie change his clothes, the rabbi protests, "The suit the gentleman wears is all he's got" (Roth 263). The beard and costume are "*physical markers*" of

his Hasidic Jewish identity (Oster 73). The sartorial “adjustment” would strip him of his ethnic and religious identities. Debra Shostak similarly points out that the 19th-century costume that makes the Hasid an anomaly in the “modern community” is “his sole identity,” and to “change his clothes is to change the man” (120).

Seeing that the greenie has no “man’s regular clothes” to wear, Eli decides to give him his own Brooks Brothers green tweed suit, complete with shirts, shoes, and a hat (Roth 281). To the delight of everyone in town, the greenie, clad in Eli’s brown hat and green suit, goes walking “up and down every street in town” to exhibit his willingness to adjust to the norm (282). Keeping his beard and side-locks, the greenie still looks recognizably Hasidic. Eli’s larger-size clothes fit him badly. What’s worse, he has no idea how to wear the typical Western dress suit properly. He wears the button-down shirt unbuttoned and ties the necktie loose and lopsided (*ibid.*). Taking on the new identity as the secular suburban bourgeois American, he doesn’t know how to conduct himself and moves with “a walk that was not a walk” (283). However, in the eyes of the Woodenton Jews, the modern suit reclassifies the greenie as one of them, and “for all his strangeness—it clung to his whiskers, signaled itself in his locomotion—he looked as if he belonged” (*ibid.*). When the greenie sees Eli from a distance, he stops and then runs his fingers through every feature of his face. “To Eli, the fingers said, *I have a face, I have a face at least*” (*ibid.*). The greenie has now acquired the majoritarian face that will lead to his acceptance into the Woodenton society.

The community seems fairly pleased with the greenie’s adjustment but they do not expect him to leave his own black garments at the door of Eli’s house (Roth 292). In what Sander L. Gilman calls a “moment of cultural cross-dressing,” Eli tries on the greenie’s antiquated black suit and Talmudic hat (159). In front of a mirror, Eli experiments with “the stranger’s strange hat,” seeing how different ways of wearing the hat produce different effects on his face (Roth 285). He comes across a white serape of unknown function and decides to wear it as “special BVD’s” under the black suit (286). Wearing the full Hasid suit, Eli feels “every inch of its strangeness,” and yet as if “those black clothes . . . were the skin of his skin” (293). The sartorial experiment that gives Eli such inexplicable feelings is the exercise of the probe-head. By connecting disparate, incompatible, facial traits, such as Eli’s secular American beardless face and the ancient black Hasidic suit, the

probe-head disrupts the striation of the faciality machine. The bizarre combination of his faciality traits eludes the gridding regime of faciality.

When Eli goes out onto his lawn, his next-door neighbor, Knudson, sees the lawyer's incongruous appearance and instantly diagnoses it as evidence of a nervous breakdown. In minutes, the news of Eli's alleged breakdown spreads through the entire neighborhood. Undeterred, Eli goes to the hospital to see his new-born first child in his new suit. On the way there, he makes a detour to the Yeshivah to see the greenie. At their meeting, he entertains the "strange notion that he was two people. Or that he was one person wearing two suits" (Roth 289). Eli's probe-head experiment has released him from the biunivocal structuration of the faciality machine and the totalization of the face. His concrete face is an "independently different" singularity (MacCormack 138).

In the end, however, the normalizing force of Woodenton's faciality machine proves overwhelming and Eli's probe-head formation does not last long. At the hospital, Eli's neighbors have the interns tranquilize him and get him hospitalized. If the Hasid's black costume marks his "disease of the spirit," then Eli's indicates his disease of the mind, and both have to be corrected for the harmony of the community.² Woodenton's faciality machine effectively detects Eli's newly created singularity, judges the extent of its deviance, and efficiently assigns him to the minority category of mental patient. Even in his deviance from the standards of sanity, Eli is normal. The hospital interns attribute Eli's breakdown to a perfectly normal reason: "First child upsets everyone" (Roth 298). The fact that Eli is committed for nothing but his probe-head experiment casts doubt on the townspeople's claim that he had suffered two mental breakdowns before (294). In all likelihood, Eli had "*chosen* to be crazy" in all three instances in order to dismantle faciality and probe new becomings (295). Although the story ends with Eli being dragged away by the medics, it is foreseeable that Eli will soon come out of the hospital a seemingly normal man, but still with the power to disrupt the stable operation of the faciality machine anytime. On the other hand, the abstract machine of faciality will again homogenize the singularities created by the

