

Introduction

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Thanks in no small part to the previous work of many of the contributors to this volume, and to their new interventions collected here, the time when any English-language publication devoted to Alain Badiou's thought was required to open with a lengthy synopsis of the same is now behind us. Peter Hallward's *Alain Badiou: A Subject to Truth* and Jason Barker's *Alain Badiou: A Critical Introduction* have provided book-length studies of, and critical engagements with, Badiou's body of work as a whole, and the editors' introductions to each of Badiou's texts in translation offer specific accounts of their individual subject matter. Rather than attempt to add to this corpus, the following introduction aims to supply an overview of the essays collected in this issue of *Polygraph*, to explain their groupings and interrelations, and to suggest starting points for readers interested in further exploring certain topics in Badiou's oeuvre.

The first two contributions, by Peter Hallward and Oliver Feltham, respectively, together do much of the work that might otherwise have been expected here, since both address in broad terms the structuring dichotomy of Badiou's thought, that of being and event. Hallward's piece, "Depending on Inconsistency," begins by laying out Badiou's claim for the ontological priority of the multiple over the one, a priority that Badiou identifies as characteristic of "all contemporary philosophy worthy of the name." As Hallward demonstrates, however, Badiou's philosophical contemporaries and rivals—among them Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida, and Žižek—respond to this realization in at least two ways that differ importantly from Badiou's own. First, they continue to search for (and usually claim to have found) exceptional experiences of *jouissance* or of an encounter with the Other, hence of a direct encounter, however fleeting or ineffable, with a reality not conditioned by the situation from which it is glimpsed. Second, they equate this encounter with the event, a move that simultaneously divides the event from the situation in which it occurs and reinstates it

as the unified term on which experience is based. Badiou's project is to avoid both of these consequences, i.e., to understand the event as a disappearing "connotation" of a situation's inconsistency, but not as a revelation or experience of it. Hallward goes on to draw out from this point a number of Badiou's positions concerning truth and subjectivity, each of which helps to make clear the nature of the relationship between the original terms of the dichotomy. "An event offers an opportunity," he concludes, "for us to acknowledge an implication of what we are"—opportunity, but not necessity; this is Hallward's (and Badiou's) point, that being ("what we are") cannot be made equivalent to the event as its manifestation, nor can the event be said to follow necessarily from the knot of conditions under which it takes place.

While Hallward's essay considers what might be called the macro-scale implications of Badiou's theorization of being and event, situating his work with respect to that of other contemporary thinkers and distinguishing his conclusions from theirs, Oliver Feltham's "And Being and Event and ..." concentrates more specifically on the technical details of Badiou's mathematical ontology. Feltham's objective, however, is less to provide a comprehensive account of this ontology than it is to understand what it means for philosophy to be "conditioned ... by generic truth procedures" located outside philosophy proper. He begins by identifying three "metaontological theses" in Badiou's work: the thesis of schematism, the thesis of the real, and the praxiological thesis. The first of these makes the claim that the representation of any situation must always exceed its presentation; in the case of infinite situations (as are all actually existing historical situations), by an infinite degree. The thesis of the real holds that acceptance of the thesis of schematism entails a conception of both the subject and the event as "inscribed" within ontology, but connected to it only in the mode of "impossibility." The subject—that non-individual entity responsible for recognizing and acting in fidelity to an event—forces the awareness of an inconsistent multiplicity, a multiplicity that cannot exist within the given situation, but that is (or will be) no longer inconsistent in the new situation to which the subject's fidelity gives rise. Feltham then proceeds to unpack Badiou's understanding of the subject in this context, and to elaborate on the praxiological thesis, which accounts for the emergence (in practice) of a new state of the situation as a result of the subject's contingent embrace of an event. In contrast to the thesis of the real, which is devoted to a disjunction between being and event, the praxiological thesis concerns the possibility of a synthesis (however tenuous) between them. Feltham concludes that the task of philosophy is the recognition and naming of these "disjunctive syntheses as they emerge in singular truth procedures," and ends his contribution by sketching the consequences of this conception.

[Readers interested in Badiou's theory of the subject may wish to see the essays by Stefan Herbrecter, Bruno Besana, and Carsten Strathausen later in the issue.]

