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Circulating Philosophy—A Note on Two Apparent Misquotations in Alain Badiou's *Logics of Worlds*¹

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0. Introduction

In the opening essay of *Conditions* (C), "The (Re)Turn of Philosophy *Itself*," French philosopher Alain Badiou claims that today we labor under a post-metaphysical "paralysis" of philosophy for which it appears that "history has entered the—perhaps interminable—era of its closure." (3) This paralysis and concomitant "malaise" of philosophy arose, according to Badiou, as a consequence of the relocation of the center of philosophy: "it no longer knows if it has a proper place." (3) Philosophy today either "strives to graft itself" onto other established praxes, such as, art, politics, science or love; or *tout court* philosophy has become "a museum of itself," relegated to the analysis of its own history, but never with the same intellectual force that stimulated philosophy's grand metaphysical past.

This diagnosis of contemporary philosophy seems as accurate today as when it was originally written in 1992 amidst the collapse of actually existing socialism. If Badiou is correct, and today philosophy labors under a "paralysis" induced by its own dislocation, then this "paralysis" is made all the more distressing amidst the many calls today for philosophy to re-engage with our "post-ideological" era in order to better comprehend it so that we can take possession of the intellectual resources at our disposal to successfully critique our world. The call Badiou sounds, however, is not simply that of a "return" in the sense of philosophy's grand system building past or the complete disentanglement of philosophy from those praxes operating "outside" it (art, politics, science, love). Nor is the goal of recentring philosophy upon its contemporary resources an attempt to stabilize it as yet another acceptable social practice or a purely critical enterprise; quite to the contrary, the stakes are much higher. Faced with its self-induced demise, philosophy must struggle free from the poles to which it naturally gravitates to remain in circulation. What we propose in this essay is that this struggle to keep philosophy circulating is essential to understanding Badiou's own philosophy, and by consequence, the prospect of a future philosophy cured of this malaise-inducing paralysis.

Against this background, the following essay intends to address an issue that has not received the attention it deserves in the discussion of Badiou's work, a work supposed to have formulated a radical break with the metaphysical tradition without falling prey to the oft-lamented traps of the linguistic turn of twentieth-century philosophy.

1. Ontologies, Subjects, and Histories: that through which philosophy circulates

As Quentin Meillassoux formulates concisely in his essay *After Finitude* (AF), Badiou "uses mathematics itself to effect a liberation from the limits of calculatory reason, a gesture altogether more powerful than any external critique of calculation in the name of some supposedly superior register of thought." (103) Meillassoux's contention is that, through the move that Badiou dubs the "Platonic turn" in philosophy, the formula "mathematics = ontology," Badiou (1) solves the problem of the strictly mathematical object: there are none²; (2) destroys logico-mathematically founded Anglo-American analytic philosophy on its own terrain³; and (3) overcomes the traditional problem of the adequation of thought and being,⁴ or what Meillassoux has termed "correlationism."⁵ This interpretation is problematic, however, as it focuses *exclusively* on one dimension of Badiou's essentially "meta-ontological" system.

In the introduction to *Being and Event* (BE), Badiou locates a constitutive lack in the discourse of being-qua-being which necessitates a supplement through which philosophy "circulates":

It follows [...] that philosophy is not centered on ontology—which exists as a separate and exact discipline—rather it *circulates* between this ontology (thus, mathematics), the modern theories of the subject and its own history.

It is the problem presented by philosophy's "circulation" outside of ontology that we will investigate in this essay. In the above passage, Badiou lays out a tripartite taxonomy of supplementation for which (a) the ontological self-sufficiency of mathematics is itself insufficiently *interpretive*, thus requiring a philosophical supplement capable of interpreting the ontological function of mathematics and (b) two other components which allow ontologically decentered philosophy to circulate, namely "modern theories of the subject" and "its own history."

The first component, the "modern theories of the subject" that Badiou mentions here, refers to those developed in his *Theory of the Subject* (TS) and more recently in the second tome of *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds* (LoW). This component is what concerns us in this essay. The second of these two components—that philosophy depends expressly on "its own history" to remain in circulation—stands as an open challenge to any Meillassoux-style reception of Badiou's work which *chooses* in favor of one or another condition for truth at the expense of others. Indeed, it is our contention that insofar as philosophy remains localized in one of the sites which produce truths (art, love, science, politics), it fails to circulate. As we intend to show, the subject can only be formulated through a poetical supplement, that is to say, an ontologically indifferent means. This is, as Badiou states in *On Beckett* (OB): "the sole remainder left by mathematical ontology to whomever is struck by the desire to think, and for whom is reserved the name of Subject." (285) Thus the subject names a gap in the ontological structure of being which cannot be articulated without simultaneously rupturing this structure – articulating this subject, however, is precisely the work of any philosophy which hopes to remain in circulation.

