

The Singular Invariant. On the dialectic which is not in Alain Badiou

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ABSTRACT:

This essay considers some of the general features of the ongoing critical reception of the philosophy of Alain Badiou. It sets out and describes the divisions within this criticism and concentrates critical attention on one aspect of this reception: the dialectic as it is rendered in the work of Bruno Bosteels. The essay shows that Bosteels' emphasis on the dialectic is at the expense of the formal consistency required by Badiou's conception of the subject: thus mistaking the philosophy.

Keywords:

Badiou, dialectic, relations, formalisation, mathematics, philosophy, subject.

The new groups are not concerned
With what there is to be learned
They got Burton suits ha! you think it's funny
Turning rebellion into money¹

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This essay is divided into two parts. The first provides a context and a position; the second a critical examination of a critical position integral to this context. The context or the conceit is this: What is the situation on the Badiouean philosophical front? That is the 'critical situation' or the situation of Badiou's work today as subject to criticism.² Given the extent of Badiou's oeuvre and the quantity of critical responses it has generated, this requires a series of distinctions or divisions. This first part will render these divisions in their generality. The second part will concentrate on a specific position elemental to one of these divisions: the dialectic. To this end it will concentrate on the writings of Bruno Bosteels, who in terms of the 'critical situation on the Badiouean philosophical front' is emblematic of this position. It will work through his efforts over the last 15 or so years, culminating thus

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¹ The Clash, 'White Man in Hammersmith Palais,' CBS, 1978.

² The focus here is on the English speaking world.

far in his work Badiou and Politics, to interpret 'against the grain' the dialectic as the kernel of Badiou's oeuvre. What fails to not be written there will draw comment.

I Context/Position

Division 1.

It is clear to this day that Being and Event serves as the foundational text of Badiou's oeuvre. This has two senses: that used in speaking of mathematical theories such as Set Theory or Category Theory, where the basic definition of foundational is not theological or generative but is that the new theory is capable of re-writing the entirety of (in this case) mathematical discourse in its own terms without loss. It is a recommencement: the desire for which, so to speak, is an immanent effect of the discourse itself such that it has realised its own impasse. Secondly, and more conventionally (and with regard to Badiou's oeuvre), if 1982's Theory of the Subject (already the theoretical summary of a suite of theoretical works and interventions), in Badiou's own estimation, fell, not unlike Hume's Treatise, 'still born from the press', then the publication of Being and Event effectively begins the slow but sure foundation of Badiou's work as systematic philosophy. And still today, 26 years later, the concepts and categories of Being and Event remain at the centre of most criticism and commentary, just as they remain crucial to Badiou's work itself.³ By far the vast majority of articles, edited collections, books and interviews focus on Being and Event (and its consequent smaller texts) as either their object of analysis or point of orientation. With few notable exceptions, this is still the case in 2014, eight years after Logiques des mondes: L'être et l'événement, 2, and five after Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2.⁴

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3 In a recent lecture at the European Graduate School (09/2012) for example Badiou articulated an un-Hegelian conception of the dialectic – an affirmative dialectic – by making use not of the categories and concepts of Logics of Worlds or Theory of the Subject but of Being and Event.

4 A recent collection of essays headlined by the editors as 'the first critical engagement with Badiou's work since Logics of Worlds' contains only one essay out of thirteen directly engaged with this work and then only with giving a re-description of the mathematics that underpins it. Two others make passing reference; most say nothing about it at all. Only James Williams and the contribution by Bartlett and Clemens devote any space to the philosophical aspects of Logics of Worlds. Indeed, the main thrust of the collection seems to be a defence of Gilles Deleuze. But that's another story. See Badiou and Philosophy, 2012. I would also note that Justin Clemens published in 2006, prior to the appearance of the English translation, a 40 page critical explication of Logic of Worlds, 'Had We But Worlds Enough, and Time, This Absolute, Philosopher...'. And

What understanding Being and Event as a foundational text brings into relief is that Theory of the Subject, in many ways an incredible work, both a formidable delimitation and an astounding synthesis, marks an impasse – political, artistic, ontological and formal. But an impasse is not an end; it is the articulated point, immanent to a process (a thought process) at which one must recommence intellectual struggle – should one acquire the resources! What is required by an impasse, as the Platonic dialogues never cease to demonstrate, as the history of philosophy verifies, is a new or renewed orientation to the question raised to the level of impasse.⁵ Philosophy comes to pass only on the basis of this (re)newed orientation to the point of impasse, which is to say, on the basis of a new decision in and for thought. To think again: to decide so as to take up, to take up so as to affirm, the decision for thought. For Badiou, as for Plato, for philosophers and philosophy more generally, this decision for a new orientation to the question is provided by the inventions and discoveries in thought that are not themselves philosophical but that have consequences for philosophy, the discourse condemned to recommence, eternally, to draw the consequences and to be addressed to all. This thought of the outside, so to speak, which will have been immanent to any possible philosophical recommencement cannot be, then, subject to some overarching or a priori concept of what it must be or how it must appear – historical, logical, biological, relational or dialectical.⁶ The absolute non-relation between impasse (exhaustion) and recommencement (generic) is what an event comes to mark.

In Being and Event most of the elements presented in Theory of the Subject – Mallarmé and Lacan, Hegel and Marx, mathematics and poetry, structure and place, formalism and dialectic, truth and knowledge and so on – remain present, but Being and Event orients itself to a decision which irretrievably refounds every element in turn: simply, the 'philosophical decision' that 'mathematics is ontology'. Such a decision is already conditioned by what a mathematics 'indiscerns'

of course we need to acknowledge how much work has been devoted to Badiou's entire oeuvre in Latin America.

5 In Plato it can be as simple as a new day, a new set of interlocutors or an interruption. Cf. the first lines of the Timaeus.

6 Cf. 'That the act and the effect of the infinite should be a question of gaps [écarts] and of written supplements, is indeed what no-one wanted to hear, as Cantor's experience showed two centuries after the founders of the new calculus' Badiou 2102, p. 207.

of being – that it is (not)One and or (not)ineffable. Concerned with being (philosophically speaking), mathematics is the science of being, the discourse of ontology, now and ‘historically’ – that is, within philosophy’s history. Thus it is mathematics qua situation – as a discrete discourse concerned with what is for all and that is in itself eventually re-founded – which makes a renewed orientation to the elements that concern philosophy, newly possible. The Cantor event, which conditions Badiou’s decision, pronounces the denumerability of the infinite against totality (the whole, the Absolute, the one-All) and disrupts the mereological impasse of the one and the many, of transcendence, expressivism, essentialism and relativism alike.

The (philosophical) statement that mathematics is ontology – the science of being qua being – is the trace of light which illuminates the speculative scene, the scene which I had restricted, in my *Thorie du sujet*, by presupposing purely and simply that there ‘was some’ subjectivization. The compatibility of this thesis with ontology preoccupied me, because the force – and absolute weakness – of the ‘old Marxism’, of dialectical materialism, had lain in its postulation of just such a compatibility in the shape of the generality of the laws of the dialectic, which is to say the isomorphy between the dialectic of nature and the dialectic of history. This (Hegelian) isomorphy was, of course, still-born.⁷

In this single point, so to speak, Being and Event is marked as absolutely distinct or ‘separate’ from the orientation of Theory of the Subject that, while irreducibly committed to the axiom ‘one divides into two’ remained, one way or another, shackled to the One of history and to a dialectical unfolding – however radicalized it appeared there.⁸

From the other side of the impasse, an other side which is precisely opened up by this decision (and, theoretically speaking, by decision as such) Theory of the Subject cannot, not now anyway, stand alone within the oeuvre either as the ‘forgotten’ arche of the entire oeuvre or as singly outside it. Being and Event includes and entirely recalibrates the

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7 Badiou 2005, p. 4.

8 Cf. ‘My antihistoricism pertains uniquely to the impossibility of integrating things into an overall history, declaring that sequences of worlds, the disparate of worlds, can be reconciled with or organised in a general dynamic’. Badiou and Sedofsky 2006, p. 250.

elements presented in Theory of the Subject with respect to its decisive orientation – that the One is not; that being is pure multiplicity; that ontology, the science of being qua being

is mathematics and that the inherent yet entirely internally consistent limits of ontology (its inconsistency) prescribe the event of that which is not being qua being. As Paul Livingston describes it this is a decision for ‘consistency and incompleteness against completeness and inconsistency’.⁹ In other words: for the generic infinite against constructivist finitude. As Oliver Feltham remarks, ‘philosophy is opened up to contingent transformation and reworking’.¹⁰

Consequently, Being and Event enacts a recommencement on ‘the philosophical front’, one that refuses to renege on prior political, artistic, mathematical or amorous commitments, and which refuses also to give up on the inherent philosophical conviction to think the thought of these not-philosophical procedures, these conditions (art, love, science and politics), as the thought of its time and to do so under the key categories that subtend any re-configuration of the philosophical front; being, truth and subject. As a foundational work we can say that Being and Event re-describes and re-configures what preceded it in Theory of the Subject, in terms that include that work without loss.¹¹ Or in generic terms, Being and Event is ‘richer in sense’.

The publication of *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2*, appears to complicate these claims. Badiou’s comment that *Logics of Worlds* (on some measures) is closer to Theory of the Subject than to Being and Event certainly seems to verify this complication especially if we consider that *Logics of Worlds* is billed as a sequel to Being and Event on the one hand, but that on the other its operating ontology (the mathematics of what it is for being to appear (onto-logy), Category Theory, has the capacity to re-write Set Theory in its own terms, to give a new and relative foundation to mathematical ‘objects’.¹²

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9 Livingston 2011, p. 53.

10 Feltham 2005, p. xxii.

11 Cf. Badiou 2008, p. 54: ‘This use of the word ‘model’, to my mind, delivers a fertile epistemological category. I propose to call model the ordinance [statut] that, in the historical process of a science, retrospectively assigns to the science’s previous practical instances their experimental transformation by a definite formal apparatus.’

12 In an interview, Badiou also points out that the earlier text, *The Concept of Model*, in some

If *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2 is a sequel,¹³ or one of the consequences of *Being and Event*, of the enquiries it opened into the philosophical situation (and the consequent impasses to which it gives rise), then it has to pertain in its key concepts and categories to the original, or in other words, remain fundamentally articulated to the original trajectory, and this it does; as we will see, the criticisms of Badiou, paradoxically, bear this out.

Quentin Meillassoux neatly summarises the sequence in this way: Badiou

add[s] to the mathematics of being [being multiple] a logic of appearance capable of accounting for the diverse consistencies revealed to us in our experience. It is therefore necessary to mobilise a logic capable of ‘capturing’ the innumerable modes of appearance possible for being and to provide some sort of connection, however slight, to visible things.¹⁴

Whereas, then, *Being and Event* includes *Theory of the Subject* without loss, even as it is an absolutely distinct work – and so a foundational work in the ‘ontological’ sense – *Logics of Worlds* is, in essence, not *Being and Event* turned inside out nor re-presented, but the construction of the ‘worldly’ consequences of the latter’s own ‘intrinsic’ and, as such, utterly consistent impasse but (unlike that between *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event*) without any alteration in its formal orientation. This is to say, the impasses arrived at in *Being and Event*, impasses necessary to the trajectory Badiou undertakes – specifically the difficulties of thinking situation as a space of appearing and site in terms of its situational being there, thus ‘beyond formalisation’ as it were – are treated in *Logics of Worlds* by ‘means of formalisation’. What is treated by way of an intrinsic and subtractive ontology in *Being and Event* is treated anew by an extrinsic, relational and ‘objective’ ontology in *Logics of Worlds*. The pathos of the ‘subject’ has no bearing on the relations which condition its possibility.

senses anticipates *Logics of Worlds*. But, and this is the rub, we can only know that from this side of the impasse! Badiou 2008, p. 96. Note also that the ‘existence’ of such objects is not established by Category Theory (CT) or by logic more generally. Mathematics remains the discourse on being as such – hence CT is a ‘mathematised logic’ and not the logicisation of mathematics. For a contrary view, and for the arguments that such a view is possible, see the work of both Z. L. Fraser and Paul Livingston.

