

## **Badiou vs. Paradoxico-Criticism**

### **Badiou contra Derrida**

As is in any case clear by now, Badiou's reduction of all forms of critical thought to constructivism is much too hasty. For whatever we may ultimately think about the constructivist gesture of limiting being to what can be said in language, *there is a kind of critical thought that is not simply reducible to this limitative gesture, or indeed any gesture of this kind.* And in fact many, if not most, of the still open projects of twentieth-century philosophy that we might usefully draw from both the analytic and the continental sides are well characterized as such non-limitative varieties of critical thought.

These projects are inheritors of Kant's project in seeking something like an ongoing reflective consideration of reason (or language) and its limits, but do not depend exclusively or even very much on the kind of restrictive, limiting gesture that Badiou rejects. With this in mind, we may now revisit Derrida's method or methods of deconstruction, which, I would suggest, is very much an example of such a critical project.

Like other instances of paradoxico-criticism, Derrida's deconstruction operates, in large part, by *raising questions* about what can and cannot be said at a particular time and with specific languages, and suggesting, at times, that these boundaries need to be reconsidered, or perhaps adjusted. Within the ambit of the analytic linguistic turn *as well as* in deconstruction, this kind of consideration has often taken the form of a reflexive consideration of the specific capabilities and liabilities of *philosophical* language, its specific possibilities of description as well as its tendencies to mislead. Here, though, the relevance of language to philosophy is not that philosophy offers a once-and-for-all delimitation of what can be said, but rather that philosophy can be a form of linguistic self-reflection in which philosophical thought calls before itself the criteria of its own usage to reflect on the possibilities of its own expression.

Deconstruction, in particular, is a set of operations *at* the limits and *on* the limits; among its aims in various modalities, as is well known, is the aim of destabilizing particular systematic *attempts* to define and delimit the language of philosophy, such as attempts to distinguish it on principled grounds from literature or from ordinary language. However, in thus making language, and a certain reflection on the

ways that philosophy has historically conceived it, central to its critical concerns, deconstruction is in no way able to be assimilated to the reductive and limitative gesture that is essential to constructivism. It introduces the indiscernible, not in order simply to dismiss it as the nonexistent, but precisely in order to trace its paradoxical appearance *outside* the system it makes possible by disappearing within it; and it introduces what Derrida has called the undecidable, not at all in order to declare it irrelevant, but precisely to show the necessity, for any given system, of what cannot be decided one way or the other strictly in its terms.

With respect to Derrida himself, Badiou maintained, through the 1990s and into the current decade, a relative silence. Although Deleuze and Lacan figure as essential conversants for Badiou during this time, Derrida makes hardly an appearance, and there is no mention of Derrida or deconstruction in *Being and Event* itself. More recently, however, in *Logics of Worlds* and in a eulogy written in 2004, Badiou has ventured to clarify the relation of his own project to Derrida's. In *Logics of Worlds*, as we have seen, Badiou replaces the univocal set theory of *Being and Event* with a more pluralistic structure, drawn from category theory, in terms of which individual worlds are structured according to various individual "logics," each of which determines the degrees of manifestation, appearance, or existence for the entities within the world in question. It is a consequence of this logical-mathematical structure that, in any particular world, there will always be some particular element whose "degree of existence" is zero: that is, each structured world has what Badiou calls a "proper inexistent." The proper inexistent appears within the particular world as that which does not exist, and can be symbolized with the symbol for the empty set ( $\emptyset$ ).

In the note on his introduction of the "inexistent" in *Logics of Worlds*, and again in his eulogy for Derrida, Badiou suggests that we can understand the whole task of deconstruction as consisting in the demonstration and eliciting of the particular inexistent for various worlds:

The thinking of the inexistent formalizes what I believe to be at stake in Jacques Derrida's sinuous approach. Ever since his first texts, and under the progressively academicized (though not by him) name of 'deconstruction', his speculative desire was to show that, whatever form of discursive imposition one may be faced with, there exists a point that escapes the rules of this imposition, a *point of flight*. The whole interminable work consists in localizing it, which is also impossible, since it is characterized by being out-of-place-in-the-place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *LofW*, p. 545.

Later on in this note, Badiou suggests that his own symbol for the inexistent,  $\emptyset_a$ , might be written, also as an “homage” to Derrida, as “différance” (p. 545); and in the very next note, written this time after Derrida’s death, he summarizes this homage as a reading of deconstruction “under [the] emblem: the passion of Inexistence.” (p. 546).

The project Badiou attributes to Derrida – that of tracing or localizing the specific inexistent of any given situation -- is one that officially occupies only a relatively local place within Badiou’s much larger programmatic ambition to formalize the very relationship between being and appearance itself. We may, thus, of course suspect an element of the anxiety of influence here. But it may be more important to ask whether Derrida’s limitless procedure of tracing the indiscernible can really be understood in this way. Again, we might wonder whether the closest specific analogue to Derrida’s project within Badiou’s system is perhaps not this local work, but rather, especially in view of Derrida’s own longstanding, deep, and central consideration of the possibility of the “event,” Badiou’s own most important formal result, the demonstration in a rigorously formal way of what necessarily escapes the possibility of signification in *any* system whatsoever. This is what Derrida indeed calls the “trace”; something like it figures in Badiou’s project, as well, under the different name of the indiscernible. (However, what Badiou calls “trace” in *Logics of Worlds* – according to the glossary at the end of the text, the “prior inexistent which, under the effect of the site, has taken the maximal value” (p. 596) – is *not* the same as the “trace” in Derrida’s sense, which presumably *never* takes on a “maximal” or even a non-zero “degree of existence,” at least not as long as we remain within the closure of metaphysics itself).

As the early Derrida showed very clearly (for instance in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*) this deconstructive work is itself possible, and necessary, as soon as there is a difference between speech and writing at all; thus, it is *not* the local work of finding the specific inexistent, but the much more global task of reading the unreadable in the metaphysical oppositions (for instance between sound and meaning, or between body and soul) that organize and structure *anything* like language itself. Of course the work of reading is located, in each case at a particular textual site, but this does not preclude deconstruction from also operating, simultaneously, as this exceedingly *general* reflection on the organizing oppositions that have structured language and thinking in Western philosophy, with a view to tracing the “closure” of what Derrida does not hesitate to call the epoch of the “metaphysics of presence.” Since Badiou refuses to see questions of language and signification as having any specific relevance to his project, it seems he must miss this more general level of the deconstructive problematic, and this may explain why he says nothing about the ways in which his own work of eliciting the event indeed closely resemble a deconstructive reading of the history and closure of metaphysics.

It would, of course, be massively inaccurate to claim that the deconstructive project does not involve, at a basic level, a consideration of the theme of the discontinuous “event” which disrupts structures and reorganizes their principles. In *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science*, Derrida begins invokes (though cautiously, and in scare quotes) the problematic possibility of an eventual “rupture” and “redoubling” that is precisely an “event” (or perhaps *the* event) of the concept of “structure” itself:

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event," if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural -- or structuralist -- thought to reduce or to suspect. But let me use the term "event" anyway, employing it with caution and as if in quotation marks. In this sense, this event will have the exterior form of a *rupture* and a *redoubling*.<sup>2</sup>

This problematic “event,” as we saw above in chapter 4, has the form of a “rupture” in that it inscribes into structured language as such the permanent possibility of breaking with any determined context whatsoever – the “force of rupture” that Derrida considers as structurally necessary to language as such, and shown in the problematic devices of quotation and citation. And as he goes on to explain, it is also a “redoubling” because:

The event I called a rupture, the disruption I alluded to at the beginning of this paper, presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this disruption was repetition in every sense of the word.<sup>3</sup>

This is nothing other than the moment of the awareness of a radical reflexivity, inscribed in language itself, by means of which the “structurality of structure” or the very structure of language is thought and theorized. This is the moment – “historical” and indeed part of “the totality” of our own “era” even if not linked exclusively to any single figure, or thinker, of it – at which “language invaded the universal problematic” and “everything became ... a system ... in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is the moment at which the system of language is thought *as a totality* for which there is no outside and in which the thought that would delimit its boundaries is necessarily caught. At this moment, there is no longer a silent “center” of language that can, governing everything else, be thought of as “escaping structurality;” no longer is it possible to define a privileged interior point at which “the permutation or the

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<sup>2</sup> Derrida 1966, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida 1966, p. 280.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida 1966, p. 280.

transformation of elements ... is forbidden” or “interdicted.” At this point of the transformative reflection of language into itself, it will no longer be possible to seek such a center, which would be, according to “classical thought” both “paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it.”<sup>5</sup> As we have seen in the analyses above, this is the moment that Derrida, Deleuze, and Wittgenstein (in his own, rather different fashion) understand as the root of the structural paradoxes of sense, grounded in the problematic reflection of the total structure of language into itself.

In “Signature, Event, Context,” discussing Austin’s theory of performative speech acts, Derrida considers the relationship of the paradoxical pseudo-concept *différance* to the kind of uniquely linguistic “event” that a performative embodies:

*Différance*, the irreducible absence of intention or assistance from the performative statement, from the most ‘event-like’ statement possible, is what authorizes me, taking into account the predicates mentioned just now, to posit the general graphematic structure of every “communication.” Above all, I will not conclude from this that there is no relative specificity of the effects of consciousness, of the effects of speech (in opposition to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no effect of the performative, no effect of ordinary language, no effect of presence and of speech acts. It is simply that these effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them term by term, but on the contrary presuppose it in dissymmetrical fashion, as the general space of their possibility ...

This general space is first of all spacing as the disruption of presence in the mark, what here I am calling writing.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, the event of the performative utterance, like all of language’s “events” and its whole “evental” definition – the very possibility of something happening *through* language or *in* language – is conditioned by the structural spacing that structures it as a “system of differences.” What is then essential

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<sup>5</sup> It is significant that Derrida does not say here that for *his analysis* or for *deconstruction* the ‘center’ is both inside and outside the structure, but rather that “classical thought” *already* implies this paradoxical structure. The aim of such thought is indeed, Derrida says, to think this paradox coherently; and “as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire.” (p. 279). Following the evental “rupture” of which he speaks, it is necessary to begin to think, by contrast, not that the center is inherently contradictory but that “there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.” (p. 280) This illustrates a general feature of the practice of paradoxico-criticism; the aim is not only to point out the contradictory and paradoxical *foundations* of the picture that assumes a fullness of sense and an unproblematic place of origin, but to *displace* this assumption infinitely and transform its reflection into an unending criticism on the basis of the latent and uncentered dimension of language as pure spacing, displacement, and *différance*.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida 1971, p. 327.

to thinking the possibility of this kind of event – which Derrida would not cease to consider, up to his very last texts, and which includes every instance of baptism, nomination, or institution (as Derrida says, the very element of “conventionality” that Austin recognizes as an essential constituent of the performative) – is the totality of this structure of language as such (both speech and writing, and the spacing of their difference as well) in its capacity to be reflected problematically into itself. This is the essential structural gesture, as we have seen, of paradoxico-criticism in all of its forms, and it defines a rigorous conception of the “event” which is, from this perspective, at the basis of all discontinuous change and historical origin. If it is also, and essentially, linked, for the paradoxico-critic, to the value and phenomenon of “repetition” which defines all language as such, this does not diminish its originality, or its capacity to tracing the paradoxical boundaries of the infinite text of a metaphysics that is without an outside, to invoke the radically new.

## **Badiou *contra* Deleuze**

As we saw above, Deleuze's entire understanding of the nature of being and becoming is thoroughly conditioned by his analysis of sense. To summarize, on Deleuze's analysis, if sense exists, as an aspect of phenomena that preconditions their linguistic expression as well as their being and becoming, it will be *auto-legislating*, in that it will both provide and be bound by the laws of inference; it will be *auto-nominating*, in that it will block the regress of names by paradoxically naming itself; it will be *sterile*, in that it will be the real precondition of language and meaning but without effects on bodies or objects; and it will be figured by the "paradoxical element" that, presenting its *own* sense, will simultaneously be *nonsense*. To this set of paradoxical traits corresponds a series of undecidabilities in the status of sense or of the paradoxical element. Between signifiers and signifieds, sense is neither word nor object; between the individual and the universal, it is neither of these. As we have seen, the underlying reason for this series of undecidabilities is that the logical structure of sense is identical to that of the Russell set, the set that includes itself in what it excludes and excludes itself from its own self-inclusion.

It is, moreover, this constitutive paradoxicality and undecidability that qualifies sense, for Deleuze, to serve as the basis for an entire reconception of what is involved in change and becoming, all the way up to his conception of what is for Deleuze most central and defining category of becoming, the paradoxical "sense-event." As this conception is both formally determined by the paradoxes of language and situated at a central point of the entirety of Deleuze's thought, it bears instructive comparison to the alternative conception of aleatory and radical change that is formulated on quite different grounds by Badiou in his own conception of the "event."

