Neither Philosophy nor Literature: The Poetic Truth Condition

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis and the work contained herein was composed entirely by me and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. Any sections of the thesis which have been published (or are forthcoming) have been identified in my acknowledgements. Information derived from the published work of others is recognised in the written text, and references have been provided in the footnotes.

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Abstract

This work is conceived as an antiphilosophical riposte to Alain Badiou's 'return of philosophy *itself*' thesis, taking as its inspiration Wittgenstein's gnomic notebook entry of the 1930s to the effect that philosophy 'ought now to be written only as one would write poetry'. Badiou wants philosophy to be as pure as mathematics, but this only sees it distilled down to an essence whereby nothing of itself remains. In 'fleshing out' its ideas as living, breathing metaphors, on the other hand, transcending its habitual tautologies and pseudo-problems, it supersedes itself; it becomes figurative, which is to say poetic, and no longer contained by discursive limits.

My argument unfolds through considerations of a series of key metaphors, considering the inherent Narcissism that leads Badiou to read his philosophy of the event *into* the works of Mallarmé and Celan. I counter his forensic, flattened, monosemic explications with *ambi*semic re-readings. Poetic motifs are re-interpreted in a context of *syn*aesthetic re-awakenings rather than 'truths,' emphasizing a hermeneutic of the 'perhaps,' and contingent encounters in which communication precedes and supersedes rational understanding.

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CONTENTS

PART TWO: SYNAESTHETICS

A note on the text

All italics appearing in quotations are present in the original text unless otherwise indicated.

In most questions of presentation I have followed the MHRA Style Guide except in one matter. The vast majority of the writers I am discussing here make liberal use of italicization for rhetorical emphasis, and on that basis I make no apology for doing the same as a conscious stylistic choice, even though the MHRA guide warns against it. This seems to be to be part of that supposed *boundary* between literary and non-literary writing I am attempting to join others in bringing into question. Often a sentence will not have the right rhythm unless stress is specifically indicated, and so sense will be compromised.

Masculine pronouns are generally used in reference to the philosopher, reflecting Badiou's own usage and his philosopher's incorrigibly masculine outlook and bearing. Otherwise, gender neutral pronouns are generally employed, usually in the form of 'he or she,' 'his or her,' etc.

I dream of a writing that would be neither philosophy nor literature, nor even contaminated by one or the other, while still keeping – I have no desire to abandon this – the memory of literature and philosophy. […] You will say, and quite rightly, that this [dream of a new institution] is the dream of every literary work.[1]

The Greeks might seem to have confirmed the death of the sage and to have replaced him with philosophers – the friends of wisdom, those who seek wisdom but do not formally possess it. But the difference between the sage and the philosopher would not be merely one of degree, as on a scale: the old oriental sage thinks, perhaps, in Figures, whereas the philosopher invents and thinks the Concept.[2]

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 73.
[2] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 3.

Introduction: Philosophizing as one would write poetry

This thesis was initially conceived from a desire to explore the implications of Wittgenstein's gnomic suggestion, in a notebook entry of the mid-1930s, that 'Philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry.'[1] The remark itself is a kind of poetic enigma which lends itself to a range of possible translations and interpretations, and is suggestive of forms of writing and thinking that develop fragmentedly, associatively and cyclically; are resistant, as Wittgenstein himself puts it, to '[forcing one's thoughts] in any single direction against their natural inclination.'[2] As a second stimulus, and in direct opposition to the this implied blurring of distinctions between philosophical and literary discourses, there is the work of Alain Badiou. A collection of Badiou's writings on literature, mostly appearing in English translation for the first time, was published in 2014 as *The Age of the Poets and Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose*.[3] The bulk of these essays date from a 1990s period during which Badiou was preoccupied with the question of poetry's relationship to philosophy.

My discussion is thus centred primarily on a loose decade of Badiou's work that begins with his 'meditation' on Stephane Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* in 1988's *Being and Event*, and culminates in his 1999 discussion Paul Celan's poem 'Anabasis.'[4] There is a pleasing symmetry here given that the period Badiou calls 'the age of the poets' is said to open with Mallarmé's work and to close with Celan's. The twofold nature of my work is, then, an exploration of the

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 24e. The remark has been traced to an original notebook entry circa. 1933-34. This is Peter Winch's translation, but the question of how best to translate the aphorism will be discussed more fully below, see n. 14.
[2] '[M]y thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them in any single direction against their natural inclination.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. vii.
[3] One of these essays, 'Philosophy and Poetry from the Vantage Point of the Unnameable', had already appeared in English under a slightly different title in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005 [1998]), pp. 16-27.
[4] Alain Badiou, *The Century* (Cambridge and Madison, MA.: Polity Press, 2007 [2005]), pp. 81-97. Though first published in 2005 the essay 'Anabasis' itself is explicitly dated 10th November 1999. There are also important readings of poems by Mallarmé in Badiou's earlier *Theory of the Subject* (1982), which did not appear in English translation until 2013.

implications of Wittgenstein's remark, and, at the same time, a counter-polemic against Badiou's attempt to secure what he calls the '(re)turn of philosophy *itself*'.[5] This is an idea that first appears in 1989's *Manifesto for Philosophy* which, along with *Conditions* (1992), lays the groundwork for Badiou's discussion of the poem as, in his words, a generic 'truth condition'.[6] Also significant are the 1998 *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, and Badiou's polemic against Wittgenstein, the earliest form of which was published in 1994, but which was published in English translation in 2011 as *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*. My thesis amounts to a critical engagement with, and rejection of, Badiou's attempt to re-establish, as I see it, philosophy's configurative hegemony over what he terms its 'conditions'.[7]

Part One, 'Sophistics,' considers Badiou's repeated identification of poetry with sophistry, and does so through the prism of two Badiouian metaphors.[8] Firstly, there is the 'suture,' which is central to the aforementioned claim that there was an 'age of the poets' during which philosophy found itself sutured to its 'poetic condition.' I will set out, and critique, Badiou's central claim that philosophy is needed as 'the go-between in our encounters with [poetic] truths', challenging, in particular, certain questionable elements in the development of this narrative.[9] Badiou declares 'closed' the age during which this suturing took place, but I am more concerned with an opening up that I believe actually takes place, exemplified by writing that continues to rise to Wittgenstein's challenge. Gerald L. Bruns, for one, sees it as axiomatic to Wittgenstein's

[5] Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy* (New York: SUNY, 1999 [1989]), p. 113.
[6] An English translation did not appear until sixteen years later: *Conditions* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008).
[7] Badiou (1999), p. 14.
[8] Barbara Cassin (*Sophistical Practice: Towards a Consistent Relativism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 25) makes a persuasive case for introducing the neologism 'sophistics' into English. As a translation of the French '*sophistique*' it lacks the immediately pejorative associations of 'sophistry' when traced back through the Platonic philosophical tradition. Even Bosteels ('Radical Antiphilosophy', *Filozofski vestnik*, Volume XXIX:2 (2008), 155) agrees, citing the use of the term in 'extant translations' of Cassin's *L'effet Sophistique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). There is a persistent inconsistency in the use of the terms sophistry and philosophy in Badiou's work, which is further complicated by the introduction of a third term: antiphilosophy.
[9] Badiou (2005), p. 10.

Philosophical Investigations that '[no] concept, including […] philosophy itself […] can be "closed by a frontier"' on the basis of 'first principles' and that 'this "No" is [perhaps] what characterizes postmodernism.'[10] Writing that thus emerges breaks free from restrictive limits placed on its 'free play', bringing into question a narrow understanding of 'philosophical' writing that Badiou's thesis demands. Some, like the work of Jacques Derrida, is written at a certain oblique angle to traditional philosophy, but with a distinctive sense of language's dynamic possibilities. Secondly, there is the metaphorical 'breaking of the mirror' wherein Badiou identifies poetry with sophistry. The idea of a conflict between philosophers and sophists that originates with Plato is re-invigorated by Badiou, who exhorts the philosopher to break the mirror in which the sophist appears to him in his own image. The sophist, he claims, appearing *as* the philosopher, attempts to use language, represented by the 'surface' of the mirror, to delude his double (or, rather, his original) and to trigger an identity crisis whereby the philosopher 'takes himself to be' a sophist. This necessitates, Badiou claims, the breaking of said mirror *by* the philosopher.[11]

Part Two, 'Synaesthetics', posits an alternative to both philosophical aesthetics and Badiouian 'inaesthetics,' beginning with counter-interpretations of some key Mallarméan metaphors such as the 'cast of the dice that will never abolish chance'.[12] The key to re-reading these metaphors

[10] Gerald L. Bruns, *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy: A Guide for the* Unruly (New York: Fordham University, 2006), p. 4. In the passage to which Bruns alludes Wittgenstein asks, 'how is the concept of a game bounded? What still counts as a game and what no longer does? Can you give the boundary? No. You can draw one; for none has so far been drawn. (But that never troubled you before when you used the word "game".)' Wittgenstein (2009), #68. See also, Hans Georg Gadamer: 'Dialectic […] does not claim to have a first principle. […] Plato was well aware of this position when he said that philosophy is something for human beings, not for gods. Gods know, but we are in this ongoing process of approximation and overcoming error by dialectically moving toward truth. In this sense I could present a partial defence of the idea that the oldest heritage of philosophy is exactly its functionality, its giving an account, and that as such it cannot presume to have first principles. This suggests very well what I would have in place of "foundation." I would call it "participation," because that is what happens in human life.' 'The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,' in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), pp. 63–64.

[11] See Ch. 2, n. 1, below.

[12] Stephane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems: A Bilingual Edition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 121. The epigraph to Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005 [1998]), which is dated 'April 1998' defines 'inaesthetics' as concerned with 'a relation of

will be what I have called *ambi*semic re-tracings of their imaginative possibilities across empirical, sensual and psychological boundaries, resisting attempts to de-mystify the poems or break their codes. I will then conclude by considering the 'encounter', both literal and symbolic, between Celan and Heidegger, at the supposed end of the age of the poets. Badiou's ostensible claim is that 'Celan completes Heidegger' and that this 'closes' the age of the poets, but it will be my contention that he *actually* believes it is he, Alain Badiou, who completes not just Heidegger, but Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan also.[13] This is an important distinction; it is essential for Badiou *personally* that *he* shuts down the notion of philosophy 'as a form of poetry' in order to fully secure the return of philosophy.

I would like to begin, however, by considering what might be meant by Wittgenstein's remark, and by exploring some of its implications and ramifications. It would be an error, I believe, to take Winch's translation, with which we began, and home in on *form*, as if the key constituent here were the mythical poem 'on the page.' In Wittgenstein's original German, '*Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur* dichten', there seems little to justify such an inference. Everything becomes much clearer, therefore, if we endorse Marjorie Perloff's preference for David Schalkwyk's translation, which is: 'Philosophy should be written only *as one would write* poetry [emphasis mine].'[14] In this way attention shifts to the *act* of writing, and the attitude cultivated in *performance* of said act, rather than on any finished product; perhaps even hinting at what Mallarmé calls 'unlimited trajectories, an opulent state suddenly turned evasive, a delicious inability to finish'.[15] The poem can then be considered as a living, mutating entity

philosophy to art that, maintaining that art itself is a producer of truths, make no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy.' Instead, Badiou claims, it 'describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art.'

[13] Badiou (1999), p. 77.

[14] David Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein's "Imperfect Garden": The Ladders and Labyrinths of philosophy as *Dichtung*', in John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer, eds., *The Literary Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 56. Quoted by Marjorie Perloff in, 'Writing Philosophy as Poetry: Literary Form in Wittgenstein' in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein,* ed. by Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 728, n. 3.

[15] Stephane Mallarmé, 'Music and Letters' in *Divagations* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 189.

inhabiting a perpetually shifting landscape of senses, consciousnesses, and cultures.[16] In another remark dated to the 1930s Wittgenstein makes his position more explicit:

> If, rather than a more correct way of thinking, I want to teach a new movement of thought, my purpose is a 'revaluation of values,' and [with this] I come to Nietzsche as well as to the opinion that the philosopher should be a poet.[17]

What is meant, therefore, by writing philosophy 'as one would write poetry' in the Wittgensteinian sense, as Perloff understands it, is 'to be aware of the need for density and resonance – rather than logic and sequential argument – in the verbal construct.'[18] The act of reading, the *way* one reads, is thus also implicated, with Wittgenstein demanding that he be read in the right *way*: 'Sometimes a sentence can be understood only if it is read at the *right* tempo. My sentences are all to be read *slowly*.'[19]

A poem such as Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, by the same token, depends on an eye able to dance across a page, and a mind able to follow the movement of the dance like a sympathetic partner.[20] Glyn Maxwell writes of 'A word and four ways. Prime meaning, resonant meaning, way it *sounds* sans meaning, way it *looks* sans meaning. Solar, lunar, musical, visual.'[21] It is to such a process of resonation, of performing the production of meaning, that Wittgenstein's sentences, according to Perloff, are 'paratactic and metonymic', circling around the point 'until the

[16] See Glyn Maxwell's *On Poetry* (London: Oberon, 2012) with its, in my opinion, misconceived discussion of the poem against the 'whiteness' of the page.
[17] *Nachlass* (23rd March 1938), item 120, p. 145r. Quoted in Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein's "Imperfect Garden"' in Gibson and Huemer, eds. (2004), p. 73, n. 7. Trans. by Huemer.
[18] Perloff in Kuusela and McGinn, eds. (2011), p. 725.
[19] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 65e.
[20] It may be just such a text as this that Jacques Derrida has in mind when he suggests that 'for certain rare texts, the writing tends, one might say, to trace the structure and the physiology of an eye that does yet exist and to which the event of the text destines itself, for which it sometimes invents its destination no less than it regulates itself by that destination.' Jacques Derrida, 'Is there a philosophical language?' in *Points . . .: Interviews, 1974-1994* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 216.
[21] Maxwell (2012), 'Black'.

"meaning" of this or that argument suddenly crystallizes.'[22] This encapsulates perfectly what distinguishes so much of Wittgenstein's writing from traditional philosophical discourse. Jan Zwicky, another writer who has engaged with that Wittgensteinian aphorism, writes that:

> philosophy may assume lyric form when [it] is conceived as an attempt to arrive at an integrated perception, a picture or understanding of how something might affect us as beings with bodies and emotions, as well as the ability to parse syllogisms […] when it attempts to give voice to an ecology of experience [and] under such circumstances, it is not useful to distinguish between art and philosophy.[23]

Zwicky, then, agrees with Perloff regarding the key characteristic of 'resonance' within what she dubs 'lyric philosophy.' As she puts it: 'The coherence that lyric awareness intuits, and that lyric thought attempts to render, is ecological in form. Ecological structure is a form of resonance.'[24] It is these ideas of an 'ecology of experience', 'resonance', and an 'embodied cognition' that lead me to 'synaesthetics' as a term intended to signify modes of writing and reading in which these strands are drawn together.[25]

Badiou's position, by contrast, is that philosophy begins, with Plato, as propositional logic.[26] That is, it begins when Plato privileges the coldly rational precision of the matheme over the emotional excesses of the mytheme. In this sense Plato's oeuvre is philosophy's founding 'event': a Badiouian event being any practice that facilitates the emergence of new truths by making a hole in existing knowledge. Badiou's fundamental claim, then, as Philippe Lacoue-

[22] Perloff in Kuusela and McGinn, eds. (2011), p. 726.
[23] Jan Zwicky, 'What is Lyric Philosophy? An Introduction', *Common Knowledge*, 20.1 (2014), 16. Zwicky's use of 'lyric, she makes clear, 'deliberately sets aside historical associations with Romantic poetry in order to focus on what it is we could be meaning when we use it to characterize Vermeer interiors, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Schubert's use of diatonic tonality, and the poetry of Ezra Pound.'
[24] Zwicky (2014), 17.
[25] The work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is a touchstone here.
[26] Although 'ontology = mathematics' is only made possible by Georg Cantor's transfinite set theory in the 1870s.

Labarthe summarises it, is that today

> the proper task of philosophy, in asserting itself again as such, is to turn away from the Poem in order to devote itself to the Matheme, according to its original vocation; or more precisely, its task is to reconstitute the entire fourfold structure of its conditions (consisting of politics, love, poetry and mathematics).[27]

These are the genres through which truths are produced but, for Badiou, 'disaster' is courted when philosophy finds itself 'sutured' to one of these conditions and, through this process, allows a truth condition such as poetry to impose restrictions on it – even though philosophy, as he presents it, seems to be a practice *defined* by strict adherence to rather narrow, self-imposed limits. It is when, Badiou states, philosophy becomes 'captive to a network of sutures to its conditions' that it finds itself 'threatened by suspension'.[28] In such circumstances, he argues, philosophy surrenders its distinctive truth-*seizing* functions to the poem where previously it had similarly allowed these functions to be co-opted by its political (i.e. dialectical materialist) and mathematical (i.e. Platonic) conditions. Badiou's thesis thus becomes an explicit rejection of just that process which sees philosophy become poetic; a rejection, in other words, of what he calls Wittgenstein's 'almost testamentary declaration'.[29] The 'disaster', in Badiouian terms, happens 'when philosophy is presented as being not a seizing of truths, but [as just another] *situation of truth*'; that is, as a discourse like any other.[30] Badiou's re-foundational project can thus be seen as an attempt at a re-inversion of Nietzsche's re-inversion (or transvaluation) of Platonic morality, restoring philosophy's status as the pure and disinterested 'lover of wisdom,' the intrepid hunter of truths beyond the material world into an

[27] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007 [2002]), p. 17.
[28] Badiou (1999), p. 64.
[29] Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 82.
[30] Badiou (1999), p. 129.

over-world of pure Ideas, and as 'true north' on the moral compass.

One thing Badiou makes abundantly clear is his intention to fight fire with fire. Philosophy's very existence is at stake, and with it the possibility of truths themselves. The fact that so much is at stake justifies, he believes, unabashedly polemical writing:

> We can and must write a *Republic* and a *Symposium* for our contemporaries. Just as for the major sophists, there were a *Gorgias* and a *Protagoras* so there must be a *Nietzsche* and the *Wittgenstein*. And, for the minor sophists, a [Gianni) *Vattimo* and a [Richard] *Rorty*. No more nor less polemical, no more nor any less respectful.[31]

If I myself, therefore, indulge in any ad hominem 'playing the man rather than the ball,' and am not always 'respectful,' this seems entirely justified on Badiou's own terms. There is, anyway, a belief, that I share, running from Nietzsche through Freud, Jung, Lacan and beyond, that non-conscious drives are often of more interest than self-conscious expression. 'Often' as Jung puts it, 'what is thought is less important than who thinks it', and philosophy has tended to depend upon conveniently ignoring this idea, for fear of reducing its own truth claims to questions of rhetorical force or conviction.[32] The difficulty is, however, that setting up such antagonisms, engaging an interlocutor, and refuting his or her position, is the very stuff of philosophy, and it is at least arguable that Plato's entire oeuvre is one long antisophistic polemic. Understanding – and the model here is, as always, Socrates – really means overpowering one's opponents (or acolytes) with pre-prepared arguments, thus subsuming their conception under one's pre-conceived schema, while simultaneously maintaining the fiction

[31] Badiou (1999), p. 137.
[32] Jung's remark is taken from a letter to Arnold Künzli dated 28th February 1943. There is also, in this regard, Nietzsche: 'I have kept a close eye on the philosophers and read between their lines for long enough to say to myself: the greatest part of conscious thought must still be attributed to instinctive activity, and this is even the case for philosophical thought.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 6-7.

that those present are equal participants in an open exploration of a knotty question.[33] In this way this becomes the 'philosophical problem' paradigm in which the pure power of reason *itself* is seen to be triumphant, through a process of calculated and disinterestedly logical inevitability.[34] Thus the Wittgensteinian 'therapeutic' approach which places the emphasis on introspection and *self*-correction is anathema to Badiou, and this might go some way to explaining why psychoanalysis and antiphilosophy are seen to be so inextricably intertwined.

An 'antiphilosophical' position, therefore, would be the belief Badiou attributes to Wittgenstein that 'there are only bodies and languages', to which – in naming his project 'materialist dialectics' – Badiou appends his own definitive caveat: 'except that there are truths.'[35] Initially, he traces the roots of this antiphilosophical insurrection back to St Paul, whom he cites as its 'inventor', but then concedes that the real 'honour' may belong 'to Diogenes, or even to Heraclitus'.[36] He gives us a long list of antagonisms which includes: 'Pascal against Descartes, Rousseau against the Encyclopaedists, Kierkegaard against Hegel, Nietzsche against Plato, [and] Lacan against Althusser'. Bosteels cites Cavell's suggestion that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

> will come to be thought of as belonging to a more or less honourable line of counter-philosophical works whose palpable philosophical eccentricity ensures their marginality to a central philosophical curriculum – along perhaps with Montaigne's or Emerson's

[33] Gödel's incompleteness theorems prove that for any axiomatic, formal system the consistency of axioms integral to that system cannot be proved within the system itself. See Kurt Gödel, *On formally undecidable propositions of Principia Mathematica and related systems*, trans. by B. Meltzer (New York: Dover, 1992 [1931])
[34] An antidote can be found in the work of Edith Stein, with her emphasis on empathy (*Einfühlung*) in phenomenological inquiry. She suggests that empathetic awareness can '"work hand in hand [with inner perception] to give me to myself."' From her doctoral thesis, and quoted in Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue 1913 – 1922* (Maryland and Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), p. 85. I am currently developing the neologism 'interstanding' as a means of differentiating these two models of inquiry, but there is insufficient space to go into that here.
[35] Alain Badiou, 'Bodies, Languages Truths' from a lecture delivered at the Victoria College of Arts, University of Melbourne, on 9th September 2006 <https://www.lacan.com/badbodies.htm>.
[36] Badiou (2011), p. 69.

> *Essays*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Rousseau's *Promenades*, Friedrich Schlegel's *Fragments*, Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, works ineradicably tinged with the philosophical whose life, nevertheless, largely depends upon their interesting those beyond the call of professional philosophy.'[37]

Postmodern antiphilosophy surely begins with Nietzsche, but Badiou traces what is, for him, the definitive use of the term to Lacan who, in 1975, exhorts his students to primarily concern themselves with the protocols of 'antiphilosophy.'[38] This is, Lacan states, 'the title I would gladly give to the investigation of what the university discourse owes to its supposed "educational" function. It is not', he goes on, 'the history of ideas, so sad, that will get to the end of this.'[39] Lacan adopts a patently Nietzschean tone in hoping for a 'patient anthology of the stupidity that characterises [academic philosophy]' that will 'put it into relief with regard to its indestructible root, its eternal dream [f]rom which there is no awakening'.[40] Badiou, in fact, describes Lacan as 'the third great and fascinated detractor of philosophy from the last century' alongside Wittgenstein and Nietzsche.[41] Lacan sees the 'university discourse' as a form of the 'master's discourse' and has clearly had little use for it declaring, in 1974: 'I do not make any philosophy; on the contrary, I am wary of it like the plague.'[42]

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[37] Badiou (2011), p. 69. Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 193, quoted by Bosteels, 'Introduction' to Badiou (2011), p. 60.

[38] There are a number of possible synonyms which could perhaps be offered in place of antiphilosophy, such as deconstructionism, post-structuralism, constructivism, relativism, or even nominalism.

[39] Jacques Lacan, 'Peut–être à Vincennes,' *Autres écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), p. 314.

[40] Lacan (2001), p. 315. Slavoj Žižek suspects it is not Hegelian metaphysics that Lacan has in mind, rather it is the Gilles Deleuze of *Anti-Oedipus* who functions as 'the stand-in for philosophy as such'. Žižek describes Deleuze as 'a philosopher of globalized perversion if ever there was one' and finds him guilty of espousing a 'false subversive radicalization that fits the existing power constellation perfectly (*The Ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 295-6).' I have to say I am not convinced that Žižek is right in this instance, because I believe Lacan casts his net of irritation and frustration much wider than this.

[41] Badiou (2011a), p. 75. As an aside, it does seem a little odd to describe Nietzsche as 'of the last [i.e. twentieth] century' given that he had lapsed into a catatonic state more than a decade before that century began and barely lived to see it.

[42] Adrian Johnston, 'This Philosophy Which Is Not One: Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian Antiphilosophy', ***S****: Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, 3 (2010), 140. See also

Foucault and Derrida also take their place on Badiou's list of antiphilosophers, although Althusser, in the same breath, as part of Badiou's 2008 'Funeral Oration' for him, is granted exemption on the basis of his statement that: 'There is [and always will be] philosophy.'[43] This even though Badiou had, fourteen years previously, asserted that

> the antiphilosophical act comes down to tracing a line of demarcation, as Althusser would have said following Lenin. And it is very well possible that Althusser's project, under the name of 'materialist philosophy,' came close to twentieth-century antiphilosophy.[44]

Barbara Cassin, whom Badiou seems to see as something like a blend of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, joins Vattimo, Rorty and Jean-François Lyotard on a list of 'sophists,' rather than being named as an antiphilosopher, and sophist is a title to which Cassin herself is more than happy to lay claim.[45] Interestingly, neither Marx nor Freud find a place on Badiou's list, though Bosteels is happy to add them on his behalf.[46] Bosteels also adds Slavoj Žižek, for good measure, citing Fredric Jameson's assessment of the latter's parallax position as 'an anti-philosophical one, for it not only eludes philosophical systemisation, but takes as its central thesis the latter's impossibility'.[47] The question of whether Heidegger could also be called an antiphilosopher remains open, though Bosteels makes clear that Badiou does not consider him

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Jacque Lacan, 'Le triomphe de la religion', *Le triomphe de la religion précéde de Discours aux catholiques*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) p. 101, quoted in Johnston (2010), p. 141.

[43] '[Althusser] was, unlike Lacan, Foucault or Derrida, who were all anti-philosophers, a philosopher. Yes he was.' Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon* (London: Verso, 2016b [2008]), p. 89.

[44] Alain Badiou, 'Silence, solipsisme, sainteté: L'antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein,' *BARCA! Poésie, Politique, Psychanalyse*, 3, 1994, p. 17.

[45] See 'Logology against Ontology', Badiou's review of Cassin's *L'effet sophistique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995) in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 309-20. In 2010 Badiou, intriguingly, collaborated with Cassin on two books: *Heidegger: Le nazisme, les femmes, la philosophie* and *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*. Both have been translated into English (see bibliography). Cassin has described the collaboration as 'a good kind of consensus […] in that it's not at all a consensus but a continuous dissent traversing particular points.' Cassin (2014), p. 21.

[46] Bosteels (2008), p. 159.

[47] Fredric Jameson, 'First Impressions', (review of *The Parallax View* by Slavoj Žižek), *London Review of Books*, 28.17, 2006, quoted by Bosteels (2008), p. 160.

one.[48] There would be many other strong candidates such as Gilles Deleuze, François Laruelle, Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Henri Lefebvre, and cases could undoubtedly be made for Walter Benjamin and Maurice Merleau-Ponty – who wrote that there is a sense in which 'language never has anything to do with anything but itself'[49] – or almost any writer whose work engages in 'thinking' while not quite seeming to be either poetry or philosophy.[50] As with Wittgenstein it seems to be as much a question of style – of *how* something is said, and perhaps how *well* it is said – as *what* is said. A case must also be made for Luce Irigaray who is, Badiou tells Louise Burchill, '"an antiphilosopher, even the antiphilosopher par excellence", in that she operates "a violent determination of philosophy on the basis of the category of "woman"'.'[51]

If Badiou traces this antiphilosophical persuasion back to the pre-Socratics, and the definitive employment of the term to Lacan, and finds its ultimate embodiment in Wittgenstein, the beginnings of postmodern scepticism regarding the privileged status of philosophical writing – in fact, an undisguised contempt for philosophers – surely comes with Nietzsche's 1873 essay 'On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense', written just after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, though unpublished at the time.[52] 'What, then, is Truth?' asks Nietzsche, before answering his own question thus:

> A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and

[48] Bosteels ((2008), p. 160) acknowledges Hallward's claim that 'Heidegger himself, of course, is most easily read as an antiphilosophical thinker' (*Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 20) while respectfully disagreeing.
[49] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. by Claude Lefort and John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 115.
[50] In the end, only 'three crucial philosophers' – Plato, Descartes, and Hegel – are explicitly granted exemption. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II, trans. by Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009),* p. 529.
[51] Louise Burchill, 'Feminism' (quoting from 'personal communication' with Badiou, 2011), in *The Badiou Dictionary*, ed. by Steven Corcoran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).
[52] It was finally published in 1896.

> rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.[53]

Nietzsche's statement can be placed at the beginning of a line leading through Wittgenstein and on to Derrida and beyond. Conceived against a background of revolution against the philosophical hegemon, this movement would, in fact, reach its apogee with the original 1967 publications of Derrida's *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*, the ultimate effect being philosophy's presentation not simply as another form of literary discourse, but as being simultaneously at its most effective and at its most impotent when it is at its most literary. To put it another way, the most vivid moments in the history of philosophy – such as when we have been asked to imagine that we are prisoners in a cave watching shadows on a wall, or that we are being deceived by an omnipotent demon, or that there is an invisible 'world-spirit' driving history forwards – owe everything to imaginative leaps beyond the mathematical language of a supposedly pure philosophy, as syllogistic deduction.

Derrida in particular, in an interview published in 1988, seems happy to endorse the suspicion that what is called philosophical writing is a matter of style, and of rhetorical force, rather than something *substantially* different from other forms of expression:

> I don't believe that there is 'a specifically philosophical writing', a sole philosophical writing whose purity is always the same and out of reach of all sorts of contaminations. And first of all for this overwhelming reason: philosophy is spoken and written in a natural language, not in an absolutely formalizable and universal language. That said,

[53] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense' in Walter Kaufmann, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1976), pp. 46-7.

> within this natural language and its uses, certain modes have been forcibly imposed (and there is a relation of force) as philosophical. The modes are multiple, conflictual, inseparable from the philosophical content itself and from its 'theses'. A philosophical debate is also a combat in view of imposing discursive modes, demonstrative procedures, rhetorical and pedagogical techniques. Each time philosophy has been opposed, it was also, although not only, by contesting the properly, authentically philosophical character of the other's discourse.[54]

Derrida thus answers the question of whether there is a *specifically* philosophical language with a resounding 'no'. There is only, he suggests, a philosophical style, a mode of discourse that seeks to establish its own hegemony by delimiting and excluding other modes of discourse on the grounds that they are *insufficiently* philosophical according to certain restrictive criteria philosophically set. For him, it seems, philosophy of the kind championed by Badiou has reached an impasse in terms of being able to present itself as more than discursive.

Wittgenstein concurs, in yet another journal entry from the 1930s:

> People say again and again that philosophy doesn't really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. But the people who say this don't understand why it has to be so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions.[55]

Here again there is no specifically philosophical language, just ordinary language and new ways of using it: 'What I invent are new *similes*' Wittgenstein admits.[56] We can see this in action in his comparison of 'the solution of philosophical problems' with a fairy tale gift that 'appears

[54] Derrida (1995), p. 219.
[55] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 15e.
[56] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 19e.

enchanted' inside a magic castle but, in daylight, is revealed as 'an ordinary bit of iron'.[57] He also notes 'the difficulty Socrates gets into when trying to give a definition of a concept' so that a 'use of the word emerges that seems not to be compatible with the concept that other uses have led us to form'.[58] In the end all Wittgenstein finds are two entrenchedly antithetical positions, so that he finally lose all patience with the Socratic dialogues: 'what a frightful waste of time! What's the point of these arguments that prove nothing and clarify nothing?'[59] 'Socrates' he goes on to say, 'keeps reducing the sophist to silence, – but does he have *right* on his side when he does this?'[60] Wittgenstein's ire might similarly been turned upon Badiou, had he lived to read him, and he might have traced Badiou's philosophy to just such a recognisably Socratic piece of misdirection. 'We are engaged in a struggle with language' Wittgenstein suggests, but 'if we clothe ourselves in a new form of expression, the old problems are discarded along with the old garment,' and this belief that language is everything seems to be precisely what Badiou *means* by 'antiphilosopher.'[61]

However, if we examine the maieutic process with which philosophy proper begins, and which so infuriates Wittgenstein, we might find something illuminating. Socrates' metaphor is an obstetric one; he is not the mother of the implicit Idea (nor even its father) rather – tracing the etymology of the word maieutics – he is the *midwife* of its explication. Ontotheologically, anamnetically, in what amounts to a psychoanalytic counterpart to this obstetric analogy, the philosopher's role is concerned with the purely logistical question of uncovering the Idea from beneath doxastic confusion (paradox), analogous also to the leading of the freed prisoner from the cave of shadows. This makes abundantly clear the kind of threat posed by the resonant,

[57] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 11e. He also compares the notion of philosophical progress to scratching an itch, asking, 'If somebody scratches the spot where he has an itch, do we have to see some progress?' Wittgenstein (1984), p. 86e.
[58] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 30e.
[59] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 14e.
[60] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 56e.
[61] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 11e. and p. 48e.

circling indirectness with which an antiphilosopher like Derrida or a poet like Mallarmé writes. A positive reading of the maieutic method has Socrates systematically eliminating false opinion (*eikasia*) until Truth is 'delivered' or 'revealed' (*alethia*). There is, however, subterfuge at work, because Socrates always already *has* the true opinion and his claim upon it is always irrefutable within (though *only* within) the closed circle of his logic. Badiou, as it happens, fully accepts that Plato was engaged in the paradoxical venture of writing 'philosophical theatre', believing that 'in the field of reason […] philosophy can also as theatre organize discussions in a vivid manner'. Not only that, but Badiou admits that the 'necessity to educate in how to come out of the cave is the true definition of philosophy and Plato knows that theatre and more generally art also transform subjectivity.'[62] In Book III of the *Republic*, for example, Socrates indulges in one of his customarily elaborate pretences, this time seeming to wrestle with the question of what poets will be allowed to say. He finds himself arguing that they should not be allowed to write in a manner that fails to demonstrate justice being served. Ultimately, there is little attempt to hide the fundamentally coercive nature of the proposal: '"We must forbid them"', Socrates declares, '"to say this sort of thing, and require their poems and stories to have quite the opposite moral."'[63]

Poetry then, in this didactic process, contra Wittgenstein, must only be composed in the 'language game of giving [ideologically sound] information'.[64] In spite of the lengths to which poets go to conceal their sources, there is, Socrates argues, nothing else from which poetic imagery might be drawn other than empirical reality. Stripped of their sorcerer's power, their

[62] Alain Badiou, from a lecture given at the Art Gallery of New South Wales as part of the Sydney Seminar for Art and Philosophy, Western Sydney University, 29th November 2014, and published as 'The Common Preoccupation of Art and Philosophy', in A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens, eds., *Badiou and His Interlocutors: Lectures, Interviews and Responses*. (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 34-5.
[63] Plato (2007), Part III, 392b. As in every Socratic dialogue there is a rather theatrical performance of ignorance whereby Socrates acts out the 'struggle' involved in drawing out the answer he already has prepared. The irony seems particularly acute when, as here, he is accusing poets of just such subterfuge and dissimulation.
[64] See Ch. 4, n. 196, below.

gaudy metaphorical clothing, '"[a]ny story or poem narrates things past, present, or future, does it not?"' he asks, rhetorically.[65] He illustrates his point by citing the *Iliad*, and Homer's adoption of the voice of the priest Chryses, whereby the poet's intention is, as much as possible, to conceal his own voice in an effort to convince his audience that it is Chryses himself who speaks. '"If, of course, the poet never concealed his own personality"', Socrates suggests, '"his poetic narrative would be wholly devoid of representation ."'"[66] Assuming the poet's intention is to reveal the truth, he is surely better served doing so clearly and directly Plato suggests, rather than mimetically, by obscuring his meaning behind an assumed character and in an assumed voice; although Plato seems entirely blind to the irony that he makes this point in the voice of Socrates. Badiou does not quite demand that the poet, Mallarmé for example, 'conceal himself nowhere' in this way, but he does seem to implicitly endorse Socrates'/Plato's line of argument in embarking upon the process of unravelling the poet's syntax to reveal the meaning hidden in the poem, as he is wont to do on several occasions.[67]

Luce Irigaray, however, exposes several of Plato's 'theatrical' manipulations of perspective in her account of the hegemonic assumptions underpinning the cave allegory. In a passage entitled '*The A-lêtheia, a Necessary Denegation among Men*' Irigaray, like Badiou, is cognizant of the dramatic nature of the cave scenario, but goes further in elucidating the manner in which its staging allows conclusions to be framed and manipulated as a Badiouian *anamnetic* naming of 'the unnameable', a Heideggerian revelation of the hidden. She writes,

> *Alêtheia* will come into play when *denomination* occurs but in fact, silently, it has determined the whole functioning of the language, its terminology, its syntax, its dramatization. Yet this exorbitant power is hidden in the fact that it is *also* used as

[65] Plato (2007), Book III, 392d.
[66] Plato (2007), Book III, 393c.
[67] See Badiou's readings of two sonnets by Mallarmé in Ch. 3, below.

> metaphor and evoked and recalled. Not without the assistance of a (de)negation: the word is *a-lêtheia*.[68]

Irigaray could almost be directly addressing the univocalisation that Badiou employs in his reading of Mallarmé when she argues that Plato's allegory only succeeds

> as long as no one seeks to interpret how equivocal is the *formality* by which veils are theoretically lifted, notably the veils of oblivion, error, and mendacity. Of fantasy. As long as no measure is taken of the fact that using representations in utterance (even if it be) by means of negation/denial, in order to repeat what tacitly determines them, does not undermine that domination but in fact increases its weight and reinforces its status.[69]

As with Plato, so with Badiou, the *causal* nature of the simulations is the one thing that will *not* be unveiled, 'de-negated,' even while the pretence of such an unveiling is being enacted. It is, Irigaray suggests, a form of 'optical jiggery-pokery' involving 'trick[s] of deduction'. As she puts it,

> nothing can be named as 'beings' except those same things which all the same men see in the same way in a setup that does not allow them to see other things and which they will designate with the same names, on the basis of the conversation between them.[70]

What, then, in Irigaray's words, 'under-lies the whole Socratic dialectic' seems to be a certain domination-as-nomination masquerading as a form of revelation, and as Derrida attests, 'one can't get out of Mallarmé's antre as one can get out of Plato's cave […] it requires an entirely different kind of speleology which no longer searches behind the lustrous appearance outside […] of the "literary mechanism".'[71]

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[68] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 262.?
[69] Irigaray (1985), p. 262.
[70] Irigaray (1985), p. 263.
[71] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 216. See also 'Music and Letters' in Mallarmé (2009), p. 187.

Given the stranglehold exerted by the philosophical hegemon, then, the ostracism of all manner of dissenting voices to which Irigaray alludes, there has been a pressing need for something much more than a new *approach* to philosophy, a need, in fact, for new kinds of writing that lie *outside* philosophy's discourse, though not necessarily *inside* that of literature. Foucault, speaking in 1975, suggests that a metaphorical 'wall […] between the philosophical and the non-philosophical' has been 'made permeable', and therefore 'derisory', by some writers.[72] He goes so far as to declare himself 'embarrassed' by the remnants of 'traditional philosophical discourse' and 'a certain Hegelianism' that still clung to his own *History of Madness* (1961).[73] 'Ridding oneself of philosophy', he argues,

> necessarily implies a similar lack of deference [to that displayed by Nietzsche]. You will not get out of it by staying within philosophy, by refining it as much as you can, by circumventing it with one's own discourse. No. It is by opposing it with a sort of astonished, joyful stupidity, a sort of uncompromising burst of laughter, which, in the end, understands, or, in any case, shatters. Yes … it shatters rather than understands.[74]

Foucault champions the inheritors of Nietzschean irreverence precisely because they do not limit themselves to the futile task of delivering a new kind of philosophy, rather they deliver writing fundamentally at odds with philosophy's traditional concerns. For Foucault, in fact, those concerns, and the seriousness with which they are expressed, are equally risible. It is significant that (thinking aloud in this way) he finally settles on the antiphilosophically provocative 'shatters' rather than more conciliatory 'understands'. His preference is indeed not

[72] Foucault lists 'Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, [and] Klossowski' as his exemplars. Michel Foucault, *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977 – 1984*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 312-13.
[73] Foucault (1988), p. 312. Foucault's first major work, *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* was finally published in English, in complete form in 2006 as *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006; paperback 2009).
[74] Foucault (1988), p. 312.

so much for 'discourses within literature' as for those 'outside philosophy'. This is a particularly important distinction if philosophical discourse is, as Derrida suggests, exclusionary, whereas literary discourse is, by contrast, radically, almost *infinitely* inclusive. In fact, almost all forms of discourse could find themselves within the literary except where they self-exclude – as with the mathematical and the philosophical – on the grounds of defining themselves *against* the literary. Crucial, for Foucault, in this regard, as with Lacan, is Nietzsche's antagonistic relationship with 'academic philosophical discourse':

> Nietzsche has all the roughness, the rusticity, of the outsider, of the peasant from the mountains, that allows him, with a shrug of the shoulders and without it seeming in any way ridiculous, to say with a strength that one cannot ignore: 'Come on, all that is rubbish…'[75]

For Foucault, it is clear, Nietzsche's writing 'opposes' philosophy, 'shatters' its pretensions, while resisting and satirically undermining ontotheological and logocentric hierarchies of value. Foucault elsewhere emphasises a quintessentially Nietzschean desire to reflect 'not so much on what is true, as on our relationship to truth'.[76] By this Foucauldian criterion of existing 'outside philosophy' those adopting an anti-/meta-/non-/a-philosophical or 'poetic' attitude need, in my view, share nothing other than a style of writing that is *more than* philosophical.

Badiou too notes this attitude of derision, and writes of 'Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, each in his own turn [evincing] a certain form of philosophical contempt for philosophy', and this seems rather to be what Foucault admires in the work of Nietzsche.[77] In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, Nietzsche goes so far as to suggest, scurrilously, that even the Gods laugh at the

[75] Foucault (1988), p. 312.
[76] Foucault (1988), p. 330.
[77] Badiou (2011), p. 74.

pretensions of philosophers, describing this laughter as 'The Olympian Vice'.

> In spite of that philosopher who, being a true Englishman, tried to give laughter a bad reputation among all thoughtful people –, 'laughter is a terrible infirmity of human nature, and one that every thinking mind will endeavour to overcome' (Hobbes) –, I would go so far as to allow myself a rank order of philosophers based on the rank of their laughter – right up to those who are capable of *golden* laughter. And given that even gods philosophize (a conclusion I have been drawn to many times –), I do not doubt that they know a new and super-human way of laughing – at the expense of everything serious! Gods like to make fun of things: it seems as if they cannot stop laughing, even during holy rites.[78]

Hobbes, at least as Nietzsche presents him, echoes Plato in seeing the danger inherent in comedy, as with tragedy, lying in its lack of temperance. Plato, in fact, has Socrates suggesting that tragedy and comedy alike cultivate excessive feelings which, in time, destroys character. '"Does not the same argument apply to laughter as to pity?"' he asks.

> "For the effect is similar when you enjoy on the stage – or even in ordinary life – jokes that you would be ashamed to make yourself, instead of detesting their vulgarity. You are giving rein to your comic instinct, which your reason has restrained for fear you may seem to be playing the fool, and bad taste in the theatre may insensibly lead you into becoming a buffoon at home."[79]

Nietzsche's preference, in sharp contrast, is always for the irreverence of Aristophanes, whom he calls 'that transfiguring, complementary spirit for whose sake we can *forgive* the whole

[78] Nietzsche (2002), pp. 174-75. It must be said that such a ranking of philosophers in terms of their sense of humour would arguably not be kind to Badiou; nor to Plato, Descartes, Hegel, or Heidegger.
[79] Plato, *The Republic* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), Book X, 606c-d.

Greek world for existing'.[80] Nietzsche finds 'no better vision of *Plato's* secrecy and Sphinx nature' than the discovery that 'under the pillow of his deathbed they did not find a 'Bible' or anything Egyptian, Pythagorean, or Platonic – but instead, the works of Aristophanes. How', asks Nietzsche, 'would even a Plato have endured life – a Greek life that he said No to – without an Aristophanes!'[81]

What starts to become clear with the feminist critique of Irigaray as well as Nietzsche's attack on the arch-Platonism of Hobbes, however, is that we can trace the antagonism between poetry and philosophy – implicit in Badiou's desire to 'de-suture philosophy from its poetic condition' – to Plato's definitively *realpolitikal* machinations. Plato himself, of course, traces the antagonism itself further back into antiquity, but it is a 'quarrel' that certainly comes to a head in Book X of the *Republic* when Socrates reaffirms his conviction that there must be no place for poetry in the ideal state he imagines, reasoning that poetry

> "has the same effect on us when it represents sex and anger, and the other desires and feelings of pleasure and pain which accompany all our actions. It waters them when they ought to be left to wither, and makes them control us when we ought, in the interests of our own greater welfare and happiness, to control them."[82]

For Socrates, the problem with the works of 'Homer and the other poets' is '"not that they are bad poetry or are not popular"', quite the opposite: '"indeed the better they are as poetry the more unsuitable they are for the ears of children or men who are to be free and fear slavery more than death."' He worries that '"our Guardians"' will be made '"more nervous and less tough than they should be"' by exposure to the works of tragic poets, that the reading of

[80] Nietzsche (2002), pp. 174-75.
[81] Nietzsche (2002), pp. 174-75.
[82] Plato (2007), Book X, 606d.

affecting laments for the deaths of heroes and leave the guardians exposed to dangerous emotions, thus compromising their decision-making capacities.[83] '"[S]uch representations definitely harm the minds of their audiences, unless they're inoculated against them by knowing their real nature,"' cautions Socrates, and we therefore '"require writers and poets to proceed on the opposite principle"'.[84]

What Socrates seems to achieve, here, is a space for propogandist art, for writing that cultivates the 'right' kind of qualities in order to prepare the young and impressionable for offices of state. He continues:

> "But you will know that the only poetry that should be allowed in a state is hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good men; once you go beyond that and admit the sweet lyric or epic muse, pleasure and pain become your rulers instead of law and the rational principles commonly accepted as best." […] "Our defence, then, when we are reminded that we banished poetry from our state, must be that its character was such as to give us good grounds for so doing and that our argument required it. But in case we are condemned for being insensitive and bad mannered, let us add that there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry."[85]

The implication is that philosophy, for Plato, represents the culmination of a hard-fought battle for control of the human soul on behalf of reason and against emotion. For Badiou, as we have noted previously, this is not merely an aesthetic question, but one of philosophy's very

[83] Plato (2007), Book III, 387b-c.
[84] Plato (2007), Book X, 595b.
[85] Plato (2007), Book X, 607a-b. See also n. 82, above. It is hard not to see an echo of Socrates' logic in that of Joseph Goebbels when, in September 1933, he established the *Reichskulturkammer*. From 1936 onwards, under the Third Reich, according Richard Grunberger, critical evaluation of literature was limited to 'a calculation of the degree of concurrence with Nazi doctrine and a conclusion indicating approval or otherwise.' Richard Grunberger, *The 12 Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany 1933–1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston of Canada Ltd, 1971), p. 357.

existence.[86] Plato would certainly have agreed with David Hume's view that poets are professional liars – sophists, in essence – whose skills are employed in convincing the reader that what is not true *is* true.[87] He is also, however, willing to accept the art of expedient lying, though only when it is the sole preserve of a specific kind of political leader of whom he approves; one who has been carefully selected, bred and trained so that his pedigree ensures his politicking *cannot*, ultimately, be at odds with 'the Good' as Plato presents it. As Adeimantus says: '"It will be for the rulers of our city, then, if anyone, to use falsehood in dealing with citizen or enemy for the good of the State; no one else must do so."'[88]

What Plato achieves, then, according to Badiou, is the establishment of the philosophical discourse as foundational by means of the matheme, and by means of an evental break from the mytheme. However, presenting philosophy as mathematics, as the language of mathematical logic, could also stand as a form of metaphorical substitution.[89] '*One word for another*' in Lacan's characterization of 'the formula for metaphor'; 'if you are a poet, Lacan suggests, you will make it into a game and produce a continuous stream, nay, a dazzling weave of metaphors.'[90] The substitutions of which symbolic logic is composed, by contrast, present us with an impoverished picture of the world, a picture that need only maintain axiomatic internal coherence. This is presumably why Wittgenstein develops what Cavell calls those 'patently and unembarrassed literary responses to [his own work] where we are asked to consider such matters as a fly trapped in a bottle, a beetle in a box, talk from a lion [and] the teeth of a rose.'[91]

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[86] Badiou (2008), p. 37.
[87] 'Poets themselves, tho' liars by profession, always endeavour to give an air of truth to their fictions; and where that is totally neglected, their performances, however ingenious, will never be able to afford much pleasure.' David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 165.
[88] Plato (2007), Book III, 389b.
[89] This must be especially the case after the work of Georg Cantor and Kurt Gödel.
[90] Zwicky (2014), p. 16; Lacan (2006), p. 422. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet put it thus: 'You can always replace one word with another. If you don't like that one, if it doesn't suit you, take another, put another in its place. There are only inexact words to designate something exactly.' *Dialogues II* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 3.
[91] Cavell (2005), p. 93.

If we imagine, as a kind of Wittgensteinian thought experiment, an arena in which discussions were conducted by means of symbolic logic alone, presenting and refuting each other's claims in unadorned notational form, we can surely only imagine the poverty, the unidimensionality, of such a discourse, and the sheer range of potential miscommunication. This is why Plato himself, in his *Republic*, gives us, by way of fleshing out his thinking, not just 'the cave of shadows', but the 'ship of fools', the 'divided line', and countless other literary flourishes. If philosophy is really, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, not the uncovering of Truth, but 'the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts', then such invention would seem best served by utilising the fullest possible range of imaginative literary techniques.[92] In this sense Jerome McGann suggests that texts are 'autopoietic mechanisms operating as self-generating feedback systems that cannot be separated from those who manipulate and use them.'[93] And if we then accept Nietzsche's 'verdict', as Deleuze and Guattari, again, present it, that 'you will know nothing through concepts unless you have first created them – that is, constructed them in an intuition specific to them', we find that we have inverted that very paradigm according to which a philosophy emerges from a social milieu, so that its figurative and performative aspects appear merely accidental.[94] Plato understands this, which is why he expends so much thought on an artistic culture that will allow philosophy and philosophers to flourish by setting strictly moderated limits on creativity.

Considering language 'poietically,' in this way – that is, as composed of such social acts of (self-)creation – is perhaps what leads Henri Lefebvre, writing in 1965, to suggest that:

> the project of a transformation of the everyday […] would restore [poetry's] lost riches […]. As a project to restore poiesis to its full sense – production and creation – it stands

[92] Deleuze and Guattari (1994), p. 6.
[93] Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 15.
[94] Deleuze and Guattari (1994), p. 7.

> in the line of poetry, while bound up on the other hand with the superseding of philosophy.[95]

For Lefebvre, poiesis is inextricably bound up with a praxis according to which 'philosophy must be superseded' precisely because of its inhibition of a fully creative engagement with the 'real' to which we have alluded.[96] Even 'poetry' is constrictive in this sense, suggests Lefebvre, because '[n]ot all creation is poiesis, but all poiesis is creation. The word 'poetry' restricts the meaning of the term.'[97] He thus defines poetry as, originally, 'a practical truth of action and production' that properly embraces *all* forms of human creativity citing, in this context, Heidegger's remarkable claim that poetry 'was not [in fact] originally a verbal act'.[98] What Lefebvre calls 'metaphilosophy', then, is indistinguishable from poetry in initiating a practical supersession of philosophy which leads to creative activity:

> In itself, metaphilosophical thought attempts to reconstruct a totality, and first of all to reunite poetry, or rather poiesis, and philosophy, at a higher level than that of their ancient split. It seeks to be *action-thought*, reconstituted unity of understanding and practical consciousness.[99]

This perhaps brings us full circle, back to Wittgenstein and what he terms 'bring[ing] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use',[100] a project Cavell memorably calls Wittgenstein's 'diurnalization of philosophy's ambitions'.[101] Wittgenstein would like us to ask ourselves, in speaking philosophically, whether 'the word is ever used in this way in the

[95] Lefebvre (2016), p. 122.
[96] Lefebvre (2016), p. 17.
[97] Lefebvre (2016), p. 8.
[98] Lefebvre (2016), p. 135.
[99] Lefebvre (2016), p. 160.
[100] Wittgenstein (2009), #116.
[101] Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013 [1989]), p. 23.

language in which it is at home'.[102] Philosophy, he suggests, 'must not interfere with the actual use of language' so that in the end it 'leaves everything as it is'.[103] As the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* puts it: 'Philosophy is not a body of doctrine, but an activity […] [it] does not result in "philosophical propositions", but rather in the clarification of propositions.'[104] Perhaps this bringing words 'home' is what generates a form of poetry in the 'bumps that the understanding [gets] by running up against the limits of language.'[105] As Cassin 'the sophist' writes, adroitly summarising her disagreement with her sometime collaborator, Badiou, 'I don't believe in Truth. He does – and he wants to. We don't see language as playing the same role.'[106]

[102] Wittgenstein (2009), #116
[103] Wittgenstein (2009), #124.
[104] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, (London: Routledge, 2001), #4.112.
[105] Wittgenstein (2009), #119
[106] Cassin (2014), p. 20. Ultimately she also wonders how much this 'sophist-philosopher' dichotomy might be a question of gender, just one of philosophy's many fraught relationships with its deviant and silenced 'others.'

PART ONE: SOPHISTICS

1. Philosophy sutured

> *[T]he fundamental criticism of Heidegger can only be the following one: the Age of the Poets is completed, it is also necessary to de-suture philosophy from its poetic condition. Which means that it is no longer required that disobjectification and disorientation be stated in the poetic metaphor. Disorientation can be* conceptualized.[1]

The age of the poets

In the title essay of *The Age of the Poets and Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose* (2014), Badiou's first concern is to clarify what he does *not* mean by this idiosyncratic phrase.[2] This is not, he declares, something 'immanent to poetry': 'It is not poets who declared the age that was theirs.'[3] He is adamant, nevertheless, that 'there really was an age of the poets', and that it was situated 'between the Paris Commune and the aftermath of World War II', between Rimbaud and Celan, with Hölderlin described as 'more of an angelical announcer' or its 'prophet and anticipating vigil'.[4] In spite of providing us with these markers the age of the poets is not, Badiou insists, 'historicist', not a 'periodization'; however, if we *are* to date it

[1] Badiou (1999), p. 74.
[2] Originally published in 1992 in *La politique des poètes: pourquoi des poètes en temps de détresse?* ed. by Jacques Rancière (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992), pp. 21-38.
[3] Badiou (2014), p. 3.
[4] Badiou (1999), p. 70-71; (2014), p. 3. Hölderlin, in spite of having died a quarter of a century before the supposed advent of the 'age', is presented as its presiding spirit owing, in no small part, presumably, to his abiding influence on Heidegger.

more precisely we might suggest that it begins with that previously mentioned 1873 work of Nietzsche's, a 'manifesto for antiphilosophy' of sorts, and ends with the publication of the first volume of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* in February 1966.[5] If one were to claim that an 'opening' rather than a 'closing' occurred at this juncture, that an antiphilosophical movement actually begins to gathers momentum in the mid-to-late1960s, then the publications of Derrida's *De la grammatologie* and *L'écriture et la différence* the following year might be considered the more noteworthy events, but Badiou himself seems to see his own burgeoning contribution to the *Cahiers* as the beginning of a personal quest to heal the wounds inflicted by Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. It is the beginning of *his* career that he really believes brings the age of the poets to a close, though modesty prevents him from saying so outright.

The age of the poets is also *not*, Badiou asserts, 'an aesthetic category', in that the seven poets who 'exemplify' the concept do so according to intra-philosophical and political, rather than aesthetic, criteria. These poets are: Hölderlin (1770–1843), Mallarmé (1842–98), Rimbaud (1854–91), Trakl (1887–1914), Pessoa (1888–1935), Mandelstam (1891–38) and Celan (1920–70).[6] The political criteria are usually Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, but are also, irrefutably, in the shadow of Nietzsche: whereas previously, Badiou makes clear, the 'historico-political condition' had jurisdiction, in a post-Nietzschean world 'art, whose heart is the poem, made a return, through an anti-Platonic retroaction, in the operators by which philosophy designated our time as that of a forgetful nihilism.'[7] Nietzsche's 'polemic against the "Plato-disease"' – itself inseparable from his distinctive style, comprised of 'aphorisms and fragments, poems and enigmas, metaphors and maxims' – ushers in a century 'cured' of Platonism and rooted, instead,

[5] Badiou (2014), p. 4. An even neater 'bookending' might situate the 'age' between Rimbaud's first published poem, 'Les Étrennes des orphelins' in 1870, and Celan's death in April 1970, although the question may ultimately be moot.
[6] Pessoa primarily in the guises of three 'heteronyms': Alberto Caeiro (1887–1915), Álvaro de Campos (1890–1935) and Ricardo Reis (1887–19?).
[7] Badiou (1999), p. 43.

in the 'destitution of truth' in which, writes Badiou, 'the matheme is abandoned in favour of the poetic suture.'[8] Badiou later adds the important caveat that '[i]t is not […] a decision taken by any of these poets that ushers in the age of the poets' but rather 'a kind of intellectual pressure, induced by the absence of free play in philosophy […]'.

