

## Chapter 8:

### Badiou versus Paradoxico-Criticism

As we have seen, the difference between Badiou's generic orientation and the paradoxico-critical orientation of Lacan, Wittgenstein, Agamben, Deleuze, and Derrida, is a real and profound one. Though both have it in common that they traverse the radical paradoxes of self-belonging and totality that twentieth century formal thought witnesses, they differ fundamentally in how they resolve the essential split that these paradoxes introduce within the traditional "One-All." As this split takes place formally at the very point of the reflexive moment of self-designation or auto-nomination, the moment of the positing and force of names and laws, the difference here has profound consequences as well for the ancient problem of the nomothesis, which Plato took up in the *Cratylus* (see chapter 1, above). As we have seen, for Badiou in *Being and Event*, the occurrence of an event 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. This picture is somewhat complicated by *Logics of Worlds'* more complex topography of "indexing," but linguistic reflexivity still plays a key role. The nomothesis, or the self-positing of rules and names, is thus invested, in Badiou's generic orientation, with the profound power of novelty, the very possibility of the creation or summoning of the new.

For Wittgenstein, by contrast:

Naming is not yet a move in a language-game – any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. One may say: with the mere naming of a thing, *nothing* has yet been done. Nor has it a name except in a game. This was what Frege meant too when he said that a word has a meaning only in the context of a sentence.<sup>1</sup>

In thus referring to Frege's famous invocation of the problematic value of context as the horizon for the meaningfulness and effectiveness of all names and nomination, Wittgenstein is *not* denying that the institution of standards poses the deepest conceptual problems for a philosophical reflection that aims to clarify the ground of this force in its determination of the occasions of a life.<sup>2</sup> He is, rather, gesturing to the paradoxical way in which the institution of a standard determines the closure of a linguistic *praxis*, henceforth consigned to the iterability of the sign and the force of laws. For the paradoxico-critic, as we

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<sup>1</sup> *PI* 49.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the context principle, in relation to the founding motives of the analytic tradition's critical inquiry into language, see Livingston (2008), chapter 2.

have seen, it is not the institution of the new standard or the positing of a new existent that provides hope – the only hope that there is – for escape from the “entanglement in our rules” that we experience at each moment of the determination of life by its regular forms. It is, rather, the clarificatory and critical *diagnosis* of this entanglement that provides the key to the possibility of a knowledge and praxis *diagonal* to this determination, a radically immanent life subtracted from rules and their force.

It is to the further analysis of this difference, on specific points, that we now turn.<sup>3</sup>

### **Badiou *contra* Deleuze**

As we saw above, Deleuze’s entire understanding of the nature of being and becoming is 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, neither individual or universal. 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 the 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 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.”

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<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, the aim is simply to contrast the paradoxico-critical and generic orientations on a series of related points. I do not make any argument for the superior value or utility of either orientation, here. In the next chapter, by contrast, I consider, and criticize, Badiou’s orientation from a *paradoxico-critical point of view* (though even there I do not argue that the paradoxico-critical orientation is *inherently* superior, but only that it is better suited for *certain* tasks and needs).

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. This structure is shown by the kind of “incorporeal” causality characteristic of 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>4</sup>

As distinct from the corporeal 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.<sup>5</sup> Through this doubled causality, a causality not of objects or bodies but of the opening of paths and differences, sense is donated to language and objects as well as ordinary propositional meaning are constituted.

However, at the same time as sense-events in this way underlie and condition the structure of “meaningful” 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 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 the 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. By contrast with the “ordinary games” which, employing a set of determinate rules that preexist the playing, which “apportion chance” in the sense that they determine what happens given certain, well defined events or outcomes, Deleuze, again drawing on Carroll, points to certain “ideal games” (such as the Queen’s croquet game in which mallets, and even loops displace themselves endlessly into different positions and varying forms) in which move and rule are one and the same and chance is not apportioned but rather affirmed at each instant.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *LofS*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> *LofS*, p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> *LofS*, p. 60. There is probably an instructive comparison to be drawn here with Wittgenstein’s own critical consideration of the relationship between rules and the unity (or lack thereof) of what are called “games” in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

It is through these “ideal games” that we can again perceive the character of originary, paradoxical sense in its definitive link to the singularity of the event. For here 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 has the structure of the sense-event as such, involves a complete affirmation of chance, unlimited by any external assumption of regularity or order.

