

GIVING FORM TO ITS OWN EXISTENCE: ANXIETY AND THE SUBJECT OF TRUTH

Sam Gillespie

For anyone willing to accept the two primary theses of *Being and Event*—that mathematics is ontology, and that there is an inconsistency that cannot be exhausted by presentation—a number of questions immediately follow. To accept that mathematics is ontology may prove useful for one particular set of problems (for example, finding the most adequate means of understanding multiplicity), but this only opens the door to a whole series of other problems. To give only the most general and obvious example, there is an uncertainty surrounding the particular relation between mathematical being (inconsistent multiplicity) and its manifestation in particular situations. Badiou maintains that the relations between a situation and its latent being are purely subtractive insofar as presentation is an operation that presents particular beings *as multiples* and not multiplicity as such. What we are left with, then, is not so much a relation that follows from the inherent limitations of either presentation or language (however limited they may in fact be), but rather an axiomatic presupposition that the nothingness that escapes presentation is an inaugural existence. Being, in other words, is not inferred from presentation, but axiomatized.¹ And as Deleuze has shown in his reading of Spinoza, axioms can just as readily generate positive manifestations (or expressions) of being.² This creates problems if Badiou wishes to create an effective connection between axiomatized being and its manifestation in situations (through presentation or forcing).

The difficulty of an axiomatization raises a set of particularly puzzling questions

1. The axiomatization of being, while itself being an axiomatization of nothing, nonetheless inaugurates certain properties (say, of multiplicity or equality) which can produce decisive effects in situations. This is nowhere more true than in politics as a truth procedure for Badiou. The Lacanian, Joan Copjec, extends from Badiou's need for an axiomatic in her recent writing. 'One must start from the notion of infinity because it is impossible to introduce it by the path of the finite. And one must begin with an axiom of equality rather than foolishly trying to bring it into being through some Other who would recognize and validate individual pleasures'. One could, in a Badiouian move, substitute Copjec's 'pleasures' with 'interest'. See Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002, p. 175.

2. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York, Zone Books, 1991.

concerning why Badiou confers existence onto nothing (a supposition that, for Cunningham, is the acme of nihilism³). Furthermore, it also overlooks any inquiry into the particular process that informs the manifestation of being-qua-being in possible or particular situations. Of course, when this is posed as a problem, what is overlooked is the fact that Badiou accords an extreme importance to the operations of both presentation (the count) and representation as the means by which particular situations and worlds are formed. The difficulty, however, is that for Badiou, presentation is not a direct presentation of being-qua-being; it is rather a constitution of a situation from which being-qua-being is subtracted. And with respect to the fact that presentation is simply the operation of the count as one, Badiou maintains that the one does not exist at all: it is purely the result of an operation. What this assumes is that only sets have an existential validity—operations don't. As a theory, this hardly seems consistent with John Van Neumann's belief that an axiomatic set theory can depart from the existence of functions alone—the existence of sets will follow from them.⁴

My aim here is not to argue for an ontological principle of unity in Badiou but to ask why the operation of the count, the material support of number, has any less ontological validity than the existence of the void? The operations of thought, for example, are certainly capable of producing thoughts that together constitute a multiplicity, but this is very different from positing thought as something that is irreducibly infinite. In the process of the constitution of thought, singular thoughts come first. It becomes difficult, furthermore, to separate an ontological theory of multiplicity from any unifying principle of presentation if we interrogate the status of the term inconsistency. In a strict set-theoretical sense, nothing is inconsistent in and of itself: something is inconsistent only insofar as it cannot follow a principle of well-ordering which departs from a principle of presentation and ordering under the count as one. From this perspective, it is difficult to then grant multiplicity an ontological primacy over and against the one. My basic starting point for the following will be that the situation, the subject and the event are categories of experience that depend upon a theorization of the one as much as they do upon any notion of transfinite infinity. Badiou's displacement of a theory of the one runs the risk of contempt of those domains of experience on which his philosophy ultimately depends.

What is missing is thus an account, on the one hand, of the process through which possible situations or possible worlds are formed, as well as the various categories that are transitive to both ontology and the situation itself, on the other. This is not to say that mathematics does not provide an adequate foundation for ontology, and by extension, a philosophical system. It is rather that something is required in addition to that frame-

3. Cunningham has written that Badiou's philosophy is an attempt 'to have the nothing as something; to be without being'. See Conor Cunningham, *A Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 243.

4. '[...] it is formally simpler to base the notion of set on that of function than conversely'. John Von Neumann, 'An Axiomatization of Set Theory', in Jean Van Heijenoort (ed.), *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 393-413, p. 396.

work that can come to constitute situations, subjects and events. Badiou's mathematical formalism, which is perfectly capable of weaving complex multiplicities and rules out of nothing, is simply an empty game of manipulating symbols. The problem is not simply that of giving the operation of presentation the same ontological validity as sets; rather, what is needed is an analysis of why being must depend upon presentation as its material support, and what sort of framework may be necessary for such a dependency. One can put this more simply: in talking about material objects (a chair, say), one would not say that it is a presentation of a chair—it is a chair. Presentation, that is, is not a direct presentation of the inconsistency of being, but rather the material instantiation of being. This holds even for a number, for which there is no ontic/ontological doubling between the being and its Being. In other words, being-qua-being is nothing apart from its material instantiation, and this nothing then becomes the rudimentary means through which being can be mathematically ordered by set theory. Even the number zero is not a direct presentation of nothing, but a mark of that nothing that enables it to become ordered as multiplicity. This is where Badiou's reader enters a quandary: if there is an excess of inconsistency which is, in itself, nothing, can it become manifest over and above presentation? This, I believe, is where Badiou was led to posit his theory of the event. The only direct presentation there could be is the event, which is simply the eruption of nothing into the situation. The pressing question, then, is how nothing comes to announce itself.

If we are to make any kind of move from ontology to particular situations, or from truth procedures to particular truths, then various questions that concern the status of particular situations, or particular truths and the effects that ensue from them inevitably follow. In his small but important book *Ethics*, Badiou observed that a generalized ethics (of human rights or life, for example) 'equates man with a simple mortal animal, it is the symptom of a disturbing conservatism, and—because of its abstract, statistical generality—it prevents us from thinking the singularity of situations'.⁵ The statement is startling, not least because it foregrounds a weakness in Badiou's own thought: no one would argue that set theory, a pure multiplicity of nothing, allows one to think particular situations. In fact, Badiou's precise point is that set theory is purely rational—it is ontology irrespective of any applicability to experience. Nor would one expect the singularity of situations to be the starting point for human action, since the event from which subjective action emanates is, as I understand it, perfectly generalizable and transitive to any situation: the inclusion of the void, in fact, follows not from situations but from a set-theoretical axiomatic. And from this perspective, taking the singularity of situations as a starting point for subjective actions is immediately questionable. As I see it, Badiou devises his own protocol for ethical action by replacing one set of general tropes (life, human rights, respect for others) with a mathematical framework that is resolutely indifferent to the singularity of situations altogether.

This is only one particular manifestation of a very general problem for Badiou. How

5. Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London, Verso, 2001, p. 16.

can a philosophy with minimal foundations that are grounded, in effect, *upon nothing*, account for novelty in any effective sense? Badiou's philosophy may provide a cohesive system that is purely foundational for subjective action and the various truths that result from it, but any kind of criteria for speaking about particular situations or—perhaps more importantly—predicting, in the present, the foreseeable change that results from subjective commitment seems altogether absent from the system outlined in *Being and Event*. What makes Badiou's thought what it is results from the fact that it is independent of experience. Certainly, thinkers such as Kant and Hegel depart from purely formal, if not empty, foundations, but these are altogether different from what Badiou proposes, if these formal foundations can provide the possible conditions of experience (as in Kant) or determination as a procedural operation (as in Hegel). If there is to be a possible movement in Badiou's philosophy beyond the sterility of the system put forth in *Being and Event*, two supplementary trajectories are required.