Conceding to Heidegger that the poem is the exclusive domain that opens thinking to the "letting-be" of Being as appearing, for Badiou, the Greek innovation was not the poem itself, nor its singularity as the opening through which nature passes (being-there), but rather that the Greeks "*interrupted* the poem with the matheme." (BE 126) In order to pass into the discourse of being-qua-being proper, the immemorial—and not exclusively Greek—activity of poetry had to be intervened at its root by a "mathematical supplementation": "a *supplement*, itself in the form of a caesura and an interruption." (126) This interruption may have been necessary to open thinking to the ontological force of the matheme, the full ontological force of mathematics; yet it is only *through* the interruption of the poem as citation *in* philosophy that the unicity of the matheme *for* philosophy emerges. That is to say, it is only when mathematics is ciphered through the truth of the poem that its capacity to provide a thought properly different from the poem emerges.

Badiou's work stages a second interruption in the opposite direction; the historical interruption of Greek poetry by mathematics is mirrored in Badiou's meta-ontological procedure of the irruption of mathematics as ontological foundation by the event as structured by poetry. Thence the central question is as follows: What are the consequences of the fact that philosophy "circulates" between the theory of the subject (in the Heideggerian legacy of poetry) and mathematics (in the Platonic legacy of ontology), and Badiou's own philosophic interruption of the two (as philosophy's immediate history)?

We will approach this question as follows. First we will offer a discussion of Badiou misquoting two figures of poetics: Stéphane Mallarmé and Samuel Beckett, and the motivation for these misquotations in Badiou's theory of the event and the subject related to it. As we move to the second pole, mathematics, the problem then emerges as to *how* mathematics appears in philosophical language, and therefore *how* it is that philosophy, sheltering both poetry and mathematics, can and should be able to quote it.

The historical irruption of the poetics of the subject by mathematics is itself, on a structural level, inverted in Badiou's philosophy. Instead of a historical interruption of Greek poetry by mathematics, we are faced with an interruption of a mathematical, essentially atonic, ontology by the event as formulated within the domain of poetry. We intend to draw out the consequences of this *second* interruption and delineate the different possible modes of appropriation to which his work as a whole is susceptible.

2. Stéphane Mallarmé: the future anterior

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou continues the formal ontological project started in *Being and Event* under more "onto-logical" than "onto-logical" auspices, (LoW 102) beginning with the maxim formulated in the preface: "*There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths.*" (4) Badiou couches this maxim in the Hegelian logic for which the third element ("truths") introduces a gap internal to the first two ("bodies and languages") "in which the Three supplements the reality of the Two." (4)

The first part of this maxim, "there are only bodies and languages," is the articulation of what Badiou calls "democratic materialism," the contemporary state of the situation and an instance of Meillassoux's "correlationism," which under the twin banners of bio- and identity politics closes the world in on itself, foreclosing the possibility of the ruptures introduced by events. The second part, "except that there are truths," formulates the mathematically irrepresentable singularity, namely, the appearance of a truth-event for which there is no mediating principle *in being*: the "belonging to itself of the event" formalized as $\alpha \sqcap \alpha$. (BE 189) This formula is cited in philosophy in the framework of mathematical set theory, or, as Badiou calls it, "the theory of the pure multiple" (38), which acknowledges that "the one *is not*." (23) For him, "the multiple is the regime of presentation" and "the one, in respect to presentation, is an operational result; being is what presents (itself)" (24).

The problem of the set-theoretically "impossible" or "agrammatical" $\alpha \sqsubset \alpha$ is therefore the fact that an element operates on itself, that is, it belongs to itself and therefore *founds* itself: "the set α such that $\alpha \sqsubset \alpha$, is solely identical to itself inasmuch as it *will have been* identical to itself." (190) It is this "will have been" that will be examined in the context of the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé.

The truth-event will always already have been the articulation of a subject, the expression of which finds no *place* in the situation. But the articulation of this subject, the medium of its transmission and perpetuation as the fidelity to a truth-event, remains in question here. As Badiou continues in *Logics of Worlds*:

One will recognize here the style of my teacher Mallarmé: nothing has taken place but the place, except, on high, perhaps, a Constellation. I cross out nevertheless, 'on high' and 'perhaps.'

(LoW 4)

We have to pay close attention to the quotational style here if we are to identify what makes philosophy "circulate." Badiou's reference comes from a sequence in Stéphane Mallarmé's famous poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A Dice Throw At Any Time Never Will Abolish Chance*), reprinted in *Oeuvres Complètes*: "*rien / n'aura eu lieu / que le lieu / excepté / à l'altitude / peut-être / une constellation.*" (474-7) It should be recognized immediately that Mallarmé's text, cast in its characteristic form with poetic emphasis on the arrangement of the words on the page, is not linear, as the poem, owing to its innovative typography, does not follow the usual axis of reading.