In 1997, Badiou published a short book on Deleuze that develops from 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>7</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>8</sup> Without a doubt, the most suggestive and provocative claim of the analysis 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?’ ...

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

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<sup>7</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 3. The only published discussion of Badiou by Deleuze is a brief (two 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 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).

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' ...<sup>9</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>10</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>11</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 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.”

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 into 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

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<sup>9</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Badiou (1997), p 8.

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

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-Cantorian "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.

On Badiou's own telling, the most fundamental divergence between himself and Deleuze occurs at *exactly* at the point of Deleuze's own decision for the totality of the One or All:

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>12</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 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

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<sup>12</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 3.

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>13</sup> Given this imperative – which is equivalent to posing the question of the *production* of sense – the structuralist operation then consists, according to Badiou, 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 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>14</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.”<sup>15</sup> 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

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<sup>13</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 36

<sup>14</sup> Badiou (1997), pp. 37-38.

<sup>15</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 38.

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>16</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 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*, Mallarmé's "true throw of the dice."

As we saw above, this "cast of the dice" captures, for Deleuze, the structure of the "sense-event," which is for Deleuze, 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 affirmation of "minor games" and the ubiquity of chance without distribution, as well as for his thinking of the Nietzschean eternal return 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,

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<sup>16</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 40.

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...

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>17</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>18</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>19</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:

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<sup>17</sup> Badiou (1997), pp. 75-76.

<sup>18</sup> *LofW*, p. 385.

<sup>19</sup> Badiou (1997), pp. 26-27.

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>20</sup>

According to Badiou, then, the issue between him and Deleuze is not that of "Platonism versus its reversal or 'overturning'" 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, what Badiou in fact calls, in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, a "Platonism of the multiple."<sup>21</sup> 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" – 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 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 its affirmation of the inherent 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 between the generic and the paradoxico-critical orientations (last chapter) a few more, concerning the very status of the discontinuous event and the being of the Idea itself. Whereas, for Badiou, events are 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

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<sup>20</sup> Badiou (1997), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Badiou (1989), p. 103.

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 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.”

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). This difference is again directly connected to the question of the One itself. The connection is clear in Badiou’s statement in “The Event as Trans-Being” 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?<sup>22</sup>

Again, the divergence that Badiou here marks as articulating the “guiding question of all contemporary philosophy” is connected fundamentally to the role and status of language. Thus, Deleuze “fashions what is to my [i.e. Badiou's] mind 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>23</sup> For Badiou, on the other hand, the event “does not 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

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<sup>22</sup> Badiou (2004a), p. 101.

<sup>23</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.

heterogeneity and difference, which Badiou vehemently – *and admirably, on the current reading* -- aims to refute in the 1997 book.<sup>24</sup>

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 rightly says, “would have laughed up his sleeve about all this pathos.”<sup>25</sup> *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>26</sup>

Once again, we have in this passage an exemplary comparison 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

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<sup>24</sup> We can thus agree wholeheartedly with the upshot of Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of Deleuze in (Žižek 2004a), according to which the usual reception of Deleuze as the philosopher of “the spontaneous, nonhierarchical, living multitude opposing the oppressive, reified System” ((Žižek 2004a) p. 32), which is drawn mostly from his works co-authored with Guattari, in fact obscures a very different politics in Deleuze, one that we can discern only by tracing through the implications of the deeply held and definitive structuralism of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* (p. 82, p. 92). For a prominent example of the received reading which Žižek opposes, see Hardt and Negri (2004).

<sup>25</sup> *LofW*, p. 387.

<sup>26</sup> *LofW*, p. 387.