Poetry thus becomes a 'general space of reception for thought and the generic procedures that philosophy, sutured as it was, could no longer establish.'[9] Perhaps, speculates Laruelle, scurrilously, the fact that philosophy is not totally free or spontaneous' is because 'it is either badly normed or badly organized and […], consequently, it must be limited by or filled with truths it does not itself produce.'[10] It is not, however, I would suggest, these poets, but rather Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger who are being charged with crimes against philosophical Truth; it is their bodies of work which constitute the antiphilosophical 'events' inhibiting philosophy in its efforts to build a barricade against an invasive relativism. 'The great 'inventor' of anti-Platonism,' according to Badiou, 'at the dawn of the suture of philosophy to the poem, and because Platonism was the main ban on such a suture, was Nietzsche'.[11] As for Wittgenstein, I have already identified his sustained attack on philosophy's pre-eminence as the affront to which Badiou implicitly and explicitly responds. Then there is Heidegger, the poets' philosopher who became increasingly engaged with poetry – initially the work of Friedrich Hölderlin, then that of Georg Trakl, and finally Celan – and who himself writes in an increasingly 'poetic' style that reaches its apotheosis in 1959's *On the Way to Language*. Each, in their way might be said to represent a significant threat to philosophy, to have colluded in its

[8] Badiou (1999), p. 100.
[9] Badiou (1999), p. 69.
[10] Laruelle (2013), pp. 40-41.
[11] Badiou (1999), p. 99. See also pp. 100-101.

'suturing'.[12]

If, then, the lives of these thinkers can together be seen to describe the parabola of Badiou's 'age of the poets,' it is surely Derrida's deconstructive writings that coincide with its supposed closure. Derrida had first given us his term '*différance*' in an early essay 'Cogito and the History of Madness' (1963). It denotes, as he explains to Kristeva in a 1968 interview, 'the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other'.[13] In his *Husserl's Origin of Geometry* (1962) Derrida neatly encapsulates what we might call the differential paradox with which Badiou is thus forced to grapple every time he writes as the philosopher who says 'there *are* truths':

> Truth *depends* on the pure possibility of speaking and writing, but is *independent* of what is spoken or written, insofar as they are in the world. If, therefore, truth suffers in and through its language from a certain changeableness, its downfall will be less a fall toward language than a degradation within language.[14]

Badiou's response to this paradox – that truth, if it is not to degrade, must somehow exist '*en dehors du texte*' – is resolutely Platonic, requiring a uniquely self-sufficient, non-deferred meaning as a metaphysics of presence accessible only to the privileged eye of the philosopher.[15]

One of my primary contentions, however, is that Badiou, like Plato before him, is always, ultimately, forced to fall back on professions of faith when faced with multiplying differences. John Locke, writing in 1692, as quoted by Michael Polanyi, sets out the distinction between

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[12] While Nietzsche and Wittgenstein have already been identified as our antiphilosophers *nonpareil* there is, as suggested earlier, disagreement between two of the most distinguished interpreters of Badiou, Bosteels and Hallward, as to whether Heidegger might also be identified as such. See Introduction, n. 48.

[13] Jacques Derrida, 'Semiology and Grammatology' [Interview with Julia Kristeva,1968], in *Positions* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 27.

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989 [1962]), p. 92.

[15] The quoted phrase refers to Foucault's misattribution of Derrida's dictum in his *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1961]), p. 602.

'faith' and 'knowledge':

> How well-grounded and great soever the assurance of faith may be wherewith it is received; but faith it is still and not knowledge; persuasion and not certainty. This is the highest the nature of things will permit us to go in matters of revealed religion, which are therefore called matters of faith; a persuasion of our own minds, short of knowledge, is the result that determines us in such truths.[16]

On these terms we will see clearly enough on which side of this equation Badiou belongs. His approach is, in essence, an Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum*: a faith that seeks understanding, except that the faith is now Maoist. In the same spirit in which Nietzsche famously declares Christianity 'Platonism for the masses', we could perhaps declare Badiouism 'Platonism for *the people*' because the Maoism Badiou espouses is, in the Trotskyan sense, a distinctly Messianic form of Revolutionary Nationalism built on a particular idea of the French people in the late 1960s.[17] As with Plato's Guardians, a cult of personality is to be cultivated around the *persuasive* figure of Badiou, the philosopher-as-revolutionary-leader, so that his insight on moral and political questions acquires a patina of infallibility.

Faith, then, is needed if the philosopher is to stage a resurgence, but in the meantime, Badiou claims, Hölderlin et al. have unwittingly come to fill the void left by 'the sutured abdication of philosophy'. Even though this has not been 'through any conscious choices of their own' their task will, nevertheless, become nothing less than the naming of the post-evental void itself.[18] 'A poem from the age of the poets is to go with the void, in the midst of gravity, under the

[16] John Locke, 'A Third Letter on Toleration' quoted in Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 280.
[17] L.D. Trotsky, 'Internationalism and the Theory of 'Exceptionalism': Preface to the American Edition of *The Permanent Revolution* (1930).' <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/xx/exception1.htm>
[18] Badiou (2014), p. 20.

emblem of a name', writes Badiou.[19] Bosteels cannot help but note the following, however:

> Badiou's reading of Nietzsche's letters and notes from his final period of madness […] presupposes a rather different understanding of the process of suture. Here, philosophy does not abdicate its own act in favour of grand politics or art so much as it appropriates the power of the revolutionary break – together with the formal resources of poetry to guarantee its prophetic transmission – for its own sake, with a paradoxical denigration of effective politics as its result. The logic is much more one of mimicry and rivalry than one of abdication and self-effacement. The lesson is thus that in order to avoid falling in the traps of antiphilosophy, philosophy would have to develop a relation to its conditions that, thanks to a measure of restraint, circumvents the temptations of suture in this other sense as well.[20]

Art emerges from an event, Badiou tells us, but the work of art is 'not an event [but] a fact of art.' Nor is the work of art a truth, rather a truth is 'an artistic procedure initiated by an event', and the work itself is 'the local instance or the differential point of a truth.' But it *is* 'a subject point of an artistic truth [which is an] (infinite) generic multiple of works.' Each work is 'a situated *inquiry* about the truth that it locally actualizes or of which it is a finite fragment.'[21]

A number of characteristics are thus essential for the establishment of this differentiation, to wit: locality, situationality, subjectivity, and multiplicity. As Badiou writes:

> Works compose a truth within the post-evental dimension that institutes *the constraint of an artistic configuration*. In the end, a truth is an artistic configuration initiated by an event (in general, an event is a group of works, a singular multiple of works) and

[19] Badiou (2014), p. 21.
[20] Bosteels (2008), p. 176.
[21] Badiou (2005), p. 12.

> unfolded through chance in the form of works that serve as its subject points.[22]

Thus art cannot itself make sense of its own act without *becoming* philosophy in a bastardised form, and it is in this regard that the artistic condition supposedly requires a de-sutured philosophy so that it can, in effect, come into its own once again. As Badiou again has it,

> there is a moment where [art] falls on the radical underside of all sense, into the void of all possible presentation, into the hollowing of truth as a hole *without borders*. This moment is that in which the void and ab-sense, such as philosophy ineluctably encounters them in the point at which truth transpires, must themselves be presented and transmitted.[23]

Referring to two of Pessoa's heteronymic guises Alberto Caiero and Alvaro de Campos, Badiou notes that for Caiero the maxim of thought is 'the insurrection of an outside without interiority' whereas Campos 'exalts absolute interiority', but between these two is 'the distance that is almost nil between the nothing of thought and the thought of nothing.'[24] Against the reduction of thought to knowledge, against objectification, against totalisation, 'Caiero and Campos seek', writes Badiou, 'to distribute the connection between thinking and the void. Every maxim of thought is a *localization of the void*.'[25] The void in this instance is that indiscernible state of being that exists beyond – on the far side of – the event, and this aphorism might well stand as the principle binding the poets of the 'age of the poets' to one another in Badiou's particular conception of their affiliation, but he remains convinced of the need for a de-sutured philosophy as a 'present[er] and transmitt[er]' of these emergent truths that is not itself poetic.[26]

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[22] Badiou (2005), p. 12.
[23] Badiou (2008), p. 45.
[24] Pessoa provides a biography and a specific *raison d'être* for each of his principle heteronyms.
[25] Badiou (2014), p. 9.
[26] Badiou (2014), p. 9.

Philosophy's poetic condition

'My conclusive thesis', declares Badiou, is that 'philosophy is threatened by suspension, and this perhaps since Hegel.' Consequently philosophy 'has indeed missed something of time, of our time, and put forth a defeated and limited image of itself'.[27] The situation is described by Badiou as a series of 'intra-philosophical schemata of the permanent possibility of disaster'. For him, the danger emerges when philosophy, 'renouncing the operational singularity of the seizing of truths, is *itself* presented as being a truth procedure. Which also means that it is presented as an art, a science, a passion, or a policy. Nietzsche's 'philosopher-poet' is, unsurprisingly, given as an example of the first – of philosophy's finding itself sutured to its artistic condition – whereas Husserl is said to exemplify 'the wish of philosophy as a rigorous science', and either Pascal or Kierkegaard are described as wishing for 'philosophy as intense existence'.[28] 'Plato's Philosopher-king' is given as an example of the political suture, although Apter and Bosteels point out that 'Marxism […] combines both [the scientific and the political] sutures in the claim to ground revolutionary politics in the science of History.'[29] Philosophy, Badiou argues, must retain the detached position from which it is able to ensure 'compossibility', a term borrowed by Badiou from Leibnizian modal metaphysics, denoting the perceived possibility of the co-existence of heterogeneous truths.[30] In Badiou's terms:

> Philosophy sets out to think its time by putting the state of procedures conditioning it into a common place. Its operations […] always think 'together' […] (or the event status

[27] Badiou (1999), p. 64 and p. 65.
[28] Badiou (1999), p. 129.
[29] Badiou (1999), p. 129); Apter and Bosteels in Badiou (2014), p. xiii.
[30] '*Compossibility* is a term that indicates the quality of being compossible; a classic philosophical concept that refers to one thing's possibility of existing alongside others at the same time. In Leibniz, the term expresses a relation in which two possible terms or events can coexist without the opposition of one of the terms entailing the suppression of the other.' Gabriel Riera, 'For an 'Ethics of Mystery': Philosophy and the Poem' in Gabriel Riera, ed., *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions* (New York: SUNY, 2005), p. 69.

of the Two).[31]

The alternative would be that it find itself reduced; brought under the regime of one among many possible '*generic* procedures.' As Badiou tells us: 'I call the "age of the poets" the moment proper to the history of philosophy in which the latter is sutured – that is to say, delegated or subjected to a single one of its conditions.'[32] In fact, it is when philosophy finds itself sutured to its scientific or its political conditions that poems first 'come to occupy the place where ordinarily the properly philosophical strategies of thought are declared.'[33]

The 'age of the poets' arrives, then – as Badiou originally describes it in his *Manifesto* – '[i]n the period that opens up just after Hegel' when philosophy is generally sutured to either its scientific or its political condition and thereby allows poetry to 'assume […] certain of philosophy's functions.'[34] In this epoch '[a]rt *itself* is a truth procedure', he tells us. That is to say, '[t]he philosophical identification of art [now] falls under the category of truth. Art is a thought in which artworks are the Real' and its truths 'are not reducible to other truths – be they scientific, political, or amorous.' In the age of the poets, therefore 'art, as a singular regime of thought, is not reducible to philosophy' – although it always ought to be, it would seem, reducible to a 'condition' of philosophy.[35] This was, as Badiou is happy to concede, an 'exceptional' period for poetry, although very few of poets are considered, and many of those he counts among the best – Victor Hugo, Gerald Manley Hopkins, and T. S. Eliot among them – are not 'inscribed' as being 'of' the age of the poets.[36] The poets *of* the age of the poets are, apparently, 'those whose work is immediately recognisable as a work of thought and for whom

[31] Badiou (1999), p. 37.
[32] Badiou (2014), p. 4.
[33] Badiou (2014), p. 5.
[34] Badiou (1999), p. 69.
[35] Badiou (2005), p. 9.
[36] Badiou (1999), p. 4.

the poem is, at the very locus where philosophy falters, a locus of language wherein a proposition about being and about time is enacted.'[37]

But why, we might wonder, is it *poetry* that assumes philosophy's mantle? Especially given that previously, he tells us, it was 'not among the conditions to which philosophy was sutured in a privileged way'. We have already intimated that the answer to this question lies with Nietzsche and what Badiou terms the 'revenge on Plato, of which [he] was the prophet.' After Nietzsche, he declares, 'all philosophers claim to be poets [and] they all *envy* poets'.[38] But envy them what? Their outsiderdom perhaps? The unfettered 'free play' of the language in which they are able to express themselves? Apparently so: 'The poem', Badiou suggests, 'is an affirmation and delectation – it does not traverse, it dwells on the threshold. The poem is not a rule-bound crossing, but rather an offering, a lawless proposition.'[39] Plato's wariness of poetry's corrupting influence on his fledgling 'Guardians' is well-known, and with good reason according to Badiou. 'The city,' he asserts, '[…] is thinkable only inasmuch as its concept is sheltered from [the powerful charms of] the poem.' If the city's 'collective subjectivity' is allowed to be 'poeticised' it will, he argues, remain 'heterogeneous to [that city].'[40] Philosophy's suturing to its poetic condition seems, in such circumstances, to render Nietzsche's revenge on Plato deliciously complete; even if, ultimately, it becomes a dish served from the cold embers of those totalitarian regimes of the last century. The irony being that those regimes arguably owe more to Plato's exclusionary logic as an apology for state control over artistic production than they do to any Nietzschean traducing of moral realism as an aspect of 'will to power.' Laruelle, in fact, suggests that Badiou's 'ontology of the void', as he calls it, 'borrows its planification not from Marxism but from essentially statist communism, with its

[37] Badiou (1999), p. 69.
[38] Badiou (1999), p. 70.
[39] Badiou (2014), p. 46.
[40] Badiou (2005), pp. 16-17.

re-education and its necessary organizational violence'.[41] The implication we are forced to draw here is that Badiou shares the belief of two important shapers of his thought – Plato and Mao Zedong – that censorship, exploitation and social engineering, along with many similar iniquities, are justifiable in pursuit of a greater good.

As we can see, then, the 'age of the poets' remains a baffling categorization in many respects. It is still not entirely clear why it should be just *those* poets Badiou cites who find themselves nominated. Mandelstam is perhaps cited because his opposition to Stalinism places him at the centre of another ideological struggle for artistic freedom. Mallarmé and Rimbaud are obviously included because of their abiding influence on French philosophy. Hölderlin's influence on Heidegger, and Celan's relationship 'with' Heidegger, might be enough to explain their inclusion, as well as Celan being allowed to 'bookend' the age at the opposite end to Mallarmé. It seems strange that there would be no place for Ingeborg Bachmann (1926–1973) whose poetry, even though she was not Jewish, was written almost as much in the shadow of the Shoah as was Celan's, and pivots on Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian themes. Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), whose work influenced the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans Georg Gadamer, seems another potential candidate. Paul Éluard (1895–1952), a great influence on Henri Lefebvre, seems another possibility, as does Paul Valéry (1871–1945). And what of George Oppen (1908–1984), another radical Jewish poet influenced by Heidegger, and who also grappled with Shelleyan and Marxist conceptions of the role of the poet after Auschwitz?[42]

[41] Laruelle (2013), p. 36. The meaning of the neologism 'planification' is helpfully explained by Laruelle's English translator, Robin Mackay, as 'intended to cover a variety of meanings'. In this case it seems to refer to the quasi-Platonic 'ordering into planes of anterior knowledges' which is undertaken by Badiou's philosophy.

[42] Oppen describes poets as the 'legislators of the unacknowledged world' in his 1978 poem 'Disasters' (*New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2003), p. 267), which is itself an inversion and repurposing of the provocative closing lines of Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry' (1821): 'Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' In Badiou's 'hypertranslation' of the *Republic* he has Socrates ask Homer: "Tell us, dear poet, what political community owes its radical

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the criteria for being cited by Badiou as a poet *of* the age of the poets are rather personal; that the poets have been chosen to fit the thesis that there was a transition from a political (dialectical materialist) to a poetic (Heideggerian) suturing. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that 'we should not be surprised that Badiou bases his claims on a relatively narrow delimitation of poetry' given that he clearly 'relies on an overly restricted concept of philosophy', which allows him to 'contest […] the declaration of its "end"' on his terms rather than those of Heidegger.[43] It is possible that the declaration of the closure of the age of the poets may simply indicate Badiou's desire to congratulate himself on his success in rescuing philosophy from the compromised position in which Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Lyotard, Derrida et al. had placed it. Regardless of this possibility, it is difficult to disagree with Apter and Bosteels that it is a 'settling of accounts with […] Heideggerianism and Althusserianism' in particular that motivates Badiou's choices: hence the efforts to shoehorn in the otherwise anachronistic Hölderlin, the inclusion of the less obviously relevant Trakl (presumably because of Heidegger's interest in him), and the insistence on the importance of Heidegger's meeting with Celan.[44] So personal does Badiou's quest seem that Laruelle is surely entitled to wonder 'whether this prodigious all-out deployment of means only goes to arm one more Don Quixote.'[45] '[W]hy' Laruelle asks, 'oppress us with this philosophy he wears like a bandolier? One would almost think he was apologising, or at least protecting himself *in extremis* against himself.'[46]

The suspicion therefore arises that Badiou, with his evident flair for the dramatic, has, in effect, reverse-engineered his account in support of a specific narrative, the catalyst in this particular

transformation to you, the way Russia owed it to Lenin, and the way many others, big or small, owed theirs to many others, both in the past and today, from Robespierre to Mandela, by way of Toussaint Louverture and Mao Zedong?" Alain Badiou, *Plato's Republic* (Cambridge and Malden, MA.: Polity Press, 2015 [2012]), p. 322. <http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/167749.pdf>

[43] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 20.

[44] Apter and Bosteels in Badiou (2014), p. viii.

[45] Laruelle (2013), p. 26.

[46] Laruelle (2013), p. 27.

three-act drama going by the evental name of 'May '68'. After the closure of the age of the poets, this 'event' marks the effective opening of a new age in which art returns the powers of compossibility to philosophy and simultaneously initiates new possibilities for art. Freed from the onerous duty of performing philosophy's truth-seizing functions *in absentia* art can become, once again, according to Badiou, a 'situation' of truth. If this new age, the age of the '(re)turn of philosophy *itself*',[47] begins in May 1968, then it may be plot symmetry rather than coincidence that has the 'age of the poets' itself supposedly beginning in May 1871, shortly after the reactionary bloodbath of *la semaine sanglante*. The theory of 'the event', one suspects, begins with a desire to press the case for a particular interpretation of the 1968 'event' in particular. There are three possible subjective responses to an event, in Badiou's theory: 'faithful', 'reactionary', or 'obscure'.[48] Unlike the false spring of 1871, however, we are perhaps being invited to give thanks that we now have a Badiou to *ensure* that fidelity to the '68 'event' (its political failure notwithstanding) is maintained *even today*, and against all odds; that it was not all for nothing. We have, it seems, a hero who will save us both from the reactionary denial of truths that emerged from the turmoil of May '68, and from the postmodern sophistry that has obscured the post-evental situation in a habitual fog of relativism.[49]

The suture

Badiou certainly develops a distinctive lexicon of his own, and no term in this lexicon seems

[47] Badiou (1999), p. 113.
[48] Badiou (2013b), pp. 411-30.
[49] Badiou's *Being and Event* itself, with its audacious rewording of the title of Heidegger's *magnum opus* (not to mention that of Sartre), and its translation of 'Being' from Heideggerian 'world historicality' to a Badiouian 'eternity', may be the primary vehicle for this transformation. The *Manifesto for Philosophy*'s echoing of the title of Marx and Engel's polemical *The Communist Manifesto* also seems no accident, Badiou clearly intending a political dimension as praxis, a personally redefined communism, as an accompaniment to what we might call, *pace* Marx and Engels (*The German Manifesto* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p. 39), his revolution 'in the realm of pure thought'.

more important than 'suture.' Riera provides a succinct summary of its meaning and usage: 'By *suture* Badiou understands an interruption of philosophy's ability to assure the compossibility (*compossibilité*) of the truths produced by the four generic procedures.'[50] In medical parlance, of course, suturing refers to the stitching together of the edges of a wound. Alternatively it can refer to the seam-like junction between two things e.g. bones (in osteology), crustal plates (in geology), or sclerites (in zoology), but we can trace Badiou's metaphorical appropriation of the term to Lacan, or more properly to a development of Lacanian thought by Jacques Alain Miller. Miller's uses the term in a paper first delivered at Lacan's 'Seminar XII: Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis' in February 1965, and published the following year in the first volume of *Les Cahiers pour l'Analyse* as 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)'.[51] It is a response to an aspect of the work of Gottlob Frege and is concerned with the set-theoretical role of the concept 'zero' in a discourse in which it is necessary yet to which it does not belong. Miller describes his 'decisive proposition' thus: '*the concept of not-identical-with-itself is assigned by the number zero* which sutures logical discourse.'[52] It 'names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse […and] figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in [*tenant-lieu*].'[53]

Badiou is, of course, fully aware of Miller's use of the term and systematically refutes Miller's thesis in a paper published in the tenth and final volume of the *Cahiers* (1969) entitled 'Mark and Lack: On Zero'.[54] We need not detain ourselves too much here with the details of that response, however, because it is Badiou's later recommissioning of the suture metaphor that is of much greater relevance in the current context. Whereas Miller uses the term to denote

[50] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 69.
[51] Jacques Alain Miller, 'La Suture (Éléments de la logique du signifiant)', *Les Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, 1.3 (January 1966), pp. 37-49. References are to Jacqueline Rose's translation 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)', *Screen* 18:4 (1977-78), 24-34.
[52] Miller (1977-78), 28.
[53] Miller (1977-78), 25.
[54] Alain Badiou, 'Marque et manque: à propos du zéro', *Les Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, 10.8 **(**Winter 1969).

something that stands in for something otherwise lacking (yet necessary) in a discourse, Badiou comes to use it to denote something like the attachment of one procedure to another – e.g. philosophy to poetry – to the ultimate detriment of both. It must be said, however, that neither Miller's nor Badiou's use of the term seems entirely apposite. The word Miller actually requires is, I would suggest, 'surrogate', something standing in place of another in order to fill an otherwise unmet need. Badiou, on the other hand, seems to see the relationship between philosophy and its conditions as something more akin to castration. It is as if philosophy's virility is at stake, its capacity to successfully dominate its subservients. Another possibility might be 'conjoinment,' in the sense that philosophy is unable to function properly with poetry parasitic upon its organic processes (the sustained pretence of parity and mutuality notwithstanding). When he states, however, that 'philosophy is today paralysed by the relation to its own history'[55] this is evidently not a physical paralysis but the same order of self-doubt – or 'dressed-up scepticism and paralysis of the will', as Nietzsche calls it[56] – that fuels apparent crises of rationality and masculinity. The myth of a calculative, coldly objective, incontrovertibly masculine Platonism seems to be just one of many steadily unravelling meta-narratives in apparent need of Badiou's darning needle.

The procuress of truths

Badiou, offers us another remarkable metaphor which makes even more explicit the underlying

[55] Badiou (2008), p. 57.

[56] Nietzsche warms to his theme in describing Frederick William I's fears that his son Frederick (the Great) would be too effeminate to rule: '*Men were lacking*; and he suspected, to his most bitter distress, that his own son was not man enough. He was wrong about this, but who wouldn't have been wrong in his place? He saw his son falling prey to atheism, *esprit*, and the entertaining, happy-go-lucky spirit of clever Frenchmen: he saw that enormous bloodsucker, the spider of scepticism, in the background, and he suspected the incurable misery of a heart that was no longer hard enough for evil or for good, of a shattered will that no longer commanded, that was no longer *able* to command.' Nietzsche (2002), p. 101-02.

machismo implicit in his narrative.[57] Philosophy's role is, supposedly, to act as an arbiter in our uncovering of artistic truths, which 'comes down to *showing* [the truth procedure that is art] as it is.' 'Philosophy', he tells us,

> is the go-between in our encounters with truths, the procuress of truth. And just as beauty is to be found in the woman encountered, but is in no way required of the procuress, so it is that truths are artistic, scientific, amorous, or political, and not philosophical.[58]

The word euphemistically translated here as 'procuress' is '*maquerelle*' with, as Lecercle notes, 'all its fine eighteenth century connotations'.[59] Philosophy, according to this picture, would appear to be something akin to the 'madam' in a brothel of truths, but given the unmistakeable paternalism of such imagery the choice of a feminine term is surely a distraction; that is, what is really meant is 'procurer' – or 'pimp,' to put it bluntly – one who manages prostitutes, facilitates transactions, and thus makes a living from their exploitation and degradation. Just as the role of the pimp is to oversee the provision of a specific service, a circumscribed form of gratification, so the role of the 'procurer' in the artistic transaction depends upon commodifying the producers, the products, and the process of production. The philosophical 'go-between' can only present any generically 'singular,' desired qualities (equivalent to 'ravishing young persons, of either sex', as Lecercle rather coyly puts it) within the boundaries of preconceived categories, as an appeal to certain stereotypical proclivities.[60]

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[57] '[Badiou's] combat for philosophy is strategic', Laruelle suggests, mischievously, 'it is a matter of struggling against his times and what they herald. There is something chivalrous in this combat – he defends a distant, evanescent philosophy with a sort of courtly love'. Laruelle (2013), p. 21.
[58] Badiou (2005), p. 10.
[59] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, 'Badiou's Poetics', in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy,* ed. by Peter Hallward (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 210.
[60] Lecercle in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 210.

Our expectations, presumably, in Badiouan terms, would be that philosophy brings art under its control and manages the resultant market efficiently.[61] Furthermore, as Laruelle astutely notes, Badiou is 'not 'interested' in [philosophy] in any intimate manner; he is interested in literature, politics, mathematics, and love.' He simply sees in philosophy 'a way of bringing together and planifying this disparate set of activities and talents.'[62] It is hardly any wonder, then, that he not only finds philosophy 'unattractive' but considers 'her' attractiveness or otherwise (synonymous with style or literary merit) a distraction and an irrelevance. Poetry, on the other hand, carries the familiar, dangerously erotic allure of the fallen woman – all poetry being, in a sense, pornographic, perhaps – that philosophy must resist, and it is perhaps worth considering that philosophy's vestal purity may actually render 'her' more Madonna than madam in this particularly Freudian economy of desire.[63]

Philosophy's role as a 'go-between' might even carry a further implication of the impotence or sexual dysfunction to which we have already alluded, in that 'it does not itself produce any

[61] There is perhaps also an echo of Nietzsche's scurrilous question: 'Suppose that truth is a woman – and why not?' from which he goes on to doubt philosophers' capacity to 'press their suit' were such the case. (Nietzsche (2002), p. 3.) Presumably this would no longer be a problem for Badiou's philosopher-pimp, whose 'suit' has become a financial transaction so that the possession of social skills or charisma becomes moot. At any rate the sexual politics of this question is further confused by the fact that Nietzsche is not so much personifying 'Truth' as objectifying 'Woman'. As another aside, it seems worth noting that 'proposition', as a verb, also suggests a clumsy and inept seduction.

[62] Laruelle (2013), pp. 20-1. See Ch. 1, n. 41.