13 Cf. Clemens 2006 for discussion of the very possibility of a philosophical sequel.

14 Q. Meillassoux 2011, p. 1-11.

In Badiouean terms, despite the appearance of a return to the typological concerns of *Theory of the Subject* – which is less a return than the ongoing pursuit of that single Idea, ‘real change’ – what the thoroughly relational ontological rearticulation ensures is the formalisation of that minimal difference (which makes all the difference) inherent to any being-multiple; that it appear-there. To put this another way, *Being and Event* is the point at which the algebra of *Theory of the Subject* and the topology of *Logics of Worlds* are rendered both indiscernible and absolutely distinct. *Being and Event* remains the decisive intervention into the apparent continuity, or linearity of the world of Badiou’s appearance and thus divides and solders the oeuvre internally.¹⁵ The point of this banal topology is not to render *Theory of the Subject* and what it ‘synthesises’ inexplicable, passé or inexistent but to set the parameters by which certain key criticisms of Badiou might be responded to via engagement with these three texts, which, precisely by appearing as variously sequential, force to the surface the impossibility of their seamless articulation.

Division 2.

The second division regards criticism itself. With the length and breadth of such an oeuvre it is impossible to account for all criticisms. The difficulty is in avoiding arbitrariness. If we divided criticisms between the many ‘one-off’ criticisms – a single review, a single response to a single conception (the event; the politics, the inaesthetics, etc), the crepuscular, overwrought or hysterical dismissals – and those readers of Badiou who have ‘gone on with it’ in some way – that is, continuing to engage critically with the concepts and categories, or to take up these and deploy them across the ‘entire system of reference’ and in so doing elaborating various critiques of the system ‘from within’ – we run the risk of missing what might be crucial. It’s entirely possible that a single intervention might penetrate to the core of the system more powerfully and with greater consequence – such as Russell’s letter to Frege – than years of sustained engagement: affirmative or negative.

15 Cf. ‘Note that while the infinity-support is required by the recurrent possibility of inscribing a mark in the empty place assigned by the primitive relation of the domain, conversely it is the impossibility of a certain mark within that domain that gives rise to the infinity point. While the former supports the rules of construction, the latter, which is inaccessible, recasts and relaunches them, thereby determining a new space of inscription, a difference in the support: the infinity-point is the differential of the infinity-support’. Badiou 2012, p.189.

Logics of Worlds is partly a response to such 'singular' interventions; namely those, no doubt in various ways, of Desanti, Deleuze, Nancy and Lyotard.¹⁶ We can leave to one side this 'strong' type of 'one-off' criticisms whose singularity registers as what is brought to bear, consistently, in their work over time. It is clear that such criticisms have been in some way taken up by Badiou, incorporated as it were, one way or another.¹⁷

Our way of distinguishing between the other 'one-offs' and the 'ongoing' is conditioned by a concern for the oeuvre as we have described it. In general, these 'one-offs' come in two guises: As noted, they deal only with single aspects of the oeuvre and often with regard to the particular concerns of the critic's field or specialty etc. or, sometimes, with their possible deployment; or they are review articles dealing only once and in passing with the concepts and categories of the 'big books'. Certainly the former includes essays, chapters and books. However, we suggest that these 'one-offs', taken together, display certain general tendencies which are both reflected in and are reflections of what we are calling the 'ongoing' engagements, those constrained by being ongoing to address the oeuvre not only as it develops but in its development – so in Badiou's case from 1966 to the present – or of what is of fundamental import within it. The claim is that the ongoing critiques include within them the general tendencies of the one-offs, and so it is the former that concern us.

Division three.

This division is more theoretical and internal. Badiou asserts that he seeks to combine 'the most uncompromising formalism and the most radical subjectivism'¹⁸ without recourse to dogmatic synthesis or succumbing to the sublime temptations of one over the other: which is to say, without returning to some version of the One. What holds

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¹⁶ Badiou, 2009, p. 361. Slavoj Žižek is probably the misfit of this notion. He at once takes his distance from Badiou, usually where the ontological rupture that Badiou brings to bear crosses paths with his Lacanian-Hegelian disjunctive synthesis, and he takes his cue from this very same rupture, usually when the repetitive drive of Lacanian-Hegelian synthesis requires supplementation. What Badiou takes from him is unclear.

¹⁷ There is another form of engagement which one often notes as taking place between 'equals'. Figures like Badiou, Agamben, Rancière, Deleuze, Groys, Sloterdijk, Negri (the list could go on) often speak at each other without (explicit) citation...and then there are enemies, usually named.

¹⁸ Badiou & Bosteels 2005, p. 243.

this formalism and subjectivism together (as two) is the conditioned and conditional, supplemental theory of truth. Thus we have again the philosophical 'world': being, subject, truth. It is along these lines that the third division unfolds, immanent to the ongoing critiques.

In short, there are critics who privilege the formalism and critics who privilege the subjectivism or who want to effect in some way the subordination of one to the other – consciously or consequently. But this is not quite accurate, for it is more often the case that those who privilege the subjectivism actually privilege one of the conditions, namely politics, reducing the other conditions to analogies or afterthoughts worthy only of mention. The privileging of the mathematics or rather ontology (which is not always what Badiou means by ontology) or its extension into the physical sciences, often realises similar reductions of the philosophical conditions of art and love, which, for Badiou are thought practices or truth procedures in their own right and without which philosophy is impossible.

The result of either privilege, mathematics or politics, is almost invariably either the occlusion of one by the other or the subsumption of one as the other: both resulting in the loss of the 'truly new'. That is, the political condition (most often) becomes sutured to the ontology (for some as an indifference; for others as the end of politics) or the mathematical condition becomes merely an adjunct or even a 'tactic' of the politics.¹⁹ In both cases there is a tendency to either push one side of the 'two' beyond what the necessity of the composition allows for, or, and consequently, the tendency to conflate (or demand the conflation of) discrete analyses such as, for example, ontological situations with empirical worlds.²⁰ These 'tendencies', which, in certain cases, display a fetish for a realism – empirical or conceptual – that appears without justification, then become grounds for criticism. Most decidedly – and indeed, this is a problem within philosophy itself, stemming from a

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¹⁹ Hence the section heading in Bosteels' Badiou and Politics, 'Whither Mathematics'. See below.

²⁰ cf. how Peter Hallward sets out his questions in his 'Translators Introduction' to Think Again. In the very first one he addresses himself to the ontology and then immediately conflates the ontological with the political – turning elements into 'someones', the nothing into the proletariat (and the subject into the individual). We are well aware of how Badiou likes to use the Internationale to illustrate the move from elementary inexistence to the orientation of a new configuration of a world (from nothing to everything) but his demonstration of the distinction between what situation is and situations stands behind this polemic. Without this it is oratory and not polemic.

misrepresentation of Plato that is still current in his reception²¹ – it is between mathematics and politics that this internecine struggle for dominance in philosophy is waged. Love and art, as noted, are mostly forgotten as is the reconfiguration of philosophy, ‘for philosophy’, that is central to Badiou’s project. Philosophy is not the repository of wisdom, but the discipline of its pursuit, an act; thus Badiou needs to also be read in terms of the procedure being undergone, the trajectory thus established, as much as for the results effected. The effect of ‘privilege’ is that the proper conditional relation of the conditions to philosophy loses all its theoretical force and, importantly, the transitory form of being, subject and truth – that every situation has being, is founded in truth and convokes its subject – is similarly lost. The usual ‘domestication by commentary’ is the result: something Badiou has worked hard to avoid.

This division yields the general critical trajectory and forms a known part of it. We are not saying that these are the most salient criticisms of Badiou:²² simply, that for whatever reason they have prevailed and been repeated and entered into the received wisdom concerning Badiou, such as it exists.²³ It’s not the case either that they are equally distributed; those with the ‘will to formalisation’ let’s say, are far outnumbered by those with the ‘will to subjectivisation’. For the ‘subjectivists’, the key refrains are ‘relations’ and ‘dialectic’. The emphasis on these requires an interpretation (or reduction) of the formalisation that privileges, as its consequence, representation,

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21 For Plato it was the poem that was to be interrupted for it provided politics with its discursive form. Plato’s recourse to mathematics – the discourse that could not be reduced to opinion – provided philosophy with the means to a thoroughgoing subtraction from this sophistic ethos.

22 Cf. for example Jon Roffe’s 2012 sustained, textually rigorous and trenchant work defending Deleuze proper from Badiou’s ‘reforms’.

23 Let’s not forget that despite what appears to be a ‘bourgeoning’ market in Badiou and Badiou related publications he remains, as do many others, of marginal interests at best to so called philosophy schools around the globe. His resonance is felt more in the disparate conditions, and as such conditionally. This is not a matter of the continental-analytic divide at all – itself the product of institutional commodification, the vanity of social status, class protectionism and intellectual vacuity, and should cease to be given any further philosophical currency. Rather there is ‘what is’, and there is ‘what is not’, philosophy – since Plato! Indeed the entirety of Platonic corpus concerns this immanent separation of what philosophy is, a separation in act, from its ‘sophistic double’. In the Sophist, analogous to the in-separation in the Republic of the just state from the slew of existing forms of the state, the nascent philosopher is seen to be what is left over when the seven variations of sophistry have been purged of the basis of their claims to, not knowledge per se, but what Badiou calls in his essay ‘On Subtraction’, ‘knowledge in truth’ (Badiou 2004, pp. 103-118.)

mediation, negation and ‘reality’ over what is often referred to as ‘abstraction’.²⁴ The latter, it’s asserted – quite forgetting that what is at stake is philosophy – is, in Badiou’s work, the real stumbling-block to subjective ‘action’ in the real world.²⁵ This tendency, whether dialectical or relational in name, supposes some form of ‘co-belonging’ always already there between ‘concept and experience or, between the logical (or ontological) and the historical (or phenomenological).’²⁶ Such assertions seem to ‘forget’ that such a ‘relation’ is precisely that which is forced – one way or another from (the) nothing (that is).

Indeed, ‘forcing’ is one of the key conceptual links between Being and Event and Logics of Worlds and a key distinction between these both and Theory of the Subject. But subject to the ‘subjectivists’ reading, the formal work, paradoxically, becomes the epiphenomenon of the real of experience and history: as if Badiou has written a mathematical ideology. This is contrary to Badiou’s non-negative description of the ‘materialist dialectic’ of Logics of Worlds as ‘ideological’ insofar as both materialism and the dialectic – the mark

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24 The question of ‘how’ this word is meant to function is interesting, given Badiou would hardly shrink from it (cf. Badiou 2003, p. 124: ‘Abstraction is the foundation of all thought’) and even Deleuze affirmed it as foundational for thought. We can also note that Badiou directly opposes his notion of subtraction to abstraction with regard to thinking situations formally. This question of abstraction is one of the things that unite Hallward and Bosteels. While, obviously, Badiou and Hegel do not accord abstraction the same status in all contexts (Hegel is, lamentably, and in direct opposition to Badiou, a fairly conventional critic of the limits of mathematics qua ‘abstraction’), Hegel is also someone who continually uses the word ‘abstract’ to name what, in other contexts, could be called the ‘refusal of abstraction’. Put differently, he again and again denounces appeals to ‘immediacy’ (the ‘real, concrete world as given to experience’) or ‘the ineffable quiddity of this singular moment’” As abstract, while, in contrast, referring to incredibly involved conceptual gymnastics as ‘concrete’. In other words, Hegel never opposes (his occasionally naive remarks about mathematics notwithstanding) “abstract thought” to “concrete reality.” On the contrary, he continually denies the concretion of the immediate, while affirming the concretion of conceptual development. Cf. Badiou’s endorsement of Deasanti’s critique of Hegel as the ‘embodiment of the bad relationship between philosophy and science’ in Badiou 2009, p. 529. Hegel’s ‘incorporation (of the sciences) to the concept’ is a charge Badiou repeats elsewhere.

25 In a review of Quentin Meillassoux’s After Finitude, Peter Hallward, in very similar vein to his treatment of Badiou vis. both BE and LW (see his ‘Order and Event 2008, pp. 97-123), again effectively conflates ontological analysis with an assertion of empirical primacy, all but dismissing Meillassoux’s project because it can’t determine revolutionary politics. See Hallward 2008a, pp. 51-56. See also Nathan Brown’s unpublished response available @ <http://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/2008/11/16/on-after-finitude-a-response-to-peter-hallward/> It’s instructive to read Hallward’s critiques of Badiou, Meillassoux and Deleuze (see Hallward 2006.) side by side. All fail, Hallward argues, with regard to ‘real’ relations. Hallward essentially claims they do not have such a concept rather than that their concepts of relations are not it. Just what is what these are not is (not yet) forthcoming.

26 Bosteels 2011, p. 42.

of the decision against 'democratic (or historical) materialism' – presuppose that being and appearance are neither.²⁷ In other words, what mathematics tells us about being and appearance is not reducible to dialectical reason or a co-relational and thus (a problematically) a priori theory of relations.