As we saw above, sense, for Deleuze, is produced by the action of structure, and is indeed a purely "surface effect" produced by a system of relations but nevertheless operating, and even opening, the frontier between words and things. At the same time, however, sense-events systematically condition the articulation between language and world, opening the very possibility of signification itself. How can we understand, then, the strange duality of sense-events, which must at the same time apparently be both precondition and pure effect of the structure that defines language as such? Again, the answer depends on the paradoxical properties of the sense-event, which can be defined only in terms of the paradoxes evinced by the attempt to understand sense. Thus, according to Deleuze, "incorporeal sense, as the result of the actions and the passions of the body, may preserve its difference from the corporeal cause only to the degree that it is linked, at the surface, to a quasi-cause which is itself incorporeal."<sup>7</sup> The order of this second, "quasi" causality is not the order of physical or material causes or effects, but what underlies

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<sup>7</sup> *LofS*, p. 94.

these, at the frontier between language and world, by giving both material causes and effects their sense. This second kind of cause is incorporeal, and is shown by the paradoxical element that interrupts and circulates within the structure of language:

We have tried to ground this second causality in a way which would conform to the incorporeal character of the surface and the event. It seemed to us that the event, that is, sense, referred *to a paradoxical element, intervening as nonsense or as an aleatory point, and operating as a quasi-cause assuring the full autonomy of the effect.*<sup>8</sup>

As distinct from the causality of bodies and objects, this second kind of causality is “ideational” and accounts both for the productivity of sense and the role of structure in producing it; as such, it involves a kind of doubled or contradictory relationship internal to its structure whereby cause is also, inseparably, effect and vice versa:

...as soon as sense is grasped, in its relation to the quasi-cause which produces and distributes it at the surface, it inherits, participates in, and even envelops and possesses the force of this ideational cause. We have seen that this cause is nothing outside of its effect, that it haunts this effect, and that it maintains with the effect an immanent relation which turns the product, the moment that it is produced, into something productive. There is no reason to repeat that sense is essentially produced. It is never originary but is always caused and derived. However, the derivation is two-fold, and, in relation to the immanence of the quasi-cause, it creates the paths which it traces and causes to bifurcate.<sup>9</sup>

Through this double causality, a causality not of objects or bodies but of the opening of paths and differences, sense is donated to language and objects and the three ordinary dimensions of the proposition (Signification, manifestation, and denotation) are constituted. In relation to the constituted order of bodies and objects, sense is neutral and sterile, a pure effect or product of the differential relations of signs; but along the line of paradoxical quasi-causality, it first makes possible anything like language in its relationship to the world at all, opening this very difference itself.

However, at the same time as sense-events are in this way underlie and condition the structure of language, they also precede and even *undermine* the *regularity* that defines discernible linguistic structures and structure as such. This regularity – whereby a structure can be understood as composed of

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<sup>8</sup> *LofS*, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> *LofS*, p. 95.



elements that are capable of being repeated or iterated, without any essential displacement or alteration, according to specific and defined rules – is itself, according to Deleuze, the outcome of operation of ordering and selecting that is performed by good sense and common sense; original, paradoxical sense, on the other hand, is prior to this operation and reveals a level of action and becoming that cannot simply be submitted to it. Deleuze develops this point through a remarkable consideration of *games*, in the course of which he contrasts the ordinary games with which we are normally acquainted with a variety of strange “ideal games,” without obvious meaning, function, or result, constructed by Carroll in his description of Alice’s adventures.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in the “caucus-race” (chapter III) the players circle endlessly, without destination or finish line; in the Queen’s croquet game (chapter VIII), the balls, mallets, and even loops displace themselves endlessly into different positions and varying forms. For Deleuze, these “ideal games” display clearly the original constitution of sense and the original effectiveness of the sense-event, prior to the ordering of these effects by good sense and common sense into the well-defined regimes of regularity that we associate with ordinary games. More specifically, in the case of ordinary games, it is necessary that a set of rules preexists the playing; that these rules “apportion chance” in the sense that they determine what happens given certain, well defined events or outcomes; and that the progress of the game is organized according to a series of discrete “throws” or appeals to chance, each of which is distinct and determines outcomes in a regular way. Thus, in the case of ordinary games, chance is involved only at certain, limited points, and all that is not determined by chance is left either to the mechanical consequences of the discrete throws, or to skill, which is understood as “the art of causality.”<sup>11</sup> By contrast, in the case of Alice’s “ideal games”:

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<sup>10</sup> There are certainly interesting and revealing connections to be drawn between Deleuze’s analysis here and the main example of reflection on the boundary of concepts and their regularities developed by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, which is precisely the concept of *games*. The most general reason that both philosophers choose to reflect on this concept is presumably the revealing contrast between what we may say about the relationship of games and rules from an abstract position of conceptual or philosophical reflection: “the game is defined by its rules”; “the rules tell us what the point of the game is” – and the *actual* variety and multiplicity of things we will actually call games in everyday use (some of which, as Wittgenstein points out, have no rules at all). Indeed, it seems as if, in parallel with Deleuze, we might see Wittgenstein’s examples of the multiplicity and variety of games as displaying a level and kind of *praxis* that, in an essential way, cannot be captured by rules and regularities. We might then take this level of *praxis* to be akin, in certain respects, to what Deleuze calls *sense*, even up to the point of discerning a revealing parallel between the paradoxical undecidability between signifier and object that defines sense for Deleuze, and the “paradox” of rule-following that gives rise to Wittgenstein’s investigation of the role of rules in language. The relevance of this parallel to Wittgenstein might additionally be confirmed by his usage of the concept of games, not only as an example of conceptual heterogeneity and multiplicity, but in connection with one of the most pervasive terms of art of the *Investigations*’ discussion of language, namely the “language-game.”

<sup>11</sup> *LofS*, p. 59.

1) There are no preexisting rules, each move invents its own rules; it bears upon its own rule. 2) Far from dividing and apportioning chance in a really distinct number of throws, all throws affirm chance and endlessly ramify it with each throw. 3) The throws therefore are not really or numerically distinct. They are qualitatively distinct, but are the qualitative forms of a single cast which is ontologically one.<sup>12</sup>

Such “ideal games,” in which move and rule are one and the same and chance is not apportioned but rather affirmed at each instant, are certainly difficult to conceive of or understand; indeed, Deleuze says and Carroll shows, they can only be thought as nonsense.<sup>13</sup> However, it is through them that we can again perceive the character of originary, paradoxical sense in its definitive link to the singularity of the event. For an event that is controlled, as in ordinary games, by the assumption of a pre-existing regime of rules and their apportionment of chance, is not really an event at all; at any rate, its pure, eventual character is modified and limited by this assumption of order. But if pure sense-events indeed underlie and found both this regime of order and the discrete throws it differentiates, then:

These throws are successive in relation to one another, yet simultaneous in relation to this point which always changes the rule, or coordinates and ramifies the corresponding series as it insinuates chance over the entire length of each series. The unique cast is a chaos, each throw of which is a fragment. Each throw operates a distribution of singularities, a constellation. But instead of dividing a closed space between fixed results which correspond to hypotheses, the mobile results are distributed in the open space of the unique and undivided cast. This is a *nomadic* and non-sedentary distribution, wherein each system of singularities communicates and resonates with the others, being at once implicated by the others and implicating them in the most important cast.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the particular and discrete “events” or throws that are only subsequently articulated by the assumption of a regular regime of “good sense” are more originally based on the unity and uniqueness of a single or “unique” cast responsible for all distributions of singularities, including but not by any means limited to the ordered regularities of the ordinary games. It is in this way that the “unique cast,” which

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<sup>12</sup> *LofS*, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> *LofS*, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> *LofS*, p. 60.

has the structure of the sense-event as such, involves a complete affirmation of chance, unlimited by any external assumption of regularity or order.<sup>15</sup>

## II

In 1997, Badiou published a short book on Deleuze that develops on a long series of mostly oblique exchanges between the two philosophers, culminating in a halting and hesitating correspondence between the two which began in 1991 and ended with Deleuze's death in 1995.<sup>16</sup> The text of *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* is critical in many ways of the philosopher whose project Badiou sees as most directly opposed to his own on the decisive question of the nature of multiplicity, and yet bears witness as well to Badiou's great respect for Deleuze, toward whom he says his own project from *Being and Event* on is most directly "positioned."<sup>17</sup> Without a doubt, the most suggestive and provocative claim of the analysis

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<sup>15</sup> Given the conception of sense-events as incorporeal, singular, and at the root of all change and becoming, we are now in a position to understand the basis of one of Deleuze's most pervasive and repeated referents, the "plane of immanence" or "consistency" to which he refers in texts ranging from some of his very first to the very last text, "Immanence: A life." This is the "impersonal transcendental field" which Deleuze draws from phenomenology's discussions of the "constitution" of phenomena on the basis of subjective experience. Developing from Husserl's conception of a field of "transcendental subjectivity" or "intersubjectivity" that is responsible for the constitution of experience and its phenomena, as well as their sense or meaning, Sartre's "transcendental field" similarly provides the stratum underlying phenomena as well as their sense. However, for Sartre (unlike for Husserl) it is a *pre-personal* and *pre-subjective* field, not to be understood simply as a domain of individual experience, but rather defined by the paradoxical structure of sense itself. Within this field, operations of sense provide the basis for the constitution of everything that is constituted as meaningful, objects and states of affairs as well as words and propositions; as the domain of the procession of sense-events, this impersonal field grounds the articulation of signifiers and signifieds, as well as the original distinction of the two series. This is a domain of surface operations, prior to the individuation of objects or the separation of signs, that is coextensive with sense in its own paradoxical character:

Metaphysical surface (transcendental field) is the name that will be given to the frontier established, on the one hand, between bodies taken together as a whole and inside the limits which envelop them, and on the other, propositions in general. This frontier implies, as we shall see, certain properties of sound in relation to the surface, making possible thereby a distinct distribution of language and bodies, or of the corporeal depth and sonorous continuum. In all these respects, the surface is the transcendental field itself, and the locus of sense and expression. Sense is that which is formed and deployed at the surface. Even the frontier is not a separation, but rather the element of an articulation, so that sense is presented both as that which happens to bodies and that which insists in propositions. (*LofS*, p. 125)

<sup>16</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 3. The only published discussion of Badiou by Deleuze is a brief (2 page) treatment of Badiou's theory of the event in Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*, (Deleuze and Guattari 1991) in which the two allege that Badiou's theory ultimately intends to return to an antiquated conception of a "higher philosophy;" Badiou has called the passage "strange" and its position "intractable." (Badiou (2000), p. 245). In *Logics of Worlds* (p. 361), however, Badiou suggests that Deleuze was one of the "perspicacious readers" who raised important objections to *Being and Event*'s conception of the auto-nomination of the event, and Badiou has

is that, quite contrary to the received image of him, Deleuze should not in any way be read as a philosopher of the Many. For, according to Badiou, Deleuze's work in fact uniformly witnesses, and even in a radically renewed way, the metaphysical privilege of the One:

Deleuze's fundamental problem is most certainly not to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One. What must the One be, for the multiple to be integrally conceivable therein as the production of simulacra? Or, yet again: in what way should the All be determined, in order that the existence of each portion of this All – far from being positioned as independent or as surging forth unpredictably – be nothing other than an expressive profile of 'the powerful, nonorganic Life that embraces the world?' (Cinema 2, p. 81; translation modified).

We can therefore first state that one must carefully identify a metaphysics of the One in the work of Deleuze. He himself indicates what its requirements are: "one single event for all events; a single and same *aliquid* for that which happens and that which is said; and a single and same being for the impossible, the possible and the real" (The Logic of Sense, p. 180; translation modified).<sup>18</sup>

The claim is, as Badiou notes, almost *directly* opposite to the received image of Deleuze as the radical prophet of difference and plurality, the great advocate of unpredictable becomings and nomadic wanderings, the presumptively subversive affirmation of the "heterogeneous multiplicity of desires" and their "unrestrained realization."<sup>19</sup> For this reason and others, Badiou's interpretation will be (and has been) vehemently opposed by those who see in Deleuze simply an ally of the "postmodern" project of what is supposed to be an unceasing restoration of the democratic rights of the body, the plurality of communities and the "postmetaphysical" celebration of disorder and chaos against the "terrorizing" claim of any organizing or sovereign principle. Nevertheless the accuracy of Badiou's interpretation of Deleuze is amply witnessed in the latter's affirmation, throughout his career, of a "single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings",<sup>20</sup> of a "unique event" which is the basis of all community and communication, and of a fundamental *univocity* of Sense that is correlative to the unitary position of the void that is also the origin of all nonsense. The ultimate principle of this univocity, Badiou suggests, is nothing other than the

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related to Bruno Bosteels in an interview that Deleuze expressed admiration for *Being and Event's* conception of the evental site. For some interesting and suggestive discussion, see (Bosteels 2008a).

<sup>18</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 11; *LofS*, p. 180.

unitary nature of a “nonorganic Life” that underlies the possible as well as the actual, the imaginary as well as the real. And as we have indeed seen, above, the plurality of events, singularities, and becomings for Deleuze is indeed strictly correlative, in each case, to the unity of the single, paradoxical stratum of the virtual, the “plane of immanence” or “impersonal transcendental field” on which all singularities and changes and their communication are but the resonance of a single, aleatory “throw of the dice.”

As we have also seen, in chapter 5 above, all of these characteristic features of Deleuze’s thought result from his inquiry into the unitary possibility of (what he terms) Sense, from which all becoming, change, and inflection begins. In that this is an inquiry into the unitary basis of all signification and meaning (as well as to its distinction from nonsense), it takes place only on the condition of a relentless and unending affirmation of the One of sense, along with all the paradoxical consequences of the immanent reflection of this One into itself. In this respect, Deleuze’s position is a deeply illustrative representative of what I have called the paradoxico-critical orientation of thought, which subsumes, as we have seen, some of the most significant and still relevant positions of critical thought in our time. These positions, although they are indeed fundamentally different from Badiou’s, are not clearly refuted or ruled out by anything Badiou himself says. But as we have also seen, the decision between the paradoxico-critical and Badiou’s own generic orientations may well represent one of the most fundamental junctures with which philosophical and political thought is faced today.

