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# The Concept of Event in the Philosophy of Vladimir Bibikhin

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### **Abstract**

The article deals with the concept of event in Vladimir Bibikhin's philosophy. It is shown that Bibikhin, like many contemporary philosophers, considers this concept to be central to today's thought. Following Heidegger in part, he offers an analysis of event, mainly based on the material of Russian history. Bibikhin builds up a structure of the concept of event (which I reconstruct here). It seems to consist of the following aspects: lightning-like instantaneity, the effect of "rapt" or "capture" made on its participants, spectacularity, constitution of right, finally, the pendulum-like oscillation between mobilization and demobilization. In general, Bibikhin gives a more complex and elaborate notion of event than Heidegger even does, and unlike Heidegger, and even more unlike Badiou, Bibikhin is highly attentive to the spectacular and aesthetic component of event. He considers this spectacular component to be constitutive even though it in no way undermines the ontological status of event.

### **Keywords**

Badiou, Bibikhin, event, Heidegger, Russian philosophy

## Introduction

In the last 30 or 40 years, we have all witnessed the turn of philosophy to the concept of event. Many thinkers of very different schools, like Whitehead in Britain, Heidegger in Germany, Deleuze and Badiou in France (and other French authors, to a varied extent), agreed on the strategic value of this concept, with and more significantly than such traditional ideas/values as being, act, or subject. As Bruno Bosteels rightly states, that,

[I]n the long aftermath of the closure of metaphysical age, the event is precisely that which unites almost all great thinkers on the scene of French philosophy today. This also means, however, that the effective impact of the thought of the event in the current situation remains by and large an obscure affair (Bosteels 175).

Bosteels also observes (Bosteels 165–175) that in the case of Badiou, the event is alternative to “act”, and that it therefore cannot be reduced to a one-time breakthrough, but includes a long post-eventual activity of the subject: “An event is a sudden commencement, but only a recommencement produces the truth of this event” (Bosteels 173).

The notion of event allows conceiving the becoming and the fundamental mobility of things, by contracting it to a local explosive origin, to a form of motion which also moves or at least reveals itself in motion. This notion further returns us to a macro-historicity but, given the disappointment in the particular “grand narratives” that we dispose of, it leaves this historicity its pure form. Hence the so-called “post-Marxism” of Badiou and his followers: the Marxist orientation at the class struggle and revolution is accepted, but not the Marxist theory of a unitary historical process. But, unlike the liberal apology of *any* new subject, here a subject must rely on a real experience of oppression and partake in a real movement of emancipation. Therefore, the “event” becomes a new name for historical objectivity, for a historical fact. However, the event is a local, horizontal objectivity, and the fact is a *supra*-empirical being that introduces infinity into a situation. Thus, unlike the vulgar Marxist “iron laws of history,” which have not left space for the freedom of revolutionary actors, here the events only exist on the condition of being united by a subjective effort.

By replacing the existentialist notion of act, the event is characterized by a high intensity of completion, but at the same time it does not derive from a subject’s *will* but comes to the subject from outside, from the substantial life of society, with its past and future. Finally, given the general routinization of cultural and state institutions, the concept of event is a way to conceive the *extraordinary* that both stands out of an order and grounds it, but may itself not aspire to normalcy or stability (for

the eventful interpretation of Carl Schmitt's concept of extraordinary see Magun 2009, Marder 2010). Therefore the event is, on the one hand, a manifestation of truth (Heidegger, Badiou) or sense (Deleuze) but, on the other hand, it is logically paradoxical (Badiou) and linguistically absurd (Deleuze).

For both Deleuze and (particularly) Badiou, "event" is politically anchored in the incomplete revolution of 1968 in France. Heidegger uses it to continue his previous considerations on the Nazi "revolution", and to disguise them. By the time he introduces *Das Ereignis*, he avoids a direct political interpretation: this event is supposed to be special, to arrive inaudibly and invisibly, being recognizable only by hints, but also here and now. In both cases, *mutatis mutandis*, the notion of event emerges to explain an impulse, an eventful momentum that remains *after* the historical event itself (in both cases the event was seen as incomplete and interrupted), and that complements it. In the case of Badiou, this ambiguous link is consciously reflected upon and leads the French thinker to speak of a "fidelity to the event" (Badiou 2005: 232ff), that is, to a possibility and an imperative for a decisive subject to keep prolonging the event in its intense, and at the same time, ephemeral character.

However, the present article is not on Badiou or Heidegger, but on a much less internationally renowned Russian thinker, Vladimir Bibikhin. Bibikhin was one of the most important and reputed Russian thinkers from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, mainly because of a number of lecture courses he gave in the 1990s and of the book editions of these courses published for the most part after his premature death in 2004. In his thought, the concept of event, and other notions of the same semantic nest ("lightning", "revolution", "renaissance") play a central role. To a certain degree, this is a clear influence of Heidegger, whose philosophy Bibikhin highly valued. He helped to introduce Heidegger into Russian culture, by translating his major works into Russian, including the key short essays and the *Being and Time*. Many of Bibikhin's contemporaries knew him mainly as a translator of Heidegger, and they thought he simply interprets his philosophy, before finally his books appeared and gave an idea of his originality and power as a thinker. Bibikhin was most probably not familiar with Badiou, and did not trust Deleuze. Within the French tradition he sympathized with Fédier and with Derrida (both of whom he knew personally and had discussions with).