On the side of formalisation there is at the limit the effort either to extend the mathematical intervention into the physical or biological sciences, to either test its veracity against these or indeed to invert the ontological (the philosophical decision qua ontology that is) into a sort of bio-ontological primacy, in which philosophy would be the means to its own subjection to 'hard science'.²⁸ There is also the effort to return this formalisation to that which it subtracted itself from most emphatically – language or coincidentally, logic: and, concomitantly, efforts to locate the subject (such as it might be) as an effect of ontology itself and thus flattening the philosophical decision for Set (and Category) Theory to the level, ultimately, of 'taste' – that which is left when formalisation is itself pushed beyond what it must do. These latter formalist efforts seek in one sense to relativise the ontologically immanent division Badiou has insisted upon between mathematical invention and its literal and formal inscription and the logical expression or formal re-presentation of the former, thus re-aligning the ontological project of intuitionism with that of Badiou's deployment of Paul Cohen's 'generic' orientation. Or, in another sense, actually seeking to both go beyond Badiou's philosophical formalisation of this division and on its very basis invalidate it in favour of logic itself qua ontology. Considerations of the consequences of this tendency, in terms of the critical situation under review, are for another essay.

What is sidelined by both exclusions, sometimes determinately, is the philosophical system: taking that word philosophy in the full sense Badiou gives to it with his claim to 'return philosophy to itself' and to address the conditions 'for philosophy'. It is the case that the very performance of these critiques, even if they seek to be positive or purposive with regard to Badiou's project, actively undermine

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²⁷ Badiou 2006, p. 253.

²⁸ Similar to those new supermarket self-serve checkouts that require the former checkout operators – those displaced by the new machines – to instruct the public in their use. Thus they are forced to do the work of doing themselves out of a job.

its radicality and denude its reach and import. The result is either a suture to an ineluctable scientific or logicist paradigm, no matter how that paradigm is itself radicalized, or the return covertly or overtly, consciously or unconsciously to the dominance of representation, of mediation, of experience or affect, of history, of the political²⁹ or of the culture-sex-technology-management complex Badiou diagnoses in his Saint Paul, and which he re-nominates in Logics of Wolds, 'democratic materialism' – the real of historical materialism. These are the consequences and tellingly, as avatars of the One, they preclude the possibility of truth and prescribe ultimately a subjective incapacity.

Division four.

To note that the modalities of critique, its general tendency, reduce to three key terms is also to elicit several proper names. At the same time, these proper names do not function (or not only) as personal names. If the question of relations (mediation, the primacy of identity) is indeed a question exemplary of a general tendency then to assign to it the proper name Peter Hallward is to mark both its most 'on-going' avatar and the generality it composes. The same goes for Bruno Bosteels and the dialectic, and for Ray Brassier, Zachary Luke Fraser, and Paul Livingstone for various critical 'uncompromising formalisation' ('abstraction').³⁰ Obviously, these names are not exhaustive of these critical procedures nor necessarily do they totalise what is at stake in these tendencies but are, as noted, exemplary, serious and insistent. Although all have written book length studies either on Badiou specifically or studies engaging significantly with Badiou we cannot here extend our explication across all figures and all points.

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²⁹ See Badiou 2005a, pp. 10-25, for the distinction between 'politics' and 'the political'.

³⁰ Oliver Feltham, whose PhD thesis *As Fire Burns* deserves recognition for its early foray into the exposition of Badiou's set-theoretical ontology and for drawing consequences from it, deserves mention here. His *Alain Badiou: Live Theory* carries this expositional work further and stakes a claim for Badiou's 'subject' but he comes down on neither side of this division. We could also mention Frank Ruda's work, specifically the excellent *Hegel's Rabble. An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 2011 & the work of such excellent readers of Badiou as Alberto Toscano, Nina Power, Ed Pluth and Domenick Hoens among several others. The point, as noted, is not lists but general tendencies that have characterised the 'situation' and must be marked for intervention. Some of the work of intervention is carried out in the work of those just named. Quentin Meillassoux's work (*After Finitude*) extends the rupture Badiou's work provides, opening a new series of enquiries provoking their own reactions. As with that of Ray Brassier (*Nihil Unbound*), it is a work of thought and in that sense philosophically lovable. There are of course recent attempts to situate Badiou theologically. A generalised account of this wider situation on the Badiouean critical front is forthcoming in Bartlett & Clemens, *What is Impossible: Badiou and Contemporary Philosophy*, (Routledge).

The remainder of this essay, then, tests the claims of one of these friendly critics, Bruno Bosteels, who speaks here for the dialectic as the central and overarching concern of Badiou. Our aim is to render discernible the 'rational kernel' of his critical concern: his questions, objections, resistances and even more importantly, perhaps, his affirmations. To do so turns ultimately on the distance he takes, and asserts, must be taken from mathematics.

II

Now, in every matter it is of great moment to start at the right point in accordance with the subject.³¹ (T. 29b)

What is it then to read philosophy, and must we only read it. Certainly the prescribed order sustained by the fundamentals does not coincide with the order of its writing.³²

Relations

In many ways the 'dialectical' critical complex that Bosteels elaborates matches and mirrors that named by Hallward in his insistence on 'relations'. Or at least, what minor disagreements they have stem from having a similar problem. Indeed, Hallward speaks often in terms of the transitivity of the two. In his introduction to *Think Again*, Hallward laments the anti-relational and anti-dialectical bias of Being and Event and its concomitant abstraction, he contends, of any possible subject from any possible political (or, we suppose, amorous, artistic or mathematical) act.³³ And indeed, in Badiou's classical or Boolean world every couple – event/site, situation/state, subject/object, void / excess, ontology/phenomenology – Hallward contends, is 'frozen stiff' by his steadfast refusal to deliver us 'a thoroughly relational ontology'.³⁴ One that will, referring here to *Logics of Worlds*, 'require us to privilege history rather than logic as the most fundamental dimension of a world,

31 Plato, *Timaeus*, 29b.

32 Derrida 1979, pp. 3-41.

33 See also Hallward 2004, p. 276. Hallward's criticisms of BE and LW are essentially isomorphic. Cf. Hallward's introduction to *Think Again* (2004, pp.1-20), 'Consequences of Abstraction' with 'Order and Event: On Badiou's Logic of Worlds,' (2008, pp. 97-123).

34 Hallward 2008, p. 121.

and to defend a theory of the subject equipped not only with truth and body but also with determination and political will.³⁵ Further, 'to take seriously the fact that in some cases—with respect to some 'points' of a world—there can be more than one way of saying yes (emphasis added).³⁶ The negative intensity of Hallward's negation is, with all seriousness, directed toward saving the (dialectical) 'materiality' of Badiou's project given, he says – suggesting some ambivalence in his understanding of what mathematics qua discourse of marks and letters is for Badiou³⁷ – that it is now even 'harder to see how this account could be characterised as either materialist or dialectical, other than in relation to the still more immaterialist and exceptionalist orientation of the first volume'.³⁸ This suggests that Hallward seems to retain a romantic understanding of mathematics, one informed by the received wisdom of Platonic idealism, and this coupled with a quaintly organic understanding of materialism and its (un)willing subject.³⁹ Moreover, the implicit correlation of appearing with a political manifestation repeats the Aristotelian conceit and so registers anew and against the grain the relational exclusivity on which it is predicated. Not all men who have language are political animals.

In his introduction to his *Badiou and Politics*, Bruno Bosteels notes that he disagrees with his friend Peter Hallward's ascription of a Kantian style dualism at the heart of Badiou's immanent divisions between truth and knowledge or subject and object, on one significant point. Whereas for Hallward there is no theory of relations in Badiou's

35 Hallward 2008, p. 121. Badiou's recent analysis of the riot might suggest he has listened to Hallward on this but a closer look demonstrates that what Badiou is enumerating in *The Return of History* is history in a subjective, thus evental, sense. The analysis is here correlated to his logics of change as set out in LW. There is no History in the sense of it being determinative or subsisting ground etc.: it is precisely what any fully subjective change brings onto the scene – in other words, the truth of the old regime!

36 Hallward 2008, p. 122. Would no be a way of saying yes? At what point would the two be indistinct? Would it just be a matter of opinion?

37 See for a critical consideration of this Justin Clemens 2003, pp. 73-102.

38 Hallward 2008, p. 123.

39 This licences the critiques of others. Daniel Bensaïd, in a minor article, uses Hallward's interpretation to offer: '... in this philosophy of politics an 'absolutist logic' that leaves little space for multiple subjectivities, shuns the democratic experience, and condemns the sophist to a sort of exile. Badiou's quasi-absolutist orientation preserves the ghost of a subject without object. This is a return to a philosophy of majestic sovereignty, whose decision seems to be founded upon a nothing that commands the whole' (TA 106).

work, for Bosteels – despite Badiou, he says, seeming to offer himself up in various ways to these criticisms – the articulation of being and event ‘on the same plane’ is the real dialectical and relational core of Badiou’s project.⁴⁰ It’s not so much then that relations remain stubbornly and fatally absent; it’s that the truth of the dialectical relation has been ‘obscured’ by the formalisation (and subsequently by the ‘die-hard maths fans’ among Badiou interpreters),⁴¹ and or by over-emphasis on ‘one or more’ of the conditions and thus the sets of references they call upon.⁴² Thus the dialectic ‘in direct lineage from Hegel’ is truly the singular invariant of Badiou’s philosophy. Bosteels is not unaware of Badiou’s efforts to differentiate his ‘dialectic’ from this lineage but Bosteels is determined that even this – the obscurities of set and category theory included – is merely one of the valences of the dialectic itself. It is finally a matter of everyone else reading Badiou correctly: ‘this means that we reread this book’s [BE] central thesis [the generic theory of the subject] from the point of view of ... Theory of the Subject’.⁴³

This strategy, combined with the authority invested in Hegel as (one of) the crucial philosopher(s),⁴⁴ the one who ‘sublates mathematics to the concept’, invites the claim from Bosteels that ‘set theory’, being in one sense the theory of ‘quantitative’ impasse, ‘confirms one of [the] principal laws’ of the dialectic insofar as it guarantees (unconsciously for Badiou) the necessity of ‘leaps’, ‘breaks’ etc. ‘in the gradualness of nature’ and so that ‘all of a sudden’ emerges the identity of opposites.⁴⁵ Let’s note three things as preface: first, the inversion played out here on the terrain of a correct interpretation. Thus, it is the case that set theory ontology (as the science of being qua being) thinks its own situational inconsistency and that an event will expose this inconsistency qua any

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40 Bosteels 2011, pp. 3-4. Žižek is also credited here with this accusation in more ‘radical’ form.

41 Bosteels 2011, p. 35 (emphasis added).

42 This is yet another sleight against mathematics of which there are quite a few in this book.

43 Bosteels 2002, p. 198. ‘Theory of the Subject’, Bosteels contends (2009, p. viii) ‘is a work whose legendary difficulty until recently turned away many more readers than it attracted lasting admirers, even from among Badiou’s most ardent followers’. Who?

44 Badiou 2009 p. 527. Plato and Descartes being the other two. The privilege of Hegel by Bosteels is not only related to Hegel’s sublation of mathematics to the concept – contra the other two – but has a personal context. See Preface to Bosteels 2011.

45 Bosteels 2011, p. 164. Badiou traces the becoming of this identity of opposites (as Bestimmung) in Hegel in the early pages of Theory of the Subject. See pp. 8-9.

situation – given ontology thinks the being of any situation. But far from confirming a law of the dialectic – which even in Theory of the Subject is the ‘law of being’⁴⁶ (and not qua being) it formalises what the latter could not think but ‘pointed to’ – the nothing that is; hence the dialectic’s reliance on some notion of the absolute or end to structure its (circular) movement. Second, this presumption leads into the confusion of ‘the identity of opposites’ with generic indiscernibility. This is symptomatic of the analogic reading strategy, which in turn accuses its ‘other’ (‘die hard math’s fans’ i.e.) of the very same thing. Verisimilitude is not an ontological category. Thirdly, the implication of the necessary relation between what mathematics qua situation realizes as itself, so to speak – inconsistency at its heart – and event is a category mistake. The former does not prescribe the occurrence of the latter given that what is formally demonstrated is the void-relation between them. Events are ‘of situations’, not mathematical formalisms. It is ironic that Bosteels’ argument plays out this way, as we will see.

Texts and Questions

The key texts for Bosteels’ elaboration of this reading strategy are the two-part ‘The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism’ (2001-2), ‘On the Subject of the Dialectic’ (2004), and his recent Badiou and Politics (2011).⁴⁷ Various repetitions of this same position are also found in the long translator’s introductions to Theory of the Subject and The Adventure of French Philosophy and most of his published work on Badiou.⁴⁸ We will concentrate primarily on the recent (2011) book as this

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46 Badiou, 2009a, p. 3.