On the one hand, there needs to be some sort of possible application of the categories of being and truth to the situations that can be thought in a manner other than subtraction. And secondly, there needs to be some possible phenomenology of subjectivity that could serve as a unifying principle to relate the particularity of situations to the various actions and evaluations (which ultimately are purely mathematical) that define subjective engagement. The first approach would lean towards Foucault's various attempts to define and engage with historically specific situations—with the particular problems that certain situations established for themselves as their transcendental, albeit historical, conditions of possibility. And, as for the latter question of subjectivity, it is Lacan who may provide the framework for speaking of a subject's relation to the inconsistent presentation of an event.

As regards the first problem (the specificity of situations), I will put Foucault aside and instead examine a question internal to Badiou's philosophy. I asked whether there is any way of thinking the relation between being and the situation apart from subtraction. This question was certainly not left unanswered by Badiou, given the centrality of the category of the event. The event, insofar as it is not derived from any given term of the situation, is neither a category of presentation or representation. To put it schematically, it is an unpresentation. The status of this unpresentation rests upon a problematic circularity, since events are events insofar as they are named and put into play in situations, which seems to be the exact same operation that informs presentation. Presentation presents, and this is constitutive of situations, while the naming of events is what is constitutive of truth procedures, but in both cases what is presented or named is purely nothing: what presentation presents is neither more nor less inconsistent than the events that are named. Being, in this instance, is univocal. But this leaves us with a problem. The only manner in which we can distinguish the appearance of inconsistent multiplicity (qua presentation and representation) from the appearance of inconsistent multiplicity (qua event) is through a rather crude recourse to experience. That is, we can assume that presented multiples are more or less recognized by everyone (given a proper paradigmatic framework), whereas events are presented or seen only by those subjects

who declare it and recognize it as such. The distinction, then, hinges upon the ability of a select number of human beings to recognize events.

I emphasize this as a problem not simply because it necessarily falls back upon a purely empirical account for distinguishing presentation from events. What I find surprising is the fact that Badiou does not appear to think that the conditions under which events occur require any other foundation than naming and recognition as such. The problem with this is that it is tautological: subjects constitute events at the same time that subjects are miraculously constituted by the naming and recognition of events.⁶

Given that events and subjects are coextensive with one another (insofar as it is impossible to have events without subjects or subjects without events), it is difficult to find a third term to account for their coextensive relation, which is why Badiou grounds the possibilities for each in the possible disjunction between presented multiples and the representative practices of the state: those singular multiples that events name. ‘The fundamental ontological characteristic of the event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event.’⁷

Here Badiou seems to refer the term ‘void’ to something that is situated. This is very different from the inherent inconsistency of a situation’s latent being that is subtracted from presentation. To be subtracted is to not be situated at all. But the question is what the situated void is, if it is neither a presented multiple among others, subtracted being, nor the event itself (insofar as the event is what inscribes the situated void)? As previously stated, singular multiples are presented but not represented—they provide the site for events at an ontological level. But at the same time, there seems to be the event itself, which names not simply that void, but the *subjective conditions* under which that void will be taken up in a truth procedure. To establish the event both as the inconsistency of the situation and a part of the situation itself, Badiou is forced to divide the event in two: part of it is directed towards that situated void, and part is directed towards that aspect of the event that escapes the situation. If exclusive emphasis is placed on the former part of the event, then it simply becomes another version of the state: it is simply a non-statist way of counting indiscernible elements. In order to avoid doubling the event with the state, another part of the event is needed which exceeds the situation, and in so doing, calls upon nothing other than itself for its own validity. It is this part of the event that instigates subjective action. The event now supplements the situation and it is this, rather than presented or unrepresented multiples, that is the true catalyst for subjective action or fidelity. Such principles, along with the definitions of the subject and the event, are supplementary to the rather closed connection between ontology and truth, as Badiou is well aware insofar as he believes that, beyond the static presentation of multiplicity set theory makes available, something must happen in order for there to be a transformation, in order for there to be truth. In ontology, I would argue, nothing happens; things

6. ‘[. . .] only an interpreting intervention can declare that an event is present in the situation; as the arrival in being of non-being, the arrival amidst the visible of the invisible’, Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London, Continuum, 2005, p. 181.

7. Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 69.

simply are.

By focusing on the set theoretical foundations of Badiou's philosophy, one overlooks the fact that events emerge in an unpredictable manner, and thus require a possible framework outside ontology to explain how they happen. This is not to say of course that events are not engaged with unknown multiplicities that have their grounding in a mathematical ontology: it is to say, rather, that events and their subjects are what force the plastic univocity of being to assume new or unforeseeable trajectories, new truths and modalities of existence. This, at bottom, is novelty in Badiou. But in order to effect a possible movement from ontology to truth, Badiou's system must add an additional step that is extrinsic to ontology. Notably, when Badiou speaks of something that happens, his terms reveal an uncharacteristic display of sentiment. In a personal quote in reference to the events of May of 1968 in Paris, for example, he stated that: 'for what was taking place, yes, we were the genuine actors, but actors absolutely seized by what was happening to them, as by something extraordinary, something properly incalculable.'⁸

What is initially so striking about this quote (and others like it that one finds periodically in Badiou) is that it makes recourse to personal experiences that are otherwise entirely absent in Badiou's philosophy. In particular, here Badiou seems to be appealing to categories of affect that presuppose a subject of experience who is gripped or seized by something incalculable, who becomes a catalyst for all possible action. What seems to be potentially overlooked, then, within the overall sterile, formal framework of the ontology of *Being and Event* is any possible theory of affect that could account for that very act of gripping the subject. This absence is telling when it comes to addressing the manner in which subjects are gripped by events.

If this objection seems to imply a reproach that is entirely at odds with what makes Badiou's philosophy what it is (a minimalist metaphysics), consider the following two points. First, it seems necessary to fall back upon some category of affect if we are to account for the processes through which subjects and events mutually enable one another.⁹ That is, there may need to be something of a necessary engagement with the possible conditions that seize and grip subjects in the constitution of events, and which may define a political mode of subjectivity. I would be arguing here for fidelity as a certain drive that propels a subject forward in the pursuit of truths.

The second consideration is even more ambitious. In Badiou's thought, there are four conditions under which truth can occur, art being one among others. It seems, however, that a classical philosophical engagement with art is impossible in Badiou's system—there is no possibility for aesthetics for Badiou. Given that the mathematization of ontology entirely strips being of any notion of affect, and given that it is precisely affect or sensation that aesthetics studies, the only possibility for a philosophical engagement with art in Badiou's philosophy is through *inaesthetics*—that is, the means through which philosophy can oversee the possible creation of truths in the arts. Art, in other words,

8. Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 124.

9. As Hardt and Negri observe, this could be part of a wider politics of accounting for affect in politics. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.

is one instantiation of the void as truth. Now, this is only one instance of what occurs when Badiou subordinates a possible arena of human action and engagement to the foundations that philosophy sets for it through science. In other words, art is philosophically important only insofar as it is capable of producing truths that are subject to various conditions established by mathematics (and, by extension, science). I have argued elsewhere, by looking at Deleuze, that it is possible to have a theory of novelty that is not necessarily subjected to a criterion of truth.¹⁰ One could say that, despite its concessions to science, Deleuze's philosophy is an aesthetic philosophy through and through. By making a move to Lacan, however, one finds a possible vocabulary for speaking of artistic production that is, on the one hand, compatible with Badiou's overall theory of the new, while nonetheless being independent of the criterion of truth.

To summarize the argument so far. I am claiming that Badiou needs a framework through which one can speak of how subjects are gripped by events. Lacan, I suggest, provides such a conception in his relation of the subject to its indiscernible being, its own real. The catalyst for action (what Badiou calls fidelity) will be found in Lacan's notion of the drive—the means through which subjects create new modalities of relating to, or experiencing, being. And the drive, my argument will go, can also provide a framework for artistic production that thinks action through an impersonalization of being at the same time that it is independent of the category of truth as such.