[63] There is a quite extraordinary passage from the *Republic* (London: Penguin, 2007) 495c-496a, which is worth considering in this context. It imagines philosophy's 'fall' and her subsequent 'defilement' at the hands of unworthy suitors, developing a bizarre and detailed analogy: '"So Philosophy is abandoned by those who should be her true lovers, who leave her deserted and unwed to pursue a life that does not really suit them, while she, like an abandoned orphan, suffers at the hands of second rate interlopers all the shame and abuse which you have said her detractors accuse her of, when they say that half her companions are worthless and the other half downright wicked." "That is what is commonly said." "And quite rightly," I replied. "For when they see so good a piece of territory, with all its titles and dignities, unoccupied, a whole crowd of squatters gladly sally out from the meaner trades, at which they have acquired a considerable degree of skill, and rush into philosophy, like a crowd of criminals taking refuge in a temple. For philosophy, abused as it is, still retains a far higher reputation than other occupations, a reputation which these stunted natures covet, their minds being as cramped and crushed by their mechanical lives as their bodies are deformed by manual trades. This all follows, doesn't it?" "Yes." "They are for all the world like some bald-headed little tinker who's just got out of prison and come into money, and who has a bath and dresses himself up in a new suit, like a bridegroom, and sets off to marry his boss's daughter because her family's fallen on hard times." "The comparison is fair enough." "What sort of children are they likely to produce? A mean and misbegotten lot, I think." "Inevitably." "And when men who are unfit for education have intimate dealings (which they don't deserve) with philosophy, are not the thoughts and opinions they produce fairly called sophistry, with nothing legitimate nor any trace of true wisdom among them?" "Certainly."'

effective truth.' Instead,

> [i]t seizes truths, shows them, exposes them, announces that they exist. In so doing it turns time toward eternity – since every truth, as a generic infinity, is eternal. Finally, philosophy makes disparate truths compossible and, on this basis, it states the being of the time in which it operates as the time of the truths that arise within it.[64]

We cannot, Badiou claims, leave this process of 'making disparate truths compossible' in the hands of poets themselves – as Heidegger does, disastrously, in inaugurating the age of the poets. In so doing, argues Badiou, one 'fails to summon the category of truth in this affair [and thus] cannot hope to succeed in establishing the plane of immanence from which the differentiation between art, science, and philosophy can proceed.'[65] For him, philosophy has, from the time of Plato onwards, depended upon establishing this plane of immanence from which it can differentiate between truth procedures, because its inability to produce truths itself would otherwise leave it (has left it?) without even a *subsidiary* role. Impotence seems, therefore, to be the primary motivation behind philosophy's self-presentation as protector of (the woman) truth. Badiou's doubts about 'her' capacity to conduct her own 'business' notwithstanding, it seems unlikely that poetry requires philosophy's protection except according to the paternalistic logic of some quaint chivalric convention in which philosophy itself is, at one and the same time, both damsel in distress *and* knight in shining armour.

Is this, the, the role that the erstwhile defender of philosophy envisages for his craft: that it function not even, to again quote Laruelle, as 'a relatively formal, empty and sterile activity of the encyclopaedic ordering and mastering of knowledges acquired from elsewhere outside of philosophy',[66] but as a pimp on behalf of generic truths as they go about their 'business'? And

[64] Badiou (2005), p. 14.
[65] Badiou (2005), p. 10.
[66] Laruelle (2013), p. 36.

since Badiou has established, on his own terms, that poetry is poetry *sui generis* and cannot therefore be reduced or limited it is difficult to see what philosophy might do *other than* re-objectify the poem i.e. subtract the poetry. As Riera suggests, poetry's localization is, for Badiou, 'regulated from an implicit economy of truth that supposes a proper – philosophical – use of the figure of the poem', a relationship of exploitation that seems to give the lie to a pretence of equality under the regime of *in*aesthetics.[67] Riera is convinced that 'although he changes grounds, Badiou remains within the scope of a foundational project.'[68] Laruelle too notes this 'philosophical desire for foundation or, at the limit, for auto-foundation.' Unlike Deleuze who was, he suggests, mischievously, 'just an engineer, a philosopher of *bricolage*', Badiou is a 'traditional' philosopher and [i]t truly takes a philosopher' he suggests, with his tongue again firmly in his cheek, 'to seek supposedly the most powerful mathematics, the most foundational, as if traditional philosophy had lost its true aim.'[69]

The poem after Heidegger, after Auschwitz

'We could say', remarks Badiou, 'that Heidegger unfolds the figure of the poet-thinker as the obverse of Nietzsche's philosopher-artist.'[70] Badiou's central thesis is, it almost goes without saying, fundamentally post-Heideggerian in its desire to declare closed the age of which Heideggerian ontology has been *de facto* sovereign. The claim that it is 'necessary to de-suture philosophy from its poetic condition' may be aspirational but the reactionary nature of this desire to re-establish philosophy when couched in terms of 'sovereignty' and 'royalty' must

[67] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 77.
[68] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 73.
[69] Laruelle (2013), p. 59.
[70] Badiou (2005), p. 6.

surely be evident enough.[71] It also results in the casting of our antiphilosophers in the role of dangerous subversives. That 'de-objectification and disorientation' can once again be 'conceptualized' rather than presented as 'poetic metaphor' is the key claim;[72] as I have already suggested, philosophers have repeatedly found themselves forced to present their most powerful arguments as the flesh and bone of metaphor rather than as skeletal syllogisms. Badiou is certainly no exception in this regard, and his metaphor of the 'suture' (as distinct from Lacan's or Miller's metaphorical uses of the term) seems carefully chosen for its viscerality, for an implication of violent wrenching and separating. These literary flourishes most obviously suggest that philosophy must always have been, in one sense or another, 'sutured to its poetic condition'; that is to say, it has always depended on metaphor, simile, allegory, metonymy and other literary devices at the apophatic, subtractive point of ontotheological transgression, at the limits of what *can* be said in mathematical monochrome.

We know that Badiou demands the return of philosophy *itself*, but the fundamental problem is that it never really *is* itself but must always present itself through metaphor, and thus perpetually *become* its conditions. As Badiou himself admits:

> This One, this good, are they not subtracted from intelligible objectivity? And is it not impossible to know them, if it is even possible to *think* them? And, to talk about them, must we not use the metaphor of the sun, the myth of the dead returned to the earth – in short, the resources of the poem?[73]

In asking this (rhetorical) question Badiou seems to be tacitly admitting that philosophy *has* always required the language of the poem to complete its thought precisely *because*, as

[71] Badiou (1999), p. 74.
[72] Badiou (1999), p. 74.
[73] Badiou (2014), p. 34.

Wittgenstein suggests: '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.'[74] Badiou defines poetry as 'the creation of a name-of-being that was previously unknown.'[75] Perhaps we can proceed from this, deductively, by summarising Badiou's position thus: 1) The poetic act 'aims […] to organise a verbal totality […] in such a way that a presence-of-being be named'; 2) 'naming must be […] thought[,] [otherwise] poetry is […] nothing more […] than a verbal instance of silence'; therefore, 3) poetry as 'the creation of a name-of-being' is a thought.[76] So, according to Badiou, when philosophy appears to become poetry it is rather that poetry, in inventing the names-of-being, is *thought*, and thus *named* by philosophy; hence the poetic is simply another arrow in the philosopher's quiver. To claim that '"all" is thinkable' is, for the antiphilosopher, the 'unsupported theoretical presumption of the philosopher' and that which the philosopher, an imposter except that, were this 'thinkability' of all things *not* the case, claims Badiou, poetry itself would be impossible as it would name nothing (no *thing*).[77]

At the root of all this seems to be a sense of philosophy's abject surrender of its power as a keeper of truth, its offering up a humiliating gesture of post-Auschwitz self-recrimination and penance. Bosteels tells us that, in the original version of his *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy* Badiou cites an illuminating anecdote of Miller's about a 'little psychoanalyst' who allows himself to be repeatedly spat upon, without protest, while calmly explaining that he accepts the humiliation because this is merely the spitter's 'symptom'. His point is that 'today there are plenty of 'little philosophers' who adore the fact that, as a symptom of our time, people hold the philosopher's desire to be something vile or superfluous.'[78] Bosteels, in turn, cites Lacoue-Labarthe as one such philosopher who accepts this contemporary abjection. Indeed, bearing

[74] Wittgenstein (2001), #5.6.
[75] Badiou (2011), p. 109.
[76] Badiou (2011), pp. 108-10.
[77] Badiou (2011), p. 110.
[78] Bosteels, 'Introduction' to Badiou (2011), pp. 1-2.

Bosteels out, Lacoue-Labarthe writes that:

> A very obscure imperative, going beyond or falling short of the mere refusal of what is dominant, commands that we let philosophy collapse within ourselves and that we open ourselves up to that diminishing, that exhaustion of philosophy, today. We must no longer have the desire to philosophize.[79]

The upshot of this process is, according to Badiou, that the poem becomes the bearer of localized truths, and philosophy, from its prone position, begging absolution, is powerless to prevent the theft. 'There is a good end,' suggests Riera, summarising Badiou's position, 'the one declared by the 'Philosophers' and a bad end, the one announced by the 'Sophists'.'[80] As Badiou reiterates *ad nauseum*, philosophy can never surrender itself to the latter without inviting the disaster that ensues when philosophy becomes merely a '*situation of truth*'.[81]

According to Badiou the closure of the age of the poets effects a liberation for both the poem *and* philosophy: 'That philosophy continues frees the poem, as singular operation of truth', he asserts. But the question then is: 'What will become of the poem after Heidegger, after the age of the poets, in other words, in what will the post-romantic poem consist?' It will be the poets themselves who will answer these questions, he tells us, and they will be free to so do once philosophy and poetry have been 'de-sutured' from one another, once the 'Heideggerian miscomprehension' has been cleared up, and once philosophical aesthetics no longer confines the poem.[82] The poem, thus 'freed from philosophical poeticizing' and 'disengaged from [its] subjective escort' will be envisaged by philosophy as 'a truth of sensible presence lodged in

[79] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 5.
[80] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 70.
[81] Badiou (1999), p. 129.
[82] Badiou (2008), p. 40.

rhythm and image, but without the corporeal captation of rhythm and image.'[83] Philosophy too will be freed; although Badiou is forced to admit, in a telling concession, that philosophy still 'exploits image, comparison and rhythm.'[84] The difference, after the age of the poets, is apparently that

> these occurrences of the literary [such as Plato's simile of the sun as an illustration of the Good] are, as such, under the jurisdiction of a principle of thought that they themselves do not constitute. They are localized at points where […] it is necessary, by a paradox of exposition, to suggest a fable, an image or a fiction, to interpretation itself.[85]

The distinction he draws may well be moot, however. Post-Nietzschean philosophy can surely no longer lay claim, for example, to any noumenal or transcendental guarantees that might underwrite such fictions as what Badiou insists on calling 'the *proving of truth* as such'.[86]

Badiou's understanding of metaphor as appropriated by philosophy seems, thinks Riera, 'commanded by an implicit philosophical determination grounded in a notion of truth as adequacy'.[87] Laruelle's question is: 'Once, it was torn from doxa and laboriously distinguished from sophistry; must there be a second Platonic effort so as to raise [philosophy] up again?' However, he goes on,

> [t]o put [philosophy] once more on an entirely mathematical terrain (not its original terrain, which was instead physical) is to prolong a glorious servitude. Badiou's additional step backwards, despite its brilliant realization, is not an objective

[83] Badiou (2008), p. 42 and p. 44.
[84] Badiou (2008), p. 44.
[85] Badiou (2008), p. 45.
[86] Badiou (2008), p. 45.
[87] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 78.

> observation of the success of philosophy, but a way of endorsing its failures.[88]

It would be better, argues Laruelle, 'to stop treating philosophy philosophically in the spirit or in imitation of a mathematics superior to the transcendental itself, and sufficient' and, rather than 'thinking every thing as philosophizable', to ''materialize' once and for all […] its formalist and sufficient mechanisms and procedures.'[89] The accusation, and we must decide whether it is a convincing one, is that Badiou presents, in Riera's words, 'an argument that is too dependent on a premodern schema of signification, for which the deposition of meaning is not compelling enough. In other words, Badiou '"Platonizes" against the postsignifying regime of the modern poem.'[90]

Not so, argues Badiou: 'The poem occurs in philosophy *at one of its points*, and this localization is never ruled by a poetic or literary principle', he asserts. What is more,

> [t]he literary in philosophy is the vectoring, in an effect of sense, of the fact that the relation of a truth to sense is a defective, emptied relation. It is this defectiveness that exposes philosophy to the imperative of a localized fiction. The moment at which the argumentation fails (*défailler*), imitates, in the power of argument itself, this: that truth causes knowledge to fail (*en défaillance*).[91]

Philosophy, Badiou suggests, 'summons the poem' at these 'points' and then 'subtractively distributes them according to their specific regime of separation from sense.'[92] So while it is the truth procedures that generate truths, something of which philosophy itself is, as we have established, incapable, it is philosophy that must, after the closure of the age of the poets,

[88] Laruelle (2013), p. 148.
[89] Laruelle (2013), p. 148.
[90] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 78.
[91] Badiou (2008), p. 46.
[92] Badiou (2008), p. 47.

organize the truth procedures which condition it after its own fashion. In short, philosophy, for Badiou, must do what the poem cannot and reflect upon the nature of the truths it generates and order these according to its own schema.

Why might philosophy have so feared the poem's power in the first place? If, as Badiou implies, philosophy finds itself so secure in its power over the poem that it can summarily summon and dismiss it, can have it do its bidding if you will, what is there to fear? And why should this re-establishment of the proper order of things be possible now, *after* the age of the poets has ended? Perhaps the answer that Badiou is so desperate to avoid is that at this point, the point at which 'the argument […] can maintain only by returning to what it was that made it possible: the actual singularity of a truth procedure', the poem will be waiting; 'on the threshold' as he himself puts it.[93] It lies in wait, implacably, mysteriously, with no axe to grind, inherently devoid of the hegemonic impulses that force philosophy to make itself hostage to political expediency. The poem must know that it will be summoned only when philosophy is at its weakest, and always on *its* own terms. It seems intrinsic to Badiou's thesis that the age of the poets must end because of what the poem cannot do. It is – as Hallward summarises Badiou's thinking here – 'incapable of a genuinely philosophical self-awareness. [It] declares the Idea but not the truth of the Idea. The poem can aspire to condition philosophy, but not to replace it.'[94] Apparently, the poem must learn its place in the hierarchy of truth production, but by the same token philosophy cannot – much as it wants to – set limits for the poem, cannot set limits on a truth procedure's generation of truths for all, as Hallward again puts it, Adorno's 'historicizing prohibition of poetry in the wake of Auschwitz.'[95] The power of the poem lies, in fact, in its having *no* 'aspirations' to condition *or* replace philosophy.

[93] Badiou (2008), p. 47.
[94] Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Chapter 8.
[95] Hallward (2003), Chapter 8.

Badiou seems to believe that his refusal to allow philosophy to be cast as a producer of truths, truths which can only be generated generically, is the fine distinction that immunises him against the charge of Hegelian historicizing. Arguing against Lacoue-Labarthe, he suggests, in fact, that philosophy can 'return' in a manner that successfully 'break[s] with historicism':

> Philosophy is possible, philosophy is necessary. And yet for it to be, it must be desired. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe says that History – he is thinking of Nazi barbarism – henceforth forbids us the desire of philosophy. I cannot grant him this … Another way out is possible. To desire philosophy against history, to break with historicism. Philosophy then reappears as what it is, a bright opening of eternity [*une éclaircie d'éternité*], without God or soul, from the very fact that its effort put us in agreement with the following: that there are truths.[96]

Laruelle, however, rightly suspects this 'bright opening of eternity' of actually being 'little more than new readings of the tradition, judging or deciding what is good or bad according to highly idealised criteria' that allows no root-and-branch reappraisal of what philosophy 'is' of the kind conducted by Derrida or Deleuze.[97] In 'rereading the past on the basis of a 'new' decision', Laruelle suggests, Badiou effectively 'limits [himself] to housekeeping and to instituting [himself] as a Platonic tribunal.'[98] In fact, rather than 'fill[ing] the hiatus between ontology and philosophy with the transcendental logic of worlds' as he claims Badiou has merely, Laruelle argues, succeeded in deepening the chasm.[99]

It certainly seems the case that it is really the so-called 'antiphilosophers' (Laruelle would presumably prefer 'non-philosophers') who are willing to engage in a radical reappraisal of the

[96] Badiou (1999), p. 137.
[97] Laruelle (2013), p. 26.
[98] Laruelle (2013), p. 26.
[99] Laruelle (2013), p. 50.

entire landscape in which philosophy is situated and to question the criteria according to which that landscape has been mapped. Indeed, in the case of Wittgenstein, we have a 'philosopher' almost entirely uninterested in the philosophical tradition. As Cavell puts it: 'Heidegger writes philosophy according to the myth of having read everything essential, Wittgenstein according to the myth of having read essentially nothing.'[100] Nietzsche likewise treats the philosophical tradition with undisguised contempt, and a willingness to go beyond the limits of philosophy, to be iconoclastic, might be considered the key to philosophizing poetically. Poetry, according to Hallward's reading of Badiou, 'must not be placed above philosophy' but neither, he would have us believe, is it the serious threat to philosophy that Plato feared it to be.[101] As a supposed condition of philosophy, it merely occupies – *ought* to occupy – a subordinate role. 'The "reversal of the reversal of Platonism" goes hand in hand', suggests Riera, 'with the reversal of the motif of the end: the end of philosophy proclaimed by the Sophists is disqualified in terms of a de-suturing, which authorizes the Philosopher to declare the end of the age of the poets.'[102] It would also seem, on Badiou's terms, to authorize the Philosopher to finally develop a schema, on his own terms, of the 'knot' that binds philosophy to the poem, after Heidegger: one that allows both to retain their unique fields of operation. Riera, however, seems right in suspecting that this actually involves the covert 'reactivation of a classical hierarchy'.[103]

Four regimes governing philosophy and the poem

Badiou presents what he calls '*three possible regimes* [or schemata] *of the relation between philosophy and the poem.*'[104] This section is intended as an overview what Badiou has said

[100] Cavell (2013), p. 19.
[101] Hallward (2003), Chapter 8.
[102] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 72.
[103] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 71.
[104] Badiou (2008), p. 38.

about these regimes in a number of different works and their place in the context of his account of the history of the poem's relationship with philosophy. Initially, he presents only two such schemata: the 'didactic' and the 'romantic', but he then adds a third: the 'classical'. For the twentieth century, which was 'characterised by the fact that it did not introduce, on a massive scale, any new schema',[105] there was only 'a synthetic schema: didacto-romanticism'. At the end of the century we find these three 'inherited schemata' – and any synthesis or combination of them – in a state of 'saturation and closure', so that a new schema is necessary.[106] This new schema has no name except that it can be described as 'an artistic configuration', which perhaps seems as good a name as any.[107] The three 'regimes' (or schemata) – 'established ways of configuring the relation of art to philosophy' – are each associated with a Greek figure: the 'romantic' with Parmenides, the 'didactic' with Plato, and the 'classical' with Aristotle.[108]

i. Parmenidian/Romantic

As Lecercle suggests, in his discussion of 'Badiou's poetics', 'the Romantic tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger[ian hermeneutics][holds that] poetic language is the natural site for authenticity and the disclosure of being and truth.'[109] In this case '[a]rt realises', according to Badiou, 'within finitude all the subjective education of which the philosophical infinity of the idea is capable.'[110] This regime/schema concerns what is termed an 'original *in*distinction between [the saying of poets and the thought of thinkers] [i]n the pre-Socratic consignment (*envoi*) of thought', but it is this unwillingness to separate the two that, for Badiou, finds such a regime fatally compromised. At this stage 'the *logos* is poetic as such' and the poem 'stands

[105] Badiou (2005), p. 5.
[106] Badiou (2005), p. 8.
[107] Badiou (2005), p. 12.
[108] Badiou (2005), p. 12. The order in which the 'didactic' and 'romantic' schemata are placed within Badiou's overall presentation seems to vary, given that the romantic schema is traced to Parmenides, so is pre-Socratic, but is latterly exemplified by Heidegger.
[109] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 210.
[110] Badiou (2005), p. 5.

in as guard for thought, as shown us in Parmenides' *Poem*, and in Heraclitus' maxims.' Parmenides, Badiou is prepared to concede, 'forms a sort of precommencement of philosophy […] in his sketching, with regard to the question of non-being, of a *reductio ad absurdum*' though this is '*not yet* […] philosophy' because Parmenides is clearly still in thrall to the mytheme in 'plac[ing] his poem under an invocation to a Goddess' and retaining a 'mystery', a veiled hiddenness.[111] '[P]hilosophy only exists through its desire to tear down mystery's veil', Badiou asserts, indicating, metaphorically, the specific nature of his departure from Heidegger, who argued for the necessity of the veil, that something about Truth must always remain hidden.[112] As Heidegger himself puts it: 'Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem. *All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry.*'[113]

The means by which the 'tearing' of the veil will be accomplished is the 'rule of consistency', which means, for Badiou, an interruption of the poem's authority by the matheme. It was only in Greece, he tells us, that 'the matheme warranted the interruption of the sacral exercise of validation by narrative (or as Lacoue-Labarthe would say, by the mytheme)'. It was only here that the 'the de-sacralization, or the de-poeticization, of truth, [could] be explicitly sanctioned'. This 'depoeticization' of truth comes about, primarily, thanks to the rupture initiated by Plato when he forced himself to resist the poem's 'seduction without concept' against, it would appear, his own disposition.[114] The regime that follows, therefore, involves a painful but necessary rupturing, by mathematical means, of the poetico-philosophical 'fusion' achieved by Parmenides, whereby: 'Image, the equivocity of language, and metaphor, all escort and

[111] Badiou (2008), p. 36.
[112] Badiou (2008), p. 36.
[113] Heidegger (2001), p. 70.
[114] Badiou (2008), p. 37.

authorize the saying of the True.'[115]

ii. Platonic/Didactic

The didactic regime/schema is founded on the 'Platonist gesture of exclusion'[116] that 'effected a *distance* between the poem and philosophy' which is necessitated by the former's status as 'a debilitating fascination, a seduction diagonal to the True'.[117] Its thesis is that 'art is incapable of truth, or that all truth is external to art', and it is essential, according to Plato, that philosophy 'interrupt' the poem's authority as naively conferred upon it by the Parmenidian romantic tradition.[118] The poem is rejected 'because of its very power, of its charm in the etymological sense.'[119] It must, according to this regime, Hallward suggests, be 'carefully controlled and supervised by extra-artistic means.' It is, Hallward adds, '[t]he definition of art, and of art alone [that it is] the charm of the semblance of truth.'[120] As Badiou writes: 'In this perspective the essential thing is the control of art'. 'Why?', he asks, rhetorically.

> Because if the truth of which art is capable comes to it from outside – if art is a didactics of the senses – it follows, and this point is crucial, that the 'good' essence of art is conveyed in its public effect, and not in the artwork itself.[121]

In all of this Badiou seems to pretend a level of cool detachment, a pretence towards which we are perhaps entitled to adopt an attitude of some scepticism, given that he himself is hardly immune to the seductive charms of the poem as it prostitutes truth in the form of a Nietzsche or a Wittgenstein or some other sophist. Lecercle, indeed, detects 'a form of Freudian denial' in

[115] Badiou (2008), p. 38.
[116] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 210. The didactic schema is also, according to Badiou, the foundation of the Marxist gesture of exclusion. Badiou (2005), p. 5.
[117] Badiou (2008), p. 38.
[118] Badiou (2005), p. 2.
[119] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 210.
[120] Hallward (2003), Chapter 8.
[121] Badiou (2005), p. 3.

this affectation of detachment, which seems as true of Badiou's own tormented relationship with poetry as it does Plato's neurotic fear of the poem's erotic/aesthetic charm and its threat to philosophy's vestal purity.[122]

One of the supposed reasons for the 'saturation' of the Platonic/Didactic schema, according to Hallward, is that '(since Brecht) it has been discredited by social realism.'[123] This need not necessarily be directly linked, as Badiou suggests, to the 'the evidence of the ukases and persecutions that were perpetrated in the socialist states'; however, the role of the philosopher as 'surveillant' in Brecht, and the 'latent supposition of a dialectical truth' does, he thinks, lead directly to Stalinism – and, by an implication he is clearly reluctant to make explicit, back to Platonism.[124] Brecht is, in fact, credited with refining the Platonic regime of didacticism by seeking out its 'immanent rules' rather than simply seeking to exclude all forms of art that do not suit a totalitarian agenda, as Plato arguably sought to do.[125]

iii. Aristotelian/Classical

The classical schema, Badiou suggests, is initially Aristotelian, and later comes to encompass psychoanalysis – which he describes as 'Aristotelian, absolutely classical.'[126] 'Was it not Aristotle himself', he asks, 'who had already signed, between art and philosophy, a peace treaty of sorts?'[127] Aristotle's armistice involves bringing the poem under the regime of philosophical aesthetics. It 'organized the *inclusion* of a knowledge of the poem within philosophy' so that it can be 'grasped *through the category of the object*, that is, through that which, being defined

[122] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 210.
[123] Hallward (2003), Chapter 8.
[124] Badiou (2005), p. 5.
[125] Badiou (2005), p. 6.
[126] Badiou (2005), p. 7.
[127] Badiou (2005), p. 3.

and reflected as such, came to delimit a regional discipline within philosophy.'[128] The poem itself, on this view, is 'incapable of truth. Its essence is mimetic, and its regime is that of semblance.'[129] Aristotle, consequently, does not fear the power of art as Plato does, confident of philosophy's capacity to tame it and bring it under his power. It is not considered dangerous, but entirely 'innocent'. 'Aristotle's prescription places art under the sign of something entirely other than knowledge and thereby frees it from the Platonic suspicion',[130] Badiou tells us. This articulation, as Riera has it, 'provides the philosopher with guidelines for philosophically *using* the poem's truths.'[131] But this is not, Badiou is careful to stipulate, 'truth per se, but rather what *a truth constrains within the imaginary*.' It is 'verisimilitude' and emotional resonance/catharsis rather than truth. Art has, therefore, a 'therapeutic function' rather than a 'cognitive or revelatory one'. 'Art does not pertain to the theoretical, but to the ethical', writes Badiou.[132] In this regime, as Hallward has it, '[art's] nature is simply therapeutic, its effect cathartic or pleasing'.[133]

iv. The Artistic Configuration

Badiou's suggested 'fourth modality' is neither classical nor didactic, nor yet romantic.[134] In this connection he presents a thesis 'according to which art would be a truth procedure sui generis, both immanent and singular'.[135] This thesis is 'axiomatic', suggests Riera, because 'it contests Heidegger's type of compossibility, his claim of the cobelonging of *logos* and the poetic, but it must also proceed in such a way as to not fall back into the space of speculative

[128] Badiou (2008), p. 38.
[129] Badiou (2005), p. 4.
[130] Badiou (2005), p. 4.
[131] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 63.
[132] Badiou (2005), p. 4.
[133] Hallward (2003), Chapter 8.
[134] Badiou (2005), p. 8.
[135] Badiou (2005), p. 10.

aesthetics.'[136] It is not a matter of jettisoning Heidegger entirely, but of deciding what can be kept and what must be rejected in order to perform the necessary de-suturing operation in such a way that leaves both parties, philosophy and poetry, not simply intact, but stronger. It involves an acceptance, in Lecercle's words, that 'the poem is a site for the production of truths'.[137] It is a matter of rejecting the 'foundational function' of the poem but retaining 'the autonomous function of the thought of the poem (*la pensée de poème*); the determination of the common destiny shared by the poet and the thinker; and finally, the risky exposure of philosophy to the poem.'[138] The question, according to Badiou, is '[w]hen one undertakes the thinking of art as an immanent production of truths, *what is the pertinent unity of what is called "art"*?'[139]

Badiou goes on to set out a number of essential propositions for the 'path to be followed'. A work of art, he argues, is 'not an event [but] a fact of art.' Neither is it a truth, rather '[a] truth is an artistic procedure initiated by an event', and the work itself is 'the local instance or the differential point of a truth.' But it *is* 'a subject point of an artistic truth [which is] a[n] (infinite) generic multiple of works.' Each work is 'a situated *inquiry* about the truth that it locally actualizes or of which it is a finite fragment.'[140] A number of characteristics are thus essential for the establishment of this differentiation: locality, situationality, subjectivity, and multiplicity. As Badiou writes:

> Works compose a truth within the post-evental dimension that institutes *the constraint of an artistic configuration*. In the end, a truth is an artistic configuration initiated by an event (in general, an event is a group of works, a singular multiple of works) and

[136] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 73.
[137] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 210.
[138] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 73.
[139] Badiou (2005), p. 10.
[140] Badiou (2005), p. 12.

> unfolded through chance in the form of works that serve as its subject points.[141]

This is the essence, as we have seen previously, of Badiou's *in*aesthetic refusal 'to turn art into an object for philosophy', to 'do' philosophical aesthetics. Badiou warns us that 'we must above all not conclude that it is philosophy's job to think art. Instead *a configuration thinks itself in the works that compose it*.'[142] It is, however, as we have seen, philosophy's job to seize and to *organise* the truths emerging from an event, to ensure that subjective fidelity towards emergent truths is maintained.