47 This work contains 12 entries on Plato. While it is true that index entries alone cannot tell us everything, it is the case that there is no sustained discussion of Badiou’s Platonism or Plato’s Badiouianism; strange for a work on the dialectical politics of a Platonist.

48 In his translator’s introduction to Theory of the Subject, Bosteels tells us of his early engagement with Badiou’s texts, the order of his reading and the emphasis he put on them. It is clearly a political orientation and TS remains something of a privileged text for him. He repeats this in his preface to Badiou and Politics. The following should be read in light of this. ‘I have come to the conclusion that this order of reading [TS, BE, LW], which somewhat [emphasis added] conventionally corresponds to the chronological order of the books’ publication and thus to their author’s trajectory as a philosopher and militant, even though it runs counter to the more common practice among English speaking readers who tend to start with one or other of the books published and translated after Being and Event, makes all the difference in the world in terms of the image of thought that can be attributed to Badiou’s philosophy as a whole. Above all, there where a privileged focus on Being and Event frequently leads to the conclusion that this thinker’s trajectory involves a clean and irreversible break away from the tradition of the dialectic, Theory of the Subject allows the reader both to nuance, if not exactly refute, this conclusion as far as the idea of the break itself is concerned and to uncover subtle dialectical threads even in the overall metaontological argumentation which, grounded in a

both returns to and restates these other texts. And in this book we will concentrate particular attention on the small section post-ironically named 'Whither Mathematics' where he seeks to explain his decision to minimise the mathematics in support of the experience of the 'subject'. This short section ends with Bosteels taking as cue Adorno's remark about reading Hegel,⁴⁹ thus marking a transitivity between Hegel and Badiou that will ground his larger inversion of Badiou's project. In reading Badiou, Bosteels says, 'Every logical and ontological operation, however formal it may well seem to be, must thus be related against the grain to the experiential core that conditions it.'⁵⁰ In other words, Bosteels reads the dialectic that is (not) in Badiou via the mathematical interruption that is not one. The aim, then, is not to turn things right side up yet again, but to insist on the break with this re-turning.

Like Hallward, Bosteels seems 'conceptually' unmoved by the 'mathematical turn' as he puts it,⁵¹ or rather, 'removed from it' and like Hallward, these works written over a decade essentially make the same criticism.⁵² It is clear, as noted, that for Bosteels 'minimising the importance of the mathematical framework' is the key to insisting on Badiou's Hegelian lineage.⁵³ On this significant point he agrees entirely

solid command of set theory, is supposed to come after this break' (Bosteels 2009, p. ix). In an enlightening note – and leaving aside the fact that this is his own 'trajectory' – seeking to justify this reading strategy, Bosteels suggest that the common bias that a philosophical oeuvre is like a Bildungsroman – a progression progressing from early mistakes and lost illusions to ever more perfected insights – is facile and should be questioned. 'After all', he continues, 'literary oeuvres are rarely considered to operate to this form'. Is it not the case however, that the young man of the Bildungsroman always returns home and reconciles with the 'transcendental of the father'? Paradoxically, Bosteels own prescribed progressive reading (the works must be read in this order TS, BE LW) coupled with the insistence that LW does return, conceptually, to TS, thus fulfilling the trajectory for which BE too is a milestone, seems to suggest that he is precisely describing a Bildungsroman? And if so this would be 'wrong'?

49 'Hegel has to be read against the grain, and in such a way that every logical operation, however formal it seems to be, is reduced to its experiential core'. Bosteels 2011, p. 42.

50 Bosteels 2011, p. 42-3.

51 Bosteels 2011, p. 3.

52 Bosteels notes that 2002's 'The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism' and 'On the Subject of the Dialectic' are incorporated into the 2011 book.

53 Bosteels 2011, p. 33. Bosteels' translation of *Peut-on penser la politique?* has been 'forthcoming' for some time. Written in 1985 it offers hints of the transition Badiou was in the process of and Bosteels often cites it precisely because it seems to combine elements of TS and BE. This 1985 text, when it is published, will be (have been) the most recent of Badiou's books translated by Bosteels.

with Hallward.⁵⁴ Ironically, it's almost as if this decision of Badiou – that mathematics is ontology – is taken too literally by Bosteels (and Hallward) in the sense that they suppose that a philosophy exists of Badiou ultimately untouched by this ontology, the 'science of being qua being' and, as such, one of the four conditions of such a philosophy.⁵⁵

In short, it can almost appear as if the abstraction and thus the separation that is Being and Event from all 'established knowledge', never took place. Or paradoxically, if it did, 'nothing took place but place'. That is to say, Being and Event rather than providing the generic force of the subject via the most rigorous formalisation of its possible being, announces only a more spectacular variation on its end. Or again: the genericity of the subject finally separates a subject from all it can do. The silent sophisticated caveat being that what it can do is always already known. But then again it's also worth asking: is this division which both Hallward and Bosteels describe in their own fashion between abstraction and relations, or dialectics and mathematics even tenable, even, dare we say it, related to Badiou's philosophy in any rigorous way? Indeed, what havoc does Bosteels' understanding of the very title of Being and Event as the presentation of an identity of opposites (thus ignoring the various functions of and) come to play in all he surveys? And indeed what havoc does it play when he understands the relation between Being and Event and Logics of Worlds to be organized by the 'vanishing mediator' of the Theory of the Subject, going so far, Žižek like, as to revise Badiou's own maxim to indemnify this claim.⁵⁶ Bosteels seeks to raise the subject to the 'level' of being and event. However, given the subject, to have any subjectivity beyond what is always already ascribed to it, is and must be the finite force of their disjunction, this dialectical flattening has the consequence of reinscribing the subject as a phenomenon like any other: A 'yet one more' that must come to be subject to this absolute order. Treating the texts in this similar way, that Logics of Worlds is the rewriting of Being and Event under condition of Theory of the Subject is fundamentally an overthrowing of Badiou's return of philosophy to itself. What type of subjectivity – faithful, reactionary or obscurantist – offers itself in this overthrow?

54 'Two badgers on the same hill' to poach a Chinese saying.

55 This as such is critical.

56 Bosteels 2011, p. 199. Instead of 'there are bodies and languages except that there are truths', Bosteels writes 'there is only being and event except that there is also the subject'.

Bosteels is certainly alive to every mention of the dialectic in Badiou's work, literally so as we will see, and contends that Badiou is not only a 'post-dialectical thinker' but, in Hegel's wake, a resolutely 'post-dialectical thinker'.⁵⁷ But two further questions must animate our enquiry: is there in this effort of Bosteels a conflation or a suturing between politics and philosophy? The overwhelmingly majority of references in Bosteels elucidations are political and in his latest work he is clear, to the point of the exclusion of all else, that this is his central concern. Is this where he seeks Badiou's materialism such that politics is the essential matter of a properly dialectical philosophy or philosophy as dialectic? If so and again: what of the other 'conditions' and what of the 'return of philosophy to itself'? What of the Platonism of the multiple or even a Platonic gesture? Indeed, there is little room for Plato here at all, sublated as he is in the glow of the Absolute. This is most apparent, let's note in passing, in the problem Bosteels forges for himself regarding the logic of the generic, that of how a truth comes to knowledge: as 're-collection' decided at a point.

Second, how can this dialectic be thought, that is, what is the place and operation of the dialectic? This is especially key given that it cannot be an ontological conception, given that the Platonic gesture, mathematics, interrupts all such law like processes⁵⁸ separates, in fact, situated knowledge from itself, capable as it is of 'both providing schemas adequate to experience and of frustrating this experience by way of conceptual inventions that no intuition could ever accept'.⁵⁹ Which is to say, the subject of experience cannot be guaranteed by dialectic. The last great effort to do this in some fashion, Lacan, fails for Badiou precisely by putting together ('on the same plane'), a la Hegel

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57 Bosteels 2012, p. xxxvii.

58 Badiou 2005, p. 169. The question for Bosteels' Hegelian inspired maintenance of the dialectic in Badiou must 'avoid' this key problem in Hegel or it has to be shown that Badiou is wrong on this. 'In other words, Hegel fails to intervene on number. He fails because the nominal equivalence he proposes between the pure presence of passing beyond in the void (the good qualitative infinity) and the qualitative concept of quantity (the good quantitative infinity) is a trick, an illusory scene of the speculative theatre. There is no symmetry between the same and the other, between proliferation and identification. However heroic the effort, it is interrupted de facto by the exteriority itself of the pure multiple. Mathematics occurs here as discontinuity within the dialectic. It is this lesson that Hegel wishes to mask by suturing under the same term-infinity-two disjoint discursive orders.'

59 Badiou 2004, p. 73.

in fact, the subject and the void; which Badiou resolutely does not do because, as he shows, it cannot be. As we will see below, Bosteels must do this (using lack and void interchangeably) in order to include, which is to say, foreclose in reaction, the very discourse that rationally, formally, which is to say, without recourse to a theory of the subject, inscribes as : the place of its own impasse!

The greater problem Bosteels has, then, and this comes to the fore in the latest book, is not so much that he seeks to account for Badiou's politics, a subject of politics or even that he might seek to account for this politics with relation to Badiou's philosophy (all this being perfectly normal), but that to support the account he gives fundamentally requires the very philosophy (a philosophy conditioned by the four conditions) which this very reductive (reduced to being read through the theories of Theory of the Subject) reading 'has done with'.

Mentions

In a long footnote to his Badiou and Politics, Bosteels takes Fabian Tarby (and others by suggestion) to task for 'hurling back at him against his reading of Badiou' the claim that the dialectic does not feature in Being and Event. Bosteels' claims that this is literally not true, as there are 'at least 25 mentions'; and more importantly (though he doesn't say that it is so) the accusation is un-true for 'broader interpretive reasons.' Our count turns up 37 page instances, and approximately 50 'mentions'.⁶⁰ We obviously cannot go into them all but a quick summary is appropriate to show something about Bosteels' 'literalist' reading strategy (and that Tarby is actually correct).

Unsurprisingly, the Hegel meditation (Med.15) contains the largest subset – and then only to point out the hallucinations regarding the infinite upon which its trajectory through the 'chicanes of the pure multiple' relies (BE 170). Pascal that 'qualified dialectician' (BE 214) and one whose intellectual force, conditioned by new realities in thought, is focused on subjective capture as its interventionist and militant vocation (BE 222), also counts several. It appears in the context of the 'old Marxism' whose 'force and absolute weakness', Badiou says, 'had

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60 4, 12, 58, 81, 83, 222, 232 331,165, 167,173, 168, 110,117, 235, 248, 272, 482 (notes), 104, 97, 157, 281, 289, 170, 214, 256, 239, 157, 272, 146, 169, 97, 109, 216, 162, 90. In the coming section all references to BE are in-text.

lain in its postulation of just such a compatibility in the shape of the generality of the laws of the dialectic, which is to say the isomorphy between the dialectic of nature and the dialectic of history. This (Hegelian) isomorphy was, of course, still-born' (BE 4): from which the only way out, for Badiou, in Theory of the Subject, that is, was to pursue beyond Lacan himself, the clear Lacanian doctrine concerning the real as the impasse of formalisation.⁶¹ The key to Being and Event, Badiou contends, is that this impasse can itself be thought, that is, formally presented, rather than 'supposed'.⁶² Some mentions are singular, such as that of Lautman's 'dialectical Ideas' or the 'Heideggerian dialectic' (BE 12), and so on. Most are not 'flattering' references, nor is the dialectic embedded anywhere in the entire edifice in any productive or demonstrative argument and, as such, these mentions can be counted only in support of Tarby's certainly interpretive rather than literal claim that BE doesn't 'say a word about the dialectic'.⁶³

Yet, as Bosteels points out, there are several mentions that might have interpretive import: exterior interpretive import, in the sense that one might try to mount a claim that in phrases such as 'the dialectic of being and event' (BE 232), or the 'subtle dialectic of knowledges and post-evental fidelity' (BE331),⁶⁴ there is something, necessarily grounded elsewhere (or why would you need a mathematical ontology?). And these as traversing what is otherwise separating itself, on the basis of an irrefutable inconsistency, from all that has gone before in terms of conceptual orientation. As if Badiou – à la the Straussian reading of Plato – retains an esoteric core, for dialectical initiates only.