This move becomes necessary because it strikes me that the condition of art is the most problematic for Badiou's philosophy in terms of the category of truth. There certainly can be various movements in art that establish formal groupings that resemble Paul Cohen's process of constructing a generic set, but it would seem unnecessarily restrictive to subordinate these formal groupings to generic conditions set to it by this addendum to Cantorian set theory. In other words, one is left with a rather brute minimalism to account for what truth can be in artistic practice. For this reason, there can only be inaeconomics in Badiou's philosophy. What a psychoanalytic notion of the drive—and, by extension, sublimation—might entail is a broadening of the protocol that Badiou uses for subjective action (a response to the indiscernibility of being) that is not necessarily confined to truth. Whether or not such an aesthetics can be philosophical is an altogether different question: it may be that such an aesthetics is a properly psychoanalytic affair. All the same, it may be necessary to explore such an option so as to accomplish two things: one, to think the proper framework that determines subjective action and two, to think through the problematic category of art as a truth condition.

THE VOID: SUBJECT OR BEING?

Lacan's influence upon Badiou is evident. One could compile a book length study on the subject, but perhaps it is more useful here to take the primary differences between the two as our point of departure. Badiou has been prominent in stating that he

10. Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics*, PhD., University of Warwick, Warwick, 2004.

proposes a different ‘localization’ of the void than Lacan and that, unlike for Lacan, being for Badiou is separate from the real. The implication of this is that philosophy and psychoanalysis presuppose different points of departure: one departs from being as a foundation, while the other starts with the position of a subject immersed in language. The question that immediately arises, then, is whether the void is localized in being, for which it is an ontological category, or is it the place from which the subject speaks?

If Lacan aligns himself with the latter position, Badiou unhesitatingly opts for the former. It should be clear that Badiou’s void is ‘inhuman and asubjective’, whereas for Lacan, on the contrary, the void is the main core of subjectivity. The barred subject, $\$$, is the void that is marked as a subject of lack, a subject alienated from its own being through the mediation of the signifier. The inscription of such a lack (void) in a linguistic chain of signifiers is what makes the subject’s ability to relate to the world through the shifting of signifiers possible.¹¹ The subject that those signifiers represent, however, is nothing but the mark of an excluded existence inside an inert symbolic framework that is necessary for experience. The subject is that void that emerges dead on arrival in the symbolic register.

One can almost immediately take issue with this distinction. From a Lacanian perspective, it is not entirely certain that the subject is simply a void *tout court*. The subject as void exists only insofar as it is marked and designated by the signifier, and not as some sort of substantial absence that can be uncovered through a procedural stripping away of material signifiers. The void is always stained or tainted by the signifier that designates the subject as lack. The subject, in such a perspective, is as material as it is empty. Judith Butler, among others, has consistently argued that the Lacanian category of the real depends upon some instantiation of a kernel that resists symbolization, and this is what makes it an ahistorical and oppressive category. She asks: ‘On the one hand, we are to accept that “the Real” means nothing other than the constitutive limit of the subject; yet on the other hand, why is it that any effort to refer to the constitutive limit of the subject in ways that do not use that nomenclature are considered a failure to understand its proper operation?’¹² Butler’s argument extends to argue that conceiving the real as the constitutive limit to the social (which is the place of the subject) amounts to determining the subject as outside the social. This is how Butler qualifies her Hegelianism: the real is simply an empty void of determination. In other words, to use the terms from the Badiou of *Theory of the Subject*, to refer to the subject as void overlooks the fact that lack is more likely the result of a structural law of placement rather than an excess of lack over and above that system. Thus, lack is a thoroughly immanent category.

The crucial point that Butler misses in her argument, however, is that it is precisely the point that the real does not designate something outside the social—it is *nothing* outside language. In other words, Butler’s criticism overlooks the fact that speaking subjects

11. The classically psychoanalytic statement ‘I feel like a motherless child’ is possible on the basis of substituting one signifier, ‘I’, for another, ‘motherless child’.

12. Judith Butler, ‘Competing Universalities’, in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London, Verso, 2000, pp. 136–81, p. 152.

designate their own real in and through the materiality of language and the limits it presupposes, not through some determinate process of exclusion. The Lacanian subject is the place of that nothing outside language, just as Badiou's void is the name for the nothing that exceeds particular instantiations of either thought or being. For the Lacanian subject, then, there is nothing outside the history that the signifier induces and the place of this nothing is the void of the subject. The void of the subject is not something that exists outside the symbolic chain. Rather, the unique position of the subject extends from the fact that there is *nothing* outside the symbolic chain. This is what makes the Lacanian subject a structurally determinate category: the impasses that render the closure of the symbolic impossible would result in a failure to determine the symbolic as a structured system were it not for the fact that a speaking subject fills that empty place of indetermination. In other words, the failure of the symbolic to inscribe itself as a closed totality is constitutive of the failure of the subject to be fully present to itself through the medium of speech.

This has, I believe, direct implications for Badiou's theory of the subject. For it asks how is it that a subject can be propelled to act through something that is manifest only through negation? Whether that negation designates the place of the subject or the place of being is a moot point: the fact of the matter is that it is a question of a determinate nothing. To interrogate the relation between the two thinkers, it will be necessary to retrace certain steps in Badiou's thought. We could start with a primary text of Lacan's theory of the subject. In his seminal essay 'Suture', Lacan's disciple Jacques-Alain Miller produced a comparative reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis with Frege's logic, which functioned as an implicit critique of the logical assumption that one can have existence without a subject.¹³ Given that Frege founded his thought of numbers upon the exclusion of any psychological subject of reflection, the subject was excluded from Frege's systematic account of the genesis of numbers through a purely logical necessity. This was a simple assertion that the existence of numbers does not depend upon the existence of a subject who thinks them. According to Miller, however, the subject reemerged in his system at that very point where Frege sought to derive an existence through logic alone. In Frege's system, zero was the primary logical number, insofar as it was the only number that could be attributed to a 'purely logical', non-empirical concept. The point, for Miller, is that the assignation of the number zero to the lack of an illogical object is the very relation that defines the subject's relation to the signifying chain. In other words, zero is the marking of the subject as a lacking subject who tries to compensate for its own lack of being through a substitution of one signifier for another (in the same way that the number 1 in Frege marks the number 0 as the number assigned to the concept 'not-equal-to-itself'). What makes Miller's essay more than a simple analogy between Lacan and Frege is that it also aims to be an explicit critique of science itself. Science, which is presumed to exist independently of a subject, must reintroduce a subject in order to sustain the progression of number. We are left to assume, then, that a psycho-

13. Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1977-8, pp. 24-34.

analytic theory of the subject is the very sustenance of a logical (or scientific) system.

In an early essay, 'Marque et manque', Badiou took issue with this very assumption insofar as he remained skeptical that science requires a concept of either a subject or of suture.¹⁴ Given the tenets of Gödel's theorem of incompleteness, there was no need for a logical system to be closed in upon itself in order to function as a consistent system for producing knowledge. Science, that is, did not need closure in order to function. 'Stratified to infinity, regulating its passages, science is a pure space, without an outside or mark, or place of what is excluded.'¹⁵ This position entails that if there is no need to mark what is excluded from a scientific order—insofar as in science 'the not-substitutable-with itself is foreclosed with neither recourse or mark'¹⁶—then there is no subject of science. This is, of course, in striking contrast to the position he would develop in *Being and Event* where subjects only exist in and through truth procedures, of which science is one part. But this does not mean that Badiou saw suture as a useless category: it founded a subject's relation to ideology. Departing from a classically Althusserian distinction between science and ideology, Badiou puts forth the theory that psychoanalysis has nothing to say about science, and that this is the negative determination of the desire that is operative in ideology. The negative determination of desire in psychoanalysis is a direct effect of the impossibility of giving a distinctly scientific account of the structural relations that make that desire possible. That is, the psychoanalytic definition of desire as lack is a desire for a scientific knowledge that can account for a subject's conditions of possibility at the same time that, at the level of that desire, such an account is strictly speaking impossible. The subject who passes from representation (ideology) into knowledge is a subject that would cease to exist at the moment of its gaining scientific knowledge. What we are left with, then, is the notion of a subject that plays a constitutive role in the 'production' of science as truth, even if that role is itself nothing more than a transitory stage towards the gaining of that knowledge.