Badiou first sought to secure what he terms the 'autonomy of the aesthetic process' as early as 1966, in an essay also collected in *The Age of the Poets*…[143] Here he makes the following opening statement:

> Art is not ideology. […] The aesthetic process decentres the specular relation with which ideology perpetuates its closed infinity. The aesthetic effect is certainly imaginary; but this imaginary is not the reflection of the real, since it is the real of this reflection.[144]

We are perhaps entitled to wonder, at this point, what third position he is able to adopt in order to make such assertions, and whether more questions have been raised than answered regarding the project of protecting philosophy and art from one another; so that the one is free to 'seize' truths and the other to 'produce' truths. Or, to frame this as a question: Why *cannot* philosophy be written *as if* one were writing poetry? What is lost when the two are merged? Badiou seems to evade this question by surreptitiously putting the poem to work on behalf of his theory of the event and that 'ontology of the void'. Thus, in his efforts to establish art's 'plane of immanence'

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[141] Badiou (2005), p. 12.
[142] Badiou (2005), p. 14.
[143] Badiou (2014), pp. 111-31. From 'The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process', originally published as 'L'autonomie du processus esthetique', *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes* 12/13 (1966), 77-89.
[144] Badiou (2014), p. 111.

what we tend to see is rather a reflection of his own ideological defence of a Platonic philosophy of the matheme, a defence that, as we have already seen Laruelle suggest, inevitably becomes Maoist.[145] To put it another way, the poem is conscripted, put to work, and Badiou's 'artistic configuration' rests on just this paradox of his own making. That is, it rests on a refusal to recognise that the 'philosophical effect' is also 'imaginary', and that an *inaesthetic* discussion of the poem fails to avoid the pitfall of propagandizing by default. However much Badiou wishes to reject, for example, 'the crass equation of Nazism and so-called communism (in effect, the Stalinist state) under the name of "totalitarianism",' and however much his 'communisms' might be said, in theory, 'to experience the antinomy […] between the finitude of the state and the infinite immanent to every truth, including and above all political truth', the underlying Platonic/Maoist logic of his position remains the same when it comes to 'the production of imaginary macroscopic entities and hyperbolic names.'[146] If the effect is essentially the same, whether these entities and names are claimed to have originated in an event or in a coup seems somewhat irrelevant.

Five operations and two gestures

Badiou suggests that 'the poem establishes guidelines for thought, proposing singular *operations* for it', and he therefore offers an 'inventory of the operations active in the poem' which are 'the operations that, from within the poem, legislate about and against the sutures of philosophy.'[147] In this section, therefore, I offer an inventory of that inventory. Badiou suggests three 'operations': 'counter-romanticism, detotalisation, and the diagonal',[148] but then adds two

[145] See n. 41, above.
[146] Badiou (2007), pp. 102-03.
[147] Badiou (2014), pp. 12-13.
[148] Badiou (2014), p. 13.

further ‘contrary operations’: ‘subtraction and dissemination’.[149]

i. Counter-romanticism

Counter-romantic poets, writes Badiou, are ‘forced to subtract the poem, in its role as thought, from its romantic definition […] aim[ing] to *centre* the poem on a tacit concept rather than on the power of the image.’[150] This provides the poem with a ‘prohibitive vocation’ as ‘counter-image’, turning away from a ‘complacency with the dream and the image in order to [obey] the rigorous laws of metaphor.’[151] Thus the central image becomes ‘the earth’; however, stripped of any complacency, it is ‘rather the imaged subtraction of the image’.[152] As Badiou tells us, this ‘place of regulated metaphorical exchanges, this ungrateful earth of the poets does violence to all nostalgia.’[153] These, then, are not poets in thrall to what Badiou calls a ‘romantic glorification’[154] which is ‘saturated by the element of pure promise – always brought back to the supposition of a return to the gods’.[155] Rather, the ‘earth’ presented here is not simply a sacred place, it is not a dream of another place imagined through a language of wistful yearning; instead, it is a more tightly-regulated place of *poetic* thought, and it is often a *godless* place, a place either abandoned by God or else mourning his ‘death’.

Osip Mandelstam’s ‘Whoever finds a horseshoe’ (1923) exemplifies this movement away from an earth of ‘romantic glorification’ towards something more determinately terrestrial.

> Everything pitches and splits.
>
> The air quivers with comparisons,

[149] Badiou (2014), p. 29.
[150] Badiou (2014), p. 13.
[151] Badiou (2014), p. 14.
[152] Badiou (2014), p. 13.
[153] Badiou (2014), p. 14.
[154] Badiou (2005), p. 3.
[155] Badiou (2005), p. 7.

No one word is better than another,

The earth hums with metaphors.

And light two-wheeled chariots,

Harnessed brightly to flocks of strenuous birds,

Explode,

Vying with the snorting favourites of the race-track.[156]

Here, metaphor takes a resolutely quotidian form, so that even the birds are 'harnessed' and put to work against their expected symbolic role as emblems of freedom. Metaphor, rather than freeing language, fills the air to such an extent that it suffocates and constrains:

The air is dark like water, everything alive swims like fish,

Fins pushing aside the sphere

That's compact, resilient, hardly heated –

The crystal in which wheels move and horses shy,

The moist black-earth every night flung open anew

By pitchforks, tridents, hoes, and ploughs.

The air is mixed as densely as the earth –

You can't get out, to get inside is arduous.[157]

In this case the 'drowsy numbness' we know from Keats is resolutely counter-romantic, here are no 'light-winged Dryad[s] of the trees' or 'viewless wings of Poesy' as counter-balancing images upon which the poet's imagination might take metaphorical flight.[158] Such imagery,

[156] Osip Mandelshtam, 'Whoever finds a horseshoe' in *Selected Poems*, selected and translated by James Greene (London: Penguin, 1991), npg.
[157] Mandelshtam (1991), npg.
[158] John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale', *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), pp. 193-195.

described by Badiou as a 'counter-image, the affirmative interruption, of the dream ' or 'the imaged subtraction of the image', seems to physically drag one down to an 'ungrateful earth' which is in no sense a pastoral idyll.[159] This earth, adds Badiou, is not the sheltering 'natural Mother', verdant and teeming with life: he cites Rimbaud from *A Season in Hell* (1873): 'If I have any taste, it is for hardly / Anything but earth and stones.'[160]

ii. Detotalization

The 'detotalizing' operation, Badiou suggests, works '[a]gainst the supposition of a Great Whole [… as] the poets of the age of the poets think detotalization, the separate, irreconcilable multiplicity. They impose on themselves a principle of inconsistency.'[161] We can see this, as Badiou puts it, 'most conceptual[ly] [and …] most prosaic[ally]'[162] in the work of (Pessoa's heteronym) Alberto Caeiro who, in 1914, writes scathingly of 'That Great Mystery the false poets speak of':

> I saw that there is no Nature,
> That Nature does not exist,
> That there are mountains, valleys, plains,
> That there are trees, flowers, grasses,
> That there are streams and stones,
> But that there's not a whole to which this belongs,
> That any real true connection
> Is a disease of our ideas.

[159] Badiou (2014), p. 13.
[160] Rimbaud, quoted in Badiou (2014), p. 14. See also 'Second Delirium: The Alchemy of the Word', in *Complete Works* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 235.
[161] Badiou (2014), p. 14.
[162] Badiou (2014), p. 14.

> Nature is parts without a whole.
>
> This perhaps is that mystery they speak of.[163]

Prosaic is certainly the word, and clearly not a huge amount of exegetical rigour need be brought to bear on this anti-poetic stanza, stripped of adjectives or any other adornment. However, thinking back to Zwicky's 'lyric philosophy' and her desire to 'give voice to an ecology of experience', one might notice two things: firstly, the irony inherent in the *un*poetic (prosaic) tenor of these lines written in verse; and secondly, that conceptually they bring out precisely what Zwicky means by 'ecology,' in the sense that an ecological intuition fully internalises the Nietzschean 'perspectivist' critique of ontotheological notions of truth.[164] In this case, however, 'parts without a whole' seems almost anti-ecological; a fragmented and elementaristic anti-Gestalt. Nietzsche himself, drolly, talks of a 'frog perspective':

> Perhaps they are merely provisional perspectives, perhaps they are not even viewed head-on; perhaps they are even viewed from below, like a frog-perspective, to borrow an expression that painters will recognize.[165]

From the provisional, partial perspective of lived experience the totalizing gesture of the 'false poet' comes to seem counter-productive – a sham, an empty conceit.

iii. Diagonality[166]

'The poets of the age of the poets', Badiou suggests, seek to 'draw a line in language that would trace a diagonal stroke through whatever classification one imagines for it, to produce a short-circuit in the circulation of linguistic energy.' This Cantorian diagonality, with its capacity to

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[163] Fernando Pessoa, *Selected Poems*, translated by Jonathan Griffin, 2nd edition (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 84.
[164] Zwicky (2014), p. 16. See Introduction, n. 23, above.
[165] Nietzsche (2002), p. 6.
[166] 'Diagonality' is a term referencing Cantor's diagonal proof and its implication of multiple infinities.

cut or to short-circuit lines of thought is a question of the poem '*wagering* that a nomination may come and interrupt signification, and from the point of this interruption for a *localizable* thought to establish itself, without any pretence to totality, but capable of being loyal to its own inauguration.'[167] Such a fidelity to anti-totalization is essential, and through it the poetic diagonal has the power not simply to 'interrupt' or 'suspend' the 'game of sense' but, in 'making a diagonal of being and its annulment [it] declares that a faithful thought, thus capable of truth, makes a hole in whatever knowledge is concentrated in significations.' Finally, this is not a negation, Badiou claims, rather it is 'always affirmative: it says "I" or "there is"'.[168]

While diagonality thus avoids a romantic yearning for the transcendent, it arguably retains the romantic affirmation of the immediate and the local against the totalising presumptions of philosophical truth and its power, and thereby seems to carry a leaner, more potent threat. The kind of 'paradoxical comparative approximations' that Badiou describes as 'the secondary rhetoric of the diagonal operation' are of least interest here.[169] These 'x is not-x' images seem rather like empty rhetorical tricks, and while Badiou states that diagonality, in its most potent form, 'cuts the threads, for another circulation of the current of thought', that this is *not* simply a negation is due to a 'being-in-the-worldness' implicit in this short-circuiting. The opening lines of Trakl's 'Psalm' provide one example:

> It is a light, which the wind has extinguished.
>
> It is a village inn, which a drunkard abandons in the afternoon.
>
> It is a vineyard, burned and black with holes full of spiders.

[167] Badiou (2014), p. 15.
[168] Badiou (2014), p. 16.
[169] Badiou (2014), p. 15.

It is a room, which they have whitewashed with milk.[170]

That anaphoric 'It is a…' (in the original German, '*Es ist ein*…') serves to emphasise the – as Badiou puts it – 'always affirmative' character of the diagonal and resolutely localizes it.[171]

With regard to diagonality as 'the rule of interruption', Badiou cites an untitled 1937 poem of Mandelstam's that seems to exhibit a certain nausea in its 'suspen[sion of] the game of sense'[172]:

Don't compare: anyone alive is matchless.
I yielded, with a kind of tender terror,
To the flatness of the plains,
And the circle of the sky made me ill.
I appealed to the air, my servant,
Waiting for service or news;
I prepared for a journey, swam along the arc
Of voyages that would never start.[173]

The stanza begins with a stark rejection of simile, but the metaphors it then develops – demonstrating how diagonality differs from paradox – exhibit a queasily destabilising quality in approaching the familiar from unexpected angles.

iv. Subtraction

Badiou describes the operation of subtraction as the poem's 'hunger' for the abolition of

[170] Georg Trakl, *The Last Gold of Expired Stars: Complete Poems 1908 – 1914* (Sykesville, Maryland: Loch Raven Press, 2010), p. 61.
[171] Badiou (2014), p. 16.
[172] Badiou (2014), p. 16.
[173] Mandelshtam, '(352) I8th January 1937' (1991), npg.

objectivity.[174] Philosophy's operations are subtractive, in that it subtracts truth from knowledge by means of an (artistic) event, by means of the untotalisable multiples immanently present in its operations: 'a truth is generic, subtracted from all exact designations'.[175] He provides us with a compelling account of what the poem *is*, as well as a persuasive exposition as to how its metaphors set about abolishing objectivity while simultaneously paving the way for a faithful and committed subjectivity. He is also more than happy to concur with Wittgenstein's assessment that the poem is not concerned with giving information, in that it 'neither communicates nor enters into general circulation'. It is, rather, borrowing a concept from Deleuze and an image from Mallarmé, a 'purity folded onto itself [which] awaits us without anxiety, in the abruptness of its closed manifestation, as a fan that only our gaze unfolds.' Badiou goes on to suggest that 'the modern poem is haunted by a central silence': 'devoid of anything sacred', he writes, it 'interrupts the general racket.' Importantly, however, he also argues that 'the poem, in this sense, says the opposite of Wittgenstein', in that the silence created by the poem says 'that which is impossible to say in the shared language of consensus, to separate it from the world so that it may be said, and always re-said for the first time.'[176] This is one of countless references to the famous closing lines of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* – 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent' – but he may actually be splitting hairs.[177] In a letter to Paul Engleman Wittgenstein writes: 'If only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – *contained* in what has been uttered!', which seems to place him quite close to Badiou, or rather Badiou quite close to Wittgenstein, in terms of the poem's subtractive operation.

Badiou, in fact, often seems to wilfully fail to grasp the import of the *Tractatus*, assuming that

[174] Badiou (2014), p. 30.
[175] Badiou (1999), p. 80.
[176] Badiou (2014), pp. 24-25.
[177] Wittgenstein (2001), #7. It is sometimes tempting to wonder whether this line is all the Wittgenstein Badiou has actually read.

Wittgenstein is endorsing silence rather than – as is really the case – the notion that verbiage exhausts sense and clouds meaning. As Polanyi puts it:

> To assert that I have knowledge which is ineffable is not to deny that I can speak of it, but only that I can speak of it adequately, the assertion itself being an appraisal of this inadequacy. […] Such reflections must of course appeal ultimately to the very sense of inadequacy which they intend to justify. They do not try to eliminate, but only to evoke more vividly our sense of inadequate representation, by persevering in the direction of greater precision and reflecting on the ultimate failure of this attempt.'[178]

Zwicky criticises a picture of the *Tractatus* derived from the misapprehensions of Russell and Ayer that 'dominates many academic imaginations', and which tends to have Wittgenstein saying that 'that which falls outside the possibility of representation in calculus can have nothing to do with truth and therefore nothing to do with meaning'. In reality, suggests Zwicky: 'The focus on ineffability, *das Mystiche*, is, by itself, a clue to the lyric nature of the vision articulated in the *Tractatus*. The integrity of this vision is confirmed in its manner of expression.'[179] The essential thing is not to attempt to say what *cannot* be said, especially where metaphor is concerned. In her 'The Death of Georg Trakl', for example, we find the line: 'He speaks echoes.'[180] We might reinvoke Badiou's words in saying that this line of Zwicky's 'suspends the game of sense and makes a diagonal of being and its annulment',[181] but in so doing we would only be acknowledging, *without* being able to say it for fear of something 'getting lost', precisely what is always 're-said for the first time' in the central silence of the poem.

[178] Polanyi (1962), p. 95
[179] Jan Zwicky, *Lyric Philosophy* (Edmonton and Calgary: Brush Education, 2014), § 159.
[180] Zwicky (2015), p. 34.
[181] Badiou (2014), p. 16.

In this regard, Badiou does again seem to agree with Wittgenstein in recognising, by way of Mallarmé, that the poem 'is opposed to […] the language of communication and of reality', and is not the language of '"universal reporting"'. It *is,* he suggests, a 'halting point' that 'stops language in its tracks'; as the 'guardian of the decency of saying' it opposes 'the obscenity of "everything to be seen" and "everything to be said".'[182] Once again one cannot imagine Wittgenstein having any quarrel with any of this, even less so with Badiou's description of the poem as a 'negative machine, which states being, or the idea, at the very point where the object has vanished.' It is this, the poem's 'subtractive operation', that 'submits the object to the test of its lack.'[183] The poem, adds Badiou, is 'a form of pure thinking, de-objectified or disenchanted with the object' and it is, therefore, 'a form of thinking henceforth separated from any given object.'[184] The central mystery, then, is always this de-objectified object, and this is the essence of the poem's power to unsettle.

In his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* Badiou sets up what he terms a 'poetic dialectic' between Mallarmé and the seventh century Arabian poet Labîd ben Rabi'a[185] on the question of subtraction: 'In the beginning,' Badiou suggests, '[the poetic path of thinking] situates within the Open the retreat of all things; but it then opens the retreat itself.'[186] What becomes clear during this dialectical process is that the poem is 'risked' in an ahistorical place, 'the void', where no past or future is certain, and that a poet like Mallarmé or Labîd enacts the purest leap beyond the known in maintaining fidelity to 'truths' ('*The* truth does not exist, only truths – the plural is crucial') emerging from an event: 'The choice that binds the subject to a truth is the choice of continuing to be: fidelity to the event, fidelity to the void.'[187] Much of Chapter 3 will

[182] Badiou (2014), p. 25.
[183] Badiou (2014), p. 29.
[184] Badiou (2014), p. 29.
[185] Badiou (2005), pp. 45-56.
[186] Badiou (2005), p. 49.
[187] Badiou (2005), p. 55.

be devoted to a discussion of Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, but the lines Badiou takes from one of Labîd's 'pre-Islamic odes' are instructive in this context, beginning with 'the return of the storyteller to the encampment [to meet] with nothing but the return of the desert.'

> Vestiges! All have fled! Empty, forsaken, the land!
> Places once full, bare places, relinquished at dawn,
> Useless ditches, abandoned tow.[188]

The poem, Badiou tells us, moves toward the 'eulogy of the lineage and the clan' and ends 'by eliciting the figure of the master of choice and of law, presented as the one for whom the initial void was destined' who is described in the poem as 'the sole master of choices.'[189]

In summing up he states that

> [e]very truth is imperilled by the possibility that there may be nothing besides the indifferent place, the sand, the rain, the ocean, the abyss. […] The subject of poetic saying is the subject of this ordeal or peril. […] Truth results from the disappearance of the master into the anonymity of the empty place.[190]

Whereas Badiou will see a 'weakness' in Mallarmé's poem in that there this 'doctrine of sacrifice […] remains a Christian one' that 'maintains an ontological dualism, together with something akin to a Platonic transcendence of truth,' on the other hand he sees the great strength of Labîd's poem to be its '[rigorous maintenance of] a principle of immanence' so that 'even the master is "one of us," he does not lie beyond'.[191] This still leaves us, however, with an irresolvable paradox in the modern context of a 'scientific, capitalistic, and democratic

[188] Badiou (2005), p. 47.
[189] Badiou (2005), p. 47.
[190] Badiou (2005), p. 50.
[191] Badiou (2005), p. 51.

modernity' which renders us unable to 'choose reasonably in what concerns the relation between mastery and truth.' For Badiou, it is thus necessary to 'take a step back' and discover 'a thinking of choice and of the decision that would go from the void to truth without passing through the figure of the master, that is, without either invoking or sacrificing the master.' It leaves us with the problem of choosing truth(s) from the 'initial ordeal of the void' that are 'at one and the same time […] anonymous (or impersonal) and nevertheless […] immanent and terrestrial' which is the essence of the subtractive operation of the modern poem.[192]

v. Dissemination

If subtraction constitutes the poem's hunger for the abolition of objectivity, then the disseminative operation is, according to Badiou, its 'thirst'.[193] It is closely linked to the subtractive, and to that wider context of de-objectification, but with subtle metaphorical differences that find it described in terms of dispersal rather than disappearance. 'Dissemination, for its part', Badiou tells us, 'seeks to dissolve the object by way of its infinite metaphorical distribution. And so, as soon as it is mentioned, the object emigrates elsewhere in the realm of the sense, is de-objectified by becoming something other than what it is.' The object is led astray 'into pure multiplicity'. Rimbaud exemplifies this operation, for Badiou, partly because 'life itself, the subject, is other and multiple', but also because, he states, 'the poem's wish is the incessant migration into heterogeneous phenomena. The poem, at the farthest remove from the *foundation* of objectivity, sets about to make it literally [sic] *founder* or *melt*.' Badiou is surely right, in one sense, that this 'complete de-objectification of presence' where the thought of the poem 'at the farthest remove from knowledge […] has always disconcerted philosophy.' The poem's disseminative operation, along with its other operations,

[192] Badiou (2005), p. 53-4. This 'subtractive operation' will be discussed further, with examples drawn from the work of Mallarmé, in Part Two, Chapter One.
[193] Badiou (2014), p. 30.

dramatise its Derridean refusal to be brought under the control of 'everything that supports the faculty to know', and this seems a persistent danger to any Platonic or Maoist agenda which would demand that the poem be harnessed for political ends.[194]

vi. De-objectification and disorientation

Finally, and relatedly, Badiou outlines 'two principle kinds of gesture by which the poem points towards its own thought.' Firstly, as we have already seen, 'against the reduction of thought to knowledge' poets of the age of the poets 'activate […] a de-objectification'.[195] Secondly, these poets 'organise […] a *disorientation* in thought.'[196] It is this quintessentially modern 'disorientation' that, Badiou believes, after the closure of the age of the poets, 'can now be conceptualized'.

> De-objectification and disorientation concentrate whatever this [counter-romantic] poetry opposes to the sutures of philosophy, a poetry that dissolves the objectivity of science – which captivates the positivisms – into pure multiplicity, and disorients History – which fascinates revolutionary thought. The age of the poets bequeaths to us, in order to liberate philosophy, the imperative of clarification without totality, a thinking of what is at once dispersed and unseparated, an inhospitable and cold reason, for want of either object or orientation. To the coldness that de-objectifies and disorients, the poem even restores a subjective tonality, which is like the winter 'colour' of the subject without object.[197]

What is activated by the poets *of* the age of the poets, Badiou declares, is a 'polemic against

[194] Badiou (2014), pp. 30-31.
[195] Badiou (2014), p. 16.
[196] Badiou (2014), p. 18.
[197] Badiou (2014), p. 20.

meaning' as objectivity, in the form of 'the unfigurable figure'; this is 'the subject without object' whereby the 'restrictive paradigm of the object is succeeded by the pure dispersion of existence.'[198] In a sense this seems to be because events which 'happen' – objectively, factually – after the death of God have been emptied of historical meaning. It becomes obscene, an affront, to claim to find meaning in the atrocities of the twentieth century, to claim that these events *meant* something that can be 'read' from them as part of a meta-narrative subject to natural laws, with some ultimate direction or purpose. The target of the poem's disruption, in the age of the poets, thus seems to be historicism, or 'oriented representations of History', against which the counter-romantic poem comes to trace its 'disorienting diagonal'.[199]

Trakl, for example, Badiou suggests, opposes History with the 'absolutely disruptive figure that is death' – and not some peripheral or secondary aspect of death, such as the idea of it or the fear of it, but 'death itself'.[200] In a Trakl poem, such as 'Seven-Song of Death' (1915), death stalks the earth, and those who live upon it, like a hunter, and is always present as night falls:

> Silently the night appears, a bleeding deer
> That slowly sinks down at the hill.[201]

Death offers little hope of respite or other-worldly palliatives, and with its recurring image of a 'grandchild' the poem presages a bleak future in which death is ever-present. Another poem, 'Helian' (1913), gives us the closing stanza:

> O you shattered eyes in black mouths,
> When the grandson in gentle derangement

[198] Badiou (2014), pp. 16-17.
[199] Badiou (1999), p. 71.
[200] Badiou (2014), p. 18.
[201] Trakl (2010), p. 139.

Ponders the darker ending alone,

The silent God lowers blue eyelids over him.[202]

Trakl's disorientating gestures lead, Badiou tells us, to 'the void latent under the weight of the world', a 'pure "there is" in which the sole advent, in the lonely wind, is that of the cadaver.'[203]

For Badiou, I would suggest, the ultimate answer to his question '[w]hat does the poem think?' is dependent upon the poem's essential *translatability*. Using lines drawn from Trakl's 'Elis' (1914) he demonstrates how well the 'thought' of the poem survives translation:

A blue deer

Quietly bleeds in the thorn bush.

A brown tree stands isolated there;

Its blue fruits have fallen from it.

Signs and stars

Sink quietly in the evening pond.[204]

Badiou's claim is that 'the slow emblematic coming of death, the painting, or figuration, of these browns and these blues which encircle and expose the blood and the stars' is not lost, even if the other things, such as the poem's rhythm, are.[205] '[W]hat the poem thinks is what endures victoriously the test of a mutilated, or forgotten, rhythm', as Badiou puts it. What survives, in spite of the 'linguistic ruin of almost everything', he believes, can only be 'a form of thought' – distinguished from 'a form of "knowledge"' – given that the poetic thought 'is

[202] Trakl (2010), p. 85.
[203] Badiou (2014), p. 20-21.
[204] I have used Doss and Schmidt's translations found in Trakl (2010), p. 97. Badiou's are found in Badiou (2014), p. 27. If Badiou is right about the poem's 'thought' surviving translation, either should suffice.
[205] Badiou (2014), p. 28.

not supported by an object' to be 'known'.[206] 'The thought of the poem does not', he suggests, 'begin until after a complete de-objectification of presence'. But he is prepared to go even further, claiming that 'at the farthest remove from knowledge, the poem is exemplarily a thought that is obtained in the retreat, or the defection, of everything that supports the faculty to know. And no doubt this is why the poem has always *disconcerted* philosophy.'

Talk of the poem 'disconcerting' philosophy inevitably leads back to Plato and the decision to ostracise of the poets from his *Kallipolis*. Badiou's commentary on Socrates' defence of the decision suggests that the decision oscillates between 'overblown conviction and […] weakness with regard to the poetic temptation'. It seems to present us with an image of the foundational figure of Western philosophy as something akin to Christ in the Judean desert, with the poem adopting the Satanic role, tempting the philsopher to compromise the purity of his Messianic vision. What Badiou finds 'astounding' is that Plato places such weight on his decision to ostracise the poets: 'The fate of the political depending on the fate of the poem!' exclaims Badiou.[207] It is both 'astounding' and somewhat implausible that Plato should confer such power on the poem, and seems disproportionate to the point of inviting further psychoanalytic conjecture: why does Plato so fear the poem? Why does he believe it has the power to compromise his sense of self-cohesion? This can only be a unique and pivotal gesture in the establishment of philosophy's right to present its method as sole arbiter in the question of truths generated generically. Badiou makes it clear that it was only in Greece that 'the matheme enabled the interruption of the sacral exercise of validation by way of the story', describing how, for Plato, the poem is 'seduction without a concept, […] legitimation without idea' and consequently must be '[banned] from the space in which the royalty of the philosopher operates.' As always, Badiou is at pains to emphasise that Plato 'regrets' this 'painful and

[206] Badiou (2014), p. 28.
[207] Badiou (2014), p. 31.

interminable rupture' but philosophy's existence, 'and not just its style alone', is at stake.[208]

For Badiou, the matheme's role in the 'ancient quarrel' between philosophy and poetry is both foundational and polemical, acting as a bulwark against both a poststructuralist privileging of the notion of discourse (which includes critical theory and hermeneutics) and the linguistic turn of Wittgenstein, a Cantorian mathematical formalism constituting the fundamental bedrock of the real. He refers to 'the Idea as Idea to which Lacan gave the name of matheme', suggesting that even the arch antiphilosopher sees the matheme as central to a rebirth of Platonism.[209] Lacan himself seems to understand this in terms of a limit, a point at which a mathematical formalism founders in its encounter with the real, which might be tied in to the notion of inexistence in Badiou's philosophy of the event. Against romantic-Parmenidian 'end of philosophy' theses the matheme presents, as polemic, the pure equation of mathematics with ontology. It supposedly operates as an antidote to the 'properly incalculable thought' that constitutes the poem's 'thinking without knowledge', offering both univocity and security of signification. *Dianoia*, whose language is mathematics, 'travers[es] the thinkable'; the poem, on the other hand, does not; it 'stands still on the threshold of what it is, withdrawing or dispersing the objects that overburden it.'[210]

Badiou's language here is again suffused with a sense of the poem's power, offering a compelling account of the placing of *dianoia* in a subordinate position to *noesis* in grasping something 'beyond substance, beyond the ideal being-there.' It also seems to reinforce the necessity of metaphor as a replacement for maieutics when, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, thought 'bumps its head against the limits of language'. '[T]he *dianoia*', Badiou suggests, 'is insufficient. We must rely on the great de-objectifying operations of the poem: subtraction and

[208] Badiou (2014), p. 37.
[209] Badiou (2008), p. 207.
[210] Badiou (2014), p. 33.

dissemination.'[211] As Lecercle puts it:

> If, when the limits of argumentative thought, of *dianoia*, have been reached, philosophy waxes poetic, then we may call for a moment when, once the vaticinating impulse of the poem has been exhausted, the poem abandons *pathos* for *logos*. We may wish for a poetry of pure *logos*, the only object of which is the contemplation of pure ideas, the production of truths.[212]

Lecercle goes on to say that Badiou finds such poetry of *logos* in Mallarmé's exemplary production of 'a poem that presents itself as thought'; though we might well have found it in Plato had he maintained the courage of his intuitions and followed the implications of his own image of the 'Divided Line.' Here Plato flirts with to privileging *noesis* over *dianoia*, contemplation over calculation, but shies away from that conclusion in the end.[213]

Badiou admits he has no interest in ending a quarrel which he sees as 'the very essence of the relation between philosophy and poetry' and warns that 'giv[ing] up on the mathematical paradigm [would be] deadly for philosophy'.[214] Philosophy must, he reiterates, establish itself 'in the contrast between the poem and the matheme, which are its primordial conditions'.[215] He issues a call for the combatants to do battle, but to do so by 'recognising the *common task*, which is to think that which was unthinkable, to say that which was impossible to say.'[216] It is easy to see why Wittgenstein represents such a threat to that part of the Badiouian project which requires the de-suturing of philosophy from its poetic condition. In sloughing off the influences of Frege and Russell that characterise his earlier work Wittgenstein effectively launches a

[211] Badiou (2014), p. 34.
[212] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 209.
[213] Plato (2007), Book VII, 509d-511e.
[214] Badiou (2014), p. 35.
[215] Badiou (2014), p. 38.
[216] Badiou (2014), p. 35.

mystico-poetic manifesto that is the antithesis of Badiou's own; that is, he suggests that disobjectification and disorientation *can only be* poeticized.