Accordingly, on behalf of the paradoxico-critical orientation as well as of Deleuze himself, *we should not oppose Badiou’s interpretation of Deleuze, but rather affirm it as displaying a coherent, rigorous, and exemplary fundamental orientation of thought which is nevertheless fundamentally different from Badiou’s own.* To do so is to join Badiou in sharply distinguishing Deleuze from the bland “postmodern” celebration of historical and cultural difference and material heterogeneity often attributed to him (most of which can indeed be subsumed to the pre-reflexive “criteriological” orientation rather than paradoxico-criticism); we can thereby enlist his project (but as we have seen, it is indeed already there enlisted, by virtue of Deleuze’s own declarations, ambitions, and methods) in the very different and much more profound project of critical reflection on the consequences of form.

The decision between paradoxico-criticism and the generic orientation occurs at a very basic and fundamental point, from which everything else results. This is the point at which critical thought, grasping the formal paradoxes of reflexivity and seeing the fundamental incompatibility between the One of consistency and the All of completeness, makes a decision for one or the other, either to affirm an irreducible multiplicity of worlds, situations, and events uniformly governed by consistency but without common horizon or totality (the generic orientation) or to maintain the assumption of a unified world and

pursue the deep and constitutive paradoxes and even contradictions that are thereby seen to result. On Badiou's own telling, the most fundamental divergence between himself and Deleuze occurs at exactly this point, as was evident in the exchange of letters that occurred between the two philosophers in the 1990s:

Moreover, the notion of 'multiplicity' was to be at the center of our epistolary controversy of 1992-94, with him maintaining that I confuse 'multiple' and 'number,' whereas I maintained that it is inconsistent to uphold, in the manner of the Stoics, the virtual Totality or what Deleuze named 'chaosmos,' because, with regard to sets, there can be neither a universal set, nor All, nor One.<sup>21</sup>

Badiou's *fundamental* criticism of Deleuze (and, as we shall see, essentially his only one) is, then, that the latter upholds the (inconsistent) All, whereas according to Badiou this is, given set theory and its implications, untenable. But as we have seen, Badiou's denial of the very possibility of affirming the All is *by no means* demanded by set theory itself, and it is indeed from the possibility of this affirmation that paradoxico-criticism (both its methods and its results) wholly results. It is thus that the most fundamental axiomatic decision of Badiou's system – his decision for the conjunction of consistency and the non-being of the All rather than the alternative decision, for the paradoxical totality – separates him decisively and formally from the entire project of Deleuze.

This is not to say that Badiou's understanding of paradoxico-criticism – though he does not, of course, employ the term – is not sophisticated, insightful, and detailed. The depth and acuity of his understanding of it is shown, for instance, in the acute and not unsympathetic analysis he gives in the *Deleuze* book to what he there calls "structuralism." On this analysis, the "structuralism of the sixties" will have consisted in rigorously and formally drawing out the consequences of univocity of being, given its plural and equivocal expression in the multiplicity of names and signs.<sup>22</sup> Given this imperative – which is equivalent to posing the question of the *production* of sense – the structuralist operation then consists in three sequential and interlinked moves. First, there is the identification in beings and phenomena of the *elements* which are understood as rigorously subject to the initially "opaque" rules of structure, the overarching system in which all elements and all possibilities of combination have their place. Second, there is the identification within the total structure of a "singular entity" which both "renders [structure] incomplete and sets it in motion." This is, of course, the "empty square" of Deleuze, the "floating

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<sup>21</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 36

signifier” of Lévi-Strauss, the “element degree zero,” “dummy element,” or “blind spot.” By means of the gap or lack it introduces, this element also introduces the dynamism of “supplement or paradox” which, according to Badiou, recurrently fascinates structuralism as such:

The paradoxical entity shines with a singular brilliance. It is what is fascinating in structuralist theory because it is like a line of flight, an evasion, or an errant liberty, by which one escapes the positivism of legalized beings. ... Basically, the empty square shows that structure is only a simulacrum and that, while it fabricates sense, the being that is proper to it – namely the life that sustains the effect of sense – does not, in any way, enter into the sense so fabricated. For life (the One), being univocal, holds the equivocity of produced sense for a nonsense.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, given this paradoxical introduction of the effective and organizing “signifier that does not signify,” a third move is possible. This is the movement of a “reascent” that would consist “in thinking how it comes about that nonsense is required to produce sense.” This final movement cannot result, Badiou says, from the operation of a particular “structural machine,” since it depends on the univocity of Being itself, its capability of being “said in a single sense of all of which it is said.” And neither will it produce, after all, the (unique) sense of Being. It will consist, Badiou suggests, rather in the demonstration that “there is no sense of sense” and hence yield the claim that sense itself is produced out of nonsense, for instance, as Deleuze suggests, by means of the “displacement” and “position” of “elements which are not by themselves ‘signifying.’”. The yield of the whole movement, from structure to its paradoxical disruption (“descending”) back up to the constitution of the virtual layer of in-consistent sense on its basis, will be, according to Badiou, a sublime *jouissance* that witnesses the self-enclosed, circular destiny of the One:

When thought succeeds in constructing, without categories, the looped path that leads, on the surface of what is, from a case to the One, then from the One to the case, it intuits the movement of the One itself. And because the One is its own movement (because it is life, or infinite virtuality), thought intuits the One. It thereby, as Spinoza so magnificently expressed it, attains intellectual beatitude, which is the enjoyment of the Impersonal.<sup>24</sup>

In this passage itself, Badiou is not explicitly critical of Deleuze’s assignation of the task of philosophy to the chronicle of this exemplary movement of the One. Elsewhere in the book, however, he contrasts its consequences, practically term by term, to those of his own set-theoretical thinking of being and the

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<sup>23</sup> Badiou (1997), pp. 37-38.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 40.

event. What Badiou sees as a profound divergence – perhaps *the* most profound divergence within philosophy today – nevertheless does not exclude points of what may at first seem surprising convergence, or even identity. The most important of these, as we have already seen, is Deleuze’s identification of the aleatory, singular and discontinuous *event*, which he, like Badiou, places at the very center of his picture of change and becoming. In fact, Deleuze does not stop short of appealing to the same poetic figure that Badiou makes use of, much later, in *Being and Event*, Mallarme’s “true throw of the dice.”

As we saw above, the “cast of the dice” captures, for Deleuze, the structure of the “sense-event,” which is, as Badiou emphasizes, *ontologically* one. That is, as Deleuze says, though the multiple singularities and events are indeed numerically distinct, they resonate and take place within the unitary medium of the unique event, which amounts to an affirmation of chance *in its totality*. This is the basis for Deleuze’s thinking of a temporality of Aion which interrupts and suspends the logic of Chronos, for the affirmation of “minor games” and the ubiquity of chance without distribution, and for Deleuze’s thinking of the eternal return of the same as the repetitive return of this singular affirmation. In his discussion of Deleuze’s conception of the event, Badiou faithfully notes these features of Deleuze’s conception of the event and the chance it affirms, and suggests that they indeed represent the point of greatest divergence from Badiou’s own conception:

In a letter written at the very end of 1993, touching on the concept of the undecidable that both of us use, although in very different ways, Deleuze took up the question of the dice throw in its direct connection with the virtual. He stated that the undecidable concerns the emissions of virtuals as pure events, as exemplified by the throw of the dice. And he declared once again, extremely clearly, that the different casts of virtuals can be formally distinct, even while they remain the forms of a single and same cast. The result is that the different casts are undecidable and that no decision is the final one – for all decisions communicate and are mutually compounded.

In reflecting on Deleuze’s persistent use, since the end of the sixties, of such quasi-identical formulations, I said to myself that the indiscernibility of casts (of events, of emissions of the virtual) was, for him, the most important of the points of passage of the One. For me, on the other hand, the absolute ontological separation of the event, the fact that it occurs in the situation without being in any way virtualizable, is the basis of the character of truths as irreducibly original, created, and fortuitous...



If, when all is said and done, chance is the affirmation, for Deleuze, of the contingency of the One in all its immanent effects, it is, for me, the predicate of the contingency of *each* event. For Deleuze, chance is the play of the All, always replayed as such; whereas I believe that there is a multiplicity (and rarity) of chances, such that the chance of an event happens to us already by chance, and not by the expressive univocity of the One.<sup>25</sup>

This disagreement over the status of chance, which is intimately connected to the fundamental difference between the generic and the paradoxico-critical orientations, is the ultimate root of the divergence which allows Badiou to reject in its totality Deleuze's category of the "virtual" and to seek a formalism of the event that is (officially) conditioned *in no way* by sense or the paradoxes of signification, but is conditioned instead solely by the actuality and transit of what Badiou calls a Truth.<sup>26</sup> The divergence extends, as well, to the very status of the Ideal and to the question of the formal itself, and hence to the legacy of Plato for contemporary thought. As Badiou notes and we have seen in chapter 5 above, Deleuze's slogan of the "overturning" of Platonism is to a large extent misleading, at least if we take it out of the context of the vast and profound resources Deleuze in fact finds within the Platonic text for carrying out the project of "mak[ing] the simulacra rise and affirming[ing] their rights...." On the basis of these resources and the implication that he himself avowedly finds in Plato's text of a view of beings that aims to "do ...justice to the real One" by "thinking the egalitarian coexistence of simulacra in a positive way," Badiou thus declares (and with this we can certainly agree) that "Deleuzianism is fundamentally a Platonism with a different accentuation."<sup>27</sup> Yet this does not preclude, once again, what is almost a direct opposition between Badiou and Deleuze on the fundamental status of the Idea itself:

Deleuze retains from Plato the univocal sovereignty of the One, but sacrifices the determination of the Idea as always actual. For him, the Idea is the virtual totality, the One is the infinite reservoir of dissimilar productions. A contrario, I uphold that the forms of the multiple are, just like the Ideas, always actual and that the virtual does not exist; I sacrifice, however, the One. The result is that Deleuze's virtual ground remains for me a transcendence, whereas for Deleuze, it is my logic of the multiple that, in not being originally referred to the act of the One, fails to hold thought firmly within immanence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Badiou (1997), pp. 75-76.

<sup>26</sup> *LofW*, p. 385.

<sup>27</sup> Badiou (1997), pp. 26-27.

<sup>28</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 46.

According to Badiou, then, the issue between him and Deleuze, then, is not that of “Platonism vs. its reversal or ‘overcoming’” but rather two very different Platonisms, two divergent and yet *equally faithful* developments of the resource of what Plato thought as the Idea. On the one hand (Deleuze) we have the unifying totality of the Idea’s One, what must accordingly be thought, in its infinite power of the unification of appearances, as the stratum of a virtuality that is avowedly real without any possibility of its reduction to the actual. On the other (Badiou) we have a “sacrifice” of the idea’s univocity in favor of the mathematically thinkable actuality of its phenomena, thought on the basis of the theory of sets or multiples, and so what we might almost term a “Platonism of the multiple.” The disagreement over fundamental grounds – Deleuze’s virtual plane of immanence vs. Badiou’s set theory – which led, on Badiou’s testimony, each philosopher to suspect the other of an untenable “transcendence” that, in both cases, challenges the very possibility of the materialism and immanence to which both were officially committed – is not easy to resolve on the basis of Plato’s text alone. Instead, as we are now in a position to see, it witnesses the very formal dichotomy to which critical thought is subject, as soon as it can no longer preserve in a single figure, as Plato still, doubtless, hoped to do, the One of consistency and the All of completeness, and must reckon under the heading of any theory of Ideas or the Ideal with the fundamental divergence of the two.

If we, then, indeed take Deleuze’s position (as portrayed by Badiou) to be an exemplary expression of the paradoxico-critical orientation, from the point of its affirmation of the radical paradoxes of the One up to its identification, on their basis, of the purely virtual plane of immanence on which sense and all becoming are alike constituted, we may thus add to the table of divergences above a few more, concerning the very status of the discontinuous event and the being of the Idea itself. Whereas, for Badiou, the event is ontologically plural and devoid of sense, constituted only on the basis of the transit of a truth in its production of a generic set, for Deleuze and the paradoxico-critical orientation the event is always the ontologically *singular* outcome of sense, thought as a totality, in its own immanent structural paradoxes. And whereas we accordingly have, on the one hand, an inherently and radically multiple being of the Ideal, actual in the real occurrence and transit of the ontologically unique event, we have, on the other, an affirmation of the unitary Idea capable of effectively organizing (whether as simulacra or as copies, “good” or “bad” duplicates) the many of its instances into a virtual and immanent One, which is, however, never to be thought as actual. The divergences between these two structures will also yield, as Badiou indeed does not hesitate to point out, profound differences on the level of the implications of the form and the outcomes of its thought.