The recasting of the poem by Marcel Broodthaers in the introduction to his famous conceptual artwork of the same name, *Un coup de dés...* from 1969, is an excellent illustration of the meta-critical emphasis that must be laid on any quotation of the poem. Broodthaers created two essentially different procedures of quotation by first blacking out the words in the same positions on the page as Mallarmé's original, thus creating a visual rendition of the typography and spatial distribution of the words on the page; and second, by repeating the entire text of Mallarmé's poem in sentence form, thus annihilating the typographical and spatial element of the poem on the page. By forcing the poem into a linear prose alien to its original presentation, Broodthaers's literary linearity reveals to the reader that any quotation from Mallarmé's original poem becomes, in effect, "infinitely spaced" as we have no way of measuring in sentence form the white space "spacing" the scattered instances of language on the page.⁶ In this sense, Badiou could have quoted: "nothing [...] has taken place [...] but the place [...] except [...] a Constellation" without doing any apparent injustice to the text. The misquotation is, however, even more conspicuous than it first appears.

Although Badiou acknowledges that he has changed the quotation—he crosses out "on high" and "perhaps"—the main alteration remains unarticulated. For the correct English translation of the French *rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu* cannot but be a *future* anterior tense: "nothing *will* have taken place but the place."⁷ We encounter a similar (mis)quotation from Mallarmé further on in *Logics*, in the introduction to the section "Theory of Points," in which Badiou introduces his reworking of the concept of the subject as first proposed in *Theory of the Subject*:

When one accepts, in the midst of the ocean of the world, to throw the dice, the Mallarméan declaration 'nothing will take place but the place' can be read as follows: 'nothing places a truth but the succession, point by point, of the choices that perpetuate it.'

(LoW 401)

Whereas in the first instance of Badiou's misquotation of Mallarmé, he shifts the future anterior *n'aura eu lieu* back to a perfect tense "has taken," he now looks into the future by rendering it with "will take," ignoring the line's perfect aspect. Badiou thus leaves out the crucial emphasis on the construction "*aura eu*," alternating between a *future* tense "*rien n'aura lieu*" ("nothing will take place" [LoW 401]) and a *past* tense "*rien n'a eu lieu*" ("nothing has taken place" [4]) quotation of Mallarmé.

We might be tempted to interpret this style of misquotation as simply paraphrastic or as a minor textual oversight on Badiou's part. This however seems not to be the case, as Badiou's close reading of Mallarmé has been a staple of his philosophical project, as he declares in a footnote to the essay on Mallarmé in *Conditions*, entitled "Mallarmé's Method: Subtraction and Isolation": "I wanted to give a larger glimpse of my studies on Mallarmé, because for twenty years now I have taken Mallarmé to be emblematic of the relationship between philosophy and poetry." (293) It seems unlikely therefore that we are dealing with "just" a mistake. Thus assuming that, like all of Badiou's philosophy, this ostensibly negative omission possesses a kernel of *affirmation*, how can we account for this *lapsus*? Why is it that exactly the future anterior, which is essentially the mode in which the truth-event is thought, is repressed in his citation of Mallarmé in *Logics of Worlds*?

The first misquotation ("nothing has taken place") occurs in relation to the exception of the truth-event, and describes how truths are exceptions to situations that are *already* structured (in the past) but for which the existence of truths are nevertheless not yet evident, whereas the second ("nothing will take place") occurs in the introduction of Book VI "Theory of Points" of *Logic of Worlds* in a discussion of the faithful rendition of a truth in the Kierkegaardian formulation of the radical choice as a

leap of faith: "where there's a choice, there's a place." (LoW 401) There Badiou interprets the future tense misquotation as stating: "nothing places a truth but the succession, point by point, of the choices that perpetuate it." (401) This conception of the perpetuation of the "truth-process" of the subject is central not only to *Logics* but also to his conception of ethics.⁸

It is in Meditation 19 of *Being and Event*, which precedes and predicts *Logics of Worlds*, that Badiou offers us a thorough discussion of *Un coup de dés...*, including a correct citation of the line appearing in a double guise in *Logics of Worlds*. At that point it functions as an articulation of the fact that "the only representable figure of the concept of the event is the staging of its undecidability." (194) And it is at this point that we encounter the limits of mathematics for which we need a supplement to interpret it.

For Badiou, the future anterior can only be formulated precisely in philosophy, harboring the poem as the articulation of the impossible exception to mathematics. In *Being and Event*, the future anterior "will have been" is introduced in Meditation 35, "The Theory of the Subject":

With the resources of the situation, with its multiples, its language, the subject generates names whose referent is in the future anterior: this is what supports belief. Such names 'will have been' assigned to a referent, or a signification, when the situation will have appeared in which the indiscernible—which is only represented (or included)—is finally presented as a truth of the first situation.