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61 Badiou notes here that he was stuck in the 'frame of Theory of the Subject,' 'caught in the grip of a logicist thesis' which he succinctly elaborates and links to the 'universally recognised Anglo-American distinction between formal and empirical sciences' (BE 5). We have already mentioned where this way out fails. Still we should note that the conception of the real as what mathematics alone marks is already realised in 'Infinitesimal Subversion' contra Hegel.

62 In RDM2 (2002) and in Badiou and Politics (2011), Bosteels cites as a key wrong turn the move from Lacan's maxim concerning the impasse of formalisation to BE's forcing of the impasse. He writes 'Theory of the Subject, which also argues that from the real as the impasse of formalization we should be able to grasp formalisation as the forceful passing of the real. The earlier work indeed seems to me much more effective in explaining where exactly this thesis imposes a vital step beyond psychoanalysis—a step which the later work barely signals in the title of its final part: 'Forcing: Truth and Subject' & 'Beyond Lacan' (Bosteels 2002, p.198).

63 Bosteels, 2011, fn. 17, p. 354.

64 Which he goes onto say is 'the kernel of being of the knowledge/truth dialectic.'

Bosteels names those of interpretative import as: the dialectics of 'void and excess' (3 mentions in 526 pages)⁶⁵, the one and the many, presentation and representation, event and intervention, truth and knowledge, (1 each) which he says 'after all, constitute pivotal moments in the book'.⁶⁶ Indeed, these are pivotal moments but this does not by any means make the dialectic pivotal. Suffice to say, and any reader can look this up, all these instance-mentions are decidedly nominal, at best descriptive or to use Bosteels' own words, which he rather flippantly directs at the mathematical condition, 'at best heuristic, at worst analogies'.⁶⁷ Nowhere in Being and Event does Badiou recommence the dialectic, quite the contrary. In other words there is absolutely no mention of the dialectic in Being and Event. Nevertheless, 'man being the measure of all things' any individual is free to insist to the contrary.

The modesty of nuance, the pathos of inversion

To be sure, Bosteels at times nuances his conception of the dialectic, under pressure from the mathematical interruption, but his goal, plainly or perhaps wholly Hegelian, avowedly political, immodest, is to reestablish the dialectic as the mode proper to any philosophy such that it serves subjective experience, resolutely political.⁶⁸ Which is to say, to promote such a notion via the work of a philosopher. The problem Bosteels confronts is effectively Badiou's own conception of what is philosophy: That 'abstraction is the foundation of all thought' or 'that thought should always establish itself beyond categorial oppositions, thereby delineating an unprecedented diagonal, is constitutive of philosophy itself'.⁶⁹ In other words, as intimated, the problem is in submitting not so much the diagonal – or in fact subtraction, supplementation or declaration – to the dialectic, this is problematic enough given in both the Meno and in Cantor the diagonal subverts the dialectic (of sophistic knowledge, of ordinality, respectively and similarly) but ultimately – and this is especially Bosteels' problem

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65 Bosteels says 'several' in Think Again (2004, p. 159), and indeed, this is integral to his reading.

66 Bosteels 2011, fn. 17, p. 354. He might have added in this vein: illegality/height of order; discontinuous/continuous; of the already/ and the still more; and of being and event itself!

67 Bosteels 2011, p. xviii.

68 Bosteels 2011, p. 163 passim.

69 Badiou 2004, p. 69. Bosteels cites this in his introduction to the Adventure of French Philosophy, 2012.

given his wont to prioritise the subject over (or under) ontology (in fact to make ontology subjective) – to submit the very ‘law of the subject’, forcing, to this priority, which he indeed attempts, rhetorically, in Badiou and Politics.

Putting the subject before what establishes it as possible effect is a peculiar sort of inversion of order. However, Bosteels does not try to invert this order – which is to say the ‘order’ relation of being and event (the event is not being qua being but every event has being) – so much as insist that it’s not even there. For Bosteels, or at least for his claims to function, knowledge as bound up in the subject of the dialectic remains primary and truth merely incidental – and thus events cannot be eventual but merely adjuncts of the absolute.⁷⁰ And this is why many of his claims are rooted in an intrusion of language rather than conceptual demonstration: that is, the concepts and categories of Being and Event, those Badiou sees as offered for deployment ‘across the entire system of reference’,⁷¹ including ‘forcing’,⁷² constantly come wrapped in the (non-or rather quasi- ontological qua Being and Event) language of Theory of the Subject – logic of scission, torsion, lack and so on – and Bosteels makes no bones about their becoming imperceptible.⁷³ In short this is what Badiou would call, yet again, a constructivist (or even nihilist) orientation, ‘one that prefers itself to every situation’.⁷⁴ One that entirely misses the point of what mathematics is for Badiou:

70 In fact abstraction is something like the necessary separation of the thought of the new from the knowledge of the situation. The subject, then, is what traverses subtractively the situation anew, conditioned by this separating ‘axiom’.

71 Badiou 2005, p. 10.

72 Bosteels 2011, p. 189.

73 Bosteels 2011, p. 160 passim. See also Bosteels 2001, 2002 and 2004 and so on. As we say, he is not smuggling them in but seems to really see them as contiguous. It is worth noting that he builds into his rhetorical strategy a certain out. Like Hallward in his critique of Logics of Worlds cited above (2008), Bosteels uses a lot of hesitations such as: ‘seems to’, ‘if this is still appropriate’, ‘to a large extent’ and so on. It has that passive aggressive feel familiar from Žižek but not original in him.

74 Badiou 2009, p. 16. See Bosteels 2011, Chapter 5, ‘Forcing the truth’ which gives no exposition of forcing at all, but defers for the most part to an exegetical tour of who and what is not Badiou: the better to set up the latter’s return to the ‘materialist dialectic’ (187). But as in much of the work, to say this is both true and not true! For in fact he does give some ‘exposition’ but it is not of ‘forcing’ in BE but forcing as read through the terminology and ‘perspective’ of TS. Bosteels just does not seem to take seriously what even he remarks: that forcing is not a concept until BE. Instead, he looks for its genesis, shall we say, in TS, plainly ignoring Badiou’s own professed genealogy and this, then, is meant to serve as the truth of the concept and so our orientation. It reads at times like an evolutionary biology.

‘...mathematics, far from being an abstract exercise that no one needs to be vitally pre-occupied with, is a subjective analyser of the highest calibre. The hostility that increasingly surrounds mathematics—too distant, they say, from ‘practice’ or ‘concrete life’—is but one sign among many of the nihilist orientation that little by little is corrupting all the subjects bowed under the rule of democratic materialism.’⁷⁵

Whither wither?

For Badiou, Bosteels freely declares, ‘Set theory serves no more noble cause than to formalise how humanity can become a part greater than the sum of its elements’⁷⁶. This quaint and anti-anti-humanist formulation leads Bosteels to pose a question to himself: ‘Whither mathematics?’ Doing so certainly demonstrates some capacity for self-reflection or at least an acknowledgement of what others have said concerning each of his prior engagements with Badiou, at least since Bosteel’s double article, ‘The Return of Dialectical Materialism’ but it turns out, of course, that he was right all the time, even if he has no capacity (and so never had), he modestly tells us, to show us why.⁷⁷

Two epithets introduce us to this section of Badiou and Politics: One from an essay in Theoretical Writings, post-Being and Event, concerning the unique capacity of mathematics to maintain that ‘if thought can formulate a problem, it can and will solve it’, regardless of time. The second, from Theory of the Subject, begins ‘Except ...’ and goes on to give a dialectical conception, grounded in lack as remainder, of the acquisition of knowledge via the ‘nameless movement through which the real appears’.⁷⁸ This is consistent with Bosteels decade long reading strategy, which seeks to clarify the obscurities of philosophical abstraction by re-reading everything post 1985 via everything prior to it – with Can Politics be Thought being considered as some sort of key to the whole mission not unlike the errant key Gregory Vlastos finds in Plato’s Meno at 81d.⁷⁹

75 Badiou 2009, p. 16.

76 Bosteels 2011, p. 33.

77 Bosteels 2011, p. 42.

78 Bosteels 2011, p. 33

79 Vlastos claims very hysterically, we might add, that the elenchus (the so-called Socratic dialogues) is essentially abandoned in the face of the geometric paradigm. Vlastos 1991, p. 119.

We note the use of these as epithets because they preface his claim to be 'precise' about the function of mathematics in Badiou's thought: a precision, apparently, no-one else, and especially not those 'most admiring readers' for whom the formalisation is 'canonical',⁸⁰ have yet articulated – not even Badiou himself if Bosteels is correct. Thus:

In minimizing the importance of the mathematical framework, then, am I not disabling a proper understanding of this thinker's singularity, or worse, falling into the traps of a vulgar cultural bias for which mathematics is either too hermetic and coldly abstract or else, in a politically correct inversion of the same bias, too masculine, falsely universalist but actually elitist, and at bottom Eurocentric?⁸¹

Indeed. But of course all this is true. Remember, the reduction of the latter (BE, formalisation) to the former (TS, subjectivism) is Bosteels key reading strategy, to make sure that the dialectic shines through like the sun into the cave. He articulates this 'precision' in 4 points but first makes a few preliminary claims.

Claims

Being and Event, Bosteels contends, is constructed of a 'layered combination' of three kinds of analytical presentation: 'conceptual, intuitive and strictly mathematical'. This is the case for the order of meditations themselves but a 'similar threefold presentation also recurs within almost every type of meditation', he claims. This is the same for Logics of Worlds, he contends.⁸² Even though he devotes a chapter to the 'move' from Being and Event to Logics of Worlds (via Theory of the Subject), we will leave this aside here. For us, Being and Event is what makes the return impossible. We will follow whither where it goes.

Bosteels contends that the reason for this layering is that the 'intrinsic truths' of mathematics eventually run up against the doxa of common beliefs. Thus, he is suggesting that the strictly mathematical

.....
80 Bosteels 2011, p. 63-4. Bosteels is not shy of ramping up the rhetoric. Indeed what sort of appeal is this, to remark canonical as inherently slavish and passé.

81 Bosteels 2011, p. 33.

82 Bosteels 2011, p. 36. That LW presents itself as Books, Scholia, Appendices, Dictionaries and Sections and TS as a Seminar and that only BE presents Meditations raises the question of the relation between this 'three kinds of analytical procedure' and the genre of their transmission. Why the difference if they are all basically the same?

aspects of the analysis in Being and Event are organised so to be in dialectical relation with this doxa. There is a sort of vacillation: Each return to intuitive language, to the dangers of 'natural language', which Badiou 'smuggles in to his exposition' as 'illustrative counterweight' is then resubmitted to the matheme.⁸³ The struggle, as Bosteels puts it, between mathematics and opinion (intuitions, finitude, obscurantism) is recommenced over and again within Being and Event, and thus philosophy, in a reversal of what Plato contends is the place of mathematics, is rendered metaxu by Bosteels' reading. It is philosophy, then, that comes to mediate between mathematical formalism and that which returns again and again in struggle with it – the 'human condition of our finitude'.⁸⁴

Against the blind disciples of mathematical rationalism i.e. the 'die-hard fans of Badiou's

otherwise undeniable mathematical propensity'⁸⁵ (and, as such, in a seamless return to Althusser)⁸⁶, Bosteels contends, glossing without constraint Badiou's discussion of the non-relation between mathematics and dialectics via way of the signifier and the symptom in Theory of the Subject,⁸⁷ that mathematics too, struggles against its own ideological tendencies. But it is through philosophy (the onto / theological struggle in theory?) that this struggle takes place or as he says, the 'concepts of philosophy' serve as the in-between of these two determinate tendencies 'opening up' the space of their struggle. Thus hard mathematical labour and the 'laziness of intuitive language' whose

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83 Bosteels 2011, p. 36.

84 Given we are free to cite BE.

85 Bosteels 2011, p. 35. Emphasis added.

86 Bosteels 2011, p. 3.

87 Cf. TS, 'Torsion,' May 2, 1977, p. 148: 'The backdrop for all this is the understanding that in grappling with language, the mathematical formalisms perform a desubjectivization only at the cost of exploiting to the maximum – to death – the signifiers to which the subject is sutured. Consider also the fascination that Marx and Engels feel for differential calculus and their somewhat naive intent to seek therein the matrix of the 'laws of the dialectic'; or Marx's fallacious conviction, displayed in his numerous writings on mathematics, that he was a mathematician because he was a dialectician. These are all signs that the enigma of writing is tied to the fantasy of a formalized dialectic. With mathematics being its restricted specialty from which, upon close scrutiny, it would be possible all the same to extract the universal principle. We should abandon this path in favour of the one I am indicating, which holds that words resonate within a demonstration well beyond the level of inferences for which they serve, even though this echo is nowhere to be heard except in the actual understanding of the chain of adduced proofs.'