² In "Fanaticism: A brief history of the concept," Alberto Toscano traces the origin of the concept of fanaticism to the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther criticized the peasants who rebelled against the German lords who exploited their labor. Luther condemned what he called the "fanaticism" of the peasants who subverted social order. The peasants' desire for social equality was considered "a disease of the spirit."

probe-heads that may arise in the community in the future.

The foregoing Deleuzo-Guattarian interpretation of “Eli, the Fanatic” shows that the conflict between communal identity and individual difference can reach a deadlock, with the regimes of faciality and probe-head engaged in an endless struggle without a definitive resolution. Reading the story from Badiou’s perspective, however, would allow the issue of individual difference in the context of communal living to have a resolution. The disagreement over sartorial customs would not have happened if the Woodenton Jews had remained faithful to the intent of their ancestors’ immigration to America to establish a community free of pogroms and inequality (Roth 279). Centering his work on the idea of “truth,” Badiou believes that differences, which belong to the realm of ontology, can be transcended in the realm of generic truth.

In Badiou’s theory of generic truth, if a community consists of subjects of a truth, then the differences among them are paradoxically both essential and irrelevant to the community. Differences do exist in the situation, but the production of truth does not: it belongs to the realm of “transbeing.” Differences among individuals are constructed by knowledge, which is “a language of the situation” (Badiou, *Being* 328). Knowledge functions to impute properties to multiples presented in the situation and to categorize them according to their properties (ibid.). Knowledge assigns an encyclopedic determinant to some multiples to make them a part of the set (ibid.). In other words, knowledge decides both how a multiple is presented in the situation and represented in the subsets of the situation (ibid.). Comprising parts that each collects “terms having this or that explicit property,” the existing situation can only be described as a world of differences (329).

Only truth is capable of departing from the differences that are the contents of knowledge. According to Badiou, truth is “that which makes a hole in a knowledge” by bringing something new into the situation (*Being* 327). For truth to emerge, something anomalous has to take place first. The anomalous happening is outside the law of the situation and thus not accessible to existing knowledge (336). The peculiar happening that is unintelligible to knowledge is the event. Badiou characterizes the event as undecidable, because there is no simple deciding as to whether the event belongs to the situation according to the existing knowledge. The event of the situation is so singular that “*its belonging to the situation of its site is*

undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself" (181). Moreover, at the moment of its taking place, an event is no longer: "hardly has the event surged forth than it has already disappeared" (Badiou, *Theoretical Writings* 115). An event happens in such a fleeting instant that it can only be retroactively identified as such. Moreover, the event is supernumerary and takes place by pure chance. Likening the event to a cast of dice, Badiou defines the event as "that which is purely hazardous, and which cannot be inferred from the situation" (*Being* 193).

Therefore, it takes "an interpretative intervention" to make the event become presented in a situation (Badiou, *Being* 181). Until this decisive intervention comes to recognize it, the event is merely errant (202). Intervention lies "in identifying that there has been some undecidability, and in deciding its belonging to the situation" (*ibid.*). It names the event as a term in the situation to give it relevance. "The essence of the intervention" is both the recognition of the "'there is' of an event" and "the unfolding of the consequences of this nomination in the space of the situation" (203).