A number of the contributions to this volume take up Badiou's use of set theory and its connection to ontology as a step toward examining other aspects of his thought. B. Madison Mount's essay on the "Cantorian revolution," however, is the lone direct and sustained engagement with his philosophy of mathematics, and is perhaps the best such treatment yet to have appeared in English or in French. Mount begins by situating Badiou's ontology within and against the historical development

of theories of the infinite through Cantor and Gödel, with particular attention to issues surrounding the Continuum Hypothesis. He then goes on, in the second section, to analyze the ways in which Badiou seeks to develop a line of thought “transverse” to what he calls the grammatical or constructivist, generic, and prodigal orientations of contemporary philosophy of mathematics. Specifically, Mount reads at length meditations 28–30 of *L’être et l’événement* in order both to show the ways in which Badiou derives a closed or nonevental understanding of constructivist thought from Leibniz’s metaphysics and to suggest the alternate conceptions that might be drawn from—or in alignment with—the same source. Mount’s essay will thus be of particular relevance to those interested in Badiou’s generally dismissive treatment of constructivism past and present, as well as to those seeking a more complete understanding of his position vis-à-vis other mathematical philosophies (and philosophies of mathematics). Finally, it provides a useful complement to and extension of Hallward’s appendix to his *Badiou* on the technical details of Badiou’s mathematical thought; see especially sections 1.2 and 2.2, which treat the Continuum Hypothesis and the large cardinal axioms in meaningful and comprehensive detail.

The next seven essays are devoted to specific problems in the other generic procedures—politics, love, and art, in that order—identified by Badiou. Jason Barker’s “Topography and Structure” is the first of two papers concerning the implications of a Badiouian politics (or metapolitics, since Badiou is careful to separate philosophical reflections on the truth procedures from the work of the procedures themselves), which he distinguishes from that of Althusser and others in the domain of “revolutionary ontology.” His argument turns mainly on the problems of determinism and structure—terms that, while natural to conventional Marxism, Barker argues are not foreign to Badiou himself. He concludes that where Althusser’s politics is characterized by overdetermination, Badiou’s remains necessarily “underdetermined,” open to the unpredictable irruption of an event, a thesis that he illustrates with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its relationship to an existing politico-economic order.

Oliver Marchart’s essay on Badiou and what he calls the “left Heideggerians”—a group that includes Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, Lefort, Rancière, and others—argues that the perceived gap between their anti- or post-foundationalism and Badiou’s professed Platonism is much smaller than is generally believed. After reviewing the useful distinction between politics [*la politique*] and the political [*le politique*], as well as Badiou’s critique of the latter as inextricably tied to “capitalo-parliamentarism,” Marchart goes on to analyze Badiou’s “politics of the real,” emphasizing its separation of politics from social bonds and from any foundation in communitarianism. As a truth procedure, any specific politics in this sense is necessarily linked to a political event, one that is collective rather than individual, open (or infinite) rather than closed, and directed against the finitizing power of the state. This evental source of political truth is the central moment of Marchart’s argument; he finds in the unconditioned unpredictability of the event—its exteriority to being—and in the link between essentialism and evil as procedures that reject the event, a suitably non-foundational origin for any existing politics, which in turn allows him to link Badiou’s political thought to the same left Heideggerians Badiou sometimes dismiss-

es as sophists. Marchart closes, however, with a series of questions concerning the ability of Badiou's conception to account for the pragmatic difficulties encountered by any situated, actually existing, and necessarily compromised politics.

[Readers interested in a different and specifically Deleuzian critique of Badiou's politics may wish to consult Eric Alliez's essay later in this volume.]

The amorous truth procedure is the subject of Lindsey Hair's essay, which seeks both to explain Badiou's debt to Lacan and to locate the formulations that result from it with respect to alternative conceptions of sexualization and sexual difference. In the case of Lacan, Hair emphasizes the "non-relation" of sexual difference, linking it to Badiou's insistence that the two "positions" of experience are both exhaustive ("there is no third position") and "absolutely disjunct." Nevertheless, the positions are related by way of the void they each include, a situation clearly analogous, if not directly equivalent, to the functions of both lack and the *objet a* in Lacan. Hair then goes on to treat in some detail the difficult problem, again in both Badiou and Lacan, of heteronormativity in the sexualization of the two disjoint positions. Although she stops short of offering definitive conclusions concerning the ultimate adaptability of Badiou's model to situations of love outside the hetero-monogamous paradigm, she does suggest that once we have accepted love as a truth procedure of the Two in Badiou's sense, it is difficult to avoid the force of his conception.