(BE 398)

The subject articulates the name of an event, which *will have* referred both to the event and the subject believing in it. The future anterior is thus the expression of a radical undecidability at the heart of affirming an event. The only way that this procedure can be articulated is through poetry, because an event is a mathematical impossibility. The subject, who is always fully co-existent with the truth of the event, is therefore, as Zachary Fraser formulates it in his essay "The Law of the Subject", "not primarily a mathematical structure, any more than mathematics is a subjective construction." (33) The mathematical move from the ontological, set-theoretical $\alpha \dashv \alpha$ to the theory of the supporting process and becoming of truths in the formula of singularity, articulated in category theory as $(\mathbf{EA} @ \mathbf{E} \mid_A) = M$,⁹ encounters its poetic counterpart in the movement from *Being and Event*'s "nothing will have taken place" (*rien n'aura eu lieu*) to the *Logics of Worlds* couple "nothing will take place/nothing has taken place" (*rien n'aura lieu/rien n'a eu lieu*).

Whereas in the *onto*-logy of *Being and Event*, Mallarmé's phrase staged the undecidability of the event, its double melancholic/messianic misquotation in the *onto*-logy of *Logics of Worlds* actually *decides* on it. It is here that pure mathematics can no longer avoid the ambiguities of interpretation. At this point the *formal* ontological proof meets its "ab-sense," in the Lacanian sense, for which mathematics alone cannot compensate. It is in answer to the question of the conditions for the presentation of a "place," through which philosophical choices circulate, that these Mallarméan (mis)quotations occupy a pivotal place for Badiou's conceptual framework. It is in the space between the site of being (mathematics) and its non-being (poetry), that the subject in Badiou's own work struggles into existence.

3. Beckett: the singular pronoun

Mallarmé's phrase from *Un coup de dés...*, is not only of seminal importance for Badiou's understanding of the truth-event, it also opens the discourse on the possibility of the subject, faithful or otherwise to truth. This discourse of the subject is formulated mainly by help of the Irish writer Samuel Beckett, especially through a quotation from his novel *The Unnamable* (U). As we have claimed that for Badiou, Mallarmé sets up the environment, the space for the event to happen; we will show that Beckett provides the formulation for the Badiouan subject itself.

In his book *Badiou on Beckett* (BoB), Andrew Gibson states that "*The Unnamable* belongs within the tradition of radically abstract modern literature inaugurated by *Un coup de dés*." (187) And the related philosophical functions of Mallarmé and Beckett are made explicit by Badiou in a passage from *On Beckett*, where he states that:

... it is not true that 'nothing will take place but the place' [*rien n'aura lieu que le lieu*] [*sic!*]. In effect all fiction, as devoted as it may be to establishing the place of being [...] presupposes or connects to a subject. This subject in turn excludes itself from the place simply by the act of naming it, whilst at the same time holding itself at a distance from this name. [...] Whence the torture of the *cogito*.

(45)

We need not venture again into Badiou's misquotation of Mallarmé here. The point is that Badiou establishes that, in fact, there is something that will take place, and that this something is the subject, which in Beckett is always a reading of the Cartesian *cogito* (albeit without all the qualities that are commonly attributed to it).

The 'I think' presupposes terror, which alone constrains the voice to over-extend towards itself in order to withdraw, as much as possible, towards its point of enunciation. As with all terror, it is also given as an imperative without concept; it imposes a repetitious insistence that does not let up and admits of no way. This

imperative, which is indifferent to all possibility, this terrorist commandment to have to maintain what cannot be, concludes *The Unnamable*: 'I must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.'

(C 261)

For Badiou, the presupposition of the *cogito* is the terroristic imperative concluding *The Unnamable*, which should be interpreted as: "I go on, in order to push to their paradoxical radiance the reasons that I would have for not going on." (LoW 89)

As was the case with Mallarmé, Beckett's quotation, which is of paramount importance to Badiou, houses an "error." For the actual concluding words from Beckett's novel are "you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." (LoW 407) Beckett's "you" has changed to Badiou's "I." As with Mallarmé, the misquotation of the poet is not accidental, but points to a fundamental philosophical issue, namely the non-pronominal, rare status of the subject. As Gibson continues, "If at the very end, the *Unnamable* may conceivably be on the threshold of its story, the implication is that the novel itself is not finally about the death of the subject, but the possibility of the birth of one." (BoB 196) But, and this is precisely the point, this subject is in no way an "I," "you," or "we":

Its [i.e., the subject's] mark is certainly not to be found in pronouns—the 'I' or 'we' of first persons. Rather it is in the 'aside from', the 'except that', the 'but for' through which the fragile scintillation of what has no place to be makes its incision in the unbroken phrasing of the world.

(LoW 45)

This thought is in no way foreign to Beckett's novel. At many instances in the story, a subject finds its way, possibly forward: "To go on, I still call that on, to go on and get on has been my only care," (U 314) "I have only to go on, as if there was something to be done, something begun, somewhere to go," (329) "Perhaps there go I after all. I can't go on in any case. But I must go on. So I'll go on," (386) "impossible to stop, impossible to go on, but I must go on, I'll go on." (388) And in the larger part of the novel, the speaking "I," which Badiou refers to as a parody of the Cartesian *cogito*, is quite certain of itself, to the point of solipsism: "I'm speaking now of me, yes, henceforward I shall speak of none but me, that's decided, even though I should not succeed, there's no reason why I should succeed, so I need have no qualms." (392) But very soon afterward, toward the end of the novel, the instability of the subject becomes apparent, and the thinking, Cartesian "I" deteriorates: "It's not I, I am he, after all, why not, why not say it, I must have said it, as well that as anything else, it's not I, not I, I can't say it, [...] if only it could be about him." (395) It is at this moment that Beckett anticipates the philosophical conclusion on the non-pronominal status of the subject that Badiou resumes concisely in *Logics of Worlds*:

... someone says you, it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either, I'm not that either, let us leave all that, [...] someone speaks of himself, that's it, in the singular, a single one, the man on duty, he, I, no matter.

(397)

This "singular" entity, that has nothing to do with pronouns—not you, not I, not that—, is "the man on duty," Badiou's faithful subject. If we compare Badiou's interpretation of the matheme of the faithful subject in its complete form ($\Sigma/\textcircled{\text{R}}\square$)—"It is important to understand that the faithful subject as such is not contained in any of the letters of its matheme, but that it is the formula as a whole" (LoW 53)—with the meta-ontological formula "mathematics = ontology," it becomes clear that the matheme is nothing but a quotation of mathematics within philosophy. Whether this be merely the "=" or the more complex mathematical proofs of the "Greater Logic," the understanding of the formula "as a whole" is only something that can happen *outside* mathematics, that is, *within* philosophy itself. Mathematics as an intellectual praxes alone would not recognize its ontological destiny; this recognition could only come about through the philosopher.

Badiou's faulty citation of the last line of Beckett's *The Unnamable* not only folds back Beckett's discourse on itself, it also signifies the *irrelevance* of any pronominal ascription to the subject. Moreover, Badiou's *compressed citation* of Beckett stresses the exceptionality of the subject caused by its ever unstable relation to the indiscernible point of the event from which it proceeds as from an origin. Nevertheless it is essentially *coherent* with Badiou's theory of the place of the subject, which could only have been formulated by means of an initial series of misquotations of Mallarmé. Thus, both Mallarmé and Beckett function as poetic pointers in the world before and after the event. According to Alberto Toscano and Nina Power, Beckett is "the courageous preparation for the event," (OB xxi) and Mallarmé as "the protocol of fidelity in its subtractive 'relationship' to a disappearance and to the isolation of a pure multiple." (xxi) Or as Gibson formulates it, "Badiou actually contrasts Beckettian vigilance with Mallarméan patience, the Irish insomniac with the French faun." (BoB 130)

Thus Mallarmé's *future anterior* and Beckett's *singular pronoun* become intimately linked in their mutual displacement and deletion. The suppression of "will have taken" and "you" founds the basis from which Badiou is able to "liberate" himself from "calculatory reason." So perhaps we must take literally that Badiou's event and its subject are, following Beckett, "ill seen ill said." (OB 58)

4. Consequences: mathematics "=" ontology

Our inspection of the two poetical misquotations from *Logics of Worlds* renders us a valuable insight into what it means for Badiou to quote from one of the three poles of circulation for philosophy. The philosophical form of the quotation is always decided upon within a philosophical context, in the line of argumentation, in the fiction productive of philosophy itself. This is what it means for philosophy to be "meta-ontological." And the ultimate conclusion is drawn by Mehdi Belhaj Kacem in his violent reading of Badiou's oeuvre, *L'esprit du nihilisme*, where he states that "Art will tell us [...] about love and politics, but as well *about mathematics itself*, that each event is arche-metaphorical." (269)

To return to our point of departure, the meta-ontological formula "mathematics = ontology" is fundamentally a *philosophical* statement in so far as mathematics is "cited [...] to let its ontological essence become manifest." (BE 18) Badiou even tells us that we "must allow [him] [...] the right to cite and dissect the mathematical text." (18) This right is based on exactly the same foundation as that which allowed Heidegger to dissect the poetical text, and moreover this right is exercised in exactly the same way in which Badiou quotes poetry. This is not without consequence, for as Sam Gillespie points out in his sparkling dissertation *The Mathematics of Novelty*: there is a fundamentally *philosophical* drive to do so.

Badiou's meta-ontological decision of set theory is founded upon a possible relation that exists between the inconsistency of infinity as a mathematical domain and the generality of a metaphysics of being.