However, since the event is not constructed from existing terms in the situation, the name of the event does not fall under the scope of knowledge. In Badiou's words, the "name of the event must emerge from the void" (*Being* 205). Although the name, as a signifier, has the existing language of the situation as its only source, it has no referent among the presented multiples. It is "supernumerary as name of the event" (329). The event is so singular that its "nomination is essentially illegal," defying the norms or laws of representation (205). Since the event is undecidable by knowledge, to denominate it as a term of the situation requires a wager (201). One has to make the decision to bet on the statement, "the event has taken place" (*Theoretical Writings* 115). By articulating the axiom of truth, "this took place, which I can neither calculate nor demonstrate," one decides the undecidable (*ibid.*). The decision to wager on the event turns the person into a subject of truth that is initiated by the event. The decision is also a declaration of the subject's fidelity to the event.

This faithful connection to the name of the event activates subjectivization, i.e., the emergence of an operator of interventional denomination who will go on to found the generic procedure of truth (Badiou, *Being* 393). The operator here is the subject who, on the strength of his or her fidelity to the event, acts as a "local configuration of a generic procedure from

which a truth is supported” (391). It is crucial to note that the subject is a “*junction*” between “*subjectivization*,” the deciding on and the naming of the event, and the “*subjective process*,” the execution of the truth procedure under fidelity to the event (239). Badiou is careful to point out that the subject does not pre-exist the event or the truth process. Rather, the truth process “*induces* a subject” to be “the bearer . . . of a fidelity” (*Ethics* 43). The subject has no substance in the sense of a “multiple counted as one” (*Being* 391). The subject is a “*pure punctum*” in the process of the verification of truth (*Theoretical Writings* 116). Moreover, the subject does not exist independently of its truth. “Every subject is qualified” by its truth (*Being* 392). For Badiou, the subject cannot be said to be an ontological category unattached to its truths.

It is important not to confuse Badiou’s concept of the subject with Deleuze and Guattari’s. According to N. Katherine Hayles, Deleuze and Guattari’s project is the “deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject and of ‘subjectification’ in general” (157). The subject in *A Thousand Plateaus* is necessarily human, with his or her “consciousness and passion,” and subjectification is a regime of organizing and stratifying the human body (184). Badiou’s “subject” is idiosyncratic and totally different from this formulation. Badiou defines “subject” as a “*local status*” or “*local configuration*” of the truth procedure (*Being* 392, 391). Subjects are the finite points of the infinite truth and the “bearer” of a fidelity to the event (*Ethics* 43). The subject is defined by its locality and instrumentality instead of its ontological category. A subject may be a loving couple, a political party, or a work of art, as long as it supports the generic procedure of truth (43-44).

Through the work of the subject, truth begins to emerge in the situation in the form of a generic subset delineated point by point via series of enquiries. In this operation, the subject relies on its fidelity to examine the consequences of the axioms of truth in the situation (Badiou, *Theoretical Writings* 115). To conduct enquiries is an exercise of fidelity because the process is carried out not with expertise but with militancy (*Being* 329). The subject does not just perfunctorily keep a record of which terms support the name of the event and which do not. With ardor for the truth, it tries to win over the terms under investigation for the event. An enquiry is thus a “gesture of fidelity” (*ibid.*). With militant fidelity, the subject enquires on those terms that it encounters in the situation to see whether they support the implication of the event. Through successive enquiries, the subject pieces together little by little all the names

that support the consequences of the event. All these names make up the outline of a subset of the situation. Suppose it will have been completed, this subset is anticipated and taken as the generic subset of truth. In Badiou's definition, "a truth is the infinite positive total"—the collective of all of the terms found to be positively connected to the event—of a generic "procedure of fidelity" (338).

Badiou characterizes truth as "generic" and "indiscernible" (*Being* 327). It is generic because the subset of truth "does not coincide with an encyclopedic determinant" (336). The generic subset does not coincide with any other particular subset of the situation, but is coexistent with every part of the situation (338-39). Each of the existing subsets might contain some terms that belong to this new subset. There is no way to describe the terms in the generic subset as having any one predicate according to knowledge (338). In other words, the generic subset "subtracts itself from the power of the One" (*Theoretical Writings* 109). Impossible to locate in any one part of the situation, the generic subset draws a "diagonal" across the situation. The only thing that all the terms of the subset of truth have in common is that they belong to the situation (*Being* 339).