From the Vantage Point of the Unnameable

When it comes to the necessary de-suturing of philosophy from its conditions, Badiou concludes the essay 'Philosophy and Poetry from the Vantage Point of the Unnameable' with his strongest claim of all: that philosophy

> gives up on the pretence to establish the names that close off that which subtracts itself. In this sense, after the poem and after the matheme, but under their thinking condition, philosophy is the most lacunary thinking of the multiplicity of thoughts.[217]

Badiou's 'foundational project', however, as Riera has described it, arguably cannot survive its encounter with the 'unfounded [regime of truth] par excellence' that is poetry.[218] 'No truth can ever deliver the meaning of meaning' admits Badiou, but philosophy can perhaps marshal its conditions, specifically the poem with its attention to the 'infinite power of language', and the matheme with its 'consistency', so that the generic truth procedures in combination achieve, if not completeness, something more than is possible for each generic procedure alone.[219] Riera suggests that 'the impact that the unfounded conditions impress upon philosophy supposes a redefinition of the graphics of compossibility, as well as of its temporality. Philosophy is now defined as the incomplete (*lacunaire*) thinking of the multiple coming after its conditions.'[220]

[217] Badiou (2014), p. 58.
[218] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 63.
[219] Badiou (2014), p. 58.
[220] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 63.

In his modernist manifesto 'Crisis of Verse', Mallarmé writes:

> The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet speaking, who yields the initiative to words, through the clash of their ordered inequalities; they light each other up through reciprocal reflections like a virtual swooping of fire across precious stones, replacing the primacy of the perceptible rhythm of respiration or the classic lyric breath, or the personal feeling driving the sentences.[221]

Words such as 'frenzy' and 'madness' are drawn from the pens of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, emphasising, for Badiou, the involuntariness and uncontrollability of a force that 'traverses language'.[222] As Heidegger also puts it: 'The poet must renounce having words under his control.'[223] Rimbaud may boast that he 'turned silences and night into words [and that what] was unutterable, [he] wrote down', that he 'made the whirling world stand still', but there is a sense that there is magic at work here and that mastering it comes at some personal cost.[224] One gets a sense that Badiou, almost in spite of himself, cannot help but align himself with Plato in mustering the organisational, disciplinary rigour of philosophy in an effort to neutralise this unpredictability. But the ultimate irony is that even Plato himself, as Badiou is forced to admit,

> is unable to hold onto this maxim, which promotes the matheme and banishes the poem. He cannot, because he himself explores the limits of *dianoia* or of discursive thought. When it is a matter of the supreme principle, the One or the Good, Plato must […] himself have recourse to images, such as that of the sun, to metaphors […] and to myth […]. In short, where what is at play is the opening of thought to the principle of the thinkable, when thinking must absorb itself into the seizing of that which institutes it as

[221] 'Crisis of Verse' in Mallarmé (2009), p. 208.
[222] Badiou (2014), p. 57.
[223] 'Words' [1958] in Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 147.
[224] Rimbaud (2008), p. 232.

> thinking, that is where Plato himself must submit language to the power of poetic speech.[225]

The problem, all along, for Badiou's analysis of poetic sophisms and philosophy's continuing capacity to organise them is, unavoidably, language itself. 'Let us call this stumbling block the *unnameable*', he suggests, following in the footsteps of Samuel Beckett, with whom he has also engaged extensively in his work. 'The unnameable is that over which a truth cannot force the nomination.'[226] Before Cantor, even the cold logic of the matheme could only be distinguished from sophistic obfuscation through language.

Badiou would seem to prefer that philosophy circumvent language altogether, and yet he is forced to concede, according to Riera, that 'any naming of the event is also of a poetic nature, since it is able to fix what disappears. The power of poetic language', continues Riera, 'lies in its fixing what disappears (presence), although it is this very power that poetry cannot name.'[227] This language is, says Lecercle,

> always, at first at least, the language of the situation, in which the event cannot be named, in which the truths that follow from the event cannot be formulated. And yet the unnameable event *must* be named, and a new language, adapted to that naming must be forged. It is a violent process. The language of the poem is paradoxical because it is the site of a violent birth: in order to attempt to name the unnameable, the poem must break and reconstruct language.[228]

Badiou's 'originality', as Lecercle puts it, 'is the articulation of the two seemingly independent

[225] Badiou (2014), p. 49.
[226] Badiou (2014), p. 54.
[227] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 82.
[228] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 211.

words, 'poem' and 'thought'.' His 'fourth path', Lecercle argues 'solve[s] the paradox the two terms form by firmly excluding one of them, the unexpected one, and turning the other, *logos*, into the very stuff that poetry is made of.'[229] Were Badiou to stop there, embrace 'the unnameable', and prevent philosophical (in)aesthetics from circumscribing and reducing the poem, one might find it easier to agree but, unfortunately, he cannot. Lacoue-Labarthe, for his part, has no desire to 'cast doubt upon the concept of the suture or of suturing' except that

> the suturing of philosophy to the Poem, as Badiou analyzes it, as well as the corresponding desuturing (the Platonic one, for example), does not exactly concern poetry, and especially not poetry in its properly modern exigency. There is a sort of misunderstanding at work here, if you like, one that certainly does bear on poetry, but also on politics – or at least on a determinate type of politics, not to say a style, associated with the philosophy from which Badiou demarcates himself.[230]

It is the *anti*philosophical style from which Badiou wishes to effect a desuturing and, of course, it is not *merely* a question of style for him. The 'misunderstanding' of which Lacoue-Labarthe accuses him, however, is that it was not 'the Poem' at all upon which the suturing was imposed, 'but rather the Mytheme'.[231]

Once again it seems necessary to return to Plato in order to find the source of this misunderstanding, to look at, in Lacoue-Labarthe's words, 'his uncompromising critique of what he calls *muthopoiesis* and [his desire] to ensure the hegemonic position of what he vindicates under the name of philosophy.' What Plato actually wishes to 'break with', Lacoue-Labarthe feels the need to emphasise, is 'the theatre (dramatic poetry) and with *mīmēsis* as a

[229] Lecercle, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 215.
[230] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 23.
[231] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 25.

daimonic and primal mode of enunciation'.[232] For reasons of political expediency, I myself would argue, what must be excluded, suggests Lacoue-Labarthe, 'more than the theatre and all the forms of mimetic or semimimetic enunciation, is myth.'[233] Badiou's re-enactment of Plato's political project would really require mass inoculation against art in the form of the didactic images we see in Mao's Socialist Education Movement. Lacoue-Labarthe, however, writes of

> the destiny that bound poetry, philosophy, and politics together, each to each and to both of the others – and in an essential mode – [taking] shape on two occasions in our history or in our tradition and […], in each case, it was a question of the very possibility of philosophy. The first time [being] nothing less than the inauguration of philosophy strictly speaking; the second time occur[ing] at the beginning of a no doubt irreversible process leading to the final completion – in every sense – of philosophy.[234]

If he is right, this irreversible process constitutes the continued unfolding of the age of non/anti-philosophy, of discourses that are not so much outside philosophy as playing such games with its boundaries as to render them permeable to the point of dissolution. Still worse, this suggests that all philosophy is *itself* antiphilosophical, criss-crossing its own self-imposed borders to the point where it can no longer find its way home.

[232] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 25.
[233] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 26.
[234] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 23.

2. The breaking of a mirror

> *Philosophy is always the breaking of a mirror. This mirror is the surface of language, onto which the sophist reduces everything that philosophy treats in its act. If the philosopher sets his gaze on this surface, his double, the sophist, will emerge, and he may take himself to be one*.[1]

The mirror and the philosopher

If the mirror is indeed 'the surface of language', as Badiou suggests, it seems crucial to understand the implications of its shattering by a philosophy which must, after all, *use* language.[2] Is the philosopher to go beneath the surface *of* language or the surface that *is* language? As a metaphor, it presents an arresting, dynamic, *violent* picture of the philosophical act in keeping with Badiou's conception of the 'event', its sudden emergence, and a radical rupturing which demands subjective fidelity to emerging truths. As I have already intimated, Badiou delights in providing such figurative embellishments for his propositions, suggesting a dependence on the literary with which philosophers have been forced to wrestle ever since Plato gave us his allegory of the cave.[3] In attempting to deconstruct the image of 'the mirror' we should perhaps begin with this sophistic double, the philosopher's malignant doppelgänger, and the mystery of his, or her, emergence.[4] Of particular significance for my thesis is the fact that Badiou seems at times to consider 'poet' a near synonym for 'sophist', at least in terms of their

[1] Badiou (1999), pp. 143-44.
[2] Mirror: Latin, *specere*, 'to look at, view', provides a common source for many words of significance related to speculative/reflective philosophy including: speculum (mirror), speculate, spectrum, spectre, respect, inspect, spectator, spectacular, and introspection.
[3] Plato (2007), Book VII, 514a-517a.
[4] To double: Latin, *duplicare*, from *duo* 'two' + *plicare* 'to fold' gives duplicate, reduplicate, duplicity, and a number of other related words linking doubling with disguise and deception.

being equally in thrall the power of language.[5] The problem of the philosopher's conviction, his apparent readiness to be duped and to have his concepts 'reduced,' can also be linked to the supposedly seductive power of poetic language. This leads on to the question of how the philosopher can express himself at all if he is to avoid being taken for a sophist/poet: not least, apparently, by himself.

Badiou deems it essential that the sophistic double be prevented from establishing a hold over the philosopher. The power wielded by the sophist seems not so much a question of thrice-removed mimesis as of *dis*simulation, the surface presentation of something as it does *not* appear in its essential nature for the purposes of manipulation and control. It is as if the philosopher must avert his eyes so as to avoid being taken in by his own image. Alternatively, it might be that the sophist cannot be allowed to fix the philosopher with *his* gaze, as if his skills might extend to hypnosis so that meeting his eye could presage a loss of autonomy or trigger some form of identity crisis. If the sophist is understood as a kind of magician, the mirror that is language must be considered one of the primary means by which he or she is able to create illusions, and Badiou seems loath to trust the philosopher not to be taken in.[6] As he admits:

> Philosophy's relation to the sophist subjects it to an inner temptation, yielding to which will cause it to split yet again. For the desire to get rid of the sophist *once and for all* hinders the seizing of truths: 'once and for all' necessarily entails that Truth annul the aleatoric nature of truths and that philosophy unduly declare itself productive of truths. The upshot of this is that a declaration of being true comes to stand in as the double of

[5] I cannot agree with Alenka Zupančič ('The Fifth Condition', in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 191) when she suggests that 'in spite of Badiou's continuous – implicit or explicit – polemics with and against "modern sophists", his philosophical enterprise can in no way be reduced to a reaction to these "bad" others.' My thesis is, in effect, that Badiou's enterprise can in *every* way be so reduced and that his own duplicity with regard to the figure of the sophist in the mirror holds the key to this reduction.

[6] Again the sophist seems to be presented as an almost Satanic figure, testing the philosopher's faith – that is, his capacity to resist worldly temptation – much as Jesus is tempted in Matt. 4: 8-10.

the *act* of Truth.[7]

Badiou seems concerned that philosophy could allow itself to take on the form of a quasi-religious dogma in order to win this battle. The 'seizing of truths' is, for Badiou, philosophy's signature act, and in this context a Manichean battle with the sophist-poet can only be a catastrophic distraction. But philosophy seems caught in a double bind whereby to declare itself a producer of truths, in response to its suturing to the poem, causes it to *become* the thing it denies, a simulacrum, its own double. It can, therefore, neither declare itself nor remain silent. The difficulty must be, as Laruelle characterises it, that '[t]he mirror is a lying science *par excellence* because it touches closest to the truth.'[8]

Sophistry, as Badiou uses the term, stands not so much for any specific school of thought antithetical to philosophy, but is rather a generic determination metonymic of corrupted thought; *all* rhetoric employed for obfuscatory rather than elucidatory effect, that is.[9] We are called, then, to witness a battle between light and darkness; between *épistème* and *eikasia*; between clarification and deception. The sophist appears to be, above all, a symptom of philosophy's devastating loss of faith in itself, in finding itself forced to reassert its ideational other-worldliness as 'first philosophy' at every turn. The philosopher seems now more isolated, more marginalised, than at any time since the death of Socrates, but the philosopher seems always to have felt so in relation to the sophist. In Plato's *Sophist*, the Eleatic stranger puts it thus: '[sophists] appear to their pupils to be wise in all things',[10] whereas those who spend too long studying philosophy, as even Socrates is forced to admit, 'become, most of them, very odd

[7] Badiou (2008), p. 25.
[8] Laruelle (2013), p. 151.
[9] See Socrates' mocking admonishment of Protagoras: '"I'm a forgetful sort of man, Protagoras, and if someone speaks at length, I lose the thread of the argument. If I were a little deaf, you would recognise the necessity of raising your voice if you wanted to talk to me; so now since you find me forgetful, cut down your answers and make them shorter if I am to follow you."' Plato, *Protagoras and Meno* (London: Penguin, 1956), 334c-d.
[10] Plato, *Sophist* 233c. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

birds, not to say thoroughly vicious; while even those who look the best of them are reduced by this study […] to complete uselessness as members of society.'[11] Badiou's philosopher seems, therefore, to consider the possibility of seeing the sophist in his own image, of seeing himself *as* the sophist, with a mixture of envy and dread: a final degradation, a slow death by a thousand compromises. What the Badiouian philosopher appears to fear most is a realization that his work has been emptied of meanings other than those he is able to persuade others to take from it; that it should become *merely* literary, in other words. He fears not simply *becoming* the sophist, but that he might already *be* a sophist and that he might, after all, have put his faith in a phantom. Holding fast to an idea against prevailing opinion is a solitary business inevitably subject to periodic crises of faith. We also cannot discount the extent to which the philosopher finds the sophist, and his status as a popular public figure, appealing, and the paroxysms of self-recrimination and confusion he experiences as a result.

In this way what at first appears a quintessentially postmodern crisis of confidence can be seen to echo Socrates' cautionary declaration that the philosopher's nature '"if it is properly taught, must in the course of its growth develop every excellence"' but that if, on the other hand, '"it is sown and grows in unsuitable soil, the very opposite will happen, unless providence intervenes".'[12] For Plato, this vulnerability is endemic: as Socrates is moved to ask,

> "Can a young man's heart remain unmoved by all this? How can his individual training stand the strain? Won't he be swamped by the flood of popular praise and blame, and carried away with the stream till he finds himself agreeing with popular ideas of what

[11] Plato (2007), Book VII, 487d.
[12] Plato (2007), Book VII, 492a. This relates, in general, to the much-discussed problem of *akrasia*, or the philosopher's 'weakness of will' whereby *knowledge* of the Truth does not necessarily entail either the motivation or the moral courage needed to act upon such knowledge.

is admirable or disgraceful, behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them?"[13]

Sophistry, when it holds out the promise of popular acclaim, will prove hard to resist even for the strongest and (in terms of moral training) best prepared philosopher. There is even, for Plato, a sense of dangerous potency inherent in the traditional philosophical skills themselves, exemplified by the persuasive power of Socratic maieutics, if they are not also tempered by virtue, by self-restraint. Plato, after all, portrays Socrates as the most persuasive of rhetoricians, and sophistry represents the temptation to 'prostitute' the art.

The threat the sophist poses supposedly resides in his duplicity, his ability to perform an imitation of the philosopher convincing enough to deceive even the philosopher himself; or at least to bring him to doubt himself. '[H]e belongs to the class of conjurers' and must be classed 'as a juggler and imitator', Plato's Stranger tells us.[14] The sophist is supposedly able to duplicate the philosopher in every respect except his integrity of purpose, his teleological directedness towards 'being' rather than 'not-being.' Moreover, according to Heidegger the sophist, unlike the philosopher, is a worldly figure: 'in terms of his commerce, that with which he properly has to do, are men, beings of his own kind, beings that occur in the world and are in it with him'.[15] In particular, he influences the young who are, Heidegger suggests, 'far removed from the uncoveredness of things' and who are thus incapable, as Plato himself admits, 'of testing, on the basis of the things themselves, what the sophist palms off on them in his speeches.'[16] The figure of the sophist holds out the tantalizing prospect not merely of acceptance, but of popular acclaim. Badiou frankly admits that the subtlety of the sophist's art makes telling him apart

[13] Plato (2007), Book VII, 492c. Nietzsche also notes this dichotomy: 'What helps feed or nourish the higher type of man must be almost poisonous to a very different and lesser type. The virtues of a base man could indicate vices and weaknesses in a philosopher. If a higher type of man were to degenerate and be destroyed, this very destruction could give him the qualities needed to make people honour him as a saint down in the lower realm where he has sunk.' Nietzsche (2002), p. 31.
[14] Plato, *Sophist* 235a-b. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>
[15] Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 267.
[16] Heidegger (2003), p. 273; Plato, *Sophist* 234c. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

from the philosopher an impossibility: 'As his operation also combines fictions of knowledge and fictions of art, the sophist is externally (or discursively) indiscernible from the philosopher'. It is by such means that the sophist 'polarizes the whole philosophical process' from *inside* that process, as it were.[17] '[T]he sophist and the philosopher are brought so close to each other', suggests Heidegger, '[that] whatever might be there to distinguish them will distinguish them in a *fundamental* way.'[18]

The philosopher's 'double' or mirror image might seem benign, initially, but much like Golyadkin's doppelgänger in Dostoevsky's 'The Double', his malignant design must soon become apparent.[19] What is more, he possesses the charm, wit, and unscrupulousness to succeed without the need for force. He has what might, in the contemporary parlance, be termed 'people skills,' having lived among ordinary people, and he or she seems ever the philosopher's superior in this regard, so that envy and desire become twin motivating factors for the philosopher's enmity. They are also the source of the philosopher's *own* duplicity in personifying an internal struggle *as* the sophist rather than accepting ownership of it. Indeed, there being no *essential* difference between the sophist and the philosopher, the former might simply be a version of the latter who has been able to compromise his principles sufficiently to meet the practical necessities of a fully socialized existence. As with Dostoevsky's story, once again, we must wonder whether the destruction of the double would only increase the philosopher's dangerous isolation, thus leading not to liberation but to insanity.[20] The sophist seems more and more to be a spectral manifestation of the philosopher's loss of conviction.

[17] Badiou (2008), p. 24-25.
[18] Heidegger (2003), p. 263. The fundamental distinction alluded to here might be a moral one, a form of Kantian 'good will', and a consequent good/evil or light/dark duality seems to be evoked. The logic also seems to reflect, perhaps, an Augustinian denial of evil as a *privatio boni*.
[19] Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'The Double', in *Notes from the Underground and the Double* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).
[20] As may have been the case for Nietzsche and his self-destructive *Übermensch* fantasies, perhaps.

Derrida, for one, is fascinated by the philosopher's preoccupation with such spectral figures. He notes that among philosophers there exists 'an axiom, at once naïve and sensible, according to which there is no such thing, the phantom does not exist. It must not exist, *therefore* we have to get rid of it, *therefore* we have to be done with it.'[21] But if it is indeed the case that it does not exist why, wonders Derrida, 'would we have to chase after the spectre, to chase it out or hunt it down?' The answer must surely lie in the philosopher's fatally compromised self-belief. We have seen Badiou admit that the obsessive pursuit of the sophist sees the philosophical act of 'seizure' become distorted as a form of *mauvaise foi* in which, to use Badiou's terminology, it duplicates itself by presenting itself as a *producer* rather than *seizer* of truths. This, in turn, leads to a form of corruption described by Badiou as 'a threefold effect of sacredness, ecstasy and terror which may lead it from the aporetic void that sustains its act to criminal prescriptions', and to philosophical Truth enshrined as a sacred object, an object, that is, of ecstatic love and of self-destructive longing.[22] In declaring itself the producer of truths philosophy, in becoming its own double, courts disaster.[23] It seems, nevertheless, an unavoidable disaster, in that it is hard to see philosophy distinguishing itself from its sophistico-poetic double other than dogmatically, via an 'other world' justified on purely rational grounds.

[21] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, 'Spectrographies' in Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, eds. *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 44-55.

[22] Badiou (2008), p. 25. 'Ecstasy,' of course, has the sense of 'standing outside oneself,' which can suggest self-duplication, but also the wholly other who is 'in no way another myself', as Levinas puts it. Levinas tells us that, 'the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery. The other's entire being is constituted in its exteriority, or rather its alterity, for exteriority is a property of space and leads the subject back to itself through light.' Emmanuel Levinas, 'Time and the Other' in *The Levinas Reader* ed. by Seán Hand, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 43.

[23] 'In Badiou's doctrine of the subject, the concept of disaster points to the foundering of the subjective unfolding of truth, witnessed when the quest of an emancipatory novelty turns into a corrupt dogma, which revels in its own exceptional nature and can think change only as tyrannical destruction.' Ozren Pupovac, 'Disaster', in in Corcoran, ed. (2015).

Anti-mimesis

Badiou asks: 'How could Heidegger break the poem's mirror – which Celan's poetry does in its own way – he who did not believe it possible to elucidate, in the order of political conditions, his own National Socialist involvement?' Badiou is alluding to Celan's 1967 meeting with Heidegger and the poem 'Todtnauberg', published in 1970, which commemorates it.[24] As Badiou explains, 'Plato must keep the poets, innocent accomplices to sophistry, out of the project of philosophical foundation',[25] and the poem's mirror must also be broken, but ideally, it would seem, by a philosopher less morally and politically compromised than Heidegger. Badiou outlines the 'configuration' of the Platonic period wherein 'the Form is manifestly an operator whose 'true' underlying principal is the matheme.' Badiou understands Plato's logic as follows:

> Imitative poetry is held at bay, the more so, as shown by Plato in the *Gorgias* as much as in the *Protagoras*, inasmuch as there is a paradoxical complicity between poetry and sophistry: poetry is the secret, esoteric dimension of sophistry since it carries to the highest point language's flexibility and variance.'[26]

From which we can perhaps glean that while poetry cannot quite be considered a synonym for sophistry it is, as he tells us elsewhere, at least 'similar to a sophism'.[27] This 'flexibility and variance' must, for Plato at least, presumably, be made inflexible and consistent. Rimbaud, in fact, one of Badiou's chosen poets, is unequivocal in his admission that poetry *does indeed* conjure 'magic sophisms' to be 'explained […] with the hallucination of words!', the

[24] Badiou (1999), p. 87. See Ch. 4, below.
[25] Badiou (1999), p. 97.
[26] Badiou (1999), p. 42.
[27] Badiou (2014), p. 57.

implication being, of course, that they *cannot* be explained.[28]

Badiou does make clear, however, that focusing exclusively on '[t]he thesis of imitation – the interior and illusory character of mimetics' as the root of philosophy's need to 'hold poetry at bay', as Plato certainly does, is to miss the point. He cites another example from Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* (1873) in order to make *his* point:

> O seasons, O castles.
> What soul is without flaws?
>
> O seasons, O castles.
>
> All its lore is known to me.
> Felicity, it enchants us all.[29]

The poem in this instance, Badiou suggests, fails to install *any* imitative regime; it is, in fact 'even the epitome of a nomination without imitation'. He goes so far as to endorse Mallarmé's counter-intuitive claim that, in such instances, 'it is nature that is incapable of imitating the poem'.[30] According to Badiou Plato's enmity emerges from another source altogether:

> What Plato says above all is that the poem ruins discursivity. In Greek: *dianoia*. What is opposed philosophically to the poem is not the dialectic, not the intuition of ideas, but *dianoia* – discursive thought that proceeds by putting arguments in a chain, the paradigm for which is mathematics.[31]

A Badiou cannot possibly countenance this ruining of discursivity. Certainly, *noetic* intuitions

[28] Rimbaud, quoted in Badiou (2014), p. 57. See also Rimbaud (2008), p. 234.
[29] Rimbaud, quoted in Badiou (2014), p. 32. See also Rimbaud (2008), p. 238.
[30] Badiou (2014), p. 32.
[31] Badiou (2014), p. 33.

will not be threatened, quite the opposite, as these intuitive connections are arguably the essence of poetry. The *dianoetic* chain of reasoning, however, may find its entire paradigm undermined by the unpredictable imaginative leaps of poetic metaphor, by the existence of a form of language-use not containable by philosophy. As Badiou admits: 'the poem remains forever unfounded', and it is my belief that Plato continually forces himself to resist something mystical and poetic which is hidden behind his own philosophy.[32]

This discordancy perhaps seems symptomatic of a recognisably Platonic psychosis emerging from that division of the *psyche* into its logical (*logistikon*), spirited (*thymoeides*), and appetitive (*epithymetikon*) aspects, the latter two which must be brought under the yoke of the former.[33] Perhaps Plato cannot forgive himself for his weakness in continuing to be seduced by the poem, for his inability to entirely supress his own concupiscence? Indeed, Lacoue-Labarthe has gone so far as to describe Plato's original act of exclusion as 'a self-mutilating operation, a purifying fire, or a sacrificial gesture' by means of which philosophy 'organises itself and sets itself into a work'. It is, he suggests, 'a scene that is in many respects the 'primal scene' of philosophy: the ritual expulsion […] of the tragic poet-actor, treated in the end in a very 'spectacular' fashion as a *pharmakos*.'[34] The poet is presented as a kind of *pharmakos* in the sense that s/he is offered as ritual sacrifice so that philosophy might be purified, emphasising what we will come to see as something of a quasi-religious cult of reason that is arguably philosophy's Platonic origin. This expulsion must be as public as possible: the poet must not simply be expelled but brought

[32] Badiou (2014), p. 57.
[33] Plato (2007), 442a-b. It is interesting to note Socrates' interpretation of a passage from the Odyssey in which Homer has Odysseus '"strike himself on the chest and call his heart to order".' Socrates suggests that, in this case, Homer '"allows one element to rebuke another, distinguishing the power to reflect about good and evil from unreasoning passion (Plato (2007), 441b)."' Might we not, however, see in this a typically Platonic (and, by extension, Badiouian) interpretation based on familiar prejudices? That is, is it not *more* likely that Homer intends not so much a general privileging of reason over emotion, but simply to emphasise the unbearable the pain Odysseus experiences at that moment?
[34] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 24. 'Spectacular,' from the Latin *specere*, see n. 2, above. The image here seems to carry a sense of being sacrificed very publicly, of being 'made an example of,' as a political gesture of purgation.

out from hiding and exposed as a charlatan. Badiou recognises that Plato, unlike Aristotle, was aware that he 'always remained susceptible to the charm of what he excluded.'[35]

Badiou's own desire (as the age of the poets closes) to 'de-suture' philosophy from the poem seems very much of a similar order of reluctant self-sacrifice bordering on self-loathing. Lacoue-Labarthe, in fact, writes of 'a legend, repeated as late as Nietzsche [in which] Plato – [much] as Mallarmé said of Rimbaud – surgically removed (*opéré*) poetry from his living body'.[36] Lacoue-Labarthe also refers to poetry as 'the […] thing that seems to have threatened philosophy in its most essential [political] project'.[37] The desire to 'surgically' remove the poetic imagination as a purgative gesture may even suggest something akin to a form of asceticism, that self-denial as inverted 'will to power' that Nietzsche finds so perversely impressive in the figure of the saint; it is the perverse willingness to pluck out one's own eye if it offends one in order *not* to be divided from oneself.[38] As Rorty has it, '[t]he dream of a first philosophy firmer than science is as old as the *Republic*, and we may agree with Dewey and Freud that the same primordial urges lie behind both religion and Platonism.'[39] For Badiou, the danger inherent in the poem is seen to reside in its combination of mimesis and imagination, its ability to conjure up the *apparently* real. 'Philosophy', he claims, 'wants to and must be established in this subtractive point where language, divested of the prestige, or mimetic incitement, of images, of fiction and of narrative, is consigned to thought.'[40]