'spontaneity' is tied to 'human finitude' become equally necessary to the precise conceptualisation of philosophy for Bosteels. The dialectic(ian) after all is the true subject of the piece and thus any break one constitutes with the other is internal to the unbreakable force of the dialectic which is absolute.

Bosteels, second claim supposes the 'double inscription' of mathematics in Being and Event: as ontology and as condition. But the consideration he gives has less to do with this question (as a situation capable of truth and as the discourse of being qua being) than with establishing that mathematics is really or 'precisely' the immanent form of a political inscription. Bosteels, such is his symptom, takes up the well-known claim of Badiou in Meditation 8 that he uses the term 'state' to mark the power-set because of its 'metaphorical affinity with politics'.⁸⁸ This 'metaphorical convenience'⁸⁹ Bosteels claims, means that politics and mathematics cannot be considered as two distinct conditions for philosophy but are 'put into relation' by this metaphor, and are both, then, combined with the 'history of philosophy' via Badiou's citation of Hegel ('or what Hegel calls the One-One'), to be 'precisely' the three domains between which philosophy 'circulates'.⁹⁰

Bosteels suggests, but doesn't go on with it, that the 'history of philosophy' might be a fifth condition. We mention this only because in the essay *On a Finally Objectless Subject*, Badiou, in passing, admits religion as a possible truth procedure (although he never mentions the dialectic)⁹¹ and also, obviously, because it's a rather large claim to make in the face of Badiou's entire philosophical system – one in which the four conditions remain the basis, to this day.⁹² So for Bosteels, on the basis of a 'metaphorical affinity' which he doesn't explore here, but which he associates with the supposed 'dialectic of void and excess'

.....
88 Badiou 2005, p. 95 (emphasis added).

89 Bosteels 2011, p. 37 (emphasis added), cites the French phrase 'Par une convenance métaphorique'

90 Bosteels 2011, p. 37.

91 Badiou, 1991, pp. 24-32. It is mentioned in a footnote.

92 In a recently published essay he describes plans for a third book in the Being and Event 'series' (which is to be called BE III: The Immanence of Truths). In this essay he declares the conditions for philosophy to be still only 4. Badiou 2011, pp. 7–24. Bosteels is not the first to propose a fifth condition: See Žižek, Zupancic and Clemens.

(which the subject qua 'forcing' comes to supplement), mathematics and politics, become a sort of super condition, one which, to be sure, will allow Bosteels to indulge his non-expertise⁹³ – which, as Badiou points out in at least two places, is easily overcome with effort – and so confine himself anyway to the politics: wherein lies, by dialectical reasoning, his expertise.

But he doesn't quite leave it there. His claim to the transitory nature of the politics and mathematics, organised around this affinity, is bolstered by, first, the claim that when Badiou does suppose to explain this affinity in Meditation 9, that what we get instead is an effect of torsion.⁹⁴ That is to say, Badiou only further strengthens the implicit relation marking this super condition, thereby 'compounding the problems of formalisation outside mathematics' by invoking as operative in 'historico-political' situations meta-mathematical concepts such as 'excrescence, singularity and normality' and thus, as Bosteels phrases it, 'in a strange torsion, what is now presented as the illustrative verification of a metamathematical concept in the historico-political domain was said earlier to have been imported into metamathematics, by reason of a metaphorical affinity, from the realm of politics!'⁹⁵ This 'torsion' between the ontological and the political, which for Bosteels is thereby implicit in all of Being and Event (and Logics of Worlds), is supposed to reveal Badiou's 'sleight of hand' in the latter works. This torsion rendered explicit grounds his reading of the oeuvre as a sustained meditation on the dialectic. Its effect is to realise in Badiou nothing short of a political philosophy.

And yet, in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou already notes that: 'the term 'torsion' designates the subject point from which the other three classic determinations of truth come to be coordinated: totality, coherence, and repetition. This then reminds me that, besides its topological use (as in the torsion of a knot, following Lacan's lead), the word 'torsion' is also used in algebra in a very simple way (149).'⁹⁶ Without going into all the hoary details provided in the Torsion

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93 Bosteels 2011, p. 41-2

94 This key term of TS is used 11 times in BE.

95 Bosteels 2011, p. 38.

96 Badiou 2009a, p. 149.

seminar – which in themselves are taut summaries of the algebraic cum topological constitution of torsion in its various configurations: elements, groups, modules, free, finite, infinite, etc. – at its most basic what torsion provides is a formalisation of the interruption of repetition and/or the forging of a divergence. Torsion is the point at which or by which ‘the cumulative is inverted into a loss’.⁹⁷ Badiou notes that he has not attempted to mathematize anything but to ‘search in existing mathematics for those places that hold in reserve the means to take a step beyond’.⁹⁸ In other words, that the impasse of a dialectical construction requires, ‘unorthodoxly’, that ‘an unexplored mathematical lead must force the divergence’ thought (or praxis) requires.⁹⁹

Points viewed as commonplace

Bosteels summarises this ‘sleight of hand’ in 4 points that are to stand as the grounds of his case against his imaginary(?) accusers or inexistent others and, as noted, as the basis of his claims to the primacy of the (pre-ontological) dialectic. Before we look at these points, which do not so much argue this case as seek historical instances of it, it needs to be remarked that Bosteels has staked a lot on a ‘metaphor’ and an ‘example’ and there appears to be some sleight of hand of his own at work here. Namely, that by recourse to the unconditional use of a metaphor and an example Bosteels has managed to avoid talking about the very mathematics he wants to avoid talking about by recourse to Badiou’s conditional use of a metaphor and an example. This is not a performative contradiction but something perhaps worse, a performative tautology. That is to say, by use of ‘ordinary language’ he has managed to reduce the specificities of ontological discourse, a very condition of the discourse of philosophy, of its deployment of (rather than return to) language, to metaphors and examples, seemingly suggesting that Badiou has confused the two or more profoundly, and again similar to Hallward’s claim above concerning ‘strategy’, that an entire ontological edifice, and we need to include, as does Bosteels in this, *Logics of Worlds*, is reducible to a crude ruse masking an

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97 Badiou 2009a, p. 171.

98 Badiou 2009a, p. 171.

99 Badiou 2009a, p. 154.

‘altogether different nature’.¹⁰⁰

Bosteels has something of a pedagogue’s fascination for the readers of Badiou. At times they are over enthusiastic devotees of the mathematics, at other times dupes lost in the metaphors, affinities and examples of Badiou’s philosophical ‘torsions’. They are ‘blameless’, he says, those readers who consider that the introduction of the term ‘state of the situation’, the ‘meta-mathematical name for the power-set’, is ‘conditioned by politics as one of the four truth procedures’.¹⁰¹ Of course they are blameless if, like him, they read *Being and Event* not from the perspective of the declaration that ontology is mathematics (and if they modestly profess their ignorance of it), but from that of *Theory of the Subject*, wherein Badiou says, as Bosteels cites, he makes no distinction between the algorithms and theorems and the political terminologies and ‘contents they organise’. As a Marxist Badiou says, ‘this is a matter of indifference to me’.¹⁰²

All well and good! But is it good enough to cite, as Bosteels does, highly attuned to the symptomal reading strategy he is forced to adopt, that Badiou says this in 1982, in regard to ‘algebra and topology’ as if this equates to 1988 and Set theory ontology (not to mention that Badiou will not avow his Marxism in quite the same way ever again)? This is what Bosteels wants us to accept, indeed, his entire effort depends on it, because all the rest – that the ‘dialectical formulations’ of *Theory of the Subject*, including those of the ‘dialectical algorithms’, ‘are rooted in explicit political practice’ – we already know (sort of).¹⁰³

Bosteels continues to quote from *Theory of the Subject*, making use of Badiou’s own analysis of the place of mathematics itself and

.....
100 Bosteels 2011, p. 38. Cf. 2011, p. xviii. In his preface Bosteels repeats the claim made in his earlier essays, that outside ontology the role of ontology is ‘heuristic at best and analogical at worst’. This justifies him, he says with all modesty, attributing it a modest role in his analysis. As we have said, expose the politics by all means, engage TS and every early work, it’s not invaluable (and Bosteels makes a good fist at demonstrating this) but philosophy is not politics, which is to say, if the analysis or exposition of the latter requires the former, then the repressed returns. And recall, ‘A contemporary philosopher, for me, is indeed someone who has the unfaltering courage to work through Lacan’s anti-philosophy (Badiou 2008, p. 129).

101 Bosteels 2011, p. 38.

102 Bosteels 2011, p. 38.

103 Bosteels 2011, p. 38.

the conditions of its operation within a politically defined theory: specifically, it being symptomatic of itself with regard to some of its own 'words'. Thus Bosteels, ever keen to return to the subjective language of Lacan as motive force in Badiou (so long as it evades the ontological claims of mathematics and provides outside cover for 'the political'),¹⁰⁴ contends that its signifiers are its symptoms, meaning that mathematics is understood politically – its signs are registered outside itself for what they are – or in other words, mathematics is politically conditioned – as already noted. It is interesting to note this psychoanalytic inflection given that psychoanalysis like mathematics intrinsically refuses any a priori relation with politics, which is why such a relation as relation has to be thought from the 'outside'. In Theory of the Subject, Badiou is no doubt trying to think and construct such a relation as the reinvigoration of a dialectic that, following Sylvain Lazarus, takes politics, if not precisely history, as its 'subject'. Yet for Lacan no such subject is even possible thus thinkable: such is why for Badiou Lacan is 'the educator of every philosophy to come'.¹⁰⁵

But in Being and Event, and Bosteels points this out here as a failure of the latter (but which is really its strength) – whose sign anyway is the inversion of order: from the ontological meditations to the subjective –, nothing, and this precisely because of what ontology has to tell us about the being of any situation, describes the conditioning of one truth procedure by another.¹⁰⁶ What Bosteels is trying not to describe, positively, is suture, but the problem he must face is that without the ontological guarantee of the actuality of the difference of situational conditions, that one is absolutely distinct from another, relation or rapport is nothing but suture and indeed we would suggest that this insight can even be found in Theory of the Subject, even if it appears as part of the very impasse it produces. Indeed, after Being and Event philosophy is what it composes, meaning the four truth procedures exist singularly and irreducibly. But as composed, and this is

.....
104 Cf. Bosteels 2002, p. 199: 'Badiou's Being and Event in this sense can be said to be both more encompassing and more limited than his Theory of the Subject. More encompassing, insofar as the latter starts from the given that there is subjectivity, whereas the former work uses the deductive power of mathematics to give the subject its substructure in ontology. And more limited, insofar as the ontological definition of being, event, truth, and subject risks to remain caught in a structural dialectic which in reality is only half of the picture'.

105 Badiou 2004, p. 119.

106 Bosteels 2011, p. 39.

crucial, their formal similarities are exposed in and by the new discourse for which they are the conditions. Philosophy thinks as itself, as their composition, as what is the same. Theory of the Subject has no such theory of (immanent) composition such is why it relies on and struggles against its own history, whereas Being and Event has no such constraint and in fact must think the impasse of this constraint.

Ontological license

Continuing, Bosteels claims that 'anyone' familiar with the classics of Marxism-Leninism will know that despite the 'mathematical language [emphasis added]' in which it is 'seemingly phrased [emphasis added]' the 'typology of states of the situation' – 'normality, singularity, excrescence' is 'imported from the realm of militant politics'. And that Badiou is merely formalising a classic political principle, one he of course goes on to criticise politically, but, Bosteels points out, from the standpoint of the mathematical formalisation.¹⁰⁷ Thus Bosteels has his conditional (chalk?) circle again.

His point being that this makes it difficult to see how Badiou could be said to be arguing solely on the basis of the 'intrinsic rationality of set theory as the ontology of political [all in fact] situations'.¹⁰⁸ Given he is involved in a polemical defense of his own modesty with reference to mathematics, he addresses these comments to the mathematical purists – those 'obviously', who do not have a familiarity with the classics of Marxism-Leninism. These comments, he says, place us beyond the equation of mathematics and ontology. 'But' – and it is worth quoting this in full –

to understand this other domain, we should always come back to the principle 'ontology does not equal politics' since politics, like the events that punctuate the historicity of mathematics as a truth procedure, involves that which is not being qua being. In other words, there is no such thing as a political ontology. This expression only hides the tensions between politics and ontology.¹⁰⁹

.....
107 Bosteels 2011, p. 39.

108 Bosteels 2011, p. 35. Cf Bosteels, 2011a, p. 47, wherein Badiou (along with several famous contemporaries) is said, under the heading of 'the ontological turn', to propose a political ontology.