The obverse side of the genericity of truth is its indiscernibility (*Being* 327). Truth is indiscernible because the group of terms positively connected to the event is "*unclassifiable* for knowledge" (338). One cannot discern a category that subsumes all of the terms of the generic subset of truth. This subset is a part in the situation that "has no particular expressible property" except that it is a part (*ibid.*). Contrary to discernable parts, which are defined by "recognizable particularities" according to the knowledge of the situation, the indiscernible part of the situation is the part whose elements are marked by no particularity except for their being in the situation (339).

Truth has no closure, as the "generic procedure of fidelity progresses to infinity" (Badiou, *Being* 342). If one subject after another carries out the investigation for the truth, the generic set will remain open, and its contents will be renewed as time goes on. Due to the infinity of the truth and the finitude of the subject, no subject can know the whole truth. The generic procedure of the production of truth is an ongoing enterprise by a possibly endless succession of faithful subjects. The completion of truth can only be anticipated. From the subject's perspective, the truth is always in the future perfect: it will always have taken place. As the local operator of fidelity for

global truth, the subject can produce a fragment of truth, or “an approximate truth” (397). The subject’s fidelity consists in its belief that it is a finite point of the trajectory of an infinite truth that is to come in its entirety (ibid.).

To advance the trajectory of truth, the subject has to “force” some new knowledge into the situation for it to accommodate the truth to come. For the subject to force a statement in the language of the subject into the situation, he or she has to act as a link between the current situation and the future situation, which is the current situation supplemented by truth. If the subject, as a term of the situation, both belongs to the generic subset of the truth and maintains a particular relation to the statement, the statement will have been demonstrable in the situation where the truth will have taken place (Badiou, *Being* 401). In other words, the faithful connection of the subject to the name of the event forces the statement related to it to be “veridical,” or authentic, in the new situation, “the situation supplemented by an indiscernible truth” (403). The subject can be thought of as a bridge between the present situation and the revamped situation to come. In Badiou’s words, “forcing . . . authorizes partial descriptions of the universe to-come in which a truth supplements the situation” (406). The subject brings a piece of knowledge about the truth into being by exercising its fidelity to the event of the truth.

By expanding the scope of the situation to accommodate the truth, the generic procedure would ultimately result in a “generic extension” (Badiou, *Being* 342). This would be the new situation, which contains the generic subset, the newly verified truth, as well as the entire contents of the old situation (ibid.). Moreover, the original language of the situation has to change radically for the truth to belong to and become normalized in the new situation (ibid.). Defining truth as a “supplement” to the situation, Badiou suggests that the parts of the initial situation coexist with the truth in the new situation (407). By defining the new situation as an “extension,” Badiou emphasizes that it is possible to make room for truth in the situation without destroying existing multiples (407-8). Renovating the situation is a generally non-destructive process that does not require killing and plundering.

The process of truth production recognizes no division among the subjects of a truth. This is why Badiou claims, “There is only one humanity” (*Conditions* 184). Badiou defines “humanity” as “that which provides support to the generic truth procedures,” i.e., a collective of subjects of a truth (ibid.). Truth is “always indifferent to the predicative distribution of its support”

(185). Subjects come from different subsets of the situation, but, as subjects, their differences do not matter to the common truth they support. Humanity, as subjects of truth, make up “a homogeneous class, one that is based on no other distribution than that induced by the subjective activations initiated by an event and thought through in a faithful procedure” (ibid.). The subjects of a truth do not need to share any other predicate than their fidelity to the event.