From all Bibikhin's works it was obvious that he took the turbulent historical condition of Russia in the 1990s very seriously: Perestroika, the fall of the USSR and the liberal reforms of the 1990s. He often refers to them in his analysis of event. He called this event a "revolution" (which few did at the time) and even saw in it a potential for "renaissance", even though he was far from naive enthusiasm for the actual policies of the new government. His capacity to combine commentary on current events and problems with the reading of philosophical texts was one of the

causes of his popularity: in the early 1990s he gathered large audiences in amphitheatres at his lectures. The event of the anti-socialist revolution in the USSR was the empirical horizon of his transcendental arguments. And, this empirical event makes its imprint on the *concept* of event. The empirical event does not determine the concept of event, but it dictates a certain problematization, attention to some particular aspects of the complex ontological structure of event, and to the diachronic interaction of these aspects.

The difference between the anti-socialist revolution in the USSR, and the Nazi takeover and the revolution of 1968 is partly responsible for the difference between the emphases on the concept of event in Bibikhin, Heidegger, and Badiou.

### Russia of the 1990s and the “other beginning”

During Perestroika in the USSR, philosophy, along with literature and political writing, was in the focus of public attention, because the basic ideals of social development were questioned, because the authors previously forbidden were being published, and because even previously in the Soviet society, which was ideocratic, philosophy as institution was in the center of public debates. Starting in 1989 and until roughly 1996, Bibikhin became the cult philosopher of Moscow (replacing Merab Mamardashvili, who left Moscow and soon died, in this role). His lecture courses filled amphitheatres in the second humanities building of the Moscow State University in Lenin Hills. Bibikhin was a secretary and junior interlocutor of the major Russian religious philosopher Alexey Losev (who started his career in the 1920s and lived until 1988), a linguist by training, and an auto-didactic expert on Heidegger’s philosophy which he translated into Russian. In the late 1980s, Bibikhin elaborated an idiosyncratic style of philosophizing where, to put it briefly, the etymological poetry of Heidegger met the ironic colloquial style of Vassiliy Rozanov and Alexey Losev.

Apart from other aspects of his work, Bibikhin was a philosopher of history and a theorist of event. It is hard to say what the main factor was, whether it was Bibikhin’s interest in Heidegger (who famously made an evolution from the thought of being to the thought of event), the influence of the eventful theology of Christianity (particularly the theology of Gregory Palamas), knowledge of the contemporary French thought, or the turbulent history of Russia in 1980s to 1990s. Bibikhin was a thinker of *Russian* history; he consistently made a philosophical concept out of Russia. Again, it is hard to say whether the main motive was the tradition of Russian religious philosophy, Perestroika-era discussions of “where Russia is going”, or Heidegger’s principle of situated thinking, from the per-

spective of “being-there”<sup>1</sup> Bibikhin originally attracted his audience partly as an original thinker but also as an expert on the Western intellectual tradition, a translator of Heidegger and of many other authors, and an obviously “non-Soviet” speaker and thinker. But, it became increasingly clear that Bibikhin is not the “Russian Heidegger” and that he has his own agenda. It is finally hard to say what played the larger role in Bibikhin becoming a thinker of Russia’s destiny: the full auditoria of admiring listeners, a feeling of inner strength, or the destined importance of what was going on in USSR/Russia at that time.

Bibikhin analyzes these events (which provided him with an authoritative speech position), not quite with sympathy, but with enthusiasm (in the full meaning of this term, Kant 20006 par. 29, Lyotard 1986). In his book “Language of Philosophy”, Bibikhin gives a new interpretation of Heraclites, treating his “Lightning”<sup>2</sup> as an event’s intrusion into a creeping routine, as a fire of mobilization that seizes (*zakhvatyvaet*) a person in its entirety (Bibikhin 1992).

The lightning reigns in the interior depths of a living organism. Birds gather in flocks and start a thousand-kilometer path, sometimes falling dead from fatigue or freezing in flight. ... The spreading of Russian population in the huge space of Eastern Europe and Asia ... could seem to somebody to be a guarantee of slow inertia, of a “Chinese” immobility. But, this mass of people that seemed to be fixed by the enormous mass of natural substance, quickly and decisively threw off the habits of prudent independence and of common sense. The message that was sent from the distant capital throughout the country in the early spring [Bibikhin speaks of the bourgeois revolution of February–March 1917. — A.M.] acted not with its content. The message was received by the country as a signal that put a human being into a different, electric condition. Everyone suddenly realized that “the time was up (Bibikhin 1993: 129–130).

And, immediately, Bibikhin gives another example of such mobilization—the start of the First World War in 1914. He quotes Werner Heisenberg who later remembers that he senses that “all of a sudden things got serious”. As Bibikhin comments, “A human being is mobilized by a sudden event, not crashed or overwhelmed, but gripped [*zakhvachen*] that is, liberated” (Bibikhin 1993: 133).

Agreeing implicitly with the political leaders of the late 1980s, M. Gorbachev and A. Yakovlev (who aimed to reinvigorate the Soviet soci-

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in early Heidegger, like in Bibikhin, *Dasein* referred among other things to the self-consciousness of a specific People and to the national question.

<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus, DK 64: “*ta panta diakidzei Keraunos*,” “It is the thunderbolt that steers the course of all things.”

ety and endow it with a new energy for economic production, cf. Kapustin 1998), Bibikhin sees the ongoing event as an input and source of energy, which would provide an impulse of historical movement in the “stagnated” atmosphere of apathy and social fragmentation.

In 1992, Bibikhin gave a lecture course entitled *Renaissance*, which is based on his earlier work on reviews of Western literature, done in the 1980s. In 1998 the materials for this course were published in a book-length study somewhat mysteriously called *New Renaissance* (Bibikhin 1998a). The subject of the book is for the most part the European “Renaissance” of the 14–16<sup>th</sup> centuries. But, for Bibikhin the Renaissance is a generic concept of eventfulness (“Renaissance is not a conception, but an event”, Bibikhin 1998a: 39). This is a key event in human history. It is the time of “remission” and of openness to the world that is necessary to all humans, an instant of fullness that cannot fully realize itself in an institution or in an artwork (Bibikhin 1998). “Renaissance is the essence of history which has always been a thrust of return (Bibikhin 1998a: 37).