109 Bosteels 2011, p. 40.

We wish, for clarity sake, Bosteels would name this complex of diehards to which he keeps referring. As fairly avid readers of the commentary on Badiou over the years, it is difficult to identify the culprits here and if we could identify them maybe we wouldn't, for who among Badiou's well-informed commentators would argue any of what Bosteels claims is being argued?¹¹⁰ Is it just Sam Gillespie, named here as raising the 'question'? From the long foot note¹¹¹ attached to his name clearly not but it is hard to see, amongst all these names and those spoken of three footnotes later, who it is that argues these specific points, even if, as Bosteels says without irony, 'the contagious enthusiasm' of some of these mathematical die-hards for the 'Cantorian Revolution' is akin to suturing mathematics to philosophy.¹¹²

But anyway, what is it Bosteels is claiming? That there is a political ontology or that there isn't? That there is another domain outside 'mathematics as ontology'? Who denies that? That mathematics, which presents presentation is a condition and thus is capable of truths like any other condition? Who argues against this (or doesn't know that what it presents qua discourse is being qua being!)? But then again does militant politics qua 'subject' actually know what it is doing (as Bosteels imputes) or is it consecrated only in its act? Thus, could it really have known what mathematics had to discover as the true condition of any situation? What type of subject knows? Is politics really like the event? Yes, the event as what happens as opposed to what is, is 'not being qua being' but politics (qua subject) names a procedure, specific to its situation, which elaborates as itself the truth of

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110 As already set out for us in the preface: 'In fact, many readers will argue that this is precisely the most distinctive feature of Badiou's work, so that mathematics would actually meet, if not exceed, the importance of politics as the principal condition for his philosophy. However, as soon as we exit the domains of strict ontology and logic in the way Badiou defines them, namely as the discourses, respectively, of being and of appearing, then the role of mathematics becomes heuristic at best and analogical at worst. This justifies, in my eyes, the modest role attributed to mathematics in my reading of Badiou and politics.' See Bosteels 2011, p. xviii. That any such hierarchy exists between the conditions is simply false.

111 Bosteels 2011, p. 361. See fn. 65.

112 Bosteels 2011, p. 361-2. fn. 68. We cannot not note that Bosteels comments critically on Z. L. Fraser (2006, pp. 23-70) given Bosteels contends he makes a change in the mathematics of the subject, and singles out for faint praise Brian Anthony Smith (2006, pp. 71-100) because he more closely accords with Bosteels own 'astute' reading of what is at stake there – the separation of subject and ontology. He makes this determination despite being ignorant of the mathematics each brings to bear.

that situation. Its very possibility is predicated in the event and an event is named 'political' if it is situated in such a manner that it addresses anyone at all; if it is immediately 'universal'. But the truth procedure has being and, as such, is formally described and, as a new infinity of the situation, is subject to the laws or the thought of being which only mathematics can think or prescribe. It is not being qua being, and it is not without being (or non-being) either. Does politics, ultimately, license Badiou's ontology? This is not really a question for Bosteels so much as the underpinning claim that licenses in turn Bosteels' entire engagement with Badiou: after all 'it's only with this last condition' that he is concerned.¹¹³ By consequence or implication all that can be thought, yet again, is the subject as reaction at best and at worst, captured as it is by 'its' knowledge, obscurantist.

Politics, then, comes first. Bosteels claims that another way in which politics overdetermines the 'metaontological use of mathematics' is with regard to events themselves. It is only possible, he says, to give the 'historical discursivity' of mathematics in the wake of the situational events that expose to the subject the 'pure multiplicity of being qua being'.¹¹⁴ We suppose he is saying that the Cantor event is what allows us (its subjects?) to know what it was that the Cantor event was? Events expose the inconsistency at the heart of situations – to the subject. But is this really a matter of linear, or indeed, 'subjective' priority? Is the fact that an event alerts us to this really to say that what the event exposed was not already there? And is that not the point of the mathematical formalisation – to show us the 'what is' of 'what there is' and of 'what happens' without a subject? How is a political event which relies on the inconsistency at the heart of presentation, with regard to its situation and not every situation, that which educates us in this inconsistency as an ontological principle of all situations? Thus politics retroactivates ontology, which anyway has the subject as its end? Politics is spirit, no doubt: like a dog with a bone.

This is what Bosteels wants us to accept: that the subject teaches pure multiplicity and thus that the thinking of pure multiplicity, that is, thinking it as it is, is subject to its political conditioning and by virtue

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113 Bosteels 2011, p. 42. To even use the term condition is to implicate oneself in the structure to which it belongs – the very structure under erasure.

114 Bosteels 2011, p. 34.

of a metaphor or an example. He proposes in this section a crude phenomenology, that is to say, a return to the field of experience as the truth of causation and thus of our knowledge of being itself.¹¹⁵ Moreover, he tells us that because of our failure to experience inconsistency in this way, we fail to understand Being and Event, which must be read against itself – that is to say, from the theory of the subject – the last sections, then – back toward the front, the ontology.¹¹⁶

This notion, while clever, for it seamlessly, if somewhat decidedly crudely,¹¹⁷ meets up with the claim to read Being and Event through Theory of the Subject, is, as he later notes, simply applied Adorno.¹¹⁸ But this is nevertheless worth repeating here not only for the completely anti-Badiouean thought it affirms but also because it is the spirit of Bosteels' entire bone of contention. That is to say, for Bosteels the rational kernel of Badiou is Hegel: 'Hegel has to be read against the grain, and in such a way that every logical operation, however formal it seems to be, is reduced to its experiential core'.¹¹⁹ Of course, even the theory of the subject in Being and Event has to undergo the torsion of its existence by Theory of the Subject, to consistently satisfy all Bosteels

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115 Cf. Badiou 2009a, p. 115. 'The real that is ours depends only on this: there are two sexes; there are two classes. Busy yourselves with this, you subjects of all experience.' Indeed the two that is not one, and which is so in the affirmative exclusion of any middle or (ontological) relation, is a constant in all his work. This is to say, in Badiou, the non-rapport is thought, formally. Any supposed corrective needs first to deal with this.

116 See below. It is a constant of the book. See e.g. 163, where he says that Being and Event can be best summed up as a 'retrieval' of the final thesis of Theory of the Subject.

117 Bosteels 2011, p. 41. 'The possibility of thinking the sheer inconsistency of being qua being, which may appear to be the autonomous task of mathematics as elucidated in philosophy, thus arrives in actual fact only if and when there happens to be a subject at work who is faithful to an event, for instance in politics'. Emphasis added.

118 Bosteels 2011, p. 138-9.

119 Bosteels 2011, p. 42. Cf. Bosteels 2002. Again, Bosteels shows himself to be literalist. But does Badiou's own comparison of BEI and BEII with Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit and Logic of Sense really suggest this? 'In this respect, Logics of Worlds stands to Being and Event as Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit stands to his Science of Logic, even though the chronological order is inverted (Badiou 2009, p. 8).' But of course it is not BE and LW that is at issue for Bosteels but TS and BE. In one of many 'personal communications' or 'proximity' citations (cf. Preface to Bosteels 2011) he tells us: 'Badiou compares Being and Event to Hegel's Science of Logic, while considering Theory of the Subject more akin to the Phenomenology of Spirit in the sense of sticking as closely as possible to the experiential content of all concepts'. Of course we will have to take his word for it. But we do know that Badiou's (finally) subjectless objectal phenomenology (if we can call it that) in LW has nothing to say about experience: at least as it is understood here, by Bosteels. It is also worth wondering what Adorno would make of being cited for a phenomenologist.

demands.¹²⁰

Unspoken determinants, axiomatic opinions, the subject as end Point 4 begins: 'There is yet another unspoken determinant that seems to have been at work...'¹²¹ Yet another? Bosteels claims that the theorem of excess – which he later claims is simply a return to the 'materialist dialectic' of Theory of the Subject (a claim with its own problems)¹²²– cannot be 'transferred' (whatever that means) to politico-historical situations unless these too are infinite (which of course they are!).¹²³

However, as noted, to achieve this aim, which is of course for some 'newness in the situation', Bosteels is constrained, in order to get the tools for the job, to raid Badiou's philosophical apparatus.¹²⁴ Unfortunately for Bosteels, it's not like sticking your hands in the back of the plumber's truck and running for your life: you have to show the veracity of your claims vis à vis these very tools and he fails in his hurry at each turn. Symptomatic of this rush is where, in the chapter entitled 'The Ontological Impasse', he breaks off the 'metaontological' summary (with interpolation) of the trajectory of Being and Event at the point

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120 Cf. Bdiou 2009, pp. 47-8. Badiou opposes his theory of the subject to three '(dominant) determinations of the concept of the subject: 1) 'Subject' would designate a register of experience, a schema for the conscious distribution of the reflexive and the non-reflexive; this thesis conjoins subject and consciousness and is deployed today as phenomenology.'

121 Bosteels 2011, p. 41.

122 Bosteels 2011, p. 160. Cf. TS 121: 'Position 5, that of the materialist dialectic, admits not without having to pay a price which we will evaluate below that we must distinguish thought from sensible being. This is its objection to the radicality of mechanicism. What it retains from the latter – against Hegel – is that what is already there in the process of knowledge is taken from being, and not from the idea. As for the trajectory, it disposes in it the spiraling discrepancy of the new, whereby it excludes the idealist integral: from the Whole, no guarantee whatsoever follows. All truth is new, even though the spiral also entails repetition. What puts the innovative interruption into the circular flexion? A certain coefficient of torsion.'

123 Bosteels 2011, p. 41. Let's note here the use of politico-historical (Hallward uses 'socio-historical': see below). It is not only false in the context of Badiou, given that a historical situation simply names a situation that admits a site and therefore is applicable to artistic, amorous, scientific and political truths, but its falsity is purposeful insofar as Bosteels needs to sideline the conditions and the form of the conditional relation of the conditions to philosophy. The entire effort is to have done with the philosophical system in order to privilege and advance some kind of critical theory as aid to the return to, again, some kind of historical materialism. Historical is given top billing in this reading, over situation, thus allowing the return to History with a capital H – 'provided of course that these laws or axioms are properly reformulated' (Bosteels 2004, p. 159). And who should do that?

124 Bosteels 2011, p. xix & 2004, p. 164.

where the mathematics might intrude. Instead, Bosteels hurries to his political rescue of historical materialism, which, however, and this is key for Bosteels entire contention from the early essays on, depends entirely on the articulation of void (which he uses interchangeably with 'lack') and excess¹²⁵ (in short, the difference being that lack is a subjective effect, void structural/formal). For Bosteels, luckily, this 'structural fact of the ontological impasse, is already mediated by subjectivity'. That is to say, it's the subject that makes inconsistency 'visible'¹²⁶(in fact it makes a new formal consistency called a 'truth' predicated on the eventual exposure of the void – thus inconsistency).¹²⁷ Thus, of course, 'intuitively', one must begin with the subject!

It's not inconvenient for Bosteels at all that in *Being and Event* Badiou argues the case for why, in this work, the subject comes last and why in fact the subject has no formative relation to ontology but is the junction of event and fidelity, precisely because, for Bosteels, *Being and Event* is the effort to obscure this very experience qua truth of the subject.¹²⁸ This move of Bosteels, relying on that 'nearly untranslatable' passage, which he supposes supports his contention, is grounded in his claim that historical situations must be infinite otherwise (as he forgets to say) the claims of situational excess and the errancy of

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125 Bosteels tells us what is and what is not 'translatable'. Here (Bosteels 2011, p. 162) he repeats his claim from RDM2 (2002) that the key passage (for him) in *Being and Event* concerning the pass of the subject at the impasse of being (unmeasure i.e.) is 'nearly untranslatable'. He manages to translate it (each time!), as do others, Oliver Feltham being one (Badiou 1988, p. 469; 2005, p. 429).

126 Bosteels 2011, p. 162.

127 Thus: 'For the purposes of what follows, this means above all to size up the iceberg of emancipatory politics that is all but hidden – if it has not already suffered a complete meltdown as a result of global warming – below the arctic waters of mathematical formalisation' (Bosteels 2011, p. 41). This conception of the subject (totally upside down as it is) vis a vis ontology, puts Bosteels squarely in the intuitionist camp, as described by Fraser 2006, pp. 23-70.