The shift from this position (where the subject is an ideological, non-scientific category) to the work of the 1970s (where the subject was a dialectical, political subject) to the current position (where there can be both political and scientific subjects) presupposes a potentially broad set of factors that could have influenced the development of Badiou's work. On the one hand, in 1967 he maintained that if there is no subject of science, it is because science is the proper subject of philosophy. But by the work of the 1970s, science had taken a backseat to politics—both as a subject of philosophy and as a condition for subjectivity altogether. In other words, there are only political subjects.

The shift to a set theoretical ontology in *Being and Event* signaled two changes in Badiou's thinking. There was first the possible coexistence of both political and scientific (as well as artistic and amorous) subjects, at the same time that the void became an exclusively ontological category. It is this second move that firmly distinguishes Badiou from Lacan, such that, by the time of *Being and Event*:

14. Alain Badiou, 'Marque et manque: à propos du zero', *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, vol. 10, 1969, pp. 150-73.

15. Badiou, 'Marque et manque', p. 161.

16. Badiou, 'Marque et manque', p. 157.

The choice here is between a structural recurrence, which thinks the subject-effect of the empty-set, so exposed in the unified network of experience, and a hypothesis of the rarity of the subject, which defers its occurrence to the event, to the intervention, and to the generic paths of fidelity, referring back and founding the void on the suturing of being for which mathematics exclusively commands knowledge.¹⁷

The rarity of the subject is what is put in the service of a mathematical determination of the void as non-subject, at the same time that subjective action is rendered possible through both the intervention of an event, as well as the void of local situations that becomes determinate in and through the forcing of truths. The subject, from such a perspective, is defined through its action. In the Lacanian register, in contrast, Badiou posits the void as the ‘subject-effect of the empty set’, which is nothing other than the purely empty-place of inequality that allows for the movement from one signifier to the next, and for which the subject is the unified condition of possibility. Ostensibly, this severs the subject from any possibility of transformation or change, given that the void that is the subject works exclusively in the interests of a structural system of determination. Aside from language, there is nothing.

The above distinction is made possible on the basis of a single question: what does the void do differently in philosophy than in psychoanalysis? In departing from the above distinction, Badiou concludes that being is distinct from the Lacanian real insofar as the real is only possible on the basis of a subject, while for philosophy, the void *is* independently of a subject. That is, the void is the primary name for an inhuman and asubjective being that precedes any possible advent of subjectivity. Such a position should hardly surprise: it is entirely consistent with the outlined trajectory of *Being and Event*, and it is concomitant with any philosophy that takes ontology as foundational. It would be absurd to make ontology a subjective category given that many non-human, or non-subjective entities have an ontological validity.

If so, why does Badiou bother to have a subject in his philosophy at all? Why did he move from declaring science to be the subject of philosophy to writing a book on the philosophy of the subject? The reason, I believe, depends on the conditions under which something new can occur. For the new to emerge, something needs to disrupt the structural. In order to account for the supplementary means with which subjects and events appear in Badiou, it becomes necessary to appeal to categories that were central to Lacan. To determine the manner in which they inform Badiou’s own position, perhaps more intimately than he realizes, one will have to undo the above distinction that Badiou has drawn between Lacan and himself.

Consider the assumption that the Lacanian subject is a pure void, a barred subject—in short, $\$$. Is it really the case that the subject is nothing other than a void that receives its determination through a linguistic structure that exceeds it, on the one hand, while being nothing but an empty system of structural determination, on the other? This position falls prey to an interpretation of the subject as nothing but its symbolic

17. Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, Paris, Seuil, 1988, p. 451.

designation, given that the lack of the subject is, strictly speaking, nothing at all. This would be no different from a rather crude interpretation of psychoanalysis as a variant of constructivist logic—the subject is insofar as it is constructed in language. Such a perspective fundamentally misinterprets the radical nature of Lacan's definition of subjectivity insofar as it reduces the question of the subject as the foundation for the constitution of meaning (insofar as it is from this position of the subject that meaning is constituted) to a definition of the subject as a determinate effect of meaning (that is, the subject as it is posited in language). Is the emphasis here put upon the materiality of language which, in some variant of behaviorist psychology, comes to determine an identity? Or is it rather the case that the exclusion of being that is essential for language as a closed system exerts an influence upon the meaning that the speaking subject produces? In other words, the lack that sutures the subject to the signifying chain, if it is to be something more than an indeterminate nothing that escapes the grip of language, must play a constitutive role in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The implications of this distinction do not hold exclusively for sorting out the internal coherence of Lacanian psychoanalysis; they are also what found Badiou's entire critique of constructivist mathematical logic—that is, the belief that existence can only be given through the discernibility of language. To counter constructivism is, of course, to maintain that there is an existence that is not exclusively subsumed within the tenets of what can be demonstrated within language. The Lacanian real is one such manifestation of an anti-constructivist tendency, given that it is what remains of being in the aftermath of the failure of meta-language. The real, as a subjective function, is the result of the following paradox. On the one hand, there is no metalanguage—everything is explicitly posited in language; on the other hand, language cannot totalize itself as a closed system for which it can then definitively state that there is nothing outside it.¹⁸

Thus, while one can maintain that the subject is purely a void, that it receives its only material support through the signifier, this is quite different from arguing that the subject is nothing other than a lack conjoined to a signifier. There is an additional something that fills out this gap between the failure of a meta-language and the impossibility of determining language as a closed system (for which the nothing outside language would be truly nothing). This something is Lacan's famous *objet petit (a)*. The object (a) is not subsumed within language, and thus does not exist as one signifier among others. At the same time, however, what makes object (a) what it is results directly from the fact that language fails to subsume the totality of being: the object (a) is the emergence, in the symbolic, of that which remains outside its grasp, a positive determination of the nega-

18. As Joan Copjec has put it: 'Whenever the split between being and appearance is denied, you can bet that one particular inscription is being overlooked: that which marks the very failure of metalanguage. Language speaks voluminously in positive statements, but it also copiously speaks of its own lack of self-sufficiency, its inability to speak the whole unvarnished truth directly and without recourse to further, exegetical speech. Some elision or negation of its powers writes itself in language as the lack of meta-language. This negation is no less an inscription for its not being formulated in a statement, and the being it poses presents no less a claim for our consideration.' Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1994, p. 9.

tive indeterminate. Like Badiou's event, the object (a) is the appearance of something that is anterior to presentation; at the same time, it is subtracted from what is subtracted. It is neither being-qua-being, nor a consistent presentation, but rather a category of the subject.

Lacan's famous formula for the fantasy is the conjoining of a barred subject to its virtual object: $\$ \diamond a$. To the lack in the subject instituted by the signifier corresponds a determination of that lack in the form of a fantasm of presence (say, in a psychoanalytic context, the desire of the analyst). What lies behind that fantasm is precisely nothing, but it is a nothing that gains determinate form in the various desires, repetitions, or sublimations of the psychoanalytic subject that desires presence beyond language. At the risk of making a mere analogy, is this not the very same logic informing Badiou's theory of the event—precisely the fleeting appearance of that which is indiscernible from the position of experience, and which is given determinate form through the activity of a subject? The very problematic status of the event in Badiou hinges upon a paradox: on the one hand, there is an excess of being over presentation; on the other hand, this excess is purely nothing. How can nothing present itself? Precisely insofar as there are events that are given form by those subjects who recognize them. We can only understand the possible correspondence between Badiou's event and Lacan's object (a) if we understand that the former is not a phenomenal event any more than the object (a) is a phenomenal object. Instead, both are what one could call 'supplements' to presentation itself that makes the move from a purely subtractive theory of presentation to a direct determination of the indeterminate possible. That is, the event is what facilitates a movement from a negative ontology (in which the question of inconsistency remains a negative determination of something that is subtracted from presentation) to a positive determination of that subtracted inconsistency qua production of truths. Likewise, in order to move from a purely negative determination of desire (which always hinges upon the immanent failure of some impossible object), the psychoanalytic subject must shift its activity to the drive, where it gives form and determination to the empty ground of its causality in and through the formation of an object (a). A distinctly Lacanian question is, how does the subject give form to its own existence?