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* providing the theoretical elements needed for a rigorous distinction of the two.

### **Badiou *contra* Derrida**

If many of the most productive methods of twentieth-century philosophical inquiry amount to the practice of essentially reflective forms of critique, it is clearly an essential precondition of their contemporary continuance and inheritance that the formal underpinnings of this practice be clearly understood. In fact, as I have suggested, 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 *non-limitative* (and hence *non-criteriological*) 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 under the heading of constructivism. 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.

Deconstruction, as we saw above, 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. Here, though, the relevance of language to philosophy is not only its yield in “destabilizing” limits or overturning “binaries,” but much more that philosophy can be a form of critical linguistic self-reflection in which thought calls before itself the criteria of its own linguistic usage to reflect on the possibilities of its own expression. Thus, as we saw in chapter 4, deconstruction traces the indiscernible, not in order simply to dismiss it as the nonexistent, but precisely in order to trace its paradoxical appearance at the limit of the system that it makes possible by disappearing *within* it. And it introduces what Derrida has called the undecidable, not at all in order to reduce it to the contingent limits of a specific language or practice, but rather 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 last decade, a relative silence.<sup>27</sup> 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 the months after Derrida's death in 2004, Badiou has ventured to clarify the relation of his own project to Derrida's.<sup>28</sup> In *Logics of Worlds*, as we have seen, Badiou supplements 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>29</sup>

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;" and in the very next note, written this time after Derrida's death,

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<sup>27</sup> There is, however, a document of some earlier disputes between Badiou and Derrida in the proceedings of a 1990 colloquium called *Lacan avec les Philosophes* (Michel 1991).

<sup>28</sup> The eulogy was given at Birkbeck College, University of London, in 2005, and later at the University of California, Irvine. It is collected in the volume *Adieu Derrida* (Douzinas (2005)) as well as, in a shorter and somewhat different form, in Badiou's book *Pocket Pantheon* (Badiou (2008a)).

<sup>29</sup> *LofW*, p. 545.

he summarizes this homage as a reading of deconstruction “under [the] emblem: the passion of Inexistence.”<sup>30</sup>

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, 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 very much 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, the sensible and the intelligible, or 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 resembles a deconstructive reading of the history and closure of metaphysics.

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<sup>30</sup> *LofW*, pp. 545-46.

From an early stage in Derrida's presentation of it, deconstruction involves as well, at a basic level, a consideration of the discontinuous "event" which disrupts structures and reorganizes their principles. As early as 1966, in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida invoked (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>31</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 ... 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>32</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>33</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>31</sup> Derrida (1966), p. 278.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida (1966), p. 280.

<sup>33</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>34</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>35</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>34</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>35</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 trace the paradoxical boundaries of the infinite text of a metaphysics that is without an outside, to invoke the radically new.

### **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. 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, a language, 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 language and mathematics, and the relationship between the two; and second because he does so from the perspective of a philosophical sensibility which is so clearly and deeply opposite to Badiou’s.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it can seem that

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<sup>36</sup> To indicate one aspect of this contrast of sensibilities, it suffices to contrast two remarks made by the two philosophers in the prefaces to their respective “masterpieces,” *Being and Event* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. First Badiou, in the new English preface written for the translation of *Being and Event* in 2005:

Soon it will have been twenty years since I published this book in France. At that moment I was quite aware of having written a ‘great’ book of philosophy. I felt that I had actually achieved what I had set out to do. Not without pride, I thought that I had inscribed my name in the history of philosophy, and in particular, in the history of those philosophical systems which are the subject of interpretations and commentaries throughout the centuries. (p. xi).

Contrast the final remarks of Wittgenstein’s preface, written in January, 1945:

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 bear 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 6, 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 looks to it to describe, in a privileged way, the metaphysical structures of possibility and necessity in themselves. For Badiou on the other hand, 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.