(133)

It is because of this "possible relation" that we must "allow" Badiou to investigate meta-ontologically the ontological capacities of certain mathematical discourses, to cite and excite mathematics as a foundation of and for philosophy. This possible method of investigation is what Badiou marks as "circulation." Again, Gillespie states this explicitly: "In this sense, set theory is an ontological foundation not in a stable sense of providing a foundation that yields determinate results, but in the sense that it poses a problem [...] that provides an impetus for thought." (146) Therefore, just like poetry, mathematics can be, from the viewpoint of a mathematician, "misquoted" in exactly the same way that Badiou has effectively deformed the phrases from Beckett and Mallarmé, as we have suggested above. Conversely, there is also no way in which Badiou, from a meta-ontological perspective, would be able to take a mathematical metaphor, for example, the Zermelo-Fraenkel axioms of set theory as the "foundation" of mathematics, in any way *too far*: "My problem is not [...] that of foundations, for that would be to advance within the internal architecture of ontology whereas my task is solely to indicate its site." (BE 14) And those sites, of course, are the sites of science (in which mathematics falls), poetry, politics, and love.

We would therefore like to propose a properly Derridean reading of the citational status of the equation sign in the formula "mathematics = ontology," because, as Badiou states, "'ontology = mathematics' is meta-ontological: this excludes it being mathematical, or ontological." (BE 13) How can we devise a strategy for reading the equation sign beyond the mathematical guise of its implied univocity?

As we have tried to show, both mathematics and poetry appear in Badiou's oeuvre as citations; in fact, he stresses his right to cite them as such. This procedure of citation is never only a "neutral" repetition, however, but always a philosophical iteration in which the act of quoting imports a kind of metaphoricity proper to philosophy as a mode of meta-ontological thinking. This metaphoricity is integral to Badiou's system. According to Badiou, it is necessary "to invent a language of decentering, or a *dispositif* of acephalic writing," (LoW 545) and it is Derrida who taught us this fact. It is this de-centering that is at work in Badiou's philosophy of which the core is the void; or, as Badiou terms it in homage to Derrida's *différance*, "*inexistence*." To highlight this language of decentering at work in Badiou's system, we propose a symbolization of the quotation mark (""). The quotation mark is the de-centered engine of circulation around the voidal center of philosophy. Because the act of citation, signaled by the quotation mark, raises the sites of truth procedures to a metaphorical level within philosophy, turning the quotation mark ninety degrees into the equation sign (=) and circulating the sign back and forth between mathematics and ontology, we can see the full effect of Badiou's metaontological formulation: not simply that "mathematics = ontology" but that mathematics "=" ontology.

If we accept the metaphorical character of philosophical language, both when it comes to poetry and mathematics, this has two consequences for Badiou's philosophy. The first, internal, consequence relates to the argumentative structure of philosophy, namely that formal constructs and paradigmatic examples cannot be completely separated. The second, external, consequence refers to the interpretative limitation, or perhaps even a certain *resistance* to interpretation and appropriation, that is produced exactly from his definition of philosophy as an unstable, decentered circulation around a void, gravitating between the three poles of the poetry of the subject, the mathematics of ontology, and the history of philosophical discourse. Those who would attempt to stabilize philosophy by retracing its decentering effect to some domain outside of philosophy proper are faced with two challenges: first, philosophy is at once too singular—that despite the fact that philosophy is constructed using paradigmatic examples taken from outside philosophy's own domain, it nevertheless reinvents them as *philosophical*, charging them with a metaphorical intensity which opens them to new philosophical meaning. The second, more devastating challenge to the attempt to stabilize philosophy is that, so long as philosophy remains in circulation, it punctuates these domains of truths—revealing to them their own nature as eventual sites, naming their voidal points "subjects"—and thereby calling forth from them *more* than they might otherwise be willing to offer (as exemplified by

Badiou's appropriation of set theoretical mathematics). Badiou's philosophy too is not immune to these consequences.

Owing to this circulation, the examples that Badiou proposes in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*—the communist revolution, falling in love, twelve-tone music, and so on—cannot fully be separated from the formulation of his philosophical, meta-ontological framework. The conditions of this framework, poetry and mathematics, are merely quoted and, as repetition goes, distorted in the process; they cannot simply rest in-themselves but are instead brought into circulation. Thus Badiou's examples must, in the literal sense of the word, support his philosophical argument. Because it is impossible to separate completely the formal framework from its paradigmatic examples, in a sense, all quotations, even the most radical mathematical ones, are *nothing but examples*. However, examples are nothing but the productive circulation of philosophy, and for that reason, indispensable for his philosophical thought.