In a short chapter of *Logics of Worlds* devoted to Deleuze, Badiou repeats in a more forceful and compressed form the statement of these fundamental oppositions between his own and Deleuze’s position

on the nature of the event. Whereas, again, the event is for Deleuze the immanent exposure of the One of all becoming, the “eternal identity of the future as a dimension of the past,” the virtual “intensification” of the actions of bodies, and the unitary composition of a Life, Badiou reverses each of these “Deleuzian axioms” explicitly: for Badiou, by contrast, the event is a “pure cut in becoming,” a “separating evanescence” that cannot be thought in terms of past or future but only as the presentation of the present itself, the origin of bodies rather than the intensification of their action, and most of all the “utterly unresonant” dissemination of a Truth that, in order to be effective in it, dictates the event’s fundamental contingency and its being “without One.”<sup>29</sup>

The ultimate reason for all of these divergences is again a fundamental disagreement about the implication of the term ‘event’ between the significance of “sense” (Deleuze) and that of “truth” (Badiou); the divergence is moreover, again, connected fundamentally to the role and status of language in both projects. Thus, Deleuze “fashions what is to my [i.e. Badiou’s] mind is a chimerical entity, an inconsistent [note the term of criticism!] portmanteau-word: the ‘sense-event.’” This coinage, Badiou says, brings Deleuze “far closer than he would have wished to the linguistic turn and the great lineage of modern sophistry;” for it “tips [the event] over entirely onto the side of language” and *thus* “contains in germ the aestheticization of all things, and the expressive politics of so-called ‘multitudes’, in which the Master’s compact thought is today dispersed.”<sup>30</sup> For Badiou, on the other hand, the event “does not

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<sup>29</sup> Compare Badiou’s statement of the difference between his conception of the event and those of several philosophers, including Deleuze and Wittgenstein: “What happens – and, inasmuch as it happens, goes beyond its multiple-being – is precisely this: a fragment of multiplicity wrested from all inclusion... Consequently, it cannot be said that the event is One. Like everything that is, the event is a multiplicity (its elements are those of the site, plus itself... We are faced here with an extreme tension, balanced precariously between the multiple on the one hand, and the metaphysical power of the One on the other. It should be clear why the general question that is the object of my dispute with Deleuze, which concerns the status of the event vis-à-vis an ontology of the multiple, and how to avoid reintroducing the power of the One at that point wherein the law of the multiple begins to falter, is the guiding question of all contemporary philosophy. This question is anticipated in Heidegger’s shift from *Sein* to *Ereignis*, or – switching registers – in Lacan, where it is entirely invested in the thinking of the analytical act as the eclipse of truth between a supposed and transmissible knowledge, between interpretation and the matheme. Lacan will find himself obliged to say that though the One is not, the act nevertheless installs the One. But it is also a decisive problem for Nietzsche: if it is a question of breaking the history of the world in two, what, in the affirmative absolute of life, is the thinkable principle that would command such a break? And it’s also the central problem for Wittgenstein: how does the act open up our access to the ‘mystical element’ – i.e., to the ethical and the aesthetic – if meaning is always captive to a proposition, or always the prisoner of grammar?” (Badiou 2004a), p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> *LofW*, p. 386. There is good reason to think that Badiou is not in fact very clear on this point with respect to Deleuze, or at least that his near-identification of Deleuze, here, with the ‘linguistic turn’ represents an important change in position from the position of his earlier, 1997 text, a shift that seems to reflect a kind of deeply-held ambivalence on Badiou’s part toward Deleuze himself. For in the earlier text, in a passage devoted to expounding Deleuze’s singular affirmation of the univocity of being, we read: “How very Greek this confidence in Being as the measure of relations, both internal and external, is! And how very indifferent to the ‘linguistic turn’ this ontological coemergence of sentences and what-occurs under the role of the One is!” Badiou (1997), p. 21.

possess the least sense, nor is it sense.” It emerges, rather, from a real point that is “strictly speaking senseless” and only relates to language in that it “makes a hole in it.”

Here, then, Badiou’s criticism of Deleuze’s conception of the event and its virtuality depends entirely on the former’s rejection of the criticism, or the dialectic, of sense and language, which rejection is, as we have seen elsewhere, a *fundamental* methodological axiom of Badiou’s thought. This rejection is, as we have also seen, here and elsewhere determined (or overdetermined?) by Badiou’s vehement opposition to what he sees as the regime of contemporary “sophistry” and the prevailing axiomatics of multiplicity and heterogeneous language-games, which determines the contemporary liberal politics of culturalist difference and its “multitudes.” This is, to a large extent, the politics of those who have taken up Deleuze’s thought; it is the politics of the “received image” of Deleuze as the great avatar of heterogeneity and difference, which Badiou vehemently – *and admirably, on the current reading* -- aims to refute in the 1997 book.

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou again in fact recognizes the great distance between Deleuze himself and the “latent religiosity” of those his disciples who “are busy blessing, in unbridled Capital, its supposed constitutive reverse, the ‘creativity’ of the multitudes,” and who would produce on the basis of this reverse a kind of “planetary Parousia of a communism of ‘forms of Life.’” Deleuze, Badiou says, “would have laughed up his sleeve about all this pathos.” *On the other hand*, though – and here is the point at which we may recognize the great weakness of Badiou’s reading of Deleuze, so strong and revealing in other ways – there remains in Deleuze, according to Badiou, a threefold determination of the event that, affirming a fundamental “empiricism” and even, Badiou somewhat cautiously suggests, a tendency to “dogmatism,” again directly opposes his own conviction:

It remains that, having conceptualized before everyone else the place of the event in the multiform procedures of thought, Deleuze was forced to reduce this place to that of what he called ‘the ideal singularities that communicate in one and the same event’. If ‘singularity’ is inevitable, the other words are all dubious. ‘Ideal’ could stand for ‘eternal’ if it did not excessively cloud over the real of the event. ‘Communicate’ could stand for ‘universal’, if it did not pass over the interruption of every communication which is immediately entailed by the rupture of transcendental continuity. We have already said why ‘one and the same’ is misleading: it turns the One-effect on bodies of the event’s impact into the absorption of the event by the One of life.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *LofW*, p. 387.

Once again, we have in this passage an exemplary comparison of the orientations of Badiou's generic orientation with the position of paradoxico-criticism, which nevertheless does not and *cannot* appear as such here, since Badiou never recognizes the paradoxico-critical orientation itself as distinct from the linguistic constructivism to which he constantly assimilates it. It is for this reason that Badiou here again identifies an exemplary instance of the paradoxico-critical orientation (which is in fact grounded, as Badiou has argued in detail, in the overarching affirmation of the One of language and sense against all its fractured and multiple instances) with the "sophistry" of contemporary conviction and the politics of superficial difference, *while at the same time and almost in the same gesture* rigorously and formally distinguishing the two.

As we have seen, we can indeed well agree with Badiou's recognition in Deleuze of an exemplary thinking, and politics, of the One of language and sense, one which is radically and fundamentally opposed to the constructivism that stops at affirming the heterogeneity of languages and the narcissism of their culturally determined differences. This is, as we have seen in other connections and registers, no "empiricist" disintegration of formal essence, but rather a rigorous and relentless thinking of the paradoxical being of the Idea; it is no facile relativism of communities, but an uncompromising pursuit of the aporetic foundations of every possibility of communication and of the common as such. To the extent that Badiou indeed gives arguments for *rejecting* Deleuze's position here (as opposed to simply giving trenchant and revealing *descriptions* of their difference) they rest entirely on his assimilation of paradoxico-criticism to constructivism; but the fact that paradoxico-criticism indeed functions only on the basis of a fundamental affirmation of the being of language as such (that is, the One of language as such *rather than* the many of historical languages and communities) is quite simply no reason to identify it, as Badiou sometimes tends to do, with any and every position that discusses language at all or affirms its significance to a "political" thought of the possibility of change and difference. Failing to recognize the specificity of paradoxico-criticism or its methods, Badiou recurrently fails to reckon with it, implying that the entire legacy of critical thought in the wake of the linguistic turn is indeed equivalent to the vaguely relativist liberalism of today's dominant politics, or to the axiomatics of contemporary conviction which in fact operate to prohibit the very possibility of significant change on a fundamental level. But by recognizing the specific methods and results of the orientation of thought for which Badiou has no category, we can indeed comprehend the radical outcomes of the structuralist thought of the twentieth century and the methodological continuity that, linking figures as diverse as Lacan, Derrida, Wittgenstein, and Deleuze, underlies their important legacy for political thought and action today.

### **Badiou contra Wittgenstein**

As we have seen in connection with both Derrida and Deleuze, then, the paradoxico-critical orientation includes formally grounded conceptions of history, meaning, the critical project, and even the event that are quite different from Badiou's and that, although they are generally missed by Badiou himself, emerge clearly if we juxtapose the main methodological contours of the projects of these philosophers to his. This already goes some way to showing the broader possibilities that are in fact open to critical thought, beyond both constructivism and onto-theology, in relation to the convictions and orthodoxies to which both the paradoxico-critical orientation and the generic one are united in opposition.

The debate that is probably most revealing and decisive here, however, is not Badiou's confrontation with either of these "continental" philosophers, with whom Badiou, whatever his doctrinal divergences, shares a history and the inheritance of a recognizably common methodological tradition, but rather the juxtaposition with Wittgenstein, with whom he certainly does not. This is so for at least two reasons. First, because Wittgenstein is, without a doubt, the twentieth century philosopher who has most penetratingly and relentlessly pursued the twofold inquiry into the nature of both language and mathematics, and the relationship between the two; and second because he does so from the perspective of a sensibility which is so clearly and deeply opposite to Badiou's. Indeed, it can seem that the two philosophers are so completely at odds that in many respects they practically mirror one another from opposite directions. Wittgenstein, the great chronicler of the depths of the "seas of language" as they draw human life into their ever-twisting currents, understands the drive to philosophy as a constant drive to run up against the limits of language, a desire to whose frustrations only a critical modality of reflection on grammar can hope to respond. As we have seen, Badiou, by contrast, rejects the linguistic turn in all of its forms, upholding, instead, an explicitly anti- or post-critical philosophy whose sole function is to witness to the infinite proceedings of truth. With respect to mathematics, the positions are different but again opposites of each other: for Wittgenstein, as we saw in chapter 7, mathematics is a technique or a practice, something whose unique status and capabilities within a human life are never to be minimized, but whose *fundamental* heterogeneity is misconceived by any description that elevates its status to that of a "master" discourse, or that looks to it to describe, in a privileged way, the metaphysical structures of possibility and necessity in themselves. For Badiou on the other hand, of course, mathematics *is* ontology, both the privileged doctrine of whatever is and the paradoxical key to a formalism of what is beyond being; and philosophy can only hope to witness this mathematical formalism of the event in what are for him its profound and intrinsic transformative consequences.

The philosophical sensibility underlying these suggestions evidently runs almost directly contrary to one that expressed in remarks such as this:

124. Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.

For it cannot give any foundation either.

It leaves everything as it is.

It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A 'leading problem of mathematical logic' is for us a problem of mathematics like any other.

And this:

125. It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of mathematics that troubles us: the state of affairs before the contradiction is resolved ... The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem.<sup>32</sup>

From the beginning of his career, indeed, Wittgenstein took up the problems of "mathematical logic" as problems of the critique of symbolic language in relation to its role in the life of its users, the vast variety of contexts and situations in which we may take "mathematical" language to have a bearing on a human life. The inquiry led him to far-ranging investigations of the leading results of set-theoretical and foundational research, including, significantly, Cantor's theory of multiple infinities.<sup>33</sup> In the remarks that take up these theories, Wittgenstein, as we have seen, often displays a critical skepticism whose ground is *not*, fundamentally, any doubt about the rigor of these theories, but rather a reflective *question* about their ways of developing or projecting the structures of language to construct or project new concepts.<sup>34</sup>

Badiou has addressed Wittgenstein, often critically but never without a kind of grudging admiration and respect, at several points in his career. In 1993-94 Badiou gave a year-long seminar on Wittgenstein under the title "L'Antiphilosophie Wittgenstein"<sup>35</sup> and in 1994 he published an article entitled "Silence, solipsism, saintete. L'antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein." There are scattered references to Wittgenstein in

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<sup>32</sup> *PI* 124-25.

<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein comments on Cantor's theory, for instance, in the *RFM*, especially pp. 131-33.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. *RFM* II-19, in reference to Cantor's demonstration of the non-denumerability of the set of real numbers: "The dangerous, deceptive thing about the idea: 'the real numbers cannot be arranged in a series', or again 'The set . . . is not denumerable' is that it makes the determination of a concept – concept formation – look like a fact of nature." With respect to the self-membership of the event, as well, it is interesting to compare what Wittgenstein says about Russell's theory of types in the *Tractatus* (*TLP* 3.33-3.333). Here Wittgenstein argues that in a clarified notation – in which each sign is used in exactly one way – it will simply be impossible to *symbolize* the self-membered set that leads to Russell's paradox. If Wittgenstein is right, it is indeed impossible in general to symbolize self-membered sets, and the need for a theory of types is thereby avoided. This is not, however, because self-membered sets are *prohibited*, in the manner of constructivism, but because the terms that attempt to name them are shown to be self-undermining. Indeed, the general orientation behind this suggestion – in which reflection about possibilities of significant symbolization in language is used to resolve or dissolve seeming philosophical problems – does not seem to correspond to anything that Badiou considers explicitly.

<sup>35</sup> Badiou (1994).

*Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds*, and the short article “Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism,” and in 2004 the volume *L’antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein* appeared, comprising a long piece on Wittgenstein deriving from the 1993-94 course, and a much shorter article “Les Langues de Wittgenstein,” earlier published in the review *Rue Descartes*. With the exception of this last, short piece, all of these discussions focus almost exclusively on the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, which Badiou subjects to a rigorous and exhaustive examination. Nowhere in Badiou’s *corpus* is there anything like a similarly deep examination of the *Philosophical Investigations*, and even when Badiou does address the “second Wittgenstein” (as he does briefly in “Les langues de Wittgenstein”) he does so by means only of a largely exterior rumination on the “rhetoric” and “voices” of Wittgenstein’s later texts.

The reason for this privileging of the *Tractatus* is not difficult to find in Badiou’s own remarks. For as he explains in the endnotes to *Logics of Worlds*, while he considers the *Tractatus* an “undeniable masterpiece,” albeit of the problematic *genre* that Badiou terms “anti-philosophy,” none of the works that follow it rise to anything like this status. For after the *Tractatus*, “the further oeuvre – which is not really one, since Wittgenstein had the good taste not to publish or finish any of it – slides from anti-philosophy into sophistry.”<sup>36</sup> Here we find, according to Badiou, only a writer “obsessed with urgent and preposterous questions, as if he were obstinately seeking some stupefied delirium;” such questions are “at times surprising inventions, which pleasingly derail the mind, at other times trite acrobatics.”<sup>37</sup> The dismissive and acerbic tone is continuous with Badiou’s longstanding polemics against “sophism” and “sophistry,” which Badiou identifies with the privileging of rhetoric and linguistics over truth, and has long considered to be the most perfect enemy of philosophy itself. The category of “anti-philosophy” is a third one, structurally balanced in a precarious way between philosophy’s essential pursuit of extra-linguistic truth and sophistry’s endless linguistic plays.