128 Cf. Badiou, 2005, p. 239. 'For my part, I will call subject the process itself of liaison between the event (thus the intervention) and the procedure of fidelity (thus its operator of connection). In *Théorie du sujet* – in which the approach is logical and historical rather than ontological – I foreshadowed some of these current developments. One can actually recognize, in what I then termed subjectivization, the group of concepts attached to intervention, and, in what I named subjective process, the concepts attached to fidelity. However, the order of reasons is this time that of a foundation: this is why the category of subject, which in my previous book immediately followed the elucidation of dialectical logic, arrives, in the strictest sense, last. Much light would be shed upon the history of philosophy if one took as one's guiding thread such a conception of the subject, at the furthest remove from any psychology – the subject as what designates the junction of an intervention and a rule of faithful connection.'

measure upon which change is predicated 'won't hold water'.¹²⁹ But the infinity of situations, Bosteels says, turns out to be strictly axiomatic, which, like Hallward, he then reduces to 'a matter of conviction' and then to 'a personal preference pure and simple'.¹³⁰ As if these are all the same. Like Hallward, he busts down this open door, the open door of the axiomatic status of the marking of the 'unmeasure' of excess, prescribed in ontology itself, by citing as evidence the same interview (cited by Hallward) in *Infinite Thought*.¹³¹ Just how infinity post-Cantor might be thought without the axiom schema is difficult to realise. The pathos of finitude this way lies.

In his introductory essay in *Think Again* (point 3) Hallward asserts that two key [related] principles – the 'one is not' and 'every situation is infinite' – are actually socio-politically determined. They have more to do, he says, with assertions of 'modern scientific atheism' (mathematics?), than ontology (in Badiou's sense we presume).¹³² He says: '...as Cantor's own piety suggests, the fact that there can be no all-inclusive set of all sets does not by itself disprove the existence of a properly transcendent limit to the very concept of set (a limit to the distinction of 'one' and 'not-one'). The point, as he goes on to assert, citing the interview from *Infinite Thought*, is 'When pressed on this point, Badiou justifies his principles in terms of their strategic political utility, rather than their strict ontological integrity.'¹³³ Bosteels likewise quotes from this interview: 'When I say that all situations are infinite it is an axiom'.¹³⁴ For Bosteels this becomes then, in line with his subjectivist line of enquiry, 'a matter of ethics:' 'namely, the decision in favour of actual infinity over and against finitude – comparable to the assumption of an axiom for which no deduction or outside legitimations are available' [emphasis added]. What we are to understand from this, as in Hallward's case, is that an axiom is the same as an opinion and that one

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129 Bosteels 2011, p. 41.

130 Bosteels 2011, p. 41. Cf. Hallward 2004, fn 24, pp. 239-40.

131 Badiou 2004, p. 182 'Ontology and Politics'.

132 Hallward 2004, p. 15.

133 Hallward 2004, p. 15.

134 Bosteels 2011, p. 41. Badiou 2004, p. 182.

can by preference pass finitude by.¹³⁵

What Hallward fails to elaborate is that Badiou frames this in terms of an axiom and the pursuit of its consequences. This seems an obvious thing to point out but the failure to understand this very coupling axiom/consequence (decision/implication) is at the heart of Hallward's misconception. Moreover, it is a misunderstanding of great importance to suppose, as this implies, that the mathematical ontology determines the philosophy. Once again, this goes to the concept of conditions. In any event, the mathematics does not support the philosophical – and not 'socio-political' or 'politico-historical' – conviction insofar as it is the very (rational) impossibility of enumerating excess that demands recourse to axioms, decisions or as he says in the interview cited, 'convictions'.¹³⁶

Very deliberately here, Badiou marks the relation between philosophy and mathematics to be one of fidelity. For Bosteels, on the other hand, the axiom, essentially, is little more than a subjective opinion: this because the subject, as what comes first as end, is what matters to him. Rather than complaining, as does Hallward, that Badiou lets ontology determine the philosophy (despite what he assumes is evidence to the contrary in the question of excess) he supposes that ontology touches on the real only subjectively; that is to say, a subject is what touches on what is ontologically valuable, and that, as above, this 'void/excess dialectic' is merely a formal catching up to what political militancy already knew.

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135 If we trust to Bosteels' citations here it's clear again that both Hallward and Žižek do not fully comprehend what Cantor means to Badiou's work. Like Peter Osborne (see *Radical Philosophy* 142, 200), they seem to assume that the return to classical categories is a return, tout court to classicism – Kantian or otherwise. Cantor makes such an orientation impossible, literally so and this means that philosophy must reconfigure these 'classical' categories – being, truth, subject – under this ineluctable condition. Of course, if one were to be resolutely post-modern or post-metaphysical one would throw out all such categories. We live precisely such a result.

136 Indeed, the next question of the interview asks Badiou if his mathematics supports this (the infinity of situations, axiomatisation and the pursuit of consequences) to which he replies 'Yes!' We should also note that he goes on to elaborate (yet again) the distinct discursive operations of mathematics/science and philosophy with regard to mathematics/science. Badiou 2004, pp. 182-3.

The problem confronting Bosteels' insistence on the dialectic – even if it is an 'untimely' one¹³⁷ – is firstly to affirm the very dualism he seeks to sublimate, between ontology and subject; secondly to position this dialectic somewhere else in Badiou's system. That is to say, the dialectic qua operation in thought must be thinkable in Badiou's own terms or Bosteels has to account for its imposition; thirdly, this 'application' of the dialectic cannot refer itself to politics alone. At least seasoned readers of Badiou might think this was the case. The question is, can Bosteels maintain the dialectic in Badiou in a way that sufficiently acknowledges the irreducibility of the multiple, which is to say, has no recourse to ends, progress or the Absolute, that in the end treats Hegel not as a father but as a site?

Rhetoric, reverse, affirmation

Our admittedly, at times, withering approach has two conditions: one, it is counter rhetorical in the sense that, as in Hallward, there is in Bosteels' elaborations a clear rhetorical trope at work; one designed to heighten certain aspects at the expense of others such that the critique has a place to insert itself and appear to function. We are not saying this is a falsification, any more than rhetoric ever is. Secondly, and this is divided in two, there is attached to this core formula cited, a long tail, as it were, which problematises Bosteels' claim that what this all means in the end is that the subject is the privileged feature in the conceptualisation of structure given that without the subject's intervention onto the scene the 'gap in structure' could not be 'visible'. Quite how we could see the void without, precisely, mathematical inscription is another matter, but it is not trivial. The visual metaphor is part of the conceptual problem Bosteels has and it is akin, funnily enough, to the accusation Callicles makes against Socrates for the crime of geometry: 'if things as are you say, Socrates, you will have the world turned upside down.'¹³⁸ Here, concurrent to having us read Being and Event backwards, Bosteels has turned the relation between truth

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137 See Bosteels 2002 and 2011, p. 2. Except that in a footnote he tells us explicitly that the claims that Being and Event breaks decidedly with the dialectic not only of TS but the dialectic altogether are overstated, over played and wrong. And in fact, rejecting Hallward's claims concerning Badiou's 'absolutism', Bosteels says that if Hallward's criticisms are meant to call for a more dialectical articulation then shouldn't we return – as a point of orientation – to the early works? See Bosteels 2011, fn. 17, pp. 353-4.

138 Plato, *Gorgias*, 481bc.

and knowledge upside down in order to support the dialectic at the heart of his political ontology.

The subject of course does not know, but is faithful to what happens and through this fidelity produces the unknown truth of the situation – to wit the state is not all, thus is marked at a point by its void and on the basis of which a new 'set' will have been inscribed in this situation such that situation is changed entirely – that is, a-void the state or knowledge of excess. The subject of course is neither the truth – being only a finite fragment of its eternity – nor is it the truth's knowledge. It is the situated forcing of the former, conditioned by an event, through the morass of the latter. It is the mode of real change: this is without doubt, but the subject can only affirm that the situation is founded on nothing: it is not that which knows or in other words, has the discursive capacity to formalise the latter. In fact to suggest so is to cross two modes of analysis which are discrete, thus, being and event, but which together organise what is to be known of any multiple or what any multiple might come to be known as. The mathematics of structure determines, with no need of the subject, what structure is. By the same token the subject is not mathematisable but, as eventual, poetic.

Bosteels' attempt to implicate Cantor in this reading is only the compound of this 'inversion' insofar as the knowledge Cantor's discovery produced was only that which was always already the truth of the situation of ontology. For it to be true, no subject is required at all, given, and this is what Meillassoux and Brassier trace in their own inimitable ways, that what the subject produces of this truth will come to be its knowledge as such. As noted already, Bosteels is dangerously close to a phenomenology, rejected by Badiou in all his works.¹³⁹ Badiou summarises that, 'the impasse of being is the point at which a Subject convokes itself to a decision, because at least one multiple, subtracted from the language, proposes to fidelity and to the names induced by a supernumerary nomination the possibility of a decision without concept'.¹⁴⁰ However, the impasse of being is not a production of the

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¹³⁹ Again, Bosteels is free to pursue a phenomenological reading, and in Badiou and Politics (2011) he does defend a version of it from Badiou's reductive depiction, but if this reading relies on Badiou's larger philosophical invention (so to speak) then quite how what this invention breaks with can be reinstated to it and still function needs to be demonstrated.

¹⁴⁰ Badiou 2005, p. 429.

subject, it does not rely on the subject's intervention, but guarantees that such an intervention will have been possible, indeed rational and moreover it guarantees the consistency (in fidelity) of the new (infinite)'situation'.

The above traces and puts into question the position Bosteels has come to over dialectics in Badiou over the last decade or so from the site of his own disavowal. The mathematical question is key because any claims to continuity in Badiou's oeuvre, which Bosteels certainly wants to claim, stand or fall with Being and Event and the claims to mathematical ontology. Logics of Worlds, being a sequel, extends the requirements of formalisation to what Being and Event realises as impasse and, as such, affirms the trajectory and orientation underway. Moreover, this double affirmation consolidates an immanent break in the oeuvre 'denumerated' 1988, 2005. The problem for Bosteels is that the dialectic, specifically, that which he wants to say remains current throughout Badiou's work, is intrinsically linked with a political paradigm which has 'history' at its core; the very thing that for Badiou 'does not exist'. And it does not exist because that upon which it is predicated (as return), the One, has been rendered inconsistent by the one discourse that does not suffer opinion or theology: mathematics. If there is no history, then there is no dialectic. At least at the level of being or of what can be presented of presentation. Moreover, as Badiou shows in Logics of Worlds, negation, the very motor of the dialectic, appears only as the effect of a function (reverse) or a logical possibility, being otherwise unfounded in any world where truths come to be as exception.¹⁴¹ The 'materialist dialectic' proceeds by virtue of an immanent exception for which it itself cannot account – neither eventually nor formally.

Bosteels is acutely aware of this difficulty and its most manifest and symptomatic in his rhetoric, but to use his phrase, 'does it hold water'? This is important for Bosteels, perhaps more than for us, for it's the stake of his whole book: these 'four factors' – already articulated – 'justify in my eyes the limited use of mathematics in the following interpretation of Badiou's philosophy and politics'.¹⁴² We add the emphasis to wonder at what work the and is doing here, this time? Is

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¹⁴¹ Badiou 2009, p. 1.

¹⁴² Bosteels 2011, p. 41.

this conjunction, reduction or disjunction? How is his use of and to be related to his understanding of it confirming a dialectical double in the title Being and Event. Certainly, 'anyone' knows that Badiou's philosophy is not his politics? But this is just to restate the question.

The immodesty of ignorance

Bosteels ends this last section with some rather unfortunate resentful claims as to the demands of those, as noted, unnamed 'die-hard mathematical readers of Badiou'. He contends that his ignorance of mathematics, which he is so very modestly willing to admit, is more prudent than laying claims to a knowledge he doesn't have: which is true, but only half the story, given one might make the effort to learn instead of crying poor. 'What is more', he says, again addressing imaginary friends, 'to anyone [those mathematical die-hards he means] who cries foul when I confess to my being mathematically challenged, I could argue... that similar demands apply to [them] who often completely ignore the links of his thought to literature, to psychoanalysis or to politics'.¹⁴³ We don't need to re-try these claims or ask who this applies too. Suffice to say that in the world of the dialectic it's not simply that two wrongs make a right, although it might appear to be what it's all about, but rather that the positive negation of a wrong (to be mathematically challenged) engenders a wrong in the other as its other, such that the material reality of the former has an ideality to negate such that absolute knowledge emerges in the figure of the subject who set it all up.

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¹⁴³ Bosteels 2011, p. 42. It is a strange, conceited claim to make that mathematical ignorance is a sign of positive knowledge of literature, psychoanalysis and politics and, concomitantly, that mathematical knowledge precludes one from knowledge of these. The cliché of it all is embarrassing and in no small measure an insult to the history of thought.

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