In *Saint Paul*, which can be considered a case study of the use of the truth procedure, Badiou explains how the universality of truth can cross over differences, which are based on the predication of the terms presented in the situation and the classification of them into disparate parts. Badiou cites Paul as a militant subject of the Christian truth whose subjectivization was initiated by the event of Jesus’ resurrection. Examining Paul’s views on the differences among his fellow believers, who have joined Paul in the production of the generic Christian truth, Badiou discovers that the apostle admits the presence of differences among individuals but denies the differences the power to wreck the truth procedure. According to Badiou, the fact that “every truth procedure collapses differences, infinitely deploying a purely generic multiplicity, does not permit us to lose sight of the fact that, in the situation . . . , *there are differences*” (98). The differences in the situation, such as opinions, customs, and positions, belong to the realm of knowledge. As a militant subject, Paul aims to expose as many differences to the universal truth as possible, so as to extend the generic subset to the maximum. Therefore, he endeavors to accommodate differences of opinions and customs, believing that “whatever people’s opinions and customs, once gripped by a truth’s postevental work, their thought becomes capable of traversing and transcending those opinions and customs without having to give up the differences that allow them to recognize themselves in the world” (Badiou, *Saint* 99).

Fidelity to the event of Jesus’ resurrection is the only thing that “identifies the Christian subject” (Badiou, *Saint* 100). The truth produced through the faithful procedure is characterized by “*an indifference that tolerates differences*” (99). Paul refuses to set up rules about “women’s dress, sexual relations, permissible or prohibited foods, the calendar, astrology,” and other matters unrelated to the fidelity to the Christ event (100). For Paul, these “conflicts of opinion and confrontations between customary differences” would only compromise the truth procedure (ibid.). The militant enterprise of

truth “must traverse worldly differences indifferently and avoid all casuistry over customs” (ibid.). Moral judgment is also inimical to the truth procedure because it hinders “the event’s ‘for all’” (101). Conflicts over worldly differences cause “communitarian divisions,” which counteract “egalitarian participation” in the production of the universal truth (104).

On the other hand, the universal truth has the power “over difference as difference” (Badiou, *Saint* 105). The generic subset of truth by definition can and must include heterogeneous terms. To make the subset of truth truly generic, Paul affirms and maintains particularizing differences. According to Badiou, Paul’s claim in the First Corinthians that a woman who prays or declares her faith in public without wearing a veil dishonors the Lord aims to affirm the difference between sexes (ibid.). Paul’s pronouncement, Badiou argues, demonstrates the fact that the truth procedure traverses this difference (ibid.). The wearing of veils by women is a sartorial custom that accentuates their sexual identity. When a woman wears a veil, she affirms her sexual difference. Sexual difference itself, however, is extrinsic to the execution of the truth procedure. The work of truth production can include anyone faithful to the event, men or women, so there is no need to force men and women to be equally veiled or unveiled. Rules eliminating this customary difference would injure the truth procedure because it makes the subset of truth less than generic (ibid.). Since truth is universal, it

must expose itself to all differences and show, through the ordeal of their division, that they are capable of welcoming the truth that traverses them. What matters . . . is that differences *carry the universal that happens to them like a grace*. Inversely, only by recognizing in differences their capacity for carrying the universal that comes upon them can the universal itself verify its own reality. (106)

Instituting a “generic extension” of the situation, truth accommodates anyone capable of fidelity to the event and militancy in the post-evental work of investigation and forcing (*Being* 342). Therefore, truth production is indifferent to individual differences.

From the perspective of the theory of truth, “Eli, the Fanatic” portrays an unnecessary conflict. Having forgotten their ancestors’ immigration in pursuit of a peaceful life free from persecution, the Woodenton Jews allow

disputes over individual differences to disrupt their production of egalitarian politics as a truth. When they accuse the Hasidic Jews of lacking in common sense, they forget that “truths have no sense” (Badiou, *Conditions* 165). That which is sensible is that which can be discerned with knowledge, while “Truths occur in making-holes in, in the defection of sense” (*ibid.*). Their common faith in a community of equality should be able to enable them to traverse their customary differences.