Starting in the late 1990s, Bibikhin often calls the years 1991–1993, “our last revolution” (Bibikhin 2003: 24, 27), drawing attention to its rootedness in the Russian tradition of “permanent revolution” going back at least to Peter the Great. Simultaneously, by 1994, he uses Heidegger’s notion of “other beginning” in relation to the current events of the time. What is important is not just the alterity of any beginning, but also the fact that Heidegger opposes the German modernity to the Greek origin, while Bibikhin writes in circumstances where one needs to re-constitute the society in a state that had already been a product of a revolution (meaning the 1917 and socialism). The issue is a revolution in a revolution, though not directly against this revolution (for Heidegger, the German beginning does not annul or repeat the Greek one, but attempts to bypass and rephrase it). The idea of event as a return to another event, which builds on the essential belatedness of a human being with regard to his or her own history, and clearly reunites the theme of “other beginning” with the theme of “renaissance”, as well as, to some extent, with the theme of “lightning”. Because Bibikhin likes to emphasize that we are always late for the lightning, we only observe it when it’s already gone (Bibikhin 1993: 156), hence the imperative to imitate it (“to imitate a thunder strike”: Bibikhin 1993: 133).

Thus, Bibikhin uses Heidegger’s philosophy to make sense of the Russian transformation as an event, in the philosophical sense of the word. Heidegger of the early 1930s was, as it is known, a theorist of *revolution*. Like many of his contemporaries, he understood revolutionary as a neotraditionalist turn, particularly the national socialist victory of 1933. Bibikhin quotes the *Beiträge*, which are relatively apolitical, but the term «other beginning» (*anderer Anfang*, or «other inception» as the English translators chose to render it) already emerges in Heidegger’s most “revolutionary” book, the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Heidegger 2000).

Our people, as standing in the center, suffers the most intense pressure—our people, the people richest in neighbors and hence the most endangered people, and for all that, the most metaphysical people. We are sure of this vocation; but this people will gain a fate from its vocation only when it creates *in itself* a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation, and grasps its tradition creatively. All this implies that this people, as a historical people, must transpose itself—and with it the history of the West—from the center of their great future happening into the originary realm of the powers of Being. [...]

To ask: how does it stand with Being? – this means nothing less than to repeat and retrieve (*wieder-holen*) the inception of our historical-spiritual *Dasein*, in order to transform it into **the other inception** (Heidegger 2000: 41 [30]).

Here, as elsewhere in the book, “other beginning” means, existentially, the *German* restart of the European history that had once begun in Ancient Greece and then supposedly finished at a dead end (the first beginning surprised, the second, frightened). As further reading shows, the ancient theme of “being” is interpreted by Heidegger as a “struggle for being against seeming” (the case of Oedipus, Heidegger 2000: 113–114 [82–83]) and as a heroic “violence-doing” (*Gewalt-tätigkeit*, Heidegger 160 [115–116]) which stands alone against the rest of the being (Antigone). Besides, Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that the cognition and the thinking are inseparable (in Oedipus, in particular) from the push to manifestation and beautiful appearance, which is fulfilled in tragedy, but aims beyond the aesthetical, to the affirmation of being as such.

As mentioned, Heidegger quotes not *The Introduction to Metaphysics* but the somewhat later manuscript, *Beiträge zur Philosophie. Vom Ereignis* (Heidegger 2012), which embodies the so-called «Kehre», the turn, of Heidegger from the revolutionary perspective towards a more disengaged one. It is in the *Beiträge* that Heidegger advances the notion of «Event-Enowning», *Ereignis*, as a basic ontological category, while at the same time removing all specific historical references (even though the theme of *Ereignis*, in the German tradition, is linked to the French revolution). Throughout the work of this time Heidegger insists that event is not a revolutionary “turn around” (*Umkehrung*) (Heidegger 1991; 2012, Magun 2013).

Still, in his *Other Beginning*, Bibikhin uses the “event,” “*Ereignis*,” as a formula of historicity applicable to Russian history. He thus synthesizes early revolutionary Heidegger with his late philosophy that criticizes subjectivism, activism, and anthropologism, and treats event as a kind of mystery and as a messianic anticipation of a “last God.” Thus, in Bibikhin both event and revolution acquire a new sense, which is kept historically concrete (Russia, its several revolutions), but acquires passive or even anti-activist accents.

In praising Renaissance and even drawing tentative parallels between Renaissance and our time, Bibikhin enters into a virtual debate with his teacher, Alexey Losev. Losev was not just an orthodox philosopher, but he also spoke against the Renaissance as a source of Modern nihilism (Losev 1978). In contrast, Bibikhin treats Renaissance as an “other beginning,” as a temporal rupture that links up a human being to world energies. Thus, he rejects the traditionalism and counterrevolutionary mood of his teacher (and of most of his compatriots), but at the same time, does not shift into the positions of humanism and secularism in the spirit of the Soviet, or Western liberal, interpretations of Renaissance. It is evident that Bibikhin, like Heidegger, offers a *conservative* revolution, but with an accent on revolution and event, which his contemporaries preferred not to make (see on this disavowal of event, Magun 2013), as well as with a pathos of novelty and an enthusiasm, which differs from the tragic heroism of early Heidegger (more resembling the mood of Hannah Arendt, whom Bibikhin also translated into Russian). This shift, as well as the attempt to take the presently lived moment seriously, provided Bibikhin with his full auditoria.

Therefore one can speak of the individuality of Bibikhin’s philosophy and, from his perspective, of the conservative-liberal individuality of the Soviet revolution of 1980s-90s, in contrast to the conservative revolution of which Heidegger was writing in the Nazi period.