From the perspective of the current analysis, the lack of any sustained engagement by Badiou with the later Wittgenstein is certainly unfortunate. Since, as we have seen, the later Wittgenstein is one of the best twentieth-century representatives of the paradoxico-critical orientation, Badiou’s refusal to engage here appears to confirm, once again, a systematic blind spot for the kind of open critical options that paradoxico-criticism represents. Most significantly, it appears to confirm that Badiou has no way to understand the critical implications of the twentieth century linguistic turn, except to treat them uniformly as the empty rhetorical prevarications of an easily refuted sophistry. That they are not just this, but indeed can bear in important ways on contemporary thought about political action and change, is, of course, one

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<sup>36</sup> *LofW*, p. 540.

<sup>37</sup> *LofW*, p. 541.



of the central stakes of this book, and is, I believe, adequately demonstrated by the analyses already given. As we have seen, in particular, the later Wittgenstein takes up the issues of rule following, force, normative authority, and the nature of techniques and technologies in ways that are penetrating, radical, and profound, and indeed have much to say about the basis of political authority and the possibilities of political change and transformation. Badiou's reluctance to engage with Wittgenstein's treatment of these themes necessitates that we rely, here, on reconstructive reasoning and partial extrapolation in order to assay the relative positions of language, truth, logic, and meaning in the different options that are today open to critical thought.

Nevertheless, as much as we might regret this lack of engagement with the later Wittgenstein, we can still learn something important about the space of these options by considering Badiou's sustained engagement with the early Wittgenstein, which he consistently conducts under the heading of "Wittgenstein's anti-philosophy." The 1993-94 course on the *Tractatus* is the second in a sequence of four year-long courses all under the heading of "L'antiphilosophie"; it is preceded in the sequence by a course on Nietzsche and followed by courses on Lacan and St. Paul (the latter would become the basis of Badiou's book entitled *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*); elsewhere, Badiou adds Pascal, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard to the list of "anti-philosophers." In all of these treatments, Badiou discusses the position of the "anti-philosopher" as that of the thinker who would dismiss or break with philosophy's essential (as it is for Badiou) quest for truth, not simply by means of a "sophistical" reduction of this quest historically contingent language-games, but by the invocation of the transformative potential of a radical subjective act or affirmation that leaps beyond any element of truth accessible to philosophy as such.<sup>38</sup> In its radically transformative potential, such an act indeed bears certain affinities to Badiou's category of the "event," but differs from it in that the object of the anti-philosophical act is conceived as lying beyond any possible linguistic expression and thus as capable of "breaking the history of the world in two" rather than contributing to the progressive historical unfolding of a generic truth. These traits commit the anti-philosopher, according to Badiou, simultaneously to a reductive or even constructivist identification of the boundaries of language with those of the world, or being, as such; and, at the same

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<sup>38</sup> "Based on his detailed readings of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan, as well as the occasional references to Pascal, Kierkegaard, or Rousseau, Badiou distinguishes a small number of basic features as the invariant core of any antiphilosophy. At least for the modern period, these invariant traits include the following: the assumption that the question of being, or that of the world, is coextensive with the question of language; consequently, the reduction of truth to being nothing more than a linguistic or rhetorical effect, the outcome of historically and culturally specific language games or tropes which therefore must be judged and, better yet, mocked in light of a critical-linguistic, discursive, or genealogical analysis; an appeal to what lies just beyond language, or rather at the upper limit of the sayable, as a domain of meaning, sense, or knowledge, irreducible to any form of truth as defined in philosophy; and, finally, in order to gain access to this domain, the search for a radical act such as the religious leap of faith or the revolutionary breaking in two of the history of the world, the sheer intensity of which would discredit in advance any systematic theoretical or conceptual elaboration." (Bosteels 2008c, pp. 8-9).

time, to the invocation of an (often ‘mystical’ or ‘extra-rational’) Beyond accessible neither to philosophy or language, but only by means of the affirmation of a kind of indescribable “remainder” resistant to any possible signification or communication.

The category of the “anti-philosopher” thus allows Badiou to group together a number of thinkers who share with the philosopher (as Badiou conceives him) the desire to pursue transformative and radical change but nevertheless submit the thinking of this change to the dictates of a structural reflection on language and its limits. In the former respect at least, they differ from what Badiou has long called “sophists;” however, it is also worth noting that the category of “anti-philosopher” as distinct from that of the “sophist” has a relatively recent origin in Badiou’s own corpus and does not yet appear, for instance, anywhere in *Being and Event*. Thus it is difficult to tell whether the polemics that appear there against constructivism and “nominalism” are meant to be limited to those who would simply pursue a “sophistical” reduction of truth to the rhetorical effects of language, or whether they extend as well to “anti-philosophers” such as Nietzsche and Lacan, who he will later see as diverging to various degrees from the reductive sophistical project.

In any case, though, in the 1993-94 course, Badiou applies the terms of this general definition of the “anti-philosophical” position to the structure and ambitions of the *Tractatus*. Here he treats the pursuit of anti-philosophy as a complex of three essential gestures: first, there is a “critical dismantling” or “deconstruction” of philosophy by means of linguistic reflection; second, a recognition of the real import of existing philosophy as consisting in its production of an “act” which is nevertheless diagnosed as “bad” or “pathological,” and finally the attempt to substitute in place of this traditional “act” of philosophy a new and utterly transformative one. Badiou finds these three gestures precisely represented in the *Tractatus*. The first is marked in the attempt (at 4.003) critically to diagnose “most of the questions of philosophy” as “nonsense,” which yields the critical analysis of the forms of philosophical pseudo-questions. The second gesture is evident, Badiou holds, in proposition 4.112, which declares philosophy to be “not a theory, but an activity” (*Tätigkeit*);<sup>39</sup> and the third one, which is perhaps the most important, is to be found, according to Badiou, in Wittgenstein’s invocation of a “mystical element” which consists in the demonstration of what cannot be said, and thus necessarily takes place only as silence. The real significance of this “mystical element” in Wittgenstein’s thought, according to Badiou, is to ensure the possibility of a kind of “archi-aesthetic” act that also manifests the basis of the very possibility of the existence of the world. This involves Wittgenstein, according to Badiou, in a complex entanglement with

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<sup>39</sup> Badiou here passes completely over the distinction between an *act* and an *activity*, which may in fact be very important to the question of how we should understand Wittgenstein’s developing conception of philosophy; see below for more on “activities” and “techniques” as distinct from acts and events.

Christianity, as well as the conception of a “sense of the world” that necessarily lies outside its boundaries; together, these themes yield the claim (at once, according to Badiou, “ontological” and “Christian”) that “God is a name for the sense of the world.”<sup>40</sup> The purpose of Wittgenstein’s critical anti-philosophy is then simply to insist upon, and “never give up” the desire for, a radical two-fold act that is both a “nonconceptual experience of the limit” and a “bet on the experience” of this limit that consists in inscribing the rigid law of silence so that the “mystical element” can be experienced at the point of its surpassing.<sup>41</sup>

There are certainly good textual grounds on which this particular interpretation of what is involved in Wittgenstein’s conception of the tasks of philosophy, mysticism, and silence could be disputed. For instance, throughout his discussion, Badiou treats the transformative act which is purportedly aimed at in Wittgenstein’s invocation of mysticism and silence as a “subjective” one, even to the point of suggesting that it is this very *act* which is to “support” the existence of the world. But Wittgenstein holds at *TLP* 5.631 that “In an important sense, there is no subject” and at *TLP* 6.373 that “the world is independent of my will.” Again, Badiou treats the import of the (supposed) “archi-aesthetic act” as that of *showing*, in religious or quasi-religious fashion, a “non-worldly” or transcendent existence beyond the limits of the world. This involves Wittgenstein, according to Badiou, in a problematic attempt to “speak the unspeakable” (even if only by means of contradictions and paradoxes) in order to indicate this existence beyond language. But as the “resolute” interpretation of the *Tractatus* has emphasized, it is not at all clear that Wittgenstein’s project is consistent with the invocation of any such “transcendental beyond” to the world, and indeed there is a very significant register of the book that consists in denying any such being.<sup>42</sup> Given these issues, it is easy to suspect that Badiou’s three-fold conception of what the work of philosophy must be, according to Wittgenstein, is substantially imposed from outside rather than really grounded in the text itself; even where Wittgenstein does speak explicitly of the character of philosophy, he describes it as an “activity” rather than an act, and moreover one directed to “elucidations” and the “clarification of propositions” rather than an active passage to the mystical. The remarks that *do* speak of the mystical (6.44, 6.45, and 6.522) do not at all, on their face at least, suggest that it can be reached by

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<sup>40</sup> Badiou (1994), 1<sup>st</sup> cours, sect. 5c.

<sup>41</sup> Badiou, (1994), 5<sup>th</sup> cours, sect. 4.

<sup>42</sup> For the “resolute” interpretation, see above, chapter 5. “And if Wittgenstein can speak of the unspeakable, even metaphorically or contradictory, it is ultimately because there is not one but two registers of existence, otherwise there would be no sense to speak of limits of worlds. You see that mention the limits of the world makes sense only if there is, if I may say, a non-mundane existence, whatever it impossible to say. But there must exist a non-worldly for there to be meaningful to speak of limits of the world.”; (Badiou 1994, 3<sup>rd</sup> cours, sect. 2g.)(but cf. *TLP* 6.521, 6.54).

means of any act or procedure, but instead that the mystical “showing” of what “cannot be said” is the result of a kind of *passive* “seeing” or “feeling” of the world “as a limited whole.”

Given this, it seems that the radical “archi-aesthetic act” which Badiou imputes to Wittgenstein may be more an artifact of Badiou’s own general categorical framework (the threefold division of philosophy, antiphilosophy, and sophistry) than anything really grounded in the *Tractatus* itself; nevertheless, at other points, Badiou’s sense of the differences here does enable him to see important structural features that both characterize the project that Wittgenstein indeed does share with other “anti-philosophers” such as Lacan, and distinguish it fundamentally from Badiou’s own. In his seventeenth seminar, delivered in 1969-70, Lacan devotes a few pages to a discussion of the overall attitude and fundamental results of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*.<sup>43</sup> Here, Lacan treats Wittgenstein as the single author who has most completely formulated what follows from the propositional articulation of truth. The claim of the *Tractatus* that there is no possibility of truth outside the proposition is, for Lacan, an essential insight, bearing certain similarities to the insights of psychoanalysis with respect to the structure of the Other and its desire. In particular, the position of Wittgenstein is similar to the “analyst’s position” itself as schematized by Lacan, in that Wittgenstein aims to “eliminate ... himself completely from his own discourse.”<sup>44</sup> This facilitates, according to Lacan, a certain operation of diagnosis and analysis directed toward philosophy from the perspective of the purely factual or “factitious” nature of language, evident in the most plain and “stupid” facts, such as the fact that “it is day.”

What is most essential to this operation is the recognition that there is no *metalanguage*, and hence no position from which to conduct the “knavery” and “bastardry” in which traditional philosophy largely consists:

The stupid thing, if I may say so, is to isolate the factitiousness of ‘It is day.’ It is a prodigiously rich piece of stupidity, for it gives rise to a leverage point, very precisely the following one, from which it results that what I have used as a leverage point myself, namely that there is no metalanguage, is pushed to its ultimate consequences.

There is no other metalanguage than all the forms of knavery, if we thereby designate these curious operations derivable from the fact that man’s desire is the Other’s desire. All acts of

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<sup>43</sup> Lacan (1970)

<sup>44</sup> Lacan (1970), p. 63.

bastardry are based on the fact of wishing to be someone's Other, I mean someone's big Other, in which the figures by which his desire will be captivated are drawn.<sup>45</sup>

That there is no metalanguage means for Wittgenstein, as also for Lacan, that the philosophical desire to occupy the place of the Other – the place which is assumed to be that of the privilege of truth – can only yield to a therapeutic analysis of logic and sense. From the perspective of this analysis, the attempt to master sense from an assumed metalinguistic position is the central operation of the forms of “knavery” that define traditional philosophy, and to which psychoanalysis and Wittgensteinian therapy jointly respond. “The only sense is the sense of desire” and that “the only truth is the truth of what the said desire for its lack hides;” this is, Lacan, says, what we must understand after reading Wittgenstein. In other words, there is no position outside the “stupid” facticity of everyday propositions from which it would be possible to master sense or to articulate a distinctive truth on its basis. This is the legacy of Wittgenstein for Lacan, and also the essential point on which, despite its need to advance into the field of truth in a way “distinct from” Wittgenstein's, psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein can nevertheless agree.

Badiou's own discussion, in the 1993-94 lectures, recognizes this denial of metalanguage as decisive to both Wittgenstein's and Lacan's position. It is from the position of this denial alone that it is possible to discern, Badiou suggests, the specific inadequation between meaning and truth: whereas philosophy, or the “university discourse” which is its genre according to Lacan, would claim to master truth from the meta-linguistic position of its complete comprehension of sense, the “anti-philosophers” Lacan and Wittgenstein ascribe the illusion of such a perspective to the “knavery” or “villainy” specific to philosophy as such. Moreover, it is at this point that both Lacan and Wittgenstein recognize what Badiou himself does not hesitate to call the “fundamental question of ethics:” the question of the relationship of meaning and truth, and of the possibility that (as Badiou suggests) there are truths that are excessive to sense (and hence raise the question of the possibility of their adequation to any existing regime); or that there is indeed, as Lacan suggests on behalf of Wittgenstein, that there is no *position* of truth that exceeds the movement of its own desire. On this basis, again, it is possible for Wittgenstein and Lacan to recognize that “truth cannot be treated as a property” and that, as Badiou admits, a fair definition of the “villainy” or “knavery” of philosophy is precisely to ignore this, and hence to seek, and presuppose, the adequation of meaning and truth from a position that makes truth a property of beings, or attempts thereby to speak on behalf of being itself.

What, though, is Badiou's own position with respect to the interlinked questions of the status of metalanguage and the specific relationship of meaning and sense? As we shall see, there are complex

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<sup>45</sup> Lacan (1970), p. 61.

issues here, and we shall have to look more closely at the formal determinants of Badiou's thought to settle them. However, it is worth noting in the present context (the 1993-94 lectures) that although Badiou does not simply reject Lacan's and Wittgenstein's sense of the "knavery" of philosophy as consisting in its attempt to assume a metalanguage position, he also does not endorse the "definition" of anti-philosophical therapy as the critical operation of detecting and removing this pretension. Rather, although there is an essential "ethical" question here about the relationship between truth and meaning (which Badiou himself recognizes *as a question*), Badiou takes this question to be resolved in Wittgenstein's text only by means of (what Badiou takes to be) Wittgenstein's affirmation of an act that is alien both to philosophy and to the articulation of sense itself, the "mystical act" or "element" that shows without saying. In that it is systematically affirmed even outside (or beyond) the articulate truth it supports, this "element" has for Wittgenstein, according to Badiou, a position closely analogous to that of desire for Lacan. For both philosophers, according to Badiou, the essential thing is not to give up on this act beyond sense; thus, whereas Lacan affirms the maxim "never give up on your desire!" Wittgenstein (on Badiou's reading) recognizes in the affirmation of the "mystical element" the point of an absolute function of assertion that "never yields" and thereby holds everything else in place. The correspondence between Wittgenstein and Lacan here also demonstrates, according to Badiou, a two-fold function of realization in this act: first, it amounts to a "bet on the experience of the limit," and so to a bet on the possibility of actually realizing the limit of thought (or expression) that it defines; and second, a legislative function, that of *making the law the law*, or of articulating the very prohibition which, consigning all that exceeds the sayable to silence, also first defines the boundary between saying and showing itself.<sup>46</sup>

In thus linking the question of the silence beyond what can be said to the fundamental structure of desire and prohibition which articulates the law as such and ensures the force of its dictates, Badiou certainly penetrates to the core of the *Tractatus*' critical project. As we saw above in chapter 6, this project already articulates in a way that at once both radical and deeply traditional the rational force of logical laws and their capacity to define the very structure that is (on the early Wittgenstein's picture) shared by language and the world. Nevertheless, as we have also seen, the further claim that this linkage between language and the world, and the possibility of tracing their shared limits, depends on something like a "mystical act," is contestable on several grounds, both internal and external to the text. First of all, Wittgenstein's own explicit assertions about the process and results of philosophical diagnosis and analysis consistently (on one legitimate reading at least) suggest a kind of progressive methodological disappearance or removal of the philosophical question, rather than its solution by means of any act whatsoever; second,

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<sup>46</sup> Badiou (1994), 5<sup>th</sup> course, section 4.

and for related reasons, the suggestion of a subject capable of performing such a transformative act (at least, by means of anything like an event or occurrence *in* the world) is quite alien to the *Tractatus*; and finally, there is no mention in connection with what *is* there designated as ‘the mystical’ of any subjective act or action whatsoever. On the other hand, although it is therefore probably *not* meant even in the *Tractatus* to be resolved in the way that Badiou thinks, the question of what links prohibition and law to the boundaries of the world and the sayable is, as we saw in chapter 6, a profound one, penetrating to the very heart of the methods and ambitions of the book, and hence revealing with respect to the relation of the *Tractatus*’ project to those philosophical projects that neighbor or contest it.

In fact, despite his adamant and consistent attempts to distance himself from the “anti-philosophical” position of Wittgenstein (as well as Lacan), *with respect to* the specific question of the basis of logical force and the connection between logic and the world which guarantees it, there are nevertheless noteworthy homologies that show the depth of their common concerns in this area. One of these, quite precisely definable and decisive for both projects, is an underlying *atomism* which, despite the differences in their respective concepts of “logic,” can nevertheless for both rightly be termed *logical*. In particular, as Badiou recognizes, the requirement in the *Tractatus* of a correspondence between simple names and objects is a crucial point, both thematically and methodologically; for it ensures a level of being, the substrate of whatever can be asserted, that is absolutely and utterly indescribable, the level at which no assertion is possible since what there is can *only* be named.<sup>47</sup> According to the theory, “objects are unalterable and subsistent;” on the other hand, they intrinsically contain the possibilities of combination which lead to their changing configurations in (describable) states of affairs. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou concurs with these points on behalf of his own theory of worlds and their transcendental structures. In particular:

Since the logic of objects is nothing but the legislation of appearing, it is not in effect possible to accept that relations between objects have a power of being. The definition of a relation must be strictly dependent on that of objects, not the other way around. On this point, we are in agreement with Wittgenstein who, having defined the ‘state of affairs’ as a ‘combination of objects’, posits that ‘if a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs

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<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere, Badiou recognizes Wittgenstein’s theory of eternal objects as “the moment of the most rigorous conceptual tension in the *Tractatus*” and the securing of an “altogether remarkable ontological base.” (Badiou 1997, p. 18).

must be written into the thing itself'. In other words, if an object enters into combination with others, this combination is, if not implied, in any case regulated by objects.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, Badiou says elsewhere in *Logics of Worlds*, by identifying the level of objects on which no change or transformation is possible, Wittgenstein sees that “the pure thinking of being is as eternal as the multiple forms whose concept it harbors”<sup>49</sup> and that the possibilities for change and development of states of affairs within the world (or within *a* world, for Badiou) must be wholly determined, in advance, by the regular possibilities of combination thereby determined and permitted by the logical structure of objects. It follows, according to Badiou, that truly *discontinuous* change (the kind that both *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* aim to theorize under the heading of the ‘event’) can be understood neither as an effect solely of the static and unchanging order of Being, nor of the regulated order of appearances, but only by means of a theory of the effects of their structural interpenetration or crossing, the possible “retroaction” of being upon appearance, at the basis of every evental site, that we have discussed above.

What, though, ensures the possibility of names? How should we understand the correspondence, seemingly always established *in advance*, between names and the simple objects that make up the substance of a world, for both Badiou and Wittgenstein? Here, telling structural differences emerge between the two pictures. For Wittgenstein, as we saw in chapter 6 above, the requirement of the existence of both simple objects and names coordinated to them is the result of a transcendental argument, premised on the requirement of the determinacy of sense. This argument prohibits, as we have seen above, any possibility of crossing between names and propositions, or between objects and states of affairs: the two levels must be kept completely distinct, according to Wittgenstein, if propositions are to have any (determinate) sense at all. The argument, as we saw above, captures in a very direct way the distinctive configuration of metaphysical structure and normative force that links Wittgenstein’s project in the *Tractatus* to Parmenides’ original discussion of the One; Wittgenstein would later reject it when he came to see the radical problem of rule-following. For Badiou, by contrast, the atomism that provides the basis for the analysis of worlds has its basis in an axiom, the “postulate of materialism” which ensures that every atom of appearance is also an atom of being. Here, there is (officially at least) no appeal to language or to the structure of sense, and hence no “transcendental” argument premised upon it. Both the autonomy of the two levels of appearance and being, and the possibility of their occasional crossing in the evental site, are instead guaranteed by the axiom that links the atoms of both. This is already enough to

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<sup>48</sup> *LofW*, p. 301.

<sup>49</sup> *LofW*, p. 358.



suggest profound differences in the way that linguistic and formal structures, respectively, enter into the two atomisms of Badiou and Wittgenstein.

This impression is confirmed, moreover, by Badiou's treatment of Wittgenstein's atomism in the 1993-94 lectures. Here, Badiou recognizes the argument for atomism as one of the most structurally essential moments of the *Tractatus*, in that by providing for a level of being that takes place before all descriptive saying, it holds in place the very distinction between showing and saying on which the *Tractatus* as a whole relies. This leads Badiou to suggest, however, that there is a deep structural problem in the *Tractatus* concerning the issue of *designation* or *nomination*. In the *Tractatus*, it is essential that names (already) stand for objects, in order that any proposition has sense; the question of *how* names are coordinated to the objects for which they stand is thus not addressed, and even treated by Wittgenstein as irrelevant.<sup>50</sup> However, according to Badiou, Wittgenstein's refusal to discuss the issue is the sign of a significant and largely unargued prohibition. In particular, it is prohibited that the act of nomination (or more generally, the act of showing or demonstrating) expresses a *thought*. Since objects can only be named and never described, the act (if such there be) involved in coordinating a name to an object can never be explained or spoken *about*: there is only, Badiou supposes, the senseless act itself. Moreover, correlative to this is a converse prohibition operating in the other direction: since naming is always distinct from asserting and never expresses a thought, it is impossible to *name* a state of affairs. As Badiou notes, the two "prohibitions" are deeply linked to the one we have just discussed, the "prohibition" of a metalanguage. For if there were a metalanguage capable of stating truths about the object language, it would be possible as well to describe the coordination of names to objects, or to speak what, for Wittgenstein, can essentially only be shown. Wittgenstein's exclusion of any possible metalanguage position will thus stand, or fall, with the logical distinction between objects and states of affairs, which is mirrored in the distinction between naming and asserting.

In the 1993-94 lectures, Badiou in fact wishes to contest the tenability of maintaining this twofold distinction in the strict fashion that Wittgenstein requires. He suggests, in particular, that we might understand the function of *poetry* as, in large part, arising from its capacity to violate the prohibition on the naming of states of affairs:

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<sup>50</sup> TLP 5.526; 6.124.

I would argue that much of **the poetic enterprise is to designate states of affairs**. *I.e.* that just as poetry is such that it engages the possibility of statements about names, so poetry is something that involves finding names for states of affairs and not simply for the unthinkable simple.<sup>51</sup>

In the function of poetry, Badiou thus recognizes a twofold power of articulation: on the one hand, the ability to produce descriptive statements about names and nominations, and on the other, the ability to “find names” for states of affairs and thereby accomplish an essential act of nomination that marks poetry off, according to Badiou, from any proposition.

The status of this suggestion with respect to Wittgenstein’s *logical* distinction between names and propositionally articulated complexes is not immediately clear. Is Badiou denying that it is possible to apply this distinction rigorously to language in general, or claiming that, in addition to names on the one hand and sentences on the other, the poem (or instance of poetry) is itself a third, wholly distinct logical category that somehow combines both? If there is indeed such a third category of language capable of the designative power of names but also of description, how are we to identify it, or determine the success of its instances? However, the larger systematic motivations for Badiou’s insistence on a poetic *lapsus* of the rigorous mutual exclusion of propositions and names are not difficult to locate within his broader project itself. Recall that, as we saw above, the theory of *Being and Event* requires that the occurrence of an event, in Badiou’s sense, always depends on a moment of paradoxical auto-nomination, whereby the faithful subjective operators of the event themselves draw a name “from the void” in order to designate the event and *thereby* summon it into being. At this moment of designation – for instance Saint-Just’s declaration “the Revolution is frozen” – the articulation of a proposition *about* the event itself plays an essential role in constituting the event, in the future anterior, as the one it *will have been*. In other words, we have here a proposition about naming, and the possibility of describing the very moment of nomination itself, which plays, for Badiou, an essential structural role in constituting any event as such.

In *Logics of Worlds*, as we have seen, this reflexive function of language remains essential to the possibility of anything like an event, although its structural role is now somewhat more complicated. Here, rather than directly naming itself, the event necessarily plays an essential role in structuring its own “transcendental,” or in re-determining the overall structure of resemblance and identity of the world in which it occurs. However, this is still a moment of reflexive linguistic activity that depends essentially on the capacity of language to describe its own operation, and in particular to describe the fixation of its own names and identities. Moreover, Badiou continues to describe this moment as “poetic.” It remains the essential point of crossing, crucial to the possibility of anything like evental change, at which language

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<sup>51</sup> Badiou (1994), 8<sup>th</sup> cours, section 3b.

summons its own powers of diagnosis and description in appearing to itself, thereby fundamentally (according to Badiou's theory at least) transforming the world by producing what has never before taken place.

All of this tends to suggest that the issue of the place of language in Badiou's own project may be more complex than he sometimes tends to suggest, and indeed that much more is involved in his quarrel with Wittgenstein than simply the question of a "pro" or "con" attitude to critical thought about language and a formally based consideration of its powers. However, to really understand what is at stake in the debate between the two thinkers which seems to pit the unyielding and extra-linguistic formalism of mathematics, on the one hand, against paradoxico-criticism's reflexive formalism of language on the other, it is helpful to consider the single point at which Badiou officially *most* vehemently disagrees with Wittgenstein and his whole attitude: the question of the status of mathematics itself. For Badiou, Wittgenstein's thought, early and late, witnesses a spectacular, enduring and decisive rejection of the demonstrative capacities of mathematics, summarized in the consistent claim that Badiou refers to Wittgenstein and says he will "never have done refuting," namely the claim that "mathematics does not think." In actuality, this is not quite what Wittgenstein ever says. In the *Tractatus*, he holds that mathematical propositions are uniformly tautologies, and hence that a mathematical *proposition* – being empty of any empirical content – does not "express a thought." Later, for instance in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, he will maintain steadfastly the reluctance thereby expressed to consider mathematical propositions as claims with their own determinate and specific referential or representative *content* (empirical or otherwise) while at the same time moving away from the *Tractatus*' picture (or any picture) of "thoughts" as exclusively propositional or sentential in structure. In any case, whether or not Wittgenstein ever proposes to deny to mathematics wholesale the power of "thought" which he (at times, at least) attributes to linguistic propositions or their structure, it is illuminating to consider Badiou's (perhaps somewhat overdetermined) response to what he takes to be Wittgenstein's fundamental position on mathematics, since it illuminates Badiou's own project, as well as the larger space of its conceptual and formal determinants.

