

SUBTRACTIVE

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Discussions of Jacques Lacan and philosophy conventionally revolve around two familiar names: Alexandre Kojève and Martin Heidegger. Alain Badiou is one philosopher who stands outside this predictable trajectory; his efforts to put philosophy back into communication with mathematics and symbolic logic, and his placement of Lacan's teaching within a philosophical tradition adjacent to the thought of Plato, Descartes and Cantor position him uniquely within contemporary thought. Badiou's project is *rare* insofar as it foresees a future to philosophy which has yet to be exhausted within contemporary ("paricidal") predictions of an end to philosophy and its subject. What such a project may effect is a complete recasting of the anti-philosophical tenets of Lacan's thought as a whole. It is clear that Lacan had repeatedly, throughout his career, sought to separate philosophy from psychoanalysis - he refused to elevate the former into a master discourse which sought truth through submitting the claims of philosophy to the finite horizon of human consciousness (a project familiar to readers of Nietzsche and Heidegger). Badiou suggests that it is not philosophy which Lacan argued against as much as an *anti-philosophical* trend that inhered in philosophy itself, within the works of Spinoza and Hegel or Nietzsche and Heidegger - a trend both anti-philosophical in its disposal of the uses of reason for seeking truth, and humanist in its rejection of the mathematical as a form of reason (in fact, of truth) sustained onto itself. Less concerned with the ontological priority of the being of the subject, Lacan maintained a radical distinction between being and meaning. It was not the subject, but rather the coincidence of consciousness with certainty that was excluded from his system. As Badiou demonstrates in the essay "Descartes/Lacan," this radical separation of knowledge and truth aligns Lacan far more closely with Descartes or Frege than with Heidegger, Kojève or Jacques Derrida.

As Bruce Fink points out in his addendum to this dossier, truth is essentially an empty category for Badiou - it is produced, in Badiou's own words, as a *hole in knowledge*, an unnameable element. It is essentially something which is indiscernible to either language or mathematical counting. Hence, Badiou's recourse to a philosophy of foundations grounded on mathematical logic resulting in a refusal of the totality of the One (as given, paradoxically, in both Spinoza and Hegel). For Badiou, the One is One through the effect of being "counted-as-one." That is, the One is generated through a finite (and generic)

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evaluation formed within the relation between what is indiscernible (trans-finite infinity) and a system in which such counting of Ones can be effected. And it is in this "rapport" between the indiscernible (multiplicity) and knowledge (finite evaluation; singularity) that a particular *condition* of philosophy can be established. Rather than insisting upon a singular condition in which philosophy can or should be realized, Badiou acknowledges that there are *four* conditions - art, love, science, and politics - in which truths can be effected (or: in which a philosophical system can force a knowledge of the empty category of truth). For Descartes and Leibniz, it was the scientific and mathematical which dominated philosophy; for Hegel and Rousseau, the political; for Heidegger and Nietzsche, it was art which "unveiled" truth. Finally, it was in psychoanalysis that love was located as the truth of the subject (*its* subject, to use Badiou's terms). Badiou privileges none of the above as much as he works to interrogate the various mechanisms by which any one condition maintains a "fidelity" to the hole where truth inheres in knowledge.

François Wahl has observed that there are two systems of philosophy: the descriptive and the foundational. If Gilles Deleuze can be placed safely within the former, it is Badiou who opts without hesitation for the latter. And this foundation is by no means given in accessible terms. For American readers familiar with the work of Lacan, the most difficult part of Badiou's theory to grasp will be the usage of mathematical concepts which go into forming the axioms of his philosophy. The terminology with which his views are presented (*forçage*, generic process, indiscernible, etc.) are derived from contemporary mathematics and set-theory and require, no doubt, an amount of work outside the texts in order to be fully grasped. For example, like Lyotard and Deleuze, Badiou uses the terms "event" and "singularity," but in a manner which cannot be divorced from its foundations in a subtractive ontology: Badiou's event does not inhere "in" a given situation, nor should singularity be thought apart from Badiou's mistrust of the One.

It is of course impossible to give any sort of comprehensive overview of the mathematical foundations of Badiou's work. The French speaker could look to *L'être et l'événement*, *Le Nombre et les Nombres*, and *Conditions* for help in these matters. Nevertheless, there are two foundations, serving as the basis of his work, which can be given: the axiom of the empty-set (*ensemble de vide* - the void as set containing no elements) and Cantor's conception of the pure infinity (that is, his proof that there can be infinite quantities of different sizes which transcend any finite evaluation). They comprise, perhaps, a foundation for what Badiou means exactly with the terms "event" and "pure presentation." For Badiou, the infinite part "can only come into being through a series of finite evaluations, and is thus never presented." And if that infinite part will never come to be presented (or "will have avoided coinciding" with what knowledge determines as known, consistent, or "discerned") then a truth will have been produced. Never present, a truth can only *function* as the "metonymy of the situation's very being." It could then be said that the series of finite evaluations (the "countings" of the situation) determines the situation, the event is the "cause" of these evaluations, and the pure presentation of infinity is what the situation aspires towards but never realizes.

Badiou himself states that it is impossible to summarize the foundations of his philosophy, but he has provided four “axiomatic shortcuts” for his English speaking readers which need a careful delineation since all understanding hinges upon them.<sup>1</sup>

- a. *A truth is always post-eventual.* The procedure of truth begins when a “supernumerary” name is put into circulation - “extracted from the very void which sutures every situation to being.” As Jacques-Alain Miller has already shown, it is the inclusion of the empty set -  $\emptyset$  - the unequal element which allows for the evaluation of singular elements within a given series. It allows for the counting from zero to one. The surplus “name” of the void confirms that the situation has been “supplemented” by a *prior* event.
- b. *The process of a truth is fidelity to the event.* The operator of fidelity evaluates the “degree of connection” that is established between the terms of the situation and the “supernumerary name of the event.”
- c. *The terms of the situation that are “declared [to be] positively connected to the event form an infinite part of the situation.”* But this infinite part can only be constituted through the succession of finite evaluations; the infinite part of the situation can never be presented *in itself* as infinite.
- d. *A truth is produced if the infinite part of the situation “avoids” coinciding with what can be known or discerned.* The temporality of the situation speaks to the future anteriority of the “metonymy of the situation’s very being.” The situation hinges upon the future with regards to the pure presentation of infinity, and the past with regards to the event. Indiscernible within knowledge, one communicates with truth only through a fidelity to the truth maintained within the situation.

Badiou’s mathematical doctrine of truth recasts the project of philosophy well outside the successive hermeneutics and critiques of truth that have led philosophy down the path towards its purported demise. Yet his is more than a conditioning of philosophy through the counter-intuitive “proofs” or assumptions of modern mathematics: it constitutes a refusal of the completion (his skepticism with regards to the One) that guides the course of contemporary humanism. One cannot, of course, expect any complete account or overview of Badiou’s thought in the following. And, given the purposes of the

present dossier, it is only natural that we would have selected works which coincide more readily with Badiou's interests in psychoanalysis. "Descartes/Lacan," "Hegel," "Psychoanalysis and Philosophy," and "What is Love?" only denote particular examples of this complex thinker's work. No amount of explanation can justify what will be presented here, for such can only predicate an amount of work which, in this country, has yet to begin.

<sup>1</sup> These "axioms" have already been given in Badiou's article "On a Finally Objectless Subject," trans. Bruce Fink, in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Cadeva, Connor, Nancy eds. (New York: Routledge, 1991).

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