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 de Wittgenstein”<sup>37</sup> and in 1994 he published an article entitled “Silence, solipsism, saintete. L’antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein .”<sup>38</sup> There are scattered references to Wittgenstein in *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds*, and the short article “Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism,” and in 2009 the volume *L’antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein* appeared, comprising a long piece on Wittgenstein deriving from the 1993-94 course, and a much shorter

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For more than one reason, what I publish here will have points of contact with what other people are writing today. – If my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine, then I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property.

I make them public with misgivings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in it is poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another – but, of course, it is not likely.

I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.

I should have liked to produce a good book. It has not turned out that way, but the time is past in which I could improve it. (p. 4)

<sup>37</sup> Badiou (1994a).

<sup>38</sup> Badiou (1994b).

article “Les Langues de Wittgenstein,” first published in 1999 in the review *Rue Descartes*.<sup>39</sup> 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 (according to Badiou) 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>40</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>41</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.

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. Nevertheless, as much as we might regret this lack of engagement with the later Wittgenstein, we can still learn something important about the options open to contemporary thought by considering Badiou’s sustained engagement with the *early* Wittgenstein, which he consistently

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<sup>39</sup> Badiou (2009).

<sup>40</sup> *LofW*, p. 540.

<sup>41</sup> *LofW*, p. 541.

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*).<sup>42</sup> 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 to 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>43</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 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

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<sup>42</sup> For some of the results of reading Lacan as an “anti-philosopher” see Badiou (1992), chapter 14.

<sup>43</sup> Bruno Bosteels has given a very clear description of the characteristics of the anti-philosopher, according to Badiou:

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).

“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 on Wittgenstein, 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) to diagnose critically “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>44</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 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>45</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”

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<sup>44</sup> Badiou here passes completely over the distinction between an *act* and an *activity*, which may in fact be 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.

<sup>45</sup> Badiou (1994a), 1<sup>st</sup> cours, sect. 5c.

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>46</sup>

There are certainly good textual grounds on which this particular interpretation of what is involved in the early Wittgenstein’s interlinked conception of philosophy, mysticism, and silence might 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 recently 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>47</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 attempting 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 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

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<sup>46</sup> Badiou, (1994a), 5<sup>th</sup> cours, sect. 4.

<sup>47</sup> For the “resolute” interpretation, see above, footnote – to chapter 5. “And if Wittgenstein can speak of the unspeakable, even metaphorically or with contradiction, it is ultimately because there is not one but two registers of existence; otherwise there would be no sense in speaking of limits of worlds. You see that mentioning the limits of the world makes sense only if there is, if I may say, a non-mundane existence, whatever it is impossible to talk about. But there must be a non-worldly [existence] for it 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).

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>48</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>49</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, according to Lacan, 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 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>50</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

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<sup>48</sup> Lacan (1970)

<sup>49</sup> Lacan (1970), p. 63.

<sup>50</sup> Lacan (1970), p. 61.

respond. That “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.<sup>51</sup> 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 it is 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 of these passages, 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, 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 these linked questions of the status of metalanguage and the specific relationship of meaning and sense? In the 1993-94 lectures, 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

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<sup>51</sup> Lacan (1970), p. 61.

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 anti-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>52</sup>

In fact, despite Badiou’s 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>53</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:

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<sup>52</sup> Badiou (1994a), 5<sup>th</sup> course, section 4.

<sup>53</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).

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 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>54</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>55</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 appearance upon being, at the basis of every eventual site, that we have discussed above.

In the 1993-94 lectures, 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>56</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,

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<sup>54</sup> *LofW*, p. 301.

<sup>55</sup> *LofW*, p. 358.

<sup>56</sup> *TLP* 5.526; 6.124.

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:

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>57</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 the objects of 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. At this moment of designation – for instance Saint-Just’s declaration “the Revolution is

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<sup>57</sup> Badiou (1994a), 8<sup>th</sup> cours, section 3b.