One possibility was put forth in Lacan's theory of sublimation. In a rudimentary sense, sublimation is the creation of determinate things in and out of a constitutive lack that is inherent to experience. It emerges out of the constitutive relation of the subject's relation to its own real. In the remainder of this essay, then, I want to examine the potential relations that inhere between Lacan's theory of sublimation and Badiou's theory of truth, while at the same time as looking to Lacan's theory of the drive (which is closely linked to sublimation) for a possible account for the subjective conditions that enable such activity. Doing so will allow me to initially reconsider the supplementary framework that is necessary to account for Badiou's theory of the event, the subject, and fidelity, at the same time as putting us in a position to question the ultimate aims of Badiou's entire project—the knotting of novelty to truth.

Now, in order to adequately assess the possible connections between Lacan's object

(a) and Badiou's event, we have to ask after the ontological status of each. The reason I say 'ontological' is because the event, in and of itself, is not exclusively an ontological category: 'with the event, we have the first *exterior* concept to the field of mathematical ontology'.¹⁹ The event supplements presentation and, by extension, ontology. For example, when considering the French revolution, there are states of affairs that are presented in the situation (to name only a few: the bourgeoisie, Jacobins, the guillotine, the massacres, the storming of the Bastille) which, in and of themselves, are a multiplicity of elements that lack a unifying principle without the name 'French Revolution' that creates of these elements an event from which a political procedure can be derived. The event 'French Revolution' is not one multiple among others (insofar as it is not, in itself, presented among the other multiplicities). It is what unifies these disparate multiplicities under the banner of its occurrence. Or, to put it another way, the event takes these elements and adds something more that exceeds direct presentation. But this something more, insofar as it is not presented, cannot be accounted for as something. Insofar as it escapes presentation, it is ontologically undecidable.

Now, in a parallel trajectory, what exactly is Lacan's object (a) if it is neither an object nor a strictly linguistic designation? How can something be said to exist if it is not articulated in language? Consider one of the most basic examples of an object (a), the breast. It would be a mistake to assume that the object simply is the breast on account of its breast-like properties. That is, the breast is not *in itself* an object of satisfaction. An infant could presumably be just as satisfied with the warm milk it provides, the pleasure it produces when digested in the body, and the satisfaction that is associated with the act of suckling. The breast, as the object (a), however, is what is imputed to give the coupling of bodies and organs the satisfaction that are proper to them: it represents something more than just one subsidiary object among others. It is the object that acts as a support for the satisfaction proper to these objects. The object (a), then, is not the object of satisfaction but that something more that satisfaction aims at. As Alenka Zupančič puts it:

After a need is satisfied, and the subject gets the demanded object, desire continues on its own; it is not 'extinguished' by the satisfaction of a need. The moment the subject attains the object she demands, the *objet petit a* appears, as a marker of that which the subject 'has not got', or *does not have*—and this itself constitutes the '*echte*' object of desire.²⁰

What Lacan's object (a) represents is a surplus satisfaction that language fails to produce. That is, if a psychoanalytic subject enters language, she does so at a price: there is a necessary acceptance that an unmediated relation to one's being falls out of the equation. What is left in its place is the installation of a lack.²¹ This is not to say, however, that

19. Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, p. 205.

20. Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, London, Verso, 2000, p. 18.

21. In Lacan's Seminar VII, which led to his eventual conceptualization of object (a), this constitutive lack, or unnamed being, was called *das Ding*. '*Das Ding* is what I will call the beyond-of-the-signified. It is as a function of this beyond-of-the-signified and of an emotional relationship to it that the subject keeps its distance and is constituted in a kind of relationship characterized by primary affect, prior to any repression.'

this lack is simply left to persist on its own accord: something reemerges to the subject that comes to fill that lack, as it presents itself in the form of an object that embodies the surplus-value of a being anterior to language. Likewise for Badiou, if inconsistent being-qua-being must, by structural necessity, be subtracted from consistent presentation under the law of the count, that subtracted being can nevertheless come to supplement the consistent presentation of a situation in and through the fleeting appearance of an event. Both Badiou's event and Lacan's object (a) are what resist the structural necessity of subtraction of exclusion: they subtract themselves from their initial subtraction as inconsistent being at the same time that their supplementation of a given field provides a unity for disparate phenomena.

One immediate objection presents itself with the above analogy. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is questionable whether the object (a) is in any way a catalyst for action. One could argue that the cause of a subject's desire is a determination of the subject as pure passivity whose desire exists in a negative relation to its posited object. In contrast, Badiou's event calls a subject into being in such a way that its residual effects will hinge upon the action and decisions taken by the subject that retroactively give form to it. The event is determined in and through subjective activity. To make an analogy between Badiou and Lacan is problematic if we lack a means of ascribing an active agency to the Lacanian subject. What possible forms can the object (a) assume that directly result from the activity of the Lacanian subject?

We can start with the rudimentary assumption of Lacan's that the subject's relation to the signifier is a structural relation to emptiness, or lack. The question that emerges from this is one of the possible relations the subject can form with that lack. One obvious example of such a relation would be the avoidance, or repression, of that lack that is constitutive of neurosis. Neurotic subjectivity may in fact have some coincidence with situations in which the void is foreclosed from presentation—in either case, normativity or stability depends upon a foreclosure of the void. But there are other possible relations of the subject to its own lack that presuppose the direct activity of the subject in determining that relation, and thus determining the lack. One such possibility was given in Freud's account of sublimation that was subsequently modified by Lacan. Sublimation is conventionally taken to be the desexualization of libido in and through the production of scientific and artistic objects and knowledge. In contrast, the drive is usually taken to be the realization of primal, destructive impulses. The former would be the cultural purification of the latter. Lacan's radical move is to have united the two terms—drive and sublimation—in the very notion of an object (a): in each case, it is the activity of the subject that gives form to the object as satisfaction. This means that the object is the residual effect of subjective action and not the object that determines a subject's desire.²²

Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, New York, Norton, 1992, p. 54.
 22. Alenka Zupančič has opposed the drive to sublimation as such: 'if the drive is a "headless" procedure, sublimation is not. Sublimation is a kind of "navigator" of the drives, and this is why it plays such an important role in society'. Sublimation can thus lead to productions of determinate modes of that nothing, whereas the drive is simply the expenditure of that nothing—a drive towards nothing. See Alenka

Thus, the sexual activity of bodies could be one possible (perhaps convenient) way of producing modalities of affect (that is, of aiming at a being beyond language), while the production of objects or knowledge in science, religion and art could exemplify other possibilities of giving determinate form to the negative determinations of the real. Science would entail a quest for the complete symbolization or determination of the real—anything that remains unsymbolizable within it would simply imply a limitation in our own knowledge. Religion attempts to fill out this lack through the imposition of a radically transcendent other, while art, it is argued, is the realization of this lack in and through its representation as something. That is, it renders the impossibility of the real possible in and through the medium of representation (a result of the paradox that the real cannot be represented). Art, it would appear, has a unique relation to the real insofar as it neither fully excludes it from experience (as in the case of religion) nor fully incorporates it within knowledge (as in science). And this may have implications for Badiou's theory of art as a truth procedure, given that, for Badiou, truth is determined through mathematics.

Badiou, no less than Lacan, defines art as an instantiation of the void: the artists he designates as exemplary producers of truth can all be noted for their minimalist tendencies: Beckett, Mallarmé, Pessoa, Schoenberg. 'Art is [...] mobilized, not because it has worth in and of itself, or with an imitative and cathartic aim, but to raise the void of Truth up to the point at which dialectical sequential linking is suspended'.²³ This notion of a purification of being is, of course, not altogether dissimilar to the commonplace notion of sublimation in Freud, who saw the sublimation of an instinct or drive as the purification of crude, and potentially destructive, instincts, into higher aims that could be met with social approval.²⁴ It is a telling sign of Freud's conservative, and under-theorized, take on the matter of sublimation that his aesthetics tended, more often than not, to focus on the classical or conventional: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Shakespeare. In 1930, at the time of *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he put forward his theory of the cultural value of arts, the work of Picasso, Lissitzky, Duchamp, and others, was left unmentioned. Freud's theory of sublimation not only ran the risk of subscribing to a conservative sexual morality (an accusation commonly leveled against psychoanalysis regardless); it fell prey, to put it mildly, to a conventional aesthetics that denied art its potential for innovation.

Freud's notion of sublimation, then, was articulated as a function of the superego, insofar as it sought a way for the satisfaction of instincts in means that were subject to

Zupančič, 'The Splendor of Creation: Kant, Lacan, Nietzsche', *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, no. 1, 1999, pp. 35-42, p. 40.

23. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 125.

24. 'A satisfaction of this kind, such as an artist's joy in creating, in giving his phantasies body, or a scientist's in solving problems or discovering truths, has a special quality which we shall certainly one day be able to characterize in metapsychological terms'. Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in Albert Dickson (ed.), *Civilization, Society and Religion*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XII Penguin Freud Library, London, Penguin, 1991, pp. 243-340, p. 267.

cultural approval. Lacan's response, although quite contrary to Freud's, did not lead to a rejection of the notion of sublimation. Sublimation for Lacan did result in the purification of affect, but these emotions were precisely those that were instigated by the cultural demands of the superego—fear and pity. Lacan's theory aims to subvert the very cultural authority that Freud's theory of sublimation put to work. To unravel the possible conflict between the two great psychoanalysts, we will have to consider the initial mockery that Lacan made of Freud's own views. In 1964, Lacan proposed the following Freudian interpretation of sublimation and its correlate in the drive:

In other words—for the moment, I am not fucking, I am talking to you. Well! I can have exactly the same satisfaction as if I were fucking. That's what it means. Indeed, it raises the question of whether in fact I am not fucking at this moment. Between these two terms—drive and satisfaction—there is set up an extreme antinomy that reminds us that the use of the function of the drive has for me no other purpose than to put in question what is meant by satisfaction.²⁵

The end of the above quote proposes the following contrast: if the drive is opposed to satisfaction, it is contradictory to speak of the satisfaction of a drive. Taken further, it is clear that satisfaction itself is a contradictory notion, insofar as there are individuals who are clearly capable of producing a certain stability in their lives in and through the manifestation of their symptoms (say, compulsive hand-washing)—this stability, while forever frustrated and dissatisfied, is what satisfaction aims at. To borrow the famous term of Slavoj Žižek, the command to 'enjoy your symptom' does not result in a possible attainment of an aim, but in a prolongation of frustrated desire that typifies neurosis. But it is just as clear that individuals who manifest neurotic symptoms are nonetheless discontented despite their attainment of satisfaction: just as, we could assume, the act of speaking does not result in the same sort of *jouissance* that can be enjoyed in sexual intercourse. This is what Lacan means when he opposes drive to satisfaction. The question then is what exactly the drive or sublimation aims at if not satisfaction. How exactly does the drive play out a trajectory of impossibility?

This question brings us to the centrality of the Lacanian real. From most of the cultural literature that has come out in the past fifteen years on the topic, it should be evident that the real is the impossible. The impossibility, that is, of having an ontology from within the parameters of psychoanalysis. Or, yet again: the impossibility of the real results from the paradoxical conclusion that there is no meta-language at the same time that language cannot foreclose the possibility of an existence that escapes language. For the speaking subject, there is no meta-discursive position from which one can state with certainty that there is nothing outside language. The real is thus the minimal ontological framework that results from the fact that, within language, being is excluded at the same time that no definitive limits for that exclusion can be demarcated. We have already established that the subject occupies the limit point from which language proceeds, but there is also the question of the excess of being that is not exhausted by the presentative

25. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1981, pp. 165-66.

capacity of language. The minimal ontological form this being takes is that of the object (a), or, in Badiou's case, the event. The question that intimately links Lacan's object (a) to Badiou's event properly concerns the activity of the subject: how does the subject give form to being beyond simply leaving it as an empty, indeterminate excess?

For Badiou, it is evident that the indiscernible is granted form through the forcing of truths. And it is unquestionably just as true that the conditions under which forcing can occur depend upon a generic, and thus universalizable, framework put into place. Truth is universal, for all.²⁶ The contrast with Lacan should be obvious: if the drive is itself an attainment of Lacanian *jouissance*, should not *jouissance* be universalizable, had by all?²⁷ Moreover, the drive itself, as an answer of sorts to the problems that irrational forms of enjoyment may represent to the subject, remains an ultimately individual notion: there can be no collective solution to the problem of *jouissance* precisely because, from the perspective of psychoanalysis, only individuals can be treated on the couch. There cannot be a collective *jouissance* of the community.²⁸ As such, psychoanalysis would be an ultimately individual notion that carried very little truth. By extension, its usefulness for speaking about Badiou's notion of subjective fidelity would appear quite limited.

My response to the above objection is twofold. First, while there is certainly a connection between what happens at the level of a subject being gripped by an event and the universal truth that may follow from such an account, the universalizability of a truth cannot in any way serve as a criterion for what happens at the level of a subject being gripped by an event. A subject declares its fidelity to the event as a pure matter of faith. This is because, in a position Badiou may since have retracted, the truthfulness of an event cannot be decided at the time of its occurrence. And from this perspective, it is just as true that subjects gripped by events can form reactionary—and hence untrue—tendencies in response to events (say, collective unities who oppose political revolution, people who regarded Schoenberg's music as noise, etc.). Nothing at the level of universalizability can define the trajectory of the subject in response to something that has the power to form collective subjects out of individuals. A theory of what creates those subjective formations is what I am looking for in psychoanalysis.

Second, Badiou has, on at least two occasions, made concessions to the Lacanian cure as a potential truth procedure, insofar as the subject on the couch can, over the course of analysis, give form to the unconscious (or indiscernible) mechanisms that com-

26. And this is not simply a formal mathematical counterpart to Badiou's ontology: a sufficient account of universalizability was given in Badiou's account of Saint Paul. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003.

27. This is a bit of a lengthy argument in itself. The basic premise behind it is that no matter how much one enjoys, there will always be others who enjoy more. This would appear to be the driving impetus behind Lacan's writing of 'Kant avec Sade', trans. James Swenson, *October*, vol. 51, 1989, pp. 55-104, as well as Slavoj Žižek's recent writings on enjoyment as a political factor, see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd ed., London, Verso, 2002.

28. Ultimately, this is what Lacan meant with his maxim 'do not cede your desire!' That is, do not let an other dictate to you what your desire should be.

pel it to act.²⁹ At an immediate level, the answer is clearly that certain individuals make decisions to change their ‘situations’ (their individual lives) in order to form new relations to the being (the *jouissance*) they have to bear in everyday life. The hard work of analysis, then, could be regarded as a truth procedure among others that allows subjects (individual human subjects, say) to form new, hopefully more rational, means of existing. The manner in which we move from psychoanalysis, a specialist field that concerns individuals on couches, to arguing for its significance for philosophy will require something else: this is what I am looking for through the theory of sublimation. Sublimation can allow for the creation of something new in art, in a manner that will be applicable, if not useful, for Badiou’s own writings on the topic.