Even more threatening than its mimetic qualities are the poem's 'magical' powers, the tricks it

[35] Badiou (2008), p. 37.
[36] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 24. See n. 34, above.
[37] Lacoue-Labarthe (2007), p. 24.
[38] 'To this day, the most powerful people have still bowed down in veneration before the saint, as the riddle of self-conquest and deliberate, final renunciation: […] in front of the saint, the powerful of the world learned a new fear, they sensed a new power, an alien, still unconquered enemy: – it was the "will to power" that made them stop in front of the saint. They had to ask him.' Nietzsche (2002), p. 48.
[39] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 223.
[40] Badiou (2008), p. 43.

does with mirrors in bewitching the understanding.[41] The mirror held up by poetry holds a twofold danger in that it threatens not only philosophy's capacity to separate the true from the imagined but also, thereby, it threatens the stability of what Lacan refers to as 'the *I* function', the self itself.[42] Badiou admits, as we have seen, that the poem is a 'lawless proposition'[43] and remains 'forever unfounded',[44] whereas the philosopher who views his own image must be able to conceptualise, *dianoetically*, what he sees there with something like mathematical precision: 'Plato will say that the true recourse against the poem is "measuring, numbering and weighing"'.[45] Citing Rimbaud once more, Badiou writes of 'the coming into being of the infinity of language as song, or symphony, which enchants with presence […]'.[46] For Badiou the poet's inability to contain the power of the language he uses must bring danger and unpredictability as a potent threat to philosophical hegemony, inhibiting the philosopher's necessary maintenance of separation from his sophistic double. Rimbaud's famous motto is, after all: '*Je est un autre*'. As Rancière puts it, 'For Badiou, to be a genuine Platonist, to be so in a modern way, is to make the Platonic eternity of the idea come forth in the radicalization of anti-*mimesis*.'[47]

Thus it is that Bosteels can describe Badiou's entire project as a 'redefinition of philosophy over and against its constant mirroring and redoubling in sophistics.'[48] This radical anti-mimesis can only be ontotheological in nature, must re-establish first principles as a bulwark against such 'redoubling'. Philosophy must be distinguished from sophistry at a fundamental level as Plato attempts when has Socrates speak of a 'craftsman' ('"a wonderfully clever man"'

[41] 'Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language.' Wittgenstein (2009), #109.
[42] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function' [1949], in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (London and New York: Norton, 2006), p. 75 [93].
[43] Badiou (2014), p. 46.
[44] Badiou (2014), p. 57.
[45] Badiou (2014), p. 46, quoting from Plato's *Republic*. See also Plato (2007), 602d.
[46] Badiou (2014), p. 57.
[47] Rancière, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 222.
[48] Badiou (2011), p.14.

according to his interlocutor, Glaucon) who '"can not only make all artificial objects, but also create all plants and animals, himself included, and, in addition, earth and sky and gods, the heavenly bodies and everything in the underworld."' Socrates tells us that this is

> "not difficult, and can be done in various ways quite quickly. The quickest way is to take a mirror and turn it round in all directions; before long you will create sun and stars and earth, yourself and all other animals and plants, and furniture and the other objects we mentioned just now."[49]

Glaucon demurs, pointing out that it would only be '"reflections, […] not real things"' that are produced. This means that art is, as Socrates reaffirms, '"by nature at third remove from the throne of truth; and the same is true of all other representative artists."'[50]

In the *Sophist* Plato tells us that, as an 'imitator', the sophist's business is 'not-being' rather than being.[51] All that one requires, his 'Eleatic Stranger' suggests, is some experience of life in order to be equipped to see these sophisms for reflections of things that are themselves not the Form of the thing. The Stranger, however, is not yet satisfied: 'If he [the sophist] tries to take cover in any of the various sections of the imitative art, we must follow him, always dividing the section into which he has retreated, until he is caught.'[52] This desire to hunt down the spectral sophist seems doubly perverse when one considers that one of Plato's six definitions of the sophist, according to Heidegger, is one who 'hunt[s people] down', who 'seizes people when he can, and by his way of speaking […] makes them the objects of his hunt'. What we find in Plato's text, conversely, is the philosopher obsessively hunting the sophist-artist in order, it seems, to pull back the curtain and force him to reveal the secrets of his craft, to unmask him

[49] Plato (2007), Part X, 596d-e.
[50] Plato (2007), Part X, 597e.
[51] Plato, *Sophist* 235a and 237c. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>
[52] Plato, *Sophist* 235c. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

before his gullible students as a charlatan who uses subterfuge and artifice to present a false picture of the world.[53]

The Stranger then enters into a disquisition on the nature of this art as 'likeness-making' in which 'the artists abandon the truth and give their figures not the actual proportions but those which seem to be beautiful and thereby convince the eye that it is seeing something it is not'; there are now, therefore, 'two forms of the image-making art[,] […] the likeness-making and the fantastic.' The Stranger admits that the sophist's elusiveness causes confusion as to how he might be categorised:

> I was uncertain before in which of the two [categories] the sophist should be placed, and even now I cannot see clearly. The fellow is really wonderful and very difficult to keep in sight, for once more, in the very cleverest manner he has withdrawn into a baffling classification where it is hard to track him.[54]

From this we can perhaps draw the Rortian conclusion that it is the philosopher rather than the artist who wishes to hold up a mirror to nature, one which makes it appear that the philosopher's concepts were formed there, in nature itself, as if by a process akin to steady erosion or continental drift. The sophist-artist, on the other hand, has no such concern, and is content to be in/between/behind the mirror(s), to appear and disappear, playing hide-and-seek in a hall of mirrors, or even in the shadows of the cave from which the philosopher has supposedly emerged. The sophist 'mimes the poetic', Derrida suggests,

> which nevertheless itself comprises the mimetic; he produces production's double. But just at the point of capture, the Sophist still eludes his pursuers through a supplementary division extended towards a vanishing point, between two forms of the mimetic […] the

[53] Heidegger (2003), p. 265.
[54] Plato, *Sophist* 236d. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

> making of likenesses (the *eikastic*) of faithful reproduction, and the making of semblances (the *fantastic*), which simulates the eikastic, pretending to simulate faithfully and deceiving the eye with a simulacrum (a phantasm)[…].[55]

Thus the sophist revels in the games s/he plays with eikasic image and reflection, and in his/her untraceability from the point of view of Platonic dialectic. The 'philosophical hunter', Derrida adds, 'comes to a stop before this bifurcation', unable to track the 'quarry (who is also a hunter)'. And perhaps because the history of this hunt cannot be written without recognising the existence of an 'endless escape route' Derrida eventually comes to describe the whole affair, *en route* to Mallarmé's 'Mimique', as an 'obliterated history of the relations between philosophy and sophistics.'[56]

What Plato would have us believe is that the artistic process – poetry – must be resisted because it is not concerned with truth, not in this naturalistic sense at least, but rather with manipulation of perspective in order to deceive the senses. This latter might very well stand as a definition of art, of sorts, but with the constructivist purpose of drawing attention to the artifice inherent in perception itself. What Badiou apparently cannot countenance in all this, however, is a postmodern equivalating of discourses which places them under the manipulative influence of the 'modern sophist' rather than the philosopher. This, he argues, is the situation that has resulted from the poetic suture, the disruption of dianoetic systems that has led us to a 'post-truth' milieu. If philosophy no longer retains the authority to make ontological distinctions then 'truth,' Badiou is suggesting, can be put to a popular vote. The picture of philosophy as a disinterested pursuit of truth seems, however, to have long since been exposed as a sham by Nietzsche and those who have since elaborated upon his genealogical and archaeological methods. The hidden motivation for disinterring the figure of the sophist, therefore, seems

[55] Derrida (1981), p. 186, n. 14b.
[56] Derrida (1981), p. 186, n. 14b.

predicated on the need to have the poet brought to heel, for reasons of political expediency very little different to those that characterise Plato's self-alienating, exclusionary logic.

Trakl's mirror

Trakl's poetry of ghosts and crepuscular half-light, of half-seens and silences, gives us a very different mirror, and a stranger 'stranger' than the one Plato has hunting the sophist to his lair. The 'soul', in Trakl's work, is a stranger but also a 'brother' or, more often, a 'sister.' Heidegger's essay on Trakl, 'Language in the Poem' (1959), begins with the line 'Something strange is the soul on the earth', from the posthumously published poem 'Springtime of the Soul' (1915). Heidegger comments that, in Trakl's poem, 'The soul journeys toward the land of evening, which is pervaded by the spirit of apartness and is, in keeping with that spirit, "ghostly."'[57] We find in Trakl's work, in the spirit of Keats' 'negative capability,' such acceptance of a place of ('ghostly' or 'spiritual') being qua mystery representative an essential distinction between the operations of the poetic metaphor and the philosophical concept. For Trakl poetry 'thinks', and dwells in, this space between perception and essence. In the poetic there is no expectation of a convergence with the 'True' in the Platonic sense. Trakl shows concern only with the earth itself towards which the stranger is moving, and it is for this reason, this sense of spiritual yearning, that Heidegger calls 'the site of Trakl's poetic work *apartness*.'

Trakl's mirrors are most often bodies of water and tend to be suffused with a deep blue which, Heidegger suggests, is not an image of holiness but 'itself is the holy, in virtue of its gathering depth which shines forth only as it veils itself.'[58] In the poem 'Night Song' (1913), when an

[57] 'The Language in the Poem: A Discussion on Georg Trakl's Poetic Work' [1959] in Heidegger (1982), p. 197. See also Trakl (2010), pp. 153-54.
[58] Heidegger (1982), p. 172.

'animal face' freezes, reflected in the waters, Heidegger understands this as 'Its gaze gather[ing] so that, checking its course, it may look toward the holy, into the 'mirror of truth'.' He adds that '[t]o look means here to enter into silence.'[59] For Heidegger, then, this is not 'just' an animal because of

> that thoughtfully recalling look for which the poet calls. The animality of the animal here intended thus vacillates in the indefinite. It has not yet been gathered up into its essential being. This animal – the thinking animal, *animal rationale,* man – is, as Nietzsche said, not yet determined.[60]

Here is an indefiniteness, an indeterminacy, but that does not, Heidegger is quick to emphasise, mean that the facts of 'man's' existence are any less well established, but rather that

> this animal's animality has not yet been gathered up onto firm ground, that is to say, has not been gathered 'home,' into its own, the home of its veiled being. [Such a] definition is what Western European metaphysics has been struggling to achieve ever since Plato. It may be struggling in vain. It may be that its way into the 'underway' is still blocked. This animal not yet determined in its nature is modern man.[61]

Indeterminacy is also reflected in Trakl's choice of lunar images. As Heidegger also suggests:

> The pond and the pond's mirror recur often in the poet's work. The waters, which are sometime black and sometimes blue, show to man his own countenance, his countering glance. But in the nighting pond of the starry sky there appears the twilight blue of the ghostly night. Its glance is cool. The cool light issues from the shining of Dame Moon

[59] Heidegger (1982), p. 166. See also Trakl (2010), p. 79.
[60] Heidegger (1982), p. 167.
[61] Heidegger (1982), p. 167.

(*selanna*).[62]

The contrast between this lunar ghostliness or spirituality (*geistlichkeit*) and the foundational certainties evoked by Plato's 'sun' seems obvious. Badiou has, of course, admitted that Platonic philosophy 'exploits image, comparison and rhythm' but only, he argues, in order 'to expose to the day something of the presence that is essentially *withdrawn* [i.e. subtracted] in the Idea of the Good.'[63] Plato's simile depends on drawing an analogy between the clarity of visual perception in direct sunlight and the 'soul' which must be '"fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality"' so that '"it understands and knows them, and its possession of intelligence is evident"'. It is, Plato has Socrates claim, '"what gives the objects of knowledge their truth and the knower's mind the power of knowing"', whereas this 'power' is always, at best, half-hidden in Trakl. [64]

In the final analysis this all seems redolent of what Derrida calls 'an old, omnipotent logic that has reigned since Plato [which says that] that which enables us to see should remain invisible: black, blinding.'[65] It is this logic, Gasché argues, which dictates that 'one cannot face the source of light, one cannot speak of that which makes speech possible.' It would seem, therefore, that it is the philosopher who requires silence as a means of denying the 'originary duplication', demands an 'invisibility and inaudibility [that marks the absolute origin of vision or speech].'[66] Hence the always shadowy nature of sophistry/poetry as it is described by Plato in the *Republic*, when contrasted with the clear 'light' of philosophy, as a trope that Plato hopes will gain traction through repetition. Perhaps it was something very like the world of Trakl's poetry from

[62] Heidegger (1982), p. 169.
[63] Badiou (2008), p. 44.
[64] Plato (2007), Part VII, 508d-e.
[65] Derrida, quoted in Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the philosophy of reflection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 230.
[66] Gasché (1986), p. 230.

which Platonic philosophy wished to distance itself? Perhaps this poetry, Plato's Socrates claims, stands for '"the twilight world of change and decay"' which, as Socrates describes it, '"can only form opinions [because] its vision is confused and its opinions shifting, and it seems to lack intelligence."'[67] Certainly Trakl's poetry has the courage to engage this place of unreason and to recognise that that there must be places of shadow; a veiled aspect to any 'truth.' The foundations upon which the philosophical superstructure is built, on the other hand, *depend upon* a strategic blindness to the duplicity inherent in the philosophy's desire to disperse these shadows in order to establish its sovereignty.

The philosopher's conviction

Badiou's defence of philosophy requires its de-suturing from sophistry by means of fidelity to truths emerging from the event. The philosopher, in such a case, is ever the 'faithful' subject (as opposed to the 'reactionary' or 'obscure' subject) who ensures the conditions for the emerging truth are met.[68] However, all of this, paradoxically, rests upon the philosopher's conviction as well as upon his rhetorical skills. It depends, in fact, upon the philosopher's ability to *be* convincing, to argue persuasively that philosophy and sophistry are fundamentally distinct. As Badiou himself contends,

> The two [philosophy and sophistry] are subjectively opposed, for the reason that the sophist's linguistic strategy aims to spare the expense of making positive assertions about truths. In this sense, philosophy could also be defined as the act by which indiscernible discourses nevertheless come to form an opposition; or as the act that

[67] Plato, (2007), 508d.
[68] Badiou (2013b), pp. 411-30.

separates it from its double.[69]

This might be said to encapsulate the entire thrust, as well as the central problem, of Badiou's refoundational project. Philosophy, it seems, must be both defence attorney *and* jury in the case. As Hallward suggests:

> It follows that both [Plato and Badiou] have seen the major external challenge to their discipline as posed by sophistry in all its forms. Philosophy's main critical task, likewise, concerns the distinction it must establish between its own truthful legitimacy and the false, disastrous manipulations of its simulacra— a problem Badiou analyzes in due course as the very essence of evil.[70]

Poetry must be one of the 'forms' of sophistry to which Hallward alludes here, and 'simulacrum' seems to be another synonym – with a hint of Baudrillard – for that corrupted version of himself the philosopher sees in the mirror. It is also interesting that Hallward reinforces the *moral* nature of the distinction in his use of 'evil', a word more at home in a theological rather than a philosophical lexicon.[71]

Strength of will, or the virtue of restraint, have always been key to philosophy's self-defence. 'For Badiou', suggests Riera, 'the suturing of philosophy to nonphilosophical fields produces "disasters": that is, in Heidegger's terms, it repeats metaphysically dominated ways of thinking and therefore, entails a prolongation of the danger (*Gefahr*).'[72] 'Disaster,' Badiou himself suggests, can only be avoided

[69] Badiou (2008), p. 25.
[70] Hallward (2003), p.6.
[71] Nietzsche was also convinced that moral conviction is at the root of all philosophy: 'Actually, to explain how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about, it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is *he* –) getting at?' Nietzsche (2002), p. 8.
[72] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 66.

> by an ethics of thought that consists in the restraint that philosophy exercises towards its sophistic double, a restraint thanks to which it is subtracted from the temptation to split into two (into the couple void/substance), leaving it to focus on the primary duplicity that founds it (sophist/philosopher).[73]

It seems far from clear, given Plato's original pessimism, why the philosopher should necessarily possess this self-discipline. Might it be through some aretaic training regime of the sort that Plato wishes for his 'Guardians'? No such regime is specified by Badiou even though he admits this is an ethical question and always must be. 'The history of philosophy,' he argues, 'is the history of its ethics,' and this 'consists in the succession of violent gestures through which philosophy is withdrawn from the disaster of reduplication.' That is to say, 'Philosophy consists uniquely in a process of desubstantializing Truth, a process that also forms its act's own self-liberation' so that, for Badiou, seizing truths is what philosophy *does* and what distinguishes it from those practices that condition it.[74]

Badiou's admission of the uncanny resemblance the sophist bears to the philosopher has, however, drawn further attention to the ineluctable circularity of his defensive strategy. The philosopher and the sophist are indistinguishable other than by establishing the former's fidelity to truths as they emerge from an event, which is presumably only possible for one who is a faithful subject, whatever *aretaic* character traits that might entail and however they might be cultivated. This truth is 'seized' or 'picked out from the dross of sense', by the philosopher, in the definitive act 'by which philosophy declares that there are truths'.[75] From the point of view of the non-philosopher, however, it seems possible only to make an entirely intuitive assessment of the *personal* credibility of the philosopher who makes this 'declaration', which ultimately

[73] Badiou (2008), p. 25.
[74] Badiou (2008), p. 25.
[75] Badiou (2008), p. 23.

comes down to whether one finds him convincing. Lyotard, writing in 1979, explains how this circularity, this paradox, first manifests in Plato (although he might just as easily be addressing Badiou in this regard):

> The fact is that the Platonic discourse that inaugurates science is not scientific, precisely to the extent that it attempts to legitimate science. Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, proceeding on prejudice.[76]

When the philosopher advances epistemological claims any subsequent judgment as to their veracity can only be highly provisional. Even Badiou is forced to admit that the only means available to philosophy in making its case are derived from 'its style of persuasive or subjectivating exposition'[77] or, what Nietzsche terms the philosopher's 'conviction': 'In every philosophy', he writes, 'there is a point where the philosopher's 'conviction' steps onto the stage: or, to use the language of an ancient Mystery: *adventavit asinus pulcher et fortissimus*.'[78]

Rorty is clear regarding the key role that the 'mind as mirror' metaphor plays in determining this 'persuasive' discourse:

> It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure,

[76] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 [1979]), p. 29.
[77] Badiou (2008), p. 23.
[78] Nietzsche (2002), p. 10. To be translated as: 'Here comes the ass, beautiful and strong.'

> nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant – getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak – would not have made sense.[79]

'Truth' thus becomes, in effect, a fideistic matter, as much as any other ontotheological construct. Plato's argument for the transcendent nature of 'the Good' arguably follows that same logic that St. Anselm will later co-opt, in his *Proslogion*, in claiming God's existence as *de dicto* necessary. The claim is that the structure of our language of value implies an ultimate value as an ultimate referent which must be the case in order for it to carry *any* meaning.[80] But when Badiou claims that 'Philosophy is never an interpretation of experience [but] involves the act of Truth with regard to truths', those who do not possess the 'eye of faith', who are thus not pre-disposed to view philosophy as anything other than a form of discourse will find themselves unable to accept his claims.[81] That is to say, if they are not *convinced* by what the philosopher says, and even if they judge the philosopher to be a 'man of conviction' – which is to say they believe that he is himself convinced of the truth of what he claims – they still need not be convinced *by* him. Is it not supposed to be the antiphilosopher rather than the philosopher who embarks upon such *ad hominem* detours? Philosophy depends on establishing a fundamental demarcation from such issues; that is, as Hallward quotes Badiou as saying, '"Of course, philosophy has never been possible without accepting the possibility of an anonymous statement and the authority of statements that compel examination in their own right (Badiou,

[79] Rorty (1979), p.12.
[80] Augustine's dictum, drawn from Isaiah 7:9, seems apposite: 'nisi credideritis non intelligitis' (If you do not believe, you will not understand'). Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), Book II, Chapter 12:17.
[81] Badiou (2008), p. 24.

Casser en deux l'histoire du monde? p. 17)"' whereas, Hallward himself adds, 'the antiphilosopher looks first to the integrity or authenticity of the speaker.'[82]

The rather tragic irony of the philosopher's position may be that he depends on eloquence as much as the sophist does but is loath to express himself. He tries to convince himself that this is because language exhausts Truth, whereas in reality he appears to feel himself inadequate to the task in comparison to the quasi-magical rhetorical powers of the enviable sophist-poet. Even more disturbingly, the double bind in which he finds himself suggests that if he *does* prove adequate to the task he will have thus, by extension, *become* the sophist. Any wider or deeper legitimacy is problematic because what Lyotard has called 'the seeds of "delegitimation" and nihilism that were inherent in the grand narratives of the nineteenth century' have already been sown, and there can be no possibility of auto-legitimation without invoking the kind of circular justifications to which we have already alluded. As Lyotard suggests,

> the speculative apparatus maintains an ambiguous relation to knowledge. It shows that knowledge is only worthy of that name to the extent that it reduplicates itself ('lifts itself up,' *bebtsich auf*; is sublated) by citing its own statements in a second-level discourse (autonymy) that functions to legitimate them.[83]

If this is the case it surely serves as a further compounded irony that the philosopher, as the authentic narrator of truths, depends upon a reflexive, self-sublative act in distinguishing himself from his 'double', the sophist, and that this is possible only via a process of reduplication that Badiou has already admitted represents a 'temptation' that must be resisted at all costs if 'disaster' is to be averted.

[82] Hallward (2003), p. 21.
[83] Lyotard (1984), p. 38.

The philosopher's blindness

Badiou's sophist-poet, this spectral presence who sees but is not seen, seems to have the privilege of inspecting the philosopher with impunity, his uncanny simulation of his alter-ego providing the most complete camouflage.[84] The appearance of the sophist may even mark the philosopher's absence, the deconstruction of the construct 'philosopher'. Turning once more to Derrida:

> A spectre is both visible and invisible, both phenomenal and non-phenomenal: a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance. The spectral logic is *de facto* a deconstructive logic. It is in the element of haunting that deconstruction finds the place most hospitable to it, at the heart of the living present, in the quickest heartbeat of the philosophical. Like the work of mourning, in a sense, which produces spectrality, and like all work produces spectrality.[85]

For Badiou, the sophist's appearance *as* the philosopher seems to be the key to his invisibility and his capacity to *see* the philosopher without him-or-herself being seen. It is the most perfect disguise. The spectre, the double, has not just mastered the art of appearing *as* the philosopher; he has, in a sense, dismantled the (construct) philosopher and taken his place, and since only the philosopher could make the distinction there is no-one to bear witness to the act, least of the philosopher who *is*, now, the sophist.

This seems, in fact, to encapsulate Badiou's knottiest problem: how to provide evidence for a crime with neither a perpetrator or a victim, nor indeed any credible independent witness. As Derrida puts it:

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[84] Spectre' (meaning 'appearance, vision, apparition') and 'inspect' are also derived from Latin, *specere*. See n.2 and n. 34, above.
[85] Derrida and Stiegler, 'Spectrographies' in Blanco and Peeren, eds. (2013), p. 39.

> The spectre is not simply this visible invisible that I can see, it is someone who watches or concerns me without any possible reciprocity, and who therefore makes the law when I am blind, blind by situation. The spectre enjoys the right of absolute inspection. He is the right of inspection itself.[86]

Derrida terms this the 'visor effect,' referring to Hamlet's question as to 'whether the witnesses who saw his father, Marcellus and Horatio, saw his eyes' or only his visor.[87] But the question is moot, the visor merely symbolising 'the situation in which I can't see who is looking at me,' in this case the sophist hiding in plain sight, in the image of the philosopher, whose power over (and seduction of) the philosopher resides precisely in his *not* being distracted by such elusive questions of veracity. This seems to bear out the existential dread that forces the Badiouian philosopher into the desperate act, (at best) bordering on insanity, of *breaking* the mirror

Is it at least worth considering, therefore, that the 'disaster' Badiou anticipates could also be described as a Narcissistic tragedy? Here is the philosopher, in his glorious isolation, becoming so enamoured of his own self-image as noble seeker of truth as to find himself beguiled, to the exclusion of all else. The image he sees in the mirror, what he describes as 'the sophist' is, as far as anyone can see, himself. Given that philosophers have traditionally expressed wariness of solipsism as a form of blindness to the existence of 'other minds,' a kind of occupational hazard; and given, too, the introspective, often *en*static, nature of their insights, we may not be so surprised by the potential seductiveness of the all-consuming, idealised image that seems to represent these insights. It is almost as if, in their uncovering of Truth they have become Gods (as Nietzsche said they must) and thus cannot bear to look upon themselves. Could Freud, in fact, have had this Platonic philosopher in mind when he claims that the narcissist

[86] Derrida and Stiegler, 'Spectrographies' in Blanco and Peeren, eds. (2013), p. 41.
[87] Derrida and Stiegler, 'Spectrographies' in Blanco and Peeren, eds. (2013), p. 41.

> is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgement, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal.[88]

Derrida's recounting of Narcissus' realization 'that he can *only* see himself, that it's only his own image he is seeing in the water (emphasis mine)' seems to take us towards this recognizably solipsistic impasse. 'To see only oneself', continues Derrida, 'is a form of blindness. One sees nothing else. And it's because of this that Narcissus cries. He cries, and in a way, he dies from not being able to see anyone else.'[89] Could this be the philosopher in quintessence, seeing only himself? As the keeper of the flame of truths, and the faithful watcher of the skies, he cannot but see his own reflection everywhere, and for him portents abound.

It seems to follow, then, that the nature of the philosopher's blindness, his self-delusion, is that by conceiving the world, by reconstructing it in his own image (autopoietically, as it were) through the concepts he generates, he reproduces (reduplicates) himself in whatever he sees.[90] How could he then fail to fall hopelessly in love with the elegance of the construct he has built in his own image? At the same time he craves the re-absorption of his double (in the sense of his compromised physical form) by a realm of pure ideas, as a form of immortality. In Ted Hughes' 1997 retelling of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Narcissus opines: 'That is my destitution. / Why can't I get apart from my body? / This is a new kind of lover's prayer. / To wish himself

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[88] Sigmund Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, eds. Joseph Sandler, Peter Fonagy, Ethel Spector Person (London: Karnac Books, 2012), p. 24.
[89] From the film, 'Derrida' (2004), dirs. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman. <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/tkttran/clips/speech-is-blind-derrida-on-echo-and-narcissus/view>
[90] 'Philosophers must distrust most those concepts they did not create themselves. (Plato was fully aware of this, even though he taught the opposite).' Deleuze and Guattari (1994), p. 5.

apart from the one he loves.'[91] In the case of the Platonic philosopher the desire has always been to be free of the physical body – a desire that reaches its apotheoses in the *res cogitans* and the *Weltgeist* – so as to inhabit a realm of pure ideas. It is the purity of his own mind, purged of irrational desires, that he loves. We might also think of Auden's Gonzalo in 'The Sea and the Mirror' (1944) who 'By his self-reflection made / Consolation an offence' and who 'by speculation froze / Vision into an idea' and eventually 'stood convicted of / Doubt and insufficient love.'[92] The philosopher's fear of/desire for the double that is himself, his self-absorption, his social blindness, thus takes on a somewhat Manichean hue and comes to resemble a distinctively Christo-Platonic cocktail of hubris and self-mortification.

The philosopher's failure to recognise himself in the mirror, his seeing (or sensing) the sophist in his stead, renders him spectral to himself.[93] 'How do you recognize a ghost?' asks Derrida, before answering his own question: 'By the fact that it does not recognize itself in a mirror.'[94] The context for this remark is a discussion of the Marxian notion of 'commodification;' the process, that is, by which the 'ghosts that are commodities transform human producers into ghosts […]'.[95] The spectralising effect of the commodity is, I would suggest, also at work in Badiou. Indeed, according to Riera, 'the militant ghosts of a noninventive politics haunt [Badiou's] *Manifesto* since, according to Badiou, Marxism has become an academic discipline unable to produce events', and it is surely not too great a stretch to speculate that the philosopher's failure to recognise himself *as* himself can be attributed to the production of the self-as-object.[96] The philosopher's idea of himself as he presents himself to others has become the commodity 'philosopher'. Paradoxically, but also self-evidently given the uncanny

[91] Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
[92] W H Auden, 'The Sea and the Mirror' *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 414.
[93] See n. 84, above. It also seems worth noting, with regard to 'spectre,' that the figurative sense 'object of dread' seems to be a modern development.
[94] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 156.
[95] Derrida (1994), p. 156.
[96] Riera, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 66.

resemblance between the 'real' philosopher and his 'other,' this must also call to mind the *professional* philosopher, a synonym for 'sophist' in Plato's work, which in turn suggests a rather Sartrean inauthenticity. This should also remind us that Lacan's coining of the term 'antiphilosopher,' as discussed in my introduction, emerged in the context of exhorting his students to reject 'academic philosophy' and the 'university discourse' much as Wittgenstein, also, was repeatedly wont to do.[97]

In Derrida's exploration of this alienated self,

> The 'mysteriousness' of the commodity-form as presumed reflection of the social form is the incredible manner in which this mirror sends back the image (*zurueck-spiegelt*) when one thinks it is reflecting for men the image of 'the social characteristics of men's own labour': such an image objectivizes by naturalizing [and] [t]he specular becomes the spectral at the threshold of this objectifying naturalization […].[98]

The social form will, however, in all probability, only derive this spectral quality, in the specific case of the philosopher, from the desire for a properly basic, non-inferential 'real' presented as an antidote to reflexive indeterminacy. There is the need for this 'real' to be established foundationally rather than (re-)constructed via contingent, intersubjective relationships. Hence we have the reification of the concept 'philosopher', and it is upon this that Badiou's own duplicity depends in his desire to draw a clear distinction from the essential *non*-philosopher, in order to complete the process of de-suturing.

[97] See Introduction, n. 39.
[98] Derrida (1994), p. 156.

The mirror of nature

There is another important 'other,' in the context of the mirror image: namely, the antiphilosopher, defined by Hallward as '[one] who insist[s] that ['the essential identity of thinking and being'] can be grounded only in an ultimately inarticulable, ultimately mysterious, first principle.'[99] Badiou tends to blur the distinction between sophist and antiphilosopher, and although Hallward has generously describes this blurring as 'idiosyncratic', we could just as easily call it fudged.[100] Sophists, according to Bosteels, are those who 'limit themselves to holding up a mirror in which philosophers see their language reflected and emptied out of all truth value.' Antiphilosophers, on the other hand, are even more dangerous because, continues Bosteels, they 'actually disparage the philosopher's act in the name of another act, one that would be far more radical than anything the metaphysical search for truth could ever hope to deliver.'[101] 'What the antiphilosopher and sophist share', suggests Tzuchien Tho, 'is a basic but different kind of opposition to the philosopher.'[102] Hallward, however, further blurs the distinction in casually referring to 'the great antiphilosophers' in terms almost identical to those Badiou uses for the sophist in the mirror, as 'in a sense, the simulacra of the great philosophers, as well as a temptation the philosopher must confront and surpass.'[103]

These ambiguities notwithstanding, Badiou seems entirely comfortable with the figure of the antiphilosopher in one form, at least; that of 'my master, Jacques Lacan'.[104] As an anti-

[99] Hallward (2003), p. 4.
[100] 'Badiou's use of these terms is idiosyncratic, and can be all the more confusing in that certain figures double on occasion as both sophist and antiphilosopher (Nietzsche, Wittgenstein) or as both sophistic and religious-hermeneutic (Heidegger).' Hallward (2003), p. 15.
[101] Bosteels, in Badiou (2011), p. 25.
[102] 'Badiou aims to distinguish the sophist as cynical and worldly, a characterisation not pertaining to the antiphilosopher […]. Despite this more recent distinction, the mirroring of philosopher and sophist is clearly the original matrix of oppositions from which a number of reflections throughout the 1990s opened up the theme of antiphilosophy as a further development of the notion of the sophist. What the antiphilosopher and sophist share is a basic but different kind of opposition to the philosopher.' Tzuchien Tho, 'Antiphilosophy' in Corcoran, ed. (2015).
[103] Hallward (2003), p. 21.
[104] Badiou (2008), p. 27.

philosopher,' he states,

> clearly, Lacan appointed himself as the educator of all future philosophers. A contemporary philosopher, for me, is indeed someone who has the unfaltering courage to work through Lacan's antiphilosophy. There are not many of them. It is as one of them, however, that I shall endeavour to explain what I declare is the return of truth. We might say that I speak here as a philosopher–subject supposed to know of anti-philosophy; and, hence, also as a lover of truth supposed to know what little credence can be granted to protests made in the name of such a love.[105]

Perhaps Badiou believes that, by engaging with Lacan in the spirit of an unconditional commitment to truth, philosophy will be kept on its mettle in the fight to retain its purity of purpose. 'In the end my theory is that philosophy should think as closely as possible to antiphilosophy,' Badiou tells Hallward in a 1998 interview.[106] Antiphilosophy is necessary, it seems, and if it *can* be distinguished from sophistry it could only be in the sense that it is fundamentally – even quintessentially – moral in its concerns. In contrast, sophistry, which is portrayed as essentially *a*moral, entirely expedient, might even pose a greater threat, given the unpredictability and unscrupulousness this amorality implies. Badiou perhaps prefers to present antiphilosophy as the enemy because it is an enemy he understands sufficiently to feel able to engage with it as an antagonist. As the 'broken mirror' metaphor attests, he feels a degree of impotence when the sophist sets to work, the latter refusing to be bound by philosophy's proscriptions in his use of language. In fact, in this regard, another means of making the distinction between these two enemies of the philosopher a little clearer might be to observe that the antiphilosopher declares himself rather than masking his intentions, that s/he is less

[105] Badiou (2008), p. 129.
[106] Alain Badiou and Peter Hallward, 'Politics and Philosophy: An interview with Alain Badiou,' *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 3:3, 1998, 124.

feared as a result of being seen rather observing the philosopher with impunity.

Rorty provides perhaps the most sustained antiphilosophical polemic against the foundationalism of the philosophy of reflection. The roots of this rejection of traditional epistemological assumptions lie in Deweyan pragmatism wherein knowledge can be understood entirely as a product of human organisms adapting to their environment. Rorty develops a thoroughgoing Derridian critique of the ontotheological desire to escape from language, symbolised in Badiou's case by the need to shatter the mirror, arguing that it is, in fact, philosophy rather than art that depends on reflective mimesis. Philosophy, Rorty suggests, has a need for 'some permanent neutral framework of all possible inquiry' in order to establish itself as *the* method of truth-seizure. First comes the 'original dominating metaphor' of 'the mind as Mirror of Nature.' With this metaphor successfully established by the Cartesian tradition, the 'next stage' is to refine the 'activity of [this] quasi-visual faculty' to produce 'a special privileged class of representations so compelling that their accuracy cannot be doubted.' These 'privileged foundations'

> will be the foundations of knowledge, and the discipline which directs us toward them – the theory of knowledge – will be the foundation of culture. The theory of knowledge will be the search for that which compels the mind to belief as soon as it is unveiled. Philosophy-as-epistemology will be the search for the immutable structures within which knowledge, life, and culture must be contained – structures set by the privileged representations which it studies. The neo-Kantian consensus thus appears as the end-product of an original wish to substitute confrontation for conversation as the determinant of our belief.[107]

[107] Rorty (1979), p. 163.

Cassin approves of what she terms Rorty's 'assimilat[ion] of the Socratic virtues […] to the virtues of conversation, and the virtues of conversation, quite simply, to the ethical virtues.' She also suggests that 'Plato's Socrates […] eschews true dialogue [because] his constantly proclaimed goal is not love of conversation or of words themselves but rather the search for the true and the good – the things themselves.'[108] In Rortian terms – as well as, arguably Derridian and Wittgensteinian terms – this is all smoke and mirrors on Plato's Socrates' part.

In his 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida' (1982), Rorty suggests that, in the final analysis, this Socratic process reflects philosophy's original colonialism and xenophobia, what he terms '[t]he philosophers own scholastic little definitions of 'philosophy' [that are] merely polemical devices – intended to exclude from the field of honour those whose pedigrees are unfamiliar.'[109] Mention of such 'privileged representations' and exclusion on the basis of 'unfamiliar pedigree' also brings to mind Fredric Jameson's remark, in his Foreword to the 1984 English translation of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, that

> The rhetoric in which all this is conveyed is to be sure one of struggle, conflict, the agonic in a quasi-heroic sense; nor must we forget Lyotard's related vision of nonhegemonic Greek philosophy (the Stoics, the Cynics, the Sophists), as the guerrilla war of the marginals, the foreigners, the non-Greeks, against the massive and repressive Order of Aristotle and his successors.[110]

In this context, Rorty argues, Derridian deconstruction represents merely 'the latest attempt of the dialecticians to shatter the Kantians' ingenuous image of themselves as accurately representing how things really are.'[111] 'It is', he continues, 'as if the Kantians had been forced,

[108] Cassin (2014), p. 55.
[109] Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 102.
[110] Jameson, in Lyotard (1984), p. xix.
[111] Rorty (1982), p. 104.

by attacks on the notions of "thought" and "the mind," to see that there is no way to cut beneath language to the thought which language expresses, no way, as Wittgenstein said, to "get between language and its object".' The 'Kantians,' argues Rorty, are really engaged in a 'disguised attempt to put language in its place, to insist that it has responsibilities to something outside itself', which might include a responsibility to break the mirror, perhaps?[112] As Rorty writes, highlighting the philosopher's traditional fear, and envy, of the poet,

> Kantian philosophy, on Derrida's view, is a kind of writing which would like not to be a kind of writing. It is a genre which would like to be a gesture, a clap of thunder, an epiphany. That is where God and man, thought and its object, words and the world meet, we want speechlessly to say; let no further words come between the happy pair. Kantian philosophers would like not to write, but just to show. They would like the words they use to be so simple as to be presuppositionless.[113]

Ultimately, on this Rortian-Derridian view, philosophers would rather show than tell because of the duality, the barrier – the double – that language creates, and the fundamental inadequacy of its own attempts at mirroring/reflecting/representing that which it is forced to confront.

The feeling among philosophers, Rorty suggests, is that they 'need not be concerned with their own Kantian motives in order to point straight to the heart of spirit – the relation of representation itself'. By contrast, for Derrida, 'anybody can get along without literary pretensions – without writing – [as long as] he is content simply to demonstrate how something falls into place in a previously established context'. The philosopher will be content simply with this 'shuddering resonance' as a piece falls place, rendering 'verbal commentary superfluous and inappropriate.' Thus Kantian philosophers, argues Rorty, would prefer to

[112] Rorty (1982), p. 110.
[113] Rorty (1982), p. 115

bypass language, and to remain silent, whereas '[d]ialectical philosophers like Derrida [do] need to write' but to do so 'as Kantian philosophers do not' – or as poets *do*, presumably.[114] Gasché, however, in similarly positioning Derrida as a sceptic regarding the scope of 'the philosophy reflection', is critical of Rorty's presentation of Derrida as a 'literary' writer. If, Gasché contends, we take

> 'writing' in Derrida to mean the scriptive and worldly practice of writing, a practice that would differ from its usual philosophical interpretation to the extent that the object it is about is no longer the world but texts, Rorty […] in 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing' is bound to misunderstand it as literary writing.[115]

But Gasché suggests that it was really only through Descartes that 'reflection explicitly acquire[d its] status of a principle par excellence'.[116] This means that, for Gasché, writing need not necessarily fall into one of these two camps – literary or scientific – so that Derrida's writing need not *necessarily* be understood as poetic simply because it sees no value in attempting to accurately represent an objective world. Its discourse, in Foucauldian terms, need not exist *within* literature simply because it is *outside* philosophy. The Derridean antiphilosopher will be primarily concerned with foregrounding those things that have previously fallen outside the frame of a mirror. That mirror has, however, since Descartes at least, reflected the image of the philosopher to the exclusion of all else.

An instance of silence

To return once again to Hallward's claim that antiphilosophy rests on a principle that there is

[114] Rorty (1982), p. 116.
[115] Gasché (1986), p. 274.
[116] Gasché (1986), p. 13.

something ‘ultimately inarticulable’, the philosopher’s fundamental problem seems to that he must communicate but betrays himself as soon as he does, something that once again seems to expose a certain *lack* of restraint. Merleau-Ponty summarises the dichotomy thus:

> The philosopher speaks, but this is a weakness in him, and an inexplicable weakness: he should keep silent, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being a philosophy that is there ready-made. But yet everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself. His entire ‘work’ is this absurd effort.[117]

Perhaps, though, the problem is not simply the philosopher’s readiness to speak, but also his inability to escape the solipsistic prison he has built for himself. As Levinas puts it, this time in reference to the ‘problem of truth’ as it manifests in Martin Buber’s thought:

> Both ontology and the theory of the subject-object relation have in common a notion of the truth as an expressible content, regardless of the particular structure of being revealed by that content. Hence the truth is expressible in words but the original function of truth, on which such expression depends, is to signify an inner meaning of a solitary mind, which appeals to no interlocutor.[118]

For Buber, then, suggests Levinas, truth is ‘more subjective, in a sense, than any other type of subjectivity’, and it is this which allows a Badiou to effectively bestow upon himself a title something like ‘arbiter of the faithful interpretation of the event.’

Apter and Bosteels argue, somewhat unconvincingly, that Badiou’s ‘belief in literature as a form of thought in its own right’ represents his ‘fundamental optimism with regard to the capacities of language.’ They also take a Badiou-esque side-swipe at those closing lines of

[117] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 125.
[118] Levinas, ‘Martin Buber and the theory of knowledge’, in Hand, ed. (1989), p. 61.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: 'ultimately, poetry and prose after the age of the poets testify to the possibility and even the necessity that we do not remain silent about that of which we cannot speak.'[119] Badiou himself says that

> Either poetry is a thought, as philosophy declares, and then naming must be reintroduced into thought, or else naming, as Wittgenstein wishes, is not a thought, and then poetry is stripped of all thinking functions and is nothing more – something I find extremist and unacceptable – than a verbal instance of silence.[120]

It seems debateable whether presenting literature as a 'truth-condition' from which philosophy must be de-sutured really does amount to championing it as 'a form of thought in its own right', as Apter and Bosteels claim. Badiou seems rather to present the poem not as 'a verbal instance of silence', but as a transaction, in the form of a subtraction and under the proprietorship of philosophy, which arguably places it in a position of abject subservience.

It seems, then, that we have been engaged in recounting a battle between philosophy and its doppelgänger over the ownership of silence. Badiou describes the sophist as 'from the outset the enemy-brother, philosophy's implacable twin.' He goes on to suggest that the 'modern sophists'

> are those who, in the footsteps of the great Wittgenstein, maintain that thought is held to the following alternative: either effects of discourse, language games, or the silent indication, the pure 'showing' of that which is subtracted from the clutches of language. Sophists are those for whom the fundamental opposition is not between truth and error, or errancy, but between speech and silence, that is, between what can be said and what

[119] Apter and Bosteels, in Badiou (2014), p. xxxv.
[120] Badiou (2011), p. 109.

> is impossible to say [, …] between propositions endowed with sense and others devoid of it.'[121]

'Most contemporary philosophy', he continues, 'is a potent sophistry ratify[ing] the final statement of the *Tractatus* […] whereas philosophy exists only to defend that the whereof one cannot speak is precisely what it sets out to say.'[122] He responds to Lyotard's claim that philosophy cannot achieve this 'saying' because 'the epoch of the Grand Narratives is over' by describing such a 'postmodernist' rebuttal' as 'a kind of general equivalence of discourses, a rule of virtuosity and obliquity [that] attempts to compromise the very idea of truth in the fall of historic narratives'. Badiou further argues that this 'adjusts the multiplicity of the registers of meaning to some silent correlate [and] is nothing but modern sophistry.' Finally, '[t]hat such a productive and virtuosic discourse [as Lyotard's] should be taken for a philosophy demonstrates', he suggests,

> the philosopher's inability today to practice a firm, founding delimitation between him-or-herself and the sophist [the modern version of which] wants to set the strength of the […] modalities of the linguistic authority of the Law against the revelation or production of the true.'[123]

What it might *actually* demonstrate, however – as has been suggested by Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Lyotard, Rorty, Merleau-Ponty and others – is the paradoxical bind in which

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[121] Badiou (1999), pp. 116-17.
[122] Badiou (1999), p. 117. See Ch. 1, n. 177, above. Badiou's interest in Wittgenstein has focused on the *Tractatus* to the more or less complete exclusion of the later Wittgenstein. In the Preface to his *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy* (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 70-71, he makes the following startling admission of failure, followed by an audacious attempt to justify this failure on the grounds of fidelity to Wittgenstein's own vision: 'Some desperate, discouraging attempts, taken up again from an ever-greater distance, have not produced anything of interest concerning the *Investigations*. To tell the truth, as my readers moreover will be able to see for themselves, I do not really like this later book, and even less so, I must say, what it has become, to wit: the involuntary, undeserved guarantee of Anglo-American grammarian philosophy – that twentieth-century form of scholasticism, as impressive for its institutional force as it is contrary to everything that Wittgenstein the mystic, the aesthete, the Stalinist of spirituality, could have desired.'
[123] Badiou (1999), pp. 117-18.

philosophy is held due to an inability to name this delimitation without naming its sophistic other – its negative, its antithesis – at the same time. The fundamental problem for philosophy seems to be that it cannot, by definition, be mysticism – and nor can it be literature or mathematics. What, we might then ask, is left? Can it achieve the resolution it craves except by means of a self-purifying ritual suicide of some kind, in *becoming* poetry?

In the recognizably Socratic guise of asking 'questions' we find Badiou tackling, head-on, that concluding line of the *Tractatus*, and seeking, thus, to reassert philosophy's ability to name the truths emerging from an event:

> It is […] quite simply false that whereof one cannot speak (in the sense of 'there is nothing to say about it that specifies it and grants it separating properties'), thereof one must be silent. It must on the contrary be named. It must be discerned as indiscernible. We are no longer held, if we accept to be within the effects of the mathematical condition, to choose between the nameable and the unthinkable. We are no longer suspended between something whereof there is an elucidation within language, and something whereof there is but an ineffable, indeed unbearable 'experience,' unravelling the mind. For the indiscernible, even though it breaks down the separating powers of language, is nonetheless proposed to the concept, which can demonstratively pass legislation on its existence.'[124]

Again, however, this appears to be a perfect piece of casuistry. For Badiou, it seems, that of which we cannot speak can be named 'indiscernible' and thereby exists even though it cannot (yet) be discerned. The problem remains that the philosophical rests upon a circular process of legitimation which prevents it from 'passing legislation' on anything except in the most circular

[124] Badiou (1999), p. 95.

and trivially self-authenticating sense. It is difficult to see what distinguishes the indiscernible – as the subtractive point at which the subject is founded, the point at which evental truths emerges – from Rorty's '"shuddering resonance" of a piece falling into place.'

Broken mirror(s)

Once the Cartesian certainty of the *res cogitans* is placed under question, the entire notion of the 'true' philosopher and the accuracy with which he is able to reflect an independently existing natural order, begins to unravel. Nietzsche first sets this train in motion, so it seems necessary to quote him at some length here:

> Let the people believe that knowing means knowing to the very end; the philosopher has to say: "When I dissect the process expressed in the proposition "I think," I get a whole set of bold claims that are difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish, – for instance, that *I* am the one who is thinking, that there must be something that is thinking in the first place, that thinking is an activity and the effect of a being who is considered the cause, that there is an "I," and finally, that it has already been determined what is meant by thinking, – that I *know* what thinking is. Because if I had not already made up my mind what thinking is, how could I tell whether what had just happened was not perhaps "willing" or "feeling"? Enough: this "I think" presupposes that I *compare* my present state with other states that I have seen in myself, in order to determine what it is: and because of this retrospective comparison with other types of "knowing," this present state has absolutely no "immediate certainty" for me."[125]

[125] Nietzsche (2002), pp. 16-17.

Following Nietzsche, Lacan, in refining his 'conception of the mirror stage', refers to 'the light it sheds on the *I* function in the experience psychoanalysis provides us of it' suggesting, most crucially, that it is an experience that 'sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the cogito.'[126] The 'important point,' he stresses,

> is that this form [the 'ideal-I'] situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality.[127]

Lacan then goes on to argue that, while the image in the mirror 'symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence' it also, simultaneously, 'prefigures its alienating destination.' As a *Gestalt* entity, it is 'replete', writes Lacan, 'with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation.'[128] The idealised philosopher-self that Badiou hopes to find in the mirror now appears mired in an inescapable ambiguity, the retreat from which begins to look, in fact, like what Lacan calls 'the finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure.'[129] This is, then, for Lacan, a 'paranoiac alienation that dates back to the time at which the specular *I* turns into the social *I*'. Finally, he states, the mirror stage 'inaugurates, through identification with the imago of one's semblable and the drama of primordial jealousy […], the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations'.[130] If, then, we

[126] Lacan (2006 [1949]), p. 75 [93].
[127] Lacan (2006 [1949]), p. 76 [94].
[128] Lacan [1949] (2006), pp. 76-77 [95].
[129] Lacan (1949) (2006), p. 78 [97].
[130] Lacan [1949] (2006), p. 79 [98].

accept this analysis, the philosopher's relationship with his 'semblable' can be recast as just such a 'drama'.

Problems begin to multiply with the notion of discerning an definitive opposition between indiscernible discourses, a possibility that is essential to Badiou's attempt to heal the philosopher's self-belief, and the re-establishment of philosophy's legitimacy by a reduplicative process of separating it from its double. As Gasché points out,

> The possibility of dialectically comprehending the opposition between what is doubled and its double as a relation of exteriorization and reappropriation of the double as the negative of what is doubled is logically dependent on the originary duplication according to which no *on* [being-present] can refer in its appearing to itself except by doubling itself in an Other.[131]

This constitutes an apparently irresolvable paradox, a *reductio ad absurdum* of primordiality, with the need to 'conceive […] a [non-Platonic] simulacrum *without an ultimate referent*' installing instead an 'infinite reference between originals and doubles.'[132] Here '[w]e are faced', Derrida suggests, in his reading of Mallarmé's 'Mimique', 'with mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double. [In fine, t]here is no simple reference', there is only a non-originary origin of speculation in difference.[133] 'For the source to become in turn an image,' Derrida states elsewhere, 'for it to become engaged in a tropic or fantastic system as well as to appear and to receive, for it to see itself as the glance of the origin, it must divide itself. [...] [T]he specular agency, far from constituting the I in its properness, immediately

[131] Gasché (1986), p. 228.
[132] Gasché (1986), pp. 226-227.
[133] Derrida (1981), p. 206. See also 'Mimesis' ('Mimique') in Mallarmé (2009), pp. 140-41.

expropriates it in order not to halt its march.'[134]

Given all this, Derrida offers us the image of Plato's cave 'transformed in its entirety into a circumscribed area contained within another – an absolutely other – structure' and as such an 'unpredictably more complicated machine'. At this stage we have, not 'mirrors […] included in the totality of all *onta* and their images,' but the reverse, 'things "present," on the contrary, would be in [the mirrors].' Derrida continues,

> Imagine that mirrors (shadows, reflections, phantasms, etc.) would no longer be *comprehended* within the structure and ontology and myth of the cave – which also situates the screen and the mirror – but would rather envelope it in its entirety, producing here or there a particular, extremely determinate effect.[135]

'Imagine' here seems to denote a characteristically poetic impulse, as would be the particular 'determinate effects' of this daring reappropriation of philosophy's founding allegory. The effect of such an imagining would be, argues Derrida, to bring into question the 'whole [Platonic] hierarchy [of the] cave and its line'. Derrida tells us that 'the "Platonic" moment inhabits the fourth surface', but that this surface 'also comprehends […] the discourse that dismantles the "Platonic" order of presence' which includes 'what *is* in its truth, behind the veil or screen' and this must surely show the breaking of that screen/surface, as Badiou demands, to be a futile gesture. Perhaps, Derrida hypothesises, if we were to remove *all* mimicry even Mallarmé could be push[ed] […] back into the most "originary" metaphysics of truth' but, he insists, '*[t]here is* mimicry, Mallarmé sets great store by it, along with simulacrum (and along with pantomime, theatre, and dance […])'.[136] If truth be told, Badiou, like Plato before him, also 'sets great store by it', so that reverting to a 'metaphysics of truth' becomes rather

[134] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), p. 285.
[135] Derrida (1981), p. 324.
[136] Derrida (1981), p. 206.

implausible except as a *tactical* retreat.

The crisis I am describing here is what Jameson calls

> the so-called crisis of representation, in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it – projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself.'[137]

Badiou makes it clear what he believes animates the crisis in a reading of Althusser on subjectivity that actually seems to take him rather close to Nietzsche, or perhaps his 'master,' Lacan. For Althusser, he suggests, '"[s]ubject" is not the name of a concept, but that of a notion, that is, the mark of an inexistence. There is no subject, since there are only processes.'[138] For Lacan, Badiou suggests, 'there is a theoretical concept of the subject which even has an ontological status,' but he believes this is not so for Althusser for whom

> the object exists even less than the subject. Althusser writes: 'object = a mirror reflection of *subject*'. The object is therefore the image of an inexistence. The process without a subject functions just as effectively as the process without an object.[139]

What Althusser himself says is that 'speak[ing] of a process without a subject implies that the notion of a subject is an *ideological notion*', and that *one* consequence of this is 'a revolution in philosophy: for all classical philosophy depends on the categories of subject and object (object = a mirror reflection of *subject*).'[140] If Althusser is right – and he claims that 'the concept of a process without a subject' underpins both Freud's and Marx's entire oeuvres – it is surely

[137] Jameson, in Lyotard (1984), p. viii.
[138] Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 59.
[139] Badiou (2006), pp. 59-60. Referencing Louis Althusser, 'Marx's Relation to Hegel', in *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx* (London: NLB, 1972), p. 185.
[140] Althusser (1972), p. 185.

difficult to see how a *faithful* subjectivity of the kind anticipated by Badiou might emerge from such a process (or 'event') as the breaking of the sophist's mirror. A classical philosophy like Badiou's seems dependent on the subject non-reflexively framing the object in the mirror, and thus requires both the subject *and* his/her mirror.

Merleau-Ponty, however, in his posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), takes us even further into a 'hyper-reflexive' adaptation of the mirror metaphor that seems to sit well with Derrida's deconstruction of the allegory of the cave. Merleau-Ponty reinforces the contradictions inherent in a dualistic philosophy of reflection by questioning even the absolutely foundational law of non-contradiction which effectively prohibits reduplication. The issue, he argues, is that the principle of non-contradiction and 'lived experience' no longer tally with one another. The gap between the 'philosopher who speaks' and 'what he speaks of', that is the gap 'between the operation of living the world and the entities and negentities in which he expresses it', creates a residue of lived experience that cannot be adequately conceptualized.[141] The result is that '[t]he lived experience can no longer recognize itself in the idealizations we draw from it.' A distinction is drawn between one's body 'as a visible thing […] contained within the full spectacle' and one's 'seeing body [that] subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it'.[142] We should, then, more properly refer to a 'reciprocity' and 'intertwining' between conceptualising and lived experience, rather than the former establishing any sovereignty over the latter. This leads Merleau-Ponty to suggest, due to the 'reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other', that we 'eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives [for] two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric when I live naively, and as soon as I question myself, the one slightly decentred with respect to the

[141] Merleau-Ponty (1968), p. 87.
[142] Merleau-Ponty (1968), p. 87.

other.'[143] It seems hard *not* to think of this 'decentring' as a close cousin of the disorientation which Badiou claims, after the closure of the age of the poets, 'can now be conceptualized' rather than presented as 'poetic metaphor'.[144] For Merleau-Ponty, however, there remains a 'residue of lived experience' that *cannot* be conceptualized, and there is a gap between its concepts and a this-worldly *lived* experience philosophy, phenomenologically, cannot bridge.

The outcome of all this is described by Merleau-Ponty variously as a 'chiasm', a 'synaesthesis', or a 'strange adhesion of the seer and the visible' involving 'vision', 'touch', and 'tangibility'. This adhesion, he argues, constitutes

> a turn[ing] back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself *surrounded* by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed a Visibility, a Tangible in itself, which belong properly neither to the body qua fact nor to the world qua fact — as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them. [145]

'[T]he seer', adds Merleau-Ponty, 'is caught up in what he sees [but] it is still himself he sees'. Perhaps echoing an earlier claim I have put forward in this chapter Merleau-Ponty describes this as 'the fundamental narcissism of all vision.' But Merleau-Ponty also identifies a 'second and more profound sense of [this] narcissism' which is, I believe, redolent of the philosopher's blindness as I have presented it here. It is

> not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but

[143] Merleau-Ponty (1968), p. 87.
[144] Badiou (1999), p. 74.
[145] Merleau-Ponty (1968), pp. 138-39.

> especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.[146]

The echo of Derrida's discussion of the 'visