

# Tarrying with Sexual Matters

Thinking Change from Lacan to Badiou

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation interrogates the significance of Alain Badiou's traversal of the antiphilosophy of Jacques Lacan, and the implications of that traversal for Badiou's thinking on the preconditions for the subject and possibilities of radical change. It focuses on the function of sexual matters in Badiou's philosophical works. Its basic presupposition posits that thinking radical change depends on an appreciation of the relations between sexual matters and an ethics of the act of subjective constitution, in the continuation of how psychoanalysis thinks the subject. While the encounter with sexual matters constitutes a key point for the psychoanalytic conception of subjective constitution and the act, sexual matters are less pronounced in the case of Badiou's philosophical works. In order to come to terms with Badiou's traversal of Lacan, this dissertation thus proposes a closer interrogation of the function of sexual matters in Badiou's philosophy. Its main thesis claims that a key to the appreciation of the significance and implications of Badiou's traversal of Lacan is located at the junctions where Badiou's ethical thrust is motivated in seemingly unwarranted conjunction with sexual matters. It argues that a key to Badiou's thinking of radical change is found at the points where his works cannot avoid a certain 'tarrying with sexual matters'.

More precisely, the issue is the conceptualizations of truths and subjects as procedures of novelty within a situation that follows from Badiou's mathematical gesture, his elaborations of a materialist dialectic, and how these conceptualizations can be effective for thinking about the possibilities of change. This issue is addressed by way of the analysis of the points at which sexual matters intrude upon Badiou's argumentations. The thesis takes the psychoanalytic reference to sex as real and the definition of the real as the impasse to formalization literally, and states that the intrusions of sexual matters in Badiou's text mark especially dense and significant points in Badiou's confrontation with the Lacanian framework. Reading for the claim that 'sex marks the spot' is first and foremost a methodological thesis, where the analysis of the symptomal knots where sexual matters intrude becomes a method for

the elaboration of the consequences of Badiou's philosophical project for thinking the subject of politics and the possibilities for change. The overall question is what it signifies to proceed from the non-object of sexual matters to thinking the possibilities of change by way of a mathematical ontology of multiplicities and a materialist dialectic of universal truths produced in the continuous process of a subject as borne in the division of an evental rupture?

This dissertation analyzes the mark of sexual matters as it resurges on three occasions in Badiou's work. Firstly, it analyzes the function of sexual matters and the feminine other in relation to Badiou's concept of the generic multiple in *L'Être et l'événement*, such as it is developed in critical dialogues with Lacan's feminine logic of the non-all. Badiou denotes the generic multiple by way of a reference to the feminine non-all, apparently, but my main claim is that this decision can only make sense if one recognizes the division of the concept of the generic multiple in two: an initial indiscernible of nothing that answers to the nomination of an event, and a consequent generic multiple proper that answers to an actual truth procedure. Secondly, this dissertation analyzes Badiou's conjoining of the real of sex and the real of class in *Théorie du sujet*, and proceeds to interrogate how Badiou turns to tragedy in order to elaborate on this conjunction. My main claim is that the figure of Prometheus the fire-bearer communicates Badiou's notion of an ethics of confidence, as the process in which radical change can be carried out. Lastly, this dissertation analyzes the function of the feminine other in relation to Badiou's conceptualization of antiphilosophy in general, in the seminar series on *L'Antiphilosophie* from 1992-1996. Lacan is there posited as a double exception, as the one to bring contemporary antiphilosophy to its conclusion and as the one to avoid the distinctive criterion of misogyny. My main claim is that these two exceptions have to be read together in order to grasp how Badiou's philosophy proceeds to think radical change from the point of impossibility.

In conclusion, I argue that the mark of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy can be read as nothing less than the mark of Badiou's traversal of Lacan as such. It is not the case merely that Lacanian antiphilosophy deals with sexual matters and that Badiou thus also deals with it, to the extent that he deals with Lacanian antiphilosophy. The moments at which sexual matters intrude upon

Badiou's argumentation are also the moments at which the decisive elements of Badiou's arguments meet up and where his elaborations on the subject, its ethical portents, and the possibilities for radical change beyond Lacan reach their climax. It is not simply the case that the Lacanian real of sexual difference necessarily marks the move from psychoanalysis to philosophy. Also Badiou's elaborations on the implications of this move, through the concept of the generic multiple through the ruminations on the status of tragedy to the misogyny of the antiphilosophical act are marked by and carried out in an intricate relation with the issue of sexual matters.

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# Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium the philosophy of Alain Badiou has received an increased amount of attention, especially for its contributions on the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change. This dissertation addresses the philosophical project of Badiou in its relation to the psychoanalytic teachings of Jacques Lacan and its rewrite of Sigmund Freud. It addresses the significance of sexual matters in Badiou's so-called traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking the preconditions and the possibilities for the subject and radical change today. It inquires into the manner in which Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy has approached the connection between sexual matters and ethics in his elaborations on the subject of politics and the possibilities for thinking change, or into the manner in which the subject of politics and the possibilities for thinking change can be approached through the interrelations of ethics and sexual matters in an appreciation of the traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy in Badiou's philosophical project.

The basic presupposition of this dissertation is formulated in the general terms of the issue of thinking radical change in and through the relations between sexual matters, an ethics of the act, and the subject of politics – in its double sense, as signifying both the subject matter of politics and the political subject, to the extent that these coincide. Actual politics or political sequences are first presumed to be the case in and with a political subject and a political act, as the preconditions for the possibilities of radical change and novelty. The issue of ethics is the issue is how such a subject of politics might be constituted. In psychoanalysis, sexual matters designates the material by which a subject comes to be, in the sense that an encounter with sexual matters demands an act of subjective constitution, potentially and at best as a radical act in and by which the subject constitutes itself as a subject of sex, or a sexuated subject. As such, sexual matters offers up the material of an ethics of the act, where ethics nominates precisely such a radical act in and by which the subject comes to

constitute itself and the field into which it intervenes. Hence, sexual matters offer a blueprint if not a foundation of ethics as a theory of subjective constitution, where the reciprocal clarification of ethics and sexual matters can in turn serve as a clarification on the subject of politics and the possibilities for change.

The basic presupposition of the relation between sexual matters, ethics, and the subject of politics is not an original contribution: the politics of a good or just disposition of sex and genders or the place of these in a good and just politics has been a preoccupation of feminist theory and practice from its first wave, if not of political philosophy in general from Plato and Aristotle onwards. In the world of today – increasingly characterized by impending ecological catastrophes, recurrent economic crises, mass migrations and xenophobic nationalisms, deficient democracies, technocratic rule, capitalizations of social life, increasing global and local polarizations – a rethinking or another interrogation of the subject of politics is pertinent. This dissertation intervenes into this conundrum by turning to Badiou's philosophical works and his traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy.

Badiou's work traverses themes that have occupied philosophy from philosophy's beginning, frequently in confrontation with philosophers preceding him. The more significant figures count Plato (insisting on truth against opinions, conceiving conditions, prioritizing mathematics), René Descartes (installing the specifically modern configuration of philosophy as a philosophy of being, truths, and the subject), Immanuel Kant (analyzing finitude, delimiting reason, rendering being as such inaccessible), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (totalizing yet historicizing being and truth as the process of their dialectical division and self-relation, thinking as infinite capacity), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ("die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*, es kömmt drauf an, sie zu *verändern*"),<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger and various post-Heideggerians (refocusing on the question of being, prioritizing poetry), Gilles Deleuze (multiplicity over and against the One), and, finally, '*le plus grand de nos morts*', Lacan.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl: "Thesen über Feuerbach" [1845/1888]: *Werke, Band 3*, Dients Verlag, Berlin, 1978, p. 7 ("philosophers have but interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change it").

<sup>2</sup> See Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1989, p. 7; see also Clemens, Justin and Adam J. Bartlett: "'The Greatest of Our Dead': Badiou and Lacan": *Badiou and*

The teachings of Lacan consummate the specifically modern conceptualizations of these themes of Western philosophy as far as Badiou is concerned. It is in Lacan that Badiou finds the determination of the real as the impasse of formalization, and mathematics or mathematized logic as the science of the real. It is also in Lacan that Badiou finds a radical assumption of the paradoxes inherent to language and a rigorous elaboration of the consequences of the truth underpinning the being of a speaking-thinking subject, conceived as castrated and split by the signifier. It is in Lacan that Badiou finds an uncompromising confrontation with the implications of an encounter with the inaccessible Thing, addressed through the notions of the drive and the object-cause of desire. It is also in Lacan that Badiou finds an advanced reapplication of the incompleteness and inconsistency of totality following from the dialectic or the self-division of the One, formalized in the non-all logic of the feminine and in an ethics of the radically subjective act. As read by Badiou, Lacan comes as close as one gets to ultimately taking leave of the theme of finitude and assuming the entire weight of the death of God, without properly doing so, without making the full leap. That is to say, Lacan comes as close as one gets to thinking the possibilities for radical change and true novelty, arriving at the core of the structures and states that impose themselves on the worlds of women and men, but without thinking it properly, without thinking it all the way. This is the context in which Badiou's call to traverse Lacanian antiphilosophy is made.

While the Lacanian framework is apt to account for the structural mechanisms of oppression as well as the inherent flaws of these mechanisms themselves that permit for their subversion, Badiou's thinking of the possibilities of radical change insists on another step into the actual processes of change. Badiou's philosophical works offers an elaborate apparatus by which to address the preconditions of the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change that both incorporates and expands on the crux of the psychoanalytic teachings of Lacan. The philosophical project of Badiou is underscored by a decisive ethical portent or thrust in the sense just defined: the decisive issue for Badiou's philosophical project is to think the preconditions and the

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*Philosophy* (ed. Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, p. 177-202.

possibilities of a subject as an active movement of radical change. The ethical thrust of Badiou's project depends on the lessons of Lacan's psychoanalytic teaching, especially the latter's notions concerning sexual difference as real. Insofar as Badiou's ethical thrust is involved with the notions of sexual difference as real, his philosophical project shares in a broader trend in contemporary radical thinking where the lessons of Lacan are mustered in an attempt to elaborate on another ethics beyond the dogmatism of the traditional moral law and the scepticism of the law's evacuation.

However, contrary to the theoretical apparatus by which psychoanalysis elaborates on the subject and an ethics of the act, the philosophical works of Badiou is not constructed around a core of sexual matters. While Badiou's traversal of Lacan constitutes the decisive move through which Badiou conceives of the preconditions for the subject and the possibilities for radical change, the crucial element in the teachings of Lacan, sexual matters, is displaced as an operative concept in Badiou's work. In any case, the explicit term at the core of Badiou's philosophical edifice is not the term of sexual matters. This displacement of sexual matters calls for further interrogation. Can one assume that the displacement of sexual matters from being the central category in Badiou's philosophy leaves intact the remaining entanglement of subjective constitution through the ethics of the act, or must one rather assume that the displacement of one term effectuates an alteration in the constitution of the remaining terms and their interrelations as well – and if the latter is the case, how does the displacement of sexual matters from its crucial position in psychoanalysis effect the thinking of subjective constitution and the ethics of the act? In order to come to terms with the full significance of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking the preconditions for the subject and the possibilities of radical change, a further analysis of how sexual matters are at work in the traversal in question is necessary.

### ***Reading Badiou Today***

In one of the earliest compilations of commentaries to appear on Badiou's work – *Alain Badiou; Penser le multiple* (2002) – Badiou himself makes an introductory

remark as to a possible categorization of his academic reception. Badiou suggests a division into two main trends or orientations:

L'une prend son départ dans la théorie formelle de l'être, la mathématique comme ontologie, le difficile concept de situation. L'autre se soutient surtout de l'événement et de ses conséquences dans l'ordre de la vérité générique. Ou encore, la première trouve ses appuis critiques dans la logique, dans la théorie des ensembles, ou dans le rapport délicat entre la multiplicité inconsistante et sa présentation pensable comme multiplicité consistante. L'autre coupe vers le Sujet selon Lacan, ou vers la politique d'émancipation, ou encore vers la théorie des procédures artistiques.<sup>3</sup>

Having first distinguished the orientation of the event from that of being, Badiou further distinguishes the orientation of the event into that of the event itself and that of its consequences in the order of generic truths. Two trends turn to three, grouped according to their orientation by way of the concepts of being, the event, or truths.

Admitting some denominational leverage, such a triple division has become a rule in the extensive amount of edited collections, special issue journals, introductions, and beginner's guides to Badiou.<sup>4</sup> To read Badiou seems to be to read him for his conceptualizations of being (ontology), the event (the possibility for change and novelty), or truths (the four conditions of philosophy, *i.e.* science, art, love, and

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<sup>3</sup> Badiou, Alain: "L'Investigation transcendentale": *Alain Badiou; Penser le multiple* (ed. Charles Ramond), L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002, p. 7-8 ("The first departs from the formal theory of being, mathematics as ontology, the difficult concept of situation. The other is sustained above all in the event and its consequences in the order of generic truth. Or again, the first finds its critical support in logic, set theory, or in the delicate relation between inconsistent multiplicity and its thinkable presentation as consistent multiplicity. The other tends towards the Subject according to Lacan, or towards the politics of emancipation, or again towards the theory of artistic procedures" [*all translations are mine, unless otherwise noted*]).

<sup>4</sup> For similar dispositions of the reception of Badiou's work, see *e.g.* Hallward, Peter: "Introduction; Consequences of Abstraction": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 1-20; Riera, Gabriel: "Introduction. Alain Badiou: The Event of Thinking": *Alain Badiou; Philosophy and its Conditions* (ed. Gabriel Riera), Suny Press, Albany, 2005, p. 1-19; Wilkens, Matthew: "Introduction": *Polygraph; An International Journal of Culture and Politics (The Philosophy of Alain Badiou)*, no. 17, 2005, p. 1-9; Pluth, Ed: *Alain Badiou; A Philosophy of the New*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 13 ff.; Bartlett and Clemens: "Introduction; Badiou's Form": *Alain Badiou; Key Concepts* (ed. A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Acumen Publishing, Durham, 2010, p. 1-7; and Bowden, Sean and Simon Duffy: "Badiou's Philosophical Heritage": *Badiou and Philosophy* (ed. Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, p. 1-15.

politics), with the additional subject fluctuating back and forth somewhere between the latter two. Together with a growing number of studies on Badiou in relation to other figures in the history of Western thinking, these themes make up the overall scheme of Badiou's general reception.

The renown of Badiou's philosophy is first and foremost tied to his proposition from *L'Être et l'événement* (1988) that mathematics equals ontology.<sup>5</sup> By proposing that mathematics thinks being-*qua*-being, Badiou's project opposes the predominant dependency on language in the wake of the linguistic turn, structuralism, and Heidegger's poetic ruminations on being. Badiou's equation of mathematics and ontology has been extensively debated, as have Badiou's elaborations on how set theory serves as the most adequate mode of thinking being-*qua*-being so far.<sup>6</sup> The mathematics of set theory allows for an ontology of pure being as unbound multiplicity, as inconsistent multiplicities of multiplicities, to the jettison of the One (*l'Un n'est pas*). It allows for a subtractive ontology to be founded on the void or empty set alone.<sup>7</sup> According to Ray Brassier, the decisive import of Badiou's work is its subtractive ontology, one that is not only dependent on but also on par with the propulsive unbinding of all things solid under capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Badiou signals a final disenchantment of ontology, insofar as 'being' is insignificant, meaning literally nothing, and the question of the meaning of being is thus rendered an antiquated superstition.<sup>9</sup> Badiou's equation of mathematics and ontology is an attempt at a properly modern ontology, one that tries to carry the full weight of the death of God

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<sup>5</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1988, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> For an early critical reading, see Desanti, Jean-Toussaint: "Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou" [1990] (trans. Ray Brassier): *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 59-66. For more general discussions on the place and function of set theory in Badiou's philosophy, see e.g. Mount, B. Madison: "The Cantorian Revolution: Alain Badiou on the Philosophy of Set Theory": *Polygraph; An International Journal of Culture and Politics (The Philosophy of Alain Badiou)*, no. 17, 2005, p. 41-91; and Baki, Barhanuddin: *Badiou's Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory*, Bloomsbury, London/New York, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 70. See also Bartlett, A.J. and Alex Ling: "Translators' Introduction; The Categorical Imperative": *Mathematics of the Transcendental* (ed. and trans. A.J. Bartlett and Alex Ling), Bloomsbury, London/New York, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> See Brassier, Ray: "Nihil Unbound; Remarks on Subtractive Ontology and Thinking Capitalism": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> See Brassier: *Nihil Unbound; Enlightenment and Extinction* (2007), Palgrave/MacMillan, London/New York, 2010, p. 116.

and a full evacuation of transcendence, one that affirms the existence of the infinite and endorses its simple banality.

To Badiou, however, his thesis on the multiplicities of being serves as a prolegomena to the interrogation of the relations between the concepts of truths and subjects in the wake of an event.<sup>10</sup> In a so-called 'Platonic gesture' or a 'Platonism of the multiple', Badiou refuses the theme of an end of philosophy. He insists on salvaging the notions of universal truths and the subject from being dispersed at the hands of a self-perpetuating dissemination of opinions and cultures, on the one hand, and from disappearing under the operations of structure and representation, on the other.<sup>11</sup> In the wake of an event and through the fidelity of a subject, universal truths may come to be through so-called generic procedures within the four conditions of science, art, love, and politics. There are attempts at comprehensive accounts of Badiou's philosophy as a system, at relating the tripartite knot of event, truths, and subjects back onto his ontological thesis. Bruno Bosteels argues that too strong a separation of being and event risks losing sight of the dialectic between the two, and thereby also of how novelty and change result from the articulation of a singular truth onto an existing state of things.<sup>12</sup> Peter Hallward makes the case that Badiou's Platonism of the multiple avoids reintroducing the One at the level of the event by aligning the event with the resurgence in a situation of pure being as unbound and inconsistent multiplicities, otherwise subtracted from presentation.<sup>13</sup> Badiou's Platonic gesture implies a reaffirmation of the death of God and the priority of the multiple, by proposing the notion of universal truths as singular processes of change that are immanent to their situation and, hence, relieved of every dependency upon transcendence.

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<sup>10</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement, op.cit.*, p. 22. See also Smith, Brian Anthony: "The Limits of the Subject in Badiou's *Being and Event*": *The Praxis of Alain Badiou* (ed. Paul Ashton, A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Repress, Melbourne, 2006, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Toscano, Alberto: "To Have Done with the End of Philosophy": *Pli; The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 9, 2000, p. 220-238.

<sup>12</sup> See Bosteels, Bruno: *Badiou and Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham/London, 2011, p. 2. See also Bosteels: "On the Subject of the Dialectic": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 150-164.

<sup>13</sup> See Hallward: "Depending on Inconsistency; Badiou's Answer to the 'Guiding Question of All Contemporary Philosophy'": *Polygraph; An International Journal of Culture and Politics (The Philosophy of Alain Badiou)*, no. 17, 2005, p. 17.

Truths nonetheless depend upon the fidelity of subjects, and Badiou's sketches for an ethics of truths have long been dominant in his reception, especially in the Anglophone world.<sup>14</sup> Seized by an event, a subject forces a truth into existence through the process of deducing the event's consequences in and for the situation. The Platonic gesture continues to inform on Badiou's project insofar as the question is not so much how to avoid the evil of oppressions and subordinations, but rather how to face up to and affirm the ways in which a subject can do good by the truth testified to by an event. The overarching imperative reads '*un pas de plus!*' or '*continuez!*' or '*never forget that which you have encountered!*'<sup>15</sup> Opposed to mere survival, the notion of a good life is to be living *in* and *by* and *for* an idea or a truth, in fidelity to which a subject can come to seize upon its proper immortality. As Ernesto Laclau observes, Badiou's ethics is an affirmative ethics articulated within an emancipatory project, and thus opposed to the widespread trend of a strictly defensive or reactive ethics of tolerance, responsiveness, and recognition of others.<sup>16</sup> Others have criticized the miraculous undertones of the event and the religious connotations of fidelity and immortality in Badiou.<sup>17</sup> But the mathematical underpinnings of Badiou's work prevent its superposition with the religious domain. Badiou speaks of a logical resistance, or of being resistant by logic.<sup>18</sup> The axiom trumps the miraculous as far as undecidability is concerned and, as Hallward points out, the fidelity in question for Badiou is first and foremost the fidelity of mathematical deduction.<sup>19</sup> Stéphane Vinolo understands the notion of immortality to effectively denounce every reference to a transcendence to come, reading it instead as strictly immanent to the construction of a

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<sup>14</sup> I owe this claim to Copjec, Joan: "Gai Savoir Sera; The Science of Love and the Insolence of Chance": *Alain Badiou; Philosophy and its Conditions* (ed. Gabriel Riera), Suny Press, Albany, 2005, p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> See Badiou: *L'Éthique; Essai sur la conscience du mal* [1993], Nous, Paris, 2003, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> See Laclau, Ernesto: "An Ethics of Militant Engagement": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Bensaid, Daniel: "Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 94-105; and Lecercle: "Cantor, Lacan, Mao, Beckett, *même combat*: The Philosophy of Alain Badiou": *Radical Philosophy*, no. 93, 1999, p. 6-13.

<sup>18</sup> See Badiou: *Abrégé de métapolitique*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1998, p. 12. The phrase is originally Georges Canguilhem's, to characterize the subjective stance of Jean Cavailles.

<sup>19</sup> See Hallward: "Ethics without Others; A Reply to Critchley on Badiou's Ethics": *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 102, 2000, p. 28.



truth in the present.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, Badiou's ethics concerns the subjection or the subordination to singular truths. But insofar as truths are universal and true only insofar as they are true for all, it is an ethics of subordination that is inherently egalitarian. It is primarily as a polemic against the limitations of thinking and in defense of the capacity of thinking to break free of its restraints and to expand on its being. It is as a defense of the capacity for thinking as radical change and true novelty, and this is also where the significance of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy enters the discussion.

### *Traversing Lacan*

Badiou's recurrent objection to Lacan concerns the structural and/or punctual limitations his theory of the subject.<sup>21</sup> Badiou's ethical imperative of continuation acquires its significance here, as a call to traverse or work through the framework of Lacanian antiphilosophy.<sup>22</sup> Antiphilosophy constitutes the crux of several seminal readings of Badiou in relation to Lacan. In the main, these debates relate to how Lacan's teachings on the real as the impasse of formalization informs on Badiou's project to think the possibilities of radical change and true novelty. For Bosteels, the traversal provides a primary lesson in dialectical thinking and an emphasis on the continuous subjective engagement against the so-called speculative-leftist temptation of conceiving of change as the radical act of an absolute beginning, and against the temptations of religion. Against the temptation of religion, antiphilosophy makes the philosopher attentive to the dogmatic dangers involved in the assumption of a substantial truth, a fullness of meaning possible to pronounce completely, as if spoken or guaranteed by God. Against speculative leftism and the tendency to think the event in an antiphilosophical manner and to ignore the dialectic between the old and the new, Bosteels argues, Badiou's thinking is characterized by its continuous dialectical

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<sup>20</sup> See Vinolo, Stéphane: *Alain Badiou; Vivre en immortel*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2014, p. 185.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1982, p. 149, and Badiou: *Logiques des Mondes*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2006, p. 502.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Badiou: "La vérité; forçage et innommable": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 196.

character, by which it insists on the importance of attending to the consequences of an event in and for a situation.<sup>23</sup>

For Justin Clemens and Adam J. Bartlett, the traversal provides a lesson on philosophy's paradoxical relation to its conditions as one of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, and thus an anti-totalitarian lesson on the impossibility of pronouncing the whole of truth. Badiou's conception of truths is indebted to Lacan's denigration of the truth of philosophy to the benefit of its obscure underside. Badiou's traversal performs a reversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy, Clemens and Bartlett argues, where truths are conceived to depend upon an operation of a pass through that which in a given situation constitutes its impossibility, its impasse, its non-relation, or its real, as it has been localized through the antiphilosophical act. Where antiphilosophy libels the philosopher for ignoring the non-relation by assuming the possibility of saying the whole of truth, Badiou's reconfiguration of truth through Lacan executes the impossibility of such a whole-saying and the non-relation that is its cause as the *sine qua non* and the very definition of the truth of philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

For Slavoj Žižek, the traversal provides a negative lesson on how Badiou's philosophical works are lacking the negativity of the death drive. On account of this lack, Žižek accuses Badiou of missing out on the psychoanalytic lessons for thinking the preconditions for political action altogether. Badiou does not acknowledge the radical implications of Lacanian theory to its fullest extent, and thereby partly plugs up the hole for radical action opened up by the negativity of the death drive. To Žižek,

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<sup>23</sup> See Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2008, p. 155-187. This article is definitely the most comprehensive discussion of Bosteels on Badiou's conceptualization of antiphilosophy, but the crux of his readings can be found in several less extensive articles, such as Bosteels: "Borges as Antiphilosopher": *Vanderbilt E-Journal of Luso-Hispanic Studies*, vol. 3, 2006, no pagination (accessed through <http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/ojs/index.php/lusohispanic/article/view/3197/1390-07.04.2017>); Bosteels: "Gjendrivelisen av filosofien" (trans. Henning Hagerup): *Agora; Journal for metafysisk spekulasjon*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2010, p. 48-60; Bosteels: "Nietzsche, Badiou, and Grand Politics; An Antiphilosophical Reading": *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (ed. Keith Ansell Pearson), Bloomsbury, London/New York, 2013, p. 219-239; and Bosteels: "Enjoy Your Truth; Lacan as Vanishing Mediator between Badiou and Žižek": *Repeating Žižek* (ed. Agon Hamza), Duke University Press, Durham/London, 2014, p. 127-145.

<sup>24</sup> See Clemens and Bartlett: "'The Greatest of Our Dead'; Badiou and Lacan", *op.cit.*, p. 177-202; Clemens: *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2013, esp. p. 1-16; Bartlett and Clemens: "Lacan": *Alain Badiou; Key Concepts* (ed. A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens) Acumen, Durham, 2010, p. 155-167; see also Bartlett, Clemens and Jon Roffe: *Lacan, Deleuze, Badiou*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014.

Badiou confuses the function of the One with "a secondary 'totalization' of a primordially dispersed and inconsistent field," instead of recognizing it as "the signifier of (self-)division, the ultimate supplement or excess: by way of re-marking the pre-existing real, the One divides it from itself, introduces its non-coincidence with itself."<sup>25</sup> Badiou thus finds himself at risk of endorsing an antiphilosophy of multiplicity (similar to Deleuze) rather than a proper Lacanian philosophy of the non-coincidence of the One, the One as essential self-division – that is, instead of being a Hegelian.

My dissertation intervenes into these debates. Although these debates are well informed on the Lacanian premises of Badiou's philosophical works, and do offers longer extrapolations on the status of sexual matters within psychoanalytic theory, a focus on the function of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy is nonetheless strangely absent. However, there is another trend in the reception of Badiou's Lacan reads Badiou's work for its propositions on matters sexual. Badiou builds his theory of love as a truth procedure and a condition for philosophy on Lacan's notion of the real as it is intricately bound to sexual matters, as the real of sexual difference. In the wake of Lacan, Badiou proposes a formula of sexualization of his own. The issue is still the possibilities of change and novelty as immanent breaks with the structures that be, but this time within the conditions of love. On that basis, Lilian Munk Rösing elaborates on how Badiou's conception of love as a truth procedure constitutes a visionary sexual philosophy beyond the normative impositions of social constructions and biological essences, an existential sex [*et eksistensielt kön*] as a process of creation occurring in and through love.<sup>26</sup>

But mine is not a dissertation on that which Badiou says *about* sexual matters. It is not a dissertation on the ways in which Badiou's propositions on femininity and

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<sup>25</sup> See Žižek, Slavoj: *Less than Nothing; Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, Verso Books, London, 2012, p. 846; see also Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction; Badiou and the Real": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 172; and Žižek: "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism; The Case of Alain Badiou": *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 97, no. 2, 1998, p. 235-261.

<sup>26</sup> See Rösing, Lilian Munk: *Könnets katekismus*, Roskilde Universitetsforlag, Frederiksberg, 2005, p. 153 ff. For other readings of Badiou on love, see *e.g.* Hoens, Dominiek: "De l'amour selon Alain Badiou": *Écrits autour de la pensée d'Alain Badiou* (ed. Bruno Besana and Oliver Feltham), L'Harmattan, Paris, 2007, p. 233-244; Webster, Jamieson: "On Love and Shame": *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2008, p. 2395-2405.

masculinity add up to a potential theory of gender or sexuation. My thesis does not so much posit the question of the possible conceptualizations of sexual matters to be found in Badiou's philosophy, or of that which Badiou thinks of sex. Rather, it posits the question of *that which sex makes Badiou think* or, more precisely, of *that which sex is the mark of in Badiou's thinking*.

My thesis make the claim that the moments at which sexual matters intrude upon Badiou's argumentation are also the moments at which the decisive elements of Badiou's arguments meet up and where his elaborations on the subject, its ethical portents, and the possibilities for radical change beyond Lacan reach their climax. Its claim goes beyond the notion that an implicit entertainment of sexual matters in Badiou's work is in need of closer scrutiny. Alenka Zupančič has argued that the sexual constitutes a 'missed encounter' between psychoanalysis and philosophy, a missed encounter that is especially pronounced in the case of Badiou.<sup>27</sup> My thesis involves an amplification of the implications of Zupančič's statement, to the extent that Zupančič's statement turns into the opposite claim, that sexual matters constitute the very crux of the encounter between the psychoanalytic teachings of Lacan and Badiou's philosophical works. My thesis highlights how sexual matters constitute something akin to the impossible proper, the impasse, or the real from the encounter of which the philosophy of Badiou spins its concepts of being, the event, truths, and the subject. It states that among the many lines of thought, traces of influence, and points of dissent that make up the intricate relations at work in Badiou's philosophical works and its traversal of the Lacanian framework, a key to the disentanglement of these lines of thought is to be located at the precise junctions where the ethical thrust of Badiou's work is inadvertently motivated and tangled up in seemingly unwarranted conjunction with sexual matters, at the moments where Badiou's project cannot avoid a certain 'tarrying with sexual matters'.

In not reading for the meaning of sexual matters but for its mark, the main thesis of this dissertation is thus of a methodological or strategic character. Sex marks the spot or the knot to be disentangled. It sticks to Lacan's notion of sex as real and the

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<sup>27</sup> See Alenka Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis? Three Interventions*, NSU Press, Uppsala, 2008, p. 21; see also Zupančič: "The Fifth Condition": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 191-201.

real as the impasse of formalization, as a dense and productive gap or fault. My thesis thus relates back to my basic presupposition and inquires into the function of sexual matters in relation to ethics and the subject of politics, in thinking radical change. The displacement of sexual matters from its key position in psychoanalysis does not entail its absence. Sexual matters still insist in thinking radical change, and by a further interrogation of the points at which sexual matters reemerge in Badiou's arguments, a better comprehension of the significance of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications can be achieved. The intrusions of sexual matters at places where sexual matters do not constitute the topic under discussion are taken to indicate points in Badiou's relation to Lacan that are especially dense, especially charged with significance and signifying possibilities. Sexual matters thus become the objective lens through which I approach, read, and analyze Badiou's work, not only as it depends on the teachings of Lacan but also as it struggles to move beyond the premises of the Lacanian model.

### ***Sexual Matters as Non-Object***

Sexual matters are not simply the objective lens through which I approach and analyze Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy, but also an element of psychoanalysis and the teachings of Lacan in its own right, as a crucial moment in the psychoanalytic theories of the subject, and in its potential for subversion and change. A clarification of the term 'sexual matters' is therefore required. The fundamental concern of the psychoanalytical orientation is not constituted by the categories of gender but rather by the questions of sex and the sexual. Psychoanalysis addresses the questions that the libido, the sexual drive, poses in and for human existence. As questions posed in and for human existence, the sexual that psychoanalysis refers to cannot be categorized in accordance with any too simple schematics of the sex/gender binary. Instead, the psychoanalytic notion of the sexual designates both the cause and the effect of the ultimate failure of too simple schematics, as it is not nature nor culture, nor both. Rather the sexual designates an excess of the bungled consummation of nature and culture. The psychoanalytic insight concerns its appreciation of sex and the sexual as

an insistent but all the more enigmatic entity, a recurrent question in lack of an answer, a strangely intrusive Thing that is itself subtracted from communication and that renders communication itself inherently problematic. Like the concept of the unconscious, the sexual problematic is an obstacle to its own conceptualization, and from the sexual reference of the bungled consummation of nature and culture swerves those bungled thoughts and actions that betray the presence of the unconscious.

The sexual names both the act and the fact in and by which the attempts at fixed and univocal categorizations and codifications of identities falter, especially but not exclusively those concerning sex and gender. This most radical aspect of psychoanalysis is often bypassed. Freud's denouncement of the capacities of biology and psychology to explain the enigma of femininity might have acquitted him from the accusations of biological determinism. On the other hand, Freud's proposition that the task of analysis is to address the question of the becoming of a woman rather than her being has been highlighted as an early contribution to the comprehension of gender as a social and cultural construction.<sup>28</sup> Freud might thereby seem to mirror the sex-gender distinction proposed in the works of Margaret Mead.<sup>29</sup> Gayle Rubin thus suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis provides the conceptual tools by which to (first) describe and (after Freud) criticize the so-called 'sex/gender system' that is responsible for the oppression of women.<sup>30</sup> Freud does offer a description of such a system, but that is not all he does. Rubin leaves out how also feminine sexuality, like its masculine other, testifies to a basic disconcertion [*Sträuben*] between the constitution and the function

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<sup>28</sup> See Freud, Sigmund: *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* [1933]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band XV*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1940, p. 124. For Freud portrayed as providing an early framework for addressing gender as social construction, any introduction or text book on gender studies and gender theory will do, but see e.g. Cranny-Francis, Anne, Wendy Warring, Pam Stavropoulos and Joan Kirkby: *Gender Studies; Terms and Debates*, Palgrave/MacMillan, Basingstoke/New York, 2003, p. 12; or Jegerstedt, Kari and Ellen Mortensen: "Hva er kjønn? Ulike tilnæringsmåter": *Kjønnsteori* (ed. Ellen Mortensen *et al.*), Gyldendal, Oslo, 2008, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> See Mead, Margaret: *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* [1935], William Morrow & Co., New York, 1963; and Mead: *Male and Female* [1949], Harper/Collins, New York, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Rubin, Gayle: "The Traffic in Women; Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex": *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (ed. Rayna R. Reiter), Monthly Review Press, New York/London, 1975, p. 157-210. For similar approaches and appreciations of psychoanalysis as a descriptive tool, see also Mitchell, Juliet: *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Allen Lane, London, 1974; and Chodorow, Nancy: *The Reproduction of Mothering; Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978.

of sexuality.<sup>31</sup> Left out from Rubin's reading of psychoanalysis as a descriptive theory of the sex/gender system is the fact that the sexual to which psychoanalysis refers is something that does not work, that always leaves something out. Jacqueline Rose argues that Rubin and others with her construe psychoanalysis as without an unconscious. Rubin assumes that the internalizations of norms and constitutions of identities work, while the basic premise of Freud is the opposite, namely that they do not: "the unconscious constantly reveals the 'failure' of identity."<sup>32</sup> At its most radical, psychoanalysis should be recognized for its subversion or disruption of the capacities of both nature and culture to provide a positive ground for the categories pertaining to sex and gender. Psychoanalysis is not alone in such subversions. Donna Haraway speaks of the cultural production of nature and the natural production of culture as 'naturecultures'.<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler topples the nature/culture distinction by setting up gender not only as the cultural meaning inscribed upon a pre-given natural sex but also as the very apparatus through which sex itself is established as a pre-given natural, with sex itself as a gendered category, a regulatory ideal or ideal construct.<sup>34</sup> But beyond the coalescence of categories disturbing a too neat distinction of nature and culture, the psychoanalytic subversion recognizes at their intersection something in excess, something that does not fit in, a returning obstacle or failure inherent to the constitution of categories and formation of identities themselves. Lacan refers to this excess or failure with the names of *surplus jouissance* or the object *petit a*, or also the real of the drive, *das Ding*, and it is this excess that is the sexual in psychoanalysis. It is by its attentiveness to how the sexual poses an obstacle to categorizations and codifications of identities that psychoanalysis is still relevant for feminism and emancipatory projects today.

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<sup>31</sup> See Freud: *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>32</sup> Rose, Jacqueline: "Femininity and its Discontents" [1983]: *Ethics; A Feminist Reader* (ed. Elizabeth Frazer, Jennifer Hornsby and Sabina Lovibond), Blackwell, Oxford/Cambridge (MA), 1992, p. 243.

<sup>33</sup> See *e.g.* Haraway, Donna: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, vol. 1, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> See Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [1990]: Routledge, New York/London, 2007, esp. p. 8-10; and Butler: *Bodies that Matter; On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* [1993], Routledge, New York/London, 2011, esp. p. xi-xii.

When I choose the term 'sexual matters' – rather than those of sex, the sexual, sexuality, or the sexual drive – in talking of the preconditions for the subject and possibilities of change, I do so mainly for two reasons. First of all, it is to make as broad as possible a reference to the psychoanalytic take on the sexual as a recurrent question in and for the existence of speaking beings. It is so as to have access to a term that can indiscriminately be applied to equally address such relatively disparate phenomena as sexual organs and sexual acts, sexual practices and sexual preferences, sexual objects and sexual aims, sexual identifications and sexual difference, while still granting these phenomena their participation in the overall impasse or deadlock that is the sexual problematic psychoanalytically conceived.

Secondly, by gathering together the diversity of sexual phenomena under the overarching heading of 'matter', I seek to underscore the materialist underpinnings of the psychoanalytic stance on the sexual problematic. Obviously, it is not an issue of materialist underpinnings in the vulgar sense by which the sexual problematic would be reducible to some tangible hands-on objectivity of the physical world, *i.e.* the physical body, if such a materialism exists at all. It would run counter to that which has been said of the psychoanalytic perspective on the sexual as an excess at the intersection of nature and culture. Rather psychoanalysis musters its materialist strength in the simple yet precise sense to which Badiou has pinned materialism, namely as the primacy of being over thinking.<sup>35</sup> Sexual matters do not depend upon thinking; *a contrario*, thinking depends upon sexual matters. Psychoanalysis musters its materialist strength in the sense that the sexual problematic constitutes both the source and aim of its orientation, a first and last point of reference whose obscure density continues to insist as that which both induces and eludes thinking, as its ultimate and ultimately exclusive condition, as an impenetrable obstacle productive of thought. To say it in punning shorthand: the sexual matters, period.

Psychoanalytically speaking, sexual matters matter as an excess beyond the sex/gender and nature/culture distinctions. Its materialist underpinnings are not those of a more orthodox historical-materialist concern for the material relations and forces at the basis of the current mode of re-production, as is Rubin's. Neither is it an issue of

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<sup>35</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 135.



positing a discursive challenge to the presumed irreducibility of materiality through evincing the materializing powers of discourse, as does Butler.<sup>36</sup> Nor is it the corporeality of the body that is raised as a question or point of inquiry, even if this corporeality is conceived of as a vibrant field of ever flowing forces or a surface of intensities and interacting affects, as is the case, in various ways, in the works of Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, and Jane Bennett.<sup>37</sup> It is not an issue of a so-called new materialist appreciation of 'materiality as force.'<sup>38</sup> Already the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism determined the subjective dimensions of objectivity, as it situated objective truth within the antagonistic relations of class struggle. The theoretical contributions of Butler, Braidotti, and Bennett (*inter alia*) continue to displace the naive notion of objectivity, leaning on Adrienne Rich's 'politics of location'<sup>39</sup> and Haraway's 'situated knowledges'.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, matter, materiality, and processes of materialization still enter into their discussions in ways pertaining to the object: as the object of interrogation or the object of investigation, even as it is continually re-forged or re-negotiated in the process. Matter figures there in some sense of positivity, whereas the materialist underpinnings of psychoanalysis amount to the opposite: not so much materiality as force but rather force as materiality. The notion of sexual matters as an obdurate density or impenetrable obstacle productive of thinking should be grasped as a strict negativity. Joan Copjec notes how the sexual problematic in psychoanalysis does not pertain to "any positive phenomenon, word or object, but is

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<sup>36</sup> Butler: *Bodies that Matter*, *op.cit.*

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Grosz, Elisabeth: *Volatile Bodies; Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1994; Grosz: *Space, Time, and Perversion; Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, Routledge, New York/London, 1995; Braidotti, Rosi: *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* [1994], Columbia University Press, New York, 2011; Braidotti: *Metamorphoses; Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Polity Press, London, 2002; Bennett, Jane: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> For this specific formulation, see Hinton, Peta and Iris van der Tuin: "Preface": *Women; A Cultural Review (Feminist Matters; The Politics of New Materialism)*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2014, p. 1-8. For more on the new materialist feminism, see e.g. Dolphijn, Rick and Iris van der Tuin: *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (ed. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin), Open Humanities Press/Michigan Publishing, Ann Arbor, 2012; and Stephens, Elizabeth: "Feminism and New Materialism; The Matter of Fluidity": *Interalia; A Journal of Queer Studies (Bodily Fluids)*, vol. 9, 2014, p. 186-202.

<sup>39</sup> Rich, Adrienne: "Notes Towards a Politics of Location" [1984]: *Blood, Bread, and Poetry; Selected Prose 1979-1985*, W.W. Norton & Co, London/New York, 1994, p. 210-231.

<sup>40</sup> See Haraway: "Situated Knowledges; The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective": *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, p. 575-599.

manifest in negative phenomena exclusively: lapses, interruptions."<sup>41</sup> Sexual matters designate a fault or hole in thinking, from which thinking emanates, and around which thinking swerves. Žižek has made the most out of this materialism, in his readings of Hegel and Lacan. He conceives of the negative tensions or antagonisms between a notion and reality as a tension immanent to the notion itself, from which the notion springs, or as the movement by which a thing emerges out of its own loss.<sup>42</sup> My point is that the materialist underpinnings of psychoanalysis in this dissertation do not amount to a theory about sex or sexuality as such: psychoanalysis teaches, strictly speaking, nothing about sexual matters. Rather it marks the traces of sexual matters in speaking beings, their effects on the subject and their consequences in and for thinking.

Sexual matters constitute the non-object of psychoanalysis as well as the non-object through which this dissertation approaches its subject matter, namely the question of how to read Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking the subject of politics and the possibilities for radical change and true novelty. Like in psychoanalysis, my readings and analyses do not take the occurrence of sexual matters in Badiou's work as lessons on sexuality. Rather, the intrusions of sexual matters in Badiou's arguments are taken as indications of particular dense and obscure points, or symptomal knots, in his relation to Lacan. Like in psychoanalysis, my method consists in the analytical elaboration of these symptomal knots, nesting up the lines of thought and threads of influence that are in play there, in order to make sense of the seemingly senseless points. It is not a matter of reading for the blind spots in Badiou's argumentation. Rather, it is a matter of making the most out of these occurrences of sexual matters, and to read under the assumption that sexual matters serve as much to conceal as to disclose the key strands in and through which the ethical thrust of Badiou's work and his thinking of radical change after Lacan is knotted together. My thesis is first and foremost a methodological thesis in the sense that it thus returns the Lacanian conception of

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<sup>41</sup> Copjec: "The Sexual Compact": *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> See Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 807; and Žižek: *Absolute Recoil; Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, Verso Books, London, 2014, p. 1.

sexual matters as real and the real as the impasse of formalization back into the readings it offers of Badiou's traversal of the Lacanian framework.

### ***Dialectic of the Subject and Politics of Change***

The overall question is how an analysis of the function of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacan can elucidate on how the Lacanian framework informs Badiou's philosophical project and its elaborations on another thinking of the subject of politics, the ethics of the act, and the possibilities for true novelty and radical change. It is an issue of the relevance of Badiou's thinking as an intervention into other theories of change and politics, at large and within the field of gender research. Ever since Marx' eleventh thesis on Feuerbach claimed that the aim of philosophy is to change the world, questions of change and political action have occupied the minds of philosophers and theorists alike, and feminism is no exception in this regard. Since its origin in the women's movement's struggle for emancipation and the theorization of that struggle, questions relating to the subject of politics have occupied gender research from the start. Although there are more feminisms than one, a general trait can be recognized in the opposition to oppressive regimes and structures, on the one hand, and in the promotion of equality (even in difference) as a fundamental principle, on the other. While initially inclined to the question of women's status, feminism nonetheless tends towards a universal scope, where none should be politically, economically, or socially oppressed, no matter their particularities (of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, creed, ability, class, *etc.*).<sup>43</sup> In its universal scope, feminism constitutes a radical emancipatory project, and it is primarily as such a

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<sup>43</sup> If not as a progressive movement, at least a movement of gradual inclusion or broadening of the perspectives of feminist theory characterizes its history, with Black Feminism (see *e.g.* hooks, bell: *Ain't I a Woman; Black Women and Feminism*, South End Press, Boston MA, 1981), Postcolonial perspectives (see *e.g.* Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty: *In Other Worlds; Essays in Cultural Politics*, Methuen, London, 1987), Lesbian and Gay, and later Queer perspectives (see *e.g.* Wittig, Monique: *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1992; Rich: "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence": *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980, p. 631-660; and Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky: *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990), Crip and disabilities perspectives (see *e.g.* Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie: *Extraordinary Bodies; Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997; and McRuer, Robert: *Crip Theory; Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, New York University Press, New York, 2007).

radical emancipatory project that this dissertation offers a contribution to feminism, that is, to a struggle against oppressive regimes and structures *tout court*. Badiou's work concerns feminism to the extent that both can be said to subscribe to the dictum that the emancipation of one goes by the emancipation of all.

Psychoanalysis is often accused of reproducing an oppressive sex/gender system, a phallogocentric economy, a hegemonic masculinity, or a normative heterosexual matrix. If Freud and Lacan are not strictly normative in their accounts of the subordination of women, their descriptions of the apparatuses and operations at work have been accused of failing to account for the historical preconditions of the established structures and, hence, for other possibilities. Luce Irigaray therefore seeks to tease out the hidden feminine repressed from the history of Western metaphysics in a critical mime,<sup>44</sup> whereas Butler suggests a critical genealogy of power's legitimating practices and the categories of identity thereby engendered and installed as self-explanatory.<sup>45</sup> These attacks on psychoanalysis miss out on its radical core, and while there might be a need for critiques of the apparatuses and operations of oppression, I express some impatience in regard to the capacities of strictly critical endeavors to provide the opportunity for actual change to occur. If capitalism is the prime operator of subordination today, the question of emancipation has to somehow address the issue of how capitalism thrives by eating its own opposition, by continuously including the excluded others within itself. The critical endeavors of pointing out how various subjects of sex, gender, and desire are excluded by various practices of power and discourse run the risk of facilitating capitalism in its feast on such excluded others, by diligently pointing these others out. But how can anything but a displacement of subordinated subject-positions and oppression can take place by such a move, in contrast to the radical change and true novelty implied by an actual non-oppressive regime? An actual non-oppressive regime might be utopian, but that is no argument against the attempt to think its possibility. Badiou calls such attempts 'communism', and his philosophical works suggest an entrance into the conundrum of thinking radical change through a materialist dialectic in which exceptional truths occasionally

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<sup>44</sup> See Irigaray, Luce: *Speculum de l'Autre femme*, Éditions du minuit, Paris, 1974.

<sup>45</sup> See Butler: *Gender Trouble*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

intrude into the mix of bodies and languages otherwise recognized by the dominant ideology of so-called democratic materialism.<sup>46</sup> The decisive point, as Bosteels points out, is precisely the status of truths as ruptures in established states of structures, where a strictly negative critique gives way to a subject's affirmation of the affirmative force of such ruptures. Badiou will find a first but not sufficient theorization of truths as ruptures in structure, as 'holes in knowledge', in Lacan's teachings on the subject of psychoanalysis.<sup>47</sup>

Badiou is not alone to appreciate the radical potential of psychoanalysis. As Lacanian psychoanalysis turns increasingly towards the notions of the real and the drive as the inherent limits of the symbolic, the law, and the structures of desire, it reveals a potential to serve as more than a mere description or diagnostics of the *status quo*. Žižek, for instance, will appropriate Lacan as a basis both of an advanced critique of the ideology of contemporary capitalism and as a radical theory of the act, of subjective destitution as an extreme subtraction from oppressive structures and subordination.<sup>48</sup> Copjec makes a similar point, simultaneously criticizing that which she determines as Butler's discursive-deconstructive position on the sexual problematic as an incomplete meaning to be endlessly re-negotiated through performative reiterations. Sex as real designates the internal limits of language and installs the subject of sex at the same level as the law, neither above nor below, writes Copjec, claiming this to be the only way to secure the incalculability of the subject and a space for action.<sup>49</sup> These examples underline a radical potential in the psychoanalytic conception of the subject beyond the mere plaything of a presumed ahistorical or irretrievable instance of the law. Subjective destitution does not designate the mechanical procedures of a more or less well-functioning symbolic structure or discursive regime, but a radical act in and by which a subject constitutes and determines both itself as a subject and the field into which it intervenes. The non-object of sexual matters marks the terms and preconditions are for a political subject in

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<sup>46</sup> See Badiou: *Logiques des mondes, op.cit.*, p. 9 ff.

<sup>47</sup> See Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics, op.cit.*, p. 2 ff. See also Badiou: "La vérité; forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology* [1989], Verso Books, London/New York, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> See Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason": *Supposing the Subject* (ed. Joan Copjec), Verso Books, London/New York, 1994, p.16-44.

the sense that the subject in question is as much the material as the agency by which changes in the political field proceed. At issue is the mark of sexual matters in Badiou's contributions to thinking such an ethics of the subjective act as a precondition for change.

Badiou celebrates the teachings of Lacan for its refusal to give up on a theory of the subject where his contemporaries preferred to let it disappear in the play of structures and powers (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault), without regressing to the metaphysics of a pre-modern humanist notion of the individual self. The Lacanian subject is a void subject, ultimately meeting up in its ontological determination in a void object *petit a*, the real cause of desire, *i.e.* the non-object of sexual matters.<sup>50</sup> Against the metaphysics of the humanist individual, Badiou turns to Lacan to elaborate on a dialectics of the subject, the so-called black sheep of dialectical materialism, where dialectics is to be read quite simply as the priority of division over unity.<sup>51</sup> Division is productive of change, whereas unity proffers nothing but static preservation and infinite repetition, and the Lacanian subject is nothing if not a split subject, or the split as subject. As Lacan ties his split subject to its ontological determination in the object *petit a*, Badiou sees the possibility of thinking another materialist dialectic, relating being (the non-object or void as productive of thinking) and division (the subject as productive of change). At the same time, Lacan is always the antiphilosopher to be traversed and worked through. As Hallward notes, Badiou's philosophical works are one continuous effort to move beyond the constraints of the Lacanian framework, which Badiou perceives as too caught up in the statics of structure. Lacan's theory of the subject is no exception, and against its punctual and void occurrence in Lacan, Badiou will strive to make *un pas de plus* and to think the subject as process, as continuation.<sup>52</sup> My questions are how sexual matters mark Badiou's elaboration on the subject as process, and what its implications are for

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<sup>50</sup> See Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie, op.cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>51</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet, op.cit.*, p. 135. See also Pluth: "The Black Sheep of Materialism: The Theory of the Subject": *Badiou and Philosophy* (ed. Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, p. 99-112.

<sup>52</sup> See Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003, p. 144.

thinking emancipation and the subject of politics as the possibility for radical change and true novelty.

The non-object of sexual matters serves to interrogate a universalized conception of the subject, in which the subject carries no particular specificity. Hence this dissertation does not concern the formulation of an ethics or a politics of sex and gender in the objective genitive, where sexual matters and gender issues would become the object of ethical deliberations or political administrations within a given body politic. On the contrary, it considers the formulation of a sexual politics or a politics of sexual matters in the subjective genitive, in a tradition that interrogates the mechanisms by which the political field can be said to be undercut by sexual matters and that appreciates a sexual politics in the subjective sense insofar as it is attentive to the mechanisms by which sexual matters is effective in the execution of politics and the failed articulations of a given body politic. For instance, James Penney argues for sexualizing politics rather than politicizing the sexual,<sup>53</sup> and Žižek's analyses of anti-Semitic and racist *jouissance* go to show how politics is already sexualized.<sup>54</sup> Sexual matters signal an excess undercutting the political field, the bungled consummation of nature and culture, thwarting its trajectories and preventing its closure, betraying an obverse of so-called civilization, its discontents proper.

However, sexualizing the politics of emancipation in a subjective sense also means to conceptualize the subject of politics on the basis of a formalized cast that is sexually differentiated. In critiques of Western rationality as inherently phallogocentric and coterminous with patriarchy and heterosexual hegemony, the notions of masculinity and oppressive exclusion are often hard to differentiate. Masculinity is oppressive as oppression is masculine, insofar as both depend on the One, on the concept. The others of the One thus also conflate easily, and femininity often signal an alternative to oppressive mechanisms and a route to emancipation, as in the feminine style of Jacques Derrida's deconstructions or the becoming-woman of

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<sup>53</sup> See Penney, James: *After Queer Theory; The Limits of Sexual Politics*, Pluto Press, London, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. Žižek: *The Metastases of Enjoyment; Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, Verso Books, London, 1994.

Deleuze's processes of deterritorialization.<sup>55</sup> French feminism has attempted to open a way out from under the binaries of masculine hegemony by conjoining femininity and vacillations of differences, movements and mobility, indiscernibility and the blurring of limits: e.g., Irigaray's fluids, Julia Kristeva's semiotic *chora* and cyclic temporalities, and Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine*.<sup>56</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's strategic essentialism also allows femininity to be used as a critical starting point for change,<sup>57</sup> whereas Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity applies an unfinished feminine materiality in an account of how becoming can produce a break with both universalism and dualism.<sup>58</sup> Lacan's teachings on the real of sexual difference also offers a formalization of the subject of politics according to a sexually differentiated logic: the excess of sexual matters undercutting the political field can be inscribed within a subjective structure in one of two ways, masculine or feminine. Whereas a masculine logic denies and excludes the excess as a means to underpin and secure the consistency and continuity of the body politic, i.e. the Law, the inflection of the subject of politics by feminine parameters, as non-all, acknowledges the excess as the very point through which a transformation of the body politic and the political field can be facilitated. At issue is not only to what extent a notion of a feminine other informs Badiou's conceptualization of change, but also how an analysis of the function of sexual matters can underline the implications involved in the notion of the feminine.

While punctual and static in Lacan, the feminine non-all nonetheless underscores Badiou's own theory of the subject. Here the subject emanates from an undecidable event and proceeds through the indiscernibles of a situation to count its truth as a generic multiplicity, that is, as a little bit of everything, as a blurring of limits

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<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Derrida, Jacques: *Éperons; Les styles de Nietzsche* [1976], Flammarion, Paris, 2010; and Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *Milles Plateaux; Capitalisme et schizophrénie II*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1980, p. 340.

<sup>56</sup> See Irigaray: "La 'mécanique' des fluides": *Ce sexe qui n'en past un*, Éditions de minuit, Paris, 1977, p. 103-117; Kristeva, Julia: *La Révolution du langage poétique; L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1974, esp. p. 22 ff; Kristeva: "Le temps des femmes": 33/44; *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, vol. 5, 1979, p. 5-19; and Cixous, Hélène: "Le rire de la Méduse": *L'Arc*, vol. 61, 1975, p. 39-54.

<sup>57</sup> See Spivak: "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman": *Displacement; Derrida and After* (ed. Mark Krupnick), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1983, p. 169-195.

<sup>58</sup> See Braidotti: "Interview with Rosi Braidotti": *New Materlism; Interviews and Cartographies* (ed. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, Open Humanities Press/Michigan Publishing, Ann Arbor, 2012, p. 19-37.



and places. Badiou seemingly shares a terminology with feminist routes of emancipation. However, Badiou thinks the others of the One not as a vitalist flux or as the other of a monolithic language, but through mathematics. Caught in the mechanisms of its own object – language – deconstruction leaves out the problematic of the radical act as that by which a subject can come to constitute itself and the field into which it intervenes. Badiou's criticism of Deleuze's vitalism is similar, as it is conceived of as a disguised philosophy of the One, unable to account for radical change: if everything continuously changes in 'one great clamor of being', then change is a constant and hence no change at all.<sup>59</sup> Badiou's mathematics is inclined towards the opposite, namely towards the division of One into two as productive of universality, of radical change *as* true novelty that is equally true in and for all. The choice of mathematics over vitalism as well as deconstruction is decisive for how Badiou comes to think the subject and the possibilities for radical change and novelty. The debates on the miraculous-religious or transcendentalist tendencies in thinking radical change return with the figure of the feminine other, where Badiou's mathematical gesture relieves his thinking of radical change from transcendence.<sup>60</sup> My question is how the figure of the feminine other operate in Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy to escape transcendence and thus to effectuate actual change, in the present.

Against deconstruction and vitalism, Badiou's foundational gesture of equating mathematics with ontology – as the science of pure being as unbound and inconsistent multiplicities of multiplicities – prepares for a materialist dialectic, a philosophy of radical change and true novelty in which truths are conceived on the grounds of the axiomatic break of a subject's decision on the undecidable, a discernment of the indiscernible in a generic multiplicity that thinks the impossible. Lacan's formulations on the real of sexual difference and the logics of sexuation motivates the mathematical gesture of Badiou, as well as Badiou's elaborations of a materialist dialectic, but only in part. The materialist dialectic goes to affirm, Badiou writes, symptomatically quoting Mao Tse-Tung, how 'we will come to know everything we did not know

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<sup>59</sup> See Badiou: *Deleuze; 'La clameur de l'Être'* [1997], Fayard/Pluriel, Paris, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> See Hallward: "Ethics without Others; A Reply to Critchley on Badiou's Ethics", *op.cit.*, p. 28; and Vinolo: *Vivre en Immortel*, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

before'.<sup>61</sup> A Lacanian mantra claims precisely that a truth can only ever be half-spoken or half-said [*mi-dit*]. So if Badiou operates in a continuation of Lacan, the my overall questions are how sexual matters function in Badiou's elaboration on the Lacanian scheme and what these elaborations allow him to think, also beyond Lacan.

### *Prospectives*

My inquiries concern the conceptualizations of truths and subjects that are entailed by the mathematical gesture of Badiou, his elaborations of a materialist dialectic, and how these conceptualizations can be effective for thinking about the possibilities of change. I recognize the key role played by Lacan, while I also recognize how Badiou's project is nothing if not a continuous struggle to traverse the premises of Lacan. My questions therefore concern how Badiou proceeds to think beyond Lacan through Lacan, and what the implications of his specific route through the Lacanian framework are for thinking the subject of politics, the possibilities of change, and the problematic of emancipation. It is to address these questions that I turn to the points at which sexual matters intrude upon Badiou's arguments. My thesis takes the psychoanalytic reference to sex as real and the definition of the real as the impasse to formalization literally, in the sense that the intrusions of sexual matters in Badiou's text mark especially dense and significant points in Badiou's confrontation with the Lacanian framework. Reading for the claim that 'sex marks the spot' thus becomes a methodological or strategic thesis, where the analysis of these points, these symptomatic knots, becomes a method to elaborate on the consequences of Badiou's philosophical project for thinking the subject of politics and the possibilities for change: To proceed from the non-object of sexual matters to thinking the possibilities of change by way of a mathematical ontology of multiplicities and a materialist dialectic of universal truths produced in the continuation of a subjective process borne in the division of an evental rupture – what does this signify?

In addition to a first chapter, "Positing the Presupposition; In Want of an Other...", three main chapters make up this dissertation. These main chapters are

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<sup>61</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet, op.cit.*, p. 217; and Badiou: *Logiques des Mondes, op.cit.*, p. 16.

independent interventions into the field designated by the basic presupposition on the relations between sexual matters, ethics, and the subject of politics. They take place at three precise points where sexual matters resurge seemingly unmotivated in Badiou's texts. They do not present a teleological argument, no gradual evolution towards an ultimate conclusion. The initial chapter is therefore designed in part to serve as a replacement for such an argument. It presents a more extensive discussion of the stakes involved in the basic presupposition that sexual matters inform an ethics of the act in relation to a theory of the subject of politics. In so doing, it provides a more substantial presentation of the field into which my thesis and the three consequent chapters intervene. It also provides a more detailed discussion on the relevant research. It addresses the significance and implications of the dictum that the emancipation of one goes by the emancipation of all in Badiou's philosophy. I first look to the context for Badiou's philosophical works and inquire into how that context informs on Badiou's approach to the subject of politics. I then look to how the psychoanalytic reference to sexual matters and the notion of the drive provide an ethics of a radically subjective act, of subjective constitution at a remove from oppressive structures. Finally, I return to Badiou's work in order to sketch out how the Lacanian framework informs on Badiou's own elaboration on a theory of the subject. The overarching questions directing my inquires in this initial chapter concern the general issues and debates that make up the field in which Badiou's philosophical works have been, are, and will be situated.

My second chapter is entitled "The Infinite and the Feminine Non-All as Inaccessibility and Actuality". It is an issue not only to what extent a notion of a feminine other operates in Badiou's thinking of change, but also the analysis of the function of sexual matters can underline the implications involved in the notion of the feminine, and how the feminine other functions in Badiou's elaboration of actual change that escapes transcendence, so as to be effective in the present situation. It interrogates Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy in the context of Badiou's mature work from the end of the 80s, centered on *L'Être et l'événement*. My point of entry is the paradoxical denotation Badiou chooses for his conceptualization of the generic multiple as the being of truth, which seemingly references Lacan's notion of

the feminine logic of the non-all. Badiou has designated the concept of the generic multiple as the emblem of his philosophical project, something that renders the reference to the feminine non-all of Lacan a curious choice all the time Lacan is the antiphilosopher to be traversed. The reference is all the more problematic insofar as Lacan's notion of the feminine non-all has been the object of severe criticism from Badiou. Badiou criticizes Lacan's notion of the feminine for relying on a romantic conception of the infinite, which renders the feminine inaccessible from within the perspective of the teachings of Lacan. The attempt to make sense out of Badiou's paradoxical denotation serves me to address more fundamental questions concerning the implications of Badiou's traversal of the Lacanian framework. Specifically, the questions concern how Badiou conceives of the problematic of modernity, the death of God, through the set theoretical notion of the actual infinite, and how this conception serves him to think the possibilities for infinite truths as immanent to a situation. Specifically, the questions concern how Badiou utilizes the notion of the actual infinite to think beyond the Lacanian framework and its tendency to reduce the possibilities of radical change to the punctual occurrences of a structural impasse, so as to think the possibilities of change as subjective processes. It is an issue of how Badiou considers the questions of the preconditions and possibilities for the subject of politics and radical change as dependent on the actual infinite in order to be posed at all.

My third chapter, "A Scission in Greek Tragedy Between Two Deaths and the Bringer of Fire", interrogates Badiou's traversal of Lacan within the context of Badiou's works from the 70s, notably *Théorie du sujet* (1982). Badiou's work signifies a shift from Sophocles to Aeschylus. It addresses the mark of sexual matters in Badiou's elaboration on the subject as process, and what its implications are for thinking emancipation, the subject of politics, and the possibility for change and novelty. Tragedy becomes a way to interrogate the relation between the real of sexual difference and class antagonism. The questions are how the real of sex and class provide a basis for a theory of the subject, how the supplementation of the psychoanalytic real of sexual difference with its Marxist other of class implicates another thinking of the subjective formations of radical change, and how the shift from Sophocles to Aeschylus communicates or elucidates on the differences involved. My

point of entry is a reference Badiou makes to a lost play of Aeschylus, *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* (n.d.). I interrogate how the figure of Prometheus can inform on an understanding of the mechanisms of Badiou's conception of the subject between sex and class. The figure of Prometheus serves to highlight three significant features of Badiou's Aeschylean theory of the subject, namely the operation of division, the perspective of the future, and the imagery of fire as a subjective formation of the relation between courage and justice under the sign of confidence. Together, these three features go to the heart of Badiou's so-called Marxist ethics of confidence. They contrast with the three significant features that dominate in the Sophoclean conception of tragedy and the psychoanalytic theory of the subject, namely the operation of reversal, the perspective of the last judgment, and the notion of between two deaths. My questions are how a comparison of the two paradigms can clarify the implications of Badiou's barely made notion of a Marxist ethics of confidence, and how this ethics strives to think the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change beyond the repetitions and contradictions of structures and the law. More generally, these questions relate to the problematic of how a revolt can foster a revolution, or where the demands on the subject of politics begin and end in a revolutionary sequence.

My fourth chapter is entitled "Paradoxes of Totality from Antiphilosophy to a Philosophy to Come". By reading for sexual matters, it focuses on the status of the feminine in Badiou's conceptualization of antiphilosophy. It interrogates the concept of antiphilosophy such as Badiou construes it in the early 90s, after the call to traverse Lacanian antiphilosophy has been made. The main focus of this chapter is the four-year seminar from 1992 to 1996 where Badiou elaborated on an effective concept of antiphilosophy through readings of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lacan, and Saint Paul. My point of entry will be a double exception made of Lacan. Badiou determines misogyny as a distinctive criterion of antiphilosophy, while adding that Lacan is an exception from this trait. At the same time, Lacan is in exception insofar as he is considered to bring contemporary antiphilosophy to a conclusion, as the antiphilosopher to be traversed by another philosophy to come. My main questions concern how the two exception of Lacan relate to each other, and how the relation between them preconditions Lacan's capacity

for thinking about change and novelty, on the one hand, and how Badiou picks up on the double exception of Lacan in another philosophy to come, and how change and novelty is consequently conceived of there, on the other. The double exception of Lacan is formulated in relation to the notion of a feminine remainder accessible only through the antiphilosophical act, on the one hand, and the philosopher's education by science, or mathematics, by which the feminine remainder is foreclosed from the philosopher's thinking operations, on the other. But the misogyny intrinsic to the antiphilosophical formalization precludes the feminine remainder, by referring it to the other side of an absolute break. The scientific education of the philosopher refuses the notion of an inaccessible remainder, as mathematics thinks in and through the impossible. My question is how these two strands meet in Lacan's antiphilosophy, and more specifically in his recourse to the *matheme*. It is a question of how the *matheme* relieves Lacan from the misogynic preclusion of the absolute break, on the one hand, and allows him to mark the function of the remainder, the real, within knowledge, on the other. It is also a question of how the mark of the function of the real within knowledge becomes the mark from which Badiou conceives of the possibility to think radical change and true novelty, in another philosophy to come. Beyond the problematic of how contemporary antiphilosophy, Lacan, and Badiou think the preconditions and possibilities of change and novelty, the overall problematic concerns the preconditions and possibilities for thinking, and in particular for thinking as change and novelty.

## (I)

### **Positing the Presupposition; In Want of an Other...**

This chapter does not so much speak to my main thesis as it addresses the basic presupposition on which my thesis rests and the field into which my thesis intervenes. My aim is to provide a more substantial exposition of the basic presupposition, which states that attempts at thinking the subject of politics and the possibility for radical change and true novelty require an initial inquiry into the relations of ethics and sexual matters. I inquire into how Badiou's philosophical project searches for an entry into the preconditions of a subject of politics and the possibilities for change through mobilizing the sexually informed ethics of Lacanian psychoanalysis, and how it implicates a universal and egalitarian politics of radical emancipation. Lacanian psychoanalysis proposes a sexually informed ethics of a radically subjective act, as an act constitutive of the subject as such. Badiou elaborates his own theory of the subject in close dialogue with Lacan, while insisting to maintain a minimal distance to the Lacanian framework. I contend that in-depth analyses of the precise points in Badiou's philosophical works where a certain 'tarrying with sexual matters' intrude upon his arguments, seemingly unwarranted, will accentuate the strands of Badiou's philosophical works that find their origin in the teachings of Lacan. Such analyses will also accentuate the strands that carry Badiou's attempts to think the preconditions and possibilities of a subject of politics and radical change beyond the Lacanian premises. In providing a more substantial exposition of my basic presupposition in this chapter, I seek to attain a firmer position by which to grasp the contents and implications of my main thesis.

This initial chapter is also an opportunity to bridge the dissertation's introduction and the following chapters. The introduction cannot help being too superficial to present the already extant research on Badiou's philosophical works and its relations to the Lacanian framework in a satisfying manner, while the following

chapters might come across as too technical and detailed to be appreciated by readers unfamiliar with Badiou, Lacan, or both. A more substantial inquiry into the main research on how the Lacanian premises inform on Badiou's philosophical works offers insight into the fundamental issues and debates that both their works have raised, and continue to raise today. It provides a foundation for the chapters to follow, by preparing the basic themes that constitute the field into which these chapters intervene.

Three general questions guide the trajectory by which I seek to address the relations of sexual matters, ethics, and the subject of politics in this chapter. First of all, I ask for the context of Badiou's philosophical work: what is the context in which his thinking takes place, and what does this context force upon Badiou's thinking? What are the problems that the situation imposes upon Badiou's philosophy, and what are the problems that Badiou's philosophy posits as especially incumbent for the present situation? As today's situation is dominated by a hegemonic and globalized capitalism, the overall problem directing Badiou's philosophical works is the want of an other politics: it is precisely the questions of the preconditions and the possibilities of a subject of politics and radical change that the current context and Badiou's project posits as imperative today.

Secondly, as it is primarily to Lacan that Badiou turns in his own theoretical elaborations on the preconditions of a subject, I ask for the contributions on offer by psychoanalysis. How does psychoanalysis think subjective constitution? How does psychoanalysis allow for a theory of radical change? The sexual drive implies a primary loss that renders speaking beings in want of an other sex: sexual relations are by definition defunct as complete fullness of being is impossible, but this impossibility also isolates the point at which the moral law undermines itself and gives way to another ethics of the act, of radical destitution as constitutive of the subject.

Thirdly, I ask for Badiou's appropriation of the Lacanian framework and the significance of his traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy. What does Lacan trigger in Badiou's work, or what do the lacks and limitations in Lacan's elaborations on an ethics of the act effectuate in Badiou's working through of the Lacanian theory of subjective constitution? My main focus is directed at how Badiou has been read to date, intimating a want of an other Badiou: while extant research on the concept of



love as a condition for philosophy has brought to the fore Badiou's Lacanian premises, and debates on Badiou's appropriation of the Lacanian real of sexual difference has stressed the limitations of Badiou's philosophical works, I stress the importance of reading the appropriation of sexual matters together with Badiou's mathematical gesture and materialist dialectic. I focus on how Badiou's mathematical gesture entails another theory of the subject, in which a dialectic of division renders the subject a process whose materialist underpinnings are provided by the event. I argue that Badiou's mathematical gesture and materialist dialectic entail a theory of the subject that is capable of responding to the predicament of globalized capitalism and of anchoring the possibilities for radical change and novelty in the concrete situation of today. In the remaining chapters I will seek to demonstrate how analyses of the intrusion of sexual matters in Badiou's texts can open another entrance into Badiou's philosophical works and serve to unravel the significance and implications of his approach for thinking the preconditions and possibilities of a subject of politics and radical change.

### ***In Want of an Other Politics; Communism as a Working Hypothesis***

In this section, I will address the fundamental problems behind Badiou's theory of the subject and the possibilities of radical change. I focus on the context in which his works are elaborated and to which his works speak, as I examine how the context can come to speak back to the comprehension of the mechanisms and operations of Badiou's philosophical works, to its preconditions and implications. Through a comparison with the last century and its projects for a radical emancipatory politics, I inquire into how Badiou's works address the predicament of today – where an emancipatory project is lacking, where alternative horizons, and thereby a subject of politics, is absent. Badiou offers an analysis into the causes of this specific predicament. He identifies them to be a fully globalized capitalism and the historical failure of communism. But the question remains how Badiou's concrete analyses can inform the more abstract mathematical-philosophical formulations of the subject that

Badiou's philosophical works provide. Through relating the concrete and the abstract, the practical and the theoretical, I seek to provide a first sketch or groundwork for further interrogation of the fundamentals of Badiou's philosophical works and its implications for thinking the subject of politics and radical change.

### *No Horizon, No Subject*

On January 22, 1917, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin gave his lecture on the 1905 revolution at *Zürischer Volkshaus*, to an ensemble of local working class youth. The final paragraph of his speech is well known:

Wir, die Alten, werden vielleicht die entscheidenden Kämpfe dieser kommenden Revolution nicht erleben. Aber ich glaube mit großer Zuversicht die Hoffnung aussprechen zu dürfen, daß die Jugendlichen, die so ausgezeichnet in der sozialistischen Bewegung der Schweiz und der ganzen Welt arbeiten, daß sie das Glück haben werden, nicht nur zu kämpfen, sondern auch zu siegen in der kommenden proletarischen Revolution.<sup>62</sup>

What strikes us about Lenin's conclusion is the apparently unquestioned precondition for his lecture. The indisputable necessity of the struggle itself is the common point of departure that binds the speaker and his audience together. As a demand imposed upon them by the concrete situation, regardless of its eventual victory or defeat, the coming revolution is coming, and when it finally dawns, the older and younger generations alike will come to answer its call, just as they have dutifully been preparing for its arrival. To Lenin, for whom every attempt at not taking sides is taking sides and

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<sup>62</sup> Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov: "Ein Vortrag über die Revolution von 1905" [1917]: *Ausgewählte Werke, Band I*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1979, p. 900 ("We, the elder, will perhaps not live to experience the decisive battles of the coming revolution. But I believe I can express in great confidence my hope that the youth, who are working so impressively in the socialist movement in Switzerland and throughout the whole world, will have the luck not only to fight but also to win in the coming proletarian revolution.").

entails fiasco for the revolution, the struggle has no outside but is a matter of a forced choice, a choice without a choice.<sup>63</sup>

Among Lenin's contemporaries, both Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai answered the forced choice of the revolution by addressing the woman's question and the problematic of sexual relations as interdependent with the class struggle, if in different ways. Zetkin determined that the liberation of the proletarian woman is a joint struggle with the men of her class against capitalism's exploits and race for a cheaper labor force,<sup>64</sup> whereas Kollontai offered a more intricate argument that tied crises in the historical modes of sexual relationships to crises in the material conditions of production and property relations. By criticizing the quality of sexual relationships today, she wrote, one would be doing more than rejecting an out-of-date form of behavior and moral code; one would be rejecting the material basis of these relationships and the notions of individual and private property.<sup>65</sup> Hence sexual and gendered struggles also fell under a choice without a choice.

A hundred years have passed since Lenin gave his lecture, and the concrete situation has changed. It is as hard to fathom a congregation unified in a clearly defined conception of its struggle to which a Lenin of today could express his confident hopes as are such hopes themselves. After the disastrous results with which the last century's excursions into various forms of state socialism ended, the emancipatory projects of the so-called left and the worker's movement have been dispersed and broken, stranded without a consolidating project to even begin to foster hopes for a victorious other future. If the struggle for Lenin and his audience at *Zürischer Volkshaus* had no outside, the predicament now is that the struggle has lost its very inside: in other words, it has lost its very subject.

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<sup>63</sup> See Lenin: "Speech Delivered at an All-Russian Conference of Political Education Workers of Gubernia and Uyezd Education Departments, November 3, 1920": *Collected Works, Vol. 31, April-December 1920* (trans. Julius Katzer), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1966, p. 363-374.

<sup>64</sup> See Zetkin, Clara: "Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman will Socialism be Victorious" [1896]: *Selected Writings* (ed. Philip Froner, trans. Kai Schoenhals), Haymarket Books, Chicago (IL), 2015, p. 72-83.

<sup>65</sup> Kollontai, Alexandra: "Sexual Relationships and the Class Struggle" [1911] (trans. Alix Holt): *Ethics; a Feminist Reader* (ed. Elizabeth Frazer, Jennifer Hornsby and Sabina Lovibond), Blackwell, Oxford/Cambridge (MA), 1992, p. 303-318.

This is the context for Badiou's philosophical project today, and this is where I situate the problematic of the subject of politics and of emancipation in my interrogation of how Badiou's philosophy informs the possibilities for thinking change. Badiou identifies the current predicament of radical emancipatory politics as caused by the dominant ideology of our times, 'democratic materialism', crystalized in the motto of "Vis sans Idée!"<sup>66</sup> Capitalism is hegemonic and the name of our *status quo*, but in fear of changing things for the worse, democratic materialism agrees to mistake hegemonic capitalism as not too bad and more than acceptable. Compared to the first decades of the last century, Badiou writes in *L'Hypothèse Communiste* (2006), the first decades of this century have seen an all-out capitulation to the demands of the market and the capitalist order. Ours is the time of a certain defeatism, discarding every notion of radical change as not only utopian and impossible but also disastrous and criminal by nature, especially the idea of communism that once motivated and moved people by the millions.<sup>67</sup> If emancipatory politics designates an alternative to capitalism, emancipatory politics today is in abeyance, left without an idea *in* or *by* or *for* which to struggle. It is left without any idea of what to do. It has lost from view not only that which Jodi Dean defines as its 'communist horizon' but any horizon at all, every indication of a beyond the *status quo*.<sup>68</sup> Without another horizon, without an idea of an alternative, there is no possible space in which a subject of politics can act or begin to materialize.

The possibility of such a space does not require a concrete alternative idea, a substantial *Jérusalem Céleste* painted on the horizon. The idea of an alternative, or even the idea of the non-necessity of the *status quo* suffices, according to Badiou, to whom the idea of communism is such an idea, one that should be appreciated as an

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<sup>66</sup> See e.g. Badiou: *Logiques des Mondes, op.cit.*, p. 533 ("Live without Idea!"): see also Badiou: "Philosophie et politique": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 218.

<sup>67</sup> See Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste; Circonstances 5*, Nouvelle Éditions Lignes, Paris, 2009, p. 186.

<sup>68</sup> See Dean, Jodi: *The Communist Horizon*, Verso Books, London/New York, 2012, p. 2 ff. She borrows the expression from Bosteels, who in his turn has borrowed it from Álvaro García Linera, vice president of Bolivia since 2006. See Bosteels: *The Actuality of Communism*, Verso Books, London/New York, 2011, p. 226 ff,

operation rather than a notion.<sup>69</sup> Badiou thereby echoes the definition of communism that Marx and Engels proposed in *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1846). They write that

[d]er Kommunismus ist für uns nicht ein *Zustand*, der hergestellt werden soll, ein *Ideal*, wonach die Wirklichkeit sich zu richten haben (wird). Wir nennen Kommunismus die *wirkliche* Bewegung, welche den jetzigen Zustand aufhebt. Die Bedingungen dieser Bewegung ergeben sich aus der jetzt bestehenden Voraussetzung.<sup>70</sup>

Communism is not conceived of as a notion or an ideal state to come, but as an operation or a movement by which the current state of affairs is abolished. In face of such a definition, the capitulation under the logic of the least of all evils cannot justify the evacuation of every opposition to the *status quo*. Dismissals of communism on the ground of its historical failures, as an ideal that has showed itself to be not working, are common across all specters of the political palate today. But the definition of communism as an effective movement would argue the exact contrary: communism is working – working for the abolishment of the established state, which is not working – or it is not at all. The question of its failures cannot be approached as a question internal to the notion itself. It must be grasped in its properly dialectical character, through its contradictory status *vis-à-vis* the concrete situation. The same goes for the question of its successes. The weight rests no more on the past than on the future, but on the here and now of the immediate present. As an effective movement working for the abolishment of the existing state, the only question of interest to communism is the following: even if there were to be no better hells than the present state, is the present state good enough, or are there not issues that warrant a call for change and a consolidation of an alternative horizon and another politics? As an effective movement, communism designates a radical emancipatory project that is likely never to be successful or complete. But the question Badiou's philosophical works serve to

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<sup>69</sup> See Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste*, *op.cit.*, 187.

<sup>70</sup> Marx and Friedrich Engels: *Die deutsche Ideologie* [1846/1932]; *Werke, Band 3*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1978, p. 35 ("Communism is for us not a *situation* to be achieved or an *ideal* after which reality is to adjust itself. We name communism the *real/effective* movement that abolishes the contemporary situation. The conditions of this movement is given by the at the moment existing premises.")

highlight is if incompleteness implies continuous failure, or if it is sufficient for communism to be effectively at work to avoid such a conclusion.

Žižek positions himself within a similar perspective, taking his cue from Lenin's notion that the struggles of the revolution are defined as the struggles of beginning from the beginning over and over again, of continuously returning to the point of departure. Žižek then turns to "Marx's good old notion of communism not as an ideal, but as a movement which reacts to actual social antagonisms,"<sup>71</sup> in order to hone in on the antagonisms by which such a movement can be reactivated today. He identifies four main antagonisms forceful enough to disrupt the reproduction of capitalism:

the looming threat of *ecological* catastrophe, the inappropriateness of the notion of *private property* for so-called 'intellectual property', the socio-ethical implications of *new techno-scientific developments* (especially in biogenetics), and, last but not least, *new forms of apartheid*, new Walls and slums.<sup>72</sup>

The term of communism is justified only by reference to the last antagonism, the one between excluded and included, Žižek continues. The point is not that it has a more pronounced class character than the other three, but that its class character provides a subversive edge to the others and prevents their reduction to matters of mere jurisprudence and legal regulation. Intellectual property and new technologies can be included in the situation's functioning state, whereas new walls and slums address the state at a fundamental level insofar as they address the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion as such. They address the capitalist system at its roots, and can thereby activate a movement for radical change, towards the end of the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion.

The current predicament cannot be that there are no reasons for change. It is not necessary to scratch the shining surface to reveal the dysfunctions underneath, as the surface is cracking by itself and betraying its true colors. Neither do Žižek's four antagonisms make up a comprehensive list of today's challenges. Ours is a world on

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<sup>71</sup> Žižek: "How to Begin from the Beginning": *The Idea of Communism* (ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2010, p. 211.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

the brink of several ecological disasters, from global warming and rising sea levels to mass extinction of species and large scale destruction of forests and farm land; a world where economic crises hit hard and steady, and austerity measures is the order of the day; where people are exploited and dispossessed, while big banks and big business are salvaged at any price; where differences are rising together with the obscure army of the unemployed excess population; where polarizations are taking hold socially as well as geographically; where the migration level is unprecedented, and xenophobia abound; where walls and fences are built faster than they can be torn down; where technocracies, oligarchies, and kakistocracies consolidate power, where parliamentary-democratic institutions lose their legitimacy, their relevance, and their critical impact: in short, a world where capital rules and labor equals unnecessary exploitation. There is, in other words, ample cause for a movement working for the abolishment of the established state, for an effective communist movement.

The oppression and subordination under capitalism can be tackled from other perspectives, as does *e.g.* Robert McRuer with his concept of 'crip times',<sup>73</sup> but the questions raised through Badiou's revitalization of the communist hypothesis is whether or not other notions than communism – as an axiomatic equality – is capable to address the fundamental mechanisms of capitalism as such. But if communism as a real and working movement is the best designation for addressing the issues of change and political action today, as Badiou and Žižek argue, it is a communism that is not and cannot be the same as the absolute and total struggle of Zetkin, Kollontai, and Lenin. If the necessity of addressing the issues of change and political action is as indisputable today as it was a century ago, the preconditions and points of departure differ. Whereas Lenin's address at *Zürischer Volkshaus* took for granted the space of its reverberation (the masses of the working class) as a self-evident common ground for the subject of politics (the proletariat and the party), such a space and ground are not unquestionably valid today. What are the preconditions for a subject of politics,

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<sup>73</sup> See McRuer: "Inhabitable Spaces: Disability, Displacement, and *El Edificio de Enfrente*", paper presented at *Disabilities, Arts, and Health*, the 9th annual conference of the Nordic Network of Gender, Body, Health, Bergen, September 2, 2016. See also McRuer: *Crip Times; Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*, New York University Press, New York, forthcoming 2018.

which subject is at stake, and where are the possibilities for such a subject to be found today; these questions constitute the context for Badiou's philosophical works.

### *A Concrete Analysis of a Concrete Situation*

Badiou's philosophical works are conditioned by the questions of the possibilities and preconditions of a subject of radical change and true novelty in the political field today (as his works are conditioned by the questions of change and novelty in the fields of art, love, and science, as well), and these questions are the context to read Badiou's philosophical works through. His works deal extensively with the reality and the gravity of current circumstances, as well as with political action as a historical and a contemporary question. His works intervene on the scene of both theoretical and practical discussions on the state of Marxism and the possible revitalization of an alternative politics today. To Hallward and his now classic *Badiou; A Subject to Truth* (2003), "no philosopher is more urgently needed, in this particular moment, than Badiou,"<sup>74</sup> precisely because Badiou's works have revitalized the discussions on a possible revitalization of an alternative politics themselves, by insisting on a politics of truths as a politics of generic equality, of singular and subjectively affirmed universality. Badiou sketches a politics against the dominant focus on the particularities of individuality, identities, rights, and the "post-modern doxa," in Žižek's words, which "renders politics a matter of *phronesis*, of strategic judgments and dialogue, not of applying fundamental cognitive insights."<sup>75</sup> Badiou conceives of politics as a truth procedure originating in an unpredictable event and carried out through the fidelity of a militant subject. He thereby "forces us to think the emergence of a new and profoundly transformed situation as a result of the articulation of a singular truth onto an existing state of things," as Bosteels observes in his *Badiou and Politics* (2011).<sup>76</sup> Badiou is often celebrated for having initiated a new theoretical appreciation of that which a subject of politics and a subjective engagement in a

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<sup>74</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>75</sup> Žižek: "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism; The Case of Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 240. This article can also be found in a more elaborate version in Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject; The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* [1999], Verso Books, London/New York, 2008, p. 145 ff.

<sup>76</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics, op.cit.*, p. 2.



political procedure can be.<sup>77</sup> But Badiou does more. He also elaborates on the possibilities of political practices based on the concrete analysis of the situation in the world today.

It is in the intersection of theory and practice that Badiou's philosophical works must be situated, if the contributions to thinking the subject of politics and the possibilities of change that his works open for are to be grasped in the full significance of their implications. There are two main points in Badiou's concrete analysis of the concrete situation today: Firstly, capitalism is absolute and fully globalized. Secondly, the cause of this state is the historical failure of the communist hypothesis to hold up a viable alternative. How is one to understand the mechanisms that underpin his analyses and the operations of his attempts to think the possibilities of change today? My question is not how to save the world, but how to pose the question. In that regard, Badiou's analyses of the historical failure of the communist hypothesis, on the one hand, and the state in which this failure has left the contemporary situation, on the other, constitute a definitive moment.

The questions of the preconditions for the subject of politics and the possibilities of change have been a constant in Badiou's professional and personal life for at least half a century. Bosteels and others have argued that politics constitute the decisive condition of the entire philosophical practice of Badiou.<sup>78</sup> Politics' dominant position in Badiou's life was consolidated in the wake of the events of May 68 and his early Maoist years, passing through the 80s and the rise of Chinese capitalism, the collapse of the Soviet Union, up until the unrestrained hegemony of the globalized capitalism of today. His critical voice has not muted, and his confidence for another victorious future has not waned: as he writes in his *Second manifeste pour la philosophie* (2009), every night must end in the promise of a dawn, and he finds it hard to see how things could possibly worsen.<sup>79</sup> However, Badiou offers a more recent

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<sup>77</sup> See e.g. Brassier: "Nihil Unbound; Remarks on Subtractive Ontology and Thinking Capitalism", *op.cit.*, p. 52; Toscano: "From the State to the World; Badiou and Anti-Capitalism": *Communication and Cognition*, vol. 37, n. 3-4, 2004, p. 200; or Dean: *The Communist Hypothesis*, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 17 and 25; see also Pluth: *Alain Badiou*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>79</sup> See Badiou: *Second manifeste pour la philosophie* [2009], Flammarion, Paris, 2010, p. 10.

and comprehensive analysis of the dominant structures of the contemporary world and the effects of these structures on the world populations, in a seminar responding to the November 13 killings in Paris, later published as a short pamphlet under the title of *Notre mal vient de plus loin* (2016).<sup>80</sup> There are three interwoven themes in his analysis, namely the triumph of globalized capitalism, the widespread weakening of the state and state functions, and the emergence of new imperialist practices.

According to Badiou, our time is the time of an unrestrained and measureless capitalism. The logic of capital has been set free. Perhaps it is not the first time the logic of capital has been liberated, but now it is on a scale far greater than before. The logic of capital has a double modality, following the dialectical movement of expansion and concentration, of concentration in and by the fact of its expansion. On the one hand, capitalism expands on all levels and across the globe, as a truly globalized capitalism. On the other hand, in the very act of expanding, capital itself is increasingly privatized and concentrated into the hands of the lucky few of the so-called 1 %. If neo-liberalism has meaning, it is as the liberated logic of capital, a liberated capitalism, Badiou writes. As a consequence of the double modality of capital, a change in the relation between capital and the state has occurred, namely a weakening of the state or state functions. It is not merely a matter of the state serving as a supportive ground for the power of capital, but of a discrepancy of the levels on which states and big business operate. "Too big to fail" is the catch phrase. Big business' influences and interests in industry, banking, and commerce cut across state levels, as big business grows both independent and executive of states and state functions. A final expression of the state function's subversion under globalized capitalism, so far, is found in the new imperialist practices that Badiou designates as 'zoning'. Against the traditional colonial regime, liberated capitalism subscribes to regicide as a tactic: the installation of unregulated and anarchic zones that lack proper

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<sup>80</sup> I will in the following rely on a transcript of his seminar, not the final published text. My references does therefore not have paginations, but I refer mainly to that which composes the text found under the first two subheadings of his lecture, "I/Structure du monde contemporain" and "II/Effet sur les populations," respectively, see Badiou: "Le Séminaire de 30 novembre 2015" (accessed through <http://angelinauzinolleros.blogspot.no/2015/11/contenido-del-seminario-de-badiou-201516.html> – 30.01.2017); see also Badiou: *Notre mal vient de plus loin; Penser les tueries du 13 novembre*, Fayard, Paris, 2016.

state apparatuses encourages an unhindered exploitation, if not indefinitely, at least for a period of time. Badiou's *exempli gratia* are regions spanning the former nation states of Libya, Iraq, Mali, Congo, and the Central African Republic.

The concrete situation of the contemporary world effects the property relations of its populations. Badiou registers an unprecedented level of inequality, and provides some significant numbers:

Nous avons donc une oligarchie de 10% [qui possède 86% des ressources disponibles], et puis nous avons une masse démunie d'à peu près la moitié de la population mondiale [qui ne possède rien], c'est la masse de la population démunie, la masse africaine, asiatique dans son écrasante majorité. Le total fait à peu près 60%. Et il reste 40%. Ces 40%, c'est la classe moyenne. La classe moyenne qui se partage, péniblement, 14% des ressources mondiales.<sup>81</sup>

The middle class is predominantly Western, and the call to protect Western values is taken literally by Badiou, as a call to protect Western wealth and secure the relatively small portion of it that still befalls its dwindling middle classes from being passed on to the masses of destitute others. But, Badiou continues, in a position even more precarious than the destitute half of the world population, there are a growing number of people

dont on peut dire qu'ils sont comptés pour rien [...] *par le capital*, ce qui veut dire qu'au regard du développement structurel du monde, ils ne sont rien, et que donc, en toute rigueur, ils ne devraient pas exister. Ils ne devraient pas être là. Ce serait mieux. Mais ils y sont quand même. [...] Ils n'ont pas accès au travail, ils ne sont

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<sup>81</sup> *Loc.cit.* ("We thus have an oligarchy of 10% [in possession of 86% of the available resources], and then we have a destitute mass counting close to half the world population [in possession of nothing], it is the mass of the destitute population, the African and Asian masses in their overwhelming majority. The total makes close to 60%. 40% remains. These 40% makes up the middle class, the middle class that divides between itself, barely, 14% of the world's resources."). Oxfam international reports the proportions to be more strained, the wealth concentrated in the hands of the richest 1% of the world population outnumbering that of the remaining 99%, where the richest 8 individuals (all men, and seven of them from the US) own as much as the poorest half. See Hardoon, Debora: "An Economy for the 99%: Oxfam Briefing Paper; Summary": *Oxfam International*, January 2017 (accessed through <https://oxfam.app.box.com/v/an-economy-for-99-percent/1/15862322999/122574729994/1-30.01.2017>).

pas non plus écoliers, ou retraités, et, par voie de conséquence, ils n'ont pas accès au marché non plus. Du point de vue de la logique générale du monde, de l'impérieuse et satisfaite mondialisation capitaliste, ils sont comme s'ils n'existaient pas.<sup>82</sup>

The status of such a growing number is more severe than a mere excess work force or reserve army of labor, as in classical Marx, Badiou suggests. The globalized system of capitalism encounters a limit intrinsic to its structure, a limit more definite, where there simply cannot be an accommodation of all women and men under the sign of continuous growth and surplus value. This number is the result of new imperialist zoning, but also its cause. The precarious status of a population counted for nothing and non-existent to the market is that which allows for the installation of unregulated and anarchic zones of exploitation. A population that does not exist is not in need of institutions of protection or recognition. It can easily be left to fend for itself in variously sized armed groups and marauding bands, or interned in variously sized humanitarian camps in the dusty rubble of Dabaab, on the rocky beaches of Southern Europe, or in the banlieues of the world's major cities.

If the reality of numbers such as these is the effect of the concrete situation of the contemporary world, the question in regard to that which is at fault in the concrete situation remains. What enables the extreme expansion and concentration of a liberated and globalized capitalism to affirm itself, unhindered, as it does? Badiou's answer is strikingly simple. Besides the objective victory of globalized capitalism in its expansion across the globe, there is a subjective side to the same victory, made manifest as an almost complete eradication of an alternative route. There is no idea of an alternative orientation of the global system and its organization of production and social relations. The predicament of our times, Badiou explains, is caused by the

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<sup>82</sup> Badiou: "Le Séminaire de 30 novembre 2015", *op.cit.* (a growing number of people "of which one can say that they are counted for nothing [...] *by capital*, that is to say that, in regard to the structural development of the world, they are nothing, and that they thus, strictly speaking, should not exist. They should not be there. It would be better. But they are there, nonetheless. [...] They do not have access to employment, they are neither students nor retirees, and, by consequence, they do not have access to the market. From the point of view of the general structure of the world, the imperious and satisfied capitalist globalization, they are as if they did not exist.")

absence on a global scale of any politics that is truly detached from the interiority of capitalism. When Badiou confronts the November 13 killings by way of a concrete analysis of the concrete situation of the world today, it is not because the mass murders in Paris are perceived to pale in comparison to the daily sufferings occurring elsewhere. Rather, the occurrence of the November 13 killings is a symptom in the place of the real trauma, the real wound: the real wound comes from afar, Badiou writes, and more precisely, it comes from the historical failure of communism.<sup>83</sup>

The historical failure of communism constitutes a recurrent theme in Badiou's philosophical trajectory. Again and again he returns to interrogate the causes and constituents of this failure. Like the political awakening of Badiou in the events of May 68, his so-called Damascene moment,<sup>84</sup> the theme of the historical failure of communism constitutes another foundational moment for Badiou's works. This moment is decisive for his approach to the question of the subject of politics today. Badiou identifies the beginning demise of the communist hypothesis at the historical point where the end of the 70s began to grow near. This point coincides with the death of Mao and the turn to capitalism under Deng Xiaoping in China. It is marked by the renegation of *les nouveaux philosophes* in France. With the rise to power of the Socialist party under the presidency of François Mitterrand in 1981, the so-called red years of the preceding decade had come to a definite end and receded into the regular customs of that which Badiou calls the parliamentary-capitalist order. The red years of the 70s had been a world wide phenomenon, characterized, *e.g.*, by the struggles for national liberation in Vietnam and Palestine, a surge of student movements from Mexico to Japan, massive strikes and occupations of factories and work places in France and Italy, and, last but not least, the Cultural Revolution in China. Mitterrand, however, signified "un revenant fortement marqué par les stigmates de la pourriture [et] d'une libéralisation financière sans précédent, qui commençait l'inclusion de la

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<sup>83</sup> *Loc.cit.* ("Notre mal vient de l'échec historique du communisme. Donc, il vient de loin, en effet.")

<sup>84</sup> See *e.g.* Bosteels: "Can Change be Thought? A Dialogue with Alain Badiou": *Alain Badiou; Philosophy and its Conditions* (ed. Gabriel Riera), Suny Press, Albany, 2005, p. 237.

France dans le capitalisme mondialisé le plus féroce."<sup>85</sup> Finally, with the collapse of the corrupted and defunct Soviet Union a decade later, the last remnant of an alternative to globalized capitalism and its Western democracy pawns was gone.

On the other hand, Badiou continues, the violence and terror that characterized the last spasms of the Second world, state socialism and its associated armed struggles, certainly contributed to the disenchantment of communist hypothesis. Its disenchantment culminated, arguably, in the Khmer Rouge killing fields in Cambodia and the Shining Path in Peru. In attempting to solve every contradiction by way of brutality and death, the revolutionary process was cut short by a net of destruction. It was the failure of the extreme left, in opposition to the rightist failure of parliamentary democracy. The point is not to equate the failures on the right and on the left, but to see how to balance the narrow path between these failures is the impossible task of every radically emancipatory politics and its subject. To resist the fascination of both the powers that be and their blind destruction, both the peaceful continuation and the ultimate sacrifice, has been the conundrum facing revolutionaries since Maximilien Robespierre, Badiou writes, or even as far back as the apostolic Paul *bat* Peter.<sup>86</sup> As the 80s turned to the 90s, the communist hypothesis had failed on both accounts, and our times, the times of absolute liberalism and a hegemonic conviction that "vouloir mieux, c'est vouloir pire"<sup>87</sup> had become a reality.

At the same time, Badiou denies that the failure of the communist hypothesis has an absolute status. He refuses to accept the complete renunciation of the problematic of radical emancipation. Rather, he suggests that the failure of the communist hypothesis should be conceived as relative to its form – its particular manifestations – along the equivalent of a scientific hypothesis: centuries of failed solutions only prove fertile for its potential, consequent confirmation, and the historical failure of the hypothesis is only the history constituting its eventual justification. For instance, Badiou suggests, it is first under the absolutely liberated and

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<sup>85</sup> Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste, op.cit.*, p. 52 ("a ghost strongly marked by the stigmas of rot [...], of an economic liberalization without precedent, which began the inclusion of France in the most ferocious globalized capitalism")

<sup>86</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 18-20.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 ("to want better is to want worse").

globalized hegemony of capitalist logic today that the conditions are in place for a proper communist international,<sup>88</sup> or even a communist *transnational*.<sup>89</sup>

My issue is not necessarily if such a communist transnational is the answer to the questions of the possible subject of politics at stake today. My point is rather that any answer to the questions of the preconditions and possibilities of a subject of politics and radical change today can only begin to be elaborated on the basis of such concrete analyses of the concrete situation. To Badiou, such an analysis entails interrogating a globalized capitalism and its effect on the world population, on the one hand, and the causalities behind the historical failures of the communist hypothesis, on the other. Such an analysis in itself does not secure an actual and effective communist movement, but it is a way to begin to answer the question of how a new horizon would possibly be opened and a new subject of politics installed in our times. It allows for a commencing reformulation of how a radical emancipatory politics can become effective.

### *The Subject in Question*

Badiou's philosophy offers a theory of the subject, elaborated in highly abstract mathematical and philosophical terms that are themselves empty. Set theory itself does not speak directly to the dispossessed masses of globalized capitalism or to the lessons to be learned from the historical failures of the communist hypothesis. The question is not only how Badiou's philosophical works can speak to the concrete situation today, but also how Badiou's concrete analysis speaks to his philosophical works: by which means is a subject conceivable at this intersection? Bosteels identifies the rational kernel of Badiou's entire philosophical endeavor in how Badiou forces us to think radical change and novelty as the articulation of truth onto an existing state of things. He has argued for how the activist stance underlying Badiou's subject of politics distinguishes Badiou's project from fellow travellers in radical thinking today. He observes four strong points in Badiou's thinking by which an actually existing truth is

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<sup>88</sup> See Badiou: *Second manifeste pour la philosophie, op.cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>89</sup> See Badiou: "Le Séminaire de 30 novembre 2015", *op.cit.*

considered possible: a) the occurrence of an event and not only its foreclosed possibility; b) an active intervention and not only a halting structure; c) the positive fidelity of a subject and not only an interminable critique, and, finally; d) a forcing of the truth through a generic extension of the situation, and not only the recognition of the situation's immanent excess.<sup>90</sup> Bosteels argues that Badiou thereby abides by the strictly political significance of Marxism, as opposed to its more philosophical and economical contributions. Badiou tends to "favor the more historical and interventionist writings such as Engels's *The Peasant War in Germany*, Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*, or Mao's *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War*, in addition to the all too obvious choice of *The Communist Manifesto*,"<sup>91</sup> all texts in which the core of Marxism comes across in the actualization of a revolutionary movement, in the subject of an actual political sequence.

The crucial thing, according to Badiou, is to refrain from giving up on the hypothesis in question, but continue to pursue its possible solution.

Ce qui est premièrement décisif, c'est de maintenir l'hypothèse historique d'un monde délivré de la loi du profit et de l'intérêt privé. [...] C'est ce que j'ai proposé d'appeler l'hypothèse communiste. Elle est en réalité largement négative, car il est plus sûr et plus important de dire que le monde tel qu'il est n'est pas *nécessaire* que de dire 'à vide' qu'un autre monde est possible.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 192. See also Bosteels: "Vérité et forçage; Badiou avec Heidegger et Lacan": *Alain Badiou; Penser le multiple* (ed. Charles Ramond), L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002, p. 287-8.

<sup>91</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 281. Bosteels is prominent in the debate on labels, whether Badiou is to be categorized as Marxist, post-Marxist, Marxian or neo-Marxist, or something else entirely. He has himself suggested the term post-Maoism for Badiou's political stance, see Bosteels: "Post-Maoism; Badiou and Politics", *Positions*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2005, p. 575-634. For contributions besides Bosteels' in this debate, see *e.g.* Toscano, Alberto: "Communism as Separation": *Think Again; Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (ed. Peter Hallward), Continuum, London/New York, 2004, p. 138-149; Harrison, Oliver: "Revolutionary Subjectivity in Post-Marxist Thought; The Case of Laclau and Badiou": *The Legacy of Marxism; Contemporary Challenges, Conflicts, and Developments* (ed. Matthews Johnston), Continuum, London/New York, 2012, p. 183-198; and Power, Nina: "Towards a New Political Subject? Badiou between Marx and Althusser": *Badiou and Philosophy* (ed. Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, p. 157-173.

<sup>92</sup> Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste*, *op.cit.*, p. 54 ("the first thing to do, is to maintain the historical hypothesis of a world freed from the law of profit and private interest. [...] This is what I have proposed to designate as the communist hypothesis. It is really largely negative, because it is



The communist hypothesis is primarily negative, along the lines of Marx' definition of communism as an effective movement for the abolishment of the established state of affairs. This negativity is congruent with Badiou's early identification of the 'communist invariants' of the struggle against property and the state, as well as the struggle for equality, insofar as equality is not the order of the day.<sup>93</sup> Marx formulates a positive equivalent that affirms the absence of equality in his notion of "die Geschichte von Klassenkämpfen."<sup>94</sup> Negatively defined, the communist hypothesis bears no specified predication or particular attribute, but works *subtractively*. It seeks first and foremost at punching a hole in existing power structures.

Punching a hole today demands different measures than in the days of Lenin, for example. But if ours is the time for a reformulation of emancipatory politics, the time for rethinking, Badiou nonetheless insists that our time is contemporaneous to that of May 68. Our predicament remains the same, namely to realize that the classical figuration of emancipatory politics is no longer operative, neither in the figurations of the party or the union. If another form of emancipatory politics is possible, it will not be one of organizing each and every one according to their place. On the contrary, it will be one of radical material and mental displacements. It will be a politics of justice, Badiou writes in his *Théorie du sujet*, that is, of justice as "*le flou des places*, le contraire donc, de la juste place."<sup>95</sup> It will be a *generic politics*, as he will come to designate it in his *L'Être et l'événement* and onwards.<sup>96</sup>

Sexual politics illuminates the stakes involved: The sexual revolution was no doubt part of the May 68 events, but it was not its motor force, according to Badiou. The sexual revolution fell under the overarching symbol of the red flag, together with the student rebellions and the general strikes, but the diagonal movement to bind it

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more certain and more important to say that the world as it is is not *necessary* than it is to 'emptily' state that another world is possible.")

<sup>93</sup> See Badiou and François Balmès: "De l'idéologie" [1976]: *Les Années Rouges*, Les Prairies ordinaires, Paris, 2012, p. 148.

<sup>94</sup> See Marx: *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* [1849]; *Werke, Band 4*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1977, p. 462.

<sup>95</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 312 ("the blurring of places, the contrary, thus, of the proper place").

<sup>96</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 375.

under the red flag, he writes, was the vision of another alternative politics beyond the classical parties and unions.<sup>97</sup> With Kollontai's basic premise of the interconnections between material and sexual relations, one can say that the sexual revolution was one way to question the classic vision of politics, as the elaboration of a new vision of politics implied a sexual revolution. Kollontai's insights also appertain to the end of the red years. In parts of the so-called third wave feminism, the historical failure of the communist hypothesis coincides an increased attention to "the contradictions that constitute women's identities" and "a commitment to work inclusively with those particular differences."<sup>98</sup> Kollontai's criticism of bourgeois individuality and the radical emancipatory project as such are replaced with issues of representation and inclusion *within* capitalism, as a further globalization of the capitalist grasp.

Badiou's theory of the subject is at odds with such positions. Hallward celebrates Badiou as the philosopher most urgently needed today on account of Badiou's criticism of particularity and traditional politics of representation. This criticism is advanced through Badiou's conceptualization of a universal and generic equality. Politics is a matter of the generic multiple of a situation, Badiou writes, insofar as 'generic' designates that it is a matter of any multiple and does not say anything particular about the situation, except precisely about its multiple-being as such, its fundamental inconsistency.<sup>99</sup> In Žižek's paraphrase,

Badiou defines as 'generic' the multiple within a situation that has no particular properties, the referent of which would enable us to classify it as its subspecies; the generic multiple belongs to the situation but is not properly included in it as its subspecies [...]. *Generic* is thus a multiple element/part of the situation that doesn't fit into it, that sticks out precisely insofar as it gives body (as it were) to the Being of the situation as such, subverting the situation by directly embodying its universality.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>98</sup> Budgeon, Shelley: *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*, Palgrave/MacMillan, Basingstoke/New York, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> See Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>100</sup> Žižek: "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism; The Case of Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 244.

It is precisely the generic lack of predication that Hallward celebrates in Badiou, as it "provides the most compelling critique of the specified." The specified designates any particularity, property, or predicate, any attribute "defined by positive, intrinsic characteristics or essences (physical, cultural, personal, and so on). The specified is a matter of inherited 'instincts' as much as of acquired habits."<sup>101</sup> Subtracted from the specified, the concept of the generic offers a corrective to the state of affairs in which the subject of politics is reduced to questions of the representation and inclusion of various differences and identities, across the intersectional palate. With identitarianism as a worst-case scenario, the reduction of politics to various 'identity politics of differences' can only hope for an appropriation under the capitalist-parliamentary machinery, as its best card. To Badiou, differences are not only that on which capitalism thrives, as they provide an ever new ground for expansion, but also that which simply is, the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of being, as obvious in the differences between you and me as in those between you and yourself.<sup>102</sup> Elevated into either a philosophical or political principle, differences and variations over differences remain unable to account for the possibilities of change.

Sam Gillespie describes both sides of Badiou's generic politics rather concisely in *The Mathematics of Novelty; Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics* (2008). As he writes,

contemporary capitalism is rife with such examples of various groups putting forth identities and pleas for recognition, to which the free market can respond with varying degrees of accommodation. [...] For example, various disenfranchised groups (women, gay people, black people) can make themselves visible, establish communities or collective identities, and make various prescriptions against the state for legitimacy [...]. And, indeed, change could be said to follow from such examples, and be perfectly compatible with liberal democratic pluralism. But if the example of contemporary identity politics could be said to offer a model in which

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<sup>101</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 274-275. See also Hallward: "Generic Sovereignty; The Philosophy of Alain Badiou": *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1998, p. 87-111.

<sup>102</sup> See e.g. Badiou: *L'Éthique, op.cit.*, p. 51.

change can occur, it is surely inadequate to constitute a true politics for Badiou. And as such, it is not an arena for the new.<sup>103</sup>

In other words, changes that are perfectly compatible with liberal democratic pluralism do not constitute a radical change, but an expansion of the old, Gillespie explains. A properly generic politics in Badiou's sense must always be an arena for the new. In such a politics, writes Gillespie,

a claim for rights is made on the basis of belonging, yet such claims tell us nothing specific about the group for whom the prescriptions are being made, since belonging could be said to hold for all members of the situation [...]. In order to have truth, there must be a sharp distinction between what specifies each member of a given situation and what is general to all members of a given situation.<sup>104</sup>

Of course, there is never a question of supporting regimes of oppression and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, creed, abilities, class, *etc.*, under such a generic politics. On the contrary, it is radically anti-discriminatory, Gillespie writes, since "a truth [that is] true as such must be true for every member of the situation."<sup>105</sup> A generic politics claims that a radical emancipatory project cannot be based on a struggle to be included or represented on the basis of *what* its members are, but only on the simple fact *that* it members are, period. To struggle for inclusion based on the identities of its members would merely equal the reverse of the exclusion based on the identities of its members, and fall under the same discriminatory logic, in a manner similar to how Wendy Brown observes that the paradoxical notion of liberal tolerance both reproduces and reinforces the differentiating or 'othering' mechanisms it supposedly seeks to circumvent, since tolerance both demands and enhances the differences it tolerates.<sup>106</sup> The definition of a

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<sup>103</sup> Gillespie: *The Mathematics of Novelty; Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics*, Repress, Melbourne, 2008, p. 79-80.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>106</sup> See Brown, Wendy: *Regulating Aversion; Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006, p. 45. Mari Ruti has criticized that which she sees as an ignorant refusal at the hands of Badiou and Žižek, primarily, in the collusion of feminism, queer theory, and multiculturalism as one simple paradigm of postmodern identity politic. Such

generic politics, on the other hand, names its members to be included simply as belonging, represented simply as presented.

Hallward notes that a generic politics posits equality as an axiom, as its starting point rather than its aim.<sup>107</sup> It is a politics not of critical adumbrations to tease out an equality to be realized at the end of an oppressive regime, but a politics of the consequences that can be drawn from the hole in oppressive regimes that the actuality of equality punches here and now. It posits as its absolute ground of possibility the equality of the simple fact that all members of a situation simply are, indiscriminately, in in-difference to difference, as Badiou writes.<sup>108</sup> Capitalism thrives on differences, as differences expand the market, but as Badiou's concrete analysis of the concrete situation today underlines, there is a growing number of radically dispossessed whose existence in the capitalist world is to not exist. This number signals a pure in-difference that is radically subtracted from the capitalist flux of differences. It is in such a radically subtracted in-difference or equality that Badiou sees the possibilities of a new horizon and another subject of politics to be extracted today.

Badiou's philosophical works and his concrete analysis of the concrete situation today meet up in this point of the in-difference of the generic member. But it is not immediately evident how a subject of politics can be thought from this point. Kollontai's basic premise of connecting the sexual back onto material property/productive relations can help to plot out a path. It returns my reading of Badiou back unto Lacan. In the generic lack of the specified, Hallward sees a radical stance subtracted from intrinsic characteristics, whether these characteristics are to be

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a collusion reveals a striking unfamiliarity with the variety of the fields of feminism, queer theory, and multiculturalist perspectives today, see Ruti, Mari: *Between Levinas and Lacan; Self, Other, Ethics*, Bloomsbury Press, London/New York, 2015, p. 88 ff. The subtitle of Butler's *Gender Trouble* is, of course, *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, but also Butler recognizes that her work has a tendency to be taken to support the celebration and buttressing of certain forms of identities over others, or a non-identity as identity. See Butler: "Preface 1999": *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York/London, 2006, p. vii-xxviii. While Badiou is often read as opposed to queer theory as such, David Vilaseca has read Badiou's concept of the event and the generic as a means to appreciate the presence of a queer hole in a nation's normality, queer working in the fringes, see Vilaseca, David: *Queer Events; Post-deconstructive Subjectivities in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960's to 1990's*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2010. See also Penney: *After Queer Theory, op.cit.*, esp. p. 175 ff.

<sup>107</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>108</sup> See Badiou: *l'Éthique, op.cit.*, p. 53.

grasped as inherited instincts or as acquired habits. Paul M. Livingston makes a similar observation in his *The Politics of Logic; Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism* (2012). Badiou has begun the discernment of "a radical alternative to the debate between the (typically leftist or constructivist) politics of contingent historical conventions, on one hand, and the (typically rightist or onto-theological) politics of an assumed 'human nature' or a divine dispensation, on the other."<sup>109</sup> Subtracted from inherited instincts and acquired habits alike, from constructivism and metaphysics both, a radical alternative to historical conventions as well as essential or divine dispensations – are these not just so many ways to say that Badiou's subject of generic politics is subtracted from the whole nature/culture conundrum, that the subject of politics is to be grasped as neither a thing of nature nor a thing of culture?

A third way to formulate the quandary in question is possible. It is the way of the psychoanalytical terminology mustered by Joan Copjec in her rebuttal of what she calls Butler's historicist-deconstructionist approach to the sex/gender problematic, or the problematic of identity *tout court*. It is possible to begin a delineation of Badiou's theory of the subject by saying that he poses an alternative position that simultaneously "shakes off all the remnants of sleepy dogmatism that continue to adhere to our thinking" without abandoning himself to the assertion of "it's binary opposite, if not of the 'despairing scepticism' about which Kant warned us, then of scepticism's sunny obverse: a confident voluntarism."<sup>110</sup> Copjec's objection to the historicist-deconstructionist approach concerns how the latter refuses "the metaphysical notion that sex is a substance inscribed at the origin of our acts, our discourse" and thus "the fiction of innate or essential sex" only to jump to the other extreme of assuming that sex is "a 'performatively enacted signification'" and "a construct of historically variable discursive practices."<sup>111</sup> The third option thus missed out on, Copjec explains, is the one where sex as an entity is understood to be "a totally

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<sup>109</sup> Livingston, Paul M: *The Politics of Logic; Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism*, Routledge, New York/London, 2012, p. 61. See also Livingston: "Badiou and the Consequences of Formalism": *Cosmos and History; The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2012, p. 139.

<sup>110</sup> Copjec, Joan: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 16-17.

<sup>111</sup> *Loc.cit.*

empty one – i.e. it is one to which no predicate can be attached."<sup>112</sup> If not a straightforward analogy or isomorphism, there is at least a movement that is reminiscent of Copjec's in Badiou's conception of a generic politics, and *vice versa*, on account of which they mutually inform on each other. As Copjec writes, "we could put it in this way: *male and female, like being, are not predicates.*"<sup>113</sup> A closer interrogation of the teachings of Lacan, or the psychoanalytic reference to sexual matters, is necessary in order to begin an interrogation of the ways in which a subject of politics can be thought from the point of generic in-difference.

### ***In Want of an Other Sex; 'Wo Es War, Soll Ich Werden'***

In this section, I interrogate the fundamentals of the psychoanalytic theory of the drive and the psychoanalytic reference to sexual matters as the basis of a theory of the subject. More precisely, I interrogate how the psychoanalytic reference to sexual matters entails a specific understanding of a possible ethics of a radical act, as an ethics of subjective destitution, on the one hand, in and through subjective constitution, on the other. I look at how psychoanalysis construes its concept of the drive as the concept of a problem, a question in lack of an answer, and how this problem has served as the basis for understanding the issues of morality and ethics from Freud to Lacan, and beyond. The psychoanalytic concept of the drive installs itself as a paradox at the heart of speaking being, at the heart of civilization and the moral law. While it provides the backup for the moral law, it also marks the point where the moral law comes into contradiction with itself. At this point, the drive opens for another ethics. The question is how this other ethics is conceived in psychoanalytic theory, and then how Badiou will utilize the psychoanalytic insights in his own elaborations on the preconditions and the possibilities of the subject of politics and radical change.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

### *Psychoanalysis' Paradoxes*

In *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905), Sigmund Freud undertook to interrogate the significance of sexual life in all human capacities, tempting the expansion of the concept of sexuality beyond its everyday restriction as a matter of mere reproduction. These essays present the sexual drive – the libido – as a 'thing' omnipresent in human being. At the same time, the sexual drive is acknowledged as something of a wild card, an erratic matter, a capricious element. It is symptomatic that Freud concludes his three essays with the admission that his knowledge of the principal processes of sexuality is far too restricted to allow for an adequate sexual theory to be proposed. This dubious state is owed to the concept of the drive. As drive, Freud writes,

können wir zunächst nichts anderes verstehen als die psychische Repräsentanz einer kontinuierlich fließenden, innersomatischen Reizquelle, zum Unterschiede vom 'Reiz', der durch vereinzelte und von außen kommenden Erregungen hergestellt wird. Trieb ist so einer der Begriffe der Abgrenzung des Seelischen vom Körperlichen. Die einfachste und nächstliegende Annahme über die Natur der Triebe wäre, daß sie an sich keine Qualität besitzen, sondern nur als Maße von Arbeitsanforderung für das Seelenleben in Betracht kommen. Was die Triebe voneinander unterscheidet und mit spezifischen Eigenschaften ausstattet, ist deren Beziehung zu ihren somatischen *Quellen* und ihren *Zielen*. Die Quelle des Triebes ist ein erregender Vorgang in einem Organ und das nächste Ziel des Triebes liegt in der Aufhebung dieses Organreizes.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Freud: *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* [1905]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band V*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main] Imago Publishing, London, 1942, p. 67 (Drive, Freud writes, "is first of all to be understood as nothing else than a psychic representative of a continuously flowing, inner-somatic source of stimulus, to be distinguished from a 'stimulus' arriving from single external excitations. Drive is thus a concept of the demarcation of the psychic and the physical. The most simple and likely assumption as to the nature of the drives would be that they as such possess no quality, but concerns psychic life only as a measure of work requirements. What distinguishes the drives from one another and provides them with specific properties, is their relation to their somatic sources and to their aims. The source of the drive is an occurrence of excitation in an organ, and the immediate aim of the drive is the resolution/abolition of this organ stimulus").



Due to its curious position somewhere between the outer surface and the inner procedures of the organism, the sexual drive, itself without quality, must accept its intransigent double status as both decisive and elusive. From his concept of the drive, Freud elaborates a theory of human being as teeming with paradoxes. These paradoxes and double binds do not define the subject only as subordinated to the established states, to the law, but also contain the seed to conceive of the subject ethically, at the point where the established states are undermined, or undermine themselves. At the end of this elaboration, the subject of politics in Badiou's philosophy returns.

On the one hand, Freud admits, it is possible that there is nothing of significance occurring in the organism that does not submit itself to the excitation of the sexual drive, just as the reverse, that there is no connectivity of other functions onto the sexual drive that cannot be returned from the sexual drive back onto other functions (*e.g.* the nutritional drive). On the other hand, the sexual drive maintains its elusive character as impossible to prove. The nature or being [*Wesen*] of sexual excitations remains to Freud an utterly unknown matter, an unsolvable riddle.<sup>115</sup> The drive is, in all matters psychoanalytical, "selbst das wichtigste wie das dunkelste Element."<sup>116</sup> No philosophy or psychological theory to date has been able to shed light on its significance.

The sexual drive is lacking a proper object, or it is lacking a proper outside. On that account, it is left to continuously swerve around its own source, founded in and through itself. The drive is defined by recourse to its source and to its aim – to an inner-somatic excitation in an organ and to its resolution or release [*Aufhebung*]. In other words, there is no proper place for the sexual object in the determination of the sexual drive as such. On the contrary, Freud explains, such an object will be whatever object in or through which the drive can achieve its aim. The object is in no way an original attribute, but serves its function according to its capabilities for realizing the satisfaction of the drive.<sup>117</sup> The object's import, specificity, and value recede into the

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<sup>115</sup> See Freud: *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>116</sup> Freud: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* [1920]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band XIII*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1940, p. 35 ("even the most important as the most obscure element").

<sup>117</sup> See Freud: "Triebe und Triebchicksale" [1915]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band X*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1946, p. 216.

background, while an unqualified something else [*etwas anderes*] comes to constitute the essential constant of the sexual drive.<sup>118</sup> One object can be replaced with virtually any other, as virtually any object can take on a sexual accentuation. All the time it remains the strange fluctuating oscillation between its source and its aim, an excitation and its outlet, an inner-somatic stimulus and its resolution, the inside and the outside, which accounts for the peculiar being of the drive.

The Freudian approach to sexual matters renders sexual matters a decisive component of every human capacity. It sees sexual matters as coterminous with the faculty of culture or even with thought as such, morality and ethics included, in a curious double bind. Freud talks of psychical forces such as "der Ekel, das Schamgefühl, die ästhetischen und moralischen Idealanforderungen,"<sup>119</sup> all functioning as restrictions to the sexual drive. But Freud immediately counters the supposition that these restrictions are the effect of external impositions of education and upbringing alone. While disgust, shame and morality impose restrictions on the sexual drive, and thus seem to be in opposition to it, Freud immediately underlines how these restrictions are nonetheless motivated by the drive itself, serving the facilitation of its outlet in other directions and fixing it onto other objects, as a reaction formation or compensation for its initial inaccessible or unacceptable aims. Exemplar of these restrictions is the prohibitions against incest and parricide, the moral law *par excellence*. On the ontogenetic level, the law is effectuated through the institution of the superego and the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, while the phylogenetic level sees the law installed by the murder of *der Urvater*, the father of the horde.

The movement involved in Freud's discussion of morality equals a 'perspectival shift'. It is the paradigmatic psychoanalytic gesture, its favorite trope, on the level of theory as well as on the level of the reality to which this theory is addressed. Psychoanalysis works to make a solution out of the problem and a problem out of the solution, to isolate at the bottom of things a paradox, a traumatic kernel, which then turns out to be productive both of itself and of the field in which it is lodged. Perhaps this gesture is at its least elusive in the case where Freud refuses to identify the

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<sup>118</sup> See Freud: *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78 ("disgust, feelings of shame, aesthetic and moral ideal requirements").

unconscious any more with the latent dream-thought than with the manifest dream, but rather as the dream-work itself, as it separates the latent dream-thought from its expression in the manifest dream.<sup>120</sup> In a similar manner, Lacan will locate the subject in the gap or interval between signifiers rather than in any signifier *per se*.<sup>121</sup> Even more telling, arguably cutting the disputes on the relations of truth and knowledge short, is how Lacan will elaborate on a notion of truth as that which produces a hole in knowledge.<sup>122</sup>

From the perspective of psychoanalysis, the paradigmatic paradox bespeaking human being goes by the name of sexuality or the sexual drive. The drive is "the paradox of a 'free instinct',"<sup>123</sup> to use Maire Jaanus words. The unqualified something else of the sexual drive names the paradox of paradoxes, the paradox from which all other paradoxes spring and to which they return. But sexuality does not thereby become the answer and solution to everything. On the contrary, the radical status of Freud's discovery and his so-called pan-sexualism rests on a notion of human sexuality as a persisting problem, a recurrent question forever in want of an answer. Rather than a universal solution or answer, Zupančič observes, sexuality is the name of a deadlock or impasse, "a paradox-ridden deviation from a norm that does not exist."<sup>124</sup> The sexual drive posits the problem of subjectivity literally, Rose writes, as a problem.<sup>125</sup> Lacan gives the crux of this notion its most infamous formulations through his

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<sup>120</sup> See Freud: *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* [1905]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band VI*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1940, p. 188.

<sup>121</sup> See e.g. Lacan: "Position de l'inconscient" [1964]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 840.

<sup>122</sup> See Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre XVII: L'Envers de la psychanalyse* (1969-1970)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1991, p. 213 ff.

<sup>123</sup> Jaanus, Maire: "The *Démontage* of the Drive": *Reading Seminar XI; Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus), Suny Press, Albany, 1995, p. 128.

<sup>124</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis?*, *op.cit.*, p. 15. For other discussions on the paradox of sexual matters in psychoanalysis, see Mitchell, Juliet: "Introduction I": *Feminine Sexuality; Jacques Lacan and the école freudien* (ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose), W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London, 1982; Rose: "Introduction II": *Feminine Sexuality; Jacques Lacan and the école freudien* (ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose), W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London, 1982; Leguil, Clothilde: *L'Être et le genre; Homme/Femme après Lacan*, PUF, Paris, 2015. See also Gallop, Jane: *Reading Lacan*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London, 1985, p. 142 ff, for another commentary on Mitchell and Rose's representations of the precariousness of the psychoanalytic project.

<sup>125</sup> See Rose: "Femininity and its Discontents", *op.cit.*, p. 254.

aphoristic statements on the lack of sexual relations [*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*] and sexual difference as real.<sup>126</sup>

To determine sexual difference as real and sexual relations as lacking is to say that there is no ratio by which to define the property of the sexual, whether it be in terms of aims, objects, or identities. In lack of definition, sexual aims, object, and identities proliferate. In other words, in lack of a proper delimitation of the field of the sexual as such, the sexual pervades into everything and becomes the ultimate limit of everything. To take but the most phallic example: a cigar might sometimes be simply a cigar, as Freud supposedly said, but it is due to the insistent question posed by the sexual drive that the significance of the cigar can become a question in the first place. Contrary to a vulgar reading of the psychoanalytic position, it is not the case that everything carries a sexual signification. Rather the question of the sexual marks, as Copjec writes, "the impossibility of completing meaning."<sup>127</sup> Insofar as one does not know what the sexual is, where it begins and ends, the sexual is that by which each and every signification necessarily remains fundamentally uncertain.

The paradoxical gesture also underscores the decisive theoretical development in which Freud conceives of repression and the return of the repressed as more or less the same, as inseparable.<sup>128</sup> Pairing up pleasure and displeasure, or pain, or the law and its transgression, also admits to a paradox. Psychoanalysis installs paradox at the very heart of the law, and thus also at the heart of morality.

A standard young Oedipus faced with the threat of castration will internalize the paternal law and renounce his incestuous and parricidal desires. Such renunciation, as castration threatens to put an end to the possibility of pleasures altogether, is as much a means of ensuring another outlet for the drive as it is an inhibition or abandonment (to

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<sup>126</sup> See e.g. Lacan: "L'Étourdit" [1972]: *Autres écrits* (ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2001, p. 455; Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII; D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (1971)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2007, p. 33; Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre XIX; ...ou pire* (1971-1972)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2011, p. 13; and Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre XX: Encore* (1972-1973)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>127</sup> See Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>128</sup> See Freud: "Die Verdrängung" [1915]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band X*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1946, p. 256-7; and Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre II; Les Écrits techniques de Freud* (1953-1954)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1978, p. 211 ff.

be *like* the father and have a woman *like* the mother, rather than to *be* the father and *have* the mother). Paradoxically, renouncing on the sexual drive at one end becomes a means of satisfying the drive at another end, just like the neurotic discovers in displeasure a means of pleasure, and *vice versa*. Displeasure, Lacan notes, serves as much as a pretext for repression as it does to procure the format of the satisfaction brought about by the return of the repressed, just like pleasure is turned off by the law only to remerge again in the reaction-formations to satisfy the law's letter.<sup>129</sup> Significantly, the law becomes a source of satisfaction in itself, both in dutifully abiding by it, but also insofar as the aggression towards the father, internalized as superego, now seeks satisfaction for itself by turning on the ego. The superego thrives on the ego's insufficiencies and sensations of guilt, reinforcing its sanctions at the first mention of illicit impulses, in a vicious spiral that feeds on itself. Similarly, the murder of *der Urvater* by his sons, the band of brothers, whose hate for the father is only matched by their love for him, only proves to secure his immortal life and re-butress the reign of his authority. Once done away with in the flesh, the father, now internalized, returns in the word of the law, whose prohibitions become all the more powerful in that the internalized father offers no escape. He is omniscient, unforgetting, and unforgiving. To Freud, the moral law at the heart of civilization, *die Kultur*, thus bespeaks a paradox as its veritable discontent, the grain of sand that clogs up the machinery and by which civilization inadvertently undermines itself through the operations of its own reinforcements.<sup>130</sup> If Freud's theory is normative of 20th century bourgeois living or of masculine hegemony, it is a strange normativity that also

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<sup>129</sup> See Lacan: "Kant avec Sade" [1963]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 785: "Le déplaisir y est reconnu d'expérience pour donner son prétexte au refoulement du désir, à se produire sur la voie de sa satisfaction: mais aussi bien pour donner la forme que prend cette satisfaction même dans le retour du refoulé. Semblablement le plaisir redouble-t-il son aversion à reconnaître la loi, de supporter le désir d'y satisfaire qu'est la défense."

<sup>130</sup> See e.g. Freud: *Das Unbehagen in das Kultur* [1930]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band XIV*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1948, p. 482 ff, where Freud discusses the relation between the individual Oedipus complex and the myth of the father of the horde respectively, as an ontogenetic and phylogenetic account for the institution of the superego and moral law, as foundational for civilization. For more on the myth of the primal horde and the murder of the father, see Freud: *Totem und Tabu* [1912]; *Gesammelte Werke, Band IX*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1944, p. 172 ff. See also Grigg, Russell: "Kant and Freud": *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, Suny Press, Albany, 2008, p. 95-108.

normalizes and contains the seed of its own subversion. With Lacan, the full effect of that seed becomes theorized.

### *Drive as One-Less*

When Lacan answers his own call to return to Freud, it is to emphasize the controversial implications of the Freudian discoveries otherwise ignored. This means that Lacan will emphasize the paradoxes and contradictions to be found in Freud's theory as that which determines and constitutes the Freudian field of psychoanalysis as such. The concept of the sexual drive is the epitome in that regard. As Lacan warns, in his seminar on *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1964), the concept of the sexual drive is a concept whose portrayal in Freud's texts is never as straightforward or natural as it might seem at first.<sup>131</sup> The drive dissolves the very bonds it binds, and *vice versa*, binds that which it dissolves. This is the insight Freud is aiming at when he suggests that there is "außer dem Eros, einen Todestrieb," and, to follow, that "aus dem Zusammen- und Gegeneinanderwirken dieser beiden ließen sich die Phänomene des Lebens erklären."<sup>132</sup> This is also the insight Lacan will appreciate in its full effect when he refuses Freud's bipartition so as to go on to unite the two of love and death under the single name of the drive, or libido, stating that every drive is virtually a death drive.<sup>133</sup> Lacan's reformulation of the paradoxes of psychoanalysis into the single concept of the death drive goes through the myth of the lamella to the mathematical number of minus-one. A negative force to divide every concept from within, including itself, the drive crystalizes the notion of the real as the internal limit of the symbolic, as subtracted from differential structures, and thereby as reminiscent of Badiou's generic multiple or equality of in-difference. The question is how the drive, while isolating the points of subjective destitution where established states undermine themselves, can turn into an ethics of the act of subjective constitution.

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<sup>131</sup> See Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre XI: Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1964)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2014, p. 183.

<sup>132</sup> Freud: *Das Unbehagen in das Kultur*, *op.cit.*, p. 478 ("beyond Eros, a deathdrive" and, to follow, that "from the counteracting attractions and repulsions of both these is it possible to bring clarity on the phenomena of the living").

<sup>133</sup> See Lacan: "Position de l'inconscient", *op.cit.*, p. 848.

In his exposition on the status of the drive, Lacan starts out with the living animal's naturally determined propensities and instincts. These find their execution in and through a momentary thrust. The force characteristic of the drive, on the other hand, is to be a constant force, *eine konstante Kraft*. The force of the drive is characterized as internally invested and not susceptible to discharge, an irrepressible something somewhere to which repression owes its cause.<sup>134</sup> Yet the drive is not to be grasped as that which simply collides with the natural propensities of human being. Neither is it to be grasped as that which simply comes into conflict with the moral law or culture. In psychoanalysis, sexual matters are not reducible to matters of either natural or cultural constitution. With its theory of sex and of the drive, Copjec writes, "psychoanalysis universalizes human nature as that which has no nature or whose nature is radically plasticized."<sup>135</sup> In her reading of Freud's variation on the Napoleonic notion of destiny, Toril Moi argues that Freud "thinks of the body in terms that undermine the opposition between natural causation and cultural meaning."<sup>136</sup> Rather than politics, as with Napoleon, it is anatomy that is the subject of destiny in Freud, in the precise sense that anatomy carries but one single guarantee, namely that of psychic conflict. It spurs an ever-productive process of diversions and distortions, readable in the strangely effective but nonetheless indiscernible lesions incapacitating the organism of the hysteric.<sup>137</sup> Jaanus suggests that the constant theme of Lacan is "the brokenness between us and nature,"<sup>138</sup> but perhaps it is more precise to speak of a brokenness *in* us and nature both, if 'us' is taken to mean something along the lines of 'beings of culture'. If 'we' are 'beings of culture', it is not because 'we' stand in opposition to nature. Rather it is because nature, at some point, comes into contradiction with itself. To get at the proper point of the drive – the point where the

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<sup>134</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 182: "quelque chose qui a un caractère d'irrépressible à travers même les répressions – d'ailleurs, s'il doit y avoir répression, c'est qu'il y a au-delà quelque chose qui pousse."

<sup>135</sup> Copjec: "The Sexual Compact", *op.cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>136</sup> Moi, Toril: "Is Anatomy Destiny? Freud and Biological Determinism": *Whose Freud? The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (ed. Peter Brooks and Alex Woloch), Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 2000, p. 71.

<sup>137</sup> For a discussion on the psychoanalytic conceptualization of the body, see Shepherdson, Charles: "The Body, Sexuality, and Sexual Difference": *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, p. 105-121.

<sup>138</sup> Jaanus: "The Démontage of the Drive", *op.cit.*, p. 123.

drive reemerges as the paradoxical unity of opposites – this should also be reversed: if 'we' are somehow still 'beings of nature', it is because 'our' culture comes into contradiction with itself, first and foremost in the paradoxical status of the moral law.

Zupančič accentuates this radical twist when she explains how psychoanalysis conceives of culture not as the result of "a germ of mind or soul deposited in our bodies, but [as] something much closer to a biological dysfunction."<sup>139</sup> This dysfunction answers to the name of the drive. It is as a dysfunction that the drive is suggestible as the non-object of psychoanalysis, insofar as it operates a short circuit between nature and culture, as "an intersection that is generative of both sides that overlap in it."<sup>140</sup> Rather than a problem *with* psychoanalysis, the failure to delimit nature and culture, body and mind, or the physical and the psychic is the very problem *of* psychoanalysis. Rather than serving as a point of criticism against psychoanalysis, this failure marks its critical point. Rather than amounting to an objection *to* psychoanalysis, it constitutes the non-object *of* psychoanalysis. It designates "a radical ontological impasse,"<sup>141</sup> Zupančič writes, and as such it names a 'missed encounter' between psychoanalysis and philosophy.

Žižek describes the internal investment of the drive as "a palpating opening, an organ which is at the same time the entire organism."<sup>142</sup> He thus captures how the drive designates the inherent contradiction by which nature and culture, the physical and the psychic, come across not so much as distinct from each other but as divided within themselves. Žižek's formulation reverberates in Lacan's myth of the lamella, the symbolization of the libido and its fundamentally lost object, the ungraspable something somewhere to which the contradictions and paradoxes of the drive answer. The myth of the lamella will, eventually, lead us to the point of the act, from which a theory of the subject is possible to address as new. But in order to get there, one is

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<sup>139</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis?*, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7; 51. For a similar point, though less pronounced, concerning how the premature birth of human beings biologically destines them to become social beings, while it is precisely their social being that inevitably lead them into conflict with the biological constitution of their anatomy, see Moi: "Is Anatomy Destiny? Freud and Biological Determinism", *op.cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>141</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis?*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>142</sup> Žižek: *Tarrying with the Negative; Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, p. 182.



required to proceed along the drive's internal investment, step by step. I will start out from Freud's image of a mouth kissing itself.

The mouth kissing itself, Lacan claims, captures perfectly the internal investment of the drive, its circular structure and looped course, its bowl-like trajectory and decisive reversal back upon itself.<sup>143</sup> First of all, the image of a mouth kissing itself (a single pair of lips, an upper and a lower, re-enveloping themselves) is an image of a mouth productive of its own satisfaction.<sup>144</sup> But the impossible smugness of these lips should not preclude the fact that they must necessarily depart from themselves in order to return back upon themselves. This movement constitutes the decisive trajectory of the drive, and underscores its processual status.<sup>145</sup> It underscores the fact that if the Freudian mouth craves to re-envelop itself, it is because there is something wanting within this mouth in the first place, something wanting that separates the lips within themselves.<sup>146</sup> The point of the Freudian mouth is not that there is a retrieval of that lost something, however. The point is that the circumnavigation of the lips' bowl-like trajectory, by which they achieve their satisfaction, encircles the void poised in the middle, and thereby makes the lost something's absence present as an object:

cet objet que nous confondons trop souvent avec ce sur quoi la pulsion se referme –  
cet objet, qui n'est en fait que la présence d'un creux, d'un vide, occupable, nous dit

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<sup>143</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>144</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 188. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, "in kissing itself, the mouth is no longer oriented to food, to need." See Grosz, Elizabeth: "The Strange Detours of Sublimation; Psychoanalysis, Homosexuality, and Art": *Umbra(a); A Journal of the Unconscious*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2001, p. 150. As a single pair of lips folded back upon themselves, the Freudian mouth kissing itself should not be immediately evocative of the lips that speak together of Irigaray, all the more so as the mouth in question is a mouth that subtracts itself from any form of communication and mediation, that is not directed towards another but strictly to itself. As will be discussed shortly, the object lost to the drive is not that of another, neither a sexual other nor an original mother, but a part of the life of the living being itself, by which its difference from Irigaray's inflection of the lips is further consolidated. See Irigaray: "Quand nos lèvres se parlent": *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1976, p. 23-28.

<sup>145</sup> Rose notes how that which matters in the drive "is not what the drive achieves, but its process." See Rose: "Introduction II", *op.cit.*, p. 34; Grosz observes that satisfaction is "movement rather than a possession, a process rather than an object." See Grosz: "The Strange Detours of Sublimation", *op.cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>146</sup> Jaanus writes that there must be a "material loss in the body that might explain the constancy of the drive." See Jaanus: "The Démontage of the Drive", *op.cit.*, p. 124.

Freud, par n'importe quel objet, et dont nous ne connaissons l'instance que sous la forme de l'objet perdu petit *a*.<sup>147</sup>

The bowl-like trajectory of the drive constitutes its lost object. It constitutes it precisely as a loss. "To put it simply," Zupančič suggests, "object *a* will come to name the other (the real) object of the drive as 'independent of its object.'"<sup>148</sup> Breasts, faeces, gazes, voices – all so many representatives or replacements of another, always-already lost something,<sup>149</sup> a primordial loss.

Lacan suggests a tentative 'symbolization' of this something through his 'myth of the lamella', the refuse of sexual reproduction. Lacan imagines the lamella as

[cette] large crêpe à se déplacer comme l'amibe, ultra-plate à passer sous les portes, omnisciente d'être menée par le pur instinct de la vie, immortelle d'être scissipare. Voilà quelque chose qu'il ne serait pas bon de sentir se couler sur votre visage, sans bruit pendant votre sommeil, pour le cacheter.<sup>150</sup>

The lamella is a myth, but as a myth it communicates the essence of the libido as an inexistent organ that nonetheless persistently insists. It is the primordial *Organ* that Freud identifies as the source of the drive, and that Lacan identifies as identical to the drive's ultimate goal. The disturbing potential of the Freudian mouth culminates here, especially as reported by Žižek's reference to the alien in Ridley Scott's eponymous film (1979), where "this amoebalike, flattened creature, which envelops the subject's face, stands for the irrepressible life beyond all finite forms."<sup>151</sup> This alien lamella is

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<sup>147</sup> Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 201 ("this object that we too often confound with that on which the drive closes back up – this object, which in fact is nothing but the presence of a hole, a void, to be occupied, Freud tells us, by no matter which object, and of whose agency we are aware only in the form of the lost object *petit a*").

<sup>148</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis?*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>149</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>150</sup> Lacan: "Position de l'inconscient", *op.cit.*, p. 845 ("[this] large pancake moving about like the amoeba, ultra-flat passing under the doors, omniscient by being carried out by the pure life instinct, immortal by being indivisible. Here is something that would not be good to feel creeping over your face, soundless during your sleep, in order to seal it shut").

<sup>151</sup> Žižek: *Tarrying with the Negative*, *op.cit.*, p. 181-182. For a slightly different inflection on the status of the lamella, see Žižek: "The Lamella of David Lynch": *Reading Seminar XI; Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus), Suny Press, Albany, 1995, p. 205-220.

the libido as an irrepressible and indestructible life immortal, insofar as pure life is the thing lost to the living through the living's submission to sexual reproduction.

The myth of the lamella symbolizes how life itself is lost to the living, at least that part of life that never dies. In sexual reproduction (meiosis), the life of the species is inseparable from the death of the individual. By way of the signifier, death comes to mark the individual as a subject to death. But the myth of the lamella also shows how any reunion with this immortal life would equal the death of the subject as such. Just like the species is all in the binary fission (mitosis) by which the amoebae replicate, so the slithering alien enveloping and sealing shut the subject's face erases all individuality, as does the self-satisfied mouth folded back upon itself. The libido, the drive, is nothing but this loss driven to circumnavigate its own loss. Lacan therefore refers to it as fundamentally *a*-sexual, and writes its mathematical number not as two (Freud's *Eros* and *Thanatos*) but as minus-one or one-less [*une-à-moins*].<sup>152</sup> If the Freudian concept of the sexual drive is never as natural as it might seem, Lacan explains, it is because Freud is uncompromising on the fact that, for speaking beings, there is no *ganze Sexualstrebung*. There is no totality of sexual life to sum up its essence and function. The loss involved in the drive is not so much that of any complementary sexual other or other sex, but the loss of its own completeness, its own total being.<sup>153</sup> While every drive is virtually a death drive, as symbolized by the lamella, every drive is therefore *actually* a partial drive, with a partial object, in the sense that the object of the drive cannot avoid being situated aside or apart, as

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<sup>152</sup> See Lacan: *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, *op.cit.*, p. 153; Lacan: *...ou pire*, *op.cit.*, p. 15; and Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 165. I owe this point also to Dolar, Mladen: "Drive and Culture", paper presented at *The Science of the Signifier; Analysing the Cultural Unconscious*, 2nd annual International Conference of Dansk Selskab for Teoretisk Psykoanalyse, Copenhagen, August 25th-27th. See also Dolar: "On Drives and Culture": *Problemi International*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, p. 55-79.

<sup>153</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 222. See also Laurent, Éric: "Alienation and Separation (I)": *Reading Seminar XI; Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus), SUNY Press, Albany, 1995, p. 24. For another reading of the trauma of sexual reproduction as represented in Ancient Greek thinking, while not explicitly taking psychoanalytic theory into the account, but nonetheless figuring some of the same accentuations on the constitutive loss sexuality entails, see Songe-Møller, Vidgis: *Den greske drømmen om kvinnens overflødighet; Essays om myter og filosofi i antikkens Hellas*, Cappelen Akademiske Forlag, Oslo, 1999, p. 53 ff.

representing but partially the function by which it is produced.<sup>154</sup> As one-less, the drive is non-identical even to itself. It renders human sexuality non-all, and marks the impossibility of sexual relations and the real of sexual difference.

### *The Act in Question*

Copjec writes of the real of sexual difference that "only the failure of its inscription is marked in the symbolic."<sup>155</sup> To indicate the relevance of the real of sexual difference for the subject of politics in Badiou's philosophical works, a comment on the position of sexual matters in speaking beings can suffice. With Freud, it is possible to say that the sexual drive is universal, in that it cuts across every category of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, creed, abilities, class, *etc.*, even the asexual, insofar as the drive is itself without an inherent quality. But this universality should be read in a strictly literal sense: the sexual drive is that which cuts across every category in the sense that it undermines these categories as such, dividing them from within and, thus, marking their inherent non-identity. In that sense, the universality of the sexual drive is due to its generic being, as Badiou might say. It marks that which subtracts itself from marks, and names its members as subtracted from the predicates of identification, from the One. The question of ethics reemerges in full force as the one-less renders human sexuality non-all. But it is an ethics that differ from the moral law of the superego. It is an ethics at the underside of the moral law, reemerging at the point where the law comes into contradiction with and undermines itself from within itself.

The terminus of analysis can be described as the subject's arrival as one-less, coming face to face with the impossibility of sexual relations and complete or total being, assuming the constitutive loss implied by being sexual as such. This is the significance to be read into the Lacanian motto of psychoanalysis, namely, '*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*':

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<sup>154</sup> See Lacan: "Position de l'inconscient", *op.cit.*, p. 847; see also Lacan: "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l'inconscient freudien" [1960]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 817.

<sup>155</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 21.

*Wo*, où *Es*, sujet dépourvu d'aucun *das* ou autre article objectivant, *war*, était, c'est d'un lieu d'être qu'il s'agit, et qu'en ce lieu: *soll*, c'est un devoir au sens moral qui là s'annonce, [...] *Ich*, je, là dois-je (comme on annonçait: ce suis-je, avant qu'on dise: c'est moi), *werden*, devenir, c'est-à-dire non pas survenir, ni même advenir, mais venir au jour de ce lieu même en tant qu'il est lieu d'être.<sup>156</sup>

To assume the loss constitutive of being sexual, arriving as a subject at the place of this loss, as one-less, is also the significance to be read into the Lacanian operation of 'traversing the fantasy'. To traverse the fantasy does not simply signify the separation of the subject from its alienating identifications in and by a given signifier, from its position in the chain. To traverse the fantasy does not simply signify the subject's concurrence with the object *petit a* as the partial object by which it attains its share of *jouissance* and its determination, at a deeper level, of its primary identification.<sup>157</sup> More radically, to traverse the fantasy signifies the subject's identification with the partiality of all partial objects, in the sense that they are situated apart and off the mark. That is to say, it signifies the subject's identification with the primordial loss that all partial objects can only ever partially come to represent, in the sense that the primordial loss produces its own partial representational stand-ins. It signifies the subject's identification with the very phenomenon of the so-called *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* – or representational representative – as the process by which the signifier's alienating identification and its excess *jouissance* by partial

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<sup>156</sup> Lacan: "La Chose freudien, ou sens du retour à Freud en psychanalyse" [1956]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 417 ("*Wo*, where *Es*, the subject relieved of every *das* or other objectifying article, *war*, was, it is a place of being that is at stake: *soll*, it is a duty in the moral sense that announces itself here, [...] *Ich*, I, there must I (as one announces it 'am I', before one says, it is me) *werden*, come to be, that is to say, neither occur nor happen, but come to light in this place itself, to the extent that it is a place of being"). For the original occurrence of the phrase in Freud, see Freud: *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>157</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 304, where he posits the question of how a subject that has traversed the radical fantasm can live the drive. According to Pierre Bruno, this is the only occurrence of the term traversing the fantasy in Lacan's work, and then posed not as a concept but as a question (see Bruno, Pierre: *La Passe; Papiers psychanalytique II*, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, Toulouse, 2003, p. 47). For more on separation in the sense discussed here, see Laurent, Éric: "Alienation and Separation (II)": *Reading Seminar XI; Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus), Suny Press, Albany, 1995, esp. p. 30-31.

objects take place.<sup>158</sup> If only the failure of its inscription is marked in the symbolic, as Copjec observes of sexual difference, at stake in the traversal of fantasy and the '*wo Es war*' is not the subject's identification with any one failed inscription. At stake is the subject's identification with failure as such, precisely insofar as such failure never ends.

Such a dynamic point of view is communicated also in Zupančič's formulation of the drive as the intersection generative of both its overlapping sides, as the drive and its object coincide as ultimately coterminous with this division, with "the split, the gap itself as object."<sup>159</sup> Žižek suggests a similar dynamic when he determines the traversal of fantasy as the operation by which "we identify with the work of our 'imagination' [...] in all its inconsistency – that is to say, as prior to its transformation into the phantasmic frame that guarantees our access to reality."<sup>160</sup> The word to underline here is that of 'work' as prior to any given outcome. This place of work is the place at which the subject must come, the place of the drive as non-identical to itself, as a paradoxical movement of double binds and dissolutions: "this 'zero level'," Žižek writes, is "the impossible moment of the 'birth of subjectivity'."<sup>161</sup>

The ethical weight of the '*wo Es war*' is on the opposite scale of the moral law and the superego, the internalized authority of the father, in more ways than one. Firstly, the Freudian accounts of Oedipus and the father of the horde have a strictly masculine inflection. The law is passed on from father to sons and concerns an administration of their access to women. Freud is infamous for his suggestion that girls would be less disposed towards the veritable destruction of the Oedipus complex that the threat of castration is due to cause in the case of boys on account of an anatomical factor, the girl's lack of a penis. Not coerced as strongly as boys to give up their libidinal siege on the members of the parental couple, Freud reasons, girls can and will

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<sup>158</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 242; see also Johnston, Adrian: "From Signifier to *Jouis-sens*; Lacan's *senti-ments* and *affectuations*": *Self and Emotional Life; Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* (Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou), Columbia University Press, New York, 2013, p. 129 ff.

<sup>159</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis?*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>160</sup> Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject*, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>161</sup> *Loc.cit.* See also Miller, Jacques-Alain: "La Suture (éléments de la logique du signifiant): *Cahiers pour l'analyse (La Vérité)*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1966, p. 37-49, where he identifies the impossible object of a concept non-identical to itself, the number zero, as the place of the subject in internal exclusion of the number chain.

continue to maintain their Oedipal desires throughout life, that is, also into adulthood. In want of a decisive reason to refrain from their parental objects and leave the Oedipus complex behind, the formation of the superego and the introjection of the paternal authority must also, in consequence, suffer: women's superego will never be as inexorable, impersonal, and independent of its affective sources as man's. In that way, the accusations that have been pinned on women through the ages – accusations according to which women have an inferior sense of justice and interest in social questions, poorer abilities for sublimation, and weaker inclinations to endure the toils of life's great necessities – would find their explanation in women's anatomical predispositions.<sup>162</sup>

The second point is related to the first point. The paternal law of the superego does not assume the constitutive loss of being sexual and the impossibility of sexual relations. With all its prohibitions and proscriptions, the paternal law relegates the possession of the phallus and the privilege of definition to the authority of the father, internalized as dead or still alive. The authority of the father is pedestalled as the exception to confirm the rule, to confirm the law. Whereas all his subjects are castrated, the father is not, or, in Lacanian parlance, in accordance with the masculine logic of sexualisation, whereas all men are submitted to the phallic function ( $\forall x. \Phi x$ ), there is at least one to whom the phallic function does not apply ( $\exists x. \sim \Phi x$ ).<sup>163</sup> The father of the horde is the paradigm of such an exceptional figure, the at-least-one or *l'homme-in-zun*. Only for the father are sexual relations to be fully consummated and immediate satisfaction accessible. Neither the impossibility of sexual relations nor the constitutive loss of being sexual is assumed. The failures of being sexual are explained instead on the grounds of the impotence of the castrated subjects, their shortcomings and insufficiencies.

There is another mode of dealing with the impossibility of sexual relations, another logic of sexualisation, namely the feminine one. It reads where there is no one that is not castrated or subjected to the phallic function ( $\sim \exists x. \sim \Phi x$ ), all the time the phallic

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<sup>162</sup> See e.g. Freud: "Einige psychische Folgen des anatomischen Geschlechtsunterschieds" [1925]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band XIV*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main] Imago Publishing, London, 1948, p. 29 ff; and Freud: *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 138 ff.

<sup>163</sup> See e.g. Lacan: "L'Étourdit", *op.cit.*, p. 458 ff; and Lacan: *Encore, op.cit.*, p. 99 ff.

functions is not-all ( $\sim\forall x. \Phi x$ ), all the time there remains something *en plus* of castration.<sup>164</sup> As non-all under the phallic function and thus refusing the function of totality, the feminine logic remains more attuned to an appreciation of the inherent non-identity and paradoxical 'one-less' of the drive. It remains open for the point where the law comes into contradiction with itself, where the law undermines its own operations. The feminine logic drives for the point where the inconsistency of the law reveals itself, where the law's lack of support becomes evident. There is no Other of the Other, Lacan will say, denoting it as the signifier of the barred Other,  $S(\bar{A})$ .<sup>165</sup> Arriving at this point does not equal the rejection of the law *tout court*. Instead of the plunge into psychotic ravings, the feminine drive to the inconsistency of the law signifies an acceptance of its contingent status. Consequently, it signifies an acceptance of the subject's responsibility for its own subjective constitution and works as the founding instance of another law of the drive: in a world where a fundamental loss determines nature and culture, *etc.*, only the radically subjective act can account for one's position and function within these fields.

Copjec has commented on the weight of fully acknowledging the real status of sexual matters for thinking of ethics as a radically subjective act, an act in which the subject constitutes itself, an act in which the subject alters the field into which it enters. She writes that

[i]t is only when we begin to define the subject as *self-governing*, as subject to its own laws, that we cease to consider her as *calculable*, as subject to laws already known, and thus manipulable. It is only when the sovereign incalculability of the subject is acknowledged that perceptions of difference will no longer nourish demands for the surrender of difference to processes of 'homogenization', 'purification' or any of the other crimes against otherness which the rise of racism has begun to acquaint us.<sup>166</sup>

And she goes on:

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<sup>164</sup> See Lacan: *Encore, op.cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>165</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>166</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 21.



To claim that the subject is at *the same level as the law* is not equivalent to claiming that she *is* the law, since any conflation of subject with law only reduces her, subjects her absolutely *to* the law. At the same level as and yet not the law, the subject can only be conceived as the failure of the law, of language. *In* language and yet *more than* language, the subject is a cause for which no signifier can account. Not because she transcends the signifier, but because she inhabits it *as limit*. This subject, radically unknowable, radically incalculable, is the only guarantee we have against racism. This is a guarantee that slips from us whenever we disregard the non-transparency of subject to signifier, whenever we make the subject coincide with the signifier rather than with its misfire.<sup>167</sup>

At this mark, where the subject is to be identified with the misfire of the signifier, the contradictions of the law, as the productive intersection generative of both its overlapping sides, Badiou will come to pick up the Lacanian subject.

### ***In Want of an Other Badiou; the Insistence of Sexual Matters***

In the following, I seek to draw up the fundamentals of how Badiou picks up on Lacan's teachings on the drive as a ground for subjective constitution. The question is what Lacanian psychoanalysis allows Badiou to think concerning the preconditions of the subject and the possibilities of change. While providing an overall presentation of Badiou's traversal of the Lacanian framework, my aim is to sketch out the basic trends that dominate the already existing research on this traversal, and to situate my thesis on that basis. I look to the concept of love as paradigmatic of Lacan's influence on Badiou, as well as a paradigm for Badiou's theory of conditions, as the processes of truths on which philosophy depends. The crucial point is how Badiou strives to think truths and subjects, dialectically, as a process of continuation from the instantaneous occurrences of an event. I look to a few select criticisms against the subject that arises from Badiou's traversal of Lacan. This allows me to pinpoint the materialist strand in Badiou's theory of the subject. Tying head to tail and returning the abstractions of this

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

and the previous section to the contextualization from which I began, the question is how working through Lacan allows Badiou to elaborate on the preconditions and possibilities of a subject of politics and radical change that also speaks to the concrete situation of globalized capitalism today.

### ***Thinking au-delà Lacan***

In the final chapter of *L'Être et l'événement*, after having brought his long extrapolation on the mathematical ontology of being, events, and truths to conclusion, Badiou considers its implications for a theory of the subject – *au-delà Lacan*. Badiou posits a rhetorical question:

Oui ou non, est-ce de l'être, en tant que l'être, que l'ensemble vide est le nom propre? Ou faut-il penser que c'est au sujet que convient adéquatement ce nom, comme si son épuration de toute épaisseur qu'on puisse savoir ne délivrait la vérité, qui parle, qu'en excentrant le point nul en éclipse dans l'intervalle des multiples de ce qui, sous le vocable de 'signifiant', garantit la présence matérielle?<sup>168</sup>

Lacan had opted for the second option, and conceived of the empty set as the name of the subject. The first option of conferring the empty set as the designation of being-*qua*-being will remain Badiou's preferred hypothesis:

Le choix est ici entre une récurrence structurale, qui pense l'effet-sujet comme ensemble vide, donc décelable aux réseaux uniformes de l'expérience, et une hypothèse sur la rareté du sujet, qui en suspend l'occurrence à l'événement, à l'intervention, et aux chemins génériques de la fidélité, renvoyant et réassurant le vide dans une fonction de suture à l'être dont la mathématique seule déploie le savoir.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 472 ("Yes or no, is it of being, *qua* being, that the empty set is the proper name? Or is it necessary to think that it is to the subject that this name adequately agrees, as if the purification of its every conceivable density alone would deliver the truth, which speaks, in 'eccentring' the zero point eclipsed in the interval of multiples of that which, under the term of 'signifier', guarantees its material presence?").

<sup>169</sup> *Loc.cit.* ("The choice is here between a structural recurrence that thinks the subject-effect as empty set, and thus detectable by the uniform grids of experience, and a hypothesis on the rarity

The gist of Badiou's contention with the Lacanian framework is played out within these parameters, insofar as it is precisely a theory of the subject that is rendered both problematic and practically available to Badiou through Lacan's reworking of Freud.

Badiou's re-elaboration on the Lacanian scheme underlines the rarity and singularity of the subject, as part of Badiou's effort to conceive of the subject as an occurrence whose very occurrence alters the field in which it occurs, whose very coming into being alters the preconditions of its being. This is true especially but not exclusively for his elaborations on the subject of politics. It is not for nothing that Žižek refers to Badiou as the paradigmatic theorist of the radically subjective act.<sup>170</sup> The question is how Badiou deserves this designation. If Badiou's philosophical works occur in the context of a globalized capitalism and the historical failure of the communist hypothesis, and if it is from Lacan and the psychoanalytic concept of the drive that a possible theory of the subject can be reformulated today, the question is how Badiou utilizes the Lacanian framework to address the predicaments posed on him by the context of his concrete situation.

If Badiou is the paradigmatic theorist of the act today, Žižek still propagates the need "to *instigate a new wave of Lacanian paranoia*: to push readers to engage in work of their own, and start to discern Lacanian themes everywhere."<sup>171</sup> But he suggests that "among contemporary philosophers, Lacan's only true 'silent partner' is Alain Badiou: although he is critical of (what he perceives as) Lacan's 'anti-philosophy', his entire work is marked by a deep fidelity to and incessant dialogue with Lacan."<sup>172</sup> Žižek echoes an appeal made by Badiou himself, directed at anyone that aspires to be a philosopher today, namely the appeal to muster the courage

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of the subject, which suspends its occurrence to the event, to the intervention, to the generic paths of fidelity, referring and reassuring the void in its function of a suture to being, of which mathematics alone deploys the knowledge").

<sup>170</sup> See Žižek: *Less than Nothing, op.cit.*, p. 427.

<sup>171</sup> Žižek: "Introduction: Lacan with (x)": *Lacan; The Silent Partners* (ed. Slavoj Žižek), Verso, London, 2006, p. 3.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. Hallward has made much the same observation of how "like his contemporaries Žižek, Milner, Lardreau, and Jambet, Badiou can fairly claim to have arrived at a reconstruction of philosophy—that is, a reasoned articulation of subject, truth, and real—that passes through rather than around the challenges posed by Lacan's ambivalent engagement with the Cartesian tradition". See Hallward: *Badiou; a Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 15.

necessary for a 'traversal without weakening' [*traverser sans faiblir*] of the antiphilosophy of Lacan.<sup>173</sup> Badiou entertains upon an incessant dialogue with Lacan, wielding the latter's teaching to the benefit and development of his own philosophical aims. But where Žižek discerns an opposition between criticism and approval, I would argue that it is precisely the tensions between the critical attitude in Badiou's own philosophical endeavors and the antiphilosophy of Lacan that turns Badiou's deep fidelity to Lacan into a productive transaction.

Badiou's question is how to use Lacan in order to pass through and beyond Lacan. It is a question of utilizing Lacan in order to expand upon Lacan's reach, much like how the fidelity of Lenin to the Marxist tradition resided in his ability to surpass the dogmatic abiding by the letter of Marx' texts and to pass on to the practical development of Marxist thought according to concrete analyses of his own concrete situation. A similar operation underscores Lacan's return to Freud as a move beyond Freud. Jacques-Alain Miller observes that this is not

a beyond Freud which leaves Freud behind; it is a beyond Freud which is nevertheless in Freud. Lacan is looking for something in Freud's work of which Freud himself was unaware. Something which we may call extimate, as it is so very intimate that Freud himself was not aware of it. So very intimate that this intimacy is extimate. It is an internal beyond.<sup>174</sup>

Similarly, Badiou's philosophy adheres to the teaching of Lacan up to the point where, in order to stay true to his teaching, it becomes necessary to pass beyond Lacan.<sup>175</sup> Insofar as Badiou takes another step beyond Lacan, he does so not by retracting or abjuring Lacan but by accepting and integrating the fundamentals of his teaching. He does so by rendering its limits and impasses pressing, and by demanding the pass beyond these impasses. It is a question neither of an outright rejection nor of an uncritical adoption, but rather of an immanent exceeding of the Lacanian framework.

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<sup>173</sup> Badiou: "La vérité; forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>174</sup> Miller: "Context and Concepts": *Reading Seminar XI* (ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus), Suny Press, Albany, 1995, p. 8.

<sup>175</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 304-305.

I argue that there is an ethical thrust in Badiou's philosophy. With the notion of an ethical thrust, I am thinking of how Badiou's philosophy is determined by the question of the subject – the preconditions of a subject, the possibilities of a subject – precisely as the possibility for radical change and true novelty. The question of the subject is the question of how actual change can occur, and this question is the guiding light of Badiou's philosophical contributions. Badiou's renown as a philosopher might still weigh on his equation, in *L'Être et l'événement*, between mathematics and ontology. The real interest of Badiou's work, however, is not to be found in the first term of this title but in its last: while the question of being-*qua*-being is not insubstantial, the real interest is directed at that-which-is-not-being-*qua*-being, and that finds its *fons et origo* in the event. The equation of mathematics and ontology serves as a preparation for his elaboration on the concepts of truths and subjects in the wake of an event.<sup>176</sup> Ed Pluth suggests that Badiou's *L'Éthique; Essai sur la conscience du mal* (1993) concludes the project of *L'Être et l'événement*.<sup>177</sup> I suggest that the ethical thrust is there from the start, and that it is there still. The question is how the general movement of Badiou's ethical thrust – as it proceeds from the ontological framework through the doctrine of events and truths on to the theory of the subject – takes place as inseparable from the trajectory of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy. In the main, the movement of Badiou's philosophical works is played out in the Lacanian operation of de-relating the couple of knowledge and truth, to be followed by the operations of their re-relating, through the forcing of a generic procedure in which the subject is realized as a subject to truth.<sup>178</sup>

Badiou mobilizes the Lacanian framework already in his first major book, *Théorie du sujet*. The Lacanian framework is introduced to supplement the dialectical materialism of Marxism with its conceptual 'black sheep', a theory of the subject.<sup>179</sup> The project is given another punctuation in *L'Être et l'événement*. Badiou observes in Lacan a delineation approximating but still failing to sufficiently solve the problematic

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<sup>176</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement, op.cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>177</sup> Pluth: "Alain Badiou, Kojève, and the Return of the Human Exception": *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2009, p. 196.

<sup>178</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement, op.cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>179</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet, op.cit.*, p. 195 ff. See also Pluth: "The Black Sheep of Materialism: The Theory of the Subject": *op.cit.*, p. 99-112.

of how a subject can be thought as compatible with that which is possible to pronounce in regard to being. The problematic of relating being and the subject, Badiou writes, will lead him to reverse the Kantian proposition in which the transcendental subject is the ground of possibility for pure mathematics. The question Badiou poses is how a subject is possible insofar as pure mathematics is the science of being. This reversal was triggered by Miller's question concerning the ontology of Lacan, as well as by Lacan's conception of the real as an impasse to formalization and pure logic as the science of the real. By way of a decision to conceive of the Multiple as the impasse of mathematics, its point of the real touching being, the inherent impossibility of mathematical formalization rather than one of its transparent concepts, Badiou turns mathematics into ontology, the science of being-*qua*-being. Simultaneously, he relieves the concept of the real from its purely subjective confines in Lacan.<sup>180</sup> In short, Badiou performs a transposition of the real. No longer a purely subjective category as in Lacan, it becomes predominantly a category of being, in an operation that sanctions the reintroduction of a doctrine of truths while requiring a reworking of the category of the subject, at the same time. An event is the supplementation of the void in a situation, the momentary appearance of the real of being as pure and inconsistent multiplicity within the consistencies of structure. A truth depends on an event, and is conceived as the processes where "l'être, ce qui s'appelle l'être, fonde le lieu fini d'un sujet."<sup>181</sup> If the Lacanian framework presented a theory of the subject as void, Badiou's transposition of the real from the subject to being forces him to reverse also the Lacanian proposition: the question becomes how, if being is void, a subject is to proceed therefrom? Badiou delivers the most precise formulation of his relation to Lacan in *Logiques des Mondes* (2006): "Lacan fait structure de ce que je crois séquence, ou devenir contingent."<sup>182</sup> Badiou's subject is not a matter of substance, a transcendental function, or a seat of experience, nor is it a void and empty point, and never an invariant or structural necessity. It can only be a rare

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<sup>180</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 10-12. For Miller's question on the ontology of Lacan, see Lacan: *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 37 ff.

<sup>181</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 475 ("being, that which is called being, founds the finite place of the subject").

<sup>182</sup> Badiou: *Logiques des Mondes*, *op.cit.*, p. 502 ("Lacan makes structure of that which I believe to be sequence, or contingent becoming").

and excessive configuration that casts itself from the hazardous tissues of truths, in the wake of an event.<sup>183</sup> Lacan remains caught up in an essentially Cartesian conception of the subject as always-already there, no matter how eccentric or empty or split it is.<sup>184</sup> The ethical thrust of Badiou's philosophy, on the other hand, drives Badiou into a dimension beyond Lacan by its insistence on the post-evental status of the subject, understood as the finite modality of infinite procedures of truths.

Badiou's confrontation with the Lacanian framework is both fundamental and pervasive, and Badiou willingly admits that the relation of Lacan to philosophy has always been and continues to be the key element that underpins his philosophical project.<sup>185</sup> But if Badiou is continuously involved in dialogues with Lacan, the exchanges taking place are not always explicit. Žižek is justified in choosing the phrase of 'silent partner' in designating the transactions between Badiou and Lacan, insofar as these transactions passes at times unpronounced, but nonetheless articulated or articulable. This is where my main thesis intervenes to interrogate the mark of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacan. Zupančič has observed how Badiou remains "utterly unyielding in his stance as regards refusing to associate subjectivity, in its emergence, with anything like 'sexuation',"<sup>186</sup> and this is a point in itself: the encounters with sexual matters are not necessarily made explicit and directly, in Badiou. There is an implicit and indirect entertainment of sexual matters taking place in his work, which – precisely as it remains to a large extent unpronounced, but extant nonetheless – calls for further investigation and closer scrutiny, if the signification and implications of Badiou's ethical thrust beyond Lacan are to be understood. But I argue that the sexual matters of the so-called missed encounter between psychoanalysis and philosophy can be accentuated into its opposite, as the crux of Badiou's relation to Lacan. It entails an appreciation of sexual matters as the impossible point of

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<sup>183</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 429-430.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 474.

<sup>185</sup> See Badiou: "Formules de 'L'Étourdit'" : *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel; Deux leçons sur 'L'Étourdit' de Lacan* (with Barbara Cassin), Fayard, Paris, 2010, p. 105.

<sup>186</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis?*, *op.cit.*, p. 14. For similar observations, see also Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 747; and Bartlett, Clemens and Roffe: *Lacan, Deleuze, Badiou*, *op.cit.*, p. 222-223. Juliet Flower MacCannell claims that Badiou desires to do away with sex altogether, to "heal sex's 'immanent break'", see MacCannell, Juliet Flower: "Alain Badiou; Philosophical Outlaw": *Alain Badiou; Philosophy and its Conditions* (ed. Gabriel Riera), Suny Press, Albany, 2005, p. 168.

philosophy, its impasse proper, the real from the non-encounter of which philosophy will spin its concepts of being, truths, and the subject. "Toute vérité fait passe d'une impasse," Badiou insists, "l'impasse de l'être [...] est en vérité la passe du Sujet."<sup>187</sup> My thesis turns this insistence of Badiou back upon his own philosophical dissemination. At the crossroads of philosophy and psychoanalysis, sexual matters marks the impasses from which the decisive constituents of Badiou's elaborations on the subject can be drawn. My remaining chapters will interrogate these marks in greater detail. For now, the question concerns what threads have been disentangled so far, by Badiou himself, or by his readers.

### *Truths of Love*

A common approach to Badiou and his Lacanian/sexual *liaisons* has been by way of the status of love in Badiou's philosophy. The question is how the status of love in Badiou can illuminate his relationship to Lacan, his immanent exceeding of the Lacanian framework, and where that leaves Badiou's reformulation of the subject. The concept of love makes the similarities between Badiou and Lacan especially pronounced, as many have remarked, while the differences it highlights might have been less ascertained. Love figures as a generic truth procedure, as one of the four conditions of philosophy (along with science, art and politics). The choice of love in approaching the issue of the Badiou-Lacan relation comes as no surprise. Love is the concept in Badiou's works that is most heavily intoned in sexual colors and Lacanian parlance. Love is where the truth of sexual difference and sexual non-relation appears, the truth of the sexual disjunction as a 'scene of Two' or 'immanent Two'.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, love figures as privileged condition, a super-condition or condition of conditions. With its concept of an immanent Two, or as "le statut événementiel du Deux,"<sup>189</sup> love provides a formal scheme for every other truth procedure (of science, art and politics), on the one hand. It comprises philosophy itself, as the love of

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<sup>187</sup> Badiou: "Philosophie et psychanalyse": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 283; and Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 469.

<sup>188</sup> Badiou: "Qu'est-ce que l'amour?": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 260 ff; and Badiou: "La Scene du Deux": *De l'amour*, Flammarion, Paris, 1999, p. 177.

<sup>189</sup> Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 18.



wisdom, on the other. Because love makes a truth out of the disjunction or non-relation as such, Badiou writes, it secures the generic as that which carries no attribute or predicate, as subtracted from every particular disjunctive position. Love thereby serves as "le gardien de l'universalité du vrai."<sup>190</sup> Hence Copjec will argue that love is the basic and central condition underlying Badiou's project as a whole,<sup>191</sup> while Žižek will note how that which "is encompassed by this fourth procedure is not just the miracle of love, but also psychoanalysis, theology, and philosophy itself." Žižek will even propose that love is "Badiou's 'Asiatic mode of production – the category into which he throws all truth procedures which do not fit the other three modes," while it simultaneously figures "as a kind of underlying formal principle or matrix of all of them."<sup>192</sup> But love is not so much an answer or off-hand solution to unpredicted problems in Badiou's philosophy, as the term 'Asiatic mode' would imply. Rather love assumes the question or the paradox as such, and makes the obstacle to the formation of an answer – the tension within the answer itself – into a truth.

Love ties to the event as the event also figures in a figure of Two. The event figures in the ultra-one poised between the void and itself, where it is counted twice as a self-belonging element, an element presented *in* and presenting its own presentation. Furthermore, Badiou writes,

[l]'événement qu'épingle à l'être-présenté la capacité intervenante reste suturé à l'imprésentable. C'est que l'essence de l'ultra-un est le Deux. Considéré, non dans son être-multiple, mais dans sa position, ou sa situation, un événement est un

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<sup>190</sup> Badiou: "Qu'est-ce que l'amour", *op.cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>191</sup> See Copjec: "Gai Savoir Sera", *op.cit.* p. 119. Hallward suggests that mathematics constitute the fundamental condition for Badiou, see Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. xxix; xxxiii; whereas Pluth suggests the same of politics, see Pluth: *Alain Badiou; A Philosophy of the New*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>192</sup> Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction", *op.cit.*, p. 170. A similar argument, though less explicit, is found in McNulty, Tracy: "Feminine Love and the Pauline Universal": *Alain Badiou; Philosophy and its Conditions* (ed. Gabriel Riera), Suny Press, Albany, 2005, p. 185-212. For more general readings of Badiou on love, see *e.g.* Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 185 ff; and Rösing: *Kønnets Katekismus*, *op.cit.*, p. 153 ff. Hallward and Rösing compare Badiou's concept of love to that found in Irigaray, a comparison they are not alone to make, see *e.g.* Watrous, Liza: "Love's Universal Impetus; Luce Irigaray and Alain Badiou": *L'Ésprit Créateur*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2012, p. 66-73; Saldanha, Arun: "Against Yin-Yang; The Dao of Feminist Universalism": *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, p. 145-168. For a slightly different take on love in relation to the mother-child relationship, see Baraitzer, Lisa: *Maternal Encounters; The Ethics of Interruption*, Routledge, London/New York, 2009.

*intervalle* plutôt qu'un terme, il s'établit, dans la rétroaction intervenante, entre l'anonymat vide que borde le site et l'en-plus d'un nom. Le mathème [de l'événement:  $e_x = x \in X, e_x$ ] inscrit du reste cette scission originaire, puisqu'il ne détermine la composition-une de l'événement  $e_x$  qu'en y distinguant de lui-même les éléments représentés du site, d'où provient par ailleurs le nom. [/] L'événement est ultra-un, outre qu'il s'interpose entre le vide et lui-même, parce qu'il est ce dont se fonde la maxime 'il y a du Deux'. Le Deux ainsi allégué n'est pas la reduplication de l'un du compte, la répétition des effets de la loi. Il est un Deux originaire, un intervalle de suspens, l'effet scindé d'une décision.<sup>193</sup>

The event as an originating Two – an inherent or immanent Two – mimics the operations of the Lacanian drive: divided within itself as well as dividing the law into which it intervenes, designating the failure of the law as the law's inherent scission. Like the drive, the Two is located at the exact point where the law comes into contradiction with itself. In Badiou's terminology of the event, the drive designates a supernumerary supplement or excess by which the real of being as pure and inconsistent multiplicity intrudes momentarily in consistent representation, in a consistent count. But besides the similarities of love, the event, and the drive, the question is also how love can highlight Badiou's differences from Lacan. If love is paradigmatic of Badiou's philosophy, it must be paradigmatic also of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy.

Zupančič elaborates on the relations between love, the event, and the drive. To her, Badiou's concept of an immanent Two constitutes "one of [contemporary philosophy's] most precious concepts which, although it comes from a singular generic procedure, has its universal value and is in no way restricted to that procedure."<sup>194</sup> She

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<sup>193</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement, op.cit.*, p. 229 ("The event that the intervening capacity pins to presented-being remains sutured to the un-presentable, insofar as the essence of the ultra-one is the Two. Considered not in its being, but in its position or its situation, the event is an *interval* rather than a term, and establishes itself, in the retroactive intervention, between the void anonymity bordering on the site and the surplus of a name. The matheme [of the event:  $e_x = x \in X, e_x$ ], moreover, inscribes this originating scission, since it determines only the one-composition of the event  $e_x$  by distinguishing itself from the elements represented by the site, from which the name comes. [/] The event is ultra-one, besides being interposed between the void and itself, because it is that on which the maxim of 'there is some Two' is founded. The Two thus alleged is not the reduplication of the one of the count, the repetition of the effects of the law. It is an originating Two, an interval of suspense, a split effect of a decision").

<sup>194</sup> Zupančič: "The Fifth Condition", *op.cit.*, p. 201.

suggests that Lacanian psychoanalysis serves Badiou as an unpronounced and 'fifth condition', in a move by which the condition of love is counted twice. At stake in the fifth condition is nothing less than the possibility of philosophy *tout court*, insofar as philosophy depends on a paradoxical relation of proximity and distance, inclusion and exclusion, *vis-à-vis* its four conditions (science, art, love, and politics). In Lacanian parlance, the relation is one of *extimacy*, where "philosophy has to pull itself away from the immediate grip of its conditions, while nevertheless remaining under the effect of these conditions."<sup>195</sup> The crux of the problem concerns philosophy's need to avoid the classical mode of representation and its stone-cut determinations, denoted by Badiou as the state of the situation or meta-structure, the presentation *of* presentation, the count *of* the count. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers an alternative mode of representation, Zupančič argues, as Lacan defines the signifier as that which comes to represent the subject for another signifier. In Lacan's definition of the signifier, representation is conceived as a presentation *within* presentation:

Here, representation as such is a wandering excess over itself; representation *is* the infinite tarrying with the excess that springs not simply from what is or is not represented (its 'object'), but from this act of representation itself, from its own inherent 'crack' or inconsistency. The Real is not something outside or beyond representation, but is the very crack of representation.<sup>196</sup>

Representation comes about as neither above nor below that which is presented, but at the same level, as a dislocation within presentation itself, as its inherent division. Zupančič recognizes such a "possibility for the 'counting the count itself' to be situated on the same level as the count" to be the stake involved in Badiou's concept of the immanent Two of love.

A Lacanian lens on love and the event is productive. Besides philosophy's relation of proximity and distance *vis-à-vis* its conditions, the concept of the immanent Two of love covers the truths of love itself, obviously, as the relation of the two lovers in their very non-relation. It also covers those of the other three conditions, and the

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

event as such. The event depends on a similar relation of the situation to its inherent non-relation. The event is an occurrence of the internal exclusion within a situation, the point where the situation's inside and outside meet in an intersection potentially productive of both its overlapping sides. As in the drive and its simultaneous binding and dissolving of its own dissolved bonds, the event occurs as an originating scission.

However, one should take care not to miss out on the precarious status of the event. Its being in a situation is to disappear in its appearance and appear in its disappearing. The event is but as a fleeting glimpse, and its actual occurrence in any situation is essentially undecidable. If the event carries more than a mere superficial similarity to the drive, one should not ignore how Badiou refuses every equation of event and truths, of event and subject. A truth comes to be as a procedure of fidelity to the event, carried out in and by a subject. The refusal to think truths and subjects as punctual occurrences, insisting instead on thinking them as procedures and continuations, comprises the principle movement in Badiou's immanent exceeding or traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy. In other words, when Badiou sets himself to task with the question of how, if being is void, a subject is to proceed therefrom, his answer is already contained in the question: it is by proceeding from the occurrence of the void of being, and not as the void itself, that subjective constitution is to be realized.

To Badiou, the subject first appears in and by a nominating intervention by which the undecidable occurrence of the event in the situation is decided upon, positively, as actual. The nominating intervention designates a foundational ethical act. The decision on the undecidable institutes the decision as a scission in the situation, but also a scission in the essence of the law. The nominating intervention is an act where the subject constitutes itself in and by an alteration of the situation into which its nomination intervenes. It is an act where the subject's constitution is coterminous with the alteration of the situation into which its nomination intervenes.<sup>197</sup> In the field of love, the nominating intervention may come in the form of a declaration of love, as in the *je t'aime* of the movies. It testifies to the occurrence of the event as the

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<sup>197</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 303; and Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 202 ff. See also Smith: "The Limits of the Subject in Badiou's *Being and Event*", *op.cit.*, p. 86 ff.

encounter between the two in love.<sup>198</sup> In the field of politics, the nominating intervention may come in the form of a revolutionary declaration, as in the Bolshevik 'all power to the soviets' or Marx' call to proletarian unity. They bear witness to how the revolution, despite appearances, has already begun. A call to proletarian unity or power to the soviets may shake the foundations of the powers that be, and thereby alter the situation by pointing to a new and previously unforeseen element of the situation. The real question, however, is how to make such a momentary intrusion of alterity into a durable alteration of the situation. The real question is how to make change last, a lasting change.

The foundational act of the nominating intervention must find its other in the notion of fidelity, Badiou suggests. After an initial decision on the undecidable has testified to the actual occurrence of an event, a truth is produced through a procedure of fidelity, where a subject faithful of the event persists in a laborious process of deducing the consequences of the event's occurrence in and for the situation. The condition of love is again paradigmatic, but not in the most obvious way. It is not so much the case that the notion of fidelity refers to love, Badiou explains, but rather the reverse. It is love that calls on the notion of fidelity so as to make love a persistent and continuous realization of the disjunctive non-relation of the Two, expanding its duration beyond its brief glimpse in the momentary encounter.<sup>199</sup> While love depends on an encounter and the event of falling in love, true love is also characterized by a certain continuation. Love is not a one-time fling, but a continuous affair. In other words, love is paradigmatic insofar as it underlines the status of the ethical act in Badiou to be an act of duration, for a subject of love as well as for the subject of science, art, or politics. The constitution of the subject is a process of continuous alteration of the situation in which the subject intervenes. The ethical act *par excellence* is therefore that of *un pas de plus*, the ethical imperative that of continuation: to continue thinking, or, amounting to the same, to continue exceeding one's own being.<sup>200</sup> The subject may originate in a punctual encounter with the void, testified to by a nominating intervention, but, to Badiou, it is through a continuous

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<sup>198</sup> See Badiou: "Qu'est-ce que l'amour?", *op.cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>199</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 257

<sup>200</sup> See Badiou: *L'Éthique*, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

process of elaborating the consequences of such an encounter that the subject materializes in a situation.

### *Too Much and Too Little*

Besides the focus on love and its precarious status in Badiou's philosophy, the route of the real as a means of entering upon the relations of Badiou and Lacan is a common alternative among Badiou's commentators. As a rule, the presence of sexual matters is less pronounced in these instances, despite the debt to sexual matters that the concept of the real owes in Lacan. The questions concern the differences in which the concept of the real operates in Badiou's philosophical works compared to in Lacan's psychoanalytic theories. The contentions among the commentators can be summed up as follows, namely that either Lacan or Badiou's real admits either too much or too little of the subject: either too much depends upon the subject, or too little is made of the subject's dependencies; either too much is decided by the subject, or too little is said of the subject's decision. I will briefly sketch out the main lines of demarcation in these debates, so as to indicate that which might have been left out and prepare for my interventions to follow.

Bosteels identifies the rational kernel of Badiou's philosophical endeavor to be its concept of forcing, the forcing of a truth at the hands of the subject. Bosteels thus underlines Badiou's truly activist stance on the subject, insofar as every truth procedure ultimately depends on the active intervention and positive fidelity of a subject. A subject actively forces a truth into existence. In short, Bosteels writes, the psychoanalytic interpretation of truth as

a brief traumatic encounter, or illuminating shock, in the midst of everyday reality [...] fails to understand the procedure whereby a truth is not something on which we chance in a fleeting change of perspective but something that is actively produced, through a step-by-step intervention, after an event.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics, op.cit.*, p. 167. See also Bosteels: "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject; The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism": *Lacan; His Silent Partners* (ed. Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2006, p. 153.

Hallward agrees with Bosteels' reading and his emphasis on the subjective preconditions of the possibility of radical change. Compared to the too little of the Lacanian model, Badiou's theory admits more of the subject:

The essential thing to understand is that this making possible is always an exceptional process. This is what distinguishes Badiou's subjective or activist conception of the real from Lacan's ultimately more structural or passive conception. As Bruno Bosteels points out with particular force, it is only the subject who, by affirming the apparently impossible consequences of an event that the situation cannot recognize, can truly act on the level of the real. Such is Badiou's most basic article of faith: truly autonomous subjective action, if founded only on an event, can indeed touch its own real – which is to say, can achieve the impossible.<sup>202</sup>

A certain paradox becomes apparent in Badiou's transposition of the real from the category of the subject to that of being. Such a transposition simultaneously enacts a transformation or revaluation of one's relation to the real. While transposed from the subject to being, the real is transformed from a passive encounter with a structural real to a properly activist-subjective affirmation of a procedural real.

Hallward is less content with such a too-much-ness of the subject than Bosteels. Hallward perceives the singular subject in Badiou's philosophy to rail too far off into its own non-relation. Celebrating Badiou for his critique of the specified, as mentioned, Hallward nonetheless challenges Badiou and his concept of the generic to provide "a more properly *specific* understanding of individuals and situations as conditioned by the relations that both enable and constrain their existence."<sup>203</sup> There is nothing in Badiou to explain the specificity of a given truth procedure and its specific subject in relation to its specific situation, Hallward argues, insofar as Badiou effectively reduces the process of subjectivization to

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<sup>202</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 14-5.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

an inaccessible moment of decision: 'The eventual nomination has always already taken place..., and this 'already' is our only guarantee. The rest is a matter of faith...!' The process of a subsequent coming to resolution figures, then, as a more or less instantaneous conversion: an event takes place; an undecidable is decided; an axiom comes into effect.<sup>204</sup>

By granting too much to the subject, Badiou simultaneously grants it too little, Hallward contends. Badiou's subject is too radically subjective, insofar as the decision on the undecidable relieves the subject of every relation to its specific situation, to its specific historical site. To Hallward, there is a step wanting in Badiou's account of the process of subjective constitution.

Gillespie's critical remarks on Badiou are similar to Hallward's. He notes a tautological argument in Badiou's theory of the event. The subject comes to constitute the event in the same move by which the nomination of the event comes to constitute the subject. Gillespie argues for the need of a third term, a theory of affect, which is wanting in Badiou's philosophical adumbrations. Only such a third term will be able to account for the coextensive relation of event and subject. More precisely, Gillespie is searching for a third term to account for how the subject can be taken, engrossed, and carried away by an event in the first place. He finds such a third term, a theory of affect, in the Lacanian notion of anxiety.<sup>205</sup> If the nominating intervention and the undecidable decision constitute the subject, the question for Gillespie concerns the grounds on which such a decision is decided upon, the instance or agency that chooses to intervene and comes to pick out a name. In short, the question is how a mere human animal opts to become a subject of truth.

In the final analysis, yet the same contention underlies Žižek's accusation of a 'hidden Kantianism' in Badiou's work. The distinction between being and event, knowledge and truth in Badiou's work supposedly echoes Kant's distinction of

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<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285

<sup>205</sup> See Gillespie: *The Mathematics of Novelty*, *op.cit.*, p. 102-3. See also Gillespie: "Giving Form to its own Existence; Anxiety and the Subject of Truth": *Cosmos and History; The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 2006, p. 167.



phenomena and noumenon, constitutive principles and regulative ideas.<sup>206</sup> All in all, Žižek reverses back upon Badiou the complaint raised by Bosteels on Badiou's behalf against Lacan. Bosteels claims that Badiou succeeds where Lacan comes up short, namely in thinking the possibility of fully embracing the consequences of an encounter with the real by way of the subject and its post-evental fidelity. Žižek argues that Badiou fails in precisely this matter. Badiou, according to Žižek, precludes that which Lacan had enabled through the notion of the analyst's discourse and his casting of the death drive, namely "the possibility of devising a discourse that has as its structuring principle the unnamable 'indivisible remainder' that eludes a discursive grasp."<sup>207</sup> Badiou thereby misses out on the radical conception of the subject that follows from the teachings of Lacan, a conception true to the properly Hegelian move by which the limit of nomination is transposed from the exterior to the interior, where the subject is conceived as the inherent obstacle to its own subjective constitution.<sup>208</sup>

Žižek's anti-Kantian attack on Badiou has been countered on many occasions, mainly on account of its failure to appreciate the status of the infinite in Badiou's philosophy.<sup>209</sup> But the underlying contention is not necessarily rebuffed. The underlying contention says that a mediate instance able to account for the occurrence of the subject within the process of subjective constitution is lacking from Badiou's account of being, events, and truths. Adrian Johnston elaborates on this. According to Johnston,

Žižek insightfully identifies Badiou's failure to specify precisely what, in the very moment that gives birth to both the truth-event and its subject, makes possible the founding negative withdrawal from the positive order of given, extant situations (i.e., the subjectifying 'no'). What underpins the uniquely human capacity to negate

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<sup>206</sup> See Žižek: "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism", *op.cit.*, p. 258-9; and Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction", *op.cit.*, p. 173-174.

<sup>207</sup> Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction", *op.cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>208</sup> See Žižek: "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism", *op.cit.*, p. 257-8.

<sup>209</sup> See e.g. Bosteels: "Badiou without Žižek": *Polygraph* 17, 2005, p. 223-246; and Farrán, Roque: "Alain Badiou and the 'Platonism of the multiple' – or on what the gesture of the re-entanglement of mathematics and philosophy implies" (trans. Roque Farrán and Imanol Galfarso): *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008 (no pagination).

'what there is' in favor of an unconditional fidelity to an 'x' internally excluded within a situational field?<sup>210</sup>

Badiou is lacking a properly developed separation between two distinct forms of void: "Incarnate voids within human nature (for example, voids as internal to the libidinal economy) should be distinguished from an inhuman, structural void as a universal feature of ontology,"<sup>211</sup> Johnston argues. To him, and to Žižek, the former void within human nature, internal to the libidinal economy, holds priority over the latter structural void. That is to say, the death drive must be acknowledged in its function of an initial negation or destruction, the precondition for any later subjective engagement or identification with a cause.

Badiou is reluctant to accept the Freudian death drive to be more than a nihilist will to nothing, an absence of any positive drive to the good.<sup>212</sup> Žižek thus flings his criticism that Badiou misses the crux of the psychoanalytic stance on the death drive, in which it serves as a "negative gesture of 'wiping the slate clean'." Such a gesture is the necessary precondition before any consequent elaboration of new truths can become a possibility, Žižek writes.<sup>213</sup> In equating the Freudian death drive with a mere 'morbid obsession with death', as another expression of human finitude, instead of appreciating its infinite and immortal qualities, Badiou misses out on the point that "this death drive is a sort of 'vanishing mediator'," as Johnston reformulates it, "a transitional factor/moment intervening between and conjoining Badiou's central non-dialecticized conceptual pairs, such as both being and event as well as individual and subject."<sup>214</sup> The death drive designates a zero-point of subjectivity that is necessary for an individual's detachment from its situation and its possible consequent decision to become a subject of truth, a subject in fidelity to the event.

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<sup>210</sup> Johnston: "There is Truth, and then there are truths—or, Slavoj Žižek as a Reader of Alain Badiou": *The International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2007, p. 160.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161. For another approach to the same argument, see also Johnston: "Nothing is not always No-One; (a)voiding Love": *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2005, p. 67-81.

<sup>212</sup> See Badiou: *L'Éthique*, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>213</sup> See Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject*, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>214</sup> Johnston: "From the Spectacular Act to the Vanishing Act; Badiou, Žižek, and the Politics of Lacanian Theory": *The International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 1, no. 0, 2007, p. 26-7. See also Bryant, Levi R.: "Symptomal Knots and Evental Ruptures; Žižek, Badiou, and Discerning the Indiscernible": *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2007 (no pagination).

Bosteels proffers the most ardent defense of Badiou in face of criticisms like the above. He argues for the necessity to counter the demands for vanishing mediators and specific or affective relationality, and makes the case for a dialectical appreciation of Badiou's major concepts. Despite its apparent disappearance towards the end of the 80s and the mathematical turn, the dialectic is already present and even ubiquitous in Badiou's works, from beginning to end. The presence of the dialectic renders the gist of Badiou's work to be more than a simple opposition between being and event. The dialectic works by installing a division in two internal to each term. Being is divided in two, as presentation and representation, and the non-coincidence of being with itself gives place to the event. The event itself is divided in two, between the void and the situation, in whose split the subject and truths are borne.<sup>215</sup> Whether or not Bosteels' argument fully counters the criticisms against which it is raised (*e.g.*, does it account for the mechanisms by which a human animal decides to become a subject?), it does make an important point by bringing the dialectic to the fore.

First of all, the presence of the dialectic raises the question of what radical change and true novelty can be. Does it come in the form of an absolute beginning, a rupture that divides the history of the world in two? Or is it a gradual and laborious process of deducing the consequences of an event in and for a situation, torn between the old and the new? Badiou opts for the latter, whereas Lacanian antiphilosophy delineates the implications of the former. Secondly, the dialectic goes hand in hand with Badiou's materialism, defined simply as the priority of being over thinking. Frank Ruda suggests that Badiou's materialism constitutes 'an idealism without idealism'.<sup>216</sup> My point is similar, namely that if ideas are the motor force of change, these ideas are materially occasioned. If the death drive designates a zero-point of subjectivity as the precondition for radical change – as the point from which thinking can begin anew –

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<sup>215</sup> See Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 162 ff. Badiou affirms Bosteels observation of the ubiquity of the dialectic, see Badiou: *Logiques des mondes*, *op.cit.*, p. 548. See also Feltham, Oliver: "Et l'être et l'événement et; la philosophie et ses nominations": *Écrits autour de la pensée d'Alain Badiou* (ed. Oliver Feltham and Bruno Besana), L'Harmattan, Paris, 2007, p. 107-124; and Besana, Bruno: "L'Événement de l'être; Une proposition de lecture, en forçage aux textes de Badiou, du rapport entre événement et situation": *Écrits autour de la pensée d'Alain Badiou*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2007, p. 125-130.

<sup>216</sup> See Ruda, Frank: "Idealism without idealism; Badiou's Materialist Renaissance": *Angelaki; Journal for the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2014, p. 85-98; see also Ruda: *For Badiou; Idealism without Idealism*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (IL), 2015.

Badiou's materialism will adamantly insist that such a precondition is provided through being, not through thinking or the subject itself: it is the established state and the structures of the concrete situation that provide the preconditions for a subject of truth and for another thinking, insofar as it provides the preconditions for an event. It is being-*qua*-being that occasions the resurgence of that-which-is-not-being-*qua*-being. It answers to the dictum that the emancipation of one goes by the emancipation of all, as it addresses the very mechanism of exclusion as such. In the present situation, Badiou's concrete analysis identifies the growing number of the ultimately dispossessed masses as the zero-point or void of globalized capitalism. These numbers count the ones whose existence is to not exist within the established states of today, whose differential position is in-difference and whose 'slate is already wiped clean'. A hazardous resurgence of the presence of these numbers within globalized capitalism today would constitute an event, and in that manner provide the material underpinnings for a possible subject of politics, a possible radical change. The question for a possible subject of politics today is whether or not an intervention to nominate such an event has occurred, and if it has, if there remains a subject to carry out the faithful deduction of its consequences within our current situation.

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My main thesis is that it is in the very junctions where the ethical thrust of Badiou's work intersect with sexual matters that a key to disentangle the still silent threads of his work can be found; that the points where his disseminations do not escape the presence of sexual matters mark especially dense and significant knots in his arguments. I do not claim that my contention will bring the debates sketched out above to a close with a last word on Badiou's elaborations on the event, truths, and the subject, the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change and true novelty. Rather I believe my contention can contribute to maintain the spaces of dispute open. I underscore the presence of the theme of sexual matters also in the discussions of Badiou that seem to derail from this theme, even if they hinge on the question of the real, the non-relation, and its place and function in human being. The issue of whether

or not Badiou mobilizes sexual matters sufficiently, or if he lets the full radical potential of psychoanalysis pass him by, is highlighted. Yet I do not to claim that Badiou is talking of sex when and where he does not, nor *vice versa*. In the chapters to follow, my point is to analyze the junctions in Badiou's work where sexual matters intrude, and utilize these junctions to accentuate how his project shares in and is to be distinguished from its Lacanian premises. On the basis of this foundational chapter, however, a preliminary conclusion can be cast on the relations between Badiou and Lacan, and how they facilitate a thinking of the subject of change and novelty.

Badiou's philosophical project is situated in the context of a globalized capitalism, in want of another politics, confronted by the conundrum of the preconditions and possibilities for the communist hypothesis as another horizon in which a subject of politics can materialize. Psychoanalysis, and especially the Lacanian rewrite of the Freudian drive as one-less, offers a theory or an ethics of the act as a subjective constitution in and through subjective destitution. It identifies the occasions on which a given structure faces its own inherent contradictions, the points at which the law undermines itself, and it posits these points as the opportunities for radical change. Lacan's teachings on the subject and the drive are not sufficient for Badiou to think the possibilities of change through, so Badiou makes the call for a traversal or immanent exceeding of the Lacanian framework. The basic step in Badiou's traversal is the transposition of the real, or the void, from the category of the subject to the category of being. This basic step bears some decisive consequences by which Badiou reformulates a doctrine of truths and a theory of the subject of his own. First of all, by the transposition of the real from the subject to being, Badiou simultaneously transforms the category of the real from being an issue of an instantaneous encounter to becoming an issue of a properly activist-subjective affirmation of continuation. The subject is no more the void of structure but the fidelity procedure of truths. Badiou's ethics of the act is an ethics of a continuous alteration of the situation, not its instantaneous overturning. With Bosteels, I would designate this aspect of continuation over instants as the dialectical aspect of Badiou's traversal: division creates movement, change, and novelty. Secondly, there is the materialist aspect of Badiou's traversal, whose weight rests on the differentiation of the

philosophical concept of the event from the antiphilosophical act. By relocating the real to being, and by conceiving of the event as the resurgence of being as void in a situation, Badiou is able propose a fully materialist theory of the subject that responds to the predicament of globalized capitalism, and that anchors the possibilities for radical change and novelty in the concrete situation of today. It is to further elaborate on the significance of the Lacanian framework on the mathematical gesture and the materialist dialectic in Badiou's philosophical works that I turn to question the function of sexual matters.

## (II)

### **The Infinite and The Feminine Non-All as Inaccessibility and Actuality**

This chapter addresses the significance of the traversal of the Lacanian edifice that Badiou designates as necessary for the philosopher today, and its implications for Badiou's thinking of radical change. As Badiou explains in *L'Être et l'événement*, his philosophy confronts the difficulty of the compatibility between a subject as process and that which it is possible to express concerning being. Spurred by Miller's interrogation, Lacan determined his ontology to be an ontology of non-being. Not entirely satisfied by Lacan's response, but intrigued by Lacan's notion of the real as an impasse to formalization and pure logic as the science of the real, Badiou set the task upon himself to radically rethink the relation between being, truths, and the subject. Badiou considers these themes to be the triad at the core of modernity.<sup>217</sup> Badiou's rethinking of this triad is based on the premise that the real is no longer to be conceived of as a category of the subject as such, as in Lacan, but rather as a category of being. Badiou discovers that the Multiple, or Number, as he will name it in *Le Nombre et les nombres* (1990), is not a transparent concept in mathematics but, *a contrario*, the impasse of mathematical formalization. The multiple is the point of the real by which mathematics touches the pure inconsistency of being as such.<sup>218</sup> This discovery does not only lay the foundations for a new understanding of ontology. It alters the field of that which can be said and thought of truths and, consequently, of the subject.

My course through this matter is determined by the question of the feminine and how an analysis of the function of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacan can serve to underline the implications involved in the notion of the feminine other. It

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<sup>217</sup> See Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>218</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 10-11; and Badiou: *Le Nombre et les nombres*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1990, p. 261.

is a question of how the figure of the feminine operates in Badiou's elaborations of actual change after Lacan. I start out from the generally accepted notion that Badiou's denomination of the generic multiple – designating the being of truth – is a badly hidden reference to the Lacanian conception of the feminine logic of the non-all. I do not argue to the contrary, but I cannot avoid the question of whether or not that is all there is to it. Interrogating the generic from the side of the feminine non-all proposes a wider discussion on the nature of the relationship between Lacan and Badiou. How does Badiou's application of the teaching of Lacan distinguish itself from the elaborations on a Lacanian ethics found in Copjec and Zupančič, among others? Much of the contention Badiou raises concerning the limitations of the Lacanian framework concerns Lacan's conception of the feminine logic of the non-all in its presumed credentials of infinity. An investigation of Badiou's relation *vis-à-vis* Lacan's conceptualization of the feminine cannot be reduced to a fringe survey. It directs itself inadvertently towards the rethinking of being, truths, and the subject occurring at the intersection of their thinking.

The motivation behind the denotation of the generic multiple as feminine is further problematized by Badiou's criticism of Lacan's conceptualizations of the feminine and the infinite, found in several of Badiou's interventions in the aftermath of *L'Être et l'événement*. According to Badiou, Lacan does not fully realize the modernity of the secularized infinite introduced through Georg Cantor and set theory. In want of a modern concept of the infinite, Badiou argues, the Lacanian edifice falters. Its phallic function needs the supplement of the generic multiple. This argument exposes the backbone in Badiou's philosophical endeavor, the radical indeterminacy of the itinerant excess of representation over presentation, where the inconsistency of being continues to insist. It pinpoints the dangers that lurk upon anyone traveling such waters, as constructivism and transcendentalism threaten to evacuate all truths from actual existence, according to Badiou. Constructivism reduces truth to knowledge, while transcendentalism transposes truth to a mystical beyond. The generic, on the other hand, thinks the being of truth through the indiscernibility of the itinerant excess, and posits infinite yet immanent truths in and as holes in knowledge.



Badiou's contention with Lacan peaks at this moment. Lacan conceives of truth as a hole in knowledge, but his antiphilosophy tends towards the transcendentalist temptation where the hole of truth remains merely indicative of a grand beyond and thus not susceptible to thinking. The generic supplement to the phallic function designates not only the hole of truth but also the procedure by which a truth gains actual existence. The generic thinks the realization of truths. A more nuanced appreciation of the presumed feminine character of the generic in Badiou's philosophy depends on a thorough extrapolation of the criticism Badiou raises in the aftermath of *L'Être et l'événement*. This criticism is anchored in an insistent trust in the modernity of the Cantorian discovery of the actual infinite and its implications. Badiou's criticism boils down to the opposition of structure and process. Lacan, in Badiou's view, does not escape the confines of structure, by which no real novelty is allowed to unfold, insofar as he locates the void in the subject as eclipsed in the signifying chain. Rather than thinking the subject as the void in structure, Badiou proffers the rare status of the subject in the wake of an event, and consigns to the subject the task of making the hole in knowledge that the event procures consist through the gradual deduction of its consequences in a continuous procedure of fidelity. The status of the feminine in Lacan and Badiou's works holds a key to the disentanglement of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking the preconditions and possibilities of the subject of politics and radical change.

### *A Paradoxical Denotation*

In *L'Être et l'événement*, Badiou denotes the generic set by the ancient astrological sign for Venus, ♀. Badiou does not say why he decides on that denotation, but leaves the question to his readers. Despite the widespread acknowledgement that it is Lacan's feminine logic of the non-all that is the reference here,<sup>219</sup> the decision for this denotation calls for further interrogation. Arun Saldanha has called it nothing short of

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<sup>219</sup> See e.g. Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

monumental.<sup>220</sup> He hails it as the token of Badiou's recognition of the necessity to address the question of the universal from a feminine and feminist perspective. The choice in character signals that Badiou recognizes the necessity to give universalism its sexual mooring, Saldanha argues. He thus grieves its disappearance from the works of Badiou that follow after *L'Être et l'événement*.<sup>221</sup> Monumental is a big word, but one does not have to disagree with Saldanha on these points. However, a closer reading of the construal of the feminine logic of the non-all and the generic set is required, as their relations are crucial in Lacan and Badiou's thinking, respectively, while not all clear. Saldanha is probably well aware that it is never the signifier in itself that renders the signifier monumental or not, but the so-called differential relations in which the signifier is poised, the position of the signifier in relation to the remaining structure. In the case of the character in question, ♀, the differential structure is stratified. First, there is the signifier within Badiou's meta-ontological edification of mathematics as ontology, where it denotes the generic multiple. Secondly, there is the meta-ontological signifier with respect to its Lacanian forerunner, the feminine logic of the non-all.

My primary agenda concerns the ethical dimensions at stake in Badiou's traversal of the Lacanian framework. How does Badiou's traversal of the teachings of Lacan result in a reformulation of a theory of the subject and the possibilities of radical change? Badiou's decision to denote the generic set by the character ♀ is astonishing, perhaps, but it is not necessarily the feminine dress of the decision that is most striking. I aim to show that the signification of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking radical change can be extracted from this single character.

Badiou informs his readers that if any category constitutes the emblem of his enterprise, it is neither the pure multiplicity nor the void – nor even the event – but the category of the generic.<sup>222</sup> Beyond Marx' generic human being, Badiou extracts the term of the generic from mathematician Paul Cohen's 1963 demonstration that the

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<sup>220</sup> See Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; What is Sexual Difference Now?": *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, p. 6.

<sup>221</sup> See Saldanha: "Against Yin-Yang; The Dao of Feminist Universalism", *op.cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>222</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

continuum hypothesis is independent of the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatic. Cohen showed that not only the affirmation but also the negation of the continuum hypothesis would be coherent with Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory. According to Badiou, the category of the generic instigates not merely an intellectual *topos*, but a veritable intellectual revolution that renders truths and the subject accessible to thinking.<sup>223</sup> As the emblem of Badiou's philosophical adventure in *L'Être et l'événement*, the generic is the principal concept allowing Badiou to elaborate his specific concepts of truths and the subject as post-evental occurrences of change and novelty.

It is not out of lack of an established tradition for denotation that Badiou decides to introduce the character ♀ to designate the generic multiple. In mathematical literature, Badiou remarks, the generic multiple is usually denoted as 'G' (for generic). The introduction of the old astrological sign in its place is made on a predilection that Badiou leaves his readers to discern.<sup>224</sup> If it is true that Badiou's decision finds its recourse in Lacan's notion of the feminine logic of the non-all, then Badiou's decision is made in order to indicate a relation of similarity or even direct equivalence between his own conceptualization of the generic multiple and Lacan's feminine logic. The striking feature of his decision is its status of a double paradox. The emblem of Badiou's accomplishment, the sign of his breakthrough as an independent philosopher and his singular contribution to thinking modernity, is represented to his readers through however a subtle reference to the very theory that supposedly should have been traversed, whose traversal was supposed to constitute precisely the crucial movement of Badiou's accomplishment, the theory of Lacan. If Badiou's reformulation of truths and the subject goes beyond the Lacanian framework, *au-delà Lacan*, as Badiou claims they do, the most striking feature is precisely Badiou's decision to introduce the crucial moment in his reformulation of these concepts through an indication of convergence with one of Lacan's most renowned theoretical postulates, the feminine logic of the non-all.

Certainly, this paradox calls for interrogation, not only for its own sake or for the sake of coming to terms with the significance of the traversal of Lacanian

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<sup>223</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 23. See also Cohen, Paul: "The Independence of the Continuum Hypothesis", *PNAS*, vol. 50, no. 6, 1963, p. 1143-1148.

<sup>224</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 392.

antiphilosophy that it encompasses. Interrogation is also called for insofar as coming to terms with the traversal is prompt for anyone who aspires, as I do here, to an appreciation of the operations, conditions, and consequences involved in Badiou's interrogations into the preconditions and possibilities for thinking the subject of politics and radical change. To fathom how Badiou's philosophical works can be effective for thinking about these questions today, this paradox is decisive, as it goes to the heart of the relation between Badiou and Lacan. It constitutes a crux in Badiou's traversal of Lacan.

Badiou's thinking is no exception to the rule that nothing occurs in a vacuum, and also Copjec and Zupančič work in the continuation of Lacan. They argue concisely for how the Lacanian framework construes the specific problematic of modernity, where modernity is characterized by the decline of the master or the death of God, the fall of the instance of authority traditionally assigned to the father. This fall has repercussion for the ethical field, not only through the disappearance of traditional authorities and structures of oppression, but also through that which emerges in the unfilled space left behind after the evacuation of authority. Badiou, Copjec, and Zupančič are all critical of contemporary discourses of ethics that reduce the ethical question to the inviolable sanctity of the individual body, under the signs of human rights, the post-modern, or bare life. Contemporary discourses of ethics are the *laissez-faire* relativism of democratic materialism, to use Badiou's words, construed to secure the privileged of the *status quo*, servant to the continuation of a Western-colonial-imperialist hegemony. Badiou, Copjec, and Zupančič alike consider the contemporary discourses as both unable and unwilling to address the possibilities of change and novelty.

Copjec and Zupančič's readings of Lacan highlight the position of sexual matters in the ethical question, as the foundations for another ethics that escapes the nostalgic return to the traditional authorities of old and sees beyond the vulnerabilities of the individual body. My interrogations discuss how Copjec and Zupančič have applied the feminine logic of the non-all to found another ethics, in order to see what the concept of the feminine non-all contains. I then turn to Badiou's criticism of Lacan's conceptualization of infinity and the feminine in the aftermath of *L'Être et*

*l'événement*, showing that Badiou's ethical thrust is also dependent on a confrontation with sexual matters. From Badiou's criticism, I return to the apparent paradox of the meta-ontological denotation for the generic set. A closer analysis of the significations surrounding the feminine denotation will bring to the fore both similarities and differences in how Lacan and Badiou conceive of being, truths, and the subject and, hence, of the preconditions and possibilities of radical change and true novelty. Lacan's notion of the feminine logic of the non-all is decisive for every attempt at a Lacanian ethics. The generic multiple is paramount in Badiou's dialectical conception of truths and the subject. It is the concept to provide their materialist underpinnings. My contention is that thinking the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change requires an apprehension of the paradoxical confrontation between the feminine non-all and the generic in Badiou's philosophical works.

### ***Towards an Ethics of the Feminine; Against the Rights of Man***

In this section, I address the specificities of the feminine logic of the non-all in the teachings of Lacan, before turning to Badiou's concept of the generic and a comparison between the two. The issue in focus is how the feminine non-all can be utilized to think anew the preconditions of a subject and the possibilities of radical change. In psychoanalytic terms, the issue concerns how the feminine non-all provides a route to think beyond the oppressive structures of the phallus and the moral law of superego, as another ethics of the feminine, or another ethics of the real. The works of Copjec and Zupančič reformulate such another ethics on the basis of the feminine logic of the non-all. Their works present the essentials of Lacan's notion of the feminine non-all, but they also draw out the principal implications of the feminine non-all for thinking the preconditions of the subject and the possibilities of change anew. The main tenets of the feminine logic of the non-all in Lacan and its implications for another ethics reveal the shared ground of Lacan, Copjec, Zupančič, and Badiou. They are critical to the dominant trends in contemporary discourses on ethics focused on the rights of man and the rights of life. Their shared ground would

explain the reasons of Badiou's decision to denote the generic as feminine. But presenting the similarities of these projects also prepares for a closer interrogation of their dissimilarities, where Badiou raises a critical voice against the limitations of the Lacanian framework that will render the reasons for his denotation paradoxical yet again.

### *Hole in the Other*

In her article "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", Copjec juxtaposes the Kantian antinomies of reason with the formulations of sexuation found in Lacan's twentieth seminar, *Encore* (1972-1973). Copjec's argument is directed against the modern sceptics that refuse sex to be anything but a bridled series of interpretations and negotiations enacted and repeated. Towards the end of her article, Copjec finally makes use of the opportunity to attack "the notorious argument that presents woman as constitutionally indisposed to developing a superego and thus susceptible to an ethical laxity."<sup>225</sup> The notorious argument is known from Freud, where an anatomical factor, the lack of a penis, renders the young girl less disposed towards the veritable shattering of the Oedipus complex that the threat of castration occasions in the case of boys. Hence the adult woman is less disposed to the institution of a superego as inexorable, impersonal, and independent of its affective sources than men are. In her readings psychoanalysis, Copjec argues that the logic of exclusion as the cornerstone of the dynamic antinomies in Kant and the masculine logic of sexuation in Lacan. The logic of exclusion is formative also of the superego and the moral law, and Copjec suggests that the time to think the ethical anew, in other ways than through the definitions of the masculine logic of the superego, is ripe: "It is now time to devote some thought to developing an ethics of inclusion or of the unlimited, that is, an ethics proper to the woman."<sup>226</sup> Copjec argues that the logic of the non-all is defining of the mathematical antinomies in Kant and the feminine logic of sexuation in Lacan. The logic of the non-all becomes the anchorage of Copjec's new ethics of the feminine, and

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<sup>225</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>226</sup> *Loc.cit.*

she performs the initiatory steps towards such an ethics in her later book, *Imagine there's no Woman; Ethics and Sublimation* (2002). Her main operation is again that of a juxtaposition, but this time a juxtaposition that is internal to Lacan: Lacan's twentieth seminar, *Encore*, is interpreted as the reformulation of his seventh seminar, *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse* (1959-1960), and the feminine non-all of the twentieth seminar is reread through the lens that the figure of Antigone offers in the seventh.

There is a strong line running from Antigone as 'the guardian of criminal being' of the earlier seminar to the feminine as the guardian of the non-all of being of the later seminar, Copjec argues.<sup>227</sup> Antigone and the feminine non-all should be perceived as two versions of the same notion, namely, the satisfaction of the drive in and through sublimation. The concept of sublimation is central to Copjec's demonstration. Sublimation is wrested from its underdeveloped status in Freudian theory and given a new direction through Lacan. In Lacan, Copjec writes, "sublimation does not separate thought from sex, but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge, that is, from the Other. For, the satisfaction of the drive by sublimation testifies to the autonomy of the subject, her independence from the Other."<sup>228</sup> Antigone is an exemplar of such an operation. By way of her unheard-of burial of her brother, the traitor-criminal Polyneices, Antigone "gives herself her own law and does not seek validation from any other authority."<sup>229</sup> There are two points to be made in this regard. Firstly, Antigone's act separates her from the Other, here in the form of Creon's civil law. Creon's law is a paradigmatic demonstration of the function of the superego, desperately trying to impose and enforce a limitation and restriction on Antigone's ways and means of enjoyment. Secondly, Antigone's act testifies to the nonexistence of the Other, the fundamental lack of an ultimate foundation for the law, its radical inconsistency, its inherent contradiction and non-identity with itself. Antigone's act testifies to the hole in the Other, the signifier of which Lacan writes as S(A).<sup>230</sup> The

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<sup>227</sup> See Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman; Ethics and Sublimation* (2002), MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2004, p. 8.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>230</sup> See e.g. Lacan: "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l'inconscient freudien", *op.cit.*, p. 818.

implications of Antigone's act can be seen in Suzanne Barnard's rendition of the feminine non-all. Barnard writes that the feminine non-all

has a view to the contingency of the signifier of the Other in its anchoring function. This means that she has a relation to the Other such that she 'knows' that *neither she nor it knows* – in other words, she 'knows' that the signifier of phallic power merely lends a certain mysterious presence to the Law that veils its real impotence.<sup>231</sup>

Contrary to Freud's description of women, the figure of Antigone and the feminine logic of the non-all do not come up short in face of the moral law. Rather, they come in excess, testifying to another *jouissance* besides the phallic one imposed by the superego and the masculine logic of exclusion and the exception.

Copjec is not alone in her pursuit of an ethics of the feminine. She follows in the line of Lacan, obviously, a Lacan that can be said to have opened for that which Saldanha has characterized as a distinct feminist strategy. The strategy is founded on the supposition that if a feminine subject formation does not enjoy a special let alone an exclusive access to the ethical domain, then there is at least another ethics that is to be conceived of as formally feminine. Saldanha mentions Zupančič and her *Ethics of the Real; Kant and Lacan* (2000) as another proponent of such a strategy. Zupančič does not thematize her contribution explicitly as an intervention into a specifically feminist corpus, as Copjec does. Saldanha nonetheless argues for Zupančič's feminist relevance insofar as she, in her reading of Kant and Lacan, discovers an uncanny Kant where an immeasurable feminine excess haunts the subject of freedom and forces its self-division.<sup>232</sup> Like Copjec's, Zupančič's readings of Kant and Lacan observe the

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<sup>231</sup> Barnard, Suzanne: "Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other *Jouissance*": *Reading Seminar XX; Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality* (ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink), Suny Press, New York, 2002, p. 178.

<sup>232</sup> See Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; What Is Sexual Difference Now?", *op.cit.*, p. 5, footnote 16. There are other contributions to be mentioned as far as such a feminist strategy is concerned, operating in a similar intersection of Kant and Lacan, and elaborating on a similar notion of ethics as non-all, notably Kiarina Kordela, who argues for the distinction between a feminine non-all and the non-all of being, see *e.g.* Kordela, Kiarina: "Genre; With and Beyond Gender and Sex (a Psychoanalytic Intervention): *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol 13, no. 2, 2008, p. 93-107; and Kordela: "Being or Sex, and Differences": *Angelaki; Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 17. no. 2, 2012, p. 49-67. See also Espinoza, Tania: "The Ethics of



limitations and constraints of an ethics caught under the logic of the superegoic law, on the one hand, and how the plume of psychoanalysis functions to subvert traditional moral philosophy, on the other. The question is what the preconditions are for a shift from a masculine moral of the superego to another ethics of the feminine, or ethics of the real, and what such a shift implies for thinking about subjective constitution and radical change.

Freud was the first to equate the categorical imperative of Kant's moral law with his own superego, Zupančič observes. First of all, Freud's equation questions the attempt to base an ethics on non-pathological foundations. Secondly, it positions the ethical at the heart of civilization's discontents, potentially causing more harm than actual well-being or happiness.<sup>233</sup> Through a dialectical interrogation of Kant's moral law, Zupančič shows how the moral law actually divides into two; the pure moral law of the categorical imperative splits into two different conceptual figures. On the one hand, there is the old law of the superego. On the other hand, there is "a law of the unknown,"<sup>234</sup> as she designates it, borrowing a reference from Badiou.

Zupančič's crucial insight concerns how the categorical imperative itself is but a half-law, a *mi-dire* in Lacanian parlance. Formulated by the command to act as if the maxim of one's action should be willed as universal law, the imperative imposes itself in the form of an enigma as far as the contents of the act in question is concerned. It leaves the questions of which act and how to perform it unanswered. The categorical imperative will take on the form of an a-temporal or completed law only through the supplement of the subject's response to this enigma. In Lacanian parlance, the Other of the law is always already at lack, and to this lack there are two basic forms of response. A real ethics of the unknown would accept this predicament and acknowledge the subjective destitution it implies. A real ethics would accept that the subject decides "the destiny of its desire" in and through its response to the lack in the Other, "that it is only with his act that the subject *creates* what the Other (the Law) wants" just as "Oedipus *retroactively* creates the symbolic debt *into which he should*

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Psychoanalysis *Encore*, The Limits of Speculative Reason": *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2015, p. 33-53.

<sup>233</sup> See Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real; Kant and Lacan*, Verso Books, London/New York, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>234</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 164-5. The reference to a law of the unknown [*une loi de l'insu*] is from Badiou: *L'Éthique, op.cit.*, p. 74.

have been born"<sup>235</sup> and thereby founds his family's *ατή*. Antigone, in her turn, shall all too willingly embrace this fate. The superego, on the contrary, imposes itself precisely in order for the subject to be relieved of having to respond at all. The superego leaves the response, the defining act of the subject, to another, namely to an Absolute Other that wants to know of no lack except the lack on the side of the subject. In the figure of the superego, the moral law is represented as already defined and completed. To the superego, the answer to the imperative enigma is already presented, if only negatively, in the proscriptive 'no' or the dismissive 'that's not it'. Through this negative certainty, the "subject finds in the superego a sort of 'practical guide' that at least gives her the clue that the best of all possible actions is always the one that makes you suffer the most."<sup>236</sup>

In its negative certainty, the superego can only inflict suffering upon its subject. The subject will never be able to live up to the superego's standards, precisely because of their strictly negative form. Zupančič suggests the names of "a heroism of the lack" or "a fidelity to a lost enjoyment" to designate the ethical aspects involved under the moral law.<sup>237</sup> This is the conundrum that also Copjec inquires into when she refers to how "the superego renders something unsayable and undoable, to be sure, but it does not say *what* we should not say or do; it merely imposes a limit which makes everything we do and say seem as naught compared to what we cannot."<sup>238</sup> As she observes of Creon, the external limits to his world that he in his superegoic character erects, "decompletes, empties out, all his endeavors, all his satisfactions, causing him to strive fruitlessly toward a goal he will never achieve."<sup>239</sup> However, compared to the anxieties that haunt the destitute subject having to continuously decide on and define its own fate, the suffering under the yoke of the superego and its unrealizable commands, the tremors of fear and humility of never being neither all nor enough, comes as a relief. To reject the negative certainty offered through the moral law of the superego and to accept with certainty that the Other does not exist, is also, Zupančič writes, to reject all other certainties and to accept the fundamental inconsistency of the

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<sup>235</sup> Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 164-6

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240

<sup>238</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>239</sup> Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

structures that make the subject. To be relieved of the imposition to act is pacifying,<sup>240</sup> or, as Lacan notes of the psychoanalytic discovery, it is more convenient to suffer the interdiction than to incur castration.<sup>241</sup> Jelica Šumič explains:

the inexistence of the Other, contrary to what might be expected or hoped for, is not in and of itself a liberating factor for the subject, it is not experienced by the subject as liberation from the capture which the Other effects upon him/her. Quite the contrary: in the absence of the master signifier which would render a given situation 'readable', the subject remains a prisoner, not of the Other that exists, but of the inexistent Other, better put perhaps, of the inexistence of the Other.<sup>242</sup>

While Creon might be frustrated in his failure to uphold the civil laws of Thebes, Antigone is ravaged by a painful madness of another kind, Copjec writes, "a wild tearing away from herself" that the audience are left only to imagine, at the beginning of the play, through a "messenger's report of [her] screeching, birdlike cries."<sup>243</sup> It is the madness of the unconditional liberty of the subject's absolute destitution.

### *Managing the Void*

Even if the figure of Antigone serves as a paradigm of the ethical act, Zupančič argues that Antigone's act nonetheless belongs to a period that has now been left behind: Antigone belongs to the era of classical ethics and not that of modernity. In order to grapple with the problem of a modern ethics, Zupančič therefore turns to another feminine figure, the heroine Sygne de Coûfontaine of Paul Claudel's *L'Ôtage* (1911), whom Lacan elaborates on in his eighth seminar, *Le Transfert* (1960-1961). Zupančič suggests that Antigone, in contrast to Coûfontaine, incarnates the symbolic phallus, denoted  $\Phi$  and to be read as the signifier of her desire, indicating that Antigone does

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<sup>240</sup> Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>241</sup> Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre VII; L'Éthique de la psychanalyse* (1959-1960)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1986, p. 354.

<sup>242</sup> Šumič, Jelica: "Politics and Psychoanalysis in The Times of The Inexistent Other": *Jacques Lacan Between Psychoanalysis and Politics* (ed. Samo Tomšič and Andreja Zevnik), Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 34.

<sup>243</sup> Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

not entirely escape the logic of exclusion. In *Antigone*, it is her own Thing that is turned into the exception that supports her existence. Coûfontaine, on the contrary, is a child of the modern insight of 'God is dead (the Other does not exist) and He knows it too'. She cannot sustain the position of exception. Rather, Zupančič argues, the figure of Coûfontaine displays the real of desire, the penis as real: "Not the  $\phi$  which belongs to the imaginary, but the 'piece of meat' [...] as the real residue of castration [...], the small 'palpitating corpse' which is the Real of the Cause of desire."<sup>244</sup> As a real 'piece of meat', Coûfontaine is reduced to refuse of her sexual being and subtracted from the symbolic structures of signification and imaginary evaluations. In Badiou's terms, Coûfontaine identifies with the in-difference of her simple belonging, the speck of flesh that is her indeterminable generic being.

On the surface, Zupančič's Coûfontaine might seem incompatible with Copjec's *Antigone*, but Copjec's conceptualization of sublimation points in a direction similar to that of the real of desire showcased by Zupančič. Lacan's definition of sublimation as the elevation of an ordinary object to the dignity of the Thing, Copjec argues, does not so much describe the idealization of the object pedestalled in the position of ultimate gratification. Sublimation rather concerns seeking "satisfaction from an ordinary object instead of waiting vainly for the arrival of the Thing."<sup>245</sup> In sublimation, she writes, the object "becomes lovable precisely in its capacity to be other than it is," but this change cannot come about without a simultaneous change occurring in the subject as well, "by naming the obstacle that prevents her from coinciding with herself [...], that is, with her own capacity to be other than she is or, to put it differently, with the lack of any determining cause of her being or actions."<sup>246</sup> The transformation occurring in sublimation is to be found in the status of the Thing rather than in the object. It is the inaccessible Thing that loses some of its substantial allure rather than the ordinary object, perfectly attainable, that gains in mystique.

A parable might communicate the matters more clearly: sublimation as it is usually misunderstood, as a form of idealization of an ordinary object, follows the logic of the labor aristocrat who, in perceiving his increase in income and

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<sup>244</sup> Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>245</sup> Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman*, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>246</sup> Copjec: "Gai Savoir Sera", *op.cit.*, p. 131.

consequentially in property as an indication of the proletariat being the progressive class, would be viable to exclaim: 'Look, property relations are changing, I am also a share holder now!' True sublimation and the properly ethical stance of psychoanalysis would equal the realization that only a universalized lack of property can possibly ever be the destiny of the proletariat as the progressive class. That destiny can never be a question of a simple changing of the guards, a transaction of wealth and power from capitalist to socialist rule or from one phallic signifier to another (as in an 'anything-he-can-do,-she-can-do-better' logic). It can only concern a leveling of the institutions of wealth and power as such.<sup>247</sup> Zupančič writes of the drive that it is found at the moment when desire encounters its own cause among its other objects, when the very condition of desire turns out as just another product of the process that it conditions.<sup>248</sup> This is Coûfontaine's position when her only option for staying true to her desire is to give up on the very cause of her desire, the family or aristocratic honor that makes up her being. The encounter with the cause of desire as yet another object of desire goes for Copjec's sublimation as the satisfaction of the drive as well. The proletarian's predicament is similar if not strictly the same: to stay true to its cause, the progression of its class, the proletarian must sacrifice this cause, insofar as the only real victory of the proletariat is its own eradication as a class, the eradication of each and every class as such, through the realization of a classless society of radical equality under communism. The progression of the proletariat equals the realization of its proletariat identifications as nothing.

I do not insist on Copjec's Antigone and Zupančič's Coûfontaine as two representations of the same figure. To do so, would force their similarities to too great an extent, perhaps. I limit my commentary to the observation that both Copjec and Zupančič find a second coming of ethics necessary, and that they both turn to Lacan and his elaboration of the feminine as the frame in which such an ethics can be thought. The general outlines comprise the movement from the realm of desire to that

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<sup>247</sup> Žižek has discussed the formal similarities between a Marxist or Marxian emancipatory politics and the Lacanian formalizations of sexual difference and the instance of the drive, see e.g. Žižek: "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!": *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality; Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2000, p. 96.

<sup>248</sup> Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real, op.cit.*, p. 244.

of the drive: the movement *D'un Autre à l'autre* as Lacan's sixteenth seminar (1968-1969) is entitled; the movement *de l'impuissance à l'impossible* as it is rephrased in his seventeenth, *L'Envers de la psychanalyse* (1969-1970).<sup>249</sup> The movement from impotence (or inability) to impossibility is usually read as a communication of how one, instead of lamenting one's failure to fulfill the Other and its unceasing demands, should realize it as impossible. But it is precisely the equivocality of the word 'realize' that bespeaks the full significance of this movement. It is always a question of the movement from the regulations imposed by the phallic law, castration, and the reign of the superego to that of that other satisfaction that both must and cannot be, as Lacan formulates it in *Encore*.<sup>250</sup> It is always a question of the movement from the continuous search for an inaccessible satisfaction in the face of which the subject can only display its fundamental impotence or inability, to that other satisfaction in and by the impossible, the drive. Lacan's theorization of a feminine logic that comes to supplement the masculine one renders possible the venture to conceive of another ethical act. This other ethics is opposed to the moral law that, to quote Saldanha, "is in itself masculine not only because it is spoken by the father(s) but because it replays the traumatic separation from the maternal flesh."<sup>251</sup> According to Zupančič, the main operation involved for both Antigone and Coûfontaine is the one through which the limits of desire itself is reached and finally breached. It is the moment of pure desire as "the limit where desire finds itself confronted with its own support, its own cause."<sup>252</sup> Upon the traversal of the cause of desire, one finds oneself surrounded by the drive, in proximity to the real Thing. This moment remains the same, even if Antigone sacrifices everything to this cause and Coûfontaine goes as far as sacrificing even this cause itself, and thereby instantiates the law on the same level, face to face, with that speck of dead flesh that is her.

The real question, however, is not of the hows and whats, but of the whys: Why has it become an urgent matter to develop a new ethics in this particular space and time, and why is it the feminine logic of the non-all and the satisfaction of the drive

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<sup>249</sup> See Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>250</sup> See Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>251</sup> Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; What is Sexual Difference Now?", *op.cit.*, p. 5

<sup>252</sup> Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

that offer themselves as viable solutions? In the formulation of these questions one can easily discern the implication that a simple gender balancing, a fifty-fifty division of the ethical faculty, does not constitute the main issue. It is not primarily a criticism of Freud's misogyny. The ante is upped, the stakes higher, the bets raised. Why is the contribution that the Lacanian framework brings to the ethical discourses of today perceived to be so precious?

After the decline of the master, modernity witnesses the reduction of the ethical to the feeble maxim that the worst thing one can lose is one's own life, Zupančič argues. She underlines that the problem with the contemporary elevation of life into the *causa sui* of the ethical is that it "lacks conceptual force and the power to mobilize."<sup>253</sup> Copjec also targets the tendency of reducing the ethical to a question of "bare, bodily – or bestial – life."<sup>254</sup> She observes this tendency in the ubiquitous proliferation of bio-politics and the 'modern life sciences', and argues that it contributes to the depletion of the value of life rather than its augmentation. Copjec does not so much target Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, say, for having identified the dominant states of the game; their work reveals important features of our contemporary situation. But she does question the ability of a critical assessment of the *status quo* to implement a call for change. The quandary of the current situation and the cause that necessitates a reformulation of the question of ethics and the ethical domain is not simply that the old morals of the masters and the paternal superego are unable to address these difficulties. More than that, these difficulties are due to the decline of the old masters and the evacuation of the moral space their disappearance has left behind. As Šumič formulates it, "the new regime of [modern] mastery, knowing no limit, no outside and therefore no exception, seems to annihilate the very possibility of a way out that would articulate the negation of the present with the creation of an alternative to that which exists."<sup>255</sup> The problem was pressing already to Kant, to whom, as Lacan notes, Newtonian physics and the Enlightenment attack on religion had rendered both Nature and God ill equipped as anchorages for the moral

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<sup>253</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>254</sup> Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>255</sup> Šumič: "Politics and Psychoanalysis in The Times of The Inexistent Other", *op.cit.*, p. 28.

domain.<sup>256</sup> Another ethics is warranted, in order for modernity to manage this void left behind after the evacuation of God – manage it, that is, rather than filling it up or simply evading it.

Copjec and Zupančič argue that none has offered a more lengthy, elaborate, and rich an analysis of the modern conundrum than Lacan has. First, they claim, Lacan pinpointed the function of the master and the master discourse with precision, and then, at the master's fall, he delineated the topologies of the void that surfaced thereby, as well as the implications of the resurfaced void in and for the subject. Thus, to Copjec, the psychoanalytic teachings of Lacan constitutes "the mother tongue of our modernity,"<sup>257</sup> the only language through which the important issues of our time can be articulated and affronted. The clause of the finite body that dominates contemporary discourses of ethics effectuates an eradication of the proper ethical space, the space of the radically subjective act, and, Copjec insists, it is only the revolutionary rethinking of the body that psychoanalysis has to offer in its definition of sexual being as non-all that is capable of advancing an exit from this contemporary predicament.

It is in the psychoanalytical rethinking of the body and sexual being Copjec discovers that which she designates, with a formulation borrowed from Badiou, as a "secularized notion of infinity."<sup>258</sup> Only a secularized infinity can break the barrier of transcendence that death now imposes upon life, she claims. For Zupančič, the concept of the real of *jouissance* is that which allows for an escape from the contemporary quagmire. She sees an equivalent to the real of *jouissance* in Badiou's concept of the event.<sup>259</sup> Zupančič also borrows the concept of 'a law of the unknown' from Badiou in order to indicate an alternative to the law of the superego. References to Badiou reappear again at crucial points in her elaboration of the ethical act of Coûfontaine, most notably in a paraphrase expressing that insofar as the law encounters itself there

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<sup>256</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 93. See also Miller: "On Shame": *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis; Reflections on Seminar XVII* (ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg), Duke University Press, Durham/London, 2006, p. 11-28.

<sup>257</sup> See Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30 (the reference to Badiou that Copjec makes is an interview, "Being by Numbers": *Artforum*, October 1994, p. 87).

<sup>259</sup> See Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 235.



where the subject creates itself through the act in question, "there is no 'hero' of the act."<sup>260</sup> The recurrence of Badiou's name at decisive moments in Copjec and Zupančič's reasoning is no more intriguing than it is accidental. Badiou's philosophical works constitute an on-going confrontation with a similar complex of problems as the one Zupančič and Copjec wrestle with, a continuous effort to make "*un pas de plus*" into modernity.<sup>261</sup> Badiou has argued extensively against the pervasiveness of a certain ethics of human rights or the rights of man, most notably is his *L'Éthique*. Isolating the core of such an ethics as the rights of the living against offenses and maltreatments to their lives and bodies, where a human is conceived as one that is able to recognize itself as a victim, Badiou first identifies its underlying colonialist and imperialist credentials. Badiou then goes on to analyze how its very structure impedes and opposes the mobilization for a positive idea or cause: every mobilization for a positive good will potentially threaten the material safety of the *status quo*, by which threat such a mobilization is automatically perceived as revelatory of an inherent evil propensity. He concludes that an ethics of the rights of man comes at the price of a strict conservatism, imposed in order to secure the foundation in basically racialist biologism (life) and no less colonialist Occidentalism (wealth) on which the rights in question rest: in the end, it is for the conservation of the life of the white man and the protection of Western values that the discourse of contemporary ethics is construed.<sup>262</sup> As such, Badiou argues, there is never an issue of an ethics in any real sense of the term at stake in the discourses on human rights and the rights of the living. Rather it is a matter of a complacent nihilism, an *eu-oudenousis*,<sup>263</sup> at the hands of which an evacuation of all proper ethical thinking – or all thinking proper *tout court* – is ventured, if not accomplished. But if Badiou shares with Copjec and Zupančič a basic concern for the status of ethics today, he does not share in their celebration of Lacan and the feminine logic of the non-all as already holding the key. Badiou shares their recognition of Lacan's contribution in delineating the void left after the fall of the

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<sup>260</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 238 and 255 (the reference to Badiou's original statement, that there is no hero of the event, is his *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 229).

<sup>261</sup> Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p.59

<sup>262</sup> See Badiou: *L'Éthique*, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>263</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 66.

father, the evacuation of the One. But if Lacan does not fill up or avoid the void, there are differences as to the extent that Lacan is recognized to actually manage the void.

### ***Along the Circuit of the Drive; In View of the Cantorian Paradise***

The last section sketched up the main tenets of the Lacanian approach to another ethics beyond the confines of the law, tenets shared to some extent by Badiou. In this section, I focus on the differences between the Lacanian approach and Badiou's project, in order to interrogate how Badiou construes the shortcomings of the Lacanian framework and how Badiou conceives of the implications of Lacan's shortcomings as impeding the possibilities for thinking about change. The feminine logic of the non-all constitutes the crux of the Lacanian approach to modernity's predicament in ethics, and thereby also to the questions of change. Badiou criticizes Lacan's notion of the feminine non-all on account of its shortcomings in face of modernity, where Lacan fails to assume the full lessons of Cantor's actual infinite. Lacan conceives of the non-all through a romantic notion of the infinite that subjects the infinite to finitude, and the feminine to the phallus. Badiou's criticism of Lacan underscores the paradox of his decision to denote the generic multiple by reference to the feminine non-all. An interrogation of Badiou's criticism thereby prepares for a further analysis of the possible routes to a resolution of the paradox and of how Badiou, through the denotation of the generic multiple, proceeds to think the preconditions and possibilities of radical change beyond Lacan, in a materialist dialectic tying being, truths, and the subject together in the wake of an event.

### ***Lacan's Lapsus***

Copjec makes mention of Badiou in her treatise on an ethics of the feminine. She wishes to extract from Badiou's call for a secularized and modern notion of infinity a possible support for the reformulation of the body that Lacan's notion of the feminine logic of the non-all, as another name of being, in her view institutes. However, it is on

this precise point that Badiou has raised a decisive objection against Lacan, through several of his interventions in *Conditions* (1992). The infinite that Lacan refers to in his elaborations on the feminine logic of the non-all is neither truly modern nor truly secularized, Badiou contends. It remains caught up in the romantic heritage of finitude that still lay hold on contemporary thought and binds it in a bias of an essentially religious or mythical character. Badiou's objection might come as a surprise, all the time the feminine logic of the non-all is considered as not only the crown of Lacan's conceptual creations – one if not the high peak of his 25 years of seminars – but also at forefront in the theoretical elaborations of and on our times in general.

Similarly, Zupančič elaborates on how the beyond of the superegoic 'heroism of the lack' makes up the true gist of Lacan's teachings. When Zupančič argues that the last words on Lacan are not found in the readings where "the accent is placed on the lack and in which the impossible is identified with the inaccessible," the readings that insist on "the primordial act of renunciation, enjoyment as impossible, and the end of analysis as the moment when the analysand must assume symbolic castration and accept a fundamental or constitutive lack (or loss),"<sup>264</sup> she proposes an alternative reading of Lacan to which Badiou remains more reluctant to give in to. Badiou is hesitant as to whether or not Lacan in fact evades the strictly inaccessible status of the infinite. Zupančič formulates the ethics of psychoanalysis as the problem of the infinite, not in the sense that it is unattainable and inaccessible, but rather because "it is impossible for us to escape it completely," because "the infinite ceaselessly 'parasitizes' the finite," and, under the name of *jouissance*, constitutes "a stain that ceaselessly pursues us."<sup>265</sup> Badiou does not only question Lacan's ability to break free from the notion of the infinite's inaccessibility. He also questions Lacan's ability to fully realize the stain of the infinite, its itinerant excess, as something not to be refused.

Copjec readily perceives Lacanian psychoanalysis as the only discursive apparatus to date that is able to address the challenges posed by modernity. She positions the non-all at its center, as the decisive conceptual tool of her address.

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<sup>264</sup> Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

Badiou's objection could at first glance seem to state the opposite, as if the non-all were to be of no avail, as if the non-all was that which prevented a proper grasp of the pressing issues of the times, but that would be a too hasty conclusion. Rather, the feminine non-all is more like a Moses catching his first and last glimpse of Palestine: it will carry only so far and not further, but the Nile delta and the forty years of deserts have been left behind, all the same. The difference between Copjec and Badiou's take on Lacan's conceptualization of the feminine logic of the non-all rests more in a perspectival shift than a categorical opposition. Copjec sees the feminine logic of the non-all as a solution to the conundrums of thinking modernity. Badiou sees it as a problem thereto, but a problem precisely because it is located at the crux of the conundrum in question, because it knots together the threads of which any thinking modernity proper must be spun, once its threads have been unknotted. To Badiou, the Lacanian notion of the feminine non-all presents a paradigmatic framework for thinking modernity, but one that fails to properly realize the full potential of this thinking itself.

This is Badiou's point in "La Vérité: forçage et innommable." He proposes that the tortuous dialectic of the finite and the infinite in Lacan constitutes the limit, and thus the real, of psychoanalytic thought. The tortuous dialectic of the finite and the infinite is at the limit of that which psychoanalysis is capable to think. In "Sujet et Infini", Badiou admits that he is willing to follow his master Lacan only to the point – indicated by the latter – where the exceeding of the teachings of Lacan becomes expedient.<sup>266</sup> At this point, the generic multiple returns in Badiou's objections. In contrast to its formulation in *L'Être et l'événement*, where the generic multiple is denoted with the astrological sign of the feminine, the generic is now inscribed as a function at a certain distance from the feminine non-all. Badiou's criticism of Lacan is lodged in this no-man's-land between the generic and the feminine non-all, and a brief recuperation of its main moments is required in order to appreciate the paradox behind Badiou's denotation of the generic set as feminine. It is necessary, also, in order to appreciate how Badiou construes the shortcomings of the Lacanian framework and its

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<sup>266</sup> See Badiou: "La Vérité: forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 203-4; Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 305.

implications for thinking the predicaments of the subject and change under Cantorian modernity.

Lacan remains pre-Cantorian, Badiou argues in "Sujet et Infini", insofar as the Lacanian edifice lacks a proper appreciation of the actual infinite.<sup>267</sup> In Lacan, the infinite is not admitted an existential affirmation. It remains in the function of an imaginary object, a myth or a fiction that serves merely as an inaccessible limit for the indefinite succession of the finite field. As Oliver Feltham has observed, "[w]e know from Badiou's own exegesis of the axiom of infinity that an endless succession of finite ordinal sets is not sufficient to constitute an infinite set: one must declare the existence of an infinite set within which that succession unfolds."<sup>268</sup> One must declare the existence of a first limit ordinal,  $\omega$ , itself not an immediate successor. A second existential signet is thus needed, as Badiou formulates it.<sup>269</sup> A first limit ordinal does not immediately follow on any successor ordinal, but is equally far from each and every preceding number in the natural numbers series. The first limit ordinal constitutes, by decision, the first infinite number: It functions as the space in which the indefinite succession of finite natural numbers is lodged. But such a decision, Badiou claims, is lacking in Lacan. In Lacan, there is only a concept of the infinite inasmuch as it is considered as an operational inaccessibility, considered, that is to say, from within the succession of the finite numbers.<sup>270</sup> The accusation is severe. The crux of it concerns a reduction of the infinite to a mere mode of the finite at the hands of Lacan, as if he were to evoke the infinite only to immediately revoke it again. Lacan's invocations of Cantor and the actual infinite never amount to more than a detour in order to return again to the theme of finitude, Badiou contends. He raises the same accusation against Hegel's spurious infinite. Whence the exceeding of a limit is regarded from its inside, the infinite that results therefrom will never have any other

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<sup>267</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 296. Clemens offers a brief but all the more accessible discussion on Badiou's critique of Lacan's conception of the infinite, summed up as the following: "Badiou's dispute with Lacan hinges on the *status* of infinity, as well as on the *function* that it is invoked to serve. Is infinity an inaccessible point, thought on the basis of the finite; or is infinity the ordinary state of being, to which the finite itself is the exception? According to Badiou, Lacan takes the first option; he himself takes the second." See Clemens: "Letter as Condition of Conditions for Alain Badiou": *Communication & Cognition*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, 2003, p. 78.

<sup>268</sup> Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory*, Continuum, London/New York, 2008, p. 121

<sup>269</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>270</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 296.

being than the interior of this limit itself. Rather than 'infiniteizing' the finite, it is the infinite that becomes 'finitized'. More precisely, in a description that Badiou finds effective, "l'infini n'est que le vide où opère la répétition du fini."<sup>271</sup> As far as Lacan's notion of the feminine logic of the non-all is concerned, Badiou writes, it is dressed up as infinite only to serve as a beneficial fiction to limit and prop up a finite conception of the subject and its phallic *jouissance*.<sup>272</sup>

The same objection against Lacan underscores the crucial movement in "La Vérité: forçage et innommable." Badiou addresses the infinite yet immanent status of truths, and pauses at Lacan's reluctance to qualify non-denumerable transfinite cardinals as anything but mystical. He identifies Lacan's reluctance as one among several expressions of a hesitation on Lacan's part to definitely break with the resigned contemplation that characterize the contemporary hermeneutics of finitude.<sup>273</sup> Without the decision for an existing limit ordinal, there is no way to arrive at the multiple infinities of infinities of the so-called Cantorian paradise. Lacan's temptation of knotting together the feminine, the infinite, and the unsayable under the figure of the ecstatic mystic expresses a purely cultural theme that have yet to undergo the radical test of the ideal of the matheme, Badiou writes.<sup>274</sup> In "Sujet et Infini", Badiou rebukes the assumption of a privileged connection between the feminine and the divine as a misconception caused by the mythical status ascribed to the inaccessibility of the infinite.<sup>275</sup>

The mythical status of the infinite in Lacan deprives the infinite of its existence. Against its mythical status, Badiou recognizes the real status of non-denumerable cardinal numbers as the only way to proceed into the field of infinite truths, into the generic. Badiou insists on how Cantor's discovery of the actual infinite and the

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<sup>271</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 184 ("the infinite is but the void in which the repetition of the finite operates").

<sup>272</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>273</sup> See Badiou: "La Vérité; forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>274</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>275</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 295. There is a similarity between the objections raised against the Lacanian notion of the feminine by Badiou, on the one hand, and certain strands of feminist criticism, on the other. Both accuse psychoanalysis and Lacan for a certain reduction of the feminine to a mere screen or fantasy of the masculine subject. The main function of the feminine thus becomes the delimitation and support of the masculine domain. See *e.g.* Irigaray: *Speculum de l'autre femme*, *op.cit.*, p. 230 ff.; Grosz: *Jacques Lacan*, *op.cit.*, p. 147 ff; and Butler: *Gender Trouble*, *op.cit.*, p. 59 ff.

affirmation of its existence constitute the true albeit hidden countercurrent of modernity, a countercurrent it is high time to acclaim conscientiously as one's own. The full affirmative force contained in the axiomatic decision on the existence of the infinite remains to be uncovered by Lacan. To fully endorse the modernity of Cantor's discovery, Badiou concludes, it is necessary to modify the Lacanian dispositive in two fundamental ways: first by way of supplementing the phallic function with a generic function of humanity, and secondly – intricately entwined with the notion of the generic – by way of another conception of the Two, where the Two, as he writes, "surgit par *effraction* de l'Un, effraction qui porte aussitôt, sans médiation, à l'infini."<sup>276</sup> Combined, the two modifications of Lacan by the generic multiple and the Two as the fracture of the One add up to a conception of truths as infinite yet immanent to a situation. An event divides a situation and its hole provides the material underpinnings for a truth as an infinite generic procedure under the fidelity of a subject. The generic will be addressed in due time. But to see how Lacan and the feminine non-all come up short of the generic and the Two, one must see how Lacan's notion of the infinite comes up short.

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<sup>276</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 304 ("arrives by way of the fracturing of the One, a fracturing that right away and immediately carries on to the infinite"). A closer interrogation as to the terminology applied by Badiou would be warranted, insofar as it opposes the mythical-imaginary object of Lacan to the real status of his own position. I will only draw up the essential lines here: Is it in a Lacanian sense that these terms – mythical-imaginary and real – are to be understood, or is it rather in a strictly mathematical sense, and what is the relation between the two conceptions, in any case? It is a valid question, especially as Badiou renders Lacan's re-nomination of the non-denumerable as the impossible to numerate into a confirmation of Lacan's conception of the non-denumerable as mythical-imaginary, explicitly opposed to the real (see Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 296; and Badiou: "La Vérité; forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 204). Seeing that Badiou repeatedly returns to Lacan's definition of the real as the impossible, this makes cause for halt. But the question is valid also on account of the strictly mathematical denotations of imaginary and real numbers, substantially discussed by Badiou in *Le Nombre et les nombres*. Real numbers are credited as the domain in which the ontology of the infinite begins. There are at least two points to note in this connection: first of all, real numbers intervene into the continuum through an incision, a cut, that defines the point where the indefinite regress of rational numbers comes to halt, in face of a limit; secondly, Dedekind ascribes a fictional status to the real numbers to which Badiou cannot concur. To Badiou, as incisions in the continuum, real numbers designates a point where numbers touch on Number, or on the Multiple as the impasse of formalization. In Dedekind's dismissal of real numbers as fictional, does one not see another version of the mythical-imaginary object and the ineffable feminine? See *e.g.* Badiou: *Le Nombre et les nombres*, *op.cit.*, p. 216 ff; and Badiou: "La Subversion infinitésimale": *Cahiers pour l'analyse (Généalogie des sciences)*, vol. 4, no. 9, p. 123.

"Sujet et infini" is the text in which Badiou elaborates most extensively on the faults that render Lacan's conceptualization of the feminine logic of the non-all problematic in regard to the infinite. Badiou turns to a passage from *Encore* where Lacan is stressing the peculiarity of the negation at stake in the feminine non-all ( $\sim\forall x. \Phi x$ , or, non-all is under the phallic function). The non-all negation is not to be read extensively and in accordance with a classical Aristotelian logic, so as to imply an affirmation of a particular negative existence ( $\exists x. \sim\Phi x$ , or, there exists at least one that is not under the phallic function). Rather it reads as the designation of an undetermined existence that is neither fully affirmed nor fully denied by the phallic function. The feminine non-all neither fully affirms nor fully denies the operation of castration. The notion of the infinite enables Lacan to wrest himself from the confines of classical logic and the particularizing effects of the negated universal. The introduction of an infinite set, Lacan argues, will render the implication of existence as following on a universal negation untenable.<sup>277</sup> As Badiou explains,

la jouissance phallique, circonscrite et finie, se soutient du pour-tout, il y a le pourtour de son pour-tout. Mais le supplément féminin n'est pas fini, il ne complète pas la première jouissance comme un ensemble déterminé. Il est sans pourtour: il n'y a pas de pourtour de pas-tout. Et voilà pourquoi il n'inclut aucune existence qui procéderait de la négation de la première jouissance.<sup>278</sup>

And, he continues,

l'infini est ici une puissance de dissymétrie. Le rapport impossible du pour-tout de l'homme et du pas-tout féminin s'inscrit dans la division de la jouissance: aucune ne peut se réaliser comme négation de l'autre, parce qu'en vérité l'infini n'est nullement la négation du fini. Il en est la détermination *inaccessible*. [...] La

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<sup>277</sup> See Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>278</sup> Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 294 ("phallic *jouissance*, circumscribed and finite, is supported by the for-all, there is the outline of its for-all. But the feminine supplement is not finite, it does not complement the first *jouissance* as a determined set. It is without outline: there is no outline of the non-all. Hence, it does not include any existence that would proceed from the negation of the first *jouissance*").



jouissance du pas-tout féminin est proprement l'infinité inaccessible où se détermine la jouissance castrée.<sup>279</sup>

Everything depends on the inaccessible status of the infinite, but to Lacan, Badiou insists, there is no need for an inaccessible infinite actually existing. For Lacan's conceptualization of the feminine logic of the non-all, it suffices that the infinite is operative merely as an inaccessible point, a virtual point subtracted from the operations and actions of the finite series.<sup>280</sup>

Badiou criticizes Lacan for juggling contradictory mathematical practices in his conceptualization of the feminine non-all, but it is mainly to Lacan's reformulation of the function of inaccessibility that he directs his attention. In this connection, he quotes at length from Lacan's seminar XIX, *...ou pire* (1971-1972), and its dispositions on inaccessibility and the conception of the Two:

Définissons-la [l'accessibilité] de ceci qu'un nombre est accessible de pouvoir être produit, soit comme somme, soit comme exponentiation des nombres qui sont plus petits que lui. A ce titre, le début des nombres se confirme de n'être pas accessible et très précisément jusqu'à 2. La chose nous intéresse tout spécialement quant à ce 2, puisque le rapport de l'1 à 0, j'ai suffisamment souligné que l'1 s'engendre de ce que le 0 marque le manque. Avec 0 et 1, que vous les additionniez ou que vous les mettiez l'un à l'autre, voire l'un à lui-même, dans une relation exponentielle, jamais le 2 ne s'atteint. Le nombre 2, au sens où je viens de le poser, qu'il puisse d'une sommation ou d'une exponentiation s'engendrer des nombres plus petits, ce test s'avère négatif: il n'y a pas de 2 qui s'engendre au moyen du 1 et du 0. [/] Une remarque de Gödel est ici éclairante, c'est très précisément que l'aleph zéro,  $\omega$ , à savoir l'infini actuel, est ce qui se trouve réaliser le même cas alors que pout tout ce qu'il en est des nombres entiers à partir de 2 – commencez à 3: 3 se fait avec 1 et 2, 4 peut se faire d'un 2 mis à sa propre exponentiation, et ainsi de suite – il n'y a pas

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<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295 ("the infinite is here a force of dissymmetry. The impossible relation of the for-all of the man and the feminine non-all is inscribed in the division of *jouissance*: neither can be realized as the negation of the other, because, in truth, the infinite is in no way the negation of the finite. It is its *inaccessible* determination. [...] The *jouissance* of the feminine non-all is really the inaccessible infinite within which the castrated *jouissance* determines itself").

<sup>280</sup> See *loc.cit.* For another discussion on whether or not Badiou hits the mark in relation to that which Lacan is aiming at with his notion of the non-all, and the mathematical preconditions of the dispute, see Grigg, Russell: "Lacan and Badiou; Logic of the *Pas-tout*": *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2008, p. 81-93.

un nombre qui ne puisse se réaliser par une de ces deux opérations à partir des nombres plus petits que lui. C'est précisément ce qui fait défaut et ce en quoi, au niveau de l'aleph 0, se reproduit cette faille que j'appelle de l'inaccessibilité.<sup>281</sup>

Badiou's objections are reducible to two points. Firstly, Lacan misconstrues the function of inaccessibility and the actual infinite as a fault within the operations of addition and exponentiation. Lacan construes inaccessibility and the infinite as caused by a fault in the operational law rather than as a exceeding of the law and, thus, dependent upon the explicit decision of an axiom. Secondly, there is a curious short circuit on Lacan's part as far as the status of the number 2 is concerned. Lacan conceives of the number 2 as inaccessible, and thereby also as infinite by definition. Badiou is willing to grant him neither, referring simply to the basic operation of arithmetic, the operation of  $1+1$ . In general, Lacan's *lapsus* in conceiving of the infinite entails an effective refusal of its status as actual. It refers the infinite to a mode of the finite, as its point of inaccessibility. The infinite is only ever approached from within the finite domain, as a fault therein. The question concerns the implications of Lacan's *lapsus* for how the Lacanian framework also comes up short in conceiving of the possibilities for change.

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<sup>281</sup> Lacan, quoted after Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 299 ("Let's define it [accessibility] so that a number is accessible by being prone to be produced, either as summation or as exponentiation of the numbers smaller than itself. In this regard, the initial numbers are confirmed to not be accessible, and precisely up until 2. This is of interest to us, especially in regard to this 2, as to the relation of the 1 to 0, I have sufficiently underscores that the 1 is engendered by that of which 0 marks the lack. With 0 and 1, whether you add them together or you put the one to the other, even the one to itself, in an exponential relation, the 2 will never be achieved. As to the number 2, in the sense I give to it, as it could be engendered by either a summation or an exponentiation of the smaller numbers, this test comes out negatively: there is no 2 that can be engendered by the means of 1 and 0. [/] A remark of Gödel is clarifying here, as it is precisely the aleph zero,  $\omega$ , that is to say, the actual infinite, which comes to realize the same case, while for all that which is of the whole numbers from 2 upwards (beginning with 3: 3 is made by 1 and 2, 4 can be made by a 2 put in its own exponentiation, and so on), there is no number that cannot be realized by one of these operations on the basis of the numbers smaller than itself. This is precisely that which is lacking and in which, at the level of the aleph zero, this fault that I call inaccessibility is reproduced.") See also Lacan: *...ou pire*, *op.cit.*, p. 178. The canonical text established by Miller and published in 2011 does differ considerably from the reproduction found in Badiou's article published 20 years earlier. I have been unable to identify the version utilized by Badiou.

### *Lacan's Symptom*

It is as symptoms that the misprisions of the inaccessible and actual infinite on Lacan's part are of interest to Badiou. Badiou is quick to identify the real motivation behind Lacan's *lapsus* in the subject split by the signifier, eclipsed in the gap between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and the metonymic chain of desire, on the one hand, and the bipartition of sexual difference in human being, on the other. If the inaccessible were to be encountered already in the number 2, it would have the structure of a fault in the law, as the point where the law undermines itself. It would also provide the mathematical formulation of the sexual non-relation and the inaccessibility of the other *jouissance*. Besides the fact that the number 2 is neither infinite nor inaccessible, there is only one problem, Badiou writes: If it were to be the case that the gap between the signifiers in the signifying chain provided an inaccessible infinite, the signifying chain and castration would be as constitutive of the other *jouissance* indicated by the feminine logic of the non-all as it already is of phallic *jouissance*. Thus there would be no real distinction to mark the movement between drive and desire, and "la jouissance féminine reste[rait] homogène à la structuration primordiale du désir."<sup>282</sup> In this way, the infinite evoked to indicate sexual difference would remain commensurable to the finite and phallic structure of desire and of the subject, such as these are articulated in the signifying chain.

An objection against Badiou's analysis could potentially be raised at this point. Might not Badiou be too tied up in the purely mathematical conditions of his arguments, to the extent that he lets a mistake in the dissemination of the number series determine the outcome of a discourse that is strictly speaking not a discourse on mathematical calculus? In focusing exclusively on the mathematical aspects of Lacan's conceptualization of the feminine logic of the non-all, does Badiou not risk losing sight of Lacan's aim, an aim to which the recourse to mathematics is but one among several supportive measures? Even if Badiou is correct in identifying a fault in Lacan's mathematical reasoning that renders the infinite a mere mode of the finite, does not the conflation of the other *jouissance* indicated through the feminine logic of the non-all

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<sup>282</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 300 ("feminine *jouissance* [would remain] homogeneous with the primordial structuration of desire").

and the signifying chain of the phallic one, which Badiou concludes to be the necessary implication of this fault, amount to an unacceptably coarse and willed misreading of what Lacan is aiming at? The difference between Badiou and Copjec's appreciation of the status of the feminine non-all concerns the presumed infinite character of the drive. Badiou rejects that it carries an infinite character, whereas Copjec endorses that it does. But surely the move from a rejection of this infinity on the basis of its pre-Cantorian and spurious conception in Lacan to the direct reduction of the drive to desire is too quick a move. Does Badiou not fail to appreciate the context in which the question of infinity is raised in Lacan?

Badiou's willed misreading might not be as coarse as it first appears. A memorable consequence follows from Lacan's mathematical mishap, Badiou suggests, the consequence by which

la seconde jouissance, la jouissance féminine, ne se supposant que de l'infini comme inaccessible, serait jouissance du sujet pur, du sujet clivé comme tel, puisque c'est au point de la faille entre ses signifiants primordiaux que s'établit l'inaccessible. Le caractère indicible de cette jouissance ne serait rien d'autre que la toujours tacite éclipse du sujet dans l'intervalle de ce qui le représente. A la question lancinante 'que veut une femme?' on pourrait répondre: jouir de la forme pure, de la forme nue de ce sujet qu'elle est.<sup>283</sup>

This passage can be read both as a mocking pastiche and as a sincere extrapolation on a consequence of Lacan's mathematical mishap. Either way, the definition of feminine *jouissance* thus provided shares in several similarities with the operations described by Copjec and Zupančič concerning the drive and its satisfaction in sublimation. It is by the repetitive nature of the drive, "only between the first and the second time, or, between any two movements of a repetition, that satisfaction is obtained; and it is only

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<sup>283</sup> *Loc.cit.* ("the second *jouissance*, the feminine *jouissance*, insofar as it is supposed to be of the infinite as inaccessible, would be the *jouissance* of the pure subject, of the divided subject as such, seeing that it is at the point of the fault of the primordial signifiers that the inaccessible is established. The unspeakable character of this *jouissance* would be nothing other than the always tacit eclipse of the subject in the interval of that which represents it. To the throbbing question of 'what does a woman want?', one would respond: to enjoy the pure form, the naked form of the subject that she is.")

between these two movements that psychoanalysis locates the subject,"<sup>284</sup> Copjec notes. Two questions should be posed at this point: First, does not the statement that a woman wants to enjoy the pure and naked form of the divided subject that she is comprise but another formulation of the drive understood as the moment when desire encounters its own cause, the moment of pure desire as desire's own limit? And second, does not a subject poised in its pure division, enjoying its own eclipse in the signifying chain, equal a subject to whom the nonexistence or lack in and of the Other never stops imposing itself, a subject to whom its own constitution as a subject must continuously be repeated, and to whom its own constitutive determinant, in Lacanian parlance, does not stop not writing itself?<sup>285</sup> In short, does not the pure subject of Badiou's willed misreading comprise the destitute subjects of the ethical act in Copjec and Zupančič?

An affirmative response to this question (yes, the pure subject in Badiou's misreading comprise the destitute subjects of Copjec and Zupančič) does not invalidate Badiou's conclusion that the supposed inaccessibility of the number 2 implies a commensurability of the signifying chain and the other *jouissance*, a conflation of desire and the drive. *A contrario*, Badiou's conclusion is very much confirmed by such a response, with the small revision that it is confirmed in the reverse. Rather than the drive becoming desire, it is desire that turns to drive, at the point where desire comes face to face with itself. This is also the definition of sublimation Copjec defends, where it is not so much a question of the regular object elevated into a Thing as the Thing turning to a regular object. By targeting a mathematical mishap in Lacan's reasoning, Badiou, apparently unbeknown and against himself, provides an exact representation of that moment when desire encounters its own cause among its other objects, an exact representation of the movements involved in the Lacanian ethics of the act.

To give this reading its proper paranoid-hallucinatory twist, one could even argue that Badiou himself repeats the same movement in question, insofar as he provides a proof of the sublimation of the drive in and through an attempt to disprove

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<sup>284</sup> Copjec: "Gai Savoir Sera", *op.cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>285</sup> For Lacan's formulation of the impossible real as that which does not stop not writing itself, see *e.g.* Lacan: *Encore, op.cit.*, p. 76.

the very same: at the point where the fault in the Lacanian argument was supposed to reveal the inconsistencies of this argument, as its full consequences was to be unleashed, the inconsistencies of the argument instead reveal themselves to be the very apogee of the argument as such – that is to say, but in the negative, that the condition turns out as just another product of the process that it conditions.

The extremes of this last twist are not required, however. It is perfectly possible to argue that the point that escapes Badiou in his biased focus on the mathematical conditions of Lacan's late teaching is the Other side, *l'Envers*, of this teaching itself: the analyst and the master are distinguished by a mere half turn of the squared wheel of discourses, and to any one position there is always a flip side to be rendered through another turn of the screw. There is always an inverse or obverse, so that if castration and phallic desire reign supreme in the chain of signifiers, it is still through this very reign itself that its own overturning is offered. The drive and the other *jouissance* may find an opening to intervene at the moment the phallic reign is made to close back in on itself. Lacan's many recourses to the topological properties of the Möbius strip, the Klein bottle, the Bishop's hat or the cross-cap – the so-called first chapter of Lacanian topology – all concern such spaces of involution.<sup>286</sup> Penney writes of Lacan's distinction of desire and drive, by way of the Möbius strip, that each concept refers to one of the strip's two sides. While blending into each other, desire and drive never meet in their pure form. Pure desire nonetheless corresponds to an experience of the drive, and *vice versa*.<sup>287</sup> The drive and desire are not the simple reverse of each other, as if the drive was the end of desire or desire the well of the drive. Rather, there are operations of involution involved in these movements from desire to drive, from impotence to impossibility, from an Other to the other, through which a failure in satisfaction transforms into a satisfaction in failure. However, if one does propose that Badiou, in his mathematical bias, misses out on the full extent of such an Other side of Lacan's teaching, one should also be careful not to miss out on Badiou's own and proper point. Hallward formulates this point as the question of "the liberation of truth from the drive," insofar as the drive "is trapped within the effectively thoughtless

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<sup>286</sup> See Miller: "Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan": *Lacan; Topologically Speaking* (ed. Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic), Other Press, New York, 2004, p. 28-48.

<sup>287</sup> See Penney: *After Queer Theory, op.cit.*, p. 137.

pursuit of inarticulate *jouissance*."<sup>288</sup> The turns of the analytical screws of discourses do not solve the dispute concerning the mythical-imaginary versus real status of the infinite in Lacan on which Badiou and Copjec disagree.

In view of the Cantorian invention, Badiou objects, the Möbius topologies cannot suffice to counter the accusation of a 'finitization' of the infinite directed at Lacan. The recurrent gestures of reversal and the operations of involution in the Lacanian edifice do not amount to so many acts of 'infinetizing' the finite. Badiou's discussions on the good and bad infinities of Hegel presents a number of striking similarities with the Lacanian notions of the drive and desire respectively, although Badiou does not make the comparisons himself. The Hegel/Lacan comparison is common in Žižek, however. Žižek equates the move from Kant to Hegel, as the move from a fault in our subjective faculties to an objective fault as such, with the move from desire to the drive, as the move from "lost object to loss itself as an object," as the move "to directly enact the 'loss' – the gap, cut, distance – itself."<sup>289</sup> If desire is characterized by its metonymic movement towards an inaccessible limit, and thereby follows the logic of Hegel's bad or spurious infinite, the twisted circuit of the drive could be argued to constitute but another repetition of the Hegelian position, namely the so-called good infinite, whose fundamental characteristic is identified by Badiou as "le répétitionnel de la répétition."<sup>290</sup> But any indefinite series of failed satisfactions in desire does not turn infinite by way of an endless circulation of satisfactory failures in the drive. No more than Hegel will Lacan be able to escape the demand for a second existential signet, the axiomatic break of a decision, to be in place before any infinity can be granted actual existence. The notion of a fundamental unity of being, of a certain continuity between the finite and the infinite, where the one evolves more or less smoothly into the other, is at the root of the romanticism of which both Hegel and Lacan ultimately suffer, as Badiou portrays their matters.<sup>291</sup> Hegel and Lacan both lack

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<sup>288</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>289</sup> Žižek: "Objet a in Social Links": *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis; Reflections on Seminar XVII* (ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg), Duke University Press, Durham/London, 2006, p. 117.

<sup>290</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement, op.cit.*, p. 188 ("the repetitiveness of repetition").

<sup>291</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 190. For a closer discussion on Badiou's relation to the Hegelian infinite, see Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 171-4; or Tzuchien, Tho: "The Good, The Bad, and

the decisive 'pure disjunction' of the axiom that alone can grant the infinite existence. If that is the case, then Badiou's decision to utilize a Lacanian reference to denote the generic multiple as the being of infinite truths is more than strange. In order to come to terms with the full significance of the character  $\varphi$ , and how it fits in Badiou's call for a traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking the preconditions of the subject and the possibilities of radical change, an analysis of the meta-ontological context of *L'Être et l'événement*, in which the generic multiple's denotation by the character  $\varphi$  is introduced, is required.

### ***Thinking Modernity; How to Posit a Generic Egg***

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have interrogated the paradox behind Badiou's denotation of the generic multiple by first elaborating on how Lacan's notion of the feminine non-all provides the framework for another ethics beyond the oppressive moral law, and then how Badiou criticizes Lacan's notion of the feminine for its failure to assume the modernity implied in Cantor's actual infinite. Badiou calls for a supplementation of Lacan with the function of the generic and a concept of the immanent Two. In this section, I will bring Lacan and Badiou together in addressing the paradoxical denotation in its own terms, as it is presented in *L'Être et l'événement*. In coming to terms with the mechanisms behind the denotation, a better understanding of how Badiou conceives of the preconditions and possibilities for the subject and radical change after Lacan is possible. The questions are how Lacan's failure to grasp the infinite precludes an apprehension of how change and novelty might come about, and how Badiou conceives of the actual infinite to prepare a notion of truths as processes of radical change. How does the Cantorian discovery of the actual infinite allow for a reformulation of the specific challenges for thinking modernity, and how

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The Indeterminate; Hegel and Badiou on The Dialectics of The Infinite": *Badiou and Hegel; Infinity, Dialectics, Subjectivity* (ed. Jim Vernon and Antonio Calcagno), Lexington Books, London, 2015, p. 35-58 (esp. p 51); and Bartlett and Clemens: "Measuring up: Some Consequences of Badiou's Confrontation with Hegel": *Badiou and Hegel; Infinity, Dialectics, Subjectivity* (ed. Jim Vernon and Antonio Calcagno), Lexington Books, London, 2015, p. 15-33 (esp. p. 21-25).



does Badiou conceive of his own philosophical works as a continuation from the point where the Lacanian framework comes up short in addressing these challenges? To Badiou, thinking modernity is thinking infinite yet immanent truths through the itinerant excess of representation over presentation. Lacan's notion of the inaccessible infinite precludes the immanence of truths, and tends towards a transcendentalist fixation of the itinerant excess in a transcendent other, whereas the generic assumes the itinerant excess and admits an immanent truth as the indiscernible of a situation. An analysis of the paradoxical denotation of the generic as feminine illuminates the significance of the itinerant excess, I argue, insofar as the generic multiple itself divides into two. The feminine reference is reserved for a primary indiscernible as the non-designation of an event, whereas Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy is captured by a secondary effective indiscernible as the generic multiple proper of a generic extension, a truth process of subjective fidelity. Through my reading for the paradoxical denotation of the generic, in light of Badiou's criticism of Lacan's notion of an inaccessible infinite, I argue that Badiou's divided conception of the generic multiple reveals a continuous strand of criticism directed at Lacan, even where this criticism is not articulated as such. The fundamental questions concern the function of the feminine other in Badiou's elaborations of the possibilities of actual change to occur within a concrete situation, and also for the significance of Badiou's ethics of continuation, of truths as subjective processes of continuous change.

### *Scylla and Charybdis*

The crux of Badiou's contention with Lacan is not to be found in his correctional advance on Lacan's mathematical mishap as such. It is as symptoms of another cause that Lacan's mishap is addressed. It concerns the immanent yet infinite status of truths, and, as such, it concerns the corner stone of Badiou's philosophical edifice. To Badiou, a truth is always a truth in and of a situation, while all the same remaining infinite.<sup>292</sup> Feltham identifies the problematic involved as another version of the most central

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<sup>292</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 456; and Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

question in critical philosophy today, the question of transmission, as it raised in and by the encounter between the infinite and the finite.<sup>293</sup> It is the question of establishing a genuine connection between the infinite and the finite, Hallward notes.<sup>294</sup> A different intonation can highlight the topological aspects of the problematic: a truth is that which must be homogeneous to a situation while simultaneously remaining heterogeneous to the same. Thus the crucial question to confront Badiou's philosophy and the traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy with is how to maintain the infinite yet immanent status of truths without falling into either of two traps, neither constructivism nor transcendentalism. In other words, how is it possible to affirm the infinite yet immanent status of truths, while neither reducing truths to just another subset of knowledge, the encyclopedia of the situation, nor giving up truths as a transcendental and unutterable mystery? In Badiou's meta-ontology of being and event, the concept of the generic designates the narrow path to avoid both pitfalls.

That a truth should be infinite, Badiou explains, is only objectionable to a meditation on finitude to the extent that truths should also remain immanent. The infinite status of truths is only objectionable from the side through which a truth touches on the real, as the impasse of formalization. An infinite truth is precluded from the constructivist plot insofar as it cannot be constructed; it remains inaccessible from within the initial, finite domain. But were an infinite truth to be thought of as transcendent or 'supra-real', Badiou writes, the thought of truths could just as easily dispose of the entire question of its subjective integration onto another sphere, the finite one, as eternally separated from infinite truth itself.<sup>295</sup> Truths would rest easy in the name of God or some equivalent figure of an absolute Other, and not be of concern to subjects of the finite world.

The immanence of truths touches upon the real, in opposition to the transcendence of the supra-real, in which no such touching is implied. What is 'real' here? It is the real of being that is brought to the fore. It is the real of pure and unbound being as inconsistent multiplicities of multiplicities. If inconsistent multiplicity is subtracted from presentation, as Badiou's meta-ontology demands,

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<sup>293</sup> See Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory, op.cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>294</sup> See Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>295</sup> See Badiou: "La Vérité; forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 204.

inconsistent multiplicity all the same returns, as an insistent existence, in the immeasurable excess of subsets over sets, inclusion over belonging, representation over presentation, state over situation. Pure and unbound being as inconsistent multiplicity returns as the itinerant excess that separates the first infinite number,  $\omega_0$ , the domain of finite numbers, from the set of its subsets, its power set,  $p(\omega_0)$ .<sup>296</sup> To this itinerant excess separating the first infinite number (the first limit ordinal) from the other infinities of possible configurations of its members in the power set, there is and can be no measure. The itinerant excess of subsets over sets is the radical implication of Cantor's discovery of the actual infinite, and Cantor's consequent infinite infinities. The entire weight of the generic as the emblem of Badiou's enterprise, his mathematical gesture, and his reformulation of truths and the subject as post-evental occurrences rests upon the notion and implications of the itinerant excess.

A brief exposition of the problematic is required in order to see the implications for Badiou's thinking. In the case of a finite set, such as a set of 2 elements, there is no obstacle to the determination of the surplus of subsets over initial elements, of inclusion over belonging. The set of subsets of 2, its power set,  $p(2)$ , is 2 to the power of 2,  $2^2$ . The set of subsets of 2 is 4. With an infinite set, there is no such determination, except the necessity that the set of subsets is of a greater cardinality, a greater number, than the initial set. There is no way to determine the exact ratio between the presentation of an infinite set and the representation of its parts. Cantor was convinced that the power set of the infinite number of natural numbers, the power set of the first limit ordinal  $p(\omega_0)$ , equaled the first infinite successor,  $\omega_1$ . Cantor's conviction is also known as the continuum hypothesis. Cantor never saw this hypothesis proven. Kurt Gödel would later demonstrate it as consistent with Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, whereas Cohen would later demonstrate its negation to be

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<sup>296</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 311. My presentation here is, perhaps, illegibly and illegitimately brief, but to the readers in need of a more extensive explication of the set theoretical conditions underlying Badiou's philosophy and conception of ontology, I refer them to either the excellent appendix to Hallward's book, or to Gillespie's concise rendition, see Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 323-348; and Gillespie: *The Mathematics of Novelty*, *op.cit.*, p. 25-69. For more detailed studies on the continuum hypothesis in Badiou's meta-ontology, see Baki: *Badiou's Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 128 ff. For an introduction on the mathematics of the continuum in general, see Tiles, Mary: *The Philosophy of Set Theory; A Historical Introduction to Cantor's Paradise* [1989], Dover Publications, Mineola NY, 2004, p. 170 ff.

consistent with Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory. The continuum hypothesis is, in other words, an undecidable statement of the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatic of set theory. As a consequence of Cantor's opening up onto his so-called paradise of infinite infinities, Badiou is able to designate the immeasurable ratio of subsets over an initial infinite set – despite Cantor's conviction to the contrary – as the real cause of every orientation of thinking, from the origins of philosophy to its future destinies. Badiou determines the impasse of formalization from which thinking swerve to be the provocation to the concept that the non-relation between sets and subsets, presentation and representation, presents.<sup>297</sup> Set theory as ontology establishes the itinerant being of the excess of representation over presentation. Badiou's own meta-ontological contribution seeks to determine its effective spell. Thinking as such is determinable as the desire to be done with this indeterminable excess. Thinking aims at taking measure of how the representations of the state exceeds the immediate presentation of a situation, even if and precisely because it is an impossible task whose aim will never be obtained. It is to this itinerant excess that the real as the inconsistent multiplicities of being answers.

The constructivist and transcendentalist traps designate two orientations around this real, as they address it by avoiding it, each in its manner. The ancient imagery of Scylla and Charybdis fits almost too well to capture the characteristics of the pitfalls of constructivism and transcendentalism. Scylla eliminates all excessive parts of ship and crew, whereas the vortex of Charybdis serves as a point of no return that is impossible to manoeuvre, swallowing ship and crew whole. Scylla the constructivist rests on the principle, after Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, that only that which can be clearly and distinctly discerned through a well-made language and a controlled progression from that which is presented, is granted a safe passage to be included in the state of representation. The operation is two-faced. Constructivism, Badiou explains, restricts the power of the state by reducing its representations to only those subsets that can be discerned and constructed. Simultaneously, constructivism grants the state an absolute authority to define the rules of representation by which a subset can be discerned and

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<sup>297</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 311 ("this provocation of the concept that is the de-relation between presentation and representation").

constructed. Scylla the constructivist thereby keeps the excess of the state contained at a minimal level, within the dimension of a knowledge that restrains it through the gradual construction of connections expanding from the already known.<sup>298</sup> As to the vortex of the transcendentalist Charybdis, words fail, except to state that she is to be of such a gigantic infinite magnitude that she encompasses situation and its state, presentation and representation, alike. The extent of her grandeur sets the measure of the representative excess by providing the law of the multiple-excess as such, as a vertiginous closure of the thinkable. While several have survived the biting strikes of Scylla, though severely reduced, none has yet reported back from beyond the mouth of Charybdis, except as mutes. In plainer words, while several have produced well-made languages to address or deal with the questions of the real, none has yet been able to pinpoint that grand cardinal or virtual being of a God or absolute Other onto which the transcendentalists hang their creed.<sup>299</sup>

Badiou credits Lacan for his avoidance of the constructivist trap of reducing truth to knowledge by eliminating all excessive parts. Lacan does not merely distinguish truth from knowledge; he even introduces an absolute separation or 'gap without concept' between them, with his notion of truth as a hole in knowledge.<sup>300</sup> But as in the ancient myth, the avoidance of one danger comes at the cost of its counterpart. From the gaping mouth of the transcendentalist trap, where truths rebound into the beyond of an ineffable assumption, Lacan exhibits a hesitance as to whether or not he really wants to escape, as far as Badiou is concerned. Lacan insists that access to truth is never granted through donation of any kind, neither from above nor below. Truth finds its origin in a hole or a disappearance (*e.g.* the *lapsus*), as that momentary emergence of a void in a situation that characterizes an event. Nonetheless, Badiou is

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<sup>298</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 319; 325. In his *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, Badiou prefers speak of *nominaliste* and *transcendante*, over *constructiviste* and *transcendente*, but the operations are the same. See Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>299</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 313-4. Leibniz has already been mentioned, but Hallward also includes Aristotle, Kant, and Deleuze in the constructivist camp, while categorising Heidegger as a transcendentalist disciple, see Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 216. According to Badiou himself, the grand specialists of set theory (*i.e.* besides Cantor himself, the members responsible for its axiomatization, Zermelo, Fraenkel, the Bourbaki group, *et al.*) fall under the latter heading, as does those aspiring to theology, see Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>300</sup> See Badiou: "La Vérité: forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 201.

only willing to grant Lacan his adherence to the immanence of truths to a certain degree, "pour l'essentiel",<sup>301</sup> as he formulates it.

Feltham observes how religion has answered the question posed by the encounter of the infinite and the finite through "its scenes of immortal–mortal interaction, in prophecy, divine dreams, incarnation or even the ritual of the Eucharist."<sup>302</sup> Bartlett, Clemens, and Roffe note how transmission in psychoanalysis is always assumed to be flawed and to falter.<sup>303</sup> Bosteels points out how one of the main struggles of Badiou against psychoanalysis has been Badiou's "reinforcing [of] the mathematical paradigm in order to resist the temptation to let oneself be seduced" by psychoanalysis' tendency to project "the real of enjoyment into a properly religious or mystical beyond, insofar as it resists all symbolization."<sup>304</sup> Miller, on his part, warns against how an abandonment of the matheme will lead analytic practice into "nothing more than a fascination with the unsayable."<sup>305</sup> I have mentioned how Badiou conceives of Lacan's triangulation of the feminine, the infinite, and the unsayable as a cultural theme yet to be solidified by the hard proof of the matheme. At this point Badiou's contention with Lacan reaches a climax: on the other side of truth's hole in knowledge, there tends to remain for Lacan's part a transcendent beyond of an inaccessible and ineffable mystery, in which the drive and the feminine non-all is lodged.

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<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>302</sup> Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory, op.cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>303</sup> See Bartlett, Clemens and Roffe: *Lacan, Deleuze, Badiou, op.cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>304</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics, op.cit.*, p. 184. Bosteels summarizes Badiou's struggle against Lacan in two main themes: firstly, a reaffirmation of philosophy by separating it from the statements of antiphilosophy, and, secondly, a reinforcement of the mathematical paradigm against the temptations of finitude, language and the mystical beyond. It is a rather strange bipartition, insofar as antiphilosophy can be said to depend on all of the temptations mentioned as appertaining to the second theme, as Bosteels should be well aware, seeing that he has written extensively on precisely this overlap elsewhere. I assume his bipartition is motivated by the argument for maintaining the ubiquity of the dialectical program of Badiou's Maoism, as strictly dominated by the operation of 'one divides into two'.

<sup>305</sup> Miller: "Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan", *op.cit.*, p. 33.

### *Strange Being*

If Lacan falls short of the hard proof of the *matheme* in his encounter with the triangulation of the feminine, the infinite, and the unsayable, it is not because Lacan has been failing to experiment with the *matheme* in the face of this triangulation. If Badiou's contention with Lacan reaches a climax at this point, a more detailed interrogation of Lacan's position according to Badiou is required in order to see the full significance of Badiou's own move to pass beyond the Lacanian framework. The question is how Lacan encounters the cultural theme of the feminine, the infinite, and the unsayable, and how that encounter does not prevent Lacan from falling for the transcendentalist trap, the Charybdean vortex in which infinite truth is effectively separated from its situation. The next question is how Badiou returns to the hard proof of the *matheme* in search of a pass beyond Lacan.

The drive, the feminine non-all, and the other *jouissance* are not synonyms, even if they do share in a fair intersection. Barnard draws attention to how Lacan, in *Encore*, introduces a perspectival shift, in a move away from the structure of the drive and towards the structure of sexual difference. As she writes, Lacan moves towards a beyond "inscribed not in the repetitive circuit of the drive but in what Lacan calls the *en-corps*, an 'enjoying substance' which insists in the body beyond its sexual being."<sup>306</sup> To evoke that which is at issue in this *en-corps*, Lacan makes recourse to the strange being of the angel [*l'être-ange*], Barnard continues, insofar as "[t]he angel – neither a 'being' nor of Being – is an asexual creature who inhabits the space between life and death and who is outside of time and hence immortal."<sup>307</sup> With a denotation from Bruce Fink, Barnard suggests that such a strange angel-being might just provide a signifier of the real, written S(a), as "the materialization across the gap between symbolic and real,"<sup>308</sup> through which feminine *jouissance* is considered to tap into that other *jouissance* beyond the sexual domain.

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<sup>306</sup> Barnard: "Tongues of Angels", *op.cit.*, p. 172. For the reference to Lacan's *l'être-ange*, the *en-corps*, and 'enjoying substance', see Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 16; 33.

<sup>307</sup> Barnard: "Tongues of Angels", *op.cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179. For another reading of Lacan's notion of 'enjoying substance' and the *en-corps* that also highlights its bridging of the gap between the symbolic and the real, see Verhaege, Paul: "Enjoyment and Impossibility; Lacan's Revision of the Oedipus Complex": *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg), Duke University Press,

Badiou is aware of Lacan's evocation of the notion of such a strange being. But contrary to Barnard, Badiou is not convinced that its presence is actually established in the teachings of Lacan. Badiou considers the strange being of an angel as a tendency that Lacan is failing to ward off, despite Lacan's insistent effort to do so. Lacan struggles to affirm the function of his notion of the feminine logic of the non-all as non-extensive, as not opening for the implication of a particular negative existential affirmation (if not all, then at least one to the contrary). Badiou regards this struggle as an effort to avoid every notion of an angel, insofar as an angel would be that one being fully exempt from the phallic function. Such a being, Badiou explains, would not only be sexless but also speechless and, hence, thoughtless. The angelic *cogito* is formulated as "si je pense, je ne suis pas".<sup>309</sup> In a short aside, Badiou entertains on the idea by which the question of the sex of angels could be solved by the simple answer of *phallus is angel*: angels do not have a sex because they are sex as such.<sup>310</sup> The strange being of an angel would designate "the purely asexual enjoyment of the body as One, fictitiously situated outside of the Other (or before/after it),"<sup>311</sup> as Lorenzo Chiezza has formulated it. It would designate a strictly pre- or extra-discursive reality. In the capacity of a pre- or extra-discursive reality, an angel would deserve the denomination of a mythical being in the Lacanian pandemonium, insofar as Lacan insists that there is no such thing as a pre-discursive reality. To the speaking beings of Lacan's universe, every reality is per definition discursively constituted.<sup>312</sup> Badiou is quick to add that Lacan's aim is not in the direction of affirming the mythical being of an angel. Nonetheless, Badiou does not believe that Lacan manages to avoid that conclusion entirely. Lacan's notion of an other *jouissance* maintains a taste of the asexual being of an angel, being a-sexual precisely because it is sex as such, not marked

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Durham/London, 2006, p. 29-49. See also Chiezza, Lorenzo: "Woman and the Number of God": *Theology after Lacan; The Passion for the Real* (ed. Creston Davis, Marcus Pound and Clayton Crockett), James Clark & Co, Cambridge, 2015, p. 166-191, in which is explored in depth the differentiation of a masculine phallic *jouissance*, a feminine and strange [*étrange*] *jouissance* that remains phallic, the totalizing angelic *jouissance* of *l'être-ange*, and a feminine *jouissance stricto sensu* as a mystical supplement to phallic *jouissance*.

<sup>309</sup> Badiou: "La Vérité: forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>310</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 293-4.

<sup>311</sup> Chiezza: "Woman and the Number of God", *op.cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>312</sup> See Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.



by the phallus either positively or negatively, insofar as it encompasses the phallic economy as that in which both the phallus and its other are lodged.

When Barnard identifies in Lacan the possibility of a signifier of the real by which the gap between the symbolic and the real would materialize through the notion of the angel, she merely sums up that which would be the full effect of such a strange being. The effect of an angel would be the fixation of the sexual non-rapport in a ratio that exceeds and encompasses the sexual as such. Its effect would be that of "the mythical end of sexual difference," to quote Chieza's equivocal words, "the epitome of the male-phallic fantasy of overcoming sexual difference in an asexual being as being One."<sup>313</sup> The end of sexual matters under the apex of the One is the ultimate significance of a signifier of the real. Such an effect is the direct equivalent of the fixation of the itinerant excess, the errant gap without concept between representation and presentation, through which pure being as inconsistent multiplicity would insist, if it was not for the fact that it is now conceived of as caught up in a transcendent and otherworldly being-beyond-being. Badiou brings to the fore the tendency of fixation in Lacan's notion of the infinite as underlying that other *jouissance* by which the feminine logic of the non-all becomes a mere prop for the finitude of the phallic subject, as a point of inaccessibility without an actual existence. It is the immanence of truths that makes the infinite status of truths a challenge to think through. To underscore this fact, Badiou's accusation against Lacan can be reformulated so as to say that Lacan falls into the trap of the transcendentalist position due to a failure on his part to sufficiently produce a solid answer to the question of how a hole can ever be infinite without butting against some final frontier or limit of the thinkable. If *phallus is angel*, then *angel is Charybdis*, and the *cogito* of truths in the mouth of Charybdis is still '*si je pense, je ne suis pas*'. If Lacan launches a conceptualization of truth as that which comes to punch a hole in knowledge, at the bottom of this hole there still awaits the notion of an ineffable beyond that encompasses hole and knowledge both.

None of the criticisms concerning Lacan's pre-Cantorian conception of the infinite and his transcendentalist solution to the excess of representation over presentation is explicitly formulated in *L'Être et l'événement*. Instead, Badiou defines

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<sup>313</sup> Chieza: "Woman and the Number of God", *op.cit.*, p. 178.

his commonality with Lacan as dependent on the status of truths as generic holes in knowledge, so as to proceed immediately to isolate their point of contention to be the exact placement of the void – the empty set – as appertaining either to the subject or to being.<sup>314</sup> Recall the apparent paradox from which this chapter started out, where the concept of the generic is presumed to be referenced through the Lacanian notion of the feminine logic of the non-all. Badiou presents the emblem of his philosophical project by reference to the theory his project was supposed to surpass. Insofar as Badiou also conveys the generic hole of truth as a common trait of Lacan and himself, it is harder to perceive the distinctive marks that would render Badiou's project, by his own words, a traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy. In *L'Être et l'événement*, it is mainly to the rarity of the subject that his traversal of the Lacanian framework is conferred. The time has come to address the matter of the generic itself and its relationship to the feminine logic of the non-all as Badiou presents it to his readers at this point, in *L'Être et l'événement*.

### *The Generic*

When confronted with quandary of the inconsistency of being or the impasse of the itinerant excess of representation over presentation, the concept of the generic offers a solution similar to the solutions of the Gordian Knot and the Columbi Egg. The constructivists and transcendentalists avoid the issue rather than facing it, by attempting to control or contain the itinerant excess. The generic adherents, on the other hand, graciously maneuver the strait of modern Messina by accepting the itinerant being of being as such. The solution is as simple as it is solid. An adherent of the generic orientation in thinking, Badiou writes,

tient que l'excès de l'état n'est impensable que parce qu'on exige le discernement des parties. On se propose cette fois, par une doctrine déployée des indiscernables, de montrer que ce sont eux qui composent l'essentiel du champ où opère l'état, et que toute pensée authentique doit d'abord forger les moyens de l'appréhension du quelconque, du multiplement-pareil, de l'indifférencié. On scrute la représentation

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<sup>314</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 472.

du côté de ce qu'elle nombre sans jamais le discerner, des parties sans bord, des conglomerats hasardeux. On tient que ce qui est représentatif d'une situation n'est pas ce qui y appartient distinctement, mais ce qui y est évasivement inclus. Tout l'effort rationnel est de disposer d'un mathème de l'indiscernable, qui fasse advenir à la pensée ces parties innombrables que rien ne permet de nommer dans leur séparation d'avec la foule de celles qui leur sont, aux yeux myopes de la langue, absolument identiques. Dans cette voie, le mystère de l'excès sera non pas réduit, mais rejoint. On connaîtra son origine, qui est que l'anonymat des parties est forcément au-delà de la distinction des appartenances.<sup>315</sup>

The generic approach to the itinerant excess rests upon a multiple by which the being of a truth is rendered thinkable. The generic approach attempts to address the representative excess from within, in opposition to its reduction from either below or above, as it is found in the discernible multiples of constructed knowledge and the transcendental multiple of a God or an absolute and ineffable Other.

The Columbi move is a recurrent operation in set theory and psychoanalysis alike. A paradox is transformed into a concept, a problem into a solution. In Freud one encounters the peculiar redoubling of the drive as a force that operates in two contradictory directions, simultaneously binding together and dissolving. Thus the paradoxical status of the sexual is transformed into its concept. Cantor performed a similar move when he turned the consternation of Galileo Galilei concerning the correspondence between whole and square numbers into the simple affirmation of their identical quantity. Cantor simply confirmed that there are as many square as whole numbers, even if the set of square numbers is itself a subset of the set of whole

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<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313 (An adherent of the generic "holds that the excess of the state is unthinkable only because one demands the discernment of its subsets. One proposes this time, through applying a doctrine of indiscernibles, to show that it is they who compose the essential of the field where the state operates, and that all authentic thinking must, in order to begin, first forge the means to apprehend the nondescript, the multiply-similar, the undifferentiated. One scrutinizes representation from the side of that which it counts without ever discerning it, the borderless subsets, the hazardous conglomerates. One holds that that which is representative of a situation is not that which belongs to it distinctly, but that which is evasively included. The whole of its rational effort is to come up with a mathème of the indiscernible, which presents to thinking these innumerable subsets that nothing permits to name in their separation from the crowd of those that are absolutely identical to them, in the blind eyes of language. In this orientation, the mystery of the excess will not be reduced, but rejoined. One recognizes its origin, which is the anonymity of the subsets as perforce beyond the distinction of belongings.").

numbers.<sup>316</sup> The same consternation of Galileo served Richard Dedekind to propose a positive definition of infinite sets, as those that are alike to one of its own subsets. An infinite set exhibits a bi-univocal correspondence between itself and one of its parts. Dedekind's definition at the same time determined the finite negatively, as the sets in which such a bi-univocal correspondence is not the case.<sup>317</sup> Instead of tempting the construction of the infinite on the basis of the finite, which is impossible, Dedekind reversed the stakes, so that the finite is constructed as taking place within the infinite. Thus the problem of the infinite became its solution.

Cantor and Dedekind's view to the conceptual force of the paradox does not go to say that either of them were adherents to the generic fairway, however. Cantor entertained the hope of hitting upon that grand transcendental cardinal that would fix the ratio of the continuum, the relation between the first limit ordinal and its power set. But the continuum hypothesis is undecidable, and the itinerant excess undeterminable. As Hallward explains, "attempts to establish a clear limitation of size fails, it seems, for the same reason that the continuum hypothesis itself cannot be confirmed: it has not proved possible to put effective limits on the (impredicative) operation of the power set axiom."<sup>318</sup> It was first at the hands of Cohen that a conceptualization of the generic surfaced. Cohen provided evidence for the independence of the continuum hypothesis in regard to Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, demonstrating the consistency of its negation to supplement Gödel's demonstration of the consistency of its affirmation. With the concept of the generic, Cohen posited his own Columbi Egg. He transformed the failure of an effective limitation of the itinerant excess of multiplicity into its principal force and determining trait, as multiplicity's inherent indetermination.

When Badiou introduces the ancient character of Venus, ♀, in *L'Être et l'événement*, it is in order to denote such an indiscernible anonymity. It is to denote the generic multiple as the indiscernible being of truth. But what is involved in the concept of the generic multiple, so as to cause its denotation in and through a character indicative of the feminine non-all of Lacan? Addressing this question is necessary before one can address the question of the significance of Badiou's call for

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<sup>316</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 295-6.

<sup>317</sup> See Badiou: *Le Nombre et les nombres*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>318</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 335.

supplementing the phallic function with a concept of the generic, and go on to address the question of the full significance of the apparent paradox of the generic multiple in the context of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking the subject and radical change.

Let me recapitulate the basics of the feminine logic of sexuation. The crux of Lacan's struggle to formalize the feminine logic of the non-all is found in the difficult escape from the grips of classical logic that would leave behind the Aristotelian specification by which the negated universal necessarily implies an affirmation of a negative existence. The feminine as non-all under the phallic function ( $\sim\forall x. \Phi x$ ) is not to be taken as an extensive negation that would imply an existent under a non-phallic function ( $\exists x. \sim\Phi x$ ), a *hommoinzune* fully outside the phallic field of language as such. With the non-all, it is not the case that a speaking being, e.g. a woman, is not at all under the phallic function. On the contrary, she is there in full, Lacan explains. But there is also something more, something in excess [*quelque chose en plus*].<sup>319</sup> The formalization of the feminine as non-all is meant to capture the situation in which a speaking being is not fully determined by the phallic function, the situation in which a speaking being finds castration to be not omnipresent and absolute, not all there is. Badiou explains this point as follows: while the masculine position and its universal for-all ( $\forall x. \Phi x$ ) also implies that the phallic function dominates everything and everywhere, the feminine non-all indicates not a complete separation from phallic domination *tout court* but a special mode of the phallic function, one in which it functions somewhere and not everywhere. Such a 'not everywhere' is written as non-all.<sup>320</sup> As in the post-Freudian or post-Oedipal conception of an ethics of the feminine beyond the moral law, the case is not that the feminine comes up short but that it comes in excess. There is something somewhere in the feminine that evades determination at the point of the phallus, an uncertain beyond the phallus.<sup>321</sup> There is something somewhere in the feminine that is also beyond castration, desire, language, and knowledge as such.

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<sup>319</sup> Lacan: *Encore, op.cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>320</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 290-1.

<sup>321</sup> See Lacan: *Encore, op.cit.*, p. 95.

Badiou introduces the denotation of the generic through the character ♀ to designate an evasion from language and knowledge. The character ♀ is an ontological transcription of the supernumerary nomination of the event, Badiou writes, and it is introduced into the formal matrix of meta-ontology in order to designate the indiscernible, the nondescript and undifferentiated multiple that falls outside nomination as such, having but the properties that is shared by all multiples in a given situation, their simple being.<sup>322</sup> The properties of a generic multiple are simply those strictly required for its pure existence as a multiple. The generic has no other property than that of consisting as a pure multiple of being. Just like the feminine is non-all due to an excess the phallic function fails to capture, so the generic multiple is non-all to the extent that it evades every discrete description due to an excessive *un peu de tout*. The generic multiple designates a predicative superabundance that escapes capture by the constructions of language and the encyclopedia of the situation, which fails to fix its being to a unitary concept of evaluation. François Wahl defines the stakes of this excessive being designated by character ♀ as

le théorème crucial du multiple – sa loi et son impasse: ce qui lui donne statut du Réel – qui pose l'excès inassignable des parties d'un ensemble à ses éléments: soit le principe de l'*excès errant*. Ainsi le générique n'est-il pas autre chose que le mise en œuvre consistante de l'excès, l'enquête fidèle sur ce par quoi l'être supplémente 'évasivement' toutes les déterminations encyclopédiques du savoir d'une situation: la procédure a hauteur d'être.<sup>323</sup>

The generic designates, in other words, a superabundance of being that evades the grips of language, insofar as an excess of determinations provides the multiple in question with a certain effect of indetermination. Or, as Badiou writes of the generic,

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<sup>322</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 392.

<sup>323</sup> Wahl, François: "Le soustractif": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 21 ("the crucial theorem of the multiple – its law and its impasse, that proffers its status of the Real – in positing the non-assignable excess of a set's parts over its elements, that is to say, the principle of the *itinerant excess*. Thus the generic is nothing but the consistent operationality of the excess, the faithful enquiry into that through which being 'evasively' come to supplement every encyclopedic determination of knowledge of a situation: the procedure at the heights of being"). See also Frazer, Zachary Luke: "The Law of the Subject; Alain Badiou, Luitzen Brouwer and the Kripkean Analyses of Forcing and the Heyting Calculus": *The Praxis of Alain Badiou* (ed. Paul Ashton, A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Re-press, Melbourne, 2016, esp. p. 48 ff.

la langue échoue à en construire le contour ou le rassemblement. Le sous-ensemble générique est un multiple pur de l'univers, évasif et incernable par quelque construction langagière que ce soit. Il indique que la puissance d'être du multiple excède ce que de telles constructions sont en état d'en fixer sous l'unité d'une évaluation. Le générique est proprement ce qui, de l'être-multiple, se soustrait au pouvoir de l'Un tel que la langue en dispose la ressource.<sup>324</sup>

The generic multiple is an anonymous representative of the being of a situation. It would seem to keep a distance imperceptible to the position Copjec describes as hers, as well as that of Lacan. In Copjec's rendition, the feminine non-all is perceived as the guardian of being, as Antigone had been the guardian of criminal being. The feminine logic of the non-all designates being besides the law and language alike. Paul Verhaege defines Lacanian *jouissance* as by definition indefinable,<sup>325</sup> whereas Zupančič quotes Žižek on how *jouissance* is the stain of the infinite that forever eludes our grasp but nonetheless is impossible to get rid of.<sup>326</sup> But if the Lacanian notions of the feminine non-all and *jouissance* seem to be mimicked in Badiou's conception of the generic multiple, the paradox of the denotation of the generic multiple by the feminine character is by that no less unresolved. The questions as to the significance of the traversal and where the contention that dominates Badiou's interventions just a couple of years after *L'Être et l'événement* has gone, are no less unanswered.

It would, however, be imprecise to conclude that the generic multiple earns its feminine denotation due to its qualification as an indeterminate and evasive being, by which it collects under its mark a little bit of everything. The devil is in the details, as the saying goes, and, as Lacan indicates by his reference to Jacques Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* (1772), it is from entertaining on the devil that the most profound

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<sup>324</sup> Badiou: "Conférence sur la soustraction": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 184 ("Language fails to construct its outline or collection. The generic subset is a pure multiple of the universe, evasive and impossible to outline by whatever linguistic construction there might be. It indicates how the force of the being of the multiple exceeds that which such constructions are able to determine under the unity of an evaluation. The generic is properly that of the multiple-being to be subtracted from the power of the One, such as language disposes of its resources").

<sup>325</sup> See Verhaege: "Enjoyment and Impossibility; Lacan's Revision of the Oedipus Complex", *op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>326</sup> See Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 241; 249.

questions (*che voui?*) are raised.<sup>327</sup> The event itself is foreclosed from ontology. Ontology restricts itself to the question of being-*qua*-being. The event, on the other hand, is the epitome of that-which-is-not-being-*qua*-being. This is the background on which the character ♀ is introduced, and the motivation underlying its choice left to the reader's own discernment. As Badiou writes, it is coherent to say that his feminine denotation is nothing but an ontological transcription of the supernumerary name of the event, and therefore it does not designate anything.<sup>328</sup> The event is a question of an interval more than a term, seen from the perspective of the situation.<sup>329</sup> Badiou's dialectic of division divides the event in two, and with it, the concept of the generic multiple. The generic poses as a twofaced being, as a determined indeterminacy and an indeterminable determination. The concept of the generic multiple is divided into a multiple not designating anything, on the one hand, and, on the other, the same multiple designating the indiscernible of the situation. Feltham aims for this dialectical movement of the generic when he underlines its twin traits of division and synthesis, where the generic must be grasped as a multiple "both inclusive – given any property, some of its elements possess it – and yet indiscernible – no property serves to classify it as a whole."<sup>330</sup> Bosteels has underlined the importance of the dialectic in Badiou's philosophy, and to further insist on the dialectical division of the concepts of the event and the generic is not a pedantic gesture. The dialectical division in two procures movement where the metaphysical One secures only stasis. Furthermore, the dialectical division of the generic multiple provides the misconstrued notion of an inaccessible Two in Lacan with its necessary correction through another conception of the Two – an immanent Two, as Badiou suggests, emerging through the fracturing of the One. Thus the dialectical division of the generic multiple allows for a conception of truth as processes of change and novelty: It allows for Badiou's philosophical works to respond to the devil's question with the ethical imperative of continuation and *un pas de plus*.

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<sup>327</sup> See Lacan: "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l'inconscient freudien", *op.cit.*, p. 815; and Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation* (1958-1959)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2013, p. 24-25.

<sup>328</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 392.

<sup>329</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 228. See also Wahl: "Le soustractif", *op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>330</sup> Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 109.



### *Holes and Extensions*

The generic multiple's division into two is decisive in Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy. The dialectic of division constitutes a principal operation for how Badiou conceives of the preconditions and possibilities for the subject and radical change. I suggest that the division between a primary indiscernible of non-designation and an effective indiscernible, a generic multiple proper, holds the key to come to terms with the paradox of Badiou's decision to denote the generic by a reference to the feminine logic of the non-all. According to the division of the generic, the evocation of the feminine non-all would be restricted in its reference to the primary indiscernible of non-designation, as Badiou himself underscores when he writes that "♀ n'est qu'un symbole formel désignant une transcendance inconnue."<sup>331</sup> The effects of such a primary non-designation have been discussed through the Lacanian non-all, but the question of its other, the effective indiscernible of the generic multiple proper remains to be addressed. The generic multiple proper holds the key to how Badiou conceives of the possibilities of infinite yet immanent truths, as actual truths that are effective in and for a situation.

The meta-ontological status of Badiou's formalizations in *L'Être et l'événement* is important to keep in mind, since his meta-ontological formalizations have the function of designating the ontological operations of set theoretical mathematics. The generic is introduced specifically in order to think the being of truth, such as Cohen has thought it. Later it is conjoined with Cohen's concept of forcing, in order to think the being of the subject. Both truths and subjects are subtracted from being-*qua*-being, as they depend upon the occurrence of that-which-is-not-being-*qua*-being, the event. Their being can nonetheless be thought, as generic multiples and as forcing, as the event can be thought as the division implied by an immanent Two. Just like the initial intervention nominating an event is to be distinguished from the consecutive process of fidelity elaborating on its consequences by being the cause of the process of fidelity, just so must the primary non-designation of ♀ be distinguished from the effective

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<sup>331</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 418.

indiscernible of the generic multiple proper. The initial indiscernible is written  $\varnothing$ . But the actual existence of the indiscernible is first accounted for in and through its so-called generic extension, written  $S(\varnothing)$ . Only the latter designates a fully immanent and infinite truth. A generic multiple, as the being of truth, does not start out as a collection of a little bit of everything; it starts out as a collection of nothing or, more precisely, as an indication of nothing. It marks the being of the event whose being is not to be, whose being is to disappear in its appearance. A generic multiple, as the being of truth, does not start out as an effective indiscernible presented and existing in a situation; it starts out as an anonymous and excrescent representation, a hole of pure transcendence. Only through the generic procedure of a process of fidelity, in the aftermath of an event and its nominating intervention, does an indiscernible multiple pass from being nothing but an anonymous transcendence to being an actually existing truth intrinsic to a situation, a generic multiple proper.

The conception of the generic is possible only through the clear distinction between a first intervention through the choice of a name to designate the primary indiscernible and a secondary procedure of fidelity as the ordered inquiry into the continued persistence of such an initial indiscernible, as it is discerned within the initial situation. Wahl makes the case clear: between intervention and fidelity, writes Wahl, is found the resurgence of the Two, as the discernment of the indiscernible as indiscernible.<sup>332</sup> Johnston also calls for as clear as possible a distinction between "Truth-as-place and truths-as-veridicalities-to-come (*i.e.* Truth versus truths), with Badiou's notion of 'forcing' (*forçage*) explaining the link between these two poles," and thereby also as a "tripartite distinction between Truth-as-place, truths-as-veridicalities-to-come, and truth processes," with "the third conjoining the first two as the locale of their intersection."<sup>333</sup> Badiou elaborates on truths as the transformations of a transcendent representation into an immanent presentation. A truth is the process of transformation by which an excessive inconsistency is made to consist as intrinsic in-consistency: "Une vérité est cette consistance minimale (une partie, une immanence

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<sup>332</sup> See Wahl: "Le soustractif", *op.cit.*, p. 21-22.

<sup>333</sup> Johnston: ""There is Truth, and then there are truths—or, Slavoj Žižek as a Reader of Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 149-150.

sans concept) qui avère dans la situation l'inconsistance qui en fait l'être."<sup>334</sup> To the extent that Lacan is lacking a concept of an effective indiscernible, "un multiple effectivement présenté dans une situation, mais radicalement soustrait à la langue de la situation,"<sup>335</sup> Badiou's contention with the Lacanian framework is located in this moment of transformation. I identify three levels: firstly, Badiou's mathematical gesture turns upon transposing the real from the subject to being, providing the material underpinnings of truths and subjects in the event; secondly, in the process of transposing the real from subject to being, or as an effect of this transposal, the status of truths is transformed from punctual to procedural being; thirdly, the transformation of truths from punctual to procedural being allows Badiou to think the radical transformation of a situation from within.

In order to delineate the distinction of the indiscernible as hole and as extension, it is helpful to reintroduce Lacan's circumvention of classical Aristotelian logic at this point. While ruminating the battery of signifiers to find a fitting suit for the feminine, Lacan proposes that it is insofar as there is none to occupy the position from which one would enjoy all women that woman is non-all. In *...ou pire*, Lacan states that

le *pas-tout* ne résulte pas de ce que rien ne le limite, car la limite y est autrement située. Contrairement à l'inclusion dans  $\exists x. \sim \Phi x$  de l'existence du Père dont le *dire que non* le situe par rapport à la fonction phallique, c'est en tant que, dans  $\sim \exists x. \sim \Phi x$ , il y a le vide, le manque, l'absence de quoi que ce soit qui dénie la fonction phallique, que, inversement, il n'y a rien d'autre que le *pas-tout* dans la position de la femme à l'endroit de la fonction phallique. Elle est en effet *pas-toute*.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie, op.cit.*, p. 90 ("A truth is this minimal consistency (a part, an immanence without concept) that reveals within the situation its founding inconsistency").

<sup>335</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement, op.cit.*, p. 424 ("a multiple effectively presented in a situation, but radically subtracted from the language of the situation").

<sup>336</sup> See Lacan: *...ou pire, op.cit.*, p. 206 ("the non-all does not result from the fact that nothing limits it, because the limit is situated otherwise there. Contrary to the inclusion in  $\exists x. \sim \Phi x$  of the existence of the Father, whose *no-saying* situates it in relation to the phallic function, it is to the extent that, in  $\sim \exists x. \sim \Phi x$ , there is a void, a lack, the absence of that which would deny the phallic function, that, inversely, there is nothing other than the *non-all* in the position of woman in the space of the phallic function. She is in effect non-all").

The feminine non-all does not follow from a lack of limits, but from lack as limit. There is something of the void denying the phallic function, and that is the reason why there is nothing but the non-all of the phallic function in the feminine position. Translated into Freudian terms, this point reads that the fall of *der Urvater* is the cause by which the feminine falls outside every attempt at universal collection.<sup>337</sup> The mythical father of the horde was the castrating one himself un-castrated, the one to whom belonged all women, and at his dethronement there is no longer a representative instance under which all women can be categorized.

In other words, there is no *hommoinzune* on the feminine side. It is from a hole in the Other that the feminine comes up as non-all and that Woman, universalized, does not exist. The masculine logic is clearly discernible through its anchorage in the exception, the One-father. It represents an absolute Other to whom belong the rights and means of judgments, both morally and epistemologically. The One-father figures as the instance that props up the symbolic structures through which knowledge is induced. The feminine has another bond to the Other, Lacan explains. The feminine bond is a bond taking place "au signifiant de cet Autre, en tant que, comme Autre, il ne peut rester que toujours Autre," and on account of which "il n'y a pas d'Autre de l'Autre."<sup>338</sup> The feminine bond is a bond to the signifier of the hole in the Other, S(A). This is the occasion for Lacan's reply that nothing can be said of Woman: "Rien ne peut se dire de la femme. La femme a rapport à S(A) et c'est en cela déjà qu'elle se dédouble, qu'elle n'est pas toute, puisque, d'autre part, elle peut avoir rapport avec  $\Phi$ ."<sup>339</sup> An obvious temptation would be to equate Badiou's two denotations of the primary non-designation of the nominating intervention, ♀, and the effective

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<sup>337</sup> Verhaege refers to Lacan's denouncement of the all-enjoying father on the grounds that it would be difficult enough for one man to satisfy one single woman, let alone all of them. See Verhaege: "Enjoyment and Impossibility", *op.cit.*, p. 42. Verhaege does not seem to realize the logical deficiency of such an argument, insofar as enjoyment and satisfaction is not nearly the same thing, regardless of whether it is the one or the all that is at issue. Who believes the Father of the horde ever satisfied all his women, anyway? He enjoyed them, which is something completely different.

<sup>338</sup> Lacan: *Encore, op.cit.*, p. 102 ("to the signifier of this Other, to the extent that it, as Other, cannot but remain forever Other," and on account of which "there is no Other of the Other").

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103 ("nothing can be said of Woman. Woman has a relation to the S(A) and it is in this already that she redoubles herself, that she is non-all, insofar as she, on the other hand, can have a relation to  $\Phi$ ").

indiscernible of the generic extension,  $S(\varnothing)$ , with Lacan's formalized notions of the hole in the Other,  $\mathbf{A}$ , and its signifier,  $S(\mathbf{A})$ . The first couple ( $\varnothing$ ,  $\mathbf{A}$ ) would thus designate an event as the hole in the Other, whereas the latter couple ( $S(\varnothing)$ ,  $S(\mathbf{A})$ ), would designate a truth procedure as marking this hole within the signifying structure. However, these equations are overhasty.

Three remarks must be made in this connection: first of all, the hole in the Other is the hole that allows of no knowledge. The phallus and the masculine logic will ascertain at least a negative certainty. The phallus enables an elaboration of a grid by which to make sense of the world. The subject confronted by the hole in the Other, on the other hand, witnesses the disintegration of all coordinates, and thus the symbolic structures that serve to underpin knowledge fall apart. The hole in the Other is where knowledge goes to die. Secondly, the splitting of Woman manages a return to the moment of the drive, as discussed by Copjec and Zupančič. Divided between the hole in the Other ( $S(\mathbf{A})$ ) and the phallus ( $\Phi$ ), the feminine takes up the precise position where the law reveals its inherent contradiction. On one side stand the phallus and the law of the superego, on the other side, the constituent absence of the law or the law of the unknown. Finally, that nothing can be said of Woman finds its cause in the scission between phallus and the hole in the Other, between  $\Phi$  and  $S(\mathbf{A})$ . As an argument of the phallic function, a woman is only discernible insofar as she is reduced to her being *quoad matrem*, as a mother. Reduced to a mother, nothing is said as to her being *per se*, says Lacan.<sup>340</sup> Her question is concentrated beyond the phallus, but then as an inarticulate hole in the Other that cannot be spoken. It can be experienced but never cognized as such. At best, it can be indicated, as it is through Gian Lorenzo Bernini's sculpture of Santa Theresa *in gaudensis*. In short, Woman does not exist! Beyond the phallus, the being of woman becomes the prerogative of the ineffable mystical experience, given to "[c]ette jouissance qu'on éprouve et dont on ne sait rien".<sup>341</sup> This third and last point of a remainder beyond speaking and thinking that is rendered

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<sup>340</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98 ("this *jouissance* that one experiences and knows nothing of").

accessible only through the act constitutes the antiphilosophical crux of Lacan's teachings.<sup>342</sup>

These remarks facilitate two observations or preliminary conclusions to follow from my analysis of the function of the feminine other in Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy. First of all, if Woman is that of which nothing can be said, my suggestion that the character ♀ is introduced to designate the primary quality of the indiscernible as non-designation becomes a plausible approach to the paradox of the Lacanian reference behind Badiou's generic multiple. A first and perhaps unexpected equation is thus demonstrated: ♀ = S(A). As a primary indiscernible of a non-designation, the nominating intervention designates the occurrence of an event. In Lacanian parlance, it marks the hole in the Other; it proffers a name or a signifier. Due to the division of the generic multiple, the demonstration of the first equation implicates the next: S(♀) ≠ S(A). Badiou's recurrent remark on Lacan concerns his lack of a proper notion of an effective indiscernible. While Lacan provides an unparalleled appreciation of radical subtraction from language – the other *jouissance* beyond the phallus – he lacks a satisfying conception of how the radically subtracted other can be present and existing within the situation from which language it is subtracted. Lacan lacks an appreciation of how a primary indiscernible is not yet the effective generic multiple of the generic extension, and he lacks a conception of the operations required for rendering such a transformation accessible to thinking.

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<sup>342</sup> One could use the opportunity of returning to the relation with the feminist critiques mentioned earlier. It is hardly a wonder if there is any single statement of Lacan to have caused more commotion than the one claiming that nothing can be said concerning Woman. The response found in Irigaray has become, by due cause, renown. Irigaray castigates Lacan and the psychoanalytic tradition for actively excluding from discourse any counter-testimony that could actually give actual voice and bear witness to the being of woman, and women. In particular, as an especially priceless counteract, one finds Irigaray's ridicule of Lacan's reference to Bernini's sculpture of *Santa Theresa*, depicting the saintly mystic as obviously coming, on the basis of which Lacan derives his arguably most tangible indication of that other *jouissance* proper to the feminine. Why go all the way to Rome, Irigaray wonders, to go look at a statue, cast by a man, as if that was the only example of a woman to be found, see Irigaray: "Cosi fan tutti": *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1977, p. 83-102. Despite divergences as to their means and ends, Badiou and Irigaray have a point of contention in common as far as Lacan is concerned, namely that it is where the hole in the Other is offered up to a beyond that remains the prerogative of mystics alone, as that other *jouissance* certainly experienced but never recognized as actually existing as such, that they both find it pressing to level their objections against Lacan and his tendency towards the mystical-transcendentalist reduction of the feminine.

The second point is more intricate, perhaps, and concerns how the generic extension offers a hidden criticism of Lacan. Badiou's explicit criticism of Lacan concerns Lacan's mythical-imaginary conception of the infinite and his transcendentalist tendencies. This contention crystallizes in Badiou calling out the absence of the actual infinite in Lacan's teachings. As a consequence of the infinite's absence in Lacan, truths are sacrificed on the altar of mystical ecstasy. Badiou's project for the revitalization of the concept of truths requires the supplementation of the phallic function with a concept of the generic multiple. The destitution of the hole in the Other and the moment of the drive of Lacanian ethics find an ultimate designation in the testimonies of the mystics, as an absolute sublimation. These ultimate moments underscore Badiou's most explicit criticism, insofar as his willed misreading of Lacan's inaccessible and infinite number 2 accurately pinpointed the involution of the drive through a rendition of the feminine as the pure subject enjoying its own naked division, its own eclipse in the signifying interval, at the point of pure desire. But if the concept of the generic divides into two – as a primary indiscernible of non-designation and the effective indiscernible of the generic multiple proper in the generic extension – the point I argue is that this division implies that Badiou's criticism of Lacan's lacking appreciation of the actual infinite is effectively present within the argument of *L'Être et l'événement* as well, even if only implicit. Badiou's criticism of Lacan's pre-Cantorian notion of the infinite and the limitations it imposes on Lacan's conception of the preconditions and possibilities of radical change and true novelty, is hidden in Badiou's conception of the generic extension,  $S(\emptyset)$ . It is this effective presence that makes up the subject matter of the remaining part of this chapter.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> An objection to the suggestion that the reference to the Lacanian feminine in Badiou's choice of denotation for the generic multiple is primarily based on the initial non-designation of an indiscernible, as that of which nothing can be said, rather than the generic extension proper of a truth procedure, might announce itself at this point: is it not more reasonable to propose instead that it is the interposition of the generic multiple between knowledge and truth, between the encyclopedia of the situation and its hole, its impossible unknown, which evokes the Lacanian non-all and makes the astrological character a fitting denotation, just like Woman to Lacan is posited with one foot on the phallus and the other in the mystical realm of the lacking Other? Is it not such a twofaced character that makes the feminine non-all, in the sense underscored by Badiou himself, insofar as the phallic function is refused its omnipotence and -presence to the benefit of an evasive 'somewhere' that escapes it? See *e.g.* Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; What is Sexual Difference Now?", *op.cit.*, p. 5; and Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 131. However, as my starting point has been the paradox implied in Badiou's decision to denote the

### *Repetition and Novelty*

Let me recapitulate the main points of my analysis. Badiou criticizes Lacan for still entertaining the cultural theme that conceives of the feminine in threesome with the unsayable and the infinite. Lacan's shortcomings are due to his pre-Cantorian notion of the infinite, where the infinite is accorded nothing but its status as operationally inaccessible. The infinite serves merely as the limit for the perpetuation of the finite series, and is not granted actual existence. As a consequence of its dependency on the infinite, Lacan's logic of the non-all reduces the feminine to a similar screen for the determination of the phallic subject. As if by accident, Badiou demonstrates how Lacan's conception of the infinite comes to represent the basic structure of the drive, moving from a first indefinite series in the metonymic chain of desire to a second reduplication through the involution of the chain upon itself in the drive. This movement from a continuous failure of satisfaction to a satisfaction in continuous failure is similar to the movement from abstract succession to concrete and self-related circulation in the Hegelian dialectic.

In want of the decisive break of the axiom of the infinite, Badiou contends, the Lacanian drive is just as unable to realize an actual infinite as the Hegelian dialectic is. If Lacan wants to maintain an appreciation of truth as a hole in knowledge, he is left with no choice but to endure in a stalemate battle with the temptation to posit the being of truth in the transcendence of a strange being-beyond-being. Badiou observes a tendency towards the transcendentalist trap of fixing the itinerant excess of representation over presentation in Lacan's notion of an other *jouissance* encompassing the field of phallic knowledge and its hole, where the drive and its feminine guardian of the non-all enjoy their status as the absolute outpost of subjective finitude. The problem for Lacan is that he keeps butting against a barrier of the ineffable, as the limit of thinking. To remain pre-Cantorian in regard to the infinite implies to miss out on the fact that the infinite is inaccessible only insofar as the finite

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generic multiple by reference to a theory he himself claims to have traversed, or at least to be in the process of traversing, I still contend that the paradox remains unresolved by following in line of such readings.



series of numbers serves as the point of departure. In other words, the infinite is inaccessible only from within the initial situation.

At last, I suggested that the decision to apply the character  $\varnothing$  was less concerned with the actual procedure of elaborating on a truth, deducing the consequences in the aftermath of an event, and more concerned with the initial starting point of such a procedure, the intervening nomination of an event. The character  $\varnothing$  is the meta-ontological equivalent of the nominating intervention that testifies to the event's occurrence. The nominating intervention designates the first recognition of the eventual status of the event, as an interruption in the everyday run of things, a fault in the smooth operations of the count, of the *status quo*, a crack in the structures of the established state.

However, in *L'Être et l'événement*, Badiou isolates the main difference between Lacan and himself in the single point of the localization of the void. Is the void a category of the subject or of being? The choice is one between a structural recurrence that thinks the subject-effect as an empty set and as relegated to the uniform networks of experience, on the one hand, and, on the other, a hypothesis of the rarity of the subject, a hypothesis by which the subject is suspended to the occurrence of an event, a nominating intervention, and the generic paths of a procedure of fidelity, Badiou explains.<sup>344</sup> Lacan does not take his leave of the former, identifying the subject as void, whereas Badiou opts for the alternative, assuring the void as the proper name of being. Lacan's Cartesian credentials cause him to posit the subject as inseparable from its enunciating position, even if it is decentered – eccentric – always at a remove from reflection and transparency. Accordingly, thinking is given up as the prerogative of language alone, in which it is quick to disappear in the intervals of the signifying chain. By implication, truth remains caught up in the category of cause. Truth as cause is the truth of neurotic suffering, Badiou quotes Lacan saying.<sup>345</sup> The cause of desire pinpoints the moment of the ethical act, where the subject determines its own truth of being *vis-à-vis* non-being or lack-in-being. Truth as the cause of the subject is not

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<sup>344</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 472.

<sup>345</sup> See *loc.cit.* For the original statement, see Lacan: "La science et la vérité" [1966]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 870.

Badiou's choice. Instead, Badiou identifies truth as the fabric or material of the subject, and isolates its cause in the event.<sup>346</sup>

When Badiou names the difference between his own and Lacan's orientation to be primarily a disagreement on the localization of the void, he does not stray from the arguments of his criticism against the Lacanian rendition of the infinite, despite appearances. My point is that these are two strands of the same contention, entwined in the same traversal. Hallward has characterized Badiou's traversal of Lacan as the liberation of truth from the drive, insofar as the drive is conceived as the ineffable domain in which truth retreats when it is no longer reducible to matters of mere correspondences and exactitudes in the field of knowledge.<sup>347</sup> To highlight the structural aspects targeted in Badiou's criticism, I would reformulate this liberating operation so as to underscore how Badiou conceives of the generic multiple as traversing the punctuality or momentary character that defines truth as cause. Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy is a traversal of the punctuality involved in the notion of truth as cause. An analysis of the function of the feminine in Badiou's meta-ontological edifice serves to accentuate this difference.

Within the confines of structure, there can be no truths, strictly speaking, Badiou insists. Structure, as the place where nothing takes place but place, offers nothing but repetition.<sup>348</sup> As Verhaege writes, "the signifier can only refer to another signifier, while the thing-in-itself [also *das Ding*] insists outside the chain of signifiers."<sup>349</sup> Structure recedes relentlessly into knowledge, even if it is as its reverse or obverse, even as there remains a blind spot and a hole at its core. The point to stress while reading Badiou is that insofar as the cause to puncture and open up a hole in structure never moves beyond the status of a mere point, however 'extimate', the actual existence of truths in Badiou's sense remains an impossibility. It does not matter whether the hole in question answers to the call of the inaccessible infinite, the feminine, the drive, or the eclipse of the subject itself. A note by Žižek enables the case to be made more clearly. Žižek differentiates between lack and hole, defining lack

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<sup>346</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 473.

<sup>347</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>348</sup> See Badiou: "Conférence sur la soustraction", *op.cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>349</sup> Verhaege: "Enjoyment and Impossibility", *op.cit.*, p. 45.

as a void within structure and constitutive of the latter, whereas hole designates more radically the point at which this structure itself breaks down. As he writes, "desire is grounded in its constitutive lack, while the drive circulates around a hole, a gap in the order of being."<sup>350</sup> This differentiation is useful, if only to retort that it is not sufficient to encircle the hole as the point of a structural breakdown in order to affirm, with Badiou, the existence of an actual truth. The obvious question to be directed at Žižek, and similar Lacanian orientations addressing the possibilities of radical change through notions of the hole, is how one could possibly encircle disintegration, if it was not precisely because the disintegration at stake remained in the form of a point.

The target of Badiou's objection to Lacan's transcendentalist tendency is the notion of truth as a structural puncture. The infinite as inaccessible transcendence serves as a structural puncture the function of which is merely to indicate the limit-points whose breaching and beyond shall remain unconceivable and otherworldly inexistent. The generic being of truth is never realized as punctuality, but always as a multiplicity – that is, as a process – or not at all, Badiou writes.<sup>351</sup> "Une vérité," Badiou insists, "est le résultat infini d'une supplémentation hasardeuse. Toute vérité est post-événementielle."<sup>352</sup> As limit-points, the inaccessible infinite of Lacan can at best, upon encounter, serve to indicate the possible point of departure for the process of a generic truth.

In a universe made up of only one function, the phallic, as is the universe of speaking beings in Lacan, all that is not-all under the phallic function, the feminine, can only remain as an un-probed hole, indicating an inaccessible beyond. There is no function besides the phallic to ensure its continuation and account for the fidelity by which its consequences can be offered to thinking as immanent to a situation. The generic function does so, and hence the need for the generic to supplement the phallic function. As *L'Être et l'événement* closes in on its conclusion, Badiou writes that

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<sup>350</sup> Žižek: "Objet a in Social Links", *op.cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>351</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 429.

<sup>352</sup> Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 89 ("A truth," on the other hand, "is the infinite result of a hazardous supplementation. Every truth is post-evental").

[c]e qui a manqué à Lacan, quoique ce manque ne soit lisible que d'avoir d'abord lu ce qui, dans ses textes, loin de manquer, fondait la possibilité d'un régime moderne du vrai, est de suspendre radicalement la vérité à la supplémentation d'un être-en-situation par un événement séparateur du vide.<sup>353</sup>

The modern regime of the true is the regime of truth as hole, or truth as real. Badiou's philosophical works interrogate whether it is the status of the real to be cause only, or also to be continuation. Insufficiently developed in Lacan, Badiou argues, is a proper thinking of the next step following on the encounter with the real, the next step of the pass through the impasse.<sup>354</sup> The question concerns the difference between the act and the event, where, to hammer the difference into a single sentence, the subject of Lacan acts where the event of Badiou subjects.

The importance of the Cantorian discovery of the actual infinite expands beyond the incessant proliferation of infinite infinities. An equally important implication for Badiou's philosophical project is the banality of the infinite after its omnipresence has been established. Žižek opposes his own Lacanian position to Badiou's conceptualization of truths by portraying Badiou's position to be that of prioritizing pure presence over and above representation.<sup>355</sup> Žižek's portrayal, which sums up as something like the equation of  $S(\varnothing) = \mathbf{A}$ , is imprecise. At stake in Badiou's decision on the axiom of the infinite, whereby it is decided that there exists an actual infinite (and more), the infinite obviously loses its air of an inaccessible mystique. The insistent question of the infinite is transposed from the question of its presence as such to the impossible question of the ratio of its representative excess and indeterminable succession. The limit ordinal as the first infinite number is easily defined as a non-successive number, transforming that which once was an impending limit for thinking unproblematic. The real problem for thinking – a problem that is pervasive in all of

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<sup>353</sup> Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 474 ("That which is lacking in Lacan, even if this lack is readable only after having first read that which in his texts, far from lacking, founds the very possibility of a modern regime of the true, is the radical suspension of truth to the supplementation of a being-in-situation through an event separating of the void").

<sup>354</sup> This point is made before by Bosteels, see *e.g.* Bosteels: "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject", *op.cit.*, p. 115 ff.

<sup>355</sup> See Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction", *op.cit.*, p. 179.

Badiou's works – is rather to be found in the question of succession itself. In *Le Nombre et les nombres*, Badiou writes that

ce que nous enseigne l'ontologie du multiple [...] est [...] que la difficulté réside dans la succession, et qu'y réside aussi la *résistance*. Toute véritable épreuve pour la pensée s'origine dans la nécessité localisable d'un pas supplémentaire, d'un commencement inentamable, qui n'est pas *soudé* par l'infini remplissage de ce qui précède, ni identique à sa dissémination. Apprendre et endurer l'épreuve du pas supplémentaire, telle est la véritable nécessité du temps. La limite est une récapitulation de ce qui la compose, sa 'profondeur' est fallacieuse, car c'est de n'avoir nul *trou* que l'ordinal limite, ou toute multiplicité 'aux limites', tire sa puissance évocatrice [...]. L'écart vide du successeur est plus redoutable, il est *véritablement* profond. Il n'y a rien de plus à penser dans la limite que dans ce qui la précède. Mais, dans le successeur, il y a un franchissement. L'audace de la pensée n'est pas de redire 'aux limites' ce qui est entièrement détenu dans la situation dont la limite est limite. L'audace de la pensée est de franchir un écart où rien n'est disposé. Nous devons réapprendre à succéder.<sup>356</sup>

The question of succession founds the problem of the continuum hypothesis and the itinerant excess of representation over presentation. The continuum hypothesis posits the first infinite successor ordinal,  $\omega_1$ , as equal in cardinality to the power set of the first limit ordinal,  $p(\omega)$ . The itinerant excess of the power set is later demonstrated as independent of the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatic of set theory, as a 'choice without concept'.<sup>357</sup> It is rather the question of succession than that of limitation that is at the foundation of the meta-ontological edifice of truths in *L'Être et l'événement*, even if

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<sup>356</sup> Badiou: *Le Nombre et les nombres*, *op.cit.*, p. 105 ("that which the ontology of the multiple [...] teaches us, is [...] that the difficulty resides in succession, and there resides also the *resistance*. Every true challenge for thinking originates in the recognizable necessity of a supplementary step, of an impenetrable commencement, which is neither solded by the infinite fulfilment of that which precedes it, nor identical to its dissemination. To master and endure the challenge of the supplementary step, that is the true necessity of the hour. The limit is a recapitulation of that of which it is composed, its 'depth' is fallacious, because it is by not having any *hole* that the limit ordinal, or every multiplicity 'at the limits', gains its evocative force [...]. The empty divide of the successor is more formidable, as it *truly* has a depth. There is nothing left to think in the limit that is not already there in that which precedes it. But in the successor, there is a cross-over. The audacity of thinking is not to repeat 'at the limits' that which is entirely implied in the situation of which the limit is the limit. The audacity of thinking is to cross over the divide where nothing is arranged. We must master again the act of succession").

<sup>357</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 309.

the succession in question depends upon the decision of the actual existence of the infinite for its being posited at all. The question concerns thinking one more step, *un pas de plus*. How can a subject come to transform the transcendent representation of nothing indicated through the nominating intervention's primary non-designation into an immanent presentation of the effective indiscernible of a generic multiple proper, in the generic extension elaborated through a process of fidelity? There is a proper ethical content to this question, as it is the only question asked by the ethics of truth, according to Badiou. It is the question of the hows of continuation, how to continue exceeding one's being, how to continue thinking, in a movement by which the two, being and thinking, become one and the same. Badiou's philosophical works realize how the effect of the Cantorian discovery on the thinking of the ethical and the preconditions and possibilities of the subject, processes of radical change and true novelty, is an implication just as decisive as its strictly mathematical and ontological portents.

### (III)

## A Scission in Greek Tragedy Between Two Deaths and the Bringer of Fire

The present chapter continues to interrogate the mark of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and its implications for thinking modernity and thinking change. Having made some headway concerning the question of the ethical status of the subject in fidelity to a truth procedure by piercing into the heavy mathematics that characterizes Badiou's thinking in the 1990s, this chapter proceeds through the topicalities of ancient Greek tragedy. Badiou frames much of his contention with Lacan during the so-called red years of the 70s – *i.e.*, his Maoist period – through Greek tragedy. Badiou's contention with Lacan during the red years culminates in *Théorie du sujet*. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the opposition between a romantic and a modern conception of the infinite, conceived of as either inaccessible or actual, the present chapter focuses on the opposition between the tragic modes of Sophocles and Aeschylus, where Badiou opts unequivocally for Aeschylus and levels his criticism of Lacan's position on the basis of the limitations inherent to its Sophoclean tendencies.

The gap between Badiou's work in the 70s and his more mature production in the 80s and 90s is not a definite rupture. Abundant threads tie these periods together. The names of mathematicians such as Cantor, Gödel, and Cohen permeate *Théorie du sujet* just like the problematic of the revolution is frequently addressed in *L'Être et l'événement*. If the names of Marx, Lenin, and Mao are more pronounced in the earlier work than in the later, the materialist dialectic, as Bosteels has shown, remains ubiquitous throughout Badiou's work.<sup>358</sup> In Badiou's philosophical project,

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<sup>358</sup> See the introduction to Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 1 ff. Badiou gives Bosteels right in identifying the dialectic as a constant theme of his philosophy, see Badiou: *Logiques des Mondes*, *op.cit.*, p. 548-549, n. I.1; and Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste*, *op.cit.*, p. 185, fn 1). For other entries into the relations between early and later Badiou, see *e.g.* Hallward: *Badiou; A*

mathematics and materialism go hand in hand. *Théorie du sujet* is often referred to as Badiou's most Lacanian book,<sup>359</sup> and Badiou's discussions of Greek tragedy occur in a confrontation with the Lacanian real of sexual difference. Badiou posits that the real that is ours depends on the fact that there are two sexes and two classes.<sup>360</sup> He argues that if the real of psychoanalysis is the impossibility of the sexual relation, then the real of Marxism is the impossibility of class relations, *i.e.*, antagonism.<sup>361</sup> Lacan's logics of sexualization are already mathematically conceived. The crucial knot of Badiou's elaborations on the subject in the 70s is still made up of a psychoanalytic notion of sexual difference, mathematics, and radical politics, even if this knot might be more pronounced in Badiou's work from the 90s.

My point of entry is tragedy; tragedy is implicated in my basic presupposition relating sexual matters, ethics, and the subject of politics. Badiou frames the thematics of tragedy within the question of sex and class, where to read Greek tragedy becomes a move to address the question of the relation between sex and class, focusing in on a conceptualization of that which is involved in a radical ethical act of subjective constitution. I interrogate the shift in the status of the tragic involved in Badiou's turn to Aeschylus, as it expands on the Sophoclean framework of Lacan, in order to answer the questions concerning what happens to tragedy and the status of the tragic the moment its decisive factor is no longer death and the experience of the limit as such, but that of continuation and succession, of *un pas de plus*? How does Badiou's turn to Aeschylus inform his attempt to reformulate the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change and true novelty after Lacan? Badiou's recourse to tragedy is usually read through his elaborations on the Sophoclean couple of Antigone and Creon and the Aeschylean couple of Orestes and Athena. Instead, I start out from the figure of Prometheus the fire-bearer, briefly mentioned by Badiou as an exemplar of the Aeschylean hero. The figure of Prometheus offers a productive entrance to interrogate

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*Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 29 ff; Pluth: *Alain Badiou*, *op.cit.*, p. 17 ff; Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 32 ff.

<sup>359</sup> See Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; Sexual Difference Now", *op.cit.*, p. 5; Mavrakis: *De quoi Badiou est-il le nom? Pour en finir avec le (XXe) siècle*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2009, p. 6; Bell, Lucy: "Articulations of the Real; from Lacan to Badiou": *Paragraph*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2011, Edinburgh University Press, p. 108.

<sup>360</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>361</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 145.



the significance of the shift in the status of the tragic, especially in relation to Badiou's Maoism and the principle that there is reason in revolting, insofar as it accentuates the distinction between Lacan and Badiou's appreciation of tragedy on three points. Firstly, the principal operation of Prometheus is the division of speech and silence, of the symbolic and the real, whereas the Sophoclean paradigm and psychoanalysis is dominated by the operation of reversal. Secondly, the perspective of Prometheus is of the future, whereas Lacan and the Oedipal family await the perspective of the last judgment. Thirdly, Prometheus is a titan and thus immortal, a fact that problematizes the Lacanian notions of between two deaths and the death drive. Prometheus thereby intervenes directly into the core of Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis. Against the death drive, Prometheus refuses the limitations of finitude and suggests an exceeding of mortal being, awarded by the immortal titan to humanity through the imagery of fire. What significance does the imagery of fire carry for thinking the subject of politics, radical change, and true novelty? The imagery of fire represents burning desire, commitment to a cause, and the capacities to manipulate and recreate the world. But in order to gain a fuller comprehension of Badiou's revolutionary ethics of confidence, a closer analysis of how Badiou maneuvers the Maoist dialectic, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Aeschylean tragedy, the figure of Prometheus, and the imagery of fire is required.

### *An Impossible Reference*

Tragedy is a question of the ethical, and Eleanor Kaufman attacks Badiou on the grounds that his ethics is missing the uncompromising confrontation or "encounter with the unsurpassable limit"<sup>362</sup> that is found in Lacan. Kaufman argues that Badiou's system lacks an appreciation of the messiness of things, of "ethics as the function that witnesses to extreme states."<sup>363</sup> Her argument is somewhat displaced. It might be possible to make a good case against the systematic aspirations in Badiou's work, but my previous chapter underscored that the main gist of Badiou's work is centered on

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<sup>362</sup> Kaufman, Eleanor: "Why the Family is Beautiful (Lacan against Badiou)": *Diacritics*, vol. 32, no. 3/4, *Ethics*, 2002, John Hopkins University Press, p. 136.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

those moments where the problematic of the limit no longer makes up the decisive issue. Badiou's philosophy addresses the moments when the said problematic of the limit has to yield to that of succession or continuation. To deplore the absence of an unsurpassable limit and extreme states in Badiou's work is thus to kick in an open door. To Badiou, messiness is but the beginning of things, and instead of the confrontation or even the breaching of the limit, the decisive moment is determined explicitly to be the work of continuation and the elaboration of consequences.

An early programmatic statement from *Théorie du sujet*, introduced along with the first mention of Lacan's name, underscores Badiou's shift in focus from the limit to continuation. Badiou writes:

Si, comme dit Lacan, le réel est l'impasse de la formalisation, il faudra de ce point risquer que la formalisation est l'im-passe du réel. [...] Il nous faut une théorie de la passe du réel, en trouée de la formalisation. Ici le réel n'est plus seulement ce qui peut manquer à sa place, mais ce qui *passe en force*.<sup>364</sup>

This statement is mirrored in the concluding remarks from *L'Être et l'événement* that I quoted towards the end of my previous chapter. Lacking in Lacan, Badiou claimed, was the suspension of truth to the supplementation of the event, the suspension from which the pass of the subject through the impasse of being were to be granted, and the punctual notion of truth as cause traversed through a notion of truth as process. As Bosteels have argued, the just quoted statement from *Théorie du sujet* makes an early argument for how a theory of the subject is possible only by way of a traversal of the Lacanian scheme.<sup>365</sup> It calls for a traversal that reconfigures the concept of the real not only as limit but also according to the notion of *un pas de plus*, as continuation or succession. At best, Badiou claims, Lacan merely indicates the direction of such a concept of the real.<sup>366</sup> In other words, it is already the same premise that underlies

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<sup>364</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet, op.cit.*, p. 41 ("If, as Lacan says, the real is the impasse of formalization, one must at this point risk that formalization is the im-passe of the real. [...] We need a theory of the pass of the real, in the hole of formalization. Here the real is no longer only that which can be lacking from its place, but that which *passes in force*").

<sup>365</sup> See Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics, op.cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>366</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet, op.cit.*, p. 162, 178, 192 and 247-249. Johnston also observes how, to Badiou, "Lacanian psychoanalysis could be said, at best, to end there where politics has

Badiou's confrontation with the Lacanian framework in *Théorie du sujet* as elsewhere, namely the ethical premise of the imperative to continue exceeding one's being.

The imperative of continuation is tied to the philosophical refusal to accept death as the ultimate limit of life. The philosopher refuses to abandon the concepts of immortality, the eternal, and the infinite. The presumption that death is the only thing that truly intrudes upon life reduces the old philosophical motif of the good life to a question of the administration of death. It implies a nihilist will-to-nothing, Badiou claims, equally present in contemporary discourses on the ethics of human rights as in the Freudian notion of the death drive.<sup>367</sup> Žižek accuses Badiou for being "at his weakest, succumbing to the *temptation of the non-thought*" when he, Badiou, opposes his notion of post-evental truths to the Freudian death drive as "the morbid obsession with death."<sup>368</sup> Žižek has a point. Badiou misses out on how the death drive might serve as a "negative gesture of 'wiping the slate clean'," and hence as a precondition for consequent elaborations of new truths.<sup>369</sup> But the underlying premise of Badiou's position is his refusal to accept death as the ultimate limit to life. Lacan identified the domain between two deaths as the ground for his ethics of psychoanalysis on the basis of the Sophoclean trilogy on the Oedipal family's destiny. But does the domain between two deaths provide sufficient leeway in order to escape the confines of death, secure the actual infinite, and thus found the imperative of continuation? Badiou answers in the negative, and when he goes all the way back to Aeschylus in his return to tragedy in *Théorie du sujet*, it is because he finds the Sophoclean paradigm of psychoanalysis unable to think the pass of the subject beyond finitude. More than a morbid obsession with death, it is the failure of the Oedipal family and the Sophoclean paradigm to think beyond the limits of death and the blind repetitions of structure that motivates Badiou to turn towards the earlier paradigm of Aeschylus. The questions concern how the Aeschylean paradigm moves beyond Sophocles, and what this implies for a theory of the subject.

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the chance of perhaps beginning", see Johnston: "From the Spectacular Act to the Vanishing Act", *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>367</sup> See Badiou: *L'Éthique*, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>368</sup> Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject*, *op.cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Badiou's turn to Aeschylus has not gone unnoticed. When Bosteels and Žižek debate whether Badiou escapes being *un Kantien cache*, or whether the forcing of truths trumps the death drive in creative and affirmative potential, they return again and again to tragedy, and to Badiou's proposal to supplement the Sophoclean pair of Antigone and Creon, as figures of anxiety and the superego, with the Aeschylean pair of Orestes and Athena, as figures of courage and justice.<sup>370</sup> While these debates are interesting, they might be somewhat displaced. The matter in question is the general status of tragedy or the tragic mode of Sophocles *contra* Aeschylus, on the one hand, and the significance of the shifts in the status of tragedy that Badiou's turn to Aeschylus testifies to, on the other. It is a question of the status of tragedy as a touchstone for ethics the moment its decisive factor ceases to be the problematic of the limit, so as to depend instead on the problematic of continuation. Instead of entering into the finer details of what the tragic figures (Antigone, Creon, Orestes, and Athena) might convey or not, I propose another entrance into this matter.

More precisely, I propose that the crux of Aeschylean tragedy is found neither in Orestes nor in Athena, but in Prometheus and in the notion of rebellious discipline and confidence that this figure offers.<sup>371</sup> It is a working hypothesis, in the sense that it provides an entrance into the cluster of questions on limits and continuations, passes and impasses. Compared to the Lacanian lessons of Copjec and Zupančič, Badiou's ethics of continuation is less determined by the language of loss and abdication; it is also less directed towards the sacrifices to be made by the tragic heroine in the realization of her impossible desire. I claim that the differences here are best appreciated through the figure of Prometheus. "Nous sommes lampadophores," Badiou

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<sup>370</sup> See *e.g.* Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 88 ff; and Bosteels: "Badiou without Žižek", *op.cit.*, p. 223 ff; see also Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction: Badiou and the Real", *op.cit.*, p. 172 ff; and Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 833.

<sup>371</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 337. To my knowledge, there is none that has made a thorough reading of the figure of Prometheus such as it appears in *Théorie du sujet*. The occasional mention occurs from time to time, see *e.g.* Pluth: *Alain Badiou; A Philosophy of the New*, *op.cit.*, p. 134-5; and Crockett: *Deleuze beyond Badiou*, *op.cit.*, p. 131-2. An in-depth analysis of Prometheus is still lacking, however. Toscano discusses the notion of a Promethean politics in dialogue with Badiou, to some extent, though not on the basis of *Théorie du sujet* and its proposition for a Promethean ethics of confidence, see Toscano: "A Plea for Prometheus": *Critical Horizons; A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*, vol. 10, no. 2, August 2009, p. 241-56.

insists throughout *Théorie du sujet*,<sup>372</sup> and he is familiar with how an Aeschylean tragedy, *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*, addresses the fate of the original bringer of fire.<sup>373</sup> Having first made the connection between Prometheus and the notion of confidence, Badiou goes on to state that confidence, the fundamental concept of his 'ethics of Marxism,' organizes the entire ethical field.<sup>374</sup> My point is not necessarily that the figure of Prometheus will reveal an entirely new conception of the Aeschylean paradigm of tragedy, but that it will clarify the mechanisms involved in Badiou's turn to Aeschylus by underscoring the notion of an ethics of confidence as a subjective formation between courage and justice.

But Badiou never reads Prometheus and his tragedy systematically, as he does with Sophocles' *Antigone* (441 BC) and Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* (458 BC). To interrogate the function of Prometheus within Badiou's thinking, one must recur to a reconstructive reading of a play that, furthermore, never made it through the annals of time in the first place. *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* is a lost play, of which only a single fragment remains. Badiou's mention of the play is a reference that both must and cannot be, as Lacan would say. *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* is, in other words, an impossible reference. I suggest that the apparent impasse of reconstructing Badiou's absent reading of Aeschylus' lost play provides an entrance into the shift in the status of tragedy and, consequently, in the status of the ethical. An analysis of the figure of Prometheus the fire-bearer might clarify the stakes involved in Badiou's pitting of sex and class against each other in an ethics of continuation. From Hegel to Lacan, the ethical reference has been Sophoclean in character and centered on the question of the being of Antigone,<sup>375</sup> Badiou observes. After the Aeschylean turn, I argue, the

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<sup>372</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 126 ("We are torchbearers").

<sup>373</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>374</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>375</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 325. The ethical reference has been predominantly Sophoclean not only from Hegel to Lacan, but also beyond. While my discussions will focus on Lacan and Badiou, but prominent representatives of a Sophoclean oriented ethics are found in the works of Irigaray and Butler, which both take place in close if critical proximity to Hegel and Lacan. Irigaray argues that Antigone's tomb represents the repression of the feminine constituting and installing masculine hegemony, see Irigaray: *Speculum de l'Autre femme*, *op.cit.*, p. 266-281. Butler suggests that Antigone is performative of a certain 'kinship trouble' that threatens the heterosexual normativity on which the stability of the state depends, see Butler: *Antigone's Claim; Kinship between Life and Death* [2000], Columbia University Press, New York, 2010, esp. p. 57-82.

question must rather concern the being of Prometheus. The question is, to vary on a familiar title, *de quoi Prométhée est-il le nom?*<sup>376</sup>

### ***Articulations of Pieces; Providing a Place for Prometheus***

In this section, I advance a basic reconstruction of the figure of Prometheus. The questions concern how Prometheus the fire-bearer can be reconstructed as a figure of tragedy, how to make sense of this figure, and how to begin to grasp it as a subjective and, hence, political formation in the context of Badiou's traversal of Lacan. I proceed in two stages. First I analyze the traces that are left of Prometheus in the works of Aeschylus, and then I supplement these traces with relevant concepts from Badiou's red-years-philosophy. I focus on two traces in this section; the name of Prometheus, signifying forethought, and the Promethean motto, communicating a division of silence and speech. Through Badiou's Maoism, the Promethean motto comes to signify a rebellious reason that divides the concrete situation of the reign of Zeus in which Prometheus finds himself. Dividing the situation, Prometheus breaks free from the old and determined sequence of Zeus' reign and opens for another and undetermined sequence under the perspective of the future. A recurrent issue is how the figure of Prometheus comes to inform an understanding of Badiou's Maoist philosophy of politics, and *vice versa*. My elaborations on the name and motto of Prometheus in this section will lay the ground for the next section's comparison with the Sophoclean paradigm and psychoanalysis, which will, in its turn, prepare for my final discussions on the imagery of fire as the most important Promethean trace.

### ***The Decision***

A question is how to read. Marc de Kesel has made an observation of Lacan's so-called anamorphic take on tragedy. In Lacan's specific mode of reading, the traditional

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<sup>376</sup> The familiar title is of course Badiou's *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom? Circonstances 4*, Nouvelle Éditions Lignes, Paris, 2007.

discursive analysis of the plot must cede to an examination of each scene in its capacity as a signifier, to "a study that focuses individually on each scene to see how they successfully conjure up that central image"<sup>377</sup> of Antigone in her unbearable splendor, Antigone between two deaths, Antigone as guardian of the being of the criminal. Lacan grounds his perception of Antigone by refocusing onto the single signifier of *ἄτη*. Usually translated as *bane* or *ruin*, *ἄτη* becomes for Lacan the designation of the limit of human life. As such, it serves Lacan as the axial term around which the entire drama of Antigone turns.<sup>378</sup> Similarly, in reading *Hamlet*, Lacan structures his analysis around a few significant terms, or fibers.<sup>379</sup> Obviously, in turning to the lost play of Aeschylus, the axial term must already be a given. There is nothing but two scattered traces left of this play. First of all, there is the name of Prometheus, which, according to Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* (1889), derives from *προμηθής* and translates as *forethought* or *providence*.<sup>380</sup> Secondly, there is a single fragment, catalogued as number 208 in Augustus Nauck's *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (1889). It reads "σιγῶν θ' ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγων τὰ καίρια". It is translated by Herbert Weir Smyth, in *Loeb's Classical Library* of Greek works, as "[b]oth silent, when there is need, and speaking in season."<sup>381</sup> Alternatively, the accusative inflection of *τὰ καίρια* could be read as more concerned with content than with time, that is to say, as more concerned with 'speaking to the point.' In any case, the fragment professes a calculated disposition of silence and speech, or, more precisely, a division internal to both silence and speech. Add to that the later half of the title of the lost play, *the Fire-Bearer*, and two thus make three. There are three fibers on which to focus: the division of silence and speech, the perspective of the future, and the imagery of fire.

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<sup>377</sup> Kesel, Marc de: *Eros and Ethics; Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII* (trans. Sigi Jöttkandt), Suny Press, Albany, 2009, p. 211.

<sup>378</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 305.

<sup>379</sup> See Lacan: *Le désir et son interprétation*, *op.cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>380</sup> See *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (ed. H. G. Liddell and Scott), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1889, p. 680.

<sup>381</sup> See Nauck, Augustus: *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Taubner, Leipzig, 1889, p. 70; and Aeschylus: "Fragments": *Loeb's Classical Library; Aeschylus*, vol. 2 (trans. Herbert Weir Smyth), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1926, p. 455.

The fragment 208 constitutes a Promethean motto, I would argue. It makes up the axial term of the only surviving play of Aeschylus' *Prometheia* trilogy, *Prometheus Bound* (n.d.).<sup>382</sup> Even if the wording of the fragment is not repeated *verbatim* as it is in other plays by Aeschylus,<sup>383</sup> its basic proposition of a calculated disposition between silence and speech constitutes a recurrent theme in this play and the central problematic for its hero. Although chained to a crag in the far-off region of Scythia as punishment for having gone against the bid of Zeus in awarding fire – the prerogative of the gods – to humanity, and thus bound to suffer the exposure of the elements and time, the proper quandary of Prometheus is not made up of his physical torments. The real predicament for Prometheus remains the fatal foresight that his name conveys. Prometheus is in possession of a secret knowledge that would hinder the foredoomed downfall of Zeus himself, if only communicated in due time to the god in question. But lest he is unbounded, Prometheus refuses to disclose his secret knowledge, to Zeus or anyone else. Therefore, in the closing scene of the play, Zeus, in a final cataclysm of thunder and lightning, hurls Prometheus to Tartarus and to tortures even more excessive than before. Some remarks on this surviving play is warranted in order to better come to terms with the figure of Prometheus, and thereby also with the status of tragedy in Badiou's philosophical reformulation of the preconditions and possibilities of radical change.

Throughout the play, in each scene, with each new character introduced on stage, the question of a proper balance between speech and silence is brought to the fore: whether it is Hephaestus who is scorned by Kratos for pitying the Prometheus he hammers to the rock ("What! Shrinking again and groaning over the foes of

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<sup>382</sup> There are several uncertainties and discussions surrounding *Prometheus Bound*, not only in relation to its date and position within the trilogy, whether it is first or second, but also concerning its authenticity, to the question of whether it is actually a play of Aeschylus or a so-called spurious play, a play wrongfully credited to him. For a thorough interrogation of these questions, see Griffith, Mark: *The Authenticity of 'Prometheus Bound'*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1977. For a brief introduction to the main lines of the debate, see Ruffell, Ian: *Aeschylus; Prometheus Bound*, Bristol Classical Press, London, 2012, p. 13-23.

<sup>383</sup> See Aeschylus: *The Seven Against Thebes: Loeb's Classical Library; Aeschylus*, vol. 1 (trans. Herbert Weir Smyth), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1922, verse 619, p. 372; and Aeschylus: *The Libation Bearers: Loeb's Classical Library; Aeschylus*, vol. 2 (trans. Herbert Weir Smyth), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1926, verse 582, p. 216.



Zeus?"),<sup>384</sup> Prometheus who retells his story to the chorus, the daughters of Oceanus ("Yet to be silent or not silent about this my fate is beyond my powers," "Painful is it to me even to tell the tale, painful to keep it silent");<sup>385</sup> Oceanus who brings Prometheus some well-intended advice ("such plight as thine, Prometheus, is but the wages of too vaunting speech," "chastisement is inflicted on a froward tongue");<sup>386</sup> Io who implores Prometheus to predict her fate in full ("Why then this thy reluctance to tell me all?", "tell me, if there be no harm in telling");<sup>387</sup> or, finally, Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, who fails to obtain the secret knowledge that Prometheus possesses ("Methinks with my much speaking I but speak in vain").<sup>388</sup> Prometheus is scorned equally for speaking too much and too little. He is chastised for being too insolent in regard to his tormentor, and for being too reticent in regard to his absolvance. But Prometheus remains unwavering in regard to the principal contradiction of silence and speech within the play: as to the injustice of his sufferings, he cannot keep his silence, even if his flaunting speech will further harm him; while concerning the prospective downfall of Zeus, he cannot divulge a word, even if his silence will cause him a well of further pains – "for 'tis no wise meet time to discourse of this. At every hazard this must be concealed; for 'tis by safeguarding it that I am to escape my ignominious bonds and outrage."<sup>389</sup> Prometheus never retreats from this defiant position. When Hermes begs him to impart the truth of his sovereign's future demise in the closing scene, Prometheus will continue to dismiss Hermes' proxy commands and threats ("thou shall learn naught whereof thou questionest me", "there is no torment or devise by which Zeus shall induce me to utter this until these injurious fetters be loosed")<sup>390</sup> until the curtain falls.

The announcement of the principal contradiction of Prometheus' decisive silence in regard to the prophesied downfall of Zeus is located halfway into the play,

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<sup>384</sup> Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound*: Loeb's Classical Library; Aeschylus, vol. 1 (trans. Herbert Weir Smyth), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1922, verse 67-8, p. 223.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 105 and 199-200, p. 227 and 233.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 320-1 and 331, p. 245.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 627 and 763, p. 271 and 283.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 1007, p. 309.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 522-525, p. 263.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 963 and 989-991, p. 303 and 307.

and not merely by chance. It captures the climactic moment of the play. In Aristotelian terms, this moment of disclosure would be designated as the play's turning point and moment of recognition.<sup>391</sup> It is truly a moment of revelation, where Prometheus reveals to both himself and his crowds his true colors. It is the moment when Prometheus affirms himself in his refusal to remain beaten and in his renewed intention to continue his rebellion against Zeus in full force. But in terms of Aristotle's classical theory of tragedy, it is a curious climactic moment. It does not incur a closure or *denouement* in the traditional sense. Rather the disclosure of the principal contradiction incurs a *renouement*, a reknitting and further thickening of the plot. The struggle commences again. Whereas the first half of the play is characterized primarily by a despairing Prometheus that laments his unjust suffering for having stolen fire from the gods and bestowed it on mankind, the second half of the play brings about a shift in character as well as in perspective. As the perspective shifts from the past as cause of his current suffering to the future, Prometheus gains in confidence that he will one day be freed and Zeus one day dethroned. As Prometheus explains, he has already seen two tyrants overthrown (*i.e.*, Uranus and Cronus), and will surely live to see the downfall of the third and present one.<sup>392</sup> Prometheus is at first wont to recognize his initial theft of fire as an error [*ἀμαρτία*], albeit an error made deliberately [*ἐκὸν ἥμαρτον*].<sup>393</sup> But the disclosure of the principal contradiction between silence and speech designate the climactic moment of recognition as nothing less than the repetition and effective reinforcement of his initial error. Prometheus recognizes that he, in his initial rebellious act against Zeus, was in the right. His rebellion was justified, or reasonable. On the grounds of that recognition, a consequent decision, no less deliberate than the

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<sup>391</sup> See Aristotle: *Poetics: Loeb's Classical Library; Aristotle*, vol. 23 (trans. Stephen Halliwell), Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1995, XI, p. 65.

<sup>392</sup> See Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound, op.cit.*, verses 956-959, p. 301. I am not the first to make a note of a development of this kind in the play. Griffith remarks how, "[a]s the play progresses, P[rometheus]'s mood grows more belligerent. Early on, his reproaches and veiled prophecies are interspersed with lamentation for his own miseries [...] with only occasional mention of the possibility of Zeus's downfall. Later, the predictions become strident and bold: they are outright threats", see Griffith: *Aeschylus; Prometheus Bound*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1983, p. 10. J. M. Mossman observes in the character of Prometheus a "movement from despair to renewed self-respect", see Mossman, J. M.: "Chains of Imagery in Prometheus Bound": *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1996, p. 62.

<sup>393</sup> See Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound, op.cit.*, verse 268, p. 241.

first, is made. Prometheus will continue his rebellion in full force, as he decides to persist in error, [ἐξαμαρτάνειν], as the chorus formulates it.<sup>394</sup>

In Aristotle's view, the finest tragedies are those in which the turn from happiness to unhappiness coincides with the moment of recognition, the acknowledgement of the tragic error that brings about the hero's demise.<sup>395</sup> Obviously, one can hardly speak of a turn from happiness to unhappiness in the case of Prometheus *qua* bound, as he is hardly content with his extreme bondage to begin with. No more can one speak of any ignorance on his part in regard to his initial error as the root cause of his current malaise.<sup>396</sup> But is it not precisely as a reverse or negative of the one advocated in the Aristotelian model that it is possible to speak of a coincidence in the climactic moment of *Prometheus Bound* – a curious coincidence, admittedly, but a coincidence nonetheless? The acknowledgement at stake in Prometheus' moment of recognition does not so much concern the erroneous status of his initial act of rebellion as such, a status of which he is already well aware, but rather the validity and legitimacy of this error, that it was not wrong to err. Furthermore, the acknowledgement and consolidation of this legitimacy, insofar as it promotes the repetition of the initial error in the continuation of his rebellion, effectuates not so much a reversal of the initial situation of Prometheus, for either better or worse, but rather a further endorsement and reinforcement of his quandary – as in another and willful turn of the screw.

The play begins with its own *denouement*, insofar as it begins with the punishment of Prometheus. The play begins as already resolved and unknotted, while the climactic moment where Prometheus reveals his decisive silence functions as a reknitting and further complication of the plot. The climactic moment marks the point at which the rebellion of Prometheus reconstitutes itself to begin again, with renewed determination. This new resolve does not find its discharge within the extant text. At first sight, Prometheus appears to be already defeated. He is banished and chained to a

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<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 1039, p. 311.

<sup>395</sup> See Aristotle: *Poetics*, *op.cit.*, XI, p. 65.

<sup>396</sup> Ruffell seems to suggest that there is neither error, turning point, nor recognition in place in the play, at least not in any traditional Aristotelian sense of the terms, and that this absence is part of the explanation for the play often having been undervalued, see Ruffell: *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

crag at the far confines of the earth, where nothing awaits him but an eternity of woe, cursedly blessed – as he as a titan is – with the dubious privilege of immortality. Prometheus appears to have been permanently disposed of at the outmost limits of the world, geographically and symbolically, as he is excluded from the community of gods and mortals alike, with no respite in view. His crime has been called on, and the execution of his punishment leaves little room for further action and intrigue. At a second glance, however, the climactic moment reveals the opposite. Despite appearances, Prometheus is not a figure utterly lost and beaten at the end of his line. Despite appearances, Prometheus is not a figure of the beginning of the end. Prometheus is the figure of the end of the beginning, as the moment by which a path is cleared for a further continuation, a new strand in the fabric of history. The decision to persist in error is not the obstinate refusal on Prometheus' part to accept his defeat or assume his guilt, even if there is more than a little obstinacy in him. The proper quality of his decision is underscored by Io's entrance on stage. She appears immediately after the climactic moment, and her appearance gives way to an extrapolation of her and Prometheus' interlocked futures to come. It is Io's descendant Heracles who will eventually liberate Prometheus from his chains. Io's entrance underscores the quality of Prometheus' decision to persist in error in its negative and affirmative aspects, as the interruption of the sequence supposedly determined, on the one hand, and the institution of another and open sequence, on the other.<sup>397</sup> Prometheus is, sticking to Badiou's terminology, a figure of a new movement of continuation, of *un pas de plus*.

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<sup>397</sup> Ruffell has already noted the reflective status of Prometheus and Io *vis-à-vis* each other, where Io is perceived as "a formal and thematic double of Prometheus," see Ruffell: *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, *op.cit.*, p. 38. As to the new dramatic sequence opened up, one could argue the opposite, that is, for a complete absence of any proper novelty in this case, insofar as the prophetic insights of Prometheus would exclude any unforeseen action, insofar as everything that happens is (supposedly) known in advance. Richard Rader has proposed such a reading, suggesting that Prometheus represents a fully deterministic worldview, where the universe is governed by necessity and fate, see Rader, Richard: "The Radical Theology of *Prometheus Bound*; or on Prometheus' God Problem": *Ramus*, vol. 42, no. 1-2, 2013, p. 162-182. Such an argument, however, does not counter my thesis that the decisive silence of Prometheus in regard to the downfall of Zeus interrupts the old sequence and opens up another and new dramatic strand, even if this strand should be determined in its own right. Mine is a thesis that builds on a strictly formal analysis of the play rather than the significance of its particular content: regardless of whether Prometheus even believes in his own prophetic claims, the very introduction of the idea that he possesses a secret and fatal knowledge produces a dramatic shift. A brief aside: Io could

### *The Lesson*

The lesson to be drawn from Prometheus' decisive silence concerns how an apparent deadlock can prove to hold within itself its own key. It teaches that a situation seemingly at an impasse can hold the possibility of its own resolution, its own passing. In other words, the lesson of Prometheus is a lesson on truth as radical change and novelty. For the Badiou of the 70s, such a lesson is more than anything a lesson in revolutionary politics. In this sense, Prometheus has nothing to lose but his chains, as Marx observed of the proletariat,<sup>398</sup> and reflects the truth inherent to a politics proper to the proletariat. The truth proper to the proletariat is, Badiou claims, revolt. The underlying principle is the principle found in Mao's crystallization of Marxism into the single proposition usually translated as 'it is right to rebel' or 'to rebel is justified' [*zaofan youli*]. To capture its somewhat idiosyncratic rendition in Badiou, however, a better translation would read that 'there is reason in revolting' [*on a raison de se révolter*].<sup>399</sup> Briefly put, the reason proper to revolt is a matter not only of the recognition that there are reasons to revolt and that revolt *will thus be justified*. It is also a matter of revolt itself as productive or *constitutive of reason* as such. Reason is in essence contradictory, founded in opposition, and realized through struggles against the powers that be, whether these powers be the bourgeoisie within or without the Party or the reign of Zeus, proletariat or Promethean. Revolts think, as thinking revolts. In the words of another and by Badiou oft-quoted phrase that captures the crux of the Maoist dialectics, whenever there is an idea, one divides into two.<sup>400</sup> A closer

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be read as a manifestation of anxiety here, as a desperate lack of place, while Prometheus courageously sticks to and continues in his non-place.

<sup>398</sup> See Marx and Engels: *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, *op.cit.*, 493.

<sup>399</sup> Mao's original statement occurs in a speech celebrating the 60th birthday of Stalin, given in Yan'an 20 December 1939. For a brief exposition of its genealogy through the Cultural Revolution, see Guo Jian, Yongyi Song & Yuan Shou: *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham/London, 2015, p. 319-320. For Badiou's reference, see e.g. Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 123-4. For the most extensive discussion of this principle by Badiou, see Badiou: "Théorie de la contradiction" [1975]: *Les Années Rouges*, Les Prairies Ordinaires, Paris, 2012, p. 11-21. For a discussion of its use by Badiou, see Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 33 ff.

<sup>400</sup> See e.g. Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 32. This is just one of the numerous references to the principle of division, both explicit and implicit, throughout Badiou's work. While noted

interrogation of the logic of Prometheus' decision will serve to clarify further the mechanisms of the principle of reason's division and the operations of its politics – a politics designated by Badiou as the art of the impossible.<sup>401</sup>

On a formal level, the Promethean motto conveys a division internal to both speech and silence. It divides speech and silence according to their right time and place, according to what can and cannot be said when and where. This first formal division effectuates a further division internal to the situation at large and the current discursive universe. The division of speech and silence thus reveals a fundamental contradiction at the heart of that which was previously presumed to be a harmonious and unified whole. It reveals a fundamental contradiction as constitutive of the identity of the situation. In the case of Prometheus, the identity of the situation is the all of gods and mortals under the reign of Zeus. By the decision to speak that which the current discourse demands to be silenced, the injustice of his bonds, and to silence that which the current discourse demands to be spoken, the knowledge to prevent the downfall of Zeus, Prometheus demonstrates another reason, a reason of his own, constituted in and through its contradiction with the dominant reason of Zeus. From the perspective of the latter, the decision of Prometheus can only appear as senseless and devoid of meaning, as an erroneous judgment on all accounts. It goes against all that the dominant reason conceives of as reasonable. The dominant reason of Zeus is reducible to an absolute compliance with the commands of the father, if for no other reason than his superior power. The logic of Zeus is, in essence, the logic of the thunderbolt. It is in that sense paradigmatic of the superegoic logic of the naked and violent injunction.<sup>402</sup>

The most pronounced expression of the dominant reason of Zeus is found in the initial bewilderment of Kratos [*Power*]. Kratos cannot conceive of how a refusal of the

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already by Lenin in his notebooks on Hegel, it is to Mao that Badiou ascribes the consolidation of the principle of division as the rational kernel of dialectics, see Badiou: "Théorie de la contradiction", *op.cit.*, p. 34 ff. The importance of this principle for Badiou's philosophy has been amply demonstrated on a number of occasions, probably most extensively in Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, esp. p. 110-156; and Wright, Colin: *Badiou in Jamaica; The Politics of Conflict*, Re-Press, Melbourne, 2013, p. 27-67.

<sup>401</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 333.

<sup>402</sup> Rader has already noted the superegoic character of Zeus, see Rader: "The Radical Theology of *Prometheus Bound*; or on Prometheus' God Problem", *op.cit.*, p. 164.

command of Zeus – explicitly referred to as the father – is even possible.<sup>403</sup> But a similar bewilderment makes up a recurrent theme in all those who come to face Prometheus, also in those who are most inclined towards his position. Io is baffled at the prospect of an overthrown Zeus,<sup>404</sup> and the chorus is at a loss of what to make of the persistent error it conceives to be at stake in the decisive silence of Prometheus. In sum, these expressions of incomprehension as to Prometheus' decision underscore how his position is unthinkable, an impossibility, within the current discursive universe. They underscore how his position is reasonable to none but himself. But they also underscore how his reason manifests itself as a negative of the reason of Zeus, and through the negation of Zeus' reason. The stance of Prometheus only comes across as erroneous from the perspective of Zeus, while it is to the perspective of Zeus that the error and the misjudgment is ascribed by the stance of Prometheus.

As Peter Wessel Zapffe observes in his grand opus on the concept of the tragic, *Om det tragiske* (1941), Prometheus is driven by the knowledge that his perpetrator will receive his punishment, to the extent that the play itself approaches the status of "the most elementary polemic play."<sup>405</sup> But beyond the mere dissent of two opposing views, I claim, the case of Prometheus is a matter of an antagonistic contradiction. In an antagonistic contradiction, the affirmation of each term is possible only through the destruction of the other in both its manifestation and its support. As Badiou writes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the proletariat's affirmation entails not only the suspension of bourgeois rule and the destruction of the bourgeoisie in its manifestation, like a true statement would exclude a false statement. It also entails the destruction of the bourgeoisie in its support, and thereby the destruction of the proletariat itself. The affirmation of the proletariat demands the destruction of class society and systematic exploitation, destroying the classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat alike.<sup>406</sup> Similarly, Prometheus musters his reason as nothing less than the

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<sup>403</sup> See Aeschylus: "Prometheus Bound", *op.cit.*, verses 40-41, p. 219.

<sup>404</sup> See *ibid.*, verse 757, p. 283.

<sup>405</sup> Zapffe, Peter Wessel: *Om det tragiske* [1941], Pax Forlag, Oslo, 1996, p. 476 ("det rent elementære kampspill").

<sup>406</sup> For Badiou's definition of the antagonistic contradiction and its expression in class struggle, see Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 42; and Pluth: *Alain Badiou; A Philosophy of the New*, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

destruction of the dominant reason of Zeus. In a certain sense, the reign of the latter is destroyed by the simple refusal to follow its command, insofar as the reign of Zeus is nothing if not absolute. Initially excluded from the world of gods and mortals, reasonable to none but himself, Prometheus returns with a vengeance, quite literally, and by refusing to abide by the reign of Zeus, Prometheus forces the reign of Zeus to define itself in relation to the rebellious opposition of Prometheus. Prometheus forces the reign of Zeus to define itself as much through the terms of its opposite, the rebellion, as through its own terms, the established state. In and through his decisive silence, Prometheus manifests another reason, and in and through his other reason, Prometheus realizes a division within the situation. On the one hand, there is the old sequence determined by Zeus, on the other, the new sequence, undetermined except in its prospective destruction of the old. The division is not simply between the old and the new. More precisely, it is a division between the old and the new that remains internal to the present, a division between the past of the present and a present future.

Prometheus finds the means to interrupt the seemingly determined sequence of his exceptional detention through the repetition and augmentation of his initial error, and not through the intrusion of some external pressure. Prometheus declines the aid of Oceanus, for instance, which offers himself to negotiate with Zeus.<sup>407</sup> There is a point to be made of this active repetition on Prometheus' part, insofar as it allows him to isolate the possibility of passing beyond the reign of Zeus at the exact point of the impossibility of passing. It is the logic of the drive, dissolving and binding the bonds it dissolves, at the point where the law contradicts and undermines itself. It is the logic of revolting reason as the political art of the impossible. The active repetition of Prometheus' initial error underscores how it is by the cause of his bondage that he finds the measure to intervene into the same bondage and procure its termination. The weakness of his position, his chains, becomes his strength, as it is the strength of Zeus that becomes Zeus' weakness. Because he is nothing under the reign of Zeus, he can reduce the reign of Zeus to nothing. By fully assuming the conditions of his predicament, Prometheus retrieves his own rebellious motor force, and by fully endorsing his exclusion from the community of gods and mortals, he finds the force to

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<sup>407</sup> See Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound*, *op.cit.*, verses 334-5 and 346, p. 245 and 247.



interrupt the smooth functioning of its established order. At this point, in the context of making sense of Badiou, it is important to underline that the climactic moment in *Prometheus Bound* designates the institution of a new and open sequence, not the conclusion of an old. As my discussions progress to Lacan's readings of tragedy, this point is important to keep in mind.

Force is to be opposed to place. It is probably the central concept in *Théorie du sujet*. The concepts of force and place are roughly equivalent to the Lacanian concepts of the real and the symbolic. Because force is such a central concept in *Théorie du sujet*, it undergoes numerous modulations and inflections.<sup>408</sup> Notably, it carries the main distinction between that which Badiou designates as the structural and the historical strand of the dialectic. The structural strand of the dialectic comprises the placement of force, the subordination of force to place, whereas the historical dialectic pursues the forcing of place, the transformation of place by force. Badiou's wager to turn from the Lacanian stance on the real as *impassé* to an appreciation of the pass of the real depends upon the function of force within these two strands of the dialectic. Badiou perceives Lacan to be too tied up with the structural strand. He therefore seeks to supplement the structural dialectic in Lacan with the historical dialectic provided through Marxism. By supplementing the structural dialectic and the placement of force with its historical other and the forcing of place, Badiou aims to account for preconditions and possibilities of the subject of politics, of radical change and true novelty.

Badiou expounds on the bifurcation of the dialectic by recourse to the distinction between the fundamental and the principal contradiction of capitalist society. The fundamental contradiction between productive forces and relations of production provides an exposition only of the basis, the disposition of places. The principal contradiction of class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat provides an exposition of the motor of historical change. It designates the so-called qualitative heterogeneity that pins the two classes against each other and prevents the

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<sup>408</sup> Bosteels argues for *force* or *forcing* as the crucial concept in Badiou's philosophy *tout court*, seeing in this concept a more or less uninterrupted line running from *Théorie du sujet* and up until *Logiques des Mondes* through *L'Être et l'événement*, see Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, esp. p. 95-104 and 186-193.

unity of their place, insofar as the affirmation of the proletariat and the proletarian project of communism are unthinkable, an impossibility, within the bourgeoisie. Economy and the opposition of places define the fundamental contradiction of the structural dialectic, whereas the political proper of the opposition of forces defines the principal contradiction of the historical dialectic.<sup>409</sup> The key point of the historical dialectic and the concept of force is the insistent question of how to envisage reality not only from the point of view of the state of things, of structure, but also from the point of view of the future, Badiou writes. This question is the question of the political proper. It effectuates a division of primacy, where the primary force within a given situation reveals itself to be nothing less than the overthrowing of the primacy of place, with the exploited classes putting an end to their exploitation, and to exploitation as such.<sup>410</sup> The stakes of the division of primacy are perhaps best captured in colonial terms, as in Franz Fanon's recourse to Matthew 20:16, stating that "the last shall be first and the first last."<sup>411</sup> Badiou often refers to the same logic through the famous verse from *L'Internationale*, "nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout!"<sup>412</sup>

Prometheus incarnates the gist of the logic of the division of primacy. Badiou writes of the so-called history of force that "la force n'est que ce qui, concentrant sur soi-même hors-lieu un terme assigné à répétition, coince la répétition, enclenchant ainsi de quoi détruire sa loi." He adds that "là où la cohérence ancienne prescrivait un déplacement, advient, par une épuration qui excède la place, une interruption."<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 44-5. It is in this context that Badiou states that "[t]out sujet est politique" (p. 46), a statement that has often been brought to the fore in the argument of a suturing of philosophy to politics taking place in Badiou's early work, see *e.g.* Feltham: "Philosophy": *Alain Badiou; Key Concepts* (ed. A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Acumen, Durham, 2010, p. 21, and Clemens: "The Conditions": *Alain Badiou; Key Concepts* (ed. A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Acumen, Durham, 2010, p. 27). While such readings are not incorrect, they are lacking context and thus miss the point of that which Badiou's statement actually purveys: if every subject is political, it is because no subject is economical, no subject arises from the fundamental contradiction of productive forces and relations of production, from basis, alone. It is in and by the principal contradiction of class antagonism that the subject, as the motor force of history, comes to be.

<sup>410</sup> See Badiou: "Théorie de la contradiction", *op.cit.*, p. 66-8.

<sup>411</sup> Fanon, Franz: *Concerning Violence* (trans. Constance Farrington), Penguin Books, London, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>412</sup> See *e.g.* Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 142; Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 261; and Badiou: *Second manifeste pour la philosophie*, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>413</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 159-160 ("force is that which staggers repetition, in concentrating a term assigned to repetition onto itself as out-place, enabling thus the

Badiou thereby provides a close to perfect description of the climactic moment of *Prometheus Bound*. Displaced onto his Scythian crag, Prometheus interrupts the perpetual repetition of his punishment under the law through a refocus onto himself in his exclusion, through a purification of his illegal status. His active repetition amounts to an augmentation of his position that goes beyond the limited place afforded to the world of gods and mortals under the reign of Zeus. If Prometheus' decisive silence and the active repetition of his initial error open for the possibility of passing in and by the exact point of its impossibility, it cannot be a matter of an arbitrary point of exit or line of flight any more than it can be a matter of an external imposition. Rather the possibility of passing must be found in and through the most dense obstacle to such a passing. In Badiou's own terms, the possibility of passing must be found in and through "l'occupation *forcée* de la place inoccupable" or "l'existence *forcée* de l'inexistant."<sup>414</sup> If the last shall become the first, the last must first make their being *last*, and if the ones that are nothing are to become everything, their nothingness must first come to intervene in everything as something, making something of nothing, quite literally. When Prometheus acknowledges his initial error as legitimate, endorsing the cause of his extreme bondage, a curious reduplication of the cause is effectuated in him. The initial cause, the error of his theft of fire, cancels its original effect, his being bound within an apparently determined sequence of inevitable oppression. The initial cause thus gives way to its effective contradiction, as the cause of the interruption that is his continued rebellion. Through its curious reduplication, the initial cause becomes constitutive of another reason that opens for another sequence and an unsettled future.

A preliminary summary of my reconstruction of Badiou's lost reading and its Promethean ethics of confidence can be made. I have dealt with the name and the motto of Prometheus, that is, with the perspective of the future and the division of silence and speech. Prometheus effectuates a division of silence and speech through his decision to keep silent on the crucial details of the prophesied downfall of Zeus. Prometheus division of silence and speech consequently interrupts the determined

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destruction of its law," and "there where the old coherence would prescribe a displacement, befalls, by a purification that exceeds the place, an interruption").

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279-280 ("the *forced* occupation of the unoccupiable place" and "the forced existence of the inexistent").

sequence to which Zeus has condemned Prometheus, and institutes another sequence for an unsettled future. The questions of the imagery of fire and the significations that imagery produces remain. However, these questions cannot be dealt with independently of the decisive silence already discussed and the new perspective it entails. The name and motto of Prometheus might seem like meager traces on which to build an understanding of an ethics of confidence, or an ethics of Marxism. It might seem like meager traces to come to terms with how Badiou strives to think radical change and true novelty beyond Lacan. A proceeding *via negativa*, through the comparison of these two traces to that which they do not communicate, to the Sophoclean paradigm of tragedy and to psychoanalysis, will uncover more of their significance. It will allow for a more elaborate articulation, which also includes the imagery of fire.

### **Via Negativa; '*Would I Were Not...*'**

In this section, I address the fundamentals of the Sophoclean paradigm and the psychoanalytic conception of tragedy. How has the Sophoclean paradigm allowed psychoanalysis to develop a conception of the subject and the ethical act, but also, and more importantly, how can Sophocles and psychoanalysis serve as a contrast to the basic traits of the figure of Prometheus? Against the operation of division and the perspective of the future, the Sophoclean paradigm is determined by the operation of reversal and the perspective of the last judgment. The dictum of Oedipus the Beggar articulates the desire to never have been. This dictum functions as the axial term of how psychoanalysis reads the Sophoclean paradigm. It expresses how the Oedipal family pursues speech until it turns into its opposite, the dead silence of the real. It expresses the crux of Lacan's concept of the domain between two deaths, the impossible point of the real by which to value the life of the Oedipal hero as already lost. But it also expresses how the point of the real is essentially unrepresentable within the Sophoclean paradigm. The question is how Prometheus comes to represent the point of the real by fully assuming his position in its place, and how he thereby

comes to instigate a new and undetermined sequence through the division of the old. An analysis of these operations of Prometheus opens for a further investigation into the imagery of fire as an emblem of a revolutionary ethics of confidence.

### *Last Judgment*

Is there a motto more opposed to psychoanalysis than the Promethean motto of the Aeschylean fragment 208, imposing a calculated disposition between silence and speech? Psychoanalysis was famously tagged the talking cure by Anna O.,<sup>415</sup> yet I am not referring to the basic principle of free association here. I do not have in mind the analysand's injunction to say anything, whatever comes to mind at whatever moment. Rather I aim at the function of desire in psychoanalysis. Desire is bound to speech. As Juliet Flower MacCannell formulates it, Lacanian psychoanalysis confirmed Freud's thesis that the unconscious is linked to language, to what can be said and what cannot be said.<sup>416</sup> Desire follows a metonymic movement, an incessant gliding from object to object and from signifier to signifier. In Lacanian parlance, desire is that which does not stop writing itself, or that which does not stop speaking itself. But there is an ultimate limit to desire. Desire does not stop speaking itself until it reaches a certain point, the impossible point that does not stop *not* writing itself, the point of the real cause of desire. The Sophoclean paradigm in tragedy represents this determination of desire.

What caused the downfall of Oedipus the King, if not the fact that he could not manage his tongue but continued, despite all advice to the contrary, to demand the truth to be spoken ("Oh speak, withhold not", "For heavens sake, tell me all", "If thou lack'st the grace to speak, I'll loose thy tongue")?<sup>417</sup> Oedipus the King demanded the truth to be spoken, even to the point where it revealed itself as the unbearable and

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<sup>415</sup> See e.g. Freud: *Über Psychoanalyse; Fünf Vorlesungen* [1909]; *Gesammelte Werke, Band VIII*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main], Imago Publishing, London, 1943, p. 7.

<sup>416</sup> See MacCannell, Juliet Flower: "The Open Ego: Woolf, Joyce and the 'mad' Subject": *Lacan on Madness; Madness, Yes You Can't* (ed. Patricia Gherovici and Manya Steinkoler), Routledge, Hove/New York, 2015, p. 205.

<sup>417</sup> Sophocles: *Oedipus the King; Loeb's Classical Library; Sophocles*, vol. 1 (trans. F. Storr), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1912, verses 326, 1009, 1152, p. 31, 93, 107.

monstrous *Mutter-Ding*, as his outmost disaster. At the point of *das Ding*, his desire becomes a truth that bursts in his eyes and leaves him blind. Lacan never tired from saying that Oedipus never suffered from the complex bearing his name. Oedipus' suffered from an unrelenting desire to know more, to know the truth and the last word of desire.<sup>418</sup> It was Oedipus' relentless pursuit of this desire that finally brought about his tragedy, bringing him too close to his real. Furthermore, what was the cause of Antigone's doom, if not the fact that she could not suffer in silence her brother's desecration by Creon's edict, but demanded her brother's proper burial and followed up on her demand by doing it herself? Antigone never stopped demanding her brother's burial, and that led her to her own living grave, in stark contrast to her sister, Ismene, whose dumbness and vagueness of the will Antigone deplored the most ("O tell it, sister; I shall hate thee more, if thou proclaim it not to all the town"<sup>419</sup>)? The fate of Antigone is made in her extreme and inhuman inflexibility, as she is inclined completely to her own end. It is here Lacan designates Antigone's unbearable splendor, the beauty of her captivating image: in her obstinate inclination to go beyond the limits of life and death, to the domain between two deaths, and to the realization of her familial *ἄτη*, Antigone serves as an illustration of the death drive. She becomes the incarnation of her desire as a pure desire, and renders visible her pure desire as a desire for death.<sup>420</sup>

Zupančič writes that the tragic heroine or hero is precisely someone who risks the path of abolishing the split between the symbolic and the metonymic character of desire, on the one hand, and its ultimate aim in the real of *das Ding*, on the other.<sup>421</sup> The risk of the path to abolition characterizes the essential tragic traits of the Sophoclean paradigm. The tragic examples of Oedipus and Antigone consist in their mutual insistence to go beyond the limits of language and the symbolic, into the grips of the real, into the monstrous night where only blindness and death awaits them.

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<sup>418</sup> See e.g. Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 317; 352; 357; see also Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>419</sup> Sophocles: *Antigone: Loeb's Classical Library; Sophocles*, vol. 1 (trans. F. Storr), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1912, verses 86-7, p. 321.

<sup>420</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>421</sup> See Zupančič: "Ethics and Tragedy in Lacan": *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 175.

Oedipus finds the cause of his downfall in his blind ignorance of the limits of desire, of that which does not lend itself to communication. Antigone finds the cause of her doom in her blatant disregard for the same limit, for that which does not stop not writing itself.

Lacan makes a point of how Antigone breaks into a lament for her life at the moment when she is carried away to her living death. At this moment, Antigone realizes herself between two deaths, as symbolically dead but not really dead, excluded from the living while still alive. Antigone laments how her living entombment will deny her the bonds of hymen, the marital bed, the birth of her children, and so on. Lacan designates it as her *κομμὸς*. Her seemingly exaggerated proclamations of emotion should not be perceived as going counter to her otherwise sober and calculative determination, as if she were suddenly to regret her act, Lacan argues. Rather her lament ensues at that specific moment for the specific reason that her life is only possible to approach from the position where life is already lost to her. Antigone can only look back and evaluate her life after having left life behind and passed into the realm of death. She can appreciate life only as lost.<sup>422</sup> In other words, Antigone's lament attests to the epistemological merit involved for the figures of the Sophoclean paradigm. The insistence to go beyond the limits of language and life, to push the indeterminate movement of desire to its end in *das Ding*, lethal in any case, provides the necessary condition by which the question of the realization of desire can be posited at all. Like any signifying chain, desire demands for its signification to be determined and ascertained retroactively. The realization of desire demands the perspective of that which Lacan designates as the last judgment: "Essayez de vous demander," he asks his audience, "ce que peut vouloir dire *avoir réalisé son désir* – si ce n'est de l'avoir réalisé, si l'on peut dire, à sa fin. C'est cet empiétement de la mort sur la vie qui donne son dynamisme à toute question quand elle essaie de se formuler sur le sujet de la réalisation du désir."<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 326. A small terminological note: to designate Antigone's lament by the term of *κομμὸς*, as Lacan does, is not strictly in line with the meaning of this latter term in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where it is used for "the dirge shared between chorus and actors," see Aristotle: *Poetics*, *op.cit.*, XII, p. 69.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 341 ("Try to ask yourselves what *to have realized one's desire* would mean, if it is not to have realized it, if one may say so, at its end. It is this encroachment of death upon life that

The risk of the path of abolition culminates in Sophocles' last play, *Oedipus at Colonus* (406 BC). It portrays Oedipus the Beggar at the end of his life. The play provides a dictum that confirms the full effect of the necessary yet impossible requirement of the perspective of the last judgment in regard to the realization of desire. It is the dictum of *μὴ φῶναι*, the dictum of *would I were not* or *would I were not born*, often repeated by Lacan.<sup>424</sup> The dictum of Oedipus the Beggar shows us, Lacan says, how, in every human experience, the interior limit zone of desire is always disposed unto the realm beyond death.<sup>425</sup>

The dictum of Oedipus the Beggar designates the axial term of psychoanalysis itself, I argue. The desire to never have been, to never have been born, is the desire to never have been separated from the *Mutter-Ding* in the first place. It is the desire to never have suffered castration, and thus the desire to never have been neither a subject of the signifier nor a subject of desire. As the paradoxical desire not to desire, it is the impossible real of desire *par excellence*. In a case more striking than the case of Antigone's splendor, Oedipus the Beggar's desire to never have been illustrates the death drive, the drive to return to an inanimate and inorganic state, as Freud formulated it in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920).<sup>426</sup> Lacan defines the desire to never have been as Oedipus' consenting malediction, his nuptial with annihilation, the true and invisible extinction that is his.<sup>427</sup> Lacan emphasizes how the case of Oedipus at Colonus is not concerned with the question of just any old death, the accidental death that anyone can suffer, but with the true death in which Oedipus will come to efface

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provides the dynamism on which rests the whole question tempting to formulate itself on the subject of the realization of desire").

<sup>424</sup> See Sophocles: *Oedipus at Colonus*: Loeb's Classical Library; Sophocles, vol. 1 (trans. F. Storr), Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge (MA)/London, 1912, verses 1224-6, p. 261. One might want to note that the dictum is by Lacan falsely accredited to Oedipus. It is not Oedipus himself who utters these words, but the chorus (during its *κομμὸς*, actually). Nonetheless, Lacan is not necessarily in the wrong to read it as a statement regarding Oedipus, as descriptive of the latter's status, insofar as Oedipus is the one to incarnate the predicament of human existence most expressly, at least in the play in question.

<sup>425</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>426</sup> See Freud: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, *op.cit.*, p. 40

<sup>427</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 357.



his very own being.<sup>428</sup> The questions are how the dictum of Oedipus allows for a thinking of ethics and the subject, and how this thinking relates to the subjective formations represented through the figure of Prometheus.

De Kesel argues that it is not so much the content of this dictum that interests Lacan as its form, and the fact that Oedipus – at the end of his life and reduced to the bare minimum of his desire to not have been – is still and irreducibly nothing but "a lump of flaming desire."<sup>429</sup> I contend that it is precisely the coincidence of form and content that is paramount in the dictum of Oedipus the Beggar. Lacan interprets the negative  $\mu\eta$  as corresponding to the French *ne discordantiel* (e.g., '*je crains qu'il ne vienne*'), the seemingly meaningless negation that Lacan nonetheless perceives to be the trace or place of the subject in the statement. Lacan perceives the *ne discordantiel* to be "la pointe du désir [comme] le sujet où s'origine l'énonciation,"<sup>430</sup> or "la négation identique à l'entrée du sujet, sur le support du signifiant."<sup>431</sup> According to de Kesel, Oedipus testifies to "how the 'no one' that he is stems ultimately from a desire and this desire, in the final analysis, is borne by that 'no one', that is, by the one who – to put it in Lacanese – exists only insofar as he is represented by signifiers."<sup>432</sup> Insufficiently underscored in this portrayal, however, is how the no-one that Oedipus as a subject is, his desire or lack-in-being [*manque-à-être*] as that which a signifier represents to another signifier, finds itself redoubled in his desire, the pure desire to be no-one or nothing. The negation ( $\mu\eta$ ) by which his desire enters the signifying chain is not only a representative of the subject or of desire as lack, but also that which this same desire aims at. Reading the form and the content of the dictum together underscores that the desire to never have been is nothing but the desire to never have been a subject even in the negative, to never have been even that no-one or nothing represented by a signifier.

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<sup>428</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 353. For comparison, see also Lacan's treatment of the death of Empedocles, who reportedly threw himself into the volcano Etna, in Lacan: "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse" [1956]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 320.

<sup>429</sup> Kesel: *Eros and Ethics*, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>430</sup> Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre VIII; Le Transfert* (1960-1961)(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2001, p. 358 ("the point of desire [as] the subject where the enunciation originates").

<sup>431</sup> Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 362 ("the negation identical to the introduction of the subject by the support of the signifier").

<sup>432</sup> Kesel: *Eros and Ethics*, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

Is there another meaning to the notion of a beyond even of the second death, the symbolic death? If Oedipus' aim is not merely the accidental death that anyone can die, but the eradication of his very being, and if that being is nothing but the gaping nothing between signifiers, must it not be towards the eradication of this nothing that his last gesture is directed? In other words, it is not merely the nothing that he is that he longs to assume, but a more radical nothing, a nothing beyond that which he has ever been. Oedipus longs to vanish in the hole in the Other, in a move beyond the dimensions of the old negation of negation. In a certain sense, *Oedipus at Colonus* provides a representation of such an ultimate eradication or nuptial with annihilation, despite the impossibility of representing it. At the end of the play, Oedipus simply disappears, as if he had dissolved in thin air. He has "gone, vanished from our eyes," the messenger reports.<sup>433</sup> Behind him, Oedipus leaves nothing, not even a grave, and thus no trace or mark, no signifier, to bear witness to his existence, his ever having been.

One of Samuel Beckett's titles, *Oh les beaux jours* (1961), could serve to characterize this end of Oedipus. 'Oh les beaux jours' is a conclusion to be made only at the end, retroactively. As such, it reintroduces Lacan's notion of the perspective of the last judgment. Lacan defines a certain triumph of being-for-death as the fundamental trait of all tragic action. Such a triumph provides the necessary perspective by which the relation between action and its inherent desire can be addressed, Lacan says.<sup>434</sup> A judgment can be passed on the life and death of Oedipus only when the chain of signifiers under which his nothing has kept insisting has been brought to a close. Only then can a judgment be made on whether or not he achieved his life's purpose in the making of his own death and thus, finally, whether or not he realized his desire. Both the chorus and his daughter-sister, Antigone, cast a positive judgment. "He did as he desired [*ἔπραξεν οἶον ἠθέληεν*]," Antigone can state only after he has gone,<sup>435</sup> whereas the chorus, in the last verse of the play, will placidly observe how "all is ordered for the best."<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Sophocles: *Oedipus at Colonus*, *op.cit.*, verse 1649, p. 293.

<sup>434</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 361-2.

<sup>435</sup> Sophocles: *Oedipus at Colonus*, *op.cit.*, verse 1695, p. 299 (trans. modified).

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 1779, p. 307.

As in the case of Prometheus, the reduplication that takes place in the case of Oedipus is remarkable. There is a manifest exaggeration to the final stance of his being-for-death. First of all, Oedipus doubles the nothing that he is, as far as he is his desire, in his desire to be nothing and to never have been. Furthermore, as the other side of this doubling, the last judgment on his acts concerns precisely the act of his last judgment. To have answered the question of whether or not Oedipus acted in conformity with the desire that sustained him is to have answered the question of whether or not Oedipus finally fulfilled the preconditions by which such a realization of his desire can be evaluated, whether or not he realized the perspective of the last judgment, the end point from which to retroactively determine his insistence under the signifying chain. The reduplication of the stance of Oedipus underscores how the conclusion of one's desire is to desire no more, and thus to be no more, just like the desire to not desire is, in the last analysis, nothing but another formulation of the desire to have one's desire finally concluded upon.

If Oedipus the Beggar and his dictum can be conceived of as representatives of the fundamental trait of all tragic action according to Lacan and the Sophoclean paradigm, it is on account of an excessive redoubling of the stakes. Oedipus showcases an exaggerated triumph of being-for-death and an exaggerated race to the limits (of life and death, desire and knowledge), as if the aim of Oedipus were to become the very measure of human action as such.<sup>437</sup> The final stance of Oedipus displays a perseverance similar to the one Copjec observes in the position of Antigone.<sup>438</sup> Oedipus is no more willing to renounce on his desire than his daughter-sister is, and no

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<sup>437</sup> A similar point is made by Zupančič, who finds support for her reading in Jean-Paul Vernant: in his reply to the Sphinx in *Oedipus the King* – that 'man' is the one to first walk on four, then two, then three legs – Oedipus is really referencing himself, as the one to mix together the three generations of his parents, himself, and his children. 'Man' thus equals 'Oedipus'. Oedipus' reply should therefore be appreciated as an act that creates the Other and the Oedipus complex for subsequent generations. Furthermore, after having blinded himself at the end of *Oedipus the King*, and coming to Colonus as an outcast, Oedipus the Beggar materializes not so much the aim for the Thing (as does e.g. Antigone) but the Thing itself (and hence that to which the tragic acts of e.g. Antigone is measured against). Hence he simultaneously 'symbolizes the real' and 'realizes the symbolic'. He both undermines and installs the Other, and thus offers himself and his act as the paradigmatic act, see Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real, op.cit.*, p. 200-211. That which is not included in Zupančič's analysis, however, is precisely the death of Oedipus, the moment from which his desire could be concluded upon, and hence her conclusion on the paradigmatic status of Oedipus' act, though similar, is not, strictly speaking, the same as mine.

<sup>438</sup> See Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman, op.cit.*, p. 40.

less than her father-brother is Antigone inclined to ever bend on her desire. Both insist on following through on their desire, beyond life and beyond death. At the same time, their perseverances to go beyond the limits of life and death, and even beyond the second death, are still oriented by the limits beyond which they aim. The limit is the defining feature of the Sophoclean character, Lacan argues. All major Sophoclean characters find themselves alive but not living, dead but still alive. Their determining trait is to be positioned *à-bout-de-course*, at the end of the line.<sup>439</sup> In the Sophoclean tragedy, as read through psychoanalysis, there is no succession and no continuation to follow in line after the end of desire has been met and realized. There is nothing but the steadfast elaboration of its already determined sequences, *i.e.* nothing but death and misery, as no subject can ever be sustained in the beyond of the real. The question is whether there is a potential for change in this perspective.

### ***Reversal***

The Sophoclean paradigm differs from the Aeschylean paradigm. Badiou characterizes the operation of reversal [*retournement*], of native reversal or reversal of the native form, as the privileged designation of the Sophoclean subject-effect as a whole.<sup>440</sup> Is there an example of this operation more striking than Oedipus the Beggar? Badiou does not discuss the play of *Oedipus at Colonus*, but he has already made the case that Oedipus the King incarnates the operation of reversal with all the clarity of his blinding act. But is there a more fundamental recuperation of the operation of reversal than the one encountered in the *μη̄ φῶναι* of Oedipus the Beggar? The essence of the Sophoclean paradigm of tragedy, Badiou writes, rests in its backwards movement towards an origin. This backwards movement involves an oscillation between the two notions of anxiety and the superego, between a formless blaze (Antigone's 'birdlike cries' of absolute destitution, the unbearable encounter of Oedipus with the truth of his desire) and a formal excess (Creon's entombment of Antigone, the blinding reaction of Oedipus to his truth). The notions of anxiety and the superego designate the movement

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<sup>439</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>440</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 180 ff.

where the subject pursues the involution of the symbolic space, the involution of the law (to which one could add the involution of desire and its signifying chain), until death.<sup>441</sup> The symbolic space collapses on itself. The essence of the Sophoclean paradigm is found in the reciprocity between the notions involved – between the Oedipus of the desire for truth and the Oedipus of the truth of desire – as they constitute each other's undersides. In sum, the motion between anxiety and the superego in the Sophoclean paradigm constitutes a closed-off dialectic from which there is offered no issue, no alternative path but a return to the beginning, to the old order of things, as in the spherical revolutions of a planetarium.<sup>442</sup> In his blinding self-mutilation, Oedipus exerts upon himself an excessive demand of superegoic character. The superegoic demand is an attempt to contain the ravaging anxiety induced through his encounter with his truth, the moment when the symbolic space collapses on itself. But Oedipus' self-mutilating demand only serves to re-exclude this truth, to drive it back into a position from which it can only return as ravaging anxiety yet again. The contradiction of anxiety and the superego follows the logic of a self-perpetuating deadlock or stalemate. It is a contradiction that is tragic, Badiou writes, insofar as it offers no other issue than death.<sup>443</sup>

Oedipus the Beggar, as he seeks his last refuge at Colonus, illustrates the gist of the stalemate involved in the Sophoclean paradigm. The backwards movement towards an origin, pursued through the involution of the symbolic space and desire until death, is literally spelled out in the desire of Oedipus to never have been and in

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<sup>441</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 183. There is a general tendency to ignore the fact that Badiou's readings of Greek tragedy and the Sophoclean paradigm in particular is as much in debt to Friedrich Hölderlin as to anyone else, including Lacan. Despite the fact that his discussions on tragedy are introduced by way of Lacan and the psychoanalytic concepts of anxiety and the superego, it is still Hölderlin and his commentary to his own translations of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* that serves as the fundamental framework for Badiou's representations of the tragic problematic in Sophocles – the problematic of reversal and the opposition between the unformable and the formal excess, equivalent to the structural dialectic of Lacan and its focus on anxiety and the superego. See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 178 ff; see also Hölderlin, Friedrich: "Anmerkungen zum Oedipus" and "Anmerkungen zur Antigone": *Sämtliche Werke*, band 5, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1965, p. 211-220 and 287-296.

<sup>442</sup> For Lacan's play on revolution as return to the beginning, see *e.g.* Lacan: "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir", *op.cit.*, p. 797; Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 54; and Lacan: "Du discours psychanalytique" [1972]: *Lacan in Italia/En Italie Lacan 1953-1978*, La Salamandra, Milan, 1978, p. 47.

<sup>443</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

his so-called nuptial with annihilation, his own true extinction, by which he disappears even as a signifier. The second-degree death that Oedipus suffers and that erases his being as desire is precisely the realization of the move in which his whole life and fate suffer their ultimate reversal. The death of Oedipus effaces his being as if he had never been born. To reformulate this point in adherence to the terminology of the Promethean motto, I would say that the name of Oedipus the Beggar designates the heedless pursuit of speech to its limit, and its consequent reversal into its opposite, the absolute silence of *das Ding*.

The effect of the death of Oedipus, I argue, is to confirm the operation of reversal as the principal name of his game. Oedipus ends up as incarnating the truth of desire, once having followed his desire for truth to the end. Having first encountered his monstrous *Mutter-Ding*, Oedipus himself takes on the function of such an unbearable real. As Zupančič observes, he becomes a live and walking *Ding*.<sup>444</sup> Oedipus the King incarnated as a living *Ding* in Oedipus the Beggar: that is the reason why he is banished from Thebes, why he seeks his last refuge at Colonus. That is also the reason why Creon again pursues him with the intention of having him reinstalled in Thebes, but not within the city limits. Creon intends to install Oedipus at the city fringes, as the constitutive outside of the symbolic space of the community, the absent guarantee that is to secure the prosperity of the city, as the oracle had predicted. Oedipus never returns to Thebes, as Antigone and his other children-siblings do. However, that does not prevent Oedipus from serving the same function in regard to the city of Athens, at the outskirts of which Colonus is located. When Oedipus is gone, when the blind and monstrous *Ding* is returned to its void outside the symbolic space, as nothing, all is ordered for the best, as the chorus concludes. The community can return to its usual order, the same old run of things, the same old *service des biens*.

The problematic of Antigone's living entombment and the refused burial of her brother, Polyneices, is similar. Polyneices' refused burial reveals that which Antigone's living entombment desperately tries to re-conceal, namely the constitutive outside that props up the consistency of the symbolic space, *i.e.* of Creon's civil law. Lacan remarks of Creon that his error consists in the mistaken presupposition that an absolute

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<sup>444</sup> See Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

law, a law without remainder, is a possibility. Polyneices and Antigone bear testimony to the fatality of Creon's error.<sup>445</sup> Jean Bollack has read the entire Cadmos family as determined by the error of presuming a possible absolute state: from the marriage of Cadmos and his god-granted wife Harmonia, the Cadmos family has remained a family closed in upon itself, a self-sufficient entity excluding every foreign element from its midst. The tragedy of Oedipus and his offspring testifies to the necessary rupture of fullness.<sup>446</sup> There can be no absolute law without remainder, no all without an exception. Prometheus' displacement onto the Scythian crag also marks the function of such an exception, as the position of the unoccupiable place that buttresses the reign of Zeus as absolute.

The difference in perspective between Sophocles and Aeschylus is brought to bear on this point of the unoccupiable place. It underscores the lesson of Prometheus' decisive silence and his active repetition of holding the unoccupiable place. Sophocles' perspective is of the last judgment, whereas Aeschylus' perspective is of the future. The fact that *Prometheus Bound* opens with the restraints of Prometheus being fastened, with Hephaestus bolting in place the chains, is significant. It supports the insistent presence of Prometheus *bound on stage* throughout the play, and underscores the very unoccupiable place as that on which the progression of the play depends. The initial shackling of the hero comes close to a violation of the Aristotelian principle of non-violence on-stage.<sup>447</sup> It closes in on a representation of the unrepresentable, as if the entire play was to be one lasting scene of torture. In any case, I argue that the crag to which Prometheus is bound in the opening sequence of his play is comparable to the living entombment into which Antigone is brought in the closing sequence of her play. The Aeschylean play commences there where the Sophoclean play draws to a stop. Equally important, the Aeschylean crag parades that which the Sophoclean tomb obscures. Prometheus allows his spectators *into* the space of the living tomb, in which Antigone disappears never to be seen again.

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<sup>445</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>446</sup> See Bollack, Jean: "Né damné": *Théâtre/Public*, no. 70-71, 1986, p. 17-22; and Bollack: "Destin d'Œdipe, destin d'une famille": *Mètis; Anthropologie des mondes grecs ancien*, vol. 3, no. 1-2, 1988, p. 159-177.

<sup>447</sup> For the principle of non-violence on-stage, see Aristotle: *Poetics*, *op.cit.*, XIV, p. 75.

Lacan makes a passing and seemingly insignificant note of how the spectator's insight is precluded from Antigone's tomb. The case is the same with Ophelia's fresh-dug grave, into which Hamlet leaps in order to rise again with newlywon resolve, as it is also with the burial site at which Oedipus the Beggar vanishes. Lacan's point is precisely that the entombment of Antigone at the limits of her *ἄτη* is beyond cognition.<sup>448</sup> The spectator cannot know of that which takes place inside this tomb. Lacan's seemingly insignificant note is an important remark on how the domain between two deaths, the realization of the death drive and *das Ding*, remains unrepresentable within the Sophoclean paradigm of psychoanalysis, as its impossible proper. This impossibility is the ultimate point of Lacan's anamorphic elaborations on the unbearable splendor of Antigone, insofar as he conceives of beauty to have a certain blinding effect. Beauty is as confusing as it is clarifying. It functions as a screen that forbids access to the very field it opens up to, that is, the field of *das Ding* and the pure desire of the death drive.<sup>449</sup> De Kesel writes that

tragedy, which keeps us under the spell of Antigone's radiant beauty, carries us away from ordinary, recognizable reality. It takes us beyond the limits of the normal – beyond what Lacan, with Sophocles, calls 'até' – to a point that will never enter the picture but to which everything in that image refers. [...] That 'thing' itself never enters the picture, although everything in the image points in this direction. It is in this sense, it [*sic*] can provide an image of my transgressive, 'thing'-directed desire.<sup>450</sup>

The beyond of the unsurpassable limit towards which the Sophoclean tragedy aims stays unrepresentable within its mode of tragic representation. There is a paradox in this fact, a paradox that is even more articulate in the case of Oedipus the Beggar and his unknown grave.

The perspective the last judgment and the operation of reversal in Sophoclean tragedy allows for some comments to be made on the status of Prometheus. *Prometheus Bound* represents nothing but the beyond of the unsurpassable limit, the

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<sup>448</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>449</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>450</sup> Kesel: *Eros and Ethics, op.cit.*, p. 245. See also Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real, op.cit.*, p.179-180.



unrepresentable of between two deaths, I claim. This play takes its spectators inside an equivalent of Antigone's living entombment from the start. As I remarked in the previous section, the climactic moment in *Prometheus Bound* designates the institution of a new and indeterminate sequence, and not the conclusion of an old. It designates a re-knotting rather than an unknotting of the plot. In Prometheus' case, the crag as the point of the real does not function as the end point from which his life and death can be retroactively determined, but rather as the point of departure for another sequence to topple the old, a sequence perceived from the perspective of the future. In this new sequence, there is no determination of life and death. Prometheus' very presence as bound on stage underscores the forced occupation of the unoccupiable place or the forced existence of the inexistent. Effectuated through his decisive silence and the augmentation of his initial error, the presence of Prometheus bound expresses the refusal on his part to accept his extreme confinement. Prometheus refuses to remain as the constitutive outside that buttresses the reign of Zeus. In one of his few references to Prometheus' *persona*, Badiou notes how the rebel Prometheus, far from being held in the exclusion of the absent cause, is the immediate actor on the route of insurrection in the Aeschylean play.<sup>451</sup> Forcing the existence of his inexistence and thus giving flesh to the void, courageously assuming the real, and naming the absent cause in and as himself, Prometheus, like an ancient revolutionary, demonstrates that the principle of the symbolic space is not one but two.<sup>452</sup> Prometheus demonstrates the reason of revolt, as contradictory or antagonistic.

Another preliminary summary of my discussions can be made. The Sophoclean paradigm of psychoanalysis finds its epitome in the *μη φῶναι* of Oedipus the Beggar. Its principal operation is the blind pursuit of speech until the point where speech ends and collapses on itself. This operation is opposed to the paradigm of Aeschylus and the Promethean motto imposing a division internal to speech and silence both. However, the opposition in question is not one of mutual exclusion. The Aeschylean paradigm must be read as the dialectical integration of its Sophoclean counterpart, writes

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<sup>451</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>452</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 181.

Badiou.<sup>453</sup> If the Sophoclean paradigm elaborates on the consequences of having followed desire to its end and realization in the death drive, the Aeschylean paradigm does not overlook these consequences. Rather, Aeschylus subjects the impossible tombs where the symbolic order breaks down in Sophocles to the operation of division and the contradictory reason of revolt. By dividing the Sophoclean space, its impossible tombs open up as the point of possibility for another order in Aeschylus. From the soundless darkness of the impossible tombs in Sophocles, a Promethean fire comes to the fore, indicating the recomposition of another world under the reign not of the authority of law but of justice. The question is how the third and last trace left of Aeschylus' lost play, the imagery of fire, illuminates the significance of the concept of justice in Badiou's philosophical works. The concept of justice is key to Badiou's grasp of how the subject of politics can effectuate radical change in the concrete situation of today. It is in tying courage to justice that the figure of Prometheus becomes a figure of an ethics of confidence.

### ***The Imagery of Fire; Confidence between Courage and Justice***

In this section, I address the imagery of fire and the significance of Badiou's Promethean ethics of confidence. Badiou integrates Greek tragedy, the dialectic, the psychoanalytic conception of the real of sexual difference, and the Marxist conception of class antagonism in an attempt at a comprehensive theory that can think the preconditions and possibilities for a subject of politics and radical change today. The question is how the mechanisms at stake in this conundrum can be elucidated through the imagery of fire and the figure of Prometheus. More precisely, the questions concerns the tragic status of Prometheus and how to make sense of his immortality in relation to mortal women and men; how the dialectical status of the imagery of fire operates in the conjunction between the problematic of the limit and the problematic of succession; how the rebellious Prometheus designates a division of the space of action opened up under the notions of sex and class as real, and thereby allows for a

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<sup>453</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 177-8.

conception of a processual and contradictory consistency; and, lastly, how the imagery of fire can explicate the significance of a Promethean ethics of confidence as a subjective formation of courage and justice. Badiou's notion of justice as the blurring of places is not only crucial for how he thinks the possibilities of radical change and the problematic of emancipation. It is also easily misconstrued as a legal, affective, or essentialist category. The question is how an analysis of the figure of Prometheus can serve to avoid such misconstruals, and accentuate the significations and implications of how Badiou's red-years-philosophy pits together sex and class in thinking an ethics of continuation.

### *Undestined Mortals*

The tragic status of Prometheus is ambivalent. Zapffe finds the *Prometheia* trilogy problematic in terms of the tragic on account of its heavily mythical contents, *i.e.* the fact that its characters and contexts are those of gods and titans rather than those of mortal women and men.<sup>454</sup> Prometheus confesses that his immortality is key to his obstinate rebellion ("Why should I fear whose fate is not to die?", "do what he will, *me* he shall never bring to death").<sup>455</sup> His immortality questions the relevance of his stance, from his decisive silence to the perspective of the future, as far as matters of being human are concerned: if he cannot die and thus wager on his life, how can his life be said to be meaningful at all? Yet such a questioning is on mark only as long as mortality is conceived of as the decisive feature of human being, whether as that ultimate evil that should never be transgressed, as in the discourse of human rights, or as that ultimate concession that defines its ethical propensity, as when Freud suggests that death is the aim of life *tout court*.<sup>456</sup> Such a questioning is only relevant if one, like Lacan and Hegel, accepts death as the ultimate master.<sup>457</sup> Lacan asserts that death should be appreciated as the unsurpassable limit whose certainty gives sustenance to life and makes it at all bearable:

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<sup>454</sup> See Zapffe: *Om det tragiske*, *op.cit.*, p. 475.

<sup>455</sup> Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound*, *op.cit.*, verses 933 and 1053, p. 301 and 311 (trans. italics).

<sup>456</sup> See Freud: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>457</sup> See *e.g.* Lacan: "Variantes de la cure-type" [1955]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 348.

vous avez bien raison de croire que vous allez mourir bien sûr: ça vous soutient. Si vous n'y croyez pas, est-ce que vous pourriez supporter la vie que vous avez? Si on n'était pas solidement appuyée sur cette certitude que ça finira, est-ce que vous pourriez supporter cette histoire?<sup>458</sup>

To Lacan, human being is tragic to the extent that it is determinable by the moment of the last judgment, intimated only by death. To opt for this evaluation of mortality, and consequently to a questioning of the relevance of Prometheus, would be to disregard that which the figure of Prometheus communicates as well as the underlying premise of Badiou's position. Prometheus and Badiou testify to the refusal to accept death as the ultimate limit of life, or rather the refusal to accept life's finitude and the unsurpassable limit as the defining feature of human being.

In "A Plea for Prometheus", Alberto Toscano has argued that the crux of the Promethean act is found in "the refusal of the articulation between divine (or political) authority and human mortality." This refusal makes up the emblem of his revolting reason. Toscano continues:

to the extent that domination is still based on the exploitation of our mortality – and especially of the cares and fears that so often prevent political mobilisation – the figure of Prometheus is not, as so many critiques of Marxism have argued, the herald of some kind of disastrous *hubris*; Prometheus is the bearer of the open question of how we, creatures that draw their breath in gasps, can manage not to be subject to the violent prerogatives of sovereignty.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> See Lacan: "Conférence à Louvain, le 13 octobre 1972" (accessed through <http://www.valas.fr/Jacques-Lacan-Conference-a-Louvain-le-13-octobre-1972,013-04.11.16>) ("you are certainly in the right to believe that you will die: it sustains you. If you did not believe it, how could you bear the life you have? If you were not firmly supported by this certainty that it would end, how could you bear all this?"). It is perhaps as much to Hegel as to Freud that Lacan owes the notion of death as the absolute master, see e.g. Huson, Timothy: "Truth and Contradiction; Reading Hegel with Lacan": *Lacan, The Silent Partners* (ed. Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2006, p. 56-78.

<sup>459</sup> Toscano: "A Plea for Prometheus", *op.cit.*, p. 254-255. Bosteels makes a similar point in relation to Badiou's concept of forcing and that which he designates as 'strong thought'. While 'strong thought' is often denounced as a paradigm of the potentially disastrous totalitarian tendencies inherent to the philosopher's position, Bosteels suggests that the true question underlying the notion of forcing concerns the question of living up to one's potential as a thinking being. See Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 174 ff.

The significance of the imagery of fire is indicated in Toscano's argument. Prometheus is not only the bearer of the open question posed by his refusal of sovereign mortality and mortal sovereignty but also the bearer of fire. More precisely, Prometheus is the subjective formation where the open question of the refusal of authority coincides with the figuration of the bearer of fire. The imagery of fire captures the point at which tragedy takes its leave from the sovereignty of death. It communicates that which Toscano has named Prometheus' "unconditional demand for emancipation."<sup>460</sup> As an unconditional demand for emancipation, the imagery of fire encompasses the Promethean figuration of both the revolting reason and the perspective of the future.

There are two key passages to quote in order to grasp how far-reaching Badiou's Promethean ethics of confidence conceives of the unconditional demand for emancipation to be. Both passages appear in the seminar of 4 Mai, 1979. The first concerns the notion of courage: "Franchir la menace de mort, laquelle n'a jamais d'autre sens que le 'n'être-plus-à-sa-place', devient la nouvelle loi, qui fait vie de la mort même."<sup>461</sup> The second concerns the notion of justice, which is defined as "*le flou des places*, le contraire, donc, de la juste place."<sup>462</sup> As the bringer of fire, Prometheus should be recognized as a figuration between courage and justice. Prometheus designates a subjective formation of the relations of courage and justice, and not the figure of another notion that operates on the same level. The two quotes provide the essential signification of the imagery of fire as a relational term: a flame is never still, and fire is the elusive and always flickering element that cannot be contained within a proper place. Fire does not only cross over the lines of demarcation between places, it crosses out and erases them. In tying courage to justice, Prometheus signals the move in which death is made life, and the non-law the new law. If the old law demands everyone to be in their proper place, and death signifies that one is no longer in one's proper place, the imagery of fire signifies the operation in which the absence *from* one's proper place is consolidated as a lasting absence *of* proper places, or a blurring of

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<sup>460</sup> Toscano: "A Plea for Prometheus", *op.cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>461</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 310 ("To surpass the menace of death, which has never had any other meaning than to 'no-longer-be-in-one's-place', becomes the new law, making life of death itself").

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312 ("*the blurring of places*, the opposite, that is, of the correct place").

places. Badiou's Promethean ethics calls for a radical demand of emancipation. It is not a matter of a simple reversal. Neither does Badiou's Promethean ethics simply ignore or dismiss the question of death. On the contrary, it confronts the impossible issue of how to render life from death. It is construed on the basis of a serious consideration of the dialectic between life and death, and Badiou's reticence against the so-called 'morbid obsession with death' in psychoanalysis concerns the latter's failure to sufficiently procure an issue from under death's sovereignty.

Prometheus underscores the emancipatory signification of the imagery of fire and its implications in relation to the question of death when he, in *Prometheus Bound*, recapitulates his conferral of fire to the human race. Prometheus explains how this act is to blame not only for "every art possessed by mortals [*πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν*]," from metallurgy and music to mathematics and medicine, but also and more importantly for having caused "blind hopes to dwell within their breasts." Once filled with blind hopes, these same mortals [*θνητοῦς*] were no longer "to foresee their doom of death [*προδέρκεσθαι μορὸν*]." <sup>463</sup> The essential lesson of this initial Promethean error concerns the 'undestination' of human being. It renders human being as undestined mortals (*ἀμοροὶ θνητοί*), if not strictly immortal mortals (*ἀθάνατοι θνητοί*), as in Heraclites. Prometheus' emphasis on the interruptive force contained in blind hope underscores this lesson: after fire, it is no longer the definite sequence of death as the limit of life that determines and sustains human being, but a sequence open to an inherently indeterminable future. Fire had been the prerogative of the immortal gods, but Prometheus awarded it to the mortal human race. The result of his conferral of fire to human mortals is nothing less than the paradoxical set comprising a multiplicity of mortal creatures no longer defined by their mortality. Instead, these mortal creatures are defined by their capacity to exceed their being, as is underscored by the coincidence of the conferral of fire and the institution of every art and faculty possessed by mortals ("they were witless erst and I made them to have sense and be endowed with reason", "though they had eyes, they saw to no avail; they had ears, but

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<sup>463</sup> Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound*, *op.cit.*, verse 506; 252 and 250, p. 259; 239 and 237 (trans. modified).

understood not").<sup>464</sup> At stake in the new configuration of undestined mortals are the capacities to reformulate the world and one's position therein. The Promethean ethics of confidence is an ethics that, under the imagery of fire, posits that the world is to be remodeled through the works of a subject. As Badiou formulates it, between the blatant appraisal of the world and its equally blatant dismissal, between the imagery of day and night, there remains the case where the world is considered as in its essence neither good nor bad, but rather as that which a subject comes to recompose through the fire of justiciary excess.<sup>465</sup> The notion of justiciary excess carries the significant weight of the imagery of fire within Badiou's Promethean ethics of confidence.

### *Criticisms*

Another look to psychoanalysis can serve to pinpoint a few distinctions that allow for a better grasp of the imagery of fire in Badiou. The questions concern the different ways the imagery of fire functions within the structural and the historical strand of the dialectic, as point and process, and how the imagery of fire relates to the problematic of the limit and that of succession. Of course, the imagery of fire is not unfamiliar to psychoanalysis. Freud let the dream of the burning son consolidate his theory of dreams as the realizations of wishes. In this dream, the burning son, already dead, approached his sleeping father and, grasping him by the arm, uttered the famous words of "*Vater, siehst du denn nicht, daß ich verbrenne?*"<sup>466</sup> To Lacan, this dream testifies to the dream's status as another reality. The reality of the dream is the reality of desire. Ultimately, the burning son signals the real of desire, the reality of the drive. The burning words of the burning son represent the impossible upon whose traumatic

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<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 443-4 and 447-8, p. 255.

<sup>465</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 336. Songe-Møller offers a very different reading of the myth of Prometheus, where the theft of fire, intended as an act to liberate the human race from the authority of Zeus, results in the introduction of death and sexuality, by way of Pandora, the first woman and cause of all ills, see Songe-Møller: *Den greske drømmen om kvinnens overflødighet*, *op.cit.*, s. 53-100. However, Pandora does not figure in Aeschylus' version of the myth, where the theft of fire, the prerogative of the gods, rather than separating gods and mortals, could be said to blur the line of separation between gods and mortals.

<sup>466</sup> See Freud: *Die Traumdeutung* [1900]: *Gesammelte Werke, Band II-III*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main] Imago Publishing, London, 1942, p. 511 ff.

encounter the father cannot but awake to another sleep, the sleep of waking life.<sup>467</sup> However, from the perspective of Badiou's *Théorie du sujet*, the mode in which the imagery of fire is addressed by psychoanalysis, through the dream, risks the representation of fire as a mere punctual occurrence within a structural repetition. The burning son grasping the father's arm designates the point of the real as a 'hitherto, but no further'. Lacan's analytic position reveals its proximity to that of Stéphane Mallarmé, as read by Badiou. Mallarmé's solution to the so-called torchbearer problematic [*le problème lampadophore*] is also structural. The poems of Mallarmé often end up in a futile reference to some remote and fixed star, either solitary or in constellation. The star is a burning point that is already there from the beginning, and signals how nothing has taken place but place itself.<sup>468</sup> As the point of a traumatic encounter with the real of desire, the imagery of fire also recedes to a mere hole, indicative, perhaps, of an inaccessible beyond. As the remote and fixed point of a structural dialectic, the imagery of fire is rendered more as a glowing ember than a living blaze, and its full transformative potential thus remains to be exploited.

I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that Badiou's criticism of the Lacanian framework and his call to surpass the menace of death and finitude has been criticized in return. In the previous section, I referred to the exaggerated death of Oedipus the Beggar and his over-the-top realization of the death drive, and I concluded that these heralded nothing essentially new. They returned to the *status quo* and buttressed Athenian prosperity. My conclusion can be criticized as well. First of all, Lacan himself never stopped to be astonished by the utter lack of conciliation in the last stance of Oedipus.<sup>469</sup> Secondly, as already mentioned, Žižek accuses Badiou for succumbing to non-thought and for being unable to appreciate the fundamentally creative potential of the death drive when he, Badiou, conflates the death drive and the *service des biens* of contemporary ethics under the single heading of the 'morbid obsession with death.' An interrogation of Žižek's criticism can highlight the

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<sup>467</sup> See Lacan: *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, p. 67 ff. See also Ragland, Ellie: "The Relation between the Voice and the Gaze": *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus), Suny Press, Albany, 1995, *op.cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>468</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, esp. p. 125-8.

<sup>469</sup> See Lacan: *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 292.



distinctive traits of Badiou's position *vis-à-vis* psychoanalysis. It can facilitate a better grasp of why and how Badiou refuses death as the determining characteristic of human being. It can also illuminate how Badiou's refusal relates to Badiou's own solution to the so-called torchbearer problematic, and how the historical strand of the dialectic strives to go beyond the punctual determination of this problematic in the structural dialectic.

In contradistinction to Badiou, Žižek explains, Lacanian psychoanalysis

does not already *posit* a 'new harmony', a new Truth-Event; it – as it were – merely wipes the slate clean for one. However, this 'merely' should be put in quotation marks, because it is Lacan's contention that, in this negative gesture of 'wiping the slate clean', something (a void) is confronted which is already 'sutured' with the arrival of a new Truth-Event. For Lacan, negativity, a negative gesture of withdrawal, precedes any positive gesture of enthusiastic identification with a Cause: negativity functions as the condition of (im)possibility of the enthusiastic identification – that is to say, it lays the ground, opens up space for it, but is simultaneously obfuscated by it and undermines it.<sup>470</sup>

Žižek continues, observing that

Lacan implicitly changes the balance between Death and Resurrection in favor of Death: what 'Death' stands for at its most radical is not merely the passing of earthly life, but the 'night of the world', the self-withdrawal, the absolute contraction of subjectivity, the severing of its links with 'reality' – *this* is the 'wiping the slate clean' that opens up the domain of the symbolic New Beginning [and] whose Freudian name is *death drive*.<sup>471</sup>

There are many bones to pick within these lines. Badiou's works do not request a 'new harmony'. Badiou's Maoist credentials consistently prevent every divergence from the principle of division, and his processual conception of truths is opposed to any simple positing or creation *ex nihilo*. However, at present I merely ask the following, namely

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<sup>470</sup> Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject*, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>471</sup> *Loc.cit.* Žižek does not discuss *Théorie du sujet* as such in this text, but primarily Badiou's reading of Saint Paul. However, Žižek nonetheless posits his criticism as a general criticism of Badiou's philosophical project.

whether or not Žižek actually misses the very point he, Žižek, is trying to address here. While Žižek insists on the gap to be maintained between the initial negative gesture of withdrawal and the prospective arrival of the new, between the preconditions for change and its effective realization, between event and truth,<sup>472</sup> I wonder whether or not he himself ends up closing up this gap.

Žižek's surprisingly explicit and all the more unwarranted contraction of truth and event in and through his capitalized notion of 'Truth-Event' is the most blatant indication that Žižek misses out on the gap between event and truth that he insists to maintain open. As Bosteels have argued, the contraction of event and truth as Truth-Event, to the extent that it is supposed to address the philosophy of Badiou, disregards Badiou's insistence on truths as always post-evental.<sup>473</sup> Kaufman performs the full conflation of the gap in question. Finding support for her claims predominantly through Žižek, Kaufman writes that the stake in Lacan "is the potential for abandoning the system, for confronting one's desire at its limits and thereby transforming everything, including the system."<sup>474</sup> Žižek's own insistence on the negativity of the death drive as the psychoanalytic concept desperately lacking in Badiou must itself be situated as the elimination of the gap between event and truth, insofar as it is Žižek's own recapitulation of the death drive that defines the so-called 'wiping clean of the slate' as effectively and always-already sutured to the arrival of the new. The limit experience is represented as if the limit experience itself was already transformative of the structures it delimits. Žižek accuses Badiou of positing a so-called 'new harmony'

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<sup>472</sup> Zupančič addresses the gap separating event and truth in her explanation of how the core of all ethics is something that is not ethical *per se* but rather of the order of an encounter, a rupture or interruption of a given structure or continuity, designated as the real in Lacan and the event in Badiou. According to Zupančič, it is a matter of an encounter with "'the impossible thing' that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe. [...] This is when ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity to what threw me 'out of joint', will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?" See Zupančič: *Ethics of the Real*, *op.cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>473</sup> The contraction of event and truth as Truth-Event by Žižek has been criticized on numerous occasions, see *e.g.* Bosteels: "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject", *op.cit.*, p. 153; and Bosteels: "Badiou without Žižek", *op.cit.*, p. 223 ff; Farran: "Alain Badiou and the 'Platonism of the Multiple' – or on What the Gesture of the Re-entanglement of Mathematics and Philosophy Implies", *op.cit.*, (no pagination); and Hoens and Pluth: "Working Through as a Truth Procedure": *Communications and Cognition*, vol. 37, no. 3/4, 2004, p. 282.

<sup>474</sup> Kaufman: "Why the Family is Beautiful", *op.cit.*, p. 145.

or a 'symbolic New Beginning' immediately and without recognizing the necessity of a negative withdrawal as the precondition for such a positing. But Žižek's accusation returns upon Žižek himself, as his recapitulation of the negativity of the death drive falls under the reverse mistake of presuming the negative gesture of wiping the slate clean as procuring automatically and immediately a symbolic new beginning, a transformation of the system as such. To Badiou, however, the problematic of the limit cannot surpass the problematic of that which is already contained within the limit, of that which the limit delimits.

Žižek misses out on the materialist dialectic of Badiou's philosophical and political projects, and how Badiou's materialist dialectic construes the problematic of succession as the crux of the subject of change. Badiou does not see a realization of change and novelty inherent to the pure gesture of negativity, neither in Antigone nor in Oedipus the Beggar. Antigone and Oedipus might open and obfuscate the space of action, as Žižek formulates it, or radiate the beauty that both grant and obstruct access to the real, as in Lacan's own readings of tragedy, but Badiou does not accept these positions or subject-formations as the last words on the subject nor as sufficient words to account for change. That does not mean that the negative gesture or the limit experience is absent from Badiou's edifice. As Bosteels argues, Badiou's move is rather to absent the inherent capacity for change from the negative gesture as such.<sup>475</sup> As Hallward writes, in Badiou, "truth is sparked by an event, but bursts into flames only through a literally endless subjective effort."<sup>476</sup> The insufficiency of the negative gesture to procure an extensive theory of the subject and to account for change is the precise reason why Badiou finds it necessary to include the dialectical integration of the Sophoclean paradigm within its Aeschylean precursor. The problematic of the limit experience is not sufficient to think the succession of radical change, and that is why Badiou supplements the concepts of anxiety and superego with those of courage and

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<sup>475</sup> See Bosteels: "Badiou without Žižek", *op.cit.*, p. 235 ff. See also Johnston, although generally more inclined towards Žižek, noting that "when Badiou, in *Théorie du sujet*, designates the subject-effect as the paradoxical unity-in-contradiction of subjectification (*i.e.* the negative gesture of withdrawal) and the subjective process (*i.e.* the positive procedure of forcing), isn't this another way of articulating the Lacanian notion of subjectivity mobilized by Žižek in his critique?" See Johnston: "There is Truth, and then there are truths – or Slavoj Žižek as a Reader of Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>476</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

justice. Through an integrated notion of tragedy, Badiou aims for a theory of the real not only as the impasse of formalization but also as the passing in force of the subject, as noted by Bosteels.<sup>477</sup> Badiou supplements the structural dialectic with its historical other, psychoanalysis with Marxism, aiming to expand the conceptualization of the real that is ours beyond the real of sexual difference, so as to also comprise the real of class antagonism. Integrating tragedy, the dialectic, sexual difference, and class struggle in the figure of a Prometheus and an ethics of confidence, Badiou aims for a comprehensive theory of the subject that will be able to account for processes of radical change and true novelty.

### *Sex and Class*

Reading tragedy is a way to address the real of sexual difference and class antagonism. Bosteels notes that Badiou's alignment of sex and class as real precedes by several years similar appropriations where the Lacanian edifice is conceived as key to thinking radical politics, such as Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) and Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989).<sup>478</sup> Lacan prefigures such appropriations in his own seminars when he compares his relation to Freud with that of Lenin to Marx,<sup>479</sup> or when he elaborates on the theory of discourses to encompass a nascent notion of the capitalist's discourse.<sup>480</sup> My questions concern how Badiou's elaboration of the real as pertaining to both sex and class differs from other elaborations of the same (Žižek, Zupančič, and Copjec), as far as its effects on the notion of the real itself is concerned. Bosteels focuses on Badiou's concept of forcing,

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<sup>477</sup> See Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>478</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 86; and Bosteels: "Translator's Introduction": *Theory of the Subject* (trans. Bruno Bosteels), Continuum, New York, 2009, p. xv. While *Théorie du sujet* was published in 1982 and thus respectively three and seven years prior to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and *The Sublime Object*, the seminar session in which Badiou's elaboration on the sex-class alignment is initiated was presented on January 10th, 1977.

<sup>479</sup> See *e.g.* Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>480</sup> See Lacan: *L'Énvers de la psychanalyse*, p. 31 ff: and Lacan: "Du discours psychanalytique", *op.cit.*, p. 40. Stretching the matters, one might propose that Freud himself indicated this direction in his introduction to *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, when he argued for the reciprocal inclusion of individual and group psychology within each other, see Freud: *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* [1921]; *Gesammelte Werke, Band XIII*, [S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main] Imago Publishing, London, 1940, p. 73.

how "truth, in order to be effective in a situation, must be forced,"<sup>481</sup> which enables him to pinpoint the singularity of Badiou's position *vis-à-vis* the late master Lacan and fellow travellers in contemporary radical thinking. The concept of forcing opposes the tendency to identify truth with the structural impasse of the situation, as its constitutive outside. Identified with a structural impasse, truth is quenched before it even begins to see the light of day, Bosteels writes. The notion of truth as a structural impasse equals "the suspension of all truth as an effective process," and evacuates "the idea of a situation that is historical and not purely structural or statelike."<sup>482</sup> The questions are how the introduction of a historical dialectic in pair with its structural other affects the notion of the real, and how this bifurcated dialectic operates in Badiou's refusal of the determining functions of death and mortality.

Copjec reserves the status of the real for sex alone. To Copjec, sexual difference is to be distinguished from other differences inscribed in the symbolic, such as race, ethnicity and class, insofar as only the failure of its inscription is inscribed in the symbolic.<sup>483</sup> Copjec appears to be an exception. In contrast, the premise of Žižek's work is a basic homology between sexual difference and class antagonism. The interpretative procedures of Marx and Freud are considered as not merely similar but formally the same, as he repeatedly writes.<sup>484</sup> Zupančič makes the point more succinctly. She observes in Lacan a resolute adherence to "the sexual as the concept of a radical ontological impasse."<sup>485</sup> The sexual as real becomes the name of an ontological impasse, and designates a purely empty meaning. The sexual as real is purely formal, and in want of proper delimitation. An indefinite expansion of the field of the sexual is only to be expected from that moment on, as an indefinite expansion is inherent to the very definition of the sexual as lacking in delimitation. As one with the discursive order, the non-relation of the sexual provides "a conceptual model for thinking of a non-relation as dictating the conditions of different kinds of ties, also

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<sup>481</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>483</sup> See Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>484</sup> See e.g. Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op.cit.*, p. 3; Žižek: "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!": *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality; Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2000, p. 113-114; and Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 800.

<sup>485</sup> Zupančič: *Why Psychoanalysis*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

social ties."<sup>486</sup> On the basis of the conceptual model of the sexual non-relation, the notion of the proletariat as not just another class among classes can be elaborated on, so as to make of the proletariat the symptomatic point at which the non-relation underpinning capitalist production is realized, in a manner similar to how feminine *jouissance* pinpoints the non-all character of the Other, as its symptomatic or constitutive lack. The contrast of Žižek and Zupančič to Copjec is superficial. Copjec admits the ontological portents of the Freudian discovery and how its theory of the drive replaces "the conceptual categories that define being, for example, in Kant."<sup>487</sup> In any case, the crucial and shared point is their recognition of how the non-relation does not constitute an underlying obstacle to the formations of the many failed concrete relations in reality but, on the contrary, as the guarantee that maintains the space in which the negotiations of relations are made possible in the first place. The crucial point for Žižek, Zupančič, and Copjec remains the appreciation of the real of the non-relation as "that which takes place and holds open the space of human action,"<sup>488</sup> regardless of whether the non-relation is explicitly designated as appertaining to sex or class, or both.

Copjec and Žižek's joint attack on Butler is underpinned by the real as the guarantee for the space of action. Their joint attack is fixed on Butler's misreading of the Lacanian real as "an ahistorical, frozen opposition, fixed as a non-negotiable framework,"<sup>489</sup> and the limitations of Butler's consequent historicist-deconstructive construal of the possibility of ethical and political interventions. Insofar as sex is real, Copjec writes, sex is not so much to be grasped as an incomplete or unstable meaning, perpetually in motion, as Butler suggests. Rather sex designates the impossibility of completing meaning, the structural incompleteness of language, and the contradictions of the logic of the signifier itself. Sex as real thus testifies to the fundamental incalculability of the subject that alone can guarantee its space of action.<sup>490</sup> To Žižek, "far from constraining the variety of sexual arrangements in advance, the Real of

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<sup>486</sup> Zupančič: "Sexual is Political?": *Jacques Lacan; Between Psychoanalysis and Politics* (ed. Samo Tomšič and Andreja Zevnik), Routledge, London/New York, 2016, p. 89.

<sup>487</sup> Copjec: *Imagine there's no Woman*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>488</sup> Copjec: "The Sexual Compact", *op.cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>489</sup> See Žižek: "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!", *op.cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>490</sup> See Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 19 ff.

sexual difference is the traumatic cause which sets their contingent proliferation in motion."<sup>491</sup> The real becomes the precondition for hegemonic negotiations rather than a specific hegemonic expression, whether absolute or consolidated through use and time. Failing to appreciate the real in such a sense, Copjec and Žižek argue, Butler risks the subordination of the subject to the whims of the symbolic order and the categories already in operation within any given discourse. Butler risks, in other words, the closure of the space of action.

If Butler tends to misread the Lacanian real, the criticism concerning how she thus closes up the space of action can be applied upon Copjec and Žižek's criticisms in return. Their more nuanced readings of Lacan that conceive of the impossible real as the precondition for ethical and political interventions might be an improvement, but they nonetheless leave the question of the intervention as such in abeyance. These criticisms of Butler tend to reduce truth to its eventual precondition, presuming that the negative gesture of wiping the slate clean is already providing the immediate transformation of the system and a new beginning. Butler raises a similar objection against Žižek. She admits that

what remains less clear to me is how one moves beyond such a dialectical reversal or impasse [that is the impossible real] to something new. How would the new be produced from an analysis of the social field that remains restricted to inversions, aporias and reversals that work regardless of time and place? Do these reversals produce something other than their own structurally identical repetitions?<sup>492</sup>

Žižek's reply to Butler's criticism is mainly made by pointing to the Lacanian act as "the radical transformation of the very universal structuring 'principle' of the existing symbolic order."<sup>493</sup> His reply is not entirely convincing, insofar as it merely repeats

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<sup>491</sup> Žižek: "Holding the Place": *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality; Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2000, p. 310.

<sup>492</sup> Butler: "Restaging the Universal": *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality; Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2000, p. 29.

<sup>493</sup> Žižek: "Da Capo Senza Fine": *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality; Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek), Verso Books, London/New York, 2000, p. 220.

that which is the crux of Butler's objection. Butler's questions are not dissimilar in their content and aim to the objections that Badiou raises in his call to traverse the Lacanian framework. Badiou's objections can be reduced to the following, namely that a guarantee for a space of action does not in and by itself guarantee action, or, more precisely, that a theoretical adumbration of such a space does not in and by itself add up to a theory of action as such. As Bosteels notes, an event is not yet a truth.<sup>494</sup> Badiou intervenes into this conundrum when he elaborates on the contradiction that pits space and action, or place and force, against each other. Badiou's question is how to articulate the logic of places with the logic of forces.<sup>495</sup> In Badiou's red-years-philosophy, the problematic of the space of action is exposed to the operation of division, and the contradiction of place and force composes the decisive problem of the dialectic.

At this point, the singularity of Badiou's position on the real of sex and class is possible to isolate *vis-à-vis* his fellow travellers of radical thinking. Žižek operates according to the definite homology between sex and class. He conceives of the mechanisms underlying both sets of differences as formally the same, where sex functions in the same manner as class, as the non-relation that defines its own space of definition, as "the difference [that] paradoxically precedes the two terms whose difference it is."<sup>496</sup> In Žižek's case, it is difficult to surmise whether his propositions on sex are contributions to the clarification of class issues, or *vice versa*. In Badiou's case, on the other hand, the strict reliance on a homology or isomorphism between sex and class, between Freud and Marx or between Lacan and Lenin and Mao, is denied. To Badiou, it is not a question of treating the problem of the revolution as formally the

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<sup>494</sup> See also Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>495</sup> See Badiou: "Théorie de la contradiction", *op.cit.*, p. 70. To be fair, in this context, both Butler and Badiou relate primarily to the structuralist Lacan of the 50s and 60s, to whom the focus on the symbolic order carries the main weight, whereas Copjec and Žižek turn to the later Lacan *post 68*, to whom there has already taken place a turn towards the real. Badiou admits that there is a positive trend in this development in Lacan's teaching, without it solving all his issues. Badiou nonetheless refrains from a more thorough interrogation of the later Lacan in his *Théorie du sujet*, see e.g. Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>496</sup> Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 780. Bosteels has suggested to read Žižek in the direction of a resolute post-Marxism in this context, where sex is the cause of a more primordial deadlock, the real to which even class distinctions is secondary [*private communication*]. Bosteels' objection is valid, but it does not undermine my main point that the operation of the real in sex and class is considered by Žižek as a formal homology.



same or just like that of the cure, even if certain similarities are acknowledged. Rather, sex and class are brought together in a double-edged provocation. When Badiou conjoins sex and class as the real that is ours, it is to address equally the need to ameliorate the current state of revolutionary theory through the teachings of Lacan as well as the inverse, the need to overcome the shortcomings and deadlocks of the Lacanian framework so as to develop an effective revolutionary practice.

It is a question, Badiou writes, of perceiving that in Lacan which Lacan himself has failed to perceive. Lacan has failed to perceive the full effect of the supplementation of a lack-in-being [*manque-à-être*] with the being of lack [*l'être-du-manque*].<sup>497</sup> As Bosteels explains, Lacan has failed to perceive the full effect of the supplementation of "the thought of the causal efficiency of lack with the consistent recomposition of the being of this lack."<sup>498</sup> In one of the relatively few crystalline formulations of the stakes involved in his confrontation with the Lacanian edifice to be found in *Théorie du sujet*, Badiou provides a clarification of his own materialist dialectic. The materialist dialectic, he writes, is the attempt to think together the two definitions of the subject as "une répétition consistante où le réel ex-siste" and as "une consistance destructrice, où le réel ex-cède."<sup>499</sup> In the structural dialectic, the impossible real is first perceived as the difference that paradoxically precedes the two terms whose difference it is, holding open the space of action and the placement of force. Badiou's stance supplements the structural dialectic with its historical other, in a materialist dialectic that expands on the first impossible real so as to also comprise the difference that exceeds the differences of the terms it defines, as a consequent destruction of space or a forcing of place.

These operations underscoring Badiou's materialist dialectic make sense in light of the reason of revolt already discussed, that is, in the sense of the qualitative heterogeneity of the antagonistic contradiction. The one term (the proletariat) can only be affirmed in and through the destruction of its other (the bourgeoisie), in both its material and its support, simultaneously implying the destruction of the first term itself

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<sup>497</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>498</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>499</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 255 ("a consistent repetition where the real ex-sists" and "a destructive consistency where the real ex-ceeds").

(the proletariat as class). Whereas Žižek tends to refer the impossible object of the non-relation to either the figure of the Jew or the *Lumpenproletariat*, as phantasmatic objects carrying the weight of class antagonism,<sup>500</sup> Badiou writes that the only historical mode of existence for class relations as antagonistic is the mode of existence that answers to the name of revolution. The only mode in which class antagonism comes to exist is by way of "*la destruction de ce qui n'était pas*,"<sup>501</sup> or, again, "la mesure de sujet exige que la stricte logique du horlieu, régie [...] par la causalité du manque, s'excède dans la *destruction du lieu*."<sup>502</sup> More precisely, the only mode of existence for class antagonism is a revolution as the destruction of the unity of place or the symbolic order, insofar as such a unity is that which has never been the case in the first place. Prometheus, like an ancient revolutionary, returns at this point. His persistent error demonstrates the principle of the symbolic space as not one but two.

The psychoanalytic take on sexual matters can only contribute up to a certain point, namely that of the lack-in-being of the structural dialectic, after which psychoanalysis maroons and ethics takes over,<sup>503</sup> Badiou writes in *Théorie du sujet*. Decades later, in *Conditions*, Badiou will refuse the phallic function as alone sufficient to account for the full affirmative force of the actual infinite.<sup>504</sup> In *Conditions*, Badiou calls for the supplementation of the phallic function with a generic multiple. In *Théorie du sujet*, he will call for the supplementation of class to sex, of Marx and Mao to Freud and Lacan, in order to account for the historical strand of the dialectic and for the requirements needed for the real destruction of the unity of place. "Historiquement," he writes, "là où advient un sujet [...] se tient véritablement ce dont Lacan nie l'existence: un autre de l'Autre, d'où ce qui valait comme premier Autre n'est plus qu'un mode inéclairé du Même."<sup>505</sup> The gist of Badiou's Maoist credentials concerns the significance of the dialectical principles of 'reason in revolt' and 'one divides into

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<sup>500</sup> See Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 801.

<sup>501</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 146 ("the destruction of that which was not").

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149 ("the measure of the subject demands that the strict logic of the outplace, managed through the causality of lack, is exceeded in *the destruction of the place*").

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>504</sup> See Badiou: "Sujet et infini", *op.cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>505</sup> Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 173 ("historically, at the place where a subject arrives is held in truth that which Lacan denies to exist: an other of the Other, from which that which passes under the first Other is no more but an obfuscated mode of the Same").

two'. This significance culminates in the notion of an other of the Other, a Trans-Other. By the principles of the Maoist dialectic, the subject is conceived of

comme division, selon l'excès, de l'ordre symbolique – de l'espace – où cet excès s'implace. D'où s'éclaire qu'un sujet politique n'advient qu'en nouant à la révolte une consistance de révolution, [...] faisant procès réel de ce que tout ordre, tout principe de commandement légal, si stable qu'il paraisse, a pour devenir de se diviser. L'Autre doit laisser venir sa propre scission en cet Autre inouï qu'il n'était pas, et ce Même dont il n'avait jamais prescrit l'identité.<sup>506</sup>

Whereas Lacan isolated the hole in the Other and thus denied the Other's consistency, Badiou's notion of a Trans-Other affirms the only possible consistency to be the consistency of contradictions.<sup>507</sup> Bosteels refers it to "the force of non-law."<sup>508</sup> The crucial point is that the Trans-Other does not plug up the hole in the Other so as to guarantee the unity of its space. On the contrary, it denies the unity of its space by affirming another Other in opposition to the first. The notion of the Trans-Other designates the moment where the unity of place becomes subject to division and the subject comes to be through the division of the unity of place. The full signification of the Promethean imagery of fire is found in the realization of the divisions in question, in the consistency of contradictions under the emblem of the Trans-Other. It ties courage to justice under the formation of confidence.

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<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177 ("as division, according to the excess, of the symbolic order – of the space – where this excess is in-placed. Thus is explained that a political subject does not arrive except by tying to the revolt a revolution's consistency, [...] making a real process of the fact that every order, every principle of legal commandment, however stable it might appear, must, in order to develop, be divided. The Other must let come its own scission into this unheard of Other that it was not and this Same of which it has never prescribed the identity").

<sup>507</sup> Badiou's polemic against the Althusserian take on ideology is no doubt to be read into the notion of the Trans-Other, together with the criticism directed at the Lacanian position. In short, to Badiou the Maoist *post* May 68, ideology is never one but two, the dominant ideology of the dominant classes and the adversary ideology in opposition to the dominant ideology, the ideology of the progressive classes. For Badiou's polemic against the Althusserian theory of ideology, see Badiou and Balmès: "De l'idéologie", *op.cit.*, esp. p. 106 ff.

<sup>508</sup> Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 101 ff.

### *Justiciary Fire*

The question is how to read the imagery of fire in Badiou's Promethean ethics of confidence. Miller's choice for the frontispiece of Lacan's *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse* provides an entry into this matter. Miller's choice is Man Ray's *Portrait du marquis de Sade* (1938), an image that depicts an obese and brick-worked de Sade in profile, contemplating a burning Bastille in the background.<sup>509</sup> Man Ray's painting seems to unwittingly reproduce Badiou's contention with the limitations of the Lacanian framework. The image of a burning Bastille is, of course, the prototypical image of how (to again borrow Hallward's formulation) the spark of an event quite literally bursts into the flames of an all-out revolutionary sequence. A burning Bastille is an exemplar of Revolution as such, of the shattering transformations of the fundamental relations constitutive of a society. But the significations of this image can be pursued further, giving the image its full poetical weight. The Bastille does not only serve as an epitome of the brutality and terror suffered under the naked commandments of a sovereign monarchy. It also serves as an epitome of the sovereign monarchy's constitutive outside. The inside of the walls of the Bastille holds nothing but inexistents and remainders, the elements excluded from the symbolic order and confined to the unoccupiable place of no-place or out-place [*hors-lieu*]. Like so many modern day versions of Antigone entombed, disposed between two deaths, the exclusion of the living dead inside the walls of the Bastille serves as the guarantee of order in *L'Ancien Régime*.

But come Prometheus the fire-bearer to set the Bastille ablaze, and no longer will it be the Bastille of *L'Ancien Régime* that consumes its subjects but rather its subjects that consume *L'Ancien Régime* and the Bastille. Come Prometheus the fire-bearer, and – in line with Badiou's first attempt at a formalized definition of the distinction between the tragic paradigms of Sophocles and Aeschylus – no longer will it be a subject divided at the hands of its truth, the instance of castration (*V/S*), but

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<sup>509</sup> It can be noted that Man Ray produced several version of his portrait of de Sade, but with some crucial differences in the motif: one alternative version shows the same obese and brick-worked marquis in profile, but this time against the background not of a burning Bastille but of a Bastille under seeming reconstruction, or a Bastille still intact.

rather the truth, the castrating instance, divided at the hands of the subject ( $S/\mathcal{A}$ ).<sup>510</sup> To get at the crux of that which these formalizations convey, yet another effort to appreciate the image of the burning Bastille should be made. The image of the burning Bastille testifies to the basic quality of fire as impossible to contain within a proper place, just as Badiou defines justice to be essentially a blurring of places and the exact opposite of the proper place, to which the superego strives to confine its unruly excess. Having first set the Bastille ablaze, the rest is history, as the saying goes. Soon all France would find itself in flames, an inferno from which another France would present and manifest itself.

The remarkable point is that it is the Bastille, *i.e.* the unoccupiable place, which is torched. In the same manner, Prometheus makes his predicament the means to escape his bondage, his chains his way to freedom. Both acts reintroduce within the old unified totality the remainder whose exclusion had guaranteed the same old unified totality; the forced existence of the inexistent element that disrupts and destroys the structures that depended on its inexistence. The real, which formerly ex-sisted in consistent repetition, is reintroduced, by the occupation of the unoccupiable place, to exceed in and as destructive consistency: Forcing the existence of the inexistent, occupying the unoccupiable place, setting the Bastille ablaze, these are all so many operations to name the spark of an event as it bursts into the flames of a revolutionary sequence. The flames thus lit cannot be contained but exceed (as fires do) the initial place of no-place, the out-place, and intrude into the neighboring places, ultimately erasing every proper place as such in an all-out blurring of places. The imagery of fire is a less abstract way of thinking the mathematical concept of a generic multiple: uncontained, unrestrained, a little bit of everything, a little bit of every place – demonstratively installing, as Badiou reflects another saying of Mao's, disorder on earth.<sup>511</sup>

As the bringer of fire, Prometheus should be recognized as a subjective formation of the relations between courage and justice. A Promethean ethics of confidence is an ethics of the move from the old law where everyone is in their proper

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<sup>510</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>511</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 287.

place to the new law of the non-law, as a lasting absence of proper places or the blurring of places. Prometheus' call for radical emancipation implies such a move. But a notion of justice as the blurring of places is a somewhat counter-intuitive notion. It is easily misconstrued. For instance, Žižek admits that he is confused by Badiou's grouping of justice as one of the four fundamental concepts of the subject (anxiety, superego, courage, and justice). Žižek suggests the notion of enthusiasm in its place, arguing that enthusiasm is a better fit for that which he perceives as 'the emotional responses' or 'affects' caused by an evental encounter.<sup>512</sup> In bringing this chapter to a close, I will therefore try to clear up some of the confusions and misconstruals too easily affixed to the notion of justice in Badiou's work – namely justice's assumed sentimental, legal and, lastly, terminal status.

Already in his appreciation of Badiou's four fundamental concepts of the subject as affects or emotional responses to an evental encounter does Žižek show his misconceptions. Here is how Žižek represents the notions of courage and justice, referring to Aeschylus' play *The Suppliants* (n.d.):

The 'suppliants' are the fifty daughters of Danaus; they arrive at Argos fleeing the fifty sons of King Aegyptus [...]. The king of Argos is reluctant to accept them, fearing the wrath of Aegyptus and war with Egypt; however, the popular assembly of the city overrules him and the suppliants are given shelter. What the people display here is courage (risking war with Egypt) and a sense of justice (protecting the 'suppliants' from their brutal fate).<sup>513</sup>

It is precisely not as 'a sense' or 'a feeling' that justice is operative in *Théorie du sujet*, if such a sense implies an intuitive compassion or affective sentiment for protecting the innocent from slaughter, just as little as courage concerns the simple risk of war and death. Rather, the popular assembly of Argos displays courage and justice by overruling the king and including the excluded in the midst of their city. The popular assembly thereby denies the proper disposition of places under the king and takes up

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<sup>512</sup> See Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 834.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 833.

the same precarious position as the suppliant maiden refugees, assuming and holding the no-place or out-place into a lasting blurring of places.

Žižek seems to have failed to do his homework properly, but his misprisions offer an opportunity for further clarification of the blurring of places involved here. In a footnote, Žižek writes that

Badiou sometimes proposes 'justice' as the Master-Signifier that should replace all-too-heavily ideological invested notions like 'freedom' or 'democracy' – but do we not encounter the same problem with justice? Plato (Badiou's main reference) determines justice as the state in which every particular determination occupies its proper place within its totality, within the global social order. Is this not the corporatist, anti-egalitarian motto *par excellence*? A lot of additional explanation is thus needed if 'justice' is to be elevated into the Master-Signifier of radical emancipatory politics."<sup>514</sup>

An affirmative answers to the rhetorical question raised here (yes, justice is corporatist) is possible only by ignoring the already comprehensive amount of extant 'additional explanation' that prevents the notion of justice as it is operative in Badiou's work to be even remotely like a corporatist, anti-egalitarian determination of everything according to its proper place. A similar short-cut underscores Žižek's ruminations on whether "this new Law imposed by Athena [is not] the patriarchal Law based on the repression of what then returns as obscene superego fury."<sup>515</sup> Also with this question does Žižek simply ignore how Badiou's *Théorie du sujet* elaborates on the justice figured by Athena as nothing less than the radical emancipation from the patriarchal Law, as a negative of a corporatist and anti-egalitarian imposition of proper places.

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<sup>514</sup> *Loc.cit.*, fn. 41.

<sup>515</sup> Žižek: "From Purification to Subtraction", *op.cit.*, p. 172. For another reading of Aeschylus' *The Eumenides* and the figure of Athena that would be more in line with Žižek's proposed rendition the new law, focused on Athena as the most masculine of goddesses, born as she was from the forehead of her father, Zeus, and thus as a prime figure for the repression of the feminine and the importance of maternity through the imposition of the patriarchal law, see *e.g.* Irigaray: *Amante marine de Friedrich Nietzsche*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1980; and Irigaray: *Le Corps à corps avec la mère*, Éditions de la Pleine Lune, Montréal, 1981.

Badiou's notion of justice is, in other words, the negative of the Law and the imposition of proper places. As the negative of the Law, I argue, Badiou's notion of justice also escapes reduction to a mere affective sentiment. In other words, it is the too lawlike interpretation of justice that causes its affective or intuitive misconstrual as 'a sense of justice'. The underlying principle of both the too lawlike or juridical notion of justice and the intuitive sense of justice is the principle of a 'to each, her or his own'. It is the principle of rights, and of the proper disposition of right and wrong. In contradistinction to such a legal definition, the principle underlying the illegal, revolting notion of justice found in Badiou is a 'nothing shall be all'. It is not a principle of rights and of the proper disposition of right and wrong, but of reason as a scission in the principle of rights, and of an indistinction in every proper disposition.

In any case, Athena's figuration of justice is not rendered in the content of her decision, but in its structure or formal quality. As the story goes, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to secure good winds on his way to Troy; thus his wife Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon upon his return; thus their son Orestes murders Clytemnestra; thus the Erinnyes are to murder Orestes. But Athena intervenes, installs a tribunal, and casts the decisive vote in favor of Orestes. She thereby absolves him of his matricidal guilt and delivers him from certain death at the hands of the bloodthirsty goddesses of vengeance. The crux of Athena's decision is not whether or not Orestes was in the right and his absolution thus juridically sound. Instead, Athena's decision concerns the absence of any parameters by which to affirm or deny the legal justification of her decision: as the vote of the Athenian tribunal comes out square, the distribution of proper places and the delimitation of right and wrong, good and evil, disintegrates. An inherent undecidability, the absolute equity of numbers renders the crux of Athena's decision to be its radical redefinition of that which a decision can be, Badiou writes, namely as a scission in the essence of the Law [*le Droit*].<sup>516</sup> Read solely for the contents of her decision, Athena would simply signal the operation of a reversal of places, a simple break with the old laws of blood and vengeance through the installation of a new law that privileges the rights of the father over those of the mother. On the other hand, the formal quality that displays the notion

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<sup>516</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 182.



of justice at stake in her figuration, I claim, is comprised by the redefinition of her decision as a scission in the essence of the Law. That is to say, the formal quality of Athena's decision comprises a blurring of places as caused by a scission in the very order and property of any ordered and proper distribution of places as such.

Perhaps the confusions and misconstruals that stick to Badiou's notion of justice have their cause in the assumption that justice designates, as Žižek reports of the Platonist reference above, a state, or a state of being. But Badiou's notion of justice does not designate a state, a terminus. It is not the end result of a laborious struggle finally brought to conclusion, not a popular army conquering the capital after 20 years of revolutionary war and installing a new harmony to last for a 1000 years, as in another *Jérusalem Céleste*. In Badiou's terminology, justice designates a so-called subjective process, as does the superego, to be differentiated from the subjectivizations involved in anxiety and courage. In other words, justice is one moment in the double dialectic of the subject, whose forced divisions and redivisions under and over the structures of places are continuous.

The notion of justice might remain elusive in its metaphorical figuration through Athena as well as in its abstract conceptualization as the scission in the essence of the Law. Here justice can be indicated only by the dissolution of the lines of demarcation and the disposition of values such as right and wrong, good and evil. But justice also carries a more concrete and practical signification in the field of politics, for the subject of politics itself. In its practical mode of expression, the notion of justice as the blurring of places is easy and straightforward. It can be understood on the basis of Badiou's recollection of his own experiences in the wake of May 68. The proper lesson of Badiou's Damascene moment, as recalled in *L'Hypothèse communiste*, is not the student rebellions, the general strikes, or the sexual liberations, but the elaboration of a new vision of politics, Badiou writes. It was a lesson first intimated to Badiou at the gates of the Chausson factory:

Ce qui se passait là, à la porte de l'usine Chausson, était tout à fait invraisemblable, inimaginable une semaine avant. Le solide dispositif syndical et partidaire tenait en général les ouvriers, les jeunes, les intellectuels, fermement enfermés dans leurs organisations respectives. [...] Dans la situation du moment, ce dispositif se

fissurait sous nos yeux. [...] Nous comprenons à ce moment, sans tout à fait encore le comprendre, là, devant l'usine Chausson, que si une politique d'émancipation nouvelle est possible, elle sera un bouleversement des classifications sociales, elle ne consistera pas à organiser chacun à sa place, elle organisera au contraire des déplacements, matériels et mentaux, foudroyants.<sup>517</sup>

In its concrete expression as the practice of the subject of politics, justice designates the simple yet significant displacement of material and mental forces, across all positions and classifications. Sparked by the unprecedented and eventual encounter of workers, students, and intellectuals meeting up beyond their traditionally determined places at the factory gates, the subjective figuration of Prometheus ties the momentous courage of stepping out and crossing over beyond one's place, of taking up position in the no-place or out-place, onto the continued process of dissolutions and upheaval of traditional dispositions of places that is the fire of justice.

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<sup>517</sup> Badiou: *L'Hypothèse communiste, op.cit.*, p. 50-51 ("That which took place there, at the gates of the Chausson factory, was completely unlikely, unimaginable a week before. The strong syndicalist and party political disposition in general held the workers, the young, the intellectuals firmly enclosed in their respective organisations. [...] In the situation of the moment, this disposition was breaking up in front of our eyes. [...] We understood at that moment, there, in front of the Chausson factory, without really understanding it yet, that if a new emancipatory politics was possible, it would be an upheaval of the social classifications, it would not consist in organizing each according to her or his place, it would on the contrary organize overwhelming displacements, both material and mental").

**(IV)**

**Paradoxes of Totality from  
Antiphilosophy to a Philosophy to Come**

Having gone through Badiou's red years philosophy and his mathematical gesture of the late 80s, the question is still how an analysis of the mark of sexual matters can illuminate the significance of the traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy in and for Badiou's thinking the subject of politics and the possibilities of change. In this chapter, I interrogate how the function of the feminine other is operative in Badiou's conception of antiphilosophy in greater detail. In *L'Être et l'événement*, there is only a brief reference to antiphilosophy. Here Badiou refers to Lacan's conferral of the philosopher's attempt at speculative totalization to the imaginary domain,<sup>518</sup> whereas antiphilosophy would avoid such speculative totalization. Antiphilosophy first becomes an operative concept for Badiou in *Conditions*. His interrogations of the concept culminate in a four-year seminar, from 1992 to 1994, dedicated to the antiphilosophy of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Lacan, and Saint Paul.<sup>519</sup> Here Badiou develops a conceptualization of antiphilosophy of his own, expanding beyond the term's particular Lacanian references. There are many others who have elaborated on Lacan's revitalization of antiphilosophy, notably Jean-Claude Milner, François Regnault, and Colette Soler,<sup>520</sup> but there are few substantial indications for a definition of antiphilosophy in Lacan. According to Milner, the term occurs but twice in Lacan,

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<sup>518</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>519</sup> See Badiou: *Saint Paul; La Fondation de l'universalisme*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1997; Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, Nous, Paris, 2009; Badiou: *Le Séminaire: Lacan, L'antiphilosophie 3* (1994-1995)(ed. Véronique Pineau), Fayard, Paris, 2013; and Badiou: *Le Séminaire: Nietzsche, L'antiphilosophie 1* (1992-1993)(ed. Véronique Pineau), Fayard, Paris, 2015.

<sup>520</sup> For discussions of these readings of Lacan's negation of philosophy, including Badiou's own, see Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 155-187; see also Johnston: "This Philosophy which is not One; Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian Antiphilosophy": *S; Journal of the Jan Van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, vol. 3, 2010, p. 137-158. See also Clemens: *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy*, *op.cit.*, p. 1-16; and Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 839 ff.

in "Peut-être à Vincennes" and the brief text of "Monsieur A".<sup>521</sup> Lacan lists antiphilosophy together with the study of linguistics, logic, and topology, as required components in any training of psychoanalysts, while he affirms that he, as an antiphilosopher, rebels against philosophy.<sup>522</sup> Regnault suggests that Lacan's rebellion is aimed at the anti-Oedipal philosophy of Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in particular, as well as at traditional systematic ontologies as theories of everything.<sup>523</sup> Soler shows how the term originates within the catholic-conservative reaction to the reason of *les philosophes des Lumières*. Against the liberated reason of Jean-Baptiste Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophie* (1764), the abbot Louis Mayeul Chaudon would celebrate the revelatory truths of religious authority in his own *Dictionnaire antiphilosophique* (1767).<sup>524</sup> Soler accentuates how antiphilosophy entails a devaluation of thinking, affirmed in Lacan's attention to the automatism of the signifier as well as in his recourse to mathematics, as the science without consciousness. Similarly, Milner conceives of antiphilosophy as another name for the matheme, the epitome of Lacan's late teachings.<sup>525</sup> With Badiou, however, the term gains in momentum as a matter confronting the philosopher, as a matter to be traversed by philosophy.

My point of entry will be a curious passage where Badiou determines misogyny as a distinctive criterion of antiphilosophy. The antiphilosopher points to a feminine remainder of the philosophical projects, accessible only through a radical act. Badiou effectively posits Lacan as a double exception: as one excepted from the distinctive criterion of misogyny, and as the one exception that brings contemporary antiphilosophy to a close. I suggest a closer reading of this curious passage as a means to clarify the mechanisms involved in Badiou's conceptualization of antiphilosophy. Specifically, my questions concern the significance of misogyny in Badiou's conception of antiphilosophy and its philosophical other, as well as the significance of Lacan's double exception in and for another philosophy to come after Lacan. These

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<sup>521</sup> See Milner, Jean-Claude: *L'Œuvre claire; Lacan, la science, la philosophie*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1995, p. 146.

<sup>522</sup> See Lacan: "Peut-être à Vincennes" [1975]: *Autres écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2001, p. 314; and Lacan: "Monsieur A": *Ornicar?*, no. 21-22, 1980, p. 17.

<sup>523</sup> See Regnault, François: "L'Antiphilosophie selon Lacan": *Conférences d'esthétique lacanienne*, Agalma, Paris, 1997, p. 61; 73. See also Žižek: *The Ticklish Subject*, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

<sup>524</sup> See Soler, Colette: "Lacan en antiphilosophie": *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2006, p. 121.

<sup>525</sup> See Milner: *L'Œuvre claire*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

questions leads through Badiou's conceptions of the antiphilosophies of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, to Lacan, but the overall problematic concerns speculative totalizations and delimitations of thinking, from which the feminine remainder is construed. The problematic of totalization and delimitation also determine the phenomena-noumenon distinction and the antinomies of reason in the critical philosophy of Kant, and the incompleteness theorem of Gödel's meta-mathematical logic. If the construction of a One-All is an impossibility and the possibilities of radical change depend upon such an impossibility – as Badiou and the antiphilosophers agree – the question is how the antiphilosophical and the philosopher's approach to such an impossibility differ. Badiou's mathematical gesture is decisive in this regard, as it allows Badiou to challenge the antiphilosopher's key moment of an inaccessible or unthinkable remainder. Overall, it is not merely an issue of how a traversal of antiphilosophy allows Badiou's philosophical works to think the preconditions and the possibilities of radical change and true novelty anew, but the more fundamental question of the preconditions and possibilities for thinking change and novelty – or for thinking *as* change and novelty. The crucial dispute between Badiou and his antiphilosophical others is whether or not change can be thought, philosophically, or if it is granted solely in and through the radical, antiphilosophical act.

### *A Double Exception*

How does Badiou posit Lacan as a double exception in relation to contemporary antiphilosophy? Bosteels comes close to this question. In "Radical Antiphilosophy", Bosteels enumerates on the four invariant traits of contemporary antiphilosophy in Badiou's conception. The four invariant traits answer to the labels of nominalism, sophistry or 'sophistics', mysticism, and radicalism: firstly, the antiphilosopher assumes that being is coextensive with language or that ontology equals grammar; secondly, truth is considered the product of linguistic constructions, as a simple rhetorical effect; thirdly, the antiphilosopher subscribes to the idea of a beyond-of-language, a remainder that escapes the grasp of words, and; fourthly, the remainder is considered to be accessible only through a radical act and never through thinking or

language alone. The act is the only recourse to the real. Antiphilosophy performs its part in the tension between these four invariants. A fifth wheel is supplemented to this four-wheeled vehicle, namely the antiphilosopher's subjective investment. It is exigent for the antiphilosopher to be personally involved in his enunciations, and to vouch for his project through his own existence.<sup>526</sup> The antiphilosopher shares the first two traits of nominalism and sophistics with the sophist. The latter traits of the mystical remainder, the radical act, and the subjective investment are proper to the antiphilosopher. As Bosteels notes, it was the insistence of these latter traits in the teachings of Lacan that pressed Badiou to develop a concept of antiphilosophy.<sup>527</sup> The question is how the concept of antiphilosophy is effective in Badiou's attempt to think the preconditions and possibilities of change and novelty.

Bosteels observes another so-called 'derivatory' feature that follows from the third invariant trait of the mysticist remainder, namely the misogynist tendency of antiphilosophy. The antiphilosopher addresses the remainder beyond language in misogynist terms. In that regard, Bosteels quotes at length from Badiou's *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein* (2009):

Reste à savoir si, de ce réel, l'antiphilosophie nous donne autre chose qu'un évanouissement sidéré, si son acte n'est pas, comme la femme pour Claudel, une promesse qui ne peut pas être tenue. À moins qu'il ne s'agisse dans toute cette histoire de la femme, précisément, dont on conviendra aussitôt que la philosophie n'a nulle ambition de parler, mais dont on doutera qu'à ce jour, disposée dans la série nominale (la foi, l'angoisse, la vie, le silence, la jouissance...) où l'antiphilosophie – sauf Lacan – l'épingle sans l'identifier, elle ait fait mieux que disparaître. L'Antiphilophe agiterait devant le philosophe, qui loyalement, éduqué sur ce point par la science, le forclôt de sa manœuvre pensante, le fantôme du féminin. Ce qui n'est pas sans expliquer quelque peu la très frappante misogynie de tous les antiphilosophes: la femme inconsciente ne leur sert qu'à placer des banderilles sur le cou épais du philosophe. Ce qui est, après tout, une explication 'entre hommes'. A-t-on jamais vu gens plus détestables, dans leur déclarations explicites sur les femmes, que Pascal (en a-t-il remarqué une autre que sa sœur?),

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<sup>526</sup> See Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 161-2; 168.

<sup>527</sup> See Bosteels: "Translator's Introduction": *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy* (trans. Bruno Bosteels), Verso Books, London/New York, 2011, p. 24.

Rousseau (la Sophie de *Émile!*), Kierkegaard (la névrose du mariage!), Nietzsche (n'en parlons même pas) ou Wittgenstein (avec sur ce point la demi-franchise d'une demi-homosexualité)? À supposer que le reste réel des théories philosophiques soit à chercher, du point de vue du désir, du côté du féminin, le sort fait à ce reste est certes plus enviable quand on s'appelle Platon, Descartes ou Hegel. Au point qu'on pourrait faire, du rapport aux femmes, un critère distinctif: plus la misogynie est flagrante, plus on est aux parages de l'antiphilosophie.<sup>528</sup>

Bosteels refrains from accentuating anything in this long quote, besides referring to the misogynist tendency as a 'derivatory feature'. Badiou himself designates it as a 'distinctive criterion'. The fact that Bosteels lets this passage stand its own ground without commentary is almost as striking as the passage itself. The quoted passage produces more questions than answers.

The passage is untypical of Badiou's manner of presentation. The accurate reasoning that is customary of his style gives here way to another style of insinuations and conjecture. It is almost as if Badiou abandons his philosophy to sophistic or even antiphilosophy. After all, the passage in its totality is posited in the form of an unanswered question or a non-argued hypothesis. Badiou first posits the doubt as to whether or not the antiphilosophical act will remain a promise to be broken. He then

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<sup>528</sup> Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 34-35; see also Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 166-167: "What remains to be seen, though, is whether of this real the antiphilosopher offers us anything else than a shattering vanishing act, or whether this act is not, like woman for Claudel, a promise that cannot be kept. Unless it is a question of woman all along in this story, precisely woman about whom we will immediately agree that philosophy has no ambition whatsoever to speak, but about whom we can also wonder whether to this day, displayed as she is in the series of nouns (faith, anxiety, life, silence, enjoyment...) with which antiphilosophy – with the exception of Lacan – has pinned her down, she has done any better than to disappear. The antiphilosopher would wave the spectre of the feminine in front of the eyes of the philosopher who, loyally, forecloses this spectre from his thinking manoeuvre, educated on this point by science. This goes a long way toward explaining something of the striking misogyny of all antiphilosophers: the unconscious woman serves them only to pin some banderillas on the thick neck of the philosopher. Which is, after all, an explanation 'among men'. Have we ever seen more detestable people, in their explicit declarations about women, than Pascal (did he ever observe one, other than his sister?), Rousseau (*Emile's* Sophie!), Kierkegaard (the neurosis of marriage!), Nietzsche (let's not even go there) or Wittgenstein (with the half-frankness of a half-homosexuality)? Supposing that from the point of view of desire the real remainder of philosophical theories must be sought after on the side of the feminine, the *fate* reserved for this remainder is certainly more enviable when one is called Plato, Descartes or Hegel. To the point where we could make of the relationship to women a distinctive criterion: the more flagrant the misogyny, the more we are in the vicinity of antiphilosophy" [*Bosteels' translation*].

follows up on this doubt with the question of whether it might not be an issue of woman all along. To the first doubt, concerning the act's ability to deliver according to its promise, an answer will be found at the end of the book. At least in the case of Wittgenstein, the answer is a definite 'no': of that which was supposed to surpass thinking, only the thought remains to be passed on, and Wittgenstein the antiphilosopher is delivered over to philosophy.<sup>529</sup> The latter question, concerning whether or not the remainder is reducible to a question of woman throughout the history of antiphilosophy, is left hanging – only to determine misogyny as a distinctive criterion.

My question is how to read this curious passage. It can be divided into a series of sub-questions concerned with the status of woman, science, and Lacan. First of all, how is one to read this woman, unconscious at that, as she is employed by the antiphilosopher in the attempt to subdue the philosophical bull? Secondly, how is one to read the philosopher's loyalty to this so-called scientific education, on account of which the feminine spectre is foreclosed from the operations of philosophy? Lastly, how is one to read the fact that Badiou includes Lacanian *jouissance* in the series of nouns by which the antiphilosophers have pinned down woman without identifying her (Pascalian faith, Kierkegaardian anxiety, Nietzschean life, Wittgensteinian silence), while he simultaneously insists that Lacan is in exception to this act? Badiou represents Lacan as a double exception: with the exception of Lacan, antiphilosophers have always pinned down woman in some inexplicable noun, only for her to disappear there. Badiou also acknowledges Lacan as the antiphilosopher to be traversed by anyone aspiring to be a philosopher today, *i.e.* the one to bring contemporary antiphilosophy after Nietzsche and Wittgenstein to its closure and thereby open up for another philosophy to come.<sup>530</sup>

How is the connection between these two exceptions of Lacan to be understood? Is it a mere coincidence that the antiphilosophy of Lacan both prepares the ground for a new philosophy and avoids pinning down woman in an unflattering noun, or is there more than a simple accidental relation at work? Is it due to his non-

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<sup>529</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>530</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire: Lacan*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.



pinning of woman that Lacan is able to bring contemporary antiphilosophy to a conclusion, or is it, *vice versa*, with his closure of contemporary antiphilosophy that he can avoid her pinning-down? Through a closer reading of the misogyny of the antiphilosopher's act and the scientific education of the philosopher, I will argue that the correct answer to the latter questions is neither: it is by pinning down the feminine remainder *as* disappearance that Lacan brings contemporary antiphilosophy to its end, insofar as his act amounts to the demonstration of the feminine remainder in its absence and the function of that absence within the extant field of knowledge. He thus marks the function of the remainder within science, from which another philosophy to come will see its initial intervention: the philosophy to come will proceed to think from that moment on.

### ***The Promise of Woman; What is in an Act?***

This section concerns how Badiou conceives of antiphilosophy, and how the feminine remainder functions to necessitate the radically subjective act. The antiphilosopher confronts the philosopher's speculative totalizations and delusions of truth by pointing to a remainder that escapes capture in theoretical adumbrations. The remainder is accessible only through the act, but I interrogate the question of how the remainder is to be conceived of as feminine, specifically, and how the feminine inflection of the remainder involves the antiphilosopher's distinctive misogyny? A first extrapolation of the basic traits of antiphilosophy prepares the ground for a further inquiry into Kant, while a comparison of the critical projects of Kant and feminist critiques of Western metaphysics serves to accentuate the similarities between the noumenon and the feminine. It thus indicates the misogynistic intonations of the other side of reason's limit. But a Lacanian Kant also identifies a split internal to the noumenon, as the point where the limit of reason leaves room for faith and the sublimation of the moral act. The status of the act, I argue, constitutes the crux of the antiphilosopher's misogyny, where the decisive question is whether the act is able to deliver, or whether the feminine remainder will forever remain an un-kept promise. Through the example of

Nietzsche, I argue that misogyny is distinctive of antiphilosophy in the sense that it is intrinsic to the very antiphilosophical formulation of the act. Nietzsche's act succumbs per definition to an absolute fallacy that precludes access to the feminine remainder and thus to the real and to radical change. Interrogating the misogyny intrinsic to the act opens for a discussion of the philosopher's education by science, and then of the double exception of Lacan.

### *Delusions of Truth*

The significance of the misogyny of antiphilosopher's act is not self-evident. However, Badiou remarks that the criterion of misogyny might serve to deepen our understanding of the case of Kant. Reversing the case, I suggest that Kant's critical project might serve to deepen our understanding of the misogyny of the antiphilosopher's act. Kant's critical project, Badiou suggests, can be summarized as follows:

donner une forme philosophique à l'antiphilosophie elle-même. Montrer philosophiquement que la prétention philosophique ne fait que remuer de l'air. Sublimier l'acte moral, indubitablement a-philosophique, au regard des misères phénoménales de la connaissance. D'où s'infère, puisque chez lui le reste a nom 'noumène', qu'un désir kantien s'adresse à un objet toujours nouménal. C'est, fortement conceptualisée, l'antique certitude du 'mystère' féminin. En langage wittgensteinien, 'femme' est ce dont on ne peut parler, et que donc il faut taire.<sup>531</sup>

Kant's project amounts to an antiphilosophical philosophy. There are two points to note in regard to the significance of the feminine remainder. Firstly, there is the concept of the noumenon itself. Secondly, there is the notion of the moral act, as

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<sup>531</sup> Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 35-6 ("to give antiphilosophy a philosophical form; to show philosophically how the philosophical pretention only serves to stir up air; to sublimate the moral act, undoubtedly a-philosophical, in regard to the phenomenal miseries of knowledge. On this basis, one can infer, seeing that the remainder with him goes by the name of 'noumenon', that a Kantian desire is always addressed at a noumenal object. It is, strongly conceptualized, the ancient certitude of the feminine 'mystery'. In Wittgensteinian language, 'woman' is that of which one cannot speak, and that of which one thus must keep silence").

sublimation or a supersession of the restraints of the phenomenal domain. To provide a basis by which to make sense of Kant's project as an antiphilosophical philosophy, a brief exposition of the general characteristics of antiphilosophy is required.

According to Badiou, there are three main operations that characterize antiphilosophy, as opposed to philosophy and as distinct from sophistics:

1. Destitution de la philosophie dans sa prétention théorique, destitution qui prend toujours la forme d'un discrédit, et pas centralement, ou pas principalement, la forme d'une réfutation. 2. Mise à jour de la vraie nature de l'opération philosophique. À l'arrière-plan de sa prétention théorique supposée et discrédité, il y a une geste proprement philosophique qui doit être repéré par l'antiphilosophie elle-même, parce qu'il est, en général, dissimulé par le philosophe, obscur ou inapparent. 3. Opposition à l'acte philosophique ainsi reconstitué d'un acte de type nouveau, d'un acte radicalement autre qui parachève la destitution de la philosophie.<sup>532</sup>

The dismissal of the philosophical category of truth constitutes the *primus motor* of the antiphilosophical vehicle.<sup>533</sup> The antiphilosopher then reveals how the adventure of philosophy does not amount so much to a theoretical endeavour as to a gesture or an act. Philosophy is not reducible to its statements and propositions. Philosophy's fabulations on truth rather serve as the garb to conceal its essence as a baleful act.

The most blatant expression of the antiphilosopher's dismissal of the category of truth is Nietzsche's reduction of truth to an ambulant army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms, solidified by use and demystified in time.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 163 ("1. The dismissal of philosophy in its theoretical pretention, a dismissal that always occurs as a discredit and not mainly, or not primarily, as a refutation; 2. the renewed appreciation of the true nature of the philosophical operation, in order to reveal that, behind its presumed but discredited theoretical pretention, there is the philosophical gesture proper, which must be pointed out by antiphilosophy itself, insofar as it is generally obscure, non-apparent, and concealed by the philosopher; 3. the opposition to the thus reconstituted philosophical act by a new type of act, a radically other act that will complete the dismissal of philosophy").

<sup>533</sup> See e.g. Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 125; Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 44; and Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>534</sup> See Nietzsche, Friedrich: "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne": *Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe; Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-1873* (ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari), Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1973, p. 374-5.

Truth is simply an effect of meaning. Furthermore, in his genealogical excavations, Nietzsche shows how the army of lies presented by the philosopher as truths is the effect of the proper philosophical gesture, the exercise of the typological power of the priest. The typological power of the priest entails an incessant evaluation of the things that are. The priest is thus a nihilist that negates every affirmative act of creation. Philosophy is a parasite on the religious exertion of the will to nothing. In veiling its true activity, philosophy is all the more guilty of negating affirmative life. To Nietzsche, Badiou observes, philosophy is a disease, the infamous sickness of Plato, and should be countered by any means.<sup>535</sup> The case of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) is similar, Badiou argues. Truth is reduced to the correspondence of a meaningful proposition and actual reality, but where Nietzsche talks of nihilism and the eradication of affirmative life through the typological catalogues of the philosopher-priest, Wittgenstein talks of philosophical nonsense, of verbiage and chatter, as the erasure of the limits between that which can and cannot be said and thought. Where Nietzsche blames philosophy for denying access to real life, as that which subtracts itself from all evaluation, Wittgenstein accuses the philosopher of obstructing the revelation of the silent meaning of the world, *i.e.* 'God', beyond the world of meaningful propositions. The metaphor of disease, Badiou insists, is never absent from the antiphilosopher's vocabulary concerning philosophy.<sup>536</sup> Against the obscure gestures of philosophy, antiphilosophy represents itself a therapeutic activity rather than a direct criticism. The antiphilosopher's guiding question is how to cure humanity from its suffering under the philosophical disease.<sup>537</sup>

The metaphor of disease encompasses the antiphilosophical trajectory to fully eschew the dominance of philosophy. This trajectory proceeds through the disruption, the exposure and, finally, the supersession of the philosophical project. To further elaborate on the medical vocabulary, the trajectory of antiphilosophy can be determined as a) an initial identification of the symptom, in the philosopher's theoretical notion of truth; b) the consequent isolation of its cause, in the philosopher's overestimation of the thinking capacities of language, and finally; c) the instigation of

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<sup>535</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 87; 126.

<sup>536</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>537</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 32.

a cure, dispensed through the antiphilosophical act.<sup>538</sup> The misogyny intrinsic to the formulation of the feminine remainder is germane to the last point, the instigation of the cure through the antiphilosophical act. However, an examination of the cause behind the symptoms is required before addressing the issue of an active cure.

If the symptom carries the different signifiers of nihilism and verbiage, the cause of the philosophical disease remains one and the same. The philosopher is a megalomaniac, who succumbs to the delusions of an unlimited thinking. The philosopher's delusions are indicated in Badiou's brief aside on how Lacan dismisses the philosopher's speculative totalizations to the imaginary register. To sum up the essentials of Lacan's definition of the imaginary in one word, Lacan's simple pun on *méconnaissance* suffices. Every conception of an ego [*me*] is always already a misconception; an element of ignorance is inherent to all knowledge.<sup>539</sup> Arguably, the most significant misconception concerns the imaginary phallus ( $- \phi$ ), the ego's identification as either having or being the object of desire. In the imaginary dyad, there is yet to be a confrontation with the concept of lack and the subject's division by the signifier. There is, to cut it short, no castration. The imaginary phallus serves as the phantasm of an immediate reciprocity. Thus it misconceives impotence for potency, nothing for something, loss for fullness.<sup>540</sup> As brief as Badiou's short aside might be, it nonetheless points to the heart of the misconception underpinning the totalizing tendency of philosophy. It is the misconception of the possibility of a unified totality, of the completion and the consistency of a One-All. Consequently, the antiphilosopher dismisses philosophy as an imaginary lure or a grandiose delusion.

When Nietzsche and Wittgenstein disrupt the philosophical argument and dismiss its concept of truth, Badiou claims, they also expose the philosophical gesture

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<sup>538</sup> See also Clemens and Bartlett: "'The Greatest of our Dead'; Badiou and Lacan", *op.cit.*, p. 193: "1) a *subordination* of philosophical categories to language, and the concomitant destitution of philosophy's pretensions to truth and system; 2) the *diagnosis* of such pretensions as evidence of a philosophical will to power; 3) the *affirmation* of an extra-philosophical ethics that escapes such strictures."

<sup>539</sup> See Lacan: "Le stade de miroir comme formateur de la fonction de Je, telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique" [1949]: *Écrits*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 99.

<sup>540</sup> See e.g. Bernard, David: "La Honte et la névrose": *Le Forum du champ lacanien de Liège*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2005, p. 1-29 (accessed through [www.lacanw.be](http://www.lacanw.be) - 05.09.2014). See also Michelsen, Magnus: "Where Being and Thinking is the Shame; *Nightwood, sub specie ruboris*": *On Shame and Guilt* (ed. René Rasmussen and Gorm Larsen), Routledge, New York/London, forthcoming.

as the blind exercise of a language delivered over to the dream of not being interrupted by any rule nor limited by any difference.<sup>541</sup> It is the ancient Parmenidean dream of the One-All that is ultimately at stake in the antiphilosophical exposure of philosophy, the dream in which the same is being and thinking. It underscores the Greek discourse of wisdom, the heir to the Parmenidean poem. The Greek discourse of wisdom, Badiou writes, is the discourse on and of the totality of nature. It is the discourse of a presumed one-to-one correspondence between wisdom, as an inner state of being, and the world, as an ordered and complete deployment of being.<sup>542</sup> It is underpinned by the notion of an uninterrupted language. The eternal truths of the world and the subjective adjustment to these truths are rendered accessible to the philosopher through the mastery of language.<sup>543</sup> But to the antiphilosopher, the notion of an uninterrupted language able to think the all of being, or even being at all, constitutes the dangerous delusion of philosophy: It turns the philosopher's claim to truth into nothing but an imposture.<sup>544</sup> The notion of the One-All will necessarily be bursting with paradoxes, and thereby dissolve itself. In opposition to the philosopher's dream of the One-All, and contrary to the sophist's abandonment of truth and knowledge at the altars of scepticism, the antiphilosophical motto *par excellence* is to be read doubly as 'not all is thinkable' and 'the thinkable is not all'. The antiphilosopher thus proffers the remainder of a real beyond thinking as the prerogative of the act. The question is how this remainder is conceived of as feminine, and how the distinctive criterion of misogyny attaches to the antiphilosopher's formulation of the feminine remainder as the prerogative of the act.

### ***The Morality of the Noumenon***

The case of Kant illuminates the function of the remainder and its feminine inflection, as well as the notion of the act. Kant evokes the concept of the noumenon in order to give metaphysics a scientific status and to avoid the pitfalls that have befallen

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<sup>541</sup> Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>542</sup> See Badiou: *Saint Paul*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>543</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>544</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

philosophy throughout history, whether it has fallen for the dogmatisms of groundless abstractions and mystical fabulations (One-All) or for the irreproachable doubts of a despairing scepticism (sophistics). The noumenon is introduced as the delimitation of the field of phenomena and knowledge. To Kant, knowledge is not impossible, but it is limited. A properly founded knowledge can only be of appearances and modes of appearances, insofar as all cognition are preconditioned by the faculties and categories of human sensibility and understanding – whether it be space and time or cause and effect. Kant relegates the real of pure being-*qua*-being or the *Ding-an-sich* to a beyond of knowledge. As Hallward observes, Kant limits cognition to the knowledge of objects of possible experience. Cognition is not about the seizure of realities as such. Thus, Hallward concludes, "Kant proposed for the first time a philosophy made fully autonomous of the play of *substantial* reality."<sup>545</sup> In the context of the antiphilosophical property of Kant's critical project, however, the leap from Kant's delimitation of cognition to objects of possible experience, on the one hand, to an understanding of the Kantian philosophy as autonomous in regard to substantial reality, on the other, should at least be postponed. The autonomy of Kantian philosophy is somewhat conditional. That is to say, as in the textbook versions of Kant, if the knowledge of phenomena is to have any sense, it is still necessary to assume that these phenomena are the appearances of something, even if such a something itself cannot be known.<sup>546</sup> This is the point at which the concept of the noumenon is introduced. As Kant explains in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781),

der Begriff eines Noumenon ist also bloß ein Grenzbegriff, um die Anmaßung der Sinnlichkeit einzuschränken, und also nur von negativem Gebrauche. Er ist aber gleichwohl nicht willkürlich erdichtet, sondern hängt mit der Einschränkung der Sinnlichkeit zusammen, ohne doch etwas Positives außer dem Umfange derselben setzen zu können.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Hallward: "Kant": *Alain Badiou; Key Concepts* (ed. A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Acumen Publishing, Durham, 2010, p. 130.

<sup>546</sup> See e.g. Kenny, Anthony: *A New History of Western Philosophy, vol. III; The Rise of Modern Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 161-2.

<sup>547</sup> Kant, Immanuel: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [1781] (ed. Jens Timmerman), Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1998, p. 368 (A 255) ("the concept of the noumenon is thus merely a limit-concept, and serves to delimit the pretensions of sensibility, and is thus only of negative applicability. It is

Substantial reality remains, even if it is merely an empty and purely negative reference, even if it is strictly inaccessible. The noumenon, as a limit-concept of sensibility, functions as the mark of such an inaccessible remainder. As a limit-concept, the noumenon is only of negative applicability and has no positive designation beyond its own extension. The noumenon is an empty designation that is bound to dissolve and disappear as soon as someone or something is to hit its mark. If only tentatively grasped in speculative reason, as an object of knowledge, the noumenon would be forced into the phenomenal forms of human sensibility and cognition and, hence, would be noumenon no more.

A simple exercise would render access to just how the Kantian noumenon can be registered as a strong conceptualization of the antiphilosopher's notion of the feminine remainder. One could simply replace the terms 'noumenon' and 'sensibility' with the terms 'woman' and 'thinking', in the quoted passage from Kant. The result would be a paragraph that ascribes to woman the status of a limit-concept delimiting the pretensions of thinking, of negative applicability, without a positive content of her own. Woman would nonetheless not be reducible to an accidental construction. Insofar as she would be determined by the domain of thinking to which she serves as the limit, woman would instead be coterminous and co-dependent with this domain itself. Such an exercise would reveal a striking resemblance between the Kantian noumenon as a philosophical rendition of the feminine remainder, on the one hand, and feminist critiques of the so-called universal subject of Western metaphysics, on the other. Feminist critiques of Western metaphysics have argued that the universal subject is in fact established on masculine parameters, in and through the suppression or repression of the feminine.

The most prominent example of such a critique is the work of Irigaray. Already in *Speculum de l'Autre femme* (1974) Irigaray argues for how Western metaphysics constructs its theories of the subject as masculine.<sup>548</sup> Freud is seen as no different from

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nonetheless not randomly invented, but depends on its relations to the delimitations of sensibility, but without being able to posit any positivity beyond its own extensionality").

<sup>548</sup> See Irigaray: *Speculum de l'Autre femme, op.cit.*, esp. p. 165. Hallward has made a case for reading Irigaray as an antiphilosopher in her own right, insofar as she "embraces a typically



his philosophical predecessors in regard to challenging the masculine hegemony. A position for the feminine is made only through the negation of the masculine, and Freud's notions of the girl as a little man, her *Penisneid*, and woman as a Dark Continent continue to reduce woman to "l'Autre du Même."<sup>549</sup> According to Irigaray, Freud fails to address the deeper structures by which woman is consigned to nothing but a possible compliment to the men of the world, where woman is never conceived in and by herself but always as another object for the same masculine subject, and Freud therefore fails to do anything but reproduce these very same structures.<sup>550</sup> Western metaphysics is not only phallogocentric, Irigaray argues; its rationality and conceptuality is also phallogomorphic. Its concepts are thoroughly indebted to the very shape of the male member and the privilege given to unity, form, identity, visibility, erection, *etc.* In these structures, the feminine can only appear as the negative other of the masculine or not at all. The feminine will at best be consigned to the categories of the irrational and the non-conceptual, if not to utter silence and to the inconceivable as such.<sup>551</sup> As Braidotti observes, Irigaray's critiques reveal how woman as the Other of the masculine subject is "reduced to unrepresentability within the male symbolic system, be it by lack, by excess or by perennial displacement of her subject-position."<sup>552</sup> Within phallogocentric discourse, the only option is to partake in the masculine masquerade and to pose in the dons made by and for man. Woman otherwise remains an empty designation that is bound to disappear as soon as she hits upon her mark. In the words of Lacan, woman does not enter under the phallic

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antiphilosophical distrust of concepts and a deliberately antisystematic means of presentation", with woman being characterized by the rather elusive traits of being "divine, angelic, ethereal, liminal, aesthetic, and so on", see Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 189; and 189, fn 29. However, to label Irigaray as an antiphilosopher is not unproblematic. One would have to explain how her project would be both feminist and misogynist, insofar as misogyny is still a distinctive feature of antiphilosophy. Contrary to Hallward, Rösing has argued for a series of parallels between Badiou and Irigaray, notably their shared interest in the conceptualization of the Two, of love. To Badiou, Rösing reminds her readers, the view that love escapes definition is at the very root of all antiphilosophy, see Rösing: *Kønnets katekismus*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>549</sup> See Irigaray: "Cosi fan tutti": *op.cit.*, p. 96

<sup>550</sup> See Irigaray: "Pouvoirs du discours; Subordination du féminin": *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1977, p. 68.

<sup>551</sup> See Irigaray: "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un": *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1977, p. 26; and Irigaray: *Speculum de l'Autre femme*, *op.cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>552</sup> Braidotti: *Metamorphoses*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

function but *quoad matrem*, in the capacity of mother.<sup>553</sup> As the noumenon in regard to the phenomenal field in Kant, woman serves as the limit-concept delimiting the domain of masculine rationality. She has no positive designation as to her own content, and is strictly of negative applicability.

Irigaray's critiques of the universal subject of Western metaphysics do not imply that the entire tradition of Western metaphysics has been antiphilosophical at heart. The opposite is the point. Western metaphysics has failed to acknowledge its own biased position and the limitations of its reach. It has belied itself to be neutral and universal and true by disowning its feminine remainder. The inability of the philosophical tradition to acknowledge its limitations is the point of the Kantian critiques as well. It is also the point of the seventh and last paragraph of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which advocates the silent bypassing of that which cannot be spoken.<sup>554</sup> Irigaray's flagging the literal flag of the feminine as the unacknowledged underside of traditional philosophy is formally similar to the limits that Kant and Wittgenstein have donned in the names of the noumenon and of mystical silence. Mystical silence, the noumenon, and the feminine all highlight the remainder that the philosophers fail to address, thus stripping the philosophical notion of truth of its assumed universality and exposing the operations of power and suppression it conceals.

However, the notion of the act remains lacking in this account. The Kantian critiques themselves have an underside, beyond the delimitation of reason. If it is viable, as Saldanha writes, that "Irigaray sees in Kant a desperate effort at overcoming the loss of the mother-object and thus of reinstating masculinism at the most supreme level," insofar as Kant would forget that "the sensible realm, imagination, intuition, nature, beauty, extension, the body, the thing-itself constitute the phantasmal feminine soil for the pure reflection of man" and that "woman-soil-nature is the 'imaginary sub-basement' for his house of splendid words,"<sup>555</sup> the sublimation of the moral act in Kant is here passed by.

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<sup>553</sup> See Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>554</sup> See Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Paul Keagan, London, 1922, § 7: "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen".

<sup>555</sup> Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; What is Sexual Difference now?", *op.cit.*, p. 2.

The sublimation of the moral act does not escape capture in Tania Espinoza's readings of Kant *avec* Lacan. According to Espinoza, the antinomies of pure reason in Kant's first critique "secures a place for a 'beyond phenomena' that, while not being purely formal, is nevertheless emptied of positive determinations."<sup>556</sup> Espinoza does not only affirm the negative function of the noumenon as delimiting the field of knowledge. She also acknowledges the double function of the noumenon as epistemologically void and ethically fulfilling. The double function of the noumenon clarifies the function of the feminine remainder in relation to the act. Both the noumenon and the act mark the point where Kant's antiphilosophical philosophy realigns with substantial reality or pure being. Kant's critical thinking, Espinoza writes, inhabits the limit of knowledge

not as the limit of reason but as the limit that reason must both police and dare to trespass in the interest of truth, as freedom. [...] In the famous phrase about denying knowledge Kant is not [...] excusing himself for having had to undermine 'reason' in order to sustain his critical project. He is simply describing the task he traced for the *Critique*: to limit speculative reason in order to leave room for ethics. 'Room for faith' is nothing other than the *noumenon* seen as necessarily empty (of objects) or as 'needing to be filled', depending on whether it is seen from the point of speculative or practical reason.<sup>557</sup>

Espinoza identifies a duality within the noumenon, similar to how Zupančič has identified a split within Kant's categorical imperative. The noumenon designates both the limitations of the field of knowledge in speculative reason, and the field of possibility of ethical action in practical reason. In a further move, and contrary to Copjec, Espinoza aligns masculinity and speculative reason with the mathematical antinomies, and femininity with practical reason and the dynamic antinomies. She explains that it is "because the feminine side regards the ethical that it is in contact with the noumenon in a positive sense as a field of possibility, while the masculine, being merely speculative, must only regard the noumenon negatively, as what cannot

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<sup>556</sup> Espinoza: "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis *Encore*, Beyond the Limits of Speculative Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

be accessed."<sup>558</sup> Thus Espinoza does not only partake in an on-going debate on Kant's legacy that shows, to borrow Saldanha's phrase, how "sexual difference is inscribed into philosophy's most basic decisions."<sup>559</sup> She also identifies the crux of the sublimation of the moral act in Kant.

The field of possibility and the room for ethics that Espinoza notes as an effect of the splitting of the noumenon between speculative and practical reason is similar to the space of action opened by the real of sexual difference in Copjec's Lacanian ethics of the feminine and by the traumatic cause that instigates the proliferation of differences in Žižek. The noumenon does not only mark the limit of reason, it also marks the point at which reason contradicts and undermines itself. The noumenon thus constitutes an almost-positive field of possibility when approached by practical reason – or by the non-theoretical ways of the moral act – whereas it remains a strictly negative moment of inaccessibility when approached by speculative reason – or by way of the theorizations of philosophy. The logic is the familiar logic of the paradoxical status of the law. Like the real of sexual difference marks the point of the law's inherent contradiction and thus leaves open a space of action, so does the noumenon mark the point of reason's inherent contradiction and thus leaves room for the sublimation of the moral act. Insofar as "practical reason cannot be proven theoretically" and, "from the point of view of theoretical reason, practical reason can only remain a hypothesis," as Espinoza writes, the sublimation of the moral act, as a leap 'beyond phenomena', remains as a room for faith.<sup>560</sup> In providing antiphilosophy with a philosophical form, Kant censures access to being as such, the thing itself, and restricts knowledge proper to the phenomena of appearances only, so as to open for a notion of the moral act as an address to being that is more concerned with what ought to be, as Espinoza writes, than with what is. The significance of the distinctive misogyny of the feminine remainder must be interrogated from this point. In the continuation of Badiou's conception of antiphilosophy, the question to be asked of the act is whether it possesses the capacity to move beyond the status of a mere matter of

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<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44. For another intimation of aligning masculine and feminine with mathematical and dynamical antinomies respectively, see Žižek: *Tarrying with the Negative*, *op.cit.*, p. 250, fn. 13.

<sup>559</sup> Saldanha: "One, Two, Many; What is Sexual Difference now?", *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>560</sup> Espinoza: "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis *Encore*, Beyond the Limits of Speculative Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 41.

faith. The question is whether or not the act has the capacity to deliver according to its promise and thus to render what ought to be into what is, or whether or not the feminine remainder precisely remains as a promise forever broken, as an inaccessible and ineffable point that merely serves to buttress the structures that are but surely ought not to be.

### *The Absolute Fallacy*

The Kantian move of limiting the field of knowledge so as to make room for an ethical address in the sublimation of the moral act is characteristic of antiphilosophy. Thus Badiou demonstrates how the premise that resonates throughout Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is that a proposition can never say *what* a thing is, only *how* it is.<sup>561</sup> Also Nietzsche denounces the possibility of an adequate language that would speak the sum total of being, insofar as language can only express a simple relation and all that is are relations and relations of relations.<sup>562</sup> Nietzsche's motto 'the death of God' designates the absence of an instance that would speak totality. Lacan reformulates this motto as the hole in the Other or the absence of a meta-language. He ties head to tails by elaborating on the absence of a meta-language through Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. To Lacan, the addendum that would designate a statement as true or false is the move proper to the philosopher's stupidity.<sup>563</sup> Saint Paul's antiphilosophy occurs in a complete disjunction with the Greek discourse of wisdom. The message of Christ resurrected renders the Greek discourse of wisdom obsolete, as it is not a matter of arguments or proofs, but of a fundamentally unfounded act of faith.<sup>564</sup> The recurrent antiphilosophical theme, Badiou writes, is how there is no meaning of meaning, no value of value, no truth of truth, or no ultimate relation by which to come to terms with relationality as such.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>561</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 36 ff.

<sup>562</sup> Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 147-148.

<sup>563</sup> See Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>564</sup> See Badiou: *Saint Paul, op.cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>565</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 116.

Bosteels observes how the installation of a limit on the thinkable begs the question of its other side,<sup>566</sup> and argues that "the act is without a doubt the most important element in the formal characterization of antiphilosophy," and that which "alone has the force of destituting, and occasionally overtaking, the philosophical category of truth."<sup>567</sup> I argue that the act has bearing only insofar as the notion of the remainder presents itself. It is by the remainder that the act is necessitated, and not the other way around. It is because something is presumed to escape the theoretical operations of the philosophical discourse that the act is promoted as that which alone can deliver that which escapes the philosopher's caper, namely an access to the real or that which truly is: affirmative life to Nietzsche, the real of *jouissance* or *das Ding* to Lacan, Christian love to Saint Paul, God or the silent meaning of the world to Wittgenstein. The question to be raised through Badiou is whether there remains anything on the other side of the antiphilosophical acts, or if the feminine remainder simply disappears there. It is the question if the fundamentally unfounded act of faith is capable to found itself, or whether it must fail in such an act of auto-foundation. By not ignoring the distinctive criterion of the antiphilosopher's misogyny, and by underscoring the feminine remainder before the act, the failures inherent to the antiphilosopher's act of auto-foundation are brought to the fore.

According to Badiou, contemporary antiphilosophies are identifiable by the determination of their matter and their act. The double determination of antiphilosophy coincides with the four conditions of Badiou's philosophy, namely art, science, love, and politics.<sup>568</sup> Nietzsche's antiphilosophy is determined by the matter of art, primarily music or the non-representational theatre of tragedy, whereas its act is the archi-political act of breaking in two the history of the world, the history of humanity [*Geschichte der Menschheit*].<sup>569</sup> The archi-political act, materialized through art, will put an end to the reactive interpretations under the nihilistic reign of the philosopher-priest, and thereby instigate pure life as the affirmation of all that is. In Wittgenstein,

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<sup>566</sup> See Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>568</sup> For a discussion on the general relations between antiphilosophy and the conditions of philosophy, the four procedures of truth, in Badiou's philosophy, see Bartlett and Clemens: "'The Greatest of our Dead'", *op.cit.*, p. 182 ff.

<sup>569</sup> See Nietzsche: *Ecce Homo: Das Hauptwerk, Band 4*, Nymphenburger, München, 1990, p. 576.

the act is the archi-aesthetic act of a pure showing, whereas the matter is science. Through the science of logic, Wittgenstein's act materializes in the clarification of the lines of demarcation between that which can and cannot be said, so as to let the principle of clarity, itself unspeakable and silent, unfold. In Lacan, the act is the archi-scientific act of demonstrating the real of *jouissance* and the impasse of formalization, through the integrated transmissions made possible by the matheme. Lacan's archi-scientific act is mediated through the matters of love, as they occur in the analytic session. Badiou does not identify the matter and the act in regard to the radical antiphilosophy of Saint Paul. But in line with the logic of conditions, it could easily be demonstrated that the act of Saint Paul is determined by the archi-amorous act of life in Christ, proffered through the Damascene encounter, while its material basis is that of a universal politics, the establishment of the militant *ecclesiae*.<sup>570</sup>

The prefix 'archi' designates a movement to the void or the real point of the respective conditions of the acts in question. In Wittgenstein, the clarity of silence figures as the real of aesthetic form. In Lacan, the real is literally the impasse of scientific formalization. In Saint Paul, the unforeseen encounter of the Damascene moment points to the real of love, the non-relation of amorous relationality as such. The case is nonetheless most pronounced in Nietzsche and his revolution as the real of politics. As Badiou explains, Nietzsche's archi-political act designates neither a philosophical foundation of politics nor a determination of the essences or origins of politics as such. Nietzsche's antiphilosophical act is determined as archi-political in the sense that it moves beyond ordinary politics. It is the radical act of breaking in two the history of the world. It is archi-political in the sense that it simultaneously extends and dissolves the field of politics. It extends the force and capacity of politics beyond issues of representation or of the state, while it renders obsolete every politics except

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<sup>570</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 69; Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 23; and Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 11. In the case of Saint Paul, Badiou opposes Saint Paul's radical act to that of the contemporary antiphilosophers of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan, see Badiou: *Saint Paul, op.cit.*, p. 70. See also Watrous: "Love's Universal Impetus; Luce Irigaray and Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 66 ff, for a reading of the relations of love and politics in the Paulinean *ecclesiae*. I have suggested Saint Paul's antiphilosophy to be archi-amorous as to its act and political in matter before, see Michelsen: "Formuleringar av stilla – Wittgenstein og Lacan, etter Badiou": *Filosofisk supplement*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2012, p. 36-43.

the archi-political act of the antiphilosopher, Nietzsche, himself.<sup>571</sup> The French Revolution had failed to be radical enough, as it got stuck in the simple negation and transvaluation of the old values, a reversal of *L'Ancien Régime* under *La Nouvelle République*. Hence, it is to Nietzsche that the task of breaking in two the history of the world befalls, and the archi-political act of Nietzsche is to finally perform the move into the invaluable of a life of pure affirmation.

The antiphilosopher proffers the act as the only recourse to the feminine remainder. But it is of the essence of the act, Badiou writes, to be ascertainable only by its effects.<sup>572</sup> Characteristic of contemporary antiphilosophy, with the exception of Lacan, Badiou continues, is the programmatic status of its acts. In contemporary antiphilosophy, the act is relegated as an anticipated certainty of a more or less immediate future, and its conditions in the present are sketched up in the constant absence of an actual affirmation of the act's having taken place.<sup>573</sup> After the antiphilosophical ventures of Wittgenstein, there is only the negative preparation of the act left, namely his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. His antiphilosophy is thus delivered over to philosophy, Badiou writes, and of the act that was to supplant thinking, there is only the thought of that act, the thought of a non-thought, left.<sup>574</sup> Bosteels makes an important observation concerning the antiphilosophical tendency of succumbing to the temptation of the absolute, non-qualified, or non-dialectical break. With emphasis on the case of Nietzsche, Bosteels refers to the issue of the antiphilosophical conception of the event *qua* act, "the radicalism of the pure event as absolute beginning, or the treatment of the event as some kind of archi-event, that is to say, in the end, the conflation of the event with the act."<sup>575</sup> Conflating the event and the act in an absolute break, antiphilosophy seeks to legitimize *itself* as truth, as both the producer and the guarantee of truth of the condition it assumes. Politically speaking, it is an issue of speculative leftism. Bosteels goes a long way to show how Badiou himself does not fully relieve himself from an ambivalent relation to the

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<sup>571</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 69-70. See also Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 172 ff.

<sup>572</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>573</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>574</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>575</sup> Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 177.



temptations of speculative leftism, although Badiou is opposed to the notion of an absolute beginning.<sup>576</sup> Insufficiently emphasized by Bosteels, however, is how the program of an absolute beginning is a contradiction in terms. It necessarily undermines itself, and fails to proffer anything except the disappearance of that of which it bears promise. The failures of the program of an absolute beginning and the distinctive criterion of misogyny are mutually explanatory.

One could designate the temptation of the non-dialectical break identified by Bosteels as the antiphilosopher's 'absolute fallacy'. Bosteels does not accentuate the issue of misogyny in relation to the absolute fallacy of the act. In fact, Bosteels reference to the antiphilosopher's distinctive criterion of misogyny as a 'derivatory feature' misses out on a key point. The antiphilosopher is not misogynistic simply because he renders the feminine remainder as the ineffable and silent other of masculine reason. The antiphilosopher values the feminine remainder above all else. Rather, the antiphilosopher's misogyny is integral to the formulation of the act in its status as an archi-act. The feminine remainder remains as a mere inaccessible screen. The antiphilosopher's promise of woman precludes the antiphilosopher from ever delivering according to this promise, due to the very way in which this promise is formulated. That is to say, the antiphilosopher's distinctive criterion of misogyny is integral to the absolute fallacy of the act.

The absolute fallacy is most pronounced in Nietzsche and his breaking in two of the history of the world, as Bosteels notes, but it is present also in Wittgenstein's kicking away of the ladder after having climbed it, and in Saint Paul's report of the new life in Christ resurrected. Nietzsche's affirmations are the obverse of Hegel's negations. Nietzsche's ornithological emblem is not the owl taking flight at dusk, but rather the cock announcing the rising of the sun. The fact that the cock crows, however, is not a demonstration of the new day. Therein lies the problem for Nietzsche. Nietzsche's problem is his auto-foundation, the problem of how to found his fundamentally unfounded act. By his act, Nietzsche seeks to impose himself in the position of his own big Other, as he seeks to prepare his own coming as the radical break of an absolute beginning. Nietzsche destiny – and the cause of his madness,

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<sup>576</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 181; and Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 273 ff.

according to Badiou – was to be torn in and between himself as both his own prophet and his own saviour, as responding to both the preparation and the execution of the absolute breaking in two of the history of the world. Having to prepare an absolute break is, of course, an untenable position. The very moment an absolute break is already prepared for, it ceases per definition to be absolute, insofar as an absolute novelty cannot be procured on the basis of the old.<sup>577</sup> Nietzsche went mad by attempting to make of himself the constitutive exception of a totality including himself, or to include himself in a totality whose constitutive exception would be himself.

The absolute fallacy is best grasped as a double fallacy. First of all, it involves the impossible procedure of the antiphilosopher's act of auto-foundation, as a preparation of that which per definition cannot be prepared. As Bosteels notes, Nietzsche's problem was to be torn between himself as both the angelic herald and the hero of the event *qua* act, both of which Badiou denies existence.<sup>578</sup> As an obverse effect of the impossible procedure of the antiphilosopher's auto-foundation, the absolute fallacy implies that the antiphilosopher makes his own proper subjectivity another All. The problem is not simply that the antiphilosopher announces his own coming, but that he, in lack of a material underpinning for his subjective act, renders his subjectivity into the material underpinnings of the change he wants to see. That is the implications of the archi-act, or the conflation of the event and the act as an archi-event. In *L'Être et l'événement*, having made explicit mention of the Nietzschean act as 'Revolution' or 'Apocalypse', Badiou argues how that which remains ignored in such a position is how

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<sup>577</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 264 ff. A similar logic underscores the so-called passion for the real, identified by Badiou, in *Le Siècle* (2005), as a determinant feature of the 20th century. In its passion for the absolute beginning (the Revolution, *Das Dritte Reich*) and the unmediated creation of the New Man (the Red man, the Aryan man), the 20th century proceeded very much in the spirit of Nietzsche and the absolute fallacy. The 20th century demanded the impossible purification of every trace of the old, but in want of total purification, every action to make the absolute break was reduced to a mere preparation or prequel for an absolute break that was to be forever postponed. The 20th century was Nietzschean in the sense that the problem of the century was the same problem that Nietzsche faced, but could not face. See Badiou: *Le Siècle*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2005, p. 75 ff.

<sup>578</sup> See Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 181.

l'événement lui-même n'existe qu'autant qu'il s'est *soumis*, par une intervention dont la possibilité exige la récurrence – et donc le non-commencement –, à la structure réglée de la situation, et qu'ainsi toute nouveauté est relative, n'étant lisible après coup que comme le hasard d'une ordre. Ce que nous enseigne la doctrine de l'événement est plutôt que tout l'effort est d'en suivre les conséquences, non d'en exalter l'occurrence.<sup>579</sup>

In *Théorie du sujet*, the proletariat's imperative of destruction forbids the political subject to be imagined along the lines of a structural inheritance, transmission, corruption, or inversion, but also as any kind of purifying rupture or as a world broken in two.<sup>580</sup> The operation of destruction and the principle of contradictory consistency underscore the laborious element involved in the breaking of new ground, its dialectical or non-miraculous character. The radical break is ascertainable only *post festum*, Badiou insists. Badiou thereby underscores the material underpinnings of radical change that the notion of an event confirms, precisely insofar as the event itself is an auto-foundation. But the being of an event is to disappear, and the appearance of any auto-foundation is to eclipse itself. Only by the strict separation of event and the subjective process that follows in its wake does the notion of change move beyond the mere structural occurrence that disappears in its own appearance. The antiphilosopher's misogyny entails that every access to the feminine remainder and radical change, relegated to a coming future and dependent on the act of an absolute beginning, is always already precluded; it is a promise to be forever broken.

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<sup>579</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 233 ("the event itself only exists to the extent that it is submitted, by way of an intervention whose possibility demands the recurrence – and thus the non-beginning –, to the ordered structure of the situation, and that thus every novelty is relative, being readable after the fact only as the hazard of an order. That which the doctrine of the event teaches us is rather that the whole effort lies in following the consequences of an event, and not in the glorification of its occurrence"). See also Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>580</sup> See Badiou: *Théorie du sujet*, *op.cit.*, p. 149.

## ***An Education by Science; the Things that Mathematics Teaches***

The issues I address in this section concern the philosopher's loyalty to the so-called education by science, and how a scientific education implies a foreclosure of the feminine remainder from the philosopher's operations. If the antiphilosopher's distinctive misogyny precludes the feminine remainder also when it is promised at the other end of the act, my questions at present are how an education by science determines the philosopher's possibilities for thinking change and novelty beyond the predicament of the feminine remainder. The central issue is how to understand science, and what an education by science entails. Wittgenstein reduces science to the totality of true propositions, and thereby intimates a remainder at the other side of science. A comparison with the problematic of delimitation in Kant's critical project underscores the essential religious fallacy involved in Wittgenstein's reduction of science and the sublimation of the act. Wittgenstein's antiphilosophy implies a conception of science as encompassed in a transcendent meaning, rendered to the archi-aesthetic act. In Badiou's philosophical works, however, science is fundamentally mathematical, where mathematics thinks in and through the impossible. The philosopher thus bypasses the disconcerting question of the remainder by refusing the notions of the inaccessible. The lesson of mathematics is that the point of impossibility is the point of possibility for thinking as change and novelty. The overall question, in other words, is not simply how to think the possibilities of change and novelty, through the act or the event, but the possibilities of thinking change and novelty – within thinking – as change. The mathematical lesson opens for the questions of Lacan's double exception.

### ***Whose Science?***

Badiou has nothing but scorn for the critical project of Kant. To Badiou, Kant defines the theme of human finitude and imposes his limits everywhere, with the additional expectancy that these limits be dutifully respected.<sup>581</sup> Kant is often considered a front line philosopher of the Enlightenment. It is thus a paradox that the project of Kant

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<sup>581</sup> See Badiou: *Logiques des Mondes, op.cit.*, p. 561.

shares in the basic tenet of the original antiphilosophy of the conservative reaction. Both the enlightened Kant and the reactionary abbot Chardon share the propensity for evincing the limitations of thinking. Also the abbot Chardon can be categorized under "l'enfermement critique (ah! les éternelles 'limites' de la Raison)"<sup>582</sup> found in Kant, even if the intentions and the interests differ. It is with no less distaste that Badiou attacks the one he considers to be the Kant of the 20th century, namely Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's project concerns the delimitation of the thinkable and the unthinkable, and his desire is precisely the desire for clarity of limits, so as to indicate the remainder on the other side. The desire for clarity of limits is bound up with the issue of science. My first questions concern how science is imbricated in the antiphilosophical notion of the remainder, and how the philosopher Badiou conceives of science. It will lead to Wittgenstein's archi-aesthetic act and the question if Wittgenstein's act can deliver what it promises any better than Nietzsche's can.

The question of science has played a pivotal role in Badiou's philosophical works from the 60s onwards.<sup>583</sup> Badiou's early contributions to *Cahiers pour l'analyse* deal extensively with the question of science. His "Marque et manque; à propos du zero" includes a polemical thrust at the doctrine of science and the logic of the signifier elaborated on in Miller's seminal texts on Lacan, "La suture (éléments de la logique du signifiant)" and "Action de la structure". Miller argues for the suture of the subject within any discourse, as the subject figures in discourse as a lacking element by way of a representative or placeholder. Miller provides the example of such a suture in Gottlob Frege's foundation of the number sequence and zero as the first mark of a lack.<sup>584</sup> Badiou accuses Miller of confusing the construction of a logical

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<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 562. For an in-depth discussion of Badiou's criticism and relation to Kant and the themes of finitude and the limits of thought, *ie* whether Badiou fully escapes the transcendental and the inaccessible, see *e.g.* Johnston: "Phantom of Inconsistency: Alain Badiou and Kantian Transcendental Idealism": *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2008, p. 345-366; Brassier: "L'Anti-phénomène; présentation et disparaître": *Écrits autour de la pensée d'Alain Badiou* (ed. Bruno Besana and Oliver Feltham), L'Harmattan, Paris, 2007, p. 55-64 and Acotto, Eduardo: "L'Ontologie du monde perdu chez Badiou": *Écrits autour de la pensée d'Alain Badiou* (ed. Bruno Besana and Oliver Feltham), L'Harmattan, Paris, 2007, p. 83-102.

<sup>583</sup> For the more systematic dispositions of the status of science in Badiou's philosophy, see *e.g.* Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 209 ff; Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 12 ff; Brassier: "Science"; *Alain Badiou; Key Concepts* (ed. A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens), Acumen Publishing, Durham, 2010, p. 61-72; and Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 45 ff.

<sup>584</sup> See Miller: "La Suture", *op.cit.*, p. 39.

mechanism with the representation of the logical mechanism within ideological discourse. Miller thereby conceals the pure production through which the logical machine never lacks anything but that which the same machine is apt to produce at another level, Badiou writes.<sup>585</sup> Through Gödel's incompleteness theorem and the production of an undecidable proposition, Badiou demonstrates an alternative production of zero, where zero functions as the mark of a lacking mark, as opposed to the mark of lack *per se*. In conclusion, Badiou argues that on this side of the scientific chain of signifiers there are only other chains, and if the signifier is sutured in any way, it is to itself alone. But that is just to say that the signifier is not sutured in science. In science, the signifier is stratified. The mark that is lacking on one level is a mark lacking because it has been marked at an earlier level, and this lacking mark can be re-marked again at a third and later level, and so on.

Badiou elaborates on the stratification of the scientific field in the earlier text, "La Subversion infinitésimal". As Feltham notes of this text, stratification is operative there

as a mathematical performative, a baptism that opens up a new domain of writings by converting one modality into another. That is, a mark that is *impossible* in one strata – such as the square root of minus one – is given a name – *i* for an imaginary number – thus opening up another *possible* series of numbers. Such operations of naming thus generate new strata of writings.<sup>586</sup>

The scientific intention is to be grasped as going in the direction of the transformation of the stratified space, Badiou explains.<sup>587</sup> In other words, the scientific intention is the intention of change, and an appendix on Gödel's incompleteness theorem demonstrates the significance of Badiou's view. Badiou speaks of Gödel's incompleteness theorem as something akin to a scientific event, even if it is still argued in the terminology of Althusser's distinction between science and ideology, and even if the term used to

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<sup>585</sup> See Badiou: "Marque et manque; à propos du zero": *Cahiers pour l'analyse (La Formalisation)*, vol. 4, no. 10, 1969, p. 150-151.

<sup>586</sup> Feltham: *Alain Badiou; Live Theory, op.cit.*, p. 20; see also Badiou: "La Subversion infinitésimal", *op.cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>587</sup> See Badiou: "Marque et manque", *op.cit.*, p. 161, fn. 16.

designate the event is Gaston Bachelard's term of the epistemological break. Badiou portrays the dialectics of science and ideology as an alternating chain of stratification, de-stratification, and re-stratification. In this chain, science continuously evades the representational confines in which ideology continuously captures it, where science again and again demonstrates how stratification resists the schemes of closure.<sup>588</sup>

Badiou's early texts testify to two points. Firstly, science is at its root mathematical and, secondly, science is open to infinite possibilities. While science has been an influential condition throughout Badiou's philosophical development, the question of science has been the question of its mathematical foundation. As Hallward points out, as far as Badiou is concerned, it seems to be the case that science is all the more scientific the more mathematical it is:

In order to preserve an effectively unlimited creativity in science, [Badiou] must restrict the scientific truth process to matters of pure formalization alone, that is, to matters involving the confrontation of form with its real limit or impasse. And since every real zone of formlessness is by definition internal to the existing means of formalization, Badiou's treatment of scientific truths effectively equates them with innovations undertaken in their mathematical foundation pure and simple.<sup>589</sup>

The second point follows on the first. Since Badiou considers science as the pure affirmation of marks and stratifications, there can be no crisis in science as such, only in its ideological representations. There are no ultimate limitations in science, neither upper nor lower, or, in the words of Badiou's own definition: "La science est le Dehors

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<sup>588</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 162. Badiou's example is the indefinitely stratified field of the so-called intuitive arithmetic of the Pythagoreans, which becomes de-stratified in an ideological representation as an integrally controllable rationality. With the formal systems of Russell, this field is then re-stratified again, only to again be de-stratified as a rational closure in the nomological systems of Husserl. Then comes Gödel, in a second break, and re-stratifies the field through a meta-mathematical mathematics, an arithmetization of syntax itself. As to its eventual status, Bosteels have also noted a similarity between the earlier Althusserian Badiou and his later fully developed concept of the event, arguing that it is "essential, however, that we traverse once again the very problematic nature of the difference between science and ideology if we want to understand not only Althusser's enterprise but also the systematic foundation of Badiou's philosophy, for the latter hinges on a similar Bachelardian, if not already Platonic, distinction between truth and knowledge, or between truth and opinion", see Bosteels: *Badiou and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p. 53-54.

<sup>589</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth*, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

sans point de cécité."<sup>590</sup> The space of science is infinite. Badiou does not abandon the fundamentals of this early position. In *Conditions*, for instance, Badiou still holds to the view that mathematics is a complete stranger to both the representations of the limit and to the theme of finitude. The mathematical concept proper of the limit is the concept of a point-of-presence [*point-présent*], Badiou explains, whereas mathematical thinking precludes the theme of finitude insofar as it necessarily presupposes the infinity of its space.<sup>591</sup> As Hallward's note also underscores, the two points of the mathematical foundations and the infinite space of science together secure the scientific capacity for change and novelty, for the creative production of new truths, as a mode of thinking in and through a point of impossibility.

In antiphilosophy, science is another matter completely. If the antiphilosophical motto *par excellence* is that 'the thinkable is not all', and if the antiphilosophical metaphor of the philosophical disease targets the philosopher's grandiose delusions, the infinity of the space of science is per definition precluded in the antiphilosopher's perspective. The antiphilosophical motto and the metaphor of disease culminate in the antiphilosopher's conception of mathematics. The question of mathematics, Badiou writes, will never cease to be the major line of demarcation between philosophy and antiphilosophy. The antiphilosopher's position, with yet an exception of Lacan, is distinguished by its de-singularization of mathematics into a simple subcategory of logic. To the antiphilosopher, mathematics is an essentially empty theory of signs, a formal rhetoric or grammar.<sup>592</sup>

To de-singularize mathematics as an empty theory of signs inadvertently positions the antiphilosopher in opposition to philosophy. The dividing line between philosophy and antiphilosophy concerns the question of whether or not mathematics constitutes a mode of thinking. In opposition to the so-called sickness of Plato, the antiphilosopher can only answer this question in the negative: mathematics is *not* a thought, but only the blind operation of rules and regulations. To acknowledge mathematics as a mode of thinking, Badiou writes, is to acknowledge that there is a

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<sup>590</sup> Badiou: "Marque et manque", *op.cit.*, p. 162 ("Science is the Outside without a blind spot").

<sup>591</sup> See Badiou: "Philosophie et mathématique": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 162.

<sup>592</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Nietzsche, op.cit.*, p. 139; and Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 74.



possible saying without the experience of an object, a possible a-subjective and ordered access to the intelligible, a possible pronunciation of being-*qua*-being, and a possible theoretical nature to the antiphilosophical act itself. In short, if mathematics thinks, the implication is that Plato was in the right.<sup>593</sup> In Badiou's reading, Plato established the philosophical appreciation of mathematics as a mode of thinking – as the discourse that thinks being-*qua*-being and that enounces something real – insofar as mathematics is the discourse in which invention and discovery merge. On the basis of mathematics, Plato declared the co-belonging or the ontological commensurability of the knower and the known, insofar as the idea in Plato designates the place where the subject and the object of the intelligible cannot be distinguished from one another.<sup>594</sup> Badiou's own equation of mathematics and ontology and his philosophical motto of a Platonism of the multiple reaffirms the original move of Plato, after Cantor and set theory, so as to make the mathematical inventions and discoveries answer to the status of pure being as infinite and indifferent multiplicities of multiplicities.<sup>595</sup>

However, if there has ever been an issue on which antiphilosophers have been in agreement, it has been that Plato was always an abomination. The possibility that Platonism makes sense runs counter to the most foundational premises of antiphilosophy. This becomes especially pronounced in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, as Badiou reads it.<sup>596</sup> Wittgenstein considers the presumption that it would be possible to

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<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>594</sup> See Badiou: *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1998, p. 97. See also Clemens: "Platonic Meditations; The Work of Alain Badiou": *Pli; The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 11, 2001, p. 209; and Clemens and Roffe: "Philosophy as Anti-Religion in the Work of Alain Badiou": *Sophia*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2000, p. 349.

<sup>595</sup> See e.g. Badiou: "Philosophie et mathématique", *op.cit.*, p. 165. For a short discussion on the relation of discovery and invention in mathematics, see Tiles, Mary: *The Philosophy of Set Theory*, *op.cit.*, p. 8 ff. For a discussion of Badiou's modern Platonism of the multiple, see Duffy, Simon: "Badiou's Platonism; The Mathematical Ideas of Post-Cantorian Set Theory": *Badiou and Philosophy* (ed. Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012, p. 59-78.

<sup>596</sup> Badiou's reading of Wittgenstein has been accused of lacking genuine insights into the actual teachings of Wittgenstein, rather amounting to an exemplary case of imposing an already established conception of philosophy onto a work that is not readily accessible to it, "a philosophical thinking caught up in a straight jacket", see Sørli, Richard: "Cul-de-Sac; Om Badiou om Wittgenstein": *Agora; Journal for metafysisk spekulasjon*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2012, p. 287. See also Livingston: *The Politics of Logic*, *op.cit.*, p. 224. On a different note, Christoffer Norris celebrates Badiou's polemic use of Wittgenstein as a reinvigoration of Wittgenstein's philosophical potency, a potency usually lost in the intratextual quarrels among the "bastard offspring of the Wittgenstein cult", see Norris, Christoffer: "Sophist or Antiphilosopher; Badiou on Wittgenstein":

'think being' or 'enounce the real' as the paradigm of the philosopher's grandiose imposture. It is the epitome of the meaningless and absurd speculations of the metaphysical tradition, while the premise of Wittgenstein's logico-philosophical elaborations states that one can never say what a thing is, only how a thing is. To avoid having to acknowledge that mathematics is a mode of thinking, Wittgenstein desingularizes mathematics as a simple subcategory of logic. Mathematics is rendered an empty performative in which nothing is said and nothing thought, a pure method of calculation by equation, and the substitution of signs one for another.

Logic is defined by the tautological status of its propositions, and tautology is defined by its inability to express a thought. A thought, in Wittgenstein's world, is narrowly defined by the two paragraphs that state that "das logische Bild der Tatsachen ist der Gedanke" and that "der Gedanke ist der sinnvolle Satz."<sup>597</sup> Thinking is simply the description of a possible state of affairs through which an arrangement of objects is represented by a chain of names. Thinking thereby becomes the prerogative of science. It is science that concerns itself with possible states of affairs, either existing as actual cases, as facts, by which the propositions that describe them are judged to be true, or not, by which their propositions are deemed false. The rest is either philosophical nonsense or, preferably, the silence rendered to the antiphilosophical act. The tautologies of logic and the equivalents of mathematical equations, however, do not describe any state of affairs that is the case or not. They simply reflect the necessities of how possible states of affairs must relate to one another, the laws of existence in its independence of that which exist, the so-called armature of the world: e.g., if something is the case, it cannot simultaneously not be the case ( $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$ ), if a combination of states is the case, it cannot simultaneously be so that the one case precludes the existence of the other ( $(p \ \& \ q) \ \square \ \sim(q \ \square \ \sim p)$ ), and so

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*Journal of Critical Realism*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2012, p. 494. For another appreciative reading, see MacKenzie, Cameron: "Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy by Alain Badiou": *SubStance*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2013, p. 180-184.

<sup>597</sup> Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *op.cit.*, § 3 and 4 ("The logical image of facts is its thought" and "A thought is the meaningful proposition"); see also Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

on.<sup>598</sup> Or  $5+7=12$ , as in Kant's example of the synthetic *a priori* judgement, which is precisely a statement on the necessary composition of elements in the world.<sup>599</sup>

In the world of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, logic and mathematics indicate the limits of a world that is essentially a limited whole. The status of the world as a limited whole is established already in the first paragraph: "Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist."<sup>600</sup> Positioned at one remove from the operations of mathematics, science is no longer conceived of as an unending Outside without blind spots, but rather, to vary on Badiou's own definition, as *le Dedans sans point de fuite*, as the Inside without escape. Wittgenstein writes:

Der Satz kann die gesamte Wirklichkeit darstellen, aber er kann nicht das darstellen, was er mit der Wirklichkeit gemein haben muss, um sie darstellen zu können – die logische Form. [/] Um die logische Form darstellen zu können, müssten wir uns mit dem Satze außerhalb der Logik aufstellen können, das heißt außerhalb der Welt.<sup>601</sup>

If 'Wirklichkeit' designates the world inasmuch as it is represented within the logical grid of propositions that describes all that is the case, it follows that science and the world are coextensive. Science has been defined as a limited whole, namely the sum total of true propositions.<sup>602</sup> There is nothing in the world which science cannot represent, just as there is nothing represented by science that cannot be in the world. However, the world has its limits and so does science, namely its limits. The world itself is not an object of the world, nor is science itself an object of science. Consequently, neither the world nor science, as the totality of that which is the case or the totality of true propositions, can be posited by way of propositions. Propositions merely describe possible arrangements of objects in the world, but there are no objects

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<sup>598</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>599</sup> See Kant: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, *op.cit.*, p. 65 (B 15).

<sup>600</sup> Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *op.cit.*, § 1 ("The world is everything that is the case").

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, § 4.12 ("Propositions can represent the whole reality, but they cannot represent that which they must have in common with reality in order to represent it – the logical form. [/] To be able to represent the logical form, we have to be able to position ourselves with the propositions outside logic, in other words, outside the world").

<sup>602</sup> See *ibid.*, § 4.11.

with which the world or the totality of science as such can enter into relations, and thus a meaningful proposition concerning the status of the world or the status of science is not possible. It is unthinkable. The other side of the limits of science is the prerogative of the silence of Wittgenstein's archi-aesthetic act.

### *Reason's Self-Referentiality*

I argue that Wittgenstein's archi-scientific act succumbs to a religious fallacy similar to the absolute fallacy of Nietzsche's archi-political act. Again, the case of Kant draws up the decisive mechanisms. Wittgenstein's problematic of the unthinkable limit of thinking is the same problematic that Kant attends to in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, especially in the first of his so-called cosmological ideas. The first cosmological idea implicates the mathematical antinomy of the presumed finite or infinite status of the world. It raises the question of the world's presumed limitation or non-limitation in space and time. Whereas Espinoza considered the mathematical antinomy as masculine, Copjec cross-reads the mathematical antinomy with Lacan's schema of feminine sexuation. My present question does not concern the sexual status of the antinomies as such. Rather, my question is how Kant's critiques can shed light on the status of the archi-aesthetic act in Wittgenstein, and on its capacity to deliver the silent remainder as the other side of science.

Wittgenstein's problematic of the unthinkable status of the logical form of the sum total of science is mirrored in Copjec's recapitulation of Kant. As Copjec explains, the mathematical antinomy is

occasioned by the attempt to think the 'world', by which Kant means 'the mathematical total of all phenomena and the totality of their synthesis'; that is to say, the universe of phenomena such that it is no longer necessary to presuppose any other phenomenon that would serve as the condition for this universe. Reason aims, then, at the unconditioned whole, the absolute all of phenomena.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>603</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 29. For Kant's own discussion, see Kant: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, *op.cit.*, p. 512 ff (A 405 ff).

The attempt to think the world occasions the antinomy between the world's presumed finite or infinite status. Kant's solution is to deny the assumption that the world as a totality of phenomena exists, that a universe of phenomena is a consistent concept. On the basis of this denial, Kant demonstrates the propositions of both the finite and the infinite status of the world as false. In Copjec's recapitulation, the thesis of a finite world is proved false as "there can be no limit to phenomena in the phenomenal realm, for this would require the existence of a phenomena of an exceptional sort, one that was not itself conditioned and would thus allow us to halt our regress, or one that took no phenomenal form, *i.e.* that was empty."<sup>604</sup> The antithesis, concerned with the infinite status of the world, falters due to the fact that all phenomena "are inescapably subject to conditions of time and space and must there be encountered one by one, indefinitely, without the possibility of reaching an end, a point where all phenomena would be known."<sup>605</sup> Copjec's recapitulation underscores how the attempt to think the world as sum total in Kant implicates the unthinkable status of the other side of the limit of thinking. The thinkable is not all, as the antiphilosopher insist.

Kordela highlights the importance of the phenomena-noumenon distinction in Kant's discussions of the mathematical antinomy, and thus brings the antiphilosophical character of Kant's philosophy to the fore. Confronted with the problematic of the finite or infinite status of the world, Kordela writes, that which

reason momentarily forgets [...] is that 'space and time, together with the appearances in them, are nothing existing in themselves and outside of my representations,' that is, reason forgets that the thing- or the world-in-itself is not in space and time. Since the question addressed here concerns the limits of the world *in space and time*, the true referent of 'world' is not the world-in-itself but the world as appearance, that is, our representation of the world. [...] As for the world in itself, the mathematic antinomy entails an 'indefinite judgment,' that is, an unanswerable question, as to whether the world as a totality exists beyond our representations.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>605</sup> *Loc.cit.*

<sup>606</sup> Kordela: "Genre; with and beyond Gender and Sex (a Psychoanalytic Intervention)", *op.cit.*, p. 94.

The world as a totality of phenomena cannot exist *as a phenomenon*, as an object of experience or as representation. Written in accordance with the terminology of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the lesson of the mathematical antinomy in Kant is that the world as the totality of that which is the case – or as the totality of true propositions – does not lend itself to propositionality. It does not lend itself to thinking. But as Kordela's recapitulation underscores, that the world does not lend itself to thinking is just to say that the question of the world as such, beyond thinking, precisely, remains. It remains as an indefinite judgment, a matter relegated to the sublimation of the moral act or the silent showing of Wittgenstein's archi-aesthetic act.

According to Copjec, there can be no limit to phenomena in the phenomenal realm, insofar as such a limit would require the existence of an exceptional and unconditional phenomenon. There is no possibility of reaching the point from which all phenomena would be accessible to knowledge. Precluded from Copjec's recapitulation, however, is the recognition of how neither of these refutations denies the possibility of a non-phenomenon in the function of such a limit. On the contrary, these refutations seem to demand the presence of a non-phenomenon. As a limit-concept of strictly negative applicability, the noumenon is installed precisely as the limitation on the phenomenal realm and the world of appearances, the world of knowledge and of science. Lacan indicates as much when he opposes any too straightforward a conflation of his own real of the Freudian thing, "une vérité qui parle," with the Kantian noumenon, as "un noumène qui, de mémoire de raison pure, la ferme."<sup>607</sup> Of course, Copjec does acknowledge the noumenon and the function of the indefinite judgment in Kant. She recognizes that it is by the cause of the noumenon that Kant "conceives of reason as limited by nothing but its own nature [...], as *internally* limited," and that it is by the indefinite judgment that Kant will "affirm that the world is not a possible object of experience without pronouncing beyond this on the existence of the world."<sup>608</sup> However, Copjec's rendition is still too quick to affirm the phenomenal realm of representations and appearances as all there is, as if Kant's philosophical project was to be fully autonomous of substantial reality. But the

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<sup>607</sup> Lacan: "La Science et la vérité", *op.cit.*, p. 869 ("a truth that speaks," with the Kantian noumenon, as "a noumenon which, by the memory of pure reason, shuts it up").

<sup>608</sup> Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 33.

noumenon and the sublimation of the moral act reintroduce the remainder in Kant. Copjec seems to ignore the possibility of an other side of reason, and thereby also the antiphilosophical character of Kantian philosophy. It is by way of the other side of reason that the antiphilosopher will presume not only the existence but also the possibility of an access to the world as such, as sum total or One-All. The other side of reason, the unthinkable beyond of the limit of the thinkable, is the domain proper of the act.

Kordela accentuates the notion of a beyond of reason in Kant, in particular when she differentiates sexuation from being. Kordela differentiates between the masculine totality by exclusion and the feminine non-all of infinite regress, on the one hand, and a bi-sexual non-all of self-referentiality, on the other. She designates the latter, the bi-sexual non-all of being's self-referentiality, as "the all-non-all."<sup>609</sup> Whereas sexuation is to be found on the level of the double failures relating to the antinomies of reason, Kordela writes, being or the thing-in-itself is only ever to be found on the level of the cause of these failures. The cause of reason's failures is the self-referentiality of reason, as it figures in the so-called paradox of set theory. In set theory, Kordela writes,

the obstacle preventing a set from forming a totality is not the infinite regression in the diachronic series of its elements but the *self-referentiality of its synchronic totality*. In set theory, the set of all sets is defined as not-all (*i.e.* as not constituting a totality), not because we perpetually encounter yet another set, but because it cannot be decided whether it itself (the set of all sets) is included as a member of itself or not.<sup>610</sup>

Against Copjec's ethics of the feminine, Kordela does not merely transpose the ethical domain from the mathematical to the dynamical antinomies, like Espinoza does. Kordela argues for the paradox of set theory as a distinct ethical genre underlying the feminine and the masculine, the mathematical and the dynamical antinomies, both. The self-referentiality of the all-non-all set, she writes, offers an open universality that

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<sup>609</sup> Kordela: "Being or Sex, and Differences", *op.cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>610</sup> Kordela: *\$urplus; Spinoza, Lacan*, Suny Press, Albany, 2007, p. 101.

is all-inclusive, *i.e.* a universality that "does not exclude its own exceptional precondition," and that is "truly self-referential, in that it includes within itself its constitutive presupposition."<sup>611</sup> While not explicitly elaborated upon by Kant himself, Kordela argues, the all-non-all set nonetheless operates in the undercurrents of his thinking. The surreptitious operations of the all-non-all set in Kant are informative of the sublimation involved in the moral act, and of the fallacies involved in the radical acts of the antiphilosopher.

According to Kordela, the moral act in Kant depends upon a shift in the registers of reason. Through the shift in register, the solutions to the antinomies are reversed. To Kordela, the moral act is found in the reversals themselves, where both sides of the antinomies co-exist. The moral act thus depends on a subversion or destabilization of the judgments of reason:

[T]he dynamic antinomy or male sex negotiates the inherent contradiction of the One [the undecidable belonging or non-belonging of the set of all sets to itself] by assuming that everything is inside the One – defined as the field of law (the symbolic order) – only insofar as, in another aspect, everything is outside: not subject to any law but free. The mathematic antinomy or female sex deals with the same problem by raising the unanswerable question as to whether the One – defined as the field of appearances (again, the symbolic order) – includes everything within itself or whether there is a world outside appearances, a world in-itself.<sup>612</sup>

Through the shifts of the moral act, beings of reason produce the time in which they live, Kordela continues, "man by creating the times at which he is free and those at which he is subject to the law; woman by creating the before and the after in which experience retroactively constitutes itself."<sup>613</sup> Kordela does not speak of a leap beyond phenomena by turning from speculative to practical reason, as did Espinoza. Nonetheless, the shifts in registers that Kordela discusses do imply a similar leap that

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<sup>611</sup> Kordela: "Genre; with and beyond Gender and Sex (a Psychoanalytic Intervention)", *op.cit.*, p. 100;102.

<sup>612</sup> Kordela: "Being or Sex, and Differences", *op.cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>613</sup> *Loc.cit.*



renders the otherwise negative value of the noumenon as inaccessible into a positive field of possibility.

Kordela's discussion of the paradox of set theory allows for a remark on the case of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's problem concerned his auto-foundation and his desire to be his own big Other in the preparation of himself as an absolute beginning. Nietzsche's position can be described by recourse to the self-referential shift that subverts the solutions of the dynamical antinomy, insofar as his paradoxical position is that of the undecidable status of the constitutive exception as both included in and excluded from its constituted totality. Nietzsche's archi-political act stranded because Nietzsche desired to create only the time at which he would be free, forgetting that this time would have to be referred to through the time at which he has been subject to the law. Wittgenstein's position can be described by way of the mathematical counterpart of Nietzsche's dynamical antinomy. Wittgenstein's conundrum is not so much whether or not the world of science is limited and forms a totality, a question he does not hesitate to answer in the affirmative. Wittgenstein's real conundrum is rather the unanswerable question of whether this world includes everything in itself, or whether there is another world beyond appearances, a world-in-itself. While Wittgenstein is likely to answer the latter unanswerable question also in the affirmative (yes, there is a world-in-itself beyond appearances), the actual affirmation of the world-in-itself, like the radical break of Nietzsche, cannot be imparted on this side of the question, by reason or propositions. The unanswerable question of the world-in-itself begs a wager on the antiphilosophical act. The question remains whether or not Wittgenstein is prone to an equivalent of Nietzsche's absolute fallacy and to forget the materialist underpinnings of this world in his act to move beyond phenomena, beyond thinking, to the world-in-itself. It is a question of the quintessential religiosity of Wittgenstein's silent remainder.

### ***Thinking Impossibility***

Badiou highlights the more peripheral paragraphs of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. These paragraphs serve to frame the central logico-philosophical apparatus of the *Tractatus*,

whose intention is not, despite appearances, the intention of positivism. Even if the bulk of the *Tractatus* is concerned with establishing the lines of demarcation that render propositions meaningful and delimits the domain of science, Wittgenstein's position on science is summed up in the empathic statement of how, even if all possible scientific question were answered, nothing would have been resolved concerning the real problems and the higher issues of life.<sup>614</sup> The higher issues of life concern the meaning of the world. The meaning of the world is to be found – if found at all – beyond the world. It lies beyond the domain of propositions and science, beyond the phenomenal field, in the world-in-itself. In Wittgenstein, Badiou explains, the notion of a meaning of the world beyond appearances is captured by way of a metaphor that articulates aesthetics and religion. It is the metaphor of the pure showing of a mystical element. It communicates that there is something inexpressible, which nonetheless shows itself and makes itself manifest.<sup>615</sup> Hallward notes how "antiphilosophy reveals where philosophy explains."<sup>616</sup> This is especially pronounced in the case of Wittgenstein. The gist of Wittgenstein's work, Badiou writes, is more than anything to establish the laws of the thinkable in order to situate the unthinkable at the upper limit of the thinkable itself.<sup>617</sup> At the upper limit – and when everything that can be said of that which can be said, have been said – the remainder is rendered, quite literally, as silence.

Badiou underscores the religious intimation of Wittgenstein's remainder beyond science. It is closer to the confrontation between the authority of religion and the reason of science from which antiphilosophy was originally coined as a term in its Enlightenment origins. Hallward identifies the crux of antiphilosophy as "a rigorous and quasi-systematic extrapolation from an essentially religious *parti pris*," as

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<sup>614</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 20, see also Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, op.cit.*, § 6.42 and § 6.52: "Sätze können nicht Höheres ausdrücken", and "Wir fühlen, dass, selbst wenn alle mögliche wissenschaftlichen Frage beantworten sind, unsere Lebensprobleme noch gar nicht berührt sind."

<sup>615</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 21; see also Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, op.cit.*, § 6.522: "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich. Dies ist das Mystische."

<sup>616</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>617</sup> Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 22; see also Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, op.cit.*, § 4.114 and § 4.115: "[Die (Anti-)Philosophie] soll das Denkbare abgrenzen und damit das Udenkbaren. Sie soll das Udenkbare von innen durch das Denkbare abgrenzen", and "Sie wird das Unsagbare bedeuten, indem sie das Sagbare klar darstellt."

basically "religion in philosophical guise, argued on philosophical terrain."<sup>618</sup> Hallward's description is fitting of Wittgenstein, who operates in the pursuit of a mystical element, an ineffable meaning, and denounces the theoretical aspirations of the philosopher as dangerous abstractions. Since the remainder ensures the closure of the scientific field, by testifying to its upper limits, Wittgenstein's religious intimation goes beyond the blunt denotation of the meaning of the world as 'God'. Wittgenstein admits to a bifurcation of meaning into a scientific domain of meaning *in* the world and another domain of the unspeakable meaning *of* the world. This bifurcation, Badiou argues, necessarily implies the admittance of a meaning of truths. Truths are not only communicated by meaning, in propositions, but are also possessed by a meaning of their own. However, Badiou continues,

pour le philosophe que je suis, l'idée que les vérités, apparemment contingentes, sont enveloppées par un sens nécessaire – surtout si, comme c'est le cas chez Wittgenstein, cette idée n'est pas l'enjeu d'un argument, si elle n'obéit à aucune discipline des propositions, si elle est ordonnée à l'acte pur et silencieux – est *l'exacte définition théorique de la foi religieuse*. Il n'y aurait donc nul hasard à ce que 'christianisme' nomme ce sens [du monde], qui à la fois surplombe, valorise et destitue le sens [dans le monde]. Et la nouveauté inouïe de l'acte antiphilosophique ne serait à la fin que le retour à cette antique croyance dont tout l'effort philosophique est de nous extirper.<sup>619</sup>

Wittgenstein's religious intimation is not that the authority of God should not be challenged by the philosopher's ruses of reason or the scientist's arguments and experimentations. His contention is that God cannot be challenged in such ways and by such means. God, as the meaning of the world, remains inaccessible on this side of

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<sup>618</sup> Hallward: *Badiou; A Subject to Truth, op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>619</sup> Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein, op.cit.*, p. 52 ("for the philosopher that I am, the idea that truths, apparently contingent, are enveloped by a necessary meaning – above all, as is the case with Wittgenstein, if this idea is not the issue of an argument, if it does not obey a propositional discipline, if it is given over to the pure and silent act – is *the exact theoretical definition of religious faith*. There is thus no chance event in the fact that 'Christianity' designates this meaning [of the world] that simultaneously overarches, valorises, and dismisses the meaning [in the world]. The unheard of novelty of the antiphilosophical act would not be anything, in the end, than the return to this ancient belief which the whole of the philosophical effort has been an attempt to liberate us from").

the pure and silent act, whereas the philosopher reveals a blatant disregard for the unspeakable in assuming that such an absolute instance could be susceptible to communication. As Badiou reformulates Wittgenstein's antipathy against the verbiage of the philosopher, "en définitive, *l'absurdité philosophique est de croire qu'il y a une vérité possible du sens (du monde), alors qu'il n'y a qu'un sens (divin) des vérités (scientifiques)*".<sup>620</sup> If Wittgenstein does not fortify himself behind the covers of the Book as did the abbot Chaudon in his attack on the Enlightenment philosophers, the mechanism at play is nonetheless similar. Both cases invest in the notion of an overarching necessity whose privilege it is to secure the contingent occurrences of the world and of science. Mathematically speaking, both cases invest in the notion of an absolute grand cardinal, a set of all sets, with the power to conclude on the continuum hypothesis and fix the itinerant excess of representation over presentation. The archi-aesthetic act would be the wager by which the belonging of the set of all sets to itself would be confirmed.

The notion of an inaccessible and unthinkable remainder that would function as a transcendent guarantee for its own production of truths is untenable to the scientifically educated philosopher. To Badiou, the lesson of a radically mathematical science amounts to the acknowledgement of the infinite stratification of an outside without blind spots. The unthinkable is precisely that from which the whole philosophical effort has strived to liberate itself. The name of Plato signals the philosophical struggle to liberate thinking from the dominance of the unthinkable. Philosophy proper first becomes the case in and by Plato's inaugural move from *μύθος* to *λόγος*, from the claims of a revealed presence to the claims of mathematical invention and discovery. As Clemens notes *à propos* ontology *vis-à-vis* onto-theology,

Plato is properly the origin of philosophy insofar as he interrupted the claims of poetry (*qua* paradigm of mysterious unveiling) by the claims of the matheme (*qua*

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<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53 ("Finally, *the philosophical absurdity is the belief that there is a possible truth of (the) meaning (of the world), while all there is is a possible (divine) meaning of (scientific) truths*").

paradigm of rigorous knowledge). Rational knowledge (exemplified for Plato by geometry) curbs and supplants the irrational inspirations of literary effusion.<sup>621</sup>

Plato operationalizes mathematics philosophically. To Plato, Clemens writes, mathematics is "not a deficient form of speaking being, but the only way in which being can be properly expressed," insofar as "it is as pure as reason gets, *i.e.* mathematics is at once non-empirical, axiomatic, deductive, extra-linguistic, non-definitional, universalizing."<sup>622</sup> Wittgenstein reduces mathematics to mere calculation and the substitution of signs, whereas Badiou, with his Platonism of the multiple, identifies the essence of mathematics in its ability to think. Mathematics thinks by means of the fundamental theorems on existence, power, decomposition, and presentation. Through such theorems, mathematics thinks the being of beings, the infinite, the composition of multiplicities, and singularities and typologies.<sup>623</sup> More importantly, mathematics is a mode of thinking that thinks in and by the impossible.

Mathematics thinks in and by the impossible, Badiou writes, insofar as mathematics formalizes that which thinking leaves behind as a remainder or impossible proper of its own field of determination, above all the field of mathematics itself, in its anterior state of deployment.<sup>624</sup> As Clemens observes, "each mathematical innovation delivers an entirely new account of multiplicity, which enables its own mathematical predecessors to be rewritten in its own terms without loss."<sup>625</sup> Badiou's remark that the mathematical concept of the limit is the concept of a point-of-presence and not the concept of a horizon gains its full significance here, as does his early argument for the stratification of the scientific space. As he observed of zero as the

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<sup>621</sup> Clemens: *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy*, *op.cit.*, p. 12. The "Introduction" from which the above quote comes, is a reworking of the previously published article whose title to a certain extent captures the crux of the antiphilosophical position as a reversal of the inaugural philosophical move of Plato, namely Clemens: "To Rupture the Matheme with a Poem; A Remark on Psychoanalysis as Anti-philosophy": *Trauma, History, Philosophy* (ed. J. Freddi *et al.*), Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle, 2007, p. 308-312.

<sup>622</sup> Clemens: "Philosophy as Anti-Religion in the Work of Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 349-350.

<sup>623</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 76-77.

<sup>624</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 48. Badiou goes on to list the incommensurables in Eudoxus, the arch as reducible to a series of segments in Archimedes, evanescent quantities in Leibniz and Isaac Newton, indiscernibles in Évariste Galois, the infinitely grand numbers in Cantor, the infinitesimals in Abraham Robinson, etc., as all so many examples of mathematical formalizations of the remainders of its field of determination.

<sup>625</sup> Clemens: "Philosophy as Anti-Religion in the Work of Alain Badiou", *op.cit.*, p. 350.

mark of a lacking mark rather than of lack as such, what is lacking on one level will be reproduced at another – or, more to the point here, what is impossible in one strata, in one formalization, serves as the point of possibility of another strata, another formalization. Hallward has already noted how the productions of scientific truths occur at the impasses of an established formalization.

Badiou refuses to reduce mathematics to simple calculation. He insists on the status of mathematics as a mode of thinking that thinks in and by the impossible. Badiou thus posits mathematics as a serious threat to the antiphilosophical notion of an unthinkable remainder. As Badiou explains, if the impossible is thinkable, as he believes mathematics demonstrates in full, the possibility of the presence of the unthinkable inadvertently becomes much less secure.<sup>626</sup> The entire antiphilosophical project thus wavers, insofar as its legitimacy depends on the unveiled presence of an element inaccessible to thinking, to be granted through the antiphilosophical act alone.

Mathematics as a mode of thinking in and by the impossible should be understood in as literal a sense as possible. An impossibility within the established formalization marks the point of possibility that enables thinking to take place, where thinking is defined as nothing less than the pass through the impasse and the procession to something previously un-thought. The joint invention and discovery of mathematics is in that sense the paradigm of thinking, insofar as it is always the joint invention and discovery of something new. But the pass through the impasse adheres not only to mathematics, Clemens and Bartlett notes. It constitutes

a constant of Badiou's method: the very point at which a thought 'fails', which is to say comes to posit its own end on the supposition of that which is inaccessible to it, marks the very point at which philosophy can (re)constitute itself as the discourse capable of composing the consequences of these 'failures'. The *familiar* ethic is 'keep going.' Philosophy, in Badiou's estimation, is what takes the next step subject to this condition for, as mathematics teaches [...] the inaccessible is not a consistent concept.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>627</sup> Clemens and Bartlett: "'The Greatest of Our Dead'; Badiou and Lacan", *op.cit.*, p. 179.

Philosophy achieves its status as a working practice under the conditions of truths by its education by a science that is radically mathematical. If the conditions of philosophy is found in the four fields of science, art, love, and politics, a radically mathematical science still occupies a special position, insofar as mathematics is as pure as reason gets, as it is both non-empirical and axiomatic, working only in and by its own makings. As Plato's inaugural move fully acknowledged, mathematics is the mode of thinking in which thinking and being, invention and discovery, are indistinguishable from one another. In that sense, mathematics is also the main paradigm for exercising the Platonic idea as the co-belonging or ontological commensurability of the knower and the known.

Both the philosophical doctrine of the event and the antiphilosophical program of the act can be determined by the moment of self-referentiality and the undecidability of this moment's belonging or non-belonging to the given situation. The program of the antiphilosophical act pursues the instantaneous leap or shift from one register to another – whether from speculative to practical reason or from the phenomenal to the noumenal domain, from the unlimited rule of law to absolute freedom or from the indeterminate regress of appearances to the ineffable affirmation of the world-in-itself – as proposed through the readings of the Lacanian Kant above. In the case of Wittgenstein and the leap into the mystical silence of the meaning of the world, there is nothing to testify to the fact that the act has taken place, insofar as both the act and its fact are silent. Like Nietzsche, who forgot the material underpinnings in his desire to create himself as absolutely free, Wittgenstein installs an absolute division between the thinkable world of meanings and the unthinkable meaning of the world. There is no communication from the other side of the limit of the thinkable back into the thinkable, or *vice versa*. Wittgenstein's intimation of the mystical element of the pure showing is a religious equivalent of Nietzsche's absolute fallacy. In distinction from the act, the philosophical concept of the event is educated by science. It conceives of the event as the point of impossibility in which thinking is occasioned. The philosophical concept of the event incorporates the lessons of mathematics. The things that mathematics teaches is not only that the inaccessible is an inconsistent concept but also – precisely *because* the inaccessible is an inconsistent

concept – that the whole effort through which radical change and true novelty can come about is found not in the instantaneous leap from one register to another but in the strenuous process of thinking the impossible within the possible, of thinking the two registers together. Thinking does not end at the limit of thinking. It begins there. The whole effort lies in the faithful elaboration of the undecidable event's consequences in and for the situation, as a gradual thinking the world anew. The double exception of Lacan addresses the lessons of mathematics.

### ***Lacanian Jouissance Remaining; Incompleteness and Inconsistency***

The issue I address in this section is how to make sense of Badiou's designation of Lacan as a double exception among antiphilosophers. At stake are the questions of how Lacan escapes the distinctive criterion of misogyny by which the feminine remainder does nothing but disappear, how Lacan concludes on contemporary antiphilosophy and thereby opens for another philosophy to come, and how these two exceptions relate to each other. Badiou argues that Lacan elaborates on a logic of the act. Lacan's logic of the act comprises the key strands of his antiphilosophy. These key strands count his anti-religious impetus, by which he refuses a transcendent meaning of truth; the archi-scientific status of his act and his recourse to the matheme, by which his act succeeds in demonstrating the function of the real in knowledge rather than promising the unveiled presence of the real beyond knowledge; and the immanent or non-programmatic status of his act as something more than a broken promise. The matheme is the crucial moment. It pinpoints the real of science – or the real of mathematics – as the impossibility of any complete and consistent formalization. Through a reading of Gödel's meta-mathematics and Lacan's references to Gödel, as an expansion of the former discussion of the Kantian problematic of delimitation, I interrogate the relations between the cause of desire as the remainder or the real of science, and science itself. Lacan's archi-scientific act demonstrates the function of the real in science, and proceeds to ask what becomes of science when psychoanalysis is included therein. The final questions concern how Badiou picks up on the Lacanian



matheme in his philosophy to come. The answer concerns the material underpinnings involved in Badiou's mathematical gesture, where the transposition of the real from a category of the subject to a category of being prevents a punctual conception of either subject or truth. An analysis of the function of the feminine other in Badiou's conceptualization of antiphilosophy underscores how the Lacanian demonstrations of the real as the point of impossibility within knowledge thus mark the point from which a Badiouan thinking as radical change and novelty proceeds.

### *A Logic of the Act*

Kant's critical project and Wittgenstein's antiphilosophy share an affinity, according to Badiou. The Kantian noumenon and the silence of the mystical element in Wittgenstein are to be construed as two variations over the ancient theme of the feminine mystery as an absolute delimitation of the thinkable. My question is how the double exception of Lacan is to be positioned in relation to the overall framework of antiphilosophy. The question is how the Lacanian notions of the real of *jouissance* and the drive – the Freudian Thing – are to be conceived of in their function as remainders to the thinking operations of philosophy. As read by Badiou, Lacan is not at all Kantian. The Lacanian real is subtracted from the field of cognition [*connaissance*] in a double sense. The Lacanian real is prone to neither cognition nor non-cognition but is rather *demonstrable*.<sup>628</sup> It is possible to argue that Lacan is an exception to the long line of antiphilosophers to have pinned down woman in some ineffable noun only for her to disappear there because he is the one to have designated his remainder not by some ineffable noun (Life, God, the noumenon) but explicitly as feminine. After all, Lacan operates with a notion of feminine *jouissance* and the non-existence of woman. I may have indicated such an argument in my earlier chapter on the "The Infinite and the Feminine Non-All". The suggestion was made that the Lacanian woman beyond the phallus tended towards the mystical experience and the status of the inaccessible, as the prerogative of the act alone. While this argument makes sense of a general

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<sup>628</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 179; and Badiou: "Formules de 'L'Étourdit'", *op.cit.*, p. 129.

antiphilosophical tendency in the teachings of Lacan, it fails to account for the double exception of Lacan. To Badiou, Lacan is the one that brings contemporary antiphilosophy to a conclusion, and thus the one that opens for another philosophy to come. The question is how.

Lacan's conclusion of contemporary antiphilosophy can be accounted for by recourse to the operations by which the remainder of the Lacanian real is figured to be demonstrable. The difference between cognition [*connaissance*] and knowledge [*savoir*] is paramount here. As Johnston notes, cognition is an issue of "conscious acquaintance or familiarity" and of what is "known *qua* consciously recognized as customary or familiar knowledge", whereas knowledge entails "conceptual, intellectual comprehension" and what is "known *qua* theoretically grasped or symbolically interpreted knowing."<sup>629</sup> The demonstrability and the double subtraction of the real from the field of cognition do not signify its subtraction from both cognition and knowledge, but neither does it signify that the real is an issue of pure conceptual comprehension as opposed to conscious acquaintance. Rather, the demonstrability of the real is an issue of marking the function of the real in knowledge, concretized by Lacan in a so-called logic of the act. According to Badiou, such a logic of the act is one moment desperately missing in the case of Wittgenstein.<sup>630</sup> In want of a logic of the act, Wittgenstein's antiphilosophy was delivered over to philosophy, as the thinking of its act or the thinking of its non-thought.

Several key strands of Lacan's antiphilosophy concur in the Lacanian logic of the act. Besides the demonstrability of the real, these strands count the non-programmatic status of Lacan's act, its archi-scientific status, Lacan's recourse to the *matheme*, and his anti-religious impetus. Hallward identified a religious attitude at the heart of antiphilosophy, and a religious attitude certainly is a trend of antiphilosophy in general. However, as Bosteels have argued, an identification of the religious attitude as an invariant trait of antiphilosophy remains unable to account for the specificities of Lacan's position. Lacan's position is characterized by its attack on the religious temptations within the philosophical tradition. It is an "attack on philosophy proper as

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<sup>629</sup> See Johnston: "This Philosophy which is not One", *op.cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>630</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

driven by a religious search for meaning, which is precisely the stupidity from which antiphilosophy seeks to awaken us," Bosteels writes, on the grounds of which he argues that it would "be imprecise to equate antiphilosophy and religion [insofar as] it is precisely one of antiphilosophy's negative lessons that religion continues to lie in wait behind philosophy's love of truth as meaning."<sup>631</sup> Clemens also highlights how Lacan comes to question the religious intonations of antiphilosophy by noting a strange reversal in Lacan's revitalization of antiphilosophy as a term, compared to the terms anti-Enlightenment origins. In Lacan, it is the philosopher who is accused of turning away from the real, and not the old priest. Lacan advocates the analyst's liberation from philosophy as *les Lumières* advocated the philosopher's liberation from religion, insofar as, as Clemens writes, philosophy occupies the space of religion as an essential 'not-wanting-to-know', a basic drive to ignorance, underscoring its flagged 'love of wisdom' and 'knowledge of truth'.<sup>632</sup> Badiou hails Lacan as the only true rationalist among his antiphilosophical compeers,<sup>633</sup> and Lacan's rationalism concurs with his anti-religious impetus. Lacan's rationalism culminates in the archi-scientific status of his act, and in his recourse to the matheme. Both the matheme and the archi-scientific act is directed at the void or real point of science as a practice, for science's own impossibility or point of impasse. It seeks to pinpoint the real of knowledge.

The anti-religious impetus and the archi-scientific act also relate to the non-programmatic status of Lacan's act. The non-programmatic status of Lacan's act concerns how its certainty is not merely anticipated. Lacan's act is the psychoanalytic act, and the significance of Lacan's call for a 'return to Freud' is found here, Badiou writes. The analyses of Freud, primarily Freud's own auto-analysis, constitute an eternal testimony of the fact that the psychoanalytic act has taken place at least once. The act's real occurrence has consequences, Badiou continues, insofar as

si l'acte a eu lieu, il n'est plus transcendant, parce qu'il doit être déchiffrable dans le savoir même, dans la production du savoir. Il doit passer, il doit se faire reconnaître comme tel dans la puissante passe historique. Voilà pourquoi je dirais que Lacan

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<sup>631</sup> Bosteels: "Radical Antiphilosophy", *op.cit.*, p. 178-179.

<sup>632</sup> See Clemens: *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy*, *op.cit.*, p. 4-5.

<sup>633</sup> See Badiou: *L'Antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

élabore la première antiphilosophie immanente et, en tant que telle, c'est la dernière antiphilosophie. Parce que si elle est réelle, alors elle s'atteste comme savoir.<sup>634</sup>

If the act has occurred, it effectively denies relegation to a religious transcendence. It must be attested to in the production of knowledge, as an immanent antiphilosophy. Under the heading of an immanent antiphilosophy, Lacan's act realizes the imbrication of its anti-religious impetus, its archi-scientific status, its recourse to the matheme, and its demonstration of the real. Confronted by the students of Vincennes in the wake of May 68, Lacan admitted that the subversive potential of his discourse did not amount to more than a reluctance to posit a solution,<sup>635</sup> and the pressing issue is no longer to prophesize for a coming rupture of the real as the full presence of Life or God or Woman. The subversion of the Lacanian act is rather the more modest operation of uncovering the function of the real in knowledge, or a tracing and marking of the function of the real within the production and circulation of knowledge.

The above suggestion that Lacan would avoid pinning down woman in an ineffable noun because of his explicit denomination of the remainder as feminine is thus open for a reformulation that also accounts for Lacan's double exception. The double exception of Lacan is not so much due to the explicit noun of the feminine as to the perseverance of its disappearing reference. If antiphilosophers before Lacan have done no better than to flag the feminine remainder under a series of ineffable nouns by which it has simply disappeared, Lacan's immanent antiphilosophy is exceptional insofar as its archi-scientific act enables the remainder to be marked in its function as a disappearance within the fields of knowledge. It is not so much a matter of chasing after the existence of the non-existent woman, which would be a futile chase, or of marking her presence, which would be to cede too much to religious revelation or philosophical speculation. It is a matter of coming to terms with how a non-existing element within the phallic universe nonetheless functions therein, and how the

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<sup>634</sup> Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 105 ("But if the act has taken place, it is no longer transcendent, because it must be possible to decipher in knowledge itself, in the production of knowledge. It must pass, it must make itself recognized as such in the forceful historical pass. That is why I say that Lacan elaborates the first immanent antiphilosophy and, as such, it is the last antiphilosophy, seeing that if it is real, then it must be attested to as knowledge").

<sup>635</sup> See Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 80.

function of such a non-existence can be marked and demonstrated. The matter has been discussed in regard to Copjec and Zupančič's readings of the drive. It is also the underlying point of Žižek's discernment of the difference between 'no relation' (there is no sexual relationship) and the 'non-relation' (there is a non-relation) in Lacan.<sup>636</sup> As Badiou explains, the Lacanian act is a matter of directing the construction of what is constrained within the field, the remainder of *jouissance*, in an elevation from impotence to impossibility.<sup>637</sup> Constructing the constrained as impotence merely indicates an inaccessible remainder in the real of sexual difference and determines suffering as a subjective fault in regard to the phallus. Impotence signals the philosopher's grandiose delusion and the misconception of a possible One-All, where the presumed cause of the suffering of the subject is the subject's separation from and inability to assume the One-All. Constructing the constrained as impossibility marks the remainder as the impasse proper of sexual relations and determines suffering as an objective fault of the phallus. Impossibility signals the fundamental inconsistency of the One-All and defines incompleteness as a fundamental trait of subjectivity. Badiou also determines the elevation of impotence to impossibility as the move proper to his own philosophy. The question is how the impossible thinking of Badiou's philosophy confers with the Lacanian act, or how the Lacanian act prepares for another philosophy to come.

### *The Mother and the Matheme*

The act of marking the real as it is operative in knowledge renders the proper content of Lacan's insurgence against philosophy and its innate religious temptation apprehensible. Philosophy is always threatening to appropriate psychoanalysis for itself and its own purposes, Badiou writes. The philosophical appropriation of psychoanalysis operates under the name of a search for truth. Such a philosophical appropriation is already well established in the vulgar conception of psychoanalysis

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<sup>636</sup> See Žižek: *Less than Nothing*, *op.cit.*, p. 795.

<sup>637</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan*, *op.cit.*, p. 203.

that considers the unconscious as the distribution of the truth of consciousness.<sup>638</sup> An obvious example is the so-called Freudian quip on the *lapsus* as 'when you say one thing but mean your mother'. The slip of the tongue is represented as bespeaking an unconscious desire for the mother as the true meaning of the conscious mind or the truth of the subject's desire. Psychoanalysis is thereby reduced to a practice of interpretation and hermeneutics. As a consequence, the analyst is easily pedestalled into the position of mastery – as the subject supposed to know the true meaning underneath every word and gesture, the truth of the subject's being. As Lacan writes of the religious field, "la vérité y est renvoyée à des fins qu'on appelle eschatologiques, c'est-à-dire qu'elle n'apparaît que comme cause final, au sens où elle est reportée à un jugement de fin de monde."<sup>639</sup> Lacan's definition of the religious field is a precise description of the stakes involved in setting out in search for the one true meaning, or the one truth to settle meaning once and for all. But Lacan's words were not intended solely for the Church but also for the church-like association of the psychoanalytic international (IPA). An analysis that sets out in search of the one truth runs the risk not only of remaining caught up in the imaginary misconceptions of the One-All, of a meaning of being and a true self. It also runs the risk – in assuming the true meaning of desire to be pinned down and ignoring the essential division and metonymic movement inherent to desire – of denying everything resembling castration.

Lacan himself determines interpretation to be the simple movement inherent to desire itself, stating that he does not search but find.<sup>640</sup> There is a difference between searching and finding. As Lacan explains in *...ou pire*, the elevation of finding over searching is not to be read as a denial of the calculability of meaning. It simply states that meaning will be calculable only on account of what is found, and that the crucial point not to miss is how that which one finds, that which arrives, is never that which one set out in search for in the first place.<sup>641</sup> The meaning of the unconscious is never

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<sup>638</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 172-173.

<sup>639</sup> See Lacan: "La science et la vérité", *op.cit.*, p. 872 ("truth is referred to so-called eschatological ends there, that is to say, truth only appears as final cause, in the sense that it is postponed to a judgement on the end of the world").

<sup>640</sup> See Lacan: *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 16; 241; See also Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>641</sup> See Lacan: *... ou pire*, *op.cit.*, p. 170.

the meaning assumed, and the religious-philosophical tendency to assume a meaning to the unconscious is the precise reason why Lacan musters his forces in an antiphilosophical rebellion, Badiou writes. When Badiou quotes one of Lacan's own definitions of the unconscious, it is one in which the names of truth and meaning have given way to that of knowledge, to a notion of "un savoir de l'insu" or "le savoir qui est dans le guise du réel du point de sa présentation comme impossible."<sup>642</sup> At the same time, Badiou takes care to underline that truth is not to be confused with the unknown knowledge involved in these definitions of the unconscious, nor with the knowledge of this knowledge.

Lacan's position on the unconscious must be distinguished from its religious-philosophical other. Clemens and Bartlett make an important remark when they write that Lacanian antiphilosophy is "a *subtractive* one" that "builds its discourse on that which, for its rival, is *impossible to say* and *impossible to know*," insofar as "analytic discourse constructs itself as the truth of the other or the thought of the real."<sup>643</sup> It is important not to misconstrue the sense in which Clemens and Bartlett's portrayal must be understood, and the reading to be avoided is the one presuming that psychoanalysis goes on to say and know that which is impossible for its others to say and know, that it goes on to think the real 'substantially', as it were, as if the real was a hidden and forgotten content of its rival.

Lacan's opposition against the common translations of Freud's '*Wo Es war...*' refuses the end of analysis to be anything akin to the ego dislocating or dislodging the id. To consider the unconscious as either the hidden truth of consciousness or an unknown knowledge to be assumed and known by way of interpretation can only remain another misprision of the Freudian motto. It emphasizes a potency falsely ascribed to the conscious mind. When Lacan suggests the translation of the Freudian motto as stating that "là où c'était, là comme sujet dois-je advenir,"<sup>644</sup> he does not suggest that the end of analysis lies in an absolute knowledge in which a full translation of the unconscious 'unknown knowns' into the 'known knowns' of

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<sup>642</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan*, p. 36; 175 ("a knowledge of the unknown" or "knowledge of this which is in the guise of the real at the point of its presentation as impossible").

<sup>643</sup> Clemens and Bartlett: "'The Greatest of Our Dead'; Badiou and Lacan", *op.cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>644</sup> Lacan: "La science et la vérité", *op.cit.*, p. 864 ("where it was, there must I as subject come to be").

consciousness were to be achieved. On the contrary, Lacan intimates how the notion of an absolute knowledge would imply the abolition of the term of *jouissance*,<sup>645</sup> and the absence of an absolute knowledge and the deficiency of a full translation are recognized no longer as caused by a regrettable impotence or inability, but as a fundamental impossibility. As Badiou suggests, the end of analysis occurs at the point of impossibility, where the subject might assume its lack-in-being in conjunction with its real.<sup>646</sup> In other words, the end of analysis aims at the point of impossibility where the subject's incompleteness adds up in conjunction with the inconsistency of the Other. Lacan indicates the main lines already in his early movement from imaginary frustration through symbolic castration to real privation.<sup>647</sup> Furthermore, Badiou writes, if philosophy is ultimately the presumption of a possible knowledge of a truth of the real, in another twist on the religious temptation to intimate the meaning of truth, Lacanian antiphilosophy undermines this philosophical configuration by way of a threefold negation:

Premièrement, il n'y a pas de vérité du réel [...]. Il y a vérité dans la mesure où il y a une fonction du réel dans le savoir. [...] Deuxièmement, il n'y a pas non plus savoir du réel. Ce qu'il y a, c'est une fonction du réel dans le savoir qui permet une situation de la vérité. Troisièmement, bien entendu, il n'y a pas non plus de savoir de la vérité. Tout au plus, pourrait-on dire, et ce serait un peu métaphorique, qu'il y a la vérité d'un savoir à proportion de ce qu'un réel y est en fonction, y fonctionne.<sup>648</sup>

The general theme is a notion of truth as relative to the function of a real in knowledge. To return to Clemens and Bartlett's portrayal, when they write that

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<sup>645</sup> See Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>646</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 203. See also Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse, op.cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>647</sup> See Lacan: *Le Séminaire, livre IV; La relation d'objet (1956-1957)*(ed. Jacques-Alain Miller), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1994, p. 25 ff.

<sup>648</sup> Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 175-176 ("First of all, there is no truth of the real [...]. There is truth to the degree that there is a function of the real in knowledge. [...] Secondly, there is no more a knowledge of the real. There is but a function of the real in knowledge permitting of a situation of truth. Thirdly, naturally, there is no more a knowledge of truth. At the most, one might say, and this will be a bit metaphorical, there is truth of a knowledge in proportion to how a real is in operation or functions therein").



psychoanalysis constructs itself as the truth of the other or the thought of the real, it is obvious that psychoanalysis can only do so in the sense that psychoanalysis constructs itself as the situation in which the function of the real can be marked, and demonstrated, in its function in and for the others of psychoanalysis, *e.g.* philosophy, religion, science, or also psychoanalysis itself. Psychoanalysis does not speak the truth of its others, nor of itself, but it constructs itself as the discourse that marks the point from where truth might speak in these others.

To construct psychoanalysis as the situation in which these points can be marked is the precise task Lacan undertakes in his theory of discourses, in *L'Envers de la psychanalyse*. He isolates the place and function of the object *petit a* – *plus-de-jouir* or surplus *jouissance* – within the discourses of the master, the university, the hysteric, and the analyst. As he declares of the position of the *petit a*, it is a matter of an effect of discourse as the effect of a reject, whose place and function he all along attempts to pinpoint.<sup>649</sup> He also underlines, in *Encore*, that the four discourses, with their four terms (S<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub>, \$, *a*) in their four positions (semblance, other, truth, production), can be constructed only on account of the fact that they have already been articulated and structured through the psychoanalytic discourse.<sup>650</sup> With a slightly different intonation, Lacan had undertaken a similar construction in "La science et la vérité". It is in affirming that the object of psychoanalysis is none other than the one he has advanced as the function of the object *petit a*, and in acknowledging the unconscious or 'a truth that speaks' as the material cause of his own practice, that Lacan is able to determine the place and function of the object *petit a* not only within analysis proper but also in regard to the fields of magic, religion, and science.<sup>651</sup> These fields can be determined on the basis of how the object *petit a* – or truth as cause – is operative within them, as efficient, final, and formal cause, respectively. The decisive part played by analysis is underscored when Lacan suggests an alternative determination of these fields as characterized by their respective repression, denegation, and foreclosure of the cause in question.<sup>652</sup> Lacan's theory of discourses and his earlier interventions make it clear

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<sup>649</sup> See Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>650</sup> See Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>651</sup> Lacan: "La science et la vérité", *op.cit.*, p. 863.

<sup>652</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 870 ff, esp. p. 874.

how analysis can construct itself as the truth of its others only to the extent that it serves to mark the function of the real in the production and circulation of knowledge in these others, and not as the revelation or donation of the truth of these others.

The task of the psychoanalytic construction carries the archi-scientific significance of Lacan's antiphilosophical act, according to Badiou. At the core of this construction, Badiou isolates the invention of the matheme. It is the matheme that enables a demonstration of the function of the real. The crucial passages on how Badiou construes the function of the matheme in the archi-scientific act of Lacan are found in Badiou's session of November 9, 1994:

Il y a le réel – en occurrence l'absence de rapport sexuel, il y a *ce qui du réel s'enseigne*, qui est le mathématisable, et il y a les mathèmes, comme impasse du mathématisable. C'est en ce point, à mon sens, que l'archiscientifique se montre au lieu où l'acte va apparaître comme ce qu'il faut bien appeler – formule abominable pour Lacan – un réel du réel [...]: le réel inscriptible du réel enseigné. Le mathème va être en un point d'impasse, mais ce point d'impasse, c'est le point du réel. Donc le mathème va être au point réel du mathématisable, lequel mathématisable est *ce qui du réel s'enseigne*. Nous sommes donc fondés à dire: le mathème, c'est ce qui inscrit comme impasse le réel [...] de ce qui du réel s'enseigne.<sup>653</sup>

In more structured and generalized terms, Badiou continues to say that the archi-scientific act depends on

[u]ne double occurrence du réel, qui est au point de l'acte comme torsion. Ici, la torsion s'opère entre le réel comme réel de la science et le réel de *ce qui du réel s'enseigne*, en tant que mathème. La double occurrence, c'est la science et le mathème, c'est-à-dire très précisément dans le texte de Lacan, le mathématisable et

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<sup>653</sup> Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 43-44 ("There is the real – in this case the absence of the sexual relation; there is *that which is taught of the real*, which is that which can be mathematized; and there are the mathemes, as the impasse of that which can be mathematized. It is at this point, in my opinion, that the archi-scientific is shown in the place where the act will appear as that which one must truly call – in a formulation abominable to Lacan – a real of the real [...] the inscribable real of the teachable real. The matheme will be in a point of impasse, but this point of impasse is the point of the real. Thus, the matheme will be at the real point of that which can be mathematized, mathematized as *that which is thought of the real*. We are thus occasioned to say that the matheme is that which inscribes the impasse that is the real [...] of that which is taught of the real").

le mathème; donc finalement le mathématique et le mathème. Et le mathème est archiscientifique parce qu'il n'est pas mathématique, étant au point du réel de la mathématique elle-même.<sup>654</sup>

The matheme marks the impossibility inherent to science and mathematics as such. If the absence of the sexual relation is real, and mathematics goes as far as anything can go in pronouncing anything on this absence, there is a point of impasse inherent to mathematics itself that does not pronounce itself (that is subtracted from cognition in a double sense), that can only be inscribed by way of the matheme (that can nonetheless be demonstrated).

If the matheme marks the real of the real, and inscribes the point of impasse of that which can be taught or pronounced, to question the meaning of that inscription or the content-reference of that mark would be an odd endeavor to take up. The mark does not have a content-reference but pinpoints the lack of a mark, and the inscription does not have a meaning but serves to convey the point where meaning falters. Nevertheless, the point in question is addressed by psychoanalysis under the category of sexual matters. The psychoanalytic category of sexual matters pinpoints the crux of the double subtraction involved in the demonstration of the real. To address the psychoanalytic category of sexual matters, Badiou refers to a series of neologisms in Lacan's "L'Étourdit". Lacan determines the real on the basis of its double subtraction from meaning and non-meaning. The real is rather an absence of meaning, written as 'ab-sense' [*ab-sens*]. Ab-sense is the psychoanalytic designation of sexual matters, through which is rendered the absence of the sexual relation as an 'ab-sex sense' [*sens ab-sexe*]:

L'ab-sens désigne le sexe, mais finalement le sexe tel qu'au réel, ou tel qu'au non-rapport, est un sens ab-sexe. On peut donc dire que l'ab-sens n'est pas non-sens, parce qu'il est sens ab-sexe, c'est-à-dire que l'ab-sens désigne bien un réel dans la

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<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46 ("A double occurrence of the real, which is at the point of the act as torsion. Here, the torsion takes place between the real as the real of science and the real of *that which is taught of the real*, as matheme. The double occurrence, that is science and the matheme, which is to say in the text of Lacan, precisely, that which can be mathematized and the matheme, and thus finally mathematics and the matheme. The matheme is archi-scientific because it is not mathematical, being at the point of the real of mathematics itself").

registration qui peut, tout de même, être dite registration du sens, même si c'est le sens comme ab-sens.<sup>655</sup>

Ab-sense is not non-meaning, just as the demonstrability of the real is not reducible to either cognition or non-cognition. Ab-sense is what befalls the demonstration of the matheme, whose task is thus still the one of Freud and his inaugural interrogations of the effects of sex on thinking. As Copjec remarks, psychoanalytically speaking, sex is the stumbling block of sense.<sup>656</sup> Copjec's remark is significant insofar as it points to how psychoanalysis, in addressing the point of impossibility in question under the category of sexual matters, provides an answer to the question of the very 'quiddity' of sex, the 'what' of sex, while apparently dodging it. Rather than some pure presence whose purity would render it meaningless and inaccessible to thinking, sex *is* the contradiction inherent to meaning or the signifier itself. Sex is the impossibility of completing meaning, as Copjec writes, or, in the terminology of Badiou's readings of Lacan, sex is ab-sense as the absence of meaning within meaning. The archi-scientific act of psychoanalysis goes to mark the function of this absence of meaning within meaning, as the point where meaning breaks down. It is the real of knowledge. The question is how the archi-scientific act proceeds to mark the function of the real within knowledge, and how Badiou's philosophical works and his attempts to think change are informed by the archi-scientific act of psychoanalysis. The question is how the mark of the function of the real comes to function in Lacanian antiphilosophy, and then in Badiou's philosophy to come.

### ***Paradoxes of Totality***

The function of the real appertains to the problem of totality. While the Kantian antinomies approached the problematic of delimitation, Kordela's notion of the all-non-all set was introduced as an expansion on the paradoxes appertaining to totality.

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<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93 ("Ab-sense designates sex, but ultimately sex as real, or as non-rapport, is an ab-sex sense. One can thus say that the ab-sense is not non-sense, because it is ab-sex sense, that is to say that ab-sense actually designates a real in a registration that can all the same be called a registration of sense, even if it is sense as ab-sense"). See also Lacan: "L'Étourdit", *op.cit.*, p. 452.

<sup>656</sup> See Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 18.

The all-non-all set determines the obstacle to the establishment of totality to be the totality's own self-referentiality. As she writes, the so-called paradox of set theory installs a set of all sets whose belonging or non-belonging to itself cannot be decided upon. A more detailed debate on the operations involved in the paradox of set theory is, however, absent from Kordela's representation. It is an unfortunate absence, since there is no single paradox of set theory but several. The set of all sets is paradoxical and cannot avoid its own self-contradiction insofar as its cardinality is both greater and lesser than that of its power-set, the set of all subsets of the set of all sets. Russell's paradox of the set of all sets that are not members of themselves, and whose belonging or non-belonging to itself remains undecidable, is another paradox that follows from the previous one. But as Kordela observes, the root cause of the paradoxes of set theory is the self-referentiality of totality. Douglas R. Hofstadter speaks of a so-called 'strange loop'<sup>657</sup> where totality is reflected upon and turned back upon totality itself in and through one of its elements. As Livingston writes, "the problematic element [...] reflexively captures the total structure of the *whole* system [...] of which it is a part, at a fixed, local point *within* that very system."<sup>658</sup> Such paradoxes of totality are not the privilege of mathematics alone. They burgeon in the field of speech and language, where self-referentiality and reflexivity seem to be a rule rather than an exception. Language cannot avoid referring to itself at some point, as, for instance, in the saying that all Cretans are liars according to the Cretan Epimenides (this sentence is false). But mathematics, to a greater extent than linguistics, has the capacity to mark the function of totality's reflexivity. The question concerns the significance and implications of this capacity. To Badiou, mathematics has also the further capacity to continue thinking in and through that mark, as thinking in and through the impossible.

Russell's *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913), coauthored with Alfred N. Whitehead, aimed to exorcise all paradoxes from mathematics and to derive all of mathematics from logic, without contradictions. The result was a hierarchization of sets known as the theory of types. It denied reflexivity by admitting reference to a given type of sets only by recourse to a superior type of sets. It denied reflexivity by

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<sup>657</sup> See Hofstadter, Douglas R.: *Gödel, Escher, Bach; An Eternal Golden Braid* [1980], Penguin Books, London, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>658</sup> Livingston: *The Politics of Logic, op.cit.*, p. 25.

prohibiting any set to be a member of itself. In terms of ordinary language, every reference to an object language would be referred to a meta-language, whose reference would again be referred to a meta-meta-language, *etc.* The goal was the axiomatic formulation of mathematics as a consistent or non-contradictory system that would also be complete or able to account for every true statement of mathematics, or more generally, "a complete codification of the universally acceptable modes of human reasoning, at least as far as they applied to mathematics."<sup>659</sup> To offer a rigorous demonstration that *Principia Mathematica* actually constituted a consistent and complete system was the program set down by meta-mathematician David Hilbert. This program was finally confuted with Gödel's incompleteness theorem, published in 1931.

Gödel's incompleteness theorem divides into two.<sup>660</sup> The first theorem states that within any formal axiomatic sufficiently complex to account for arithmetic, such as *Principia Mathematica*, there exists at least one undecidable statement (the Gödel sentence) that asserts its own improvableity (this sentence cannot be proven). There exists at least one true statement that can be neither proved nor disproved but at the cost of the system's inconsistency. The second theorem states that the proof of the consistency of a formal axiomatic sufficiently complex to account for arithmetic cannot be demonstrated within that system but at the cost, again, of inconsistency. To demonstrate the consistency of a system like *Principia Mathematica* by the parameters of that system renders the system inconsistent. A consistent system implies its own incompleteness, whereas a complete system implies its own inconsistency. As Livingston notes, the two faces of Gödel's incompleteness theorem demonstrate "the impossibility of any formalization of mathematical reasoning that combines both completeness [...] and logical consistency," or the "fundamental impossibility of a formalization of reason and language that achieves totality in its referential scope

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<sup>659</sup> See Hofstadter: *Gödel, Escher, Bach, op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>660</sup> For Gödel's text, see Gödel, Kurt: "Über Formal Unentscheidbare Sätze der *Principia Mathematica* und Verwandter Systeme, I": *Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik*, vol. 38, 1931, p. 173-198; and also Gödel: "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of *Principia Mathematica* and Related Systems, I": *The Undecidable; Basic Papers on Undecidable Propositions, Unsolvability Problems and Computable Functions* (ed. Martin Davis), Dover Publications, Mineola NY, 1993, p. 4-38. I base my exposition primarily on the summaries provided in Hofstadter: *Gödel, Escher, Bach, op.cit.*, p. 17-24; and Livingston: *The Politics of Logic, op.cit.*, p. 20 ff.

while avoiding paradox in its implications."<sup>661</sup> The undecidable statement of the Gödel sentence reintroduces paradox into the very core of mathematics itself, despite Russell and Whitehead's attempts at its eradication. Gödel reintroduces paradox by exploiting how any sufficiently complex axiomatic, let alone any complete codification of human reasoning, cannot avoid comprising elements of reflexivity. Within a sufficiently complex axiomatic, there is always the possibility of forming statements about the axiomatic itself. John D. Barrow uses the fitting term of a so-called 'incestuous encoding'.<sup>662</sup> Taken in their full effect, Gödel's incompleteness theorems indicate how reason cannot be proven to be consistent without proving itself inconsistent.

Lacan picks up on Gödel's insights in this effect. Gödel's incompleteness theorem provides a non-metaphorical showcase of how no language knows how to say the truth of truth, as Lacan first formulates it,<sup>663</sup> or, as he later rephrases it, of how the place of truth is itself a holed-out place that renders only a negative answer viable in response to the question of whether or not knowledge, in the place of truth, can know of itself at all.<sup>664</sup> Lacan identifies the absence of the truth of truth, or of knowledge's knowledge of itself, as the most accurate formulation of Freud's notion of primary repression [*Urverdrängung*]. Primary repression answers to a logical fault within the symbolic order, that is, within the big Other, on account of which the big Other's proper content will remain unknown to the big Other itself. The big Other is unknowable in and for itself, and it is to this status that the absence of any *ganze Sexualstrebung*, any totality of sexual life that would summarize both the essence and the function of sex, is due. The logic is the familiar logic of the law's inherent contradiction and, as in the ab-sense discussed above, the status of the symbolic order's incompleteness and inconsistency is the very designation of sex as such, of sex as real. Through the teachings of Lacan, Freud's inaugural step to interrogate the effects of sex on thinking is retranslated into a question of the effects on thinking of the logical fault within the symbolic, or the question of the effects on thinking of thinking's failure to think itself. The speaking beings addressed by psychoanalysis is

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<sup>661</sup> Livingston: *The Politics of Logic, op.cit.*, p. 24-25.

<sup>662</sup> See Barrow, John D.: *Impossibility; The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 222

<sup>663</sup> See Lacan: "La science et la vérité", *op.cit.*, p. 867.

<sup>664</sup> See Lacan: *D'un Autre à l'autre, op.cit.*, p. 59-60.

faced with an undecidable statement that captures the crux of the symbolic order's failure to account for its own consistency. The subject of language is faced with the undecidable decision between the two equally failed solutions of the two logics of sexuation: either a consistent but incomplete masculinity and the prohibition against including everything in the All, as Copjec writes, or a complete but inconsistent femininity and the impossibility of constructing an All.<sup>665</sup> If Gödel provides a non-metaphorical showcase for primary repression, a metaphorical showcase is found in the myth of the lamella. It symbolizes the primordial loss entailed in sexual reproduction and the inherent impossibility of consistency and completion.

Lacan determines the self-convoluting structure of the big Other's relation to itself as equal to the object *petit a*, the object-cause of desire. Insofar as the subject is that which a signifier represents for another signifier, the object *petit a* is the hole designated at the level of the Other, the battery of signifiers, when the Other is put in question in its relation to the subject, that is to say, when it is put in question in relation to the signifier's relation to itself.<sup>666</sup> The inconsistency of the Other is relegated as the cause that twists every enunciation into a demand, into a question of the desire of the Other. Insofar as the Other cannot account fully for its contents, the question of the desire of the Other cannot be answered, and in lack of an answer to the question of the desire of the Other, the subject can never fully know of what it speaks when it speaks, of what is said in a saying (*qu'on dise reste oublié derrière ce qui se dit dans ce qui s'entend...*). The inconsistency of the Other is the cause of the unconscious of every discourse. Ultimately, Lacan claims, the insights of Gödel testify to the presence of the subject of mathematics within mathematics. More precisely, Gödel's incompleteness theorem defines the point where the mathematician's desire

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<sup>665</sup> See Copjec: "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason", *op.cit.*, p. 41. See also Boucher, Geoff: *The Charmed Circle of Ideology; A Critique of Laclau and Mouffe, Butler and Žižek*, Re-press, Melbourne, 2008, p. 171, fn. 4. The two sides of Gödel's incompleteness theorem seem to translate into the determining halves of Lacan's two logics of sexuation. The first theorem, stating that there is at least one true statement that cannot be proved or disproved within the system, translates as the masculine logic of exception (there is at least one speaking being that is not subject to the phallic function), whereas the second theorem, stating that the consistency of the system cannot be demonstrated within the system itself, translates into the feminine logic of the non-all (non-all speaking beings are subjects to the phallic function).

<sup>666</sup> See Lacan: *D'un Autre à l'autre*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.



interrupts the mathematical discourse.<sup>667</sup> The mathematical discourse is no less incomplete and unable to sustain its consistency than any other discourse.

The inconsistency of the Other and the insistence of desire make up the precise moments that science does not want to know anything about, according to Lacan. Science forecloses desire from its operations, Lacan explains, as the characteristic of science *vis-à-vis* its pre-scientific others is science's absolute indifference in regard to its operator's purity of spirit. The desire of the scientist is completely irrelevant as far as the operations and outcomes of science are concerned.<sup>668</sup> A similar point can be made in regard to the university discourse. The university discourse succumbs to the presupposition of an 'I-crazy' [*Je-cratie*], Lacan remarks, a certain not-wanting-to-know anything about the inherent disruption in the place of enunciation. It does not want to know anything about the truth that speaks and, hence, disrupts the presumed unity of the speaking act.<sup>669</sup> Science and the university discourse are thus both sustained by an underlying subject supposed to know, namely the subject supposed to know signification as such. The scientific discourse is sustained by a subject supposed to speak the truth and master the one-to-one relationship not only in and to itself as a subject but also, and more importantly, in and to a consistent Other: The famous book of nature, written in the language of mathematics, is to be completed with no lacking pages, and consistently contained between its two covers. Gödel's incompleteness theorem, in Lacan's reading, signals the moment when desire and the inconsistency of the Other are allowed to sieve back into the scientific discourse.

If science defines itself as the effective foreclosure of desire and the unconscious, it is obvious that psychoanalysis does not amount to a self-defined science. The analytic act revolves around the question of the desire of the analyst, and it is through the question of the desire of the analyst that Lacan's 'return to Freud' gains its full significance. I have already noted how Badiou determines the return to Freud as paramount in the non-programmatic status of the analytic act, where the act is demonstrated to have occurred at least once. But Lacan's return to Freud is also a return to the question of the desire of Freud himself. It implies the effects of something

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<sup>667</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>668</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>669</sup> See Lacan: *L'Envers de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 70-71.

in Freud's work that has never been properly analyzed and, hence, continues to speak without Freud or his readers knowing of that which is said and spoken about thereby – until Lacan calls for his return.<sup>670</sup> Badiou suggests a difficult thesis, namely that "pour Lacan le désir de l'analyste, c'est le mathème."<sup>671</sup> The thesis is interesting, and all the more so when read in the context of the full significance of Lacan's return to Freud. Badiou's thesis should be read in as strong and literal a sense as possible. The thesis can be read in the direction that the desire of the analyst is *for* the matheme, in the sense that arriving at the matheme is also the arrival at the end of analysis, the elevation of constraint from impotence to impossibility. A stronger reading of the thesis, however, would signify the identity of the desire of the analyst and the matheme. The desire of the analyst *is* the matheme, in the sense that the desire of the analyst is to be marked as the impasse of that which can be mathematized, of mathematics or science as such. In keeping with the notion of the real as doubly subtracted from the field of cognition, the desire of the analyst is the matheme, in the sense that the desire of the analyst is prone to neither cognition nor non-cognition, being instead only demonstrable. In contradistinction to science, psychoanalysis aims for the desire underscoring and disrupting its discourse. It aims for the undecidable statement in and by which the inconsistency of the Other is realized, and it is at this moment that the archi-scientific character of the Lacanian act culminates: it is not so much a question of whether or not psychoanalysis is a science, Lacan suggests, but rather of that which becomes of a science insofar as psychoanalysis is to be included therein. The question is, in other words, what becomes of a science that acknowledges the effects of its own underlying desires, its inconsistencies and incompletions, and its own impossibilities. My final question is how the Lacanian intrusions into science pave the way for Badiou's philosophy to come.

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<sup>670</sup> See Lacan: *Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>671</sup> Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan*, *op.cit.*, p. 46 ("for Lacan, the desire of the analyst, it is the matheme").

### *The Philosophy to Come*

Badiou's seminar on the antiphilosophy of Lacan ends in mid-air, inconclusively, especially in regard to the question of how another philosophy to come is to emerge from Lacan's conclusion of contemporary antiphilosophy. Badiou's "Formules de 'L'Étourdit'" fares little better. It offers an elusive remark on how the eternity proper to philosophy distinguishes it from the fluctuations of haste and restraint that characterize the practice of psychoanalysis in the disposition between the correct formalization of the matheme and the balanced distribution of anxiety.<sup>672</sup> Bosteels has identified the lessons of Lacanian antiphilosophy to be first and foremost the positive lesson against the religious temptation of meaning. By refusing a transcendent meaning of truth, the philosopher will avoid the grandiose delusions of the One-All. Bosteels also identifies a negative lesson of antiphilosophy more generally, as the lesson against the conflation of the event and the act as absolute beginning. It is a lesson in avoiding the absolute fallacy of a subjective auto-foundation. Keeping the event and the act separate enables the philosopher to think change as a process that moves beyond the instantaneous structural occurrence that disappears in its own appearance. Both the non-programmatic and the archi-scientific status of the Lacanian act contributes to this negative lesson, insofar as it is concerned with the demonstration of the function of the real within knowledge and not with the revealed presence of the real beyond knowledge.

An analysis of the mark of sexual matters and the function of the feminine other indicate how the lesson of Badiou's philosophy to come consists in reading these two lessons together, connecting the lesson against the religious temptation of a meaning of truths with the lesson against the absolute fallacy of the radically subjective act. It is the lesson of the possibility of thinking radical change and true novelty as the forced pass of an impasse. It is the lesson of thinking radical change from the point of impossibility, as the continuous elaboration of the consequences of an encounter with the real. The route to think these two lessons together goes through mathematics, and thus also through the antiphilosophy of Lacan. To Badiou, Lacan is alone among antiphilosophers to have properly appreciated the real stakes involved in mathematics.

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<sup>672</sup> See Badiou: "Formules de 'L'Étourdit'", *op.cit.*, p. 135.

On several occasions Badiou approvingly quotes Lacan's statement that mathematical formulation is the aim and the ideal.<sup>673</sup> Badiou's many recourses to Lacan's idealization of mathematics support the claim that the appreciation of the real stakes of mathematics involved in Lacanian antiphilosophy constitutes the lesson *par excellence* for Badiou's philosophy to come.

The common position among antiphilosophers is to denounce mathematics and de-singularize it as a lesser version of logics. As a lesser version of logic, mathematics does not amount to a mode of thinking. In contradistinction to this common position, Badiou argues, Lacan acknowledges that the real stakes of mathematics concerns the status of mathematics as a knowledge subtracted from cognition or as a science without consciousness. As a science without consciousness, mathematics constitutes a mode of thinking in which "le dit se renouvelle de prendre sujet d'un dire plutôt que d'aucune réalité."<sup>674</sup> It is a matter of recognizing the axiomatic status of mathematics and its necessarily non-founded or inconsistent foundations. The field of theorems or truths, the said [*le dit*], is founded in and by axioms, the saying [*le dire*], but the axioms as such are necessarily non-founded beyond themselves.

It is, however, in the implications of recognizing the axiomatic status of mathematics that the real stakes of mathematics are raised, and raised on two accounts. First of all, at least as far as Badiou's philosophy is concerned, to recognize the axiomatic status of mathematics is also to recognize mathematics as the mode of thinking in which invention and discovery coincide. It is to recognize that Plato was in the right, that there is a possible a-subjective and ordered access to the intelligible, as in the notion of the Platonic idea where thinking and being are the same and the knower and the known converge. It is to recognize mathematics as the mode of thinking that enounces something real, as the science of the real. Secondly, and this point goes for Lacan as well as for Badiou, to recognize the axiomatic status of mathematics is also to recognize the demonstrability of the undecidable statement that marks the inconsistency and un-founded foundation of the mathematic axiomatic

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<sup>673</sup> See *e.g.* Badiou: "Philosophie et psychanalyse", *op.cit.*, p. 292; and Badiou: "L'Antiphilosophie; Lacan et Platon": *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 322. For the original quote in Lacan, see Lacan: *Encore*, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>674</sup> See Lacan: "L'Étourdit", *op.cit.*, p. 452 ("the said renews itself by taking its subject from a saying more than from any reality"); see also Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan*, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

itself. It is to recognize, in yet a next step, that the *matheme* marks the point of impossibility of the axiomatic, of mathematical formalization and science itself. It is to recognize the *matheme* as the real of science or, in Badiou's words, the real of the real. That is to say, it is only by recognizing mathematics as an axiomatically founded practice that it is possible to demonstrate, by way of mathematics itself, the points of impossibility that are intrinsic to the mathematic axiomatic and constitutive of the practice of mathematics as such.

The trick to appreciate the significance of Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and his move to philosophy to come is to see how these two points can be thought as coinciding. Mathematics is the only discourse that knows absolutely the things of which it speaks, Badiou writes,<sup>675</sup> and the trick to Badiou's philosophy to come is to see how mathematics as the science of the real coincides with the *matheme's* marking of the real of science. If mathematics is the mode of thinking that can think the remainder, the real of pure and inconsistent being, it is because mathematics is the mode of thinking that thinks in and through the impossible points where the saying and the said intersect. Mathematics thinks being insofar as it is the mode of thinking that proceeds to think in and through inconsistency. The joint invention and discovery that characterizes the mathematical mode of thinking signify nothing less than the operations of radical change and true novelty that are involved when the remainders or the inconsistencies of one axiomatic open up to the point of passage of an integral transmission that will render these remainders and inconsistencies into the foundation of another axiomatic.

However, if mathematics is the mode of thinking that thinks radical change and true novelty in the integral transmissions of an axiomatic transposition, or, as Lacan says, if mathematics is the discourse in which the said renews itself by recourse to a saying more than by any reality, philosophy is, to vary on Lacan's definition, the discourse in which is said the saying of mathematics: *ce qui dit le dire de la mathématique comme dit qui ne se renouvelle que d'un dire*. Gödel does not think that he determines the disappearing being of the event when he proposes his incompleteness theorem, nor does Cohen think that he determines the being of a truth

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<sup>675</sup> See Badiou: *L'Être et l'événement*, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

procedure when he proposes his concept of the generic multiple. It is Badiou who thinks these thoughts. Philosophy is the mode of thinking that thinks the preconditions and possibilities of change and novelty, and the implications of change and novelty for further thinking.

To Lacan, the division between the saying and the said that mathematics makes into its proper practice implies that a truth can only ever be half-said [*mi-dit*]. A truth can be half-said in the saying, as positing another axiom, or it can be half-said in the said, as in another theorem, but a truth cannot be whole-said or all-said as the two halves together. The subject of enunciation is split from the subject of the enunciated, or as Lacan phrases it, "qu'on dise reste oublié derrière ce qui se dit dans ce qui s'entend."<sup>676</sup> Mathematics does not posit a whole-saying or an all-saying either, but it operates in and marks the division that makes a truth always only half-said, whereas the archi-scientific act is the only one to bridge the gap between the two halves. The archi-scientific act of Lacan, Badiou writes, amounts to the emergence of a said-saying [*un dire-dit*].<sup>677</sup> At its most radical, the said-saying of the act is not merely a matter of positing another axiomatic, installing another master signifier, or postulating another instance of the law. As in the discussions of Copjec and Zupančič on the strange reversals and self-convoluting structures characteristic of the drive as desire come face to face with its own cause, the said-saying of the act involves the full assumption of the inconsistency of the Other and the non-coincidence between the saying and the said. It is a said-saying that posits the non-foundation of its saying as the foundation of its said or, again, as a said-saying, the act posits the non-foundation of every axiomatic as the foundation of its axiomatic. At its most radical, the act assumes the full destitution of the subject under the undecidable question of the Other and the subject's desire, as the law of the unknown.

In Badiou's philosophical edifice, a truth is not half-said but sparsely said [*peu-dit*] and hardly ever said at all.<sup>678</sup> It is a rare occurrence that another axiomatic is declared, and even rarer that such a declaration is followed through and elaborated upon in a subjective procedure of fidelity. Badiou's contention against antiphilosophy

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<sup>676</sup> Lacan: "L'Étourdit", *op.cit.*, p. 449.

<sup>677</sup> See Badiou: *Le Séminaire; Lacan, op.cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>678</sup> See Badiou: "La Vérité; forçage et innommable", *op.cit.*, p. 205.

in general and the Lacanian framework is already familiar. That which the doctrine of the event and mathematics teaches the philosopher is that the whole effort is not in the exaltation of the event's occurrence but in the laborious process of following up its consequences in and for a situation. Lacan is nonetheless acknowledged for having marked the point of the real as the point at which an event might occur. He marks the point where thinking fails to think itself, and to Badiou, this is the point that marks the beginning of thinking. The initial instantiation of a truth in and by an event carries a similarity to Lacan's act in its non-founded foundation and undecidable status. There is nothing in the given knowledge of the situation to either prove or disprove the event's occurrence, except by the undecidable decision on its having-taken-place and its consequent nomination as an event. As Lacan's archi-scientific act marks the disappearance of *jouissance* within discourse, Badiou's meta-ontological denotation of the nominating intervention that affirms the occurrence of the event as a disappearing appearance is made by the character  $\varnothing$ . Through the nominating intervention, the event figures as an ultra-one, a Two, as poised between the void of the situation and itself. The nominating intervention is thus also a mode of a said-saying. It is a pure decision for positing an axiom by which the axiomatic of the situation itself is rendered inconsistent, or, again, the nominating intervention posits the inconsistency of the situation as true – so as to open for the laborious process of changing the situation through a truth procedure. Through a truth procedure, that which was previously nothing and void, the mark of inconsistency, comes to in-consist in a generic multiple proper. The denotation of the generic multiple proper – the generic extension, written  $S(\varnothing)$  – does more than merely mark the remainder. It signals the forced entry of the remainder into existence within the situation. Hence an event and its consequent truth procedure tap into the inconsistency of pure being as unbound multiplicity:

Puisque le fond sans fond de ce qui est présent est l'inconsistance, une vérité sera ce qui, de l'intérieur du présenté, comme *partie* de ce présenté, fait advenir au jour l'inconsistance dont se soutient en dernier ressort la consistance de la présentation. [...] Une vérité sera ainsi une partie générique de la situation, [...] désignant qu'elle

en est une partie quelconque, qu'elle ne dit rien de particulier sur la situation, sinon justement son être-multiple en tant que tel, son inconsistance fondamentale.<sup>679</sup>

In Badiou's mathematical gesture, where the real is transposed from the subject to being, the demonstration of the real does not stop at the point of its impossibility within a given situation, or within an established axiomatic. It starts there, as the point of possibility for thinking radical change and true novelty. It thinks the feminine other from within the situation. It demonstrates that thinking is precisely radical change and true novelty or it is not thinking at all.

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<sup>679</sup> Badiou: *Manifeste pour la philosophie, op.cit.*, p. 88-90 ("Since the foundation without foundation of that which is present is inconsistency, a truth will be that which, from the interior of the presented, as a *part* of the presented, brings to light the inconsistency on which the consistency of the situation in the last instance rests. [...] A truth will thus be a generic part of the situation, [...] designating that it is a random part thereof, that it says nothing particular of the situation, unless precisely its multiple-being as such, its fundamental inconsistency").



## Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have addressed Badiou's traversal of Lacanian antiphilosophy and the implications of that traversal for Badiou's thinking of the preconditions and possibilities for the subject of politics, radical change and true novelty, and the problematic of emancipation. My thesis claims that a key to the disentanglement of the lines of thought, traces of influence, and points of dissent that are at work in the relation between Badiou and the Lacanian framework is located at the precise junctions where Badiou's project is inadvertently motivated in conjunction with sexual matters, or where his arguments cannot avoid a certain tarrying with sexual matters. Hence, my thesis has primarily been of a methodological or strategic character. Reading by the assumption that 'sex marks the spot' has been a strategy for interrogating the significance and the implications of Badiou's traversal of Lacan. Analyzing these points or symptomal knots where sexual matters intrude upon Badiou's project has been a method for elaborating upon the consequences of Badiou's philosophical investigations into the preconditions and the possibilities of the subject and radical change beyond Lacan. It has also been an opportunity to compare the concrete conceptualizations of truths and the subject that are entailed by Badiou's mathematical gesture and materialist dialectic with other trends within radical thinking today that also originate in the teachings of Lacan. My investigations have focused on three such symptomal points: the feminine denotation of the generic multiple of a truth procedure in Badiou's *L'Être et l'événement*, the conjunction of sex and class as real in the readings of Greek tragedy in *Théorie du sujet*, and the double exception of Lacan in relation to the misogynistic status of the antiphilosophical act and the closure of contemporary antiphilosophy in Badiou's seminar series on *L'Antiphilosophie*. In addition, I have offered an initial and general interrogation of the main lines of Badiou's approach to the subject of politics, the teachings of Lacan, and the possibilities of change today, where I positioned Badiou's philosophical works in relation to this dissertation's basic presupposition that the subject of politics, ethics,

and sexual matters all tie up in thinking true novelty and radical change. In conclusion, I propose to return to and situate the investigations of my three main chapters within the discussions surrounding this basic presupposition.

On the basis of its conception of sexual matters as real and appertaining to the drive, psychoanalysis suggests an ethics of the radical act as a moment of subjective constitution in and through subjective destitution. The subject constitutes itself and the field into which it intervenes at the point where the law comes into contradiction with and undermines itself, at the absolute void of the signifying structures and discriminatory systems. Hence, psychoanalysis conceives of an ethics of the radical act as a moment of auto-foundation at the point of the real, where the subject fully assumes its real being in the split between signifiers and the hole in the Other, thus securing and holding open a space for action at one remove from – or as an obverse of – the existing structures and powers of oppression. Badiou's philosophical works elaborate on the psychoanalytic premises in order to think the preconditions and possibilities for a subject of politics and radical change today, while ruminating on the concrete situation of a liberated and globalized capitalism after the historical failure of the communist hypothesis. Badiou's traversal of Lacan involves the mathematical gesture that transposes the real from the category of the subject to the category of being. Two main consequences follow. Firstly, Badiou proposes a materialist conception of the event as the resurgence of inconsistent being as void in the situation, and secondly, Badiou proposes a dialectical conception of the subject as an affirmation of continuation, in an ethics of the act as the act of a continuous alteration of the situation and the creation of novelty. Badiou's philosophical works thereby responds to the predicament of the concrete situation, by identifying the preconditions of the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change in the ultimately dispossessed and inexistent populations under globalized capitalism. In that way, Badiou proposes a politics of radical change that abides by the dictum that the emancipation of one goes by the emancipation of all.

My fourth and last chapter analyzed the function of the feminine other in Badiou's conceptualization of antiphilosophy and the double exception of Lacan. It intervened into the problematic of the act as auto-foundation *vis-à-vis* continuation.

The antiphilosophical formulation of the act implies the intrinsic and distinctive criterion of misogyny, insofar as the act is proffered as the promise of an absolute break and hence as a promise always-already broken. Badiou considers Lacan to be in exception from the misogynistic formulation of the act and, thus, the one to bring contemporary antiphilosophy to conclusion, precisely because of the archi-scientific status of the Lacanian act and its recourse to the *matheme*. The archi-scientific act of Lacan does not concern the promise of a revealed presence of the unspeakable and unthinkable real beyond all evaluations and knowledge *tout court*, but the consistent transmission and marking of the function of the real within knowledge, in and through the *matheme*. The *matheme* in the archi-scientific act marks the moment of a possible subjective destitution, where the subject can come to be in conjunction with its real being, or in the hole in the Other. To Badiou, the Lacanian *matheme* serves to locate the point of impossibility within an extant field of knowledge, and to identify the undecidable that in Badiou's terminology equals the possible occurrence of an event. To Badiou, it serves to mark the point from which thinking commences and to ground thinking in the material conditions of the situation into which thinking intervenes. But Badiou's criticism of the Lacanian framework is still present, even if it pales in comparison to the criticism of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. In Badiou's scientifically and mathematically educated philosophy, marking the function of the real – the feminine remainder – and the possible occurrence of an event is merely the precondition for the subject and for the possibilities of thinking radical change. To realize a proper thinking of radical change implies the faithful deduction of the consequences of the event's occurrence in and for the situation in which the event's occurrence is an undecidable – or, in other words, a proper thinking of radical change implies the laborious process of including the division of the situation in the situation so as to alter the situation. Educated by a mathematical science, Badiou's philosophy to come takes the occurrence of the feminine remainder as its starting point, and proceeds to think the feminine within the situation.

My second to last chapter interrogated how a scission in Greek tragedy related to Badiou's move to relate the real of sex and the real of class, in an attempt to come to terms with the implications of the act of subjective constitution as a precondition for

radical change. The mark of sexual matters in Badiou's ethics of continuation was examined through the Aeschylean figuration of Prometheus as a representation of a Marxist ethics of confidence, precisely insofar as it contrasts with the representations of the radical acts of Antigone and Oedipus the Beggar in the Sophoclean paradigm and the Lacanian framework. The figure of Prometheus accentuates Badiou's position *vis-à-vis* Lacan on three points, namely as the priority of the operation of division over that of reversal, the perspective of the future over that of the last judgement, and a notion of immortality over the concept of the death drive. The figure of Prometheus thus accentuates the contributions of Badiou's Maoism during his red years to his confrontation with the Lacanian framework, where the structural dialectic of Lacan and the real of sex are supplemented by the historical dialectic of Badiou's Maoism and the real of class. As the bringer of fire and the one to tie courage and justice together under the banner of confidence, the figure of Prometheus was read as the representation of how a radical change is conceived of by Badiou as a subjective process of continuation from the initial point of contradiction or division internal to the situation. The guiding principle of Badiou's thinking of radical change during the red years is the Maoist principle that there is reason in revolt and that one divides into two. The significance of Badiou's confrontation with the Lacanian framework lies in reading these two principles together. The division of the situation fosters reason as revolt, and revolt as reason. The possibilities of radical change is located in the deduction within the situation of the situation's own point of impossibility, or in the continuation of thinking from the impossible. As a protrusion from the initial place of the unoccupiable place, the imagery of fire signals the possibilities of radical change in a process of expanding on the situation through the effects that follow on the occupation of the unoccupiable place, into a lasting blurring of places.

My second chapter on the infinite and the feminine non-all as inaccessibility and actuality addressed Badiou's seemingly paradoxical decision to denote the generic multiple through a reference to the Lacanian notion of the feminine logic of the non-all. It intervened into the contemporary debates on the applicability of the feminine non-all for elaborating on an alternative ethics beyond the superegoic injunctions of the moral law and the discourses of the rights of life. Badiou criticizes Lacan's notion

of the feminine non-all on the grounds that it is preconditioned by an essentially romantic and pre-Cantorian conception of the infinite as inaccessibility rather than actuality. As inaccessibility, the infinite and the feminine proffer only a hole of inconsistency that serves to buttress the consistency of the field of the finite and the phallic function, and are thus unable to account for the possibilities of radical change and true novelty. The hole of the infinite simply indicates another beyond that remains inaccessible from within the established structures that constitute the finite field. Against all romantic infatuations with the finite, Badiou advances the implications of Cantor's actual infinite. The decision on the actuality of the infinite transposes the problematic of thinking from the point of the inaccessible limit to the question of the undecidable succession, in the shape of the continuum hypothesis and the itinerant excess of representation over presentation, subsets over sets. The problematic of thinking is thus not a problem of the finite in relation to the infinite or *vice versa*, but a problem of the relation of the infinite to itself. Cantor's joint invention and discovery of the actual infinite finally allows Cohen to assume the itinerant excess and to conceive of the generic multiple as a set of indiscernibles, on account of which Badiou conceives of the generic multiple as the being of truths. The seemingly paradoxical decision to denote the generic multiple through a reference to the feminine non-all can be explained by acknowledging the division internal to the concept of the generic multiple in Badiou's meta-ontological apparatus. On the one hand, there is the primary non-designation of the feminine reference, designating the intervention of nominating an event, whereas, on the other hand, the actual existence of the indiscernible of the generic multiple proper is designated by the generic extension, which follows in the process of deducing the consequences of the event in and for the situation. The generic multiple supplements the phallic function in Lacan, and thus designates not only the hole of truth but also the procedure through which an immanent yet infinite truth gains actual existence. The generic thinks the realization of truths in and for a situation and, thus, the possibilities for radical change.

In the introduction, I posed the question of what it would mean to proceed from the non-object of sexual matters to thinking the possibilities of change by way of a mathematical ontology of multiplicities and a materialist dialectic of universal truths

produced in the continuation of a subjective process borne in the division of an eventual rupture. In short, this question concerns that of which sex is the mark in Badiou's traversal of Lacan. The almost too simple answer to this question is that sex is the mark of Badiou's traversal of Lacan. If the crux of Badiou's traversal of Lacan is determined by the mathematical gesture of his transposition of the real from the category of the subject to the category of being, and the implications of this transposition for a materialist dialectic that proceeds to think the subject and radical change as process over puncture, as historical sequence over structure, as indeterminable succession over inaccessible limit, or as an ethics of continuation over an ethics of the encounter, sex is the precise mark of that gesture and its implications. The moments at which sexual matters intrude upon Badiou's argumentation are also the moments at which the decisive elements of Badiou's arguments meet up and where his elaborations on the subject, its ethical portents, and the possibilities for radical change beyond Lacan reach their climax. It is not simply that the Lacanian real of sexual difference necessarily marks the move by which the real is transposed to being. Also Badiou's elaborations on the implications of this move, through the criticism of the inaccessible infinite of the feminine to Lacan's dodging of the misogyny of the antiphilosophical act, as well as in the pre-mathematical confrontations of the mortal real of sex with the tragic mode of the psychoanalytic paradigm, are marked by the intrusion of sexual matters.

It is thus possible to maintain the argument that also Badiou's thinking of the preconditions of the subject of politics and the possibilities of radical change is intricately intertwined with sexual matters, and that sexual matters constitute a crux of his elaboration of an ethics of the continuous act. It is thus possible to maintain that an ongoing confrontation with the issue of sexual matters underscores Badiou's politics as a politics under the dictum that the emancipation of one goes by the emancipation of all. But that which closer analyses of the function of sexual matters in Badiou's traversal of Lacan serve to highlight – and that also differentiate Badiou's philosophical project from other contemporary trajectories in radical thinking – is how Badiou's mathematical gesture and his materialist dialectic proceed into an affirmative thinking of that which sexual matters is the mark, or of the feminine other otherwise

precluded from thought. An analysis of the mark of sexual matters underlines not only the extent to which a notion of the feminine other operates in Badiou's philosophy but also how the feminine other functions in Badiou's elaborations on the possibilities of actual change, of an infinite yet immanent truth, and an ethics of continuation. Sexual matters function precisely to mark the points in Badiou's philosophical works where Badiou elaborates on how thinking proceeds as a process of change. It marks the precise point at which he elaborates on how the One of a situation divides into two, and through which the situation opens up for that which previously was excluded from its midst. In other words, it marks the point from which the real as the impasse of formalization gives way to the pass of a subject, and the pass of truth. It thus marks the point from which the process of political change might proceed, beyond the point at which the law contradicts and undermines itself according to the psychoanalytic perspective, and beyond the critical identifications of the mechanisms of oppression and subordination.

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