Moreover, the generic procedure of truth operates by a law that is on a different level from that of zoning ordinances, which Eli evokes to demand the Yeshivah’s removal. Eli tells Rabbi Tzoref that laws “protect us . . . the community” and “Without law there is chaos” (Roth 251, ellipsis original; 266). However, Tzoref appeals to another law, as he replies to Eli, “What you call law, I call shame. The heart, Mr. Peck, the heart is the law! God!” (266).

According to Badiou, “The trajectory of a truth, which institutes its subjects as detached from the statist laws of the situation, is nonetheless consistent according to another law: the one that, addressing the truth to everyone, universalizes the subject” (*Saint* 87). Individuals as subjects of a truth are detached from their respective classes and categories determined by the situation. The subjects of a truth are governed by “a transliteral law, a law of the spirit” (*ibid.*). This transliteral law is what Tzoref refers to when he evokes “the heart” as “the law” (Roth 266). The law of the truth procedure is a “law of the break with law,” i.e., it is indifferent to the management of different interests, which is the province of statist laws (*Saint* 89). When Eli asks him to respect the zoning law, Tzoref admits, “The law is the law,” but adds, “And then of course. . . . The law is not the law. When is the law that is the law not the law” (Roth 251)? The zoning law is the rule of the situation, not the truth procedure. There is no denying that there are differences in the world that have to be managed by enforcing laws; however, such laws do not apply to the truth procedure. Speaking of Paul’s production of the Christian truth, Badiou says, “fidelity is the law of a truth” (*Saint* 90). The subjective fidelity to the event that initiates the generic truth procedure enables the subjects of the truth to transcend the literal law of the state.

Despite his duty as a lawyer representing the Woodenton Jewish community, Eli feels an agonizing ambivalence toward the newcomers. Although he is under an obligation to evict the Yeshivah as soon as possible, he keeps stalling for time. His clients demonize the newcomers, but Eli

believes they are no less human than the assimilated Jews (Roth 276). In his willingness to accept the Yeshivah into the community, Eli is the only one in Woodenton to remain faithful to the event of the Ashkenazi Jewry's immigration to America and to the production of the truth of equality. Moreover, he adopts the Hasidic garb himself in an attempt to show that sartorial practices are inconsequential to the enterprise of truth production. The inclusion of observers of different customs in the truth process will empower the genericity of truth and enable truth to be truly universal.

As Eli's forced hospitalization at the ending suggests, in the operation of the trajectory of the truth procedure, which demands militant investigation and forcing, the opportunities for setbacks are legion. Nevertheless, the denouement of the story also holds out some hope. As the medics tear off Eli's black jacket and inject him with tranquilizer, "The drug calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached" (Roth 298). Temporary frustration may happen to any subject faithful to the truth, but it doesn't necessarily drench the subject's fiery militancy. If Eli is the true "fanatic" of the story, as its title suggests, his fanaticism lies in the unquenchable zeal for the truth procedure. Eli will not waver from the truth procedure of egalitarian politics, which is the only thing that will resolve the conflict between individual difference and communal identity for good.

While the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of faciality contributes significantly to an understanding of the clothing controversy in "Eli, the Fanatic," Badiou's theory of truth provides a more optimistic interpretation of the story. The use of a dual approach aims to present a comprehensive reading of Roth's early piece on post-WWII American-Jewish identity. As Jessica G. Rabin remarks, Roth's works exhibit a delicate balance between "ethnic particularity" and "American universality" (9). Even when they engage specifically Jewish themes, Roth's novels retain universal resonance. "Eli, the Fanatic" is one such distinctively Jewish story that is also relevant to other minority groups, mainstream America, or other parts of the world. Reading the sartorial disagreement it depicts as not just an ethnic issue but also a universal theme—the conflict between individual difference and communal identity—serves to show an appreciation of the Jewish American novelist's universal importance.

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