At this juncture, a few more words must be said about the character of the historical transformation that the Soviet Union and then Russia were experiencing at that time. Gorbachev announced “Perestroika,” which he repeatedly called a “revolution” that would continue the Revolution of 1917, lead to the large scale mobilization of masses, then to the ultimate collapse of the imperial state and to a radical socio-economic reconstruction of the 15 resulting countries. Russia changed its symbols, official dogmas, aesthetic priorities, structures of property, and governance. In this sense, the transformation was revolutionary. But the *moods* that led to this revolution were neither radical in the Jacobin sense nor purely liberal-democratic. The ideological hegemony of this heterogeneous movement belonged to conservatism, not to liberalism, or, more precisely, liberalism was interpreted in the conservative sense (Magun 2010). Liberal critics were chastising the Soviet system for its forced activism, for the attempts to build a “new man,” calling to return to the “natural” and “normal” foundation of society such as private property, market, and positive science. The manifestos of Perestroika included a brilliant, but clerically oriented film, “Repentance,” and alternative rock songs, like Yury Shevchuk’s song *Revolution*, with the lyrics “Revolution, you taught us to believe in the injustice of the Good,” or Boris Grebenshikov’s “A Train on Fire,” which called its listeners to jump from the revolutionary locomotive. So it is not surprising that when Gorbachev’s team lost the initiative of reforms, and the system breakdown became radical, the term



“revolution” was no longer used in connection with the ongoing events. The liberal ideologists consciously rejected it, because they did not want to emphasize the violent and confrontational nature of the transformations, and the Marxist opposition even considered the Perestroika and the transformation to be a “restoration” (of pre-revolutionary time). In this sense, Heidegger, with his mixture of idyllic/archaic and tragic/revolutionary motifs, really suited the mood of many Perestroika intellectuals, and it is no accident that Bibikhin’s translations of his work became so popular then. However, unlike the conservative revolution of early Heidegger, and unlike the early Nazi regime, Soviet intellectuals were not eager to declare their revolutionary nature and tended to demonize revolution as such. In this sense, Bibikhin’s lectures and books, far from being an expression of the mainstream, were a polemical appeal to notice the powerful constituent event which was going on then; an event, which remained unconscious or in the form of an uncontrolled “geopolitical catastrophe” for the majority.

## The Aspects of Event in Bibikhin’s Thought

I will now systematically trace the aspects of event according to Bibikhin and the originality of his concept of event in comparison to Heidegger and other 20<sup>th</sup> century authors, which will help me to enrich the theory of event and reach a better understanding of the epoch of 1980–90s.

Let us remember that Heidegger described the German conservative revolution as a “struggle for being” fought particularly against the stream of becoming and against the false “seeming” (*Schein*). The abundance quotes from Greek tragedies in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* emphasizes not the suffering of a hero and not the sequence of actions, but the solitude and groundlessness of a human being, who advances into the “disclosure” of being and must act at his/her risk. Here, as well as in Heidegger’s *Rectorate* speech (Heidegger 1985) there emerges the notion of “spirit” that must lead the German people, as a kind of event-ontological enthusiasm. Bibikhin, on the other hand, emphasizes different elements of events and revolutions.

1) First of all, the core concept of his mature philosophy is the notion of “grip”—alternatively, “rapt,” or “seizure” (*zakhvachennost’*,” from “*khvatat’*,” to grip, to seize, to capture). This term at the same time means the mobilized engagement of the human being in the event (a version of “enthusiasm”, which is also etymologically linked to possession), a form of human being’s relation to beings (the subject that Bibikhin develops in detail in his lecture course of property), and engagement in an entertaining spectacle. “*Zakhvachennost’*” is strictly opposed to “*zanyatost’*” (being occupied) the latter is considered an improper, weak form of engagement.

“We are busy,” is a euphemistic expression. In fact, no one and nothing has gripped (*zakhvatilo*) us, we have occupied ourselves. Something different begins to happen when we are really seized. Only the new can grip. When we are gripped by the event—nothing else can grip us—we never say that we do not have time. A seized, engaged person is the one who always has time (Bibikhin 1993: 148).

Heidegger has some similar notions, such as spirit, decisiveness, authenticity, and most directly *Ergriffenheit*, a “grip” that describes the action of affect and mood (*Stimmung*, attunement: (Heidegger 2008: 7–8, 181, etc.), cf. the article of Alexander Pogrebnyak in this issue, Pogrebnyak 2015). But generally Heidegger is less preoccupied with the issue of human beings’ historical engagement (as opposed to apathy and cynicism): for Heidegger it is more important to be *open* to an indeterminate future than to participate in an event. In this sense, Bibikhin’s philosophy has a more ethico-political sounding. His accent on “grip” (*zakhvachennost*) is actually closer to Badiou’s notion of fidelity than to Heidegger. Both Bibikhin and Badiou react angrily to those who do not sense the nerve of time, do not participate in anything, and snub the mass movements and tastes. But, for Bibikhin, “fidelity” would be an excessively subjectivist and “activist” term—he always emphasizes that a “grip” is not a subject’s decision but an attention to something that has already gripped us. This is why the grip is first of all an affect, or rather, a passion—a zone of indifference between activity and passivity. And, being an affect, it brings joy, even enjoyment: there is something vertiginous in the word “*zakhvachennost*” (like in “rapt”).