Art, the last of Badiou's truth procedures, is the object in one way or another of the next four essays. Élie During's "How Much Truth Can Art Bear?" is an evaluation of Badiou's response to the Platonic question posed in its title. It is no surprise, of course, that Badiou finds art capable of producing truth; During's purpose is not to reiterate this claim, but to trace both the assumptions and the consequences of inaeesthetics, the specifically philosophical engagement with art's truth. During's first conclusion is that inaeesthetics is necessarily local, concerned with individual artistic products and situations rather than with art "in general" outside its historical specificity. With this in mind, he turns to Mallarmé, one of Badiou's favorite examples, observing that his work is of interest to Badiou precisely because it produces a void or lack in being, rather than merely announcing the presence thereof. Mallarmé's poetry thus provides, according to During, a properly artistic event, one that it is the job of philosophy (in the form of inaeesthetics) to recognize and to maintain. During then goes on to address a number of complications and potential objections to this view, most significantly those concerning a potential hierarchy of the arts, the status of the individual work of art, and the critique of Badiou's position developed by Jacques Rancière. Finally, he closes with an analysis of art's educational or didactic potential under Badiou's conception, concluding that inaeesthetics is ultimately a kind of slogan for an understanding of art that does not allow it to be excluded from political efficacy.

Like During, Nico Baumbach offers an analysis of Badiou's inaeesthetics as such, though with an emphasis on, and detailed reading of, Badiou's own most recent inaeesthetic production, the "Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art." This is to say that instead of examining specific works of contemporary art in an attempt to intervene in the artistic procedure itself, Baumbach and Badiou alike seek to formulate a set of principles according to which art functions as a truth procedure within our own

situation. The seeming tension in this case with During's conclusion that, for Badiou, inaeesthetics is not concerned with "art in general" is less pronounced than it may appear; as During and Baumbach both emphasize, a contemporary inaeesthetics is contemporary in the most literal sense, it is of its time and drawn from the conditions of its specific situation. Thus the diagnoses and prescriptions for art offered by Badiou in the "Fifteen Theses" are specific to artistic production as it now exists, even when they do not name individual works. With this analysis in mind, Baumbach works first to establish the nature of the relationship between philosophy and art, a task with important implications not only for inaeesthetics, but for any reading of Badiou's philosophical system in relation to the generic procedures. He concludes that art both "wounds" philosophy and puts it into question, since it forces philosophy to respond to truths that philosophy does not itself produce. Baumbach's reading of the "Fifteen Theses" then seeks to elucidate the philosophy produced in fidelity to the dicta of contemporary art, among them a rejection of "the will to formal innovation" and an absolute resistance to both imperialism and identitarianism. The essay concludes with a number of open questions about the inaeesthetics, some of which—most notably those concerning the rejection of classical aesthetics and the specific figures of Badiou's modernity—are both shared with During and taken up in part by the next two articles.

Following these two relatively abstract studies of Badiou's inaeesthetics are more applied essays by Andrew Gibson and Stefan Herbrechter. Gibson's piece reads Beckett as producing a body of work that is "much closer to mathematics than it is to most literature," characterized as it is by a "will to abstraction, ... withdrawal from the world of which it nevertheless retains a residual trace, ... concern with extraordinary paradoxes ... , and formalization of material that is threatened with drastic inconsistency." To the extent that both Badiou's ontology and his theory of the event represent attempts to deal in generic terms with this same set of problems and concerns, Gibson argues that the two writers can be illuminatingly read together as "vestigial or melancholic modernists" characterized by their engagement with what he names the "pathos of intermittency." In order to demonstrate the plausibility of the connection, Gibson devotes a large portion of his essay to a lucid elaboration of Badiou's mathematical ontology and its relationship to the event (which makes this a useful companion piece to B. Madison Mount's more technically demanding contribution to this volume). He then goes on to explain Badiou and Beckett's divergent emphases on the "remainder," the material of everyday life and of historical experience untouched by the grace of the event. Gibson's claim is that Beckett's work provides a sustained examination of the results of the event's rarity, i.e., that Beckett's work complements Badiou's by drawing out the existential consequences of his metaphysics. Gibson thus closes his essay with insightful short readings of several of Beckett's texts, including *The Lost Ones*, *Lessness*, and *Waiting for Godot*; readers interested in more extended engagements with Beckett's work in this context may wish to consult Gibson's engaging afterword to *On Beckett*, the collected English translation of Badiou's writings on Beckett.

In "Badiou, Derrida, and *The Matrix*," Stefan Herbrechter presents a detailed reading of just one work of art, the Wachowski brothers' film named in his title. He

argues that *The Matrix* can be understood “as if” it fulfilled the criteria of Badiou’s notion for an event,” an event Herbrechter identifies with the end of humanism and the moment at which posthumanism is born. Thus, on his reading, Neo is a figure for—and the film is symptomatic of—the kind of posthuman (or perhaps nonhuman) subjectivity that is both a central feature of Badiou’s theory and the site of a potential contemporary truth procedure. Herbrechter argues that Neo’s Christ-like “resurrection” as an element of the matrix functions effectively as an allegory of the posthuman event, and that the related aspects or consequences of this event—its subject, the truth procedure to which it gives rise, the void or real it reveals—map out the domain of our posthuman situation. He goes on to compare this model to related theories advanced by Derrida and Žižek, concluding that they are largely compatible, in fact that they require one another; Badiou to supplement the others’ elision of truth, and they to supply his lack of a meaningful concept of the other.