In the first place, this means that Badiou's "personal" arguments in *Logics of Worlds* potentially have a destructive effect on his philosophical project if not properly selected. For example, in *Logics of Worlds*, the Scholium "A Musical Variant of the Metaphysics of the Subject" on twelve-tone music in the beginning of the twentieth century, recounts the truth of the maxim "all twelve tones are equal," and the ensuing fidelity of its subjects like Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern. This truth has sparked the project of serial music in which *all* musical parameters became equalized until even the uncertainty of human reaction speed became quantified, and we can name Karlheinz Stockhausen here as the most ardent, faithful pursuer of the truth-event of twelve-tone music in all its universality, which, however, is at the same its main weakness. Nevertheless, in a note at the end of *Logic of Worlds*, Badiou asks "to be allowed a concession to sheer personal taste. Of all the musicians active in the second half of the twentieth century, after Webern's death, Olivier Messiaen is my favourite." (LoW 528) If we would inspect Messiaen's fidelity to the truth-event of twelve-tone music, we discover soon enough that it didn't last very long, even though he invented the strictly serial dispositif of the *Modes de valeurs et d'intensités* in 1949. In spite of his initial fidelity, Messiaen is above all an obscure subject, that dissimulated the event of twelve-tone music under the guise of primitive bird song and an adamant Catholicism.

Badiou's personal taste would not be immediately relevant if his ontological framework could be fully detached from his subjective preferences. This is however not the case. If we accept that mathematics is quoted *as* ontology, the argument for choosing one or the other theorem, formula, or axiom is philosophically motivated by Badiou *as* faithful subject (to a mathematical truth) and therefore depends on examples that render this motivation credible and productive. Therefore, we cannot grant him his "concession to sheer personal taste," because if we did so, then what could we make of his other personal preferences, such as "*The Unnamable* was my favourite book"? (OB 39) How are we supposed to distinguish "sheer" personal tastes revealing obscure subjects in the heart of a series of examples pertaining to the "Metaphysics of the Subject," and a "favourite" book formulating the very essence of the faithful subject? If philosophy fundamentally circulates around the eventual examples that it shelters, then personal taste cannot simply be a "personal" taste. As the American poet Wallace Stevens put it in his essay *Relations Between Poetry and Painting*, "In the logic of events, the only wrong would be to attempt to falsify the logic, to be disloyal to the truth." (751)

The second, more serious consequence is that the paradigmatic examples of truth-events intrinsic to Badiou's philosophy make it *impossible*, as Meillassoux stated, to "liberate oneself from calculatory reason" (AF 103) without accepting the political, amorous, scientific, and artistic truths that co-found this liberation. Any philosophy that bases itself on Badiou's meta-physics cannot *not* be potentially political, amorous, scientific, and artistic, as none of these sites can be foreclosed a priori by any philosophical superstructure.

Therefore, any mathematical or poetical (or for that matter: political or amorous) attack on or appropriation of Badiou's philosophy is impossible. For this would imply a suture¹⁰ of a particular truth procedure to philosophy, and would thus fail to acknowledge the citational, and therefore structural, status of both. To point out, for instance, that the Zermelo-Fraenkel axioms in set theory or Heyting algebra are only one of the possibilities in the immense field of post-Cantorian mathematics, and that there are many logics, algebras, and calculi that do not in any way correspond to Badiou's quotation of mathematics is just as ineffectual as enumerating the many different forms of democratic, anarchic, communist, and capitalist forms of government in the world in order to "falsify" Badiou's political militancy.

Nevertheless, the presupposition of suturing philosophy to one of its conditions is discernible in many of the critical assessments of Badiou's work, especially when it comes to the discourse of mathematics as ontology. Badiou's emphasis on mathematics has led many a commentator to assume that Badiou is making mathematical rather than philosophical claims. For example, in his article "Badiou's Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics," Ray Brassier states that "not only does the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatization of set-theory provide the fundamental infrastructure to which all mathematics can be reduced, it is also the guarantor for the mathematical sciences' access to reality." (136) To assume that a philosophically preferable axiomatization provides a "foundation" for mathematics is widely considered by today's mathematicians to be technically invalid. But to claim that it moreover provides a guarantee for the *mathematical* sciences' "access to reality" is nothing but the complete suture of philosophy to one of its conditions (science), and this conflicts fundamentally with Badiou's position. Any access to reality strictly operates on a meta-ontological level, mediated through philosophy, and

therefore any "shortcut" of this kind is nothing but an annihilation of any properly philosophical innovation, in which case, philosophy would cease to circulate. This brings us to the problem of "non-philosophy."

A similar one-sidedness can be observed when "non-philosopher" François Laruelle states in his essay "Badiou and Non-Philosophy: A Parallel" that for Badiou "ontology is a special form of 'non-philosophy' inside philosophy itself" (n.p.). Laruelle, who has been pointed out by Brassier in his essay "Axiomatic Heresy" as "the most important unknown philosopher working in Europe today," fully misses the precise status of Badiou's ontology. The so-called "ontological core" is explicitly a citation of an *exemplary* mathematics within the realm of philosophy. Even though mathematics itself might generate multiple truths within its own truth procedure, only in collision with philosophy does it acquire its proper status as ontology. In effect, philosophy allows mathematics to be thought *as* ontology. But this comes at a cost. Philosophy shelters mathematics as its ontological core *only* insofar as it *decides* (in the strict Badiouian sense¹¹) to include a specific mathematical truth, and thereby excludes many others. As we saw with Badiou's citational preferences, only within the non-domain of philosophy, the de-centering language of philosophy, that these truths come about *as* truths. What Laruelle refers to as Badiou's "non-philosophy" is nothing but the overt generalization from the set of truth procedures from all four domains together. Art, politics, love, and science are non-philosophical in the precise sense that they produce truths external to philosophy. However, that they attain the status of *truths* at all is philosophically mediated. Philosophy harbors the truth of these decisions. In this sense, Badiou's generic procedures share nothing with what Laruelle has dubbed non-philosophy. When Laruelle states that "B[adiou] affirms philosophy by sacrificing ontology to science," he misinterprets the precise status of this sacrifice: the "=" in "mathematics = ontology" as a sheltering citation of exactly the "="-symbol. The failure to recognize that this equation sign in "mathematics = ontology" only exists as a philosophical quotation of mathematics is precisely what produces a suture that ends the circulation of philosophy.

Contrary to the tendency of many of his followers, Badiou doesn't avoid correlationism by suturing mathematics to philosophical ontology, nor does he do so, as a Heideggerian reading would have it, through a suture of philosophy and poetry. By extracting the citational status of philosophy from its metaphysical past *and* not suturing it to a domain outside philosophy, Badiou is able to formulate the singularity of the event, which will never have been "always already" formulated by language. In this profound sense, Badiou keeps philosophy in circulation amidst all the proclamations of its "end." This dependency on citation as the procedure that paradoxically forces the singular exception to the language of the "state of affairs" is obscured in speculative realism's obsession with the "object." Without poetry, the ontological landscape of philosophy remains barren; without the power of its citational status, philosophy doesn't exist at all.

Just as Greek poetics needed the interruption of mathematics to found the basis of philosophy, post-Cantorian mathematics as ontology needs the interruption of poetry, of a subject, to be activated. Only this activation can break the "paralysis of philosophy" (MP 113) produced by any suture of philosophy to its truth conditions and overcome philosophy's malaise. Nevertheless it is from these conditions that philosophy is able to draw its citational resources, to produce the de-centered thinking that allows it to circulate: "bound in the resources of fiction; it is the philosophical *act* as an act of second thought." (C 290n4) And it is only as a *second* thought that philosophy will ever be able to *re-turn* to itself, that is, to circulate.

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Notes

1.

This article was inspired by some of the issues addressed by Alain Badiou during his seminar at the European Graduate School in 2009. We would like to thank him and Judith Balso for the extensive comments on the following text.

2. cf. Badiou, *Being and Event* (BE), 6-7.

3. cf. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* (LoW), 93.

4. In the introduction to *Being and Event* Badiou singles out "mathematicians" as those who "broke with adequation" (BE 3).

5. "By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term *considered apart from the other*" (AF 5, emphasis added).

6. We cannot but refer here to Jacques Derrida's transposition of this Mallarméan term in his essay "Differance" in *Margins of Philosophy*. "The verb 'to differ' [...] expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible" (129). This is also precisely the point that Badiou grasps from Derrida, when he states that the "thinking of the inexistent" is an "interminable work [which] consists in localizing it, which is also impossible, since it is characterized by being out-of-place-in-the-place." Cf. LoW 545.

7. The misquotation already occurs in the French text and is faithfully repeated in the English translation.

8. See, for instance, the short (by now infamous) book *Ethics* in which Badiou argues against the notion of a grand Ethics, an ethics "in general," which would be predicated on an abstract Subject, in favor of localized *subjectivized* ethics: "There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject—or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject" (40). Subjects only emerge from a process of consistency, faithful to an event (fidelity), by which the subject appears in a "new way of being" (41): "We might say that the process of truth *induces* a subject" (43).

9. This formula can be read as "the evental site *A* (which is defined as $\text{Id}(A, A)$) as the maximally affects the transcendental value of an inexistent object indexed on *A*." About this formula Badiou states the following: "We have declared that this equation is strictly impossible if *A* is a mere fact, which behaves like a modification [...] If *A* is a singularity—and not just a fact—the equation is also formally impossible. But in this case, *it may be* that the existential power of the singularity subverts the regime of the possible. This subversion defines the strong singularity or the event" (LoW 393).

10. In *Manifesto for Philosophy* (MP), Badiou defines a suture as a situation in which "philosophy delegates its functions to one or other of its conditions" (61).

11. In the introduction to *BE* Badiou states concisely: "The existence of a truth is suspended from the occurrence of an event. But since the event is only *decided* as such in the retroaction of an intervention, what finally results is a complex trajectory," (BE 17) of which the text of *BE* is an answer.