This is a central moment in Bibikhin; it further distinguishes him from Heidegger and Badiou, because it introduces an ironic distance in relation to event. An event, says Bibikhin, is always “action” in the sense of performance and spectacle, therefore its grip and rapt are partly an *aesthetic* kind (Bibikhin, following Heidegger, mistrusted the notion of “aesthetic,” but the idea of affect-driven action is there). Thus, the event seduces, and not always to something “good.” I have already mentioned the discussion at the start of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Bibikhin quotes Heisenberg there: “No one of the people I knew enjoyed what was coming and no one considered the start of the war to be good. [...] I would say: «everyone felt that it suddenly got really serious.»” Bibikhin adds: “People rose, mobilized themselves, with little understanding of what was at stake, but having grasped what was crucial: something serious has just begun” (Bibikhin 1993: 130). As Bibikhin notes in his book *Wittgenstein*, this seriousness paradoxically coincides with *play*. Nothing is more serious than a game in which you bet everything you have, are carried away by it (Bibikhin 2005b: 509–510, cf. Bibikhin 2003: 30).

Thus, even though Bibikhin agrees with Heidegger and Badiou that the event has a higher ontological value, he indicates that this value

does not necessarily lead to anything ontologically solid or primary: it is not that being wins over non-being (early Heidegger) or emerges from the nothingness (Badiou). On the contrary, an event may be disastrous in its consequences, like the First World War, for instance. But, it is in a human being's nature to be engaged, gripped, and carried away by what is going on.

In his 2001–2002 course entitled, *Introduction into Philosophy of Right* (Bibikhin 2005a), Bibikhin introduces a new human right, the *right of the spectator*. This right (that reminds of the ancient *panem et circenses*) is essentially a right to event “a spectator does not need anything but a gripping and rapturing [*zakhvatyvayuschuiu*] force of action.” “The life and well-being of an actor,” continues Bibikhin, commenting simultaneously on Marquis de Custine and Plotinus, “are not envisioned by the spectator's project. What is needed, is first of all the scale (literally the amplitude, *razmakh*) of the play, so that it does not stop to be interesting, gripping, and rapturing (*zakhvatyvaiuschim*)” (Bibikhin 2005a: 89).

All of this is applied to Russian history and generally to history of law as a *right to history*.

What is present in these words, is at the same time an irony, an immoralism of a kind, and an ontological criticism: the higher feature of a human being is the engagement by event, but it is preferable to engage in it with open eyes, attentively, perceiving the ontological freedom of event (more on it below) even behind an oppression or a suffering of a being.

Hence an ironic commentary that Bibikhin makes in his key article *Law of Russian History* (Bibikhin 2003: 8–69), on the late work of Anna Akhmatova, a great Russian/Soviet poet. Bibikhin describes Akhmatova as constantly ruminating on the theme of the disaster (*beda*) that happened to the country and to her personally. Yet, soberly speaking, Akhmatova's personal biography was not that disastrous against the background of the time: she had a long, beautiful, eventful, although difficult life, with international recognition at the end. But there is sweetness in the catastrophe: “The grip (*zakhvachennost*) and the acuteness (*ostrota*) are not of an achievement of a success, but of a disarming disaster or in an incomparable woe” (Bibikhin 2003: 70). Thus, Bibikhin comments on the syndrome of catastrophism that is common for contemporary culture, and particularly for Russian culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Kertman 2000, Magun 2008).

2) The second aspect of event in Bibikhin is, logically, the one of *spectacle*. In Heidegger, *spectacle* distantly echoes the theme of appearance and manifestation of being (*Schein, Erscheinung*), or the struggle between the true manifestation and the false appearance. Heidegger indicates that Oedipus aspires to clairvoyance and omniscience, enjoys glory and recognition and then, after realizing the horrible truth, cuts his eyes out, while at the same time opening all doors and exposing himself to the public (Heidegger 2000: 112).

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Here, being is inseparable from the mere appearance of aesthetic spectacle, and yet being is also split by spectacle. The act (to see) is inseparable from its corresponding passive side (being seen).

Unlike Heidegger, Bibikhin does not emphasize the activity of passivity (“we, the scholars, in fact disclose ourselves through knowledge and active fight for knowledge against being”) but, rather the passivity of activity. The heroic acts of revolutionaries are a function of their being rapt by the revolutionary game.

And generally, Bibikhin resolves this issue in a more complicated way than Heidegger does. He picks up the partial rehabilitation of appearance and the idea of reversibility between seeing and being seen from him and from Husserl, but he does not stop at this, steering the conversation toward the sphere of aesthetic eventfulness, more decisively than Heidegger and Badiou have ever done. Of course, both Heidegger and Badiou perceive art as eventful. But they explain art/beauty by ontology, not the other way around. To Bibikhin, in contrast, event is a capturing and interesting spectacle, and the aesthetical, entertaining moment is inseparable from an authentic revolutionary being. For example, he said that the Soviet system fell because it bored its citizens.

The socialist or communist civilization had been almost constructed, the Soviet man had been formed, but he began to bore himself as if he was his own spectator and stopped putting effort into supporting his being (Bibikhin 2005a: 82).

So, as it appears, this is how the aforementioned “right of the spectator” functions.

We can therefore speak of the onlooker (*glyadyaschiy*) as of the one who has the prior right, that is the right whether the theatre of history should be or not to be. The onlooker has a right to a rapturing spectacle, to an exceptional and borderline acuteness (Bibikhin 2005: 88).

Once again, Bibikhin gives a philosophical interpretation of empirical events: the Perestroika of the 1980s in the Soviet Union started and developed as a kind of a TV show (the proceedings from the democratically elected People’s Congress were televised live and watched by most TV spectators) and as an explosion of interest in printed literary journals. (The same is true of the recent wave of political protest, which is often called a “facebook revolution.” The media technologies originally created for private correspondence and entertainment are playing a mobilizing role). At the same time, the technologization of event has the potential to simulate and emulate events as its reverse side. But has not this simulation always been an important element of performing arts and political practice?