Following this series of interventions focused on the individual truth procedures is a group of essays devoted to evaluating the overall standing of Badiou’s project and his relationship to other philosophers, and which return time and again to the problem of subjectivity. The first of these is Bruno Bosteels’ careful disentanglement of Badiou’s thought from Slavoj Žižek’s widely-received interpretation of it. Bosteels argues that Žižek attempts to present himself as the secret or repressed truth of Badiou, a move that operates through the now-traditional framework of Lacan’s “Kant with Sade.” He identifies and responds to three principal critiques raised by Žižek: that Badiou is a closet Kantian (or, alternatively and paradoxically, Deleuzian); that he fails to follow out the consequences of his own politics of subtraction; and that he does not take into adequate account the lessons of Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically those concerning the death drive. Bosteels then offers a critical comparison of Žižek’s “act” and Badiou’s “event,” concluding that the former is split in Žižek’s work between Lacanian and Badiouian usages without the possibility of a successful resolution. This analysis leads Bosteels, finally, to two sets of speculations, one on the status of truth after psychoanalysis, and the other on the effectivity of Žižek’s frequent readings of the form “Y with X,” which he argues depend crucially on the logical or ontological (if not always the strictly temporal) priority of the second term.

The next intervention is Bruno Besana’s “One or Several Events?” a detailed and illuminating interpretation of Badiou’s theory of the event, its link to a new subjectivity, and the points of disagreement on both matters with Deleuze. Concerning the event, he observes that what separates Badiou from Deleuze is the presence in the latter of an insistence on the ultimate univocity of being. In Deleuze, he argues, this leads to the conclusion that every apparently individual event—or one might better write “occurrence”—is in fact a manifestation of the single event of being (a formulation that necessarily equates being and event). Badiou, on the other hand, is perfectly willing to sacrifice the univocity of being in favor of a meaningful distinction between individual events and between the orders “being” and “event.” This disagreement extends to their respective conceptions of the subject, which Deleuze understands as entirely immanent to its situation in every case, whereas Badiou forsakes such immanence, arguing that it reduces subjects to what Besana calls “the simulacra of identities, . . . the multiple phantasms of the same One.” Instead, a Ba-

diouian understanding of the subject holds it to be the “presentification”—the making present, in both the spatial and the temporal senses of the word—of an event, a formulation that makes plain the impossibility in any meaningful sense of a strictly immanent event. This is related, of course, to Badiou’s denunciation of constructivism as a “closed” ontology (concerning which, see B. Madison Mount’s essay in this volume), and it is a similar charge that lies at the bottom of his quarrel with Deleuze, one that may or may not be a matter of taste, as he claimed in his *Deleuze*.

Continuing this debate is Eric Alliez’s contribution, itself the culmination of an exchange of essays with Badiou, which is included here as a Deleuzian counterpoint to Besana and Badiou’s arguments. (This seems especially relevant now that Badiou’s “One, Multiple, Multiplicities,” to which it responds, is available in English translation; see *Theoretical Writings*, 67–80.) Although he claims for them a shared “radical antecedence of politics” to ontology, Alliez denies categorically many of the points central to Badiou’s reading of Deleuze, most importantly the characterization of Deleuze’s thought as a “Platonism of the multiple.” Alliez argues that Badiou’s attempt to “reestablish the truth of Deleuzism, if necessary *against* Deleuze himself” results in a fundamental misprision of Deleuze’s insights, one that can be maintained only by ignoring Deleuze’s collaborations with Guattari. This produces in Badiou, according to Alliez, a “Lacanian” psychoanalytic vision of multiplicity as “the event of nothing destined for all” that is wholly incompatible with any theorization of multiplicity as multitude.