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, although its structural role is now somewhat more complicated, remains essential to the possibility of anything like an event. Here, Badiou replaces what was essentially, in *Being and Event*, a nomothesis of names with one of laws, but the auto-nominating moment whereby an event is caught up in its own legislative power remains essential. In the transition from the *Tractatus* to the later work, Wittgenstein, by contrast, comes to see the nomothesis as the site of a radical and pervasive paradox. This is not so much (any longer) the paradox of the *origin* of rules and names, which Badiou here appears to ascribe to an irreducible “poetic” dimension of language, but rather the paradox of the force and application of rules in the everyday use of language.

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 says, and indeed that much more is involved in his quarrel with Wittgenstein than simply the question of a “pro” or “con” attitude to 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 capacity of mathematics to manifest thought. This rejection is, according to Badiou, summarized in the *Tractatus*’ claim that “a proposition of mathematics does not express a thought;”<sup>58</sup> Badiou says in *Briefings on Existence* that he will “never finish up with refuting” it in his insistence that, to the contrary, “Mathematics is a thought.” In the context of the *Tractatus*, the claim is in fact a consequence of the position that mathematical propositions, being reducible to logical tautologies, are empty of empirical content and so say nothing.<sup>59</sup> It is thus not in fact clear that the claim, in context, has, as Badiou holds, the consequence of denying the power of thought to mathematics; and it is thus, at the very least, misleading that just after quoting the *Tractatus* claim, Badiou presents it quite incongruously as the expression of a “major overall thesis of empiricism and

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<sup>58</sup> *TLP* 6.21.

<sup>59</sup> Badiou (1998b), p. 94; cf. *TLP* 5.43 and 6.1-6.2.

sophistry.”<sup>60</sup> However this may be, later on, for instance in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein will indeed maintain steadfastly this reluctance 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 of “thoughts” as exclusively propositional or sentential in structure.

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>61</sup> As representatives of the “grand style,” Badiou marshals quotations from Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and Lautreamont. 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. Badiou quotes as an example of this “trite pragmatism” a remark from *RFM* which Anscombe translates as follows:

I should like to ask something like: “Is its 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>62</sup>

In context, Wittgenstein’s point is clearly *not* to affirm pragmatism or to claim that our calculations must be judged by a standard of usefulness. Importantly, the point 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>63</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.

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<sup>60</sup> Badiou (1998b), p. 94;

<sup>61</sup> Badiou (2004b), p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> *RFM*, III-81. The remark is quoted out of context and appears to be mistranslated in Badiou’s article (Badiou (2004b), p. 15), although since the article was itself translated into English from Badiou’s unpublished manuscript, it is impossible to tell whether Badiou himself or his translator is to blame for this.

<sup>63</sup> This is the crux of Wittgenstein’s dispute with Turing in the 1939 lectures; see chapter 6, above.

As we saw above (chapter 6), 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. 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. 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 impossible, but also seek the roots of the 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 (chapter 1), 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 at 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>64</sup>

Instead, 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>65</sup> This is not, as I have argued, 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>66</sup>

For Badiou, by stark contrast, there is no interesting problem of the relation of language to life or of the role within it of what we reflectively grasp as techniques and rules. 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>67</sup> For any such treatment again misses, according to Badiou, the way that mathematics captures in thought all that is sayable about Being itself:

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.

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<sup>64</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>65</sup> *PI* 111.

<sup>66</sup> *PI* 373, 371.

<sup>67</sup> Badiou (1998a).

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>68</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, or why this thought of mathematics as a technique must be taken to *exclude* the possibility that it is also an exemplary domain of formal and even ontological thought. 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 does not in fact do so. What *is* true is that for Wittgenstein, the interest of this critical reflection on the meaning, force and application of “mathematical” rules derives largely 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 tend to play a role in, and even determine, our human self-conception. The Platonistic elevation of “mathematical objects” into superlatives, in which the metaphors 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. This is the question of the way in which what may seem 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 (infinite) 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.

Such a resolution does not depend, according to Wittgenstein, 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.<sup>69</sup> 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:

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<sup>68</sup> Badiou (1998a), pp. 47-48.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *PI* 124, 133.

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).