In a 2004 article entitled "Mathematics and Philosophy: The Grand Style and the Little Style," Badiou contrasts what he calls the "grand style," which "stipulates that mathematics provides a direct illumination of philosophy, rather than the opposite" with the "little style," which proposes to treat mathematics as an "object for philosophical scrutiny," and thus as the definitive object for a distinctive area of philosophical specialization, the "philosophy of mathematics."<sup>52</sup> As representatives of the "grand

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<sup>52</sup> Badiou (2004c), p. 7.

style,” Badiou marshals quotations from Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and Laotse. He takes Wittgenstein’s remarks, by contrast, to be a paradigm instance of the ‘little style.’ In denying (as Badiou understands him) the relation of mathematics to thought, Wittgenstein falls, according to Badiou, into a kind of reductive linguistic pragmatism that equally characterizes the “fashionable” constructivist or nominalist projects from which Badiou would most of all like to distance himself:

Let us be blunt and remark in passing that, in this regard, Wittgenstein, despite the cunning of his sterilized loquacity and despite the undeniable formal beauty of the *Tractatus* – without doubt one of the masterpieces of anti-philosophy – must be counted among the architects of the little style, whose principle he sets out with his customary brutality. Thus, in proposition 6.21 of the *Tractatus*, he declares: ‘A proposition of mathematics does not express a thought.’ Or worse still, in his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, we find this sort of trite pragmatism, which is very fashionable nowadays:

I should like to ask something like: ‘Does every calculation lead you to something useful? In that case, you have avoided contradiction. And if it does not lead you to anything useful then what difference does it make if you run into a contradiction?’

We can forgive Wittgenstein. But not those who shelter behind his aesthetic cunning (whose entire impetus is ethical, i.e. religious) the better to adopt the little style once and for all and (vainly) try to throw to the modern lions of indifference those determined to remain faithful to the grand style.<sup>53</sup>

Actually the quotation Badiou uses from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* is taken out of context and badly mistranslated. In its proper context it has little to do with pragmatism. Wittgenstein is, rather, discussing the interesting question of why the existence of a contradiction *anywhere* in a calculus should be felt (for instance by those who worked on the “foundations of mathematics”, thinkers such as Frege and Russell) to vitiate its usefulness *everywhere*. Anscombe’s translation shows this much more clearly:

I should like to ask something like: “Is it usefulness you are out for in your calculus?—In that case you do not get any contradiction. And if you aren’t out for usefulness – then it doesn’t matter if you do get one.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> (Badiou, *Mathematics and Philosophy: The Grand Style and the Little Style* 2004), p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> *RFM*, III-81.

In context and correctly translated, Wittgenstein's point is *not* to affirm pragmatism or to claim that our calculations must be judged by a standard of usefulness. Importantly, it is a wholly conditional one. *If* we are looking for a calculus which will be useful – say one that will help us compare measurements – then what matters is simply its practical success, and the sort of “contradiction in the foundations” of the calculus that Russell and Frege sought to hunt out and eliminate need not, seemingly, affect this usefulness at all.<sup>55</sup> If, on the other hand, we don't care about the usefulness of our calculus, then a contradiction is simply another symbolic expression; again, it doesn't matter.

As we saw above (chapter 7), this is a way of putting Wittgenstein's characteristic attitude toward contradictions, which seems calculated to raise the hackles of mathematicians and philosophers of mathematics alike, but is not obviously false, absurd, or untenable. Indeed, as we saw, Wittgenstein's “relaxed” attitude toward contradiction has a precise diagnostic and therapeutic function within his thought: specifically, it is designed critically to interrogate what is involved in the axiomatic or unquestioned assumption that contradiction must be avoided at all cost, an assumption that plays directly into foundationalist projects in mathematics and substantially contributes to the metaphysical pictures that produce their imaginary justification. What Wittgenstein is doing here, by contrast, is what he very often does while reflecting on the nature of mathematics and its role in our lives. He is posing the *question* of how a symbolic system is applied – how it gains what we may see as its significance in a human life. The question of this significance can include the question of how we use the symbol system to calculate, how we apply it to practical judgments, what we use it to build, measure, or do. His aim is, in large part, to show that the logicist's quest for “secure foundations” for such a calculus is irrelevant to this question of significance, for a poorly founded or unfounded calculus *might* serve us as well as any. As we have indeed seen, Wittgenstein ceaselessly poses this question, what we might call the question of “significance for life,” whenever he reflects on language and symbolism; but it is, in this context, highly misleading to claim that his purpose is to *reduce* mathematical claims – or any claims – to some pre-established *standard* or *notion* of use or usefulness.

But is not the later Wittgenstein, after all, the great twentieth-century chronicler of linguistic contingency, the avatar of a relativism of socially constituted “language games” and hence the radical critic of any claim to deduce the unity of language as such or determine, from an abstract theoretical standpoint, the effects of its structure? The best answer to all of these interpretive questions, I think, is “no.” Here, we must not only resist a dominant pragmatist or relativist reading of Wittgenstein that assigns to the realities of “practice,” “institution,” and the “social” itself a self-evidence which he would certainly have found

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<sup>55</sup> This is the crux of Wittgenstein's dispute with Turing in the 1939 lectures; see chapter 7, above.

impossible, but also seek the roots of most radical and penetrating problematics (including the problematic of rule-following), which lie in his unquestionably unique vision of language itself. On this vision, as we have seen above, it is not “agreement in opinions” that constitutes the possibility of language but that much deeper and more elusive “agreement in judgments” that is grounded in “forms of life;” this is not the agreement of a conventional institution or “socially grounded” norms of practice, but on the far deeper ground of those aspects of our lives and bearing that first make anything like meaningful language, and hence *also* any “social whole” possible at all. If Wittgenstein evinces this ground by means of the labels of “practice,” “institutions,” and “rules,” the attempt is not all to present these concepts and their values as unproblematic, but rather to identify and demonstrate the deeply rooted and far-ranging problems involved in them; if the “unity of essence” that the traditional theorist attempts to find for language or language-games by finding the “one thing” that they all have in common is here denied (for instance, PI 65), this is *not* to deny the importance of a search for the essence of language that here continues in a methodologically radicalized form.<sup>56</sup> In fact, with the removal of the theorist’s ambition to find a “single analysis” of the proposition as such and a “completely resolved form of every expression,” the investigation becomes a far-reaching chronicle of the variety of interrelated structures that define language in its complex relation to a (human) life, an investigation which does not stop short of detecting the most pervasive and “deep disquietudes” of this life, problems that “are as deep in us as the forms of our language” and bear a “significance ... as great as the importance of our language.”<sup>57</sup> This is not an abandonment of the Platonic search for form, but a radicalization of it on the level of “forms of life,” not an abandonment of the Platonic inquiry, under the heading of the “idea,” into the being of whatever is, but rather its transformation on the ground of language itself (for “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is” and “*Essence* is expressed in grammar” ); not, again, an abandonment of the fundamental Platonic distinction between being and appearance, which finds expression in all subsequent forms of the “critique of illusion,” but a renewal of this critique on the basis of an unprecedented reflection on “grammar,” in which is to be found as well the source of the foundational “superstitions” of human life.<sup>58</sup>

As we saw above, Wittgenstein’s conception of limits, meaningfulness, and use *in the Tractatus* exhibits, to a certain extent at least, the commitments of what I have called the *criteriological* orientation of thought. The work as a whole attempts to “draw the limits” of thought by comprehending the structure of

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. PI 92: “This [viz., the attempt to find a “single completely resolved form of every expression”] finds expression in questions as to the *essence* of language, of propositions, of thought.—For if **we too in these investigations are trying to understand the essence of language – its function, its structure,**--yet this is not what those questions have in view.” (emphasis added in bold)

<sup>57</sup> PI 111.

<sup>58</sup> PI 373, 371.

language, and treats whatever exceeds those (presumably fixed) limits as having the status of nonsense. This means that, with respect to mathematical propositions for instance, the sentences that might at first appear to assert substantial truths about superlative entities – for instance numbers or sets, construed as Platonic, extra-empirical entities – must instead be understood as wholly empty of content. However, as we have also seen, Wittgenstein’s *subsequent* development witnesses a methodologically radical transition from the critical project in the criteriological mode of the *Tractatus* to the paradoxico-critical project we have seen in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here, there is no attempt to delimit language once and for all, or to discuss those propositions which lie outside the boundaries thereby established as simply nonsense. Correlatively, there is a new and much more radical operation of criticism involved in the reflexive and formal consideration of what constitutes the structure of language itself, as it is represented into itself; the yield of this is the rule-following considerations of the *Investigations*, as well as the specific kind of critical investigation into rules and their force that provides its larger context in Wittgenstein’s own thought.<sup>59</sup>

In the remark we have just considered, Badiou reads Wittgenstein as if his position does not change at all and as if he is thus simply and uniformly identical to the constructivist or pragmatist philosophers from whom Badiou would most like to distinguish himself. This is a misreading. More specifically, Badiou’s attribution of a reductionist pragmatism to Wittgenstein depends on attributing to him at least two general kinds of commitments that he quite clearly does not hold by the time of the remark in RFM, written in 1939 or 1940; first, a substantial philosophical *theory* of the bounds of sense; and second, an intention to apply this theory to *reform* or *limit* existing usage. Badiou’s implicit attribution of these commitments to Wittgenstein prevents him from recognizing the significantly more subtle and complex way in which Wittgenstein deploys immanent reflection on the forms of our language both to dissipate illusion and to redefine our vision of ourselves. This methodology, equally critical and dialectical, is, as we have seen, “political” *not* in the sense that it seeks to reform life according to a pre-existing law of language, but inasmuch as it repeatedly intervenes on the ground of our linguistic picturing to ourselves of the forms of or lives as we meet with them in the language we speak.

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<sup>59</sup> In *RFM*, for instance, as we have seen, Wittgenstein clearly and consistently rejects the “finitism” which characterizes criteriology and constructivism (according to Badiou). For instance: “Finitism and behaviourism are quite similar trends. Both say, but surely, all we have here is . . . Both deny the existence of something, both with a view to escaping a confusion.” (*RFM* II-61) The language of “convention” [*Abmachung*] as a basis of language, as well, though employed in the *Tractatus* (for instance, at 4.002) and through the middle period, vanishes by the time of the *Philosophical Investigations* (although language is said, at *PI* 355, to “rest on” “convention” in the *different* sense of *Ubereinkunft*, which runs much more toward “agreement.”)

By contrast, Badiou constantly appeals to mathematics (as we have repeatedly seen) as the *uninterpreted* and even essentially *uninterpretable* privileged source of the formalisms that define, for him, the very structure of any social whole and the very possibility of its transformation. From the perspective of this conception, which accords to the privileged text of mathematics the substantial power of thinking the very formalism that ensures the possibility of change, any “reduction” of mathematics to the status of a “mere technique” or calculus is indeed “ruinous,” and it is the constant task of philosophy to oppose any such treatment.

In Badiou’s doctrine of Being and the event, Cantor’s theory of infinities, along with the mathematical and set-theoretical results that grow from it, therefore attains the status of a privileged, almost revelatory text, from which both the truths of ontology and what structurally exceeds it can be read off directly and without further ado. For Badiou, the subject’s unproblematic openness to the multiple infinities of transfinite set theory is itself the basis for its capacity to intervene in any existing situation; it is therefore the multiple infinity of the subject’s situation that ultimately licenses all of the political implications of Badiou’s doctrine as well.

For Badiou, by stark contrast, there is no interesting problem of the application of language in life. Indeed, it is *never* part of Badiou’s discourse of infinity and the event even to pose the question of how we are able to express an “infinite procedure” in finite symbolism, how we *learn* an “infinite technique,” how what we learn is communicated or justified, or – more broadly – what kind of role the “technique of calculating with infinities” can be held to play in an ordinary human life. Indeed, as Badiou explains in a 1998 article entitled “The Question of Being Today,” he takes the ontological authority of mathematics itself to demonstrate that any treatment of it *as* a technique is seriously misguided.<sup>60</sup> For any such treatment necessarily misses, according to Badiou, the essential way in which the multiplicity of mathematics, following Cantor’s discovery of the multiplicity of infinities, thinks and pronounces on all that is sayable about Being itself:

Moreover, since it was subsequently established that Cantor’s achievement lay not so much in elaborating a particular theory as in providing the very site for what is mathematically thinkable (the famous ‘paradise’ evoked by Hilbert), it becomes possible to state by way of retroactive generalization that, ever since the Greek origin of ontology, being has been persistently inscribed through the deployment of pure mathematics. ...

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<sup>60</sup> Badiou (1998a).



More generally, if ontology or what is sayable of being qua being is coextensive with mathematics, what are the tasks of philosophy?

The first one probably consists in philosophy humbling itself, against its own latent wishes, before mathematics by acknowledging that mathematics is in effect the thinking of pure being, of being qua being.

I say against its own latent wishes, for in its actual development philosophy has manifested a stubborn tendency to yield to the sophistical injunction and to claim that although an analysis of mathematics might be necessary to the existence of philosophy, the former cannot lay claim to the rank of genuine thinking. Philosophy is partly responsible for the reduction of mathematics to the status of mere calculation or technique. This is a ruinous image, to which mathematics is reduced by current opinion with the aristocratic complicity of mathematicians themselves, who are all too willing to accept that, in any case, the rabble will never be able to understand their science.