In “The Badiou-Event,” Carsten Strathausen offers a more sympathetic, but ultimately critical, reading of Badiou’s project. His central question concerns the object named in his title, an “event” in philosophy named for Badiou and grounded in his thought. But there can be no such thing as a philosophical event, he observes, asking why many of Badiou’s adherents and exponents nevertheless “entertain [this] nonsensical proposition.” His answer is that the idea of a Badiou-event suggests the possibility that not only Badiou, but philosophy itself can and do “*matter* in the most radical sense of the term” as interventions in their situation. Strathausen remains skeptical, however, of Badiou’s ability to unite theory and practice (or philosophy and politics), which he argues remain separated by Badiou’s “decisionism,” a problem that in turn concerns the nature of subjectivity. In order to define the contours of Badiou’s theory of the subject, Strathausen compares it to those of Laclau, Althusser, Butler, and Derrida, concluding that it most closely resembles Derrida’s, but with the important difference that Derrida is able to account for the genesis of the decision by locating it outside the subject, which then becomes the passive recipient of the Other’s demand. There follows a related discussion of “situation,” which Strathausen contrasts to Luhmann’s systems theory and which he claims must result in the supposition of a transcendental “thought” outside any situation and capable of evaluating its constituent elements. All of this leads Strathausen to conclude that what is needed in contemporary politics is, instead of Badiou’s theorization of rupture and militancy, a rigorous commitment to participation in liberal-democratic institutions and procedures, i.e., to a wholly immanent process of political change. Badiou is valuable in this case, then, as a reminder that these institutions cannot be taken for granted,

that they must be chosen and supported, defended even, against their opponents on the left as well as those on the right.

The final contribution to the issue is the transcript of a discussion between Simon Critchley and members of the audience to whom he presented a paper titled “Ethics as Subjectivation.” Since the debate is introduced with care and concision by Jon Baldwin and Nick Haeffner, I will observe here only that it is pursued with vigor and intelligence by its participants, and provides a fitting conclusion to the issue, taking up as it does a wide range of topics and questions raised in the preceding essays.

It is my hope that this issue of *Polygraph* will help to shape the growing debate in anglophone criticism over the interpretation and direction of Badiou’s thought. As is plain from the above synopses and even more evident in the essays themselves, there has yet to be achieved a broad consensus on many of the issues central to Badiou’s project, a state of affairs that makes this a particularly interesting moment at which to participate in the conversation about it. The interventions collected here advance this conversation both in the common ground they are able to find on a number of topics and in the contradictions they maintain on others. To this we can say only “keep going!” and look forward to the results. ■

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A Note on Notation

Badiou’s mathematical notation is at times idiosyncratic. To the extent possible, we have retained in the present volume each individual author’s usage, most of which remain fairly close to Badiou’s own. An exception is B. Madison Mount’s essay, in which standard notation has been adopted in some cases by the author so as to compare more easily Badiou’s work with that of other philosophers of mathematics.

Table of Abbreviations

The following is not a comprehensive bibliography of Badiou’s texts (for which, see Hallward’s *Badiou*, among other sources). It is intended only to simplify citations in this issue; as such, it includes most of Badiou’s book-length works, but none of his articles and none of the secondary work on his thought. References to the texts listed below are supplied parenthetically in the body of each essay, rather than in the notes (as is the case for all other references).

Note that English translations use the abbreviation of their French counterparts, followed by a lower-case *e*. In particular, *Ee* (Peter Hallward’s English translation of *L’éthique*) should not be confused with *EE* (the French original of *L’être et l’événement*).

- AM *Abrégé de métapolitique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998)
- B *Beckett: L’incroyable désir* (Paris: Hachette, 1995)
- C *Conditions* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992)
- CD *Casser en deux l’histoire du monde* (Paris: Éditions du Perroquet, 1992)
- CM *Le concept de modèle: Introduction à une épistémologie matérialiste des mathématiques* (Paris: Éditions Maspero, 1969)

- CT *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998)
- D *Gilles Deleuze: La clameur de l'être* (Paris: Hachette, 1997)
- De *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)
- DO *D'un désastre obscur: Droit, état, politique* (La Tour de l'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1991)
- DP *Monde contemporain et désir de philosophie* (Reims: Noria, 1992)
- E *L'éthique: Essai sur la conscience du mal* (Paris: Éditions Hatier, 1993); reissued, with new pagination, by Nous (Caen, 2003)
- Ee *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001)
- EE *L'être et l'événement* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1988)
- I *De l'idéologie* (Paris: Éditions Maspero, 1976)
- IT *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2003)
- LM *Logiques des mondes* (forthcoming)
- MP *Manifeste pour la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989)
- MPe *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999)
- NN *Le nombre et les nombres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990)
- PM *Petit manuel d'inesthétique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998)
- PMe *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)
- PP *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1985)
- RT *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1990)
- S *Le siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, forthcoming)
- SB *Samuel Beckett: L'écriture du générique et l'amour* (Paris: Le Perroquet, 1989)
- SP *Saint Paul et la fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997)
- SPE *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)
- TC *Théorie de la contradiction* (Paris: Éditions Maspero, 1975)
- TS *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982)
- TW *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004)