The rigor of ontological authenticity is hardly pertinent here. As an “anti-activist,” Bibikhin considers it important that historical engagement expresses itself not only in an active civic position, but also in passive spectacularity. Historically, the same logic characterized the Nazi movement. Radio played a role in the Nazi movement coming to power, and many observers (starting with Benjamin) accused the regime of a perverse aestheticism (perhaps the strongest statement of this is Robert Sieberberg’s project “Hitler. A Film from Germany.”) But Heidegger pays little attention to such a prosaic medium of event as the mass media. His theory of technology treats it as a revelation and reinstatement of being, not as a rapturing attraction. In contrast, recent history has shown that revolutions are inseparable from the technology of event (which includes, in particular, all mimetic art).

Bibikhin’s reflections on eventfulness as an aim in and of itself relate to a lesser extent to the 1980–90s revolution in Russia, because in that case, almost no one was prepared to recognize the revolutionary character of events. Most saw the events of the 1980–90s as either a “transition” or a disaster. But these reflections rightly anticipate the features of the *next* global wave of revolutions, those of the 2000s. Contrary to the 1990s, in the 2000s the scale of event becomes one of the explicit goals of the social movements, and the revolution, a reflexive phenomenon (“there should be revolutions, therefore we take part in them,” see on this, Magun 2014). In philosophy, Alain Badiou has defended a similar perspective since the 1980s, arguing that “event” includes its name as its own variable, affirms itself, and realizes itself through imposing its identity as an event (Badiou 1988).

One other aspect of the eventfulness as an aesthetic aim in itself, which Bibikhin emphasizes, is the propensity for polar oscillations that he calls “swing” (*kacheli*) (Bibikhin 2005: 69).<sup>5</sup> For Heidegger, as we have seen, the issue of event is not revolution, not reversal, but something new, different, and singular: one may also say, *interesting* (if we read “interesting,” with Bibikhin, as the original Latin “inter est,” something that stands out between the two poles). But Bibikhin also adds that novelty is always relative, while the eventfulness itself is always borderline. It is a trajectory drawn by the swing movement, with its amplitude. The event consists in a rapturing “aspect shift” (such as the Gestalt switch illustrated by the ambiguous pictures like “duck/rabbit”), which Bibikhin elaborates upon in his book on Wittgenstein:

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<sup>5</sup> “Aesthetical” is here not Bibikhin’s notion but my meta-term, which I need for clarifying Bibikhin’s standpoint, behind his back so to say, while the author himself has never used this term and was suspicious about it. I also hold the term “aesthetical” to be imprecise, and containing a dubious reference to the “sensuous” as opposed to rational, but it is accepted conventionally to mean a sphere of meaning (the beautiful/the artistic/the taste) to which I here refer.

## The Concept of Event in the Philosophy of Vladimir Bibikhin

If we bracket the emotions and exclamatory signs usually surrounding everything aesthetical, there will remain the aspect shift that reigns in this region, and strangely concerns us (Bibikhin 2005b: 513).

The magic of shift is also a magic of reversal—reversal of perspective at least—and one can speculate that Bibikhin thinks of Russia of the 1990s, where symbolic order was so visibly inverted. The Coca-Cola logo was written on the former party buildings, “oligarchs,” and “mafia” from the horror stories about capitalist life were supposedly running the country, and the arch-dissident Solzhenitsyn was taught in schools. Hence the political inversion that is implied by the word “revolution,” and hence the moderate attraction to revolutions with “serious” people who rightfully mistrust the sustainability of such carnival inversions.

It is of further interest that Bibikhin applied the idea of event as a rapturing drama valuable in itself, to be broader than the social life as such, and also applied it to nature. Thus, he even uses this idea of event to explain sexual reproduction in animals!

The sexual act turns out to be unnecessary to nature, practically speaking. Nature could break through directly, by using parthenogenesis and cloning [...] — [it] emerges as a pretext for the polarization of the masculine and feminine. Nature could provide for the maintenance of a genus anyway, but it looks for something like a strain, a split, a distance, a separation. Not for contrariness, but for complexity (Bibikhin 2011: 147).

Event thus takes on a general ontological significance, but not as a ground (like in Bibikhin), rather as an indispensable *effect*.

3) The third essential moment of event, for Bibikhin, is its *result*, namely, the force of the *right* that the event sets up.

Unlike the “revolution” of the Nazis, the anti-communist revolution brought a fundamental break in economic relations—namely, the privatization of means of production, a large-scale impoverishment and enrichment of a large stratum of society. Moreover, carrying liberal banners, this revolution led to the acceptance of a new constitution and set a goal to create a new legal order and a new regime of rights. This goal failed almost entirely, and as a result, the intellectuals produced a discourse of lawlessness, corruption, and lack of legal culture in the population.

Therefore Bibikhin, unlike Heidegger, pays a lot of attention to legal issues. In 1993, he taught a seminar on *Property*, relying predominantly on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. He is concerned primarily with the ontological significance of “proper” as “true,” “authentic.” This could sound like a defense of liberal privatization and indeed is a reaction to it. Plus, the fact that property is ontologically founded is nothing new; this is implied already by Locke (for whom property is the same as *propriety*). But, Bibikhin makes a further step in his analysis of property, emphasizing in Hegel’s

doctrine that the higher degree of property is its *alienation*, a refusal to possess. Bibikhin combines Hegel with Heidegger here (referring implicitly to *Gelassenheit*, see Heidegger 1966) in saying that true property consists in letting things go, letting them be (again, an environmental anti-activism is at work here, among other things). Hence Bibikhin's theme of the automaton of the world, with which one should not meddle (Bibikhin 2005b). All of this is not a preaching of quietism, but a tracing of the logic of the revolutionary grip. Property is originally an act of gripping, in the double sense of taking an object and of being carried away by it.

Private property is interpreted in the sense of a negative, or rather, privative, theology, and as a discovery of an unapproachable treasure under our feet, which is the proximity of the distant (to use Benjamin's definition of aura).

I can only find something comparably fundamental as the right of state, in the freedom of the proper. This may sound like a riddle so far. The proper, in the privative sense of not yet found, turns with its binding side of the law as alien force (Bibikhin 2005a: 38).

But the obverse side of this unattainability of the right is the alienation of the right from humans and of humans from right.

The event, while gripping and rapturing, also throws at, allows to be, and carries away, because it opens up a space-time. From the logic where a subject encounters and delimits an object, putting it into his/her delineated cosmos, we pass on to a logic where the object itself, in opening up, seems to swallow the subject and invite him/her into its internal space. Event, in this sense, is the same as Heidegger's "thing."

Again, it is hard not to notice the motifs close to the paradoxical conservative revolution. The appeal "not to meddle with the automaton of the world" is ideologically close to the liberal conservatism of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1980s, which accused the authorities of economic dirigisme and of a "totalitarian" immersion into private life.

In his later texts, which were written when the anti-Soviet revolution had come to an end, Bibikhin not only discusses the seizure of property, but the right and law as such. He discusses the *krepost'*, a word which means bondage, or literally, "hardness," and is the institution of old Russia that established the dependence of serfs on their master. Bibikhin describes them as "an orgy of severity" (Bibikhin 2003: 341) or "belated discipline" (Bibikhin 2003: 39), which is supposed to be characteristic of Russia in particular.

"Orgy" brings us back to the idea of a festive event; to the playful nature of its severe law ("The Law of Russian History" is the title of the key Bibikhin's article from 1996).

Generally, for Bibikhin, Russia is a country that has not elaborated its "early discipline" of preparation for events (Bibikhin 2013: 14–15) and

lives these events more acutely than the others. This corresponds to the larger ontological model in which we are always “late for the event.” We do not control its emergence, we miss the moment of our own attention, and attention unconsciously precedes our identifying judgment.

This structure also provides an understanding of current events: “The revolution of 1987–1993 [Sic! —A.M.] attempted to reenter into the region of right and law, but then quickly exited” (Bibikhin 2005: 119).

The issue here, says Bibikhin, is the essential “freedom of law” (Bibikhin 2005: 126–127), that is, law’s ambiguity and flexibility for interpretation, which the event discovers, and proceeding to establish another, sublegal order (cf. the distinction between the constituent and the constituted power in Sieyes). The right of bondage (a contemporary parallel to it is the widely discussed “*dedovschina*,” a system of informal domination in the Russian army) emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in a situation of legal indeterminacy and corrected the fluidity and obscurity of the existing law with the severity of the newly introduced order. Bibikhin certainly does not approve of this, but points that this is not a question of chaos and disorder, but a combination of an increased strictness with an increased freedom.

Still, the link between the informal *krepost'* (bondage/hardness) and the official law/right is not fully clear. Bibikhin points out an analogy, but also a contrast. Law is strict, and also relies on an event of foundation, but it is conscious, while in the *krepost'*, there is an unconscious, lightning-quick, and severe hardening. Perhaps, I would speculate, it is the philosophical reflexion that can help to transfer the former to the latter. That an event, for example a revolution, creates law is nothing new. What is interesting is that some events, sudden and instant, establish not a law but a severity of extralegal custom. It is in this severity that Bibikhin sees a mimesis of event and its repetition. But, ethically, he tends to respect the strictness of law and, like his liberal contemporaries, thinks that Russia must discover law in its public meaning (as opposed to the reign of *krepost'*).

4) The fourth important aspect of event, as conceived by Bibikhin, is the respective relation between the forces of mobilization and demobilization within this event.

During the events of the 1990s in Russia (like in most Eastern European countries), observers were surprised to see a steady retreat of the previously politicized masses from public sphere, and a fast depoliticization of the post-Soviet society. In the long run, this fast de-mobilization led to the collapse of democratic institutions.

Bibikhin has a peculiar explanation for this, which relies both on the logic of event and on an analogy in the Russian history. He mentions a historical event from the Russian Middle Ages, presenting it as a kind of primary scene of Russian politics (Bibikhin 1998b: 194–210, cf. my analysis in Magun 2013). After the death of the Kiev Prince Vladimir, one of his children was to inherit the throne. But two of them, Boris and Gleb, one of



whom was the eldest, and thus a legitimate heir, abstained from fighting for power with the third one, Svyatopolk. As a result, Svyatopolk killed them and usurped the power. Bibikhin claims that since then, power in Russia is a space that is always already emptied out by political abstention, and thus always essentially usurped. Here, strangely, Bibikhin's theory coincides with the notion of democracy by Claude Lefort (whom he had probably not read). In Lefort, the French revolution leaves the place of sovereign vacant, so that all rulers look like usurpers (Lefort 1986: 136ff). The post-eventual relation to power is analogous here to the relation to property. The point is not just pure negativity (as in Lefort), but in letting-go of a capturing thing as a higher expression of power and property. Both remain intangible but *remain* (like in Hegel's notion of determinate reflexion). So, Bibikhin grasps, in a somewhat mythologizing form, the attitude of Soviet and post-Soviet citizens to public space. It is public because it is no one's, and not because it acquires an official public status. Like in the case of law and bondage (*krepot'*), the mechanism that is close to Western democracy is radicalized. The void in the place of power leads to its actual usurpation by a despot.

For late Heidegger, the event (*Ereignis*) also has a negative aspect, in that it both gives itself and takes itself away, *eignet sich* and *enteignet sich* (Heidegger 2002). However, it remains unclear what the participants of the event do. Heidegger does not attribute to the participants a *Gelassenheit* in relation to the event, and he does not mention that they would sustain the event by withdrawing from it. In Bibikhin's work, the negativity, which makes part of event a sense of catastrophe, is at the same time a moment of retreating from an intense experience, a moment of the subject's withdrawal.

In the case of the Perestroika and the events of the nineties, not only is the actual devastation of the country and the relative starvation of a part of the population important, but also the lamentation ritual (Ries 2000). The lamentation ritual became dominant by the end of Perestroika and pre-determined the aforementioned depoliticization of the population. Like in Bibikhin's discussion of Akhmatova, what is significant is not just the suffering as such, but the institution of suffering, which, at least in Russia, is a crucial moment of event. As Bibikhin writes, while ironically reconstructing a typical discourse of the time:

— What are you talking about, dear sir, what kind of new beginning? Now, that everything is sliding toward the abyss?  
A consciousness of crisis, destruction, collapse, of desperate condition, is sweet, because it takes responsibilities and cares away. Generally, recognition of deadlock is intertwined with an internal jubilation. "The inexplicable joys are perhaps a sign of immortality" (Pushkin) (Bibikhin 2003: 341).

Bibikhin argues against this catastrophic mood, because it directly contradicts his enthusiasm for the open and masks a desire not to get involved in anything. But in any case, Bibikhin argues that this catastrophism is a mediate form of living through a revolution or renaissance as a festival, and unconsciously carries a potential of eventfulness. He also writes: “Let us look anew at the Russian habit of emphasizing their backwardness, uselessness, ‘throwness away’ (*brosovost’*, from ‘throw’)” (Bibikhin 2003: 15). Peter the Great, like his contemporary Ivan Pososhkov, liked this tone of national self-humiliation, particularly in the face of the West as a model. “I (even though I’ve been to many countries) have hardly seen anything near Russia’s bad customs” (Pososhkov, *Book on Poverty and Wealth* (1724), cit. in Bibikhin 2003: 15). One may add that a style of ironic self-depreciation is characteristic of Bibikhin himself. His lyric hero is a small, insignificant man who is nevertheless capable of many serious things if pressed (cf on Hamlet, Luther, and St Paul on this kind of irony, Bibikhin 1998a: 350). This is not at all like Heidegger’s “grand style.”

The sense of trash-like “throwness away” (*brosovost’*) is etymologically related to Heidegger’s “*Geworfenheit*” and to his *Entwurf*: one can be *thrown to* something, in the sense of being mobilized. From such catastrophism, it is one step away from utopia. “The shift ‘despair/promise’ must be complete so as to derive from the current intolerable state of things the need for an urgent change.” (Bibikhin 1993: 17). It is this chance that is contained in the unpreparedness for event that Bibikhin takes as the main indicator of the country’s current situation. I tried to develop the same ideas in my book *Negative Revolution*, (Magun 2013) but, unlike Bibikhin, I do not develop a national narrative and do not attribute the dialectic of revolution exclusively to *Russia*. I also show that in the Russian 1990s, the public sphere was not just let be but was actively rejected and destroyed as a site of power. Thus, at the end of an epoch that was started by the Great Socialist Revolution and by reflection upon it, we have a downfall and defeat of this revolution’s accomplishments which, paradoxically, realized itself in a revolutionary form. It is not by chance that the last great Russian thinkers of the century, a philosopher of grip, rapt and throwness, was a strange commentator and at times, even an apologist, of this tragic and ironic revolution.

## Conclusion

Because this paper discusses the structure of event, let me conclude with a list of its aspects.

The event has the following characteristics:

- It is lightning-like and quick
- It grips and raptures, and facilitates a firm grip of things, spaces and times.

- It precedes consciousness and is not “given” to it
- It is always repetitive, it is often a return (renaissance, revolution), but for the same reason it searches for an “other beginning.”
- It is affective and vertiginous.
- It is historically concrete (or: it is a *historical* event)
- It is a source and an object of law and right, particularly of the right to event
- It is self-sufficient and reflexive, always questioning itself.
- It seduces and disorients, plunging a person inside him/herself and at the same collecting him/her together into a fist.
- It leaves itself, in its core, intangible for the subject and even pushes it away, leading to alienation and demobilization of the subject.

Thus, I propose some important correctives to the concepts of event that exists in the current literature. Compared with the event of Heidegger and Badiou, Bibikhin’s notion of event is ironic, not moralistic (even though it is an ethical concept), because he distinguishes between the form of event (that is capturing) and its content (which is not always that significant), and perceives its polar oscillation between the two poles (mainly of utopia and catastrophe). Bibikhin is also attentive to the aesthetic character of event: the theatrical and mimetic, playful, and continual reenactment of what has already happened.

If I am may insert some criticism of Bibikhin, then the disadvantage of his doctrine, in comparison with the two aforementioned authors, is his relative indifference to the actual events that are used as examples. A rapprochement between the reforms of Peter the Great, revolution of 1917, the First World War, and the Perestroika may be justified but it requires a further evaluation and differentiation, at least for ethical purposes. Badiou, in his *Ethics* (Badiou 2001: 75–82) makes some arguments as to why the revolution of 1917 is a true event, and the Nazi revolution is not, but Bibikhin also make some good arguments as to why such a distinction is not a simple one.

In conclusion, I will return to the remark of Bosteels that I quoted in the beginning. Event, as a paradigm of existence, will probably remain with us for long, and we need its detailed analytic where philosophy could give a hand to other social sciences, where in the last years there has been a rising interest to the study of events and of the mechanisms by which they engage people (Beissinger 2002; Sewell 2005, etc.). A logic and an ethics of events are necessary to understand their empirical development and subjective perception. Bibikhin, with his capacity for combining the ontological and the anecdotal/prosaic levels of analysis, points to some paths that such studies could take.

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