It is therefore incumbent upon philosophy to maintain – as it has very often attempted to, even as it obliterated that very attempt – that mathematics thinks.<sup>61</sup>

Badiou does not say, here, precisely what is so dangerous about a philosophical treatment of mathematics as a kind of technique, among others, whose role in our lives is to be judged, and understood, in terms of what it does for us. It may be that he thinks that any such view amounts to placing mathematics under a “sophistical injunction,” although (as we saw in the last section), it is clear that Wittgenstein’s own critical inquiry into the complexities and problems of mathematical technique as we meet with them in the course of our complicated form of life does not place mathematics under any such injunction.

There is no doubt that for Wittgenstein, the interest of this critical reflection on the meaning, force and application of “mathematical” rules derives from their capacity to exemplify and model the more general problems of linguistic meaning and understanding. The interest of treating mathematics as a technique of symbol manipulation is in what it tends to show about the conception of language as a technique of symbol manipulation, and about the way in which the problems of this conception of language tends to play a role in, and even determine, our human self-conception. The Platonistic elevation of “mathematical objects” into superlatives, in which the metaphysics of actualized infinity plays an irreducible part, tends to obfuscate this role of language in life by foreclosing the inherent paradoxes of its application. To this, Wittgenstein’s criticism responds with a skeptical inquiry that operates as another way of posing the standing question of the relationship of language to life, of the way in which may seem

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<sup>61</sup> Badiou (1998a), pp. 47-48.

to be the infinite possibilities of human sense are fated to live out the constraint of their expression in finite forms of language. To pose this critical question is not to subject or constrain meaning (mathematical or otherwise) to a fixed corpus of grammatical rules or the straitjacket of a pre-determined sense of the limits of expression, but rather to pursue what we may feel to be the essential mismatch between (finitary) forms of expression and (infinitary) meaning, as we meet with this problem in the varied linguistic occasions of an ordinary life, up to the point of the ultimate resolution, or dissolution, of the problem that this is felt to represent.<sup>62</sup>

How, then, should we locate this large-scale dispute, which is at once methodological, axiological, and stylistic, between Wittgenstein and Badiou? To begin with, it is not a disagreement within the philosophy of mathematics itself. Neither Badiou nor Wittgenstein occupies, as we have seen, *any* of the main positions that have largely exhausted discussion in the twentieth century about the status of “mathematical entities” and knowledge. Neither one is, for instance, a Platonist in the usual sense, and both reject the intuitionism of finitists like Brouwer. The relationship of each to Hilbert’s project of formalism is, in both cases, somewhat more complex, but it is clear that neither Badiou nor Wittgenstein conceives of mathematics simply as a formal calculus, wholly devoid of sense. Within the “philosophy of mathematics” as traditionally conceived, or anything even remotely like it, it is therefore difficult to find neutral terms by means of which the issue between Wittgenstein and Badiou could even be adequately *stated* (let alone resolved). Taken simply as an epistemic object, mathematics is for Badiou the superlative text of a privileged revelation of the categories of pure being; for Wittgenstein it is a technique, or complex of techniques, among others that go into defining a human life, worthy of no special elevation but subject always to the critical question of meaningfulness to the varied plans, projects and circumstances of a human life.

We can, however, gain some further insights by considering once again the interlinked questions of self-reference and infinity, as they occur and are variously treated in both projects. As we have seen, for

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<sup>62</sup> Such a resolution does not depend, according to Wittgenstein, simply on new discoveries or even on new institutions or inventions, although the *forms* of our techniques of calculating, reflecting and judging in mathematics are deeply important to it. In the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, right after discussing what he sees as the “hocus-pocus” of Cantor’s procedure, Wittgenstein comments on the role of technique, habit, and technology in producing determinative changes in human life:

23. The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it was possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual.

Think of the use of the motor-car producing or encouraging certain sicknesses, and mankind being plagued by such sickness until, from some cause or other, as the result of some development or other, it abandons the habit of driving. (*RFM* II-32).

Badiou the possibility of a radical philosophy in our time is intrinsically wedded to the development of mathematics, and in particular to the theory of multiple infinities founded by Georg Cantor. It is Badiou's sense, indeed, that this theory represents a *transformative* moment in thought, on par with the early modern construction of geometrized space or the Parmenidean discovery of the problem of the one and the many itself. As Badiou explains in the 1992 article, "Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism", this discovery of the multiplicity of actually existing mathematic infinities marks a fundamental break from what he calls the "Romantic gesture," which (on his telling) always depends on a prejudicial inscription of finitude in thought that could not be questioned on formal grounds until the advent of Cantor's theory.<sup>63</sup> It is this prejudicial finitism, Badiou thinks, that is responsible for both the critical motif of horizon and the ultimately criteriological "pathos" of a singularizing being-toward-death:

Romantic philosophy localizes the infinite in the temporalization of the concept as a historical envelopment of finitude.

At the same time, in what is henceforth its own parallel but separate and isolated development, mathematics localizes a plurality of infinities in the indifference of the pure multiple. It has processed the actual infinite via the banality of cardinal number. ... By initiating a thinking in which the infinite is irrevocably separated from every instance of the One, mathematics has, in its own domain, successfully consummated the death of God.

Mathematics now treats the finite as a special case whose concept is derived from that of the infinite. The infinite is no longer that sacred exception coordinating an excess over the finite, or a negation, a sublation of finitude. For contemporary mathematics, it is the infinite that admits of a simple, positive definition, since it represents the ordinary form of multiplicities, while it is the finite that is deduced from the infinite by means of negation or limitation. If one places philosophy under the condition of such a mathematics, it becomes impossible to maintain the discourse of the pathos of finitude. 'We' are infinite, like every multiple-situation, and the finite is a lacunal abstraction. Death itself merely inscribes us within the natural form of infinite being-multiple, that of the limit ordinal, which punctuates the recapitulation of our infinity in a pure, external 'dying'.<sup>64</sup>

For Badiou, then, it is the actual existence of a multiplicity of infinities, as "demonstrated" by Cantor's theory, that offers to liberate philosophy from Parmenides' doctrine of the One and from all the

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<sup>63</sup> Badiou (1992b)

<sup>64</sup> Badiou (1992b), pp. 36-37.

criteriological and critical modes of philosophy that it dominates. For fidelity to the event permits the infinite pursuit of the generic procedures, which realize truths in the fields of art, science, politics, and love. Without the event's capacity to rend the closure of being by introducing a "generic set" indiscernible to the ontological logic of already existing situations, truth itself, in Badiou's sense, would be impossible in that all happening would be reducible to the univocity of the One.

Here and elsewhere, Badiou treats Wittgenstein, implicitly and explicitly, as if he (Wittgenstein) were simply committed to the "romantic" philosophy of finitude, and hence to the "pathetic" figures of death and "historicity" that he (Badiou) identifies with it. As we have seen (above, chapter 7) this is a second, massive misreading (in addition to the misreading of Wittgenstein as a pragmatist discussed above). For at no point in his career was Wittgenstein a finitist, and his thought always depends on a deep and radical consideration of the problematic entry of *infinity* into a human life.

As we have seen, this question of infinity and its role in a human life is also deeply linked to the question of self-reference and its implications, as figured in exemplary fashion (for instance) in Russell's paradox and the differing possible reactions to it. Philosophical attitudes toward self-reference are indeed fundamentally linked to the question of the ontological structure of being, as well as to the prohibitive force of rational strictures and demands, indeed to the question of the very force of reason itself. One of these attitudes is expressed by Russell's theory of types, which axiomatically prohibits self-reference and self-inclusion through the introduction of an axiomatic stratification of what objects *can* exist. But as we saw, in so doing, it issues a prohibition whose own force must remain enigmatic on the level of what it claims to prohibit; prohibiting what is by its own lights impossible, it intervenes in a way that must appear arbitrary from the position of the syntactical possibilities on which it passes judgment. The theory of types is thus a meta-decision as to what can exist; the decision governs language in a way that ensures the desired consequences but is essentially arbitrary from its position.

By contrast, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* took the position that self-reference is simply impossible, and hence that the paradox to which Russell's theory of types responds need not even arise. This position avoids, as we saw, the necessity of resolving the paradox, in the fashion of Russell, by means of an inherent stricture on the types of beings that can exist; however, at the same time, it nevertheless replicates something of the prohibitive character of Russell's solution by declaring certain (apparently coherent) ordinary linguistic operations nonsensical or out of order. The prohibition of self-reference, which is operative on the level of the *Tractatus*' official theory of meaning, itself plays a decisive role, as we saw, in formulating and enforcing the axiomatic requirement of the determinacy of sense, which is also articulated by the strict distinction between objects and states of affairs, or between the level of sense

and that of the facts it uniformly conditions. On the other hand, as we saw, if the crossing between meaning and fact that occurs in self-reference can thus seem to be interdicted always already in advance by the sublime enunciation of a law whose mandate and stake would be the clarity of human life to itself, it seems evident, as well, that the interdiction makes possible what it prohibits and the stricture proclaims its own breach. That is, if the theory and structure that would hold facts and meanings rigorously apart undermines itself in its own statement, then the question of this statement (what we can see as the origin of all authority and rational force) is neither simply a *quid juris* or a *quaestio facti*; at the factual origin of law stands the image of an auto-nomination that is neither fact nor law, the singular moment of origin at which the totality of an infinite structure is reflected in the finite point of institution. The crossing at this point remains, and is ceaselessly repeated in the ongoing life of language, as the form of the force of the general rule over the particular case. Thus it is not surprising that Wittgenstein's position on the question of self-reference changes dramatically from the *Tractatus* to the later work. Here, rather than being prohibited once and for all and in advance, the crossing evident in the moment of nomination, whereby an indifferent object is raised to the rank of a standard and henceforth serves as an "instrument" for the language game as a whole, is seen as an essential, if problematic, moment of the constitution of language games themselves. The moment of nomination, whereby practices and language-games are constituted by their own problematic auto-designation, remains structurally the site of fundamental and deep critical paradoxes, the most significant of which is the permanent structural paradox of the rule's symbolic representation within the practice it constitutes.

Badiou's attitude toward self-reference is different from any of these. Instead of prohibiting self-reference, it aims to permit it, and even to promote it, through its inscription of the schema of the event. It thus makes meta-ontological decision that is, in some ways, directly opposite to Russell's. Self-reference *does* take place, and is even encouraged, in that it is only through problematic self-reference that the event is capable of designating itself, and thus coming to take place at all. Thus there is nothing *essentially* paradoxical, for Badiou, about the capability of the event to designate itself, or to exploit the resources of the reflexive power of language in self-description to call itself into existence; or in any case, if such a power of productive self-designation seems paradoxical or impossible from the perspective of the existing situation, it is only because it calls into existence an event which, though strictly impossible from *its* position, will nevertheless appear retroactively as unproblematic in the *new* situation which the faithful tracing of the event's consequences makes possible. Thus, for Badiou, to whatever extent paradox might be thought to formally adhere to the moment of self-reference, or of constitutive nomination, it is both formally and materially resolved by the progress toward a new, transformed

situation which will henceforth occur (at least if the event is indeed successful in bringing about its radical train of consequences).

This is a crucial and telling difference, one to which we will return below, and one that goes to the very heart of the capacity of language to reflect itself, and thus to articulate the terms in which we can understand, inherit, or transform it. But is this, language's internal image of itself, proposed ceaselessly and reiterated in the terms by which we represent to ourselves the lives we live, indeed real – or is it itself illusory or virtual, phenomenon of an inherent elusiveness of meaning that rests ultimately on nothing but itself, a spectral remnant of an origin that never was, haunting language and life eternally with its false simulacrum of memory? And does the paradoxical crossing between language and world that accomplishes fundamental nominations and thus constitutes meaning ever, *in fact*, take place? Where and how, for what reasons and according to what measure? Without necessarily answering the question of the reality of paradox in the affirmative, it seems that we cannot simply answer it in the negative either. That is, if the Wittgensteinian critique of technique and practice ceaselessly diagnoses the paradoxical crossing of language and the world that occurs in self-reference as illusion, it should also not escape our attention that we routinely count this illusion as among the *constitutive bases* of human life and practice. If an illusion it is, it is an illusion that we live by, and its appearance – be it real or virtual, rational or spectral – is the image and vision of meaning itself as we meet with it in our ordinary and ongoing reflection on our lives. We will live with this illusion, so it seems, as long as we are fated to experience the phenomenon of language, ambiguously, both as infinite sense and the always finite syntax of a determinate symbolism, as long as we are constrained to experience the living spirit of meaning as always already fallen into the dead letter.

If we indeed have here to deal, as the dispute between Wittgenstein and Badiou tends in multiple ways to suggest, with the very question of how (where, when, and *whether*) the “rational force” of language creates and constrains the categories in terms of which we give meaning to the world and our lives, this question of the actual taking-place of a problematic crossing between language and the world will indeed determine the entire possibility of the *position* of the sovereign power of linguistic authority to pass judgment on what is, or of its critical or deconstructive *deposition* at the point of the nullity of its power over life. For if Wittgenstein's critical philosophy of language and Badiou's decisionism of ontological mathematics seem in a certain respect to mirror each other, each calling the other into question at the paradoxical point of an infinity whose assurance as positive being is itself very much at issue between them, they are nevertheless both, as such, instances of what we might describe as “reflection on the consequences of formalism.” And it is, hence, not unreasonable to suspect that we may find grounds for understanding better what is at stake in this massive divergence of means, methods, styles and results (if

not a resolution of it) by considering once more the very stakes and implications of a formal reflection on formalism itself.