I will thus attempt to go through these two points so as to assess what they may have to offer Badiou’s theory of the event, the subject and fidelity. It is ultimately a question of affect as a principle of the subject, over and above the structural relations that make subjectivization possible. It may seem odd to appeal to Lacan for these purposes, given that he has often been accused of stripping psychoanalysis of *any* notion of affect. From such a perspective, it offers a cold and sterile framework for speaking about human behavior. Philosophically, however, the psychoanalytic notion of the drive remains tainted by an irrationality that, more often than not, assumes morbid or abject vicissitudes (for example, Žižek’s comparison of an encounter with the ‘monstrous real’ with Badiou’s truth procedures). This psychoanalytic approach, for Žižek, constitutes an irrationality that underlies every philosophical approach to fill out the void of the indiscernible through the forcing of truths: in a Truth-Event, the void of the death drive, of radical negativity, a gap that momentarily suspends the Order of Being, continues to resonate.³⁰

In many ways, Žižek is entirely correct. In the first place, truth is indeed an empty category: behind any particular or local instantiation of it, there is nothing other than the void, just as ontology and thinking are nothing apart from their particular presentations or instantiations. But there is a surreptitious jump that Žižek makes from the emptiness of truth as a category to the fact that the truth procedures become nothing more than a way of regulating primordial psychic drives (whereby love is nothing other than the ability of human beings to rationalize an unbridled *jouissance*, politics becomes a means of modulating the non-universalizability of enjoyment as a political factor, art is a means of sublimating the abject horror of the real into beautiful objects, etc). Žižek’s move is to ground *all* subjective action in impulses and interests that are applicable only to a psychoanalytic subject. In other words, at the bottom of Badiou’s truth procedures lie libidinal impulses. What he has done, then, is oppose Lacan to Badiou

29. In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou wrote that: ‘We won’t pay any attention to those who argue that a couch is not as serious as a concentration camp. To them we say without hesitation that this remains to be seen. The axiom of the nouveaux philosophes—“a camp is a camp”—is just as false as what the Chicago therapists wanted to promote through the excommunication of Lacan: “a couch is a couch”. The fact is that the psychoanalytic cure has no other real aim than that of the readjustment of the subject to its own repetition.’ See Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.

30. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, New York, Verso, 1999, pp. 162-3.

without acknowledging that this distinction is possible on the basis of what distinguishes psychoanalysis from philosophy. And secondly, is it not the very point that sublimation, in supposing the desexualization of libido, makes categories such as ‘unbridled’ jouissance secondary to the ultimate aims of its activity? The applicability of the drive for Badiou’s philosophy will hold only insofar as the drive ceases to be a purely individual notion and admits of a capacity for universalizability. In other words, I am in no way arguing for a correlation between Badiou and Lacan on the ground that subjective action presupposes a libidinal interest (in the same way that sublimation presupposes a drive), but rather that the elementary relation of a subject to its enjoyment (that is, a speaking subject to its unsaid being) is constitutive of the relation between Badiou’s subject and the event. What is required, then, is not a sexualized content, but rather a minimal condition of affect that defines that relation.

AFFECT DEFINED

Lacan’s major writing on the topic of affect occurs in his tenth seminar, on Anxiety. Anxiety, he says, is the only thing we can be sure of. I take this to mean that the other emotions that regulate human experience are always capable of deceiving. I have already mentioned fear and pity: clearly, with respect to contemporary events, there is no doubt that we live in a world where feared enemies and pitied victims proliferate. And their invocation in politics can often serve contradictory aims. For example, in relation to contemporary events, the same Muslim population we fear in the name of potential terrorist attacks is the same we pity in the name of the humanitarian interventions of ‘just wars.’³¹ Fear and pity, in either case, arouses the need for a resolution, just as readily as their transgression can find form in other, more threatening, extremes. Anxiety is something different, because it is instituted on an entirely different basis. What we fear or pity is conventionally what is other to us: in contrast, what arouses our anxiety is altogether intimate to us. It’s hardly surprising that ethical indignation is often aroused with respect to people at a distance from ourselves (in Bosnia, Palestine, Iraq), rather than with regard to people we encounter in our everyday lives (UK and American citizens who live in poverty or are incarcerated).

What gives structure to anxiety is not a lack (a constitutive wound at the heart of experience), but rather, in Lacan’s terms, a *lack of lack*. ‘Anxiety is not the signal of a lack, but of something that you must manage to conceive of at this redoubled level of being the absence of this support of lack’ (5.12.62). Subjective lack, which makes the emergence of the speaking subject in language possible, is also that which guarantees that the object (a), qua cause of desire, will always remain at a distance from that subject. It is always excluded, and thus open to various irrational vicissitudes. As an object of desire, the object (a) remains an impossible object which the subject relates to by virtue of some kind of constitutive failure. But in the absence of that lack, the object no longer remains

31. See Jacqueline Rose’s admirable editorial, ‘We are all afraid, but of what exactly?’, *The Guardian*, 20 March 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,917712,00.html>, accessed July 6, 2004.

at a distance; it emerges full-circle to the subject as the constitutive core of its grounding in being. And this being that is revealed to the subject as its own ground is precisely that empty place, that nothing that is the subject's own being. The confrontation of the subject with this being is the proper catalyst for action. The arousal of anxiety is thus unlike other psychological notions of affect that are constitutive of a subject's relation to the stability of their symbolic order. While fear and pity, among other affects, could be said to determine the manner in which subjects hold irrational relations to their jouissance and its various vicissitudes, it is anxiety, the encounter with the empty ground of being, that prompts an individual to go into analysis with the hope of forming other, preferably more rational, relations to their jouissance. Anxiety is the cause of subjective change precisely because it lacks a support in representation.

I will present this in the simplest form to provide a way into Badiou. In 'normal' situations, there may be certain elements that are subtracted. As we saw in the case of immigrant workers, some may be represented as excluded in the contemporary political situation of France, and this subtractive representation may arouse various feelings of disgust, pity or resentment. The arousal of these feelings depends upon their status as subtracted, as lacking what French citizens have (work permits, legal status, recognition by the state, etc). The movement that would facilitate the shift to an event would be to consider them not as subtracted elements of the situation 'France', but rather as human beings that, like French citizens, occupy the same place. If an event, or a political sequence, is to be established in their name, what is required is a recognition of the common being that is shared with French citizens, from which various prescriptions against the French state can be made on behalf of their ontological validity.

It is one thing to say that the example of the *sans-papiers* can provide one such example of a situation's recognition of its own subtracted being. It is another thing, however, to say that such a recognition arouses anxiety, or that such anxiety is the sole catalyst for subjective action, or fidelity. And, of course, anxiety is not an exclusively Lacanian notion, given that his work on the topic has been preceded by Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Freud, among others. If anything could be said to unite these latter three interpretations, it is the belief that anxiety is a subject's own confrontation with possibility: the possibility of moral obligation through the acknowledgement of guilt (Kierkegaard), or the possibility of one's own freedom to exist in the world (Heidegger). The indeterminateness of anxiety, then, is not anxiety about something in particular, but about being in general. And this revelation of being in general, the fact that it is not something that can be represented as excluded, and hence managed, is constitutive of a subject's relation to indeterminate being.

Taking this as our point of departure, we must then ask what it is that anxiety may provoke in psychoanalytic theory and what its counterpart may be in Badiou's truth procedure? The answer to the first part of the problem is simple enough: in contrast to emotions like fear and pity, anxiety is distinct from ordinary passionate attachments that define a subject's relation to the world. In other words, a person is compelled to go into analysis less on the basis of a compulsive need or desire for something (however much

that can serve as a prop for their wish for analysis) as because of an underlying anxiety that makes ordinary life unbearable. The subject is seized by something it doesn't have a name for, and this is what could be said to prompt the series of investigations that ensue in the course of analysis. So far, this is quite concomitant with how Badiou sees a truth procedure. 'To speak brutally, I do not think that analysis is an interpretation, because it is regulated not by sense, but by truth. This is certainly not an uncovering of truth, of which we know that it is vain to think it could be uncovered, because it is generic.'³² Analysis does not uncover a preexisting truth, but is rather a means through which a subject gives form and shape to the indiscernible being that grounds its anxiety.

This final point is the pretext for the conclusion of this discussion. If analysis is ultimately something that individuals, as opposed to collective subjects, undergo, why should it then be seen as universal or generic? Isn't the whole point of Lacan's enterprise that *jouissance* cannot be universalized, had by all? Lacan's famous utilitarian analogy of *jouissance* as a white sheet illustrates this logic perfectly: if you cut enough holes in the sheet for everyone to stick their head through, you end up destroying the sheet in turn. The universalization of *jouissance* is its own abnegation. And if we conceive the ultimate goal of analysis to be new, more rational, relations subjects form with their *jouissance*, we are left with something that is fundamentally incompatible with Badiou's truth procedure. The crux of this problematic takes us to the difference between being and the real. I mentioned before that the real is a category of the subject. What is implied by this is that the being of a truth that comes to be instituted in the situation traverses the individuality of the subject who chose to recognize it over others who did not. Badiou's subjects are unique subjects to the extent that they recognize events that others don't; however, if truth is for all, the particularity of the subject is abnegated. The move from psychoanalysis to philosophy, and from the real to being requires that truth must pass over from being a subjective principle of fidelity to become a truth that exists for all qua forcing. The real, as I see it, names that part of a truth that the subject operates in the service of, at the same time that the subject's actions traverse the individuality of the real.

I previously distinguished satisfaction from *jouissance* on the grounds that the former attains a certain stability that is rooted within language, whereas the latter is an explicit excess of being over language. *Jouissance*, at bottom, is Lacan's name for being. And the object (a), that bit of *jouissance* that supports subjective activity, is the correlate for Badiou's event. What the object (a) and the event both provide is a minimal framework through which a subject confronts being. Given that neither the event nor the object (a) have proper supports in representation, there is never a guarantee that disaster might not ensue from the subjective relations they establish. Perhaps their indeterminacy is what allows them to, quite often, assume irrational forms, as witnessed in the example of false truth procedures in Badiou, or in the obscure attachments that subjects form with obscure forms of enjoyment, in Lacan. The conditions of possibility of change and

32. Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, Paris, Seuil, 1992, p. 208.

novelty in both Badiou or Lacan are just as readily the possible conditions for evil.

When Badiou remarks that analysis is not interpretation, he means that there is a point in the analytic situation that cannot be reduced to the dimension of language, which guides the subject forth in his or her pursuit of a truth. In the absence of a meta-language, *jouissance* is that excess of the subject to itself, that part of the subject that is more than simply the sum total of its activity. When coupled with the object (a), then, the subject is driven in pursuit of something that is not reducible to its experience. And conversely, to see the real as a category of the subject is to put the subject in tandem with something that exceeds its structural configuration in a linguistic network: it is that part of the subject that exceeds its own activity. What distinguishes Badiou's subject from Lacan's, then, is the process through which that subjective excess passes over from being a purely subjective principle (qua the real of *jouissance*) into something that holds for a collective human situation in its totality (qua generic being of a truth). Forcing is what makes that shift possible. But it would be difficult to see how forcing would be possible were it not for the activity of a militant subject who is put in the service of something that exceeds all positive or representative value in the situation. Lacan, I have argued, provides the framework for Badiou's subjectivity.

The final question, then, concerns what we are to make of sublimation in Lacan. Is it a notion that is concomitant with art as a truth procedure in Badiou? The question returns us to Badiou's comment that truth in analysis cannot be uncovered because it is generic. Is there a generic, higher faculty of *jouissance*? Sublimation, I have suggested, offers one such possibility in and through the production of aesthetic objects that instantiate the empty ground of being that is annulled in and through the advent of language. And artistic sublimation may do this in a manner that is altogether different from the realizations that occur in religion or science.

When Badiou remarked that *jouissance* cannot be reduced to interpretation, he meant that it was that limit point of the situation which refuses closure. It becomes quite easy, then, to see that *jouissance* cannot be universalized: it cannot be given as a totality that can then be cut up and dived equally among all inhabitants of the situation. Like Russell's paradox, this is a direct effect of the inherent incompleteness of being itself. What needs to be asked is whether it is possible for art to instantiate that incompleteness. The artists that Badiou champions seem to share a tendency to strip away detail to uncover, or localize, the purity of the void. When Lacan describes sublimation as the 'elevation of an object into the dignity of a Thing',³³ I take him to mean that a Thing remains irreducible to the exchange or distribution of goods that typify stability in a social situation. This Thing, this object (a), that embodies our *jouissance* maintains its generic or universal value insofar as it is not reduced to the dominant logic of the situation, whether that be the baseness of fear or pity, or the customary circulation of goods in a capitalist society.

What sorts out the disparity of terms (*jouissance*, drive, sublimation, object (a), anxi-

33. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 112.

ety) with regard to the terms of Badiou's philosophy? For readers less familiar with Lacan, the following shortcut can provide an axiomatic framework with which to digest the preceding remarks:

1. The subject's declaration of an event defines a rudimentary means of relating to being. If the event is object (a), the affect that defines the subject's relation to that object (or event) is anxiety.

2. Being is distinct from the real insofar as the real is a category of a speaking subject's relation to its own (impossible) being. The real presupposes a subject, while only the appearance of an event presupposes a subject. Events cannot be deduced from an asubjective, impersonal ontology.

3. If the drive can typify a subject's fidelity to an event (insofar as the psychoanalytic theory of the drive is a subject's instantiation of its object (a)), sublimation is a means of instantiating the forms of indiscernible being that can be met with recognition from other subjects. It provides a productive form in which a drive can achieve satisfaction irrespective of its object. Thus, the value we impute to the artistic object depends less upon its usefulness or ability to satisfy human wants or interests, but rather upon the fact that it gives form to a being that eludes the speech of the speaking subject.

Sam Gillespie
University of Warwick

REFERENCES

- Badiou, Alain, 'Marque et manque: à propos du zero', *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, vol. 10, 1969, pp. 150-73.
- Badiou, Alain, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris, Seuil, 1982.
- Badiou, Alain, *L'être et l'événement*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.
- Badiou, Alain, *Conditions*, Paris, Seuil, 1992.
- Badiou, Alain, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Badiou, Alain, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London, Verso, 2001.
- Badiou, Alain, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Badiou, Alain, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, London, Continuum, 2005.
- Butler, Judith, 'Competing Universalities', in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London, Verso, 2000, pp. 136-81.
- Copjec, Joan, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1994.
- Copjec, Joan, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002.

- Cunningham, Conor, *A Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*, London, Routledge, 2002.
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York, Zone Books, 1991.
- Freud, Sigmund, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in Albert Dickson (ed.), *Civilization, Society and Religion*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XII Penguin Freud Library, London, Penguin, 1991, pp. 243-340.
- Gillespie, Sam, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics*, PhD., University of Warwick, Warwick, 2004.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1981.
- Lacan, Jacques, 'Kant avec Sade', trans. James Swenson, *October*, vol. 51, 1989, pp. 55-104.
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, New York, Norton, 1992.
- Miller, Jacques-Alain, 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1977-8, pp. 24-34.
- Neumann, John Von, 'An Axiomatization of Set Theory', in Jean Van Heijenoort (ed.), *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 393-413.
- Rose, Jacqueline, 'We are all afraid, but of what exactly?', *The Guardian*, 20 March 2003, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,917712,00.html>>, accessed July 6, 2004.
- Žižek, Slavoj, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London, Verso, 1999.
- Žižek, Slavoj, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd ed., London, Verso, 2002.
- Zupančič, Alenka, 'The Splendor of Creation: Kant, Lacan, Nietzsche', *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, no. 1, 1999, pp. 35-42.
- Zupančič, Alenka, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, London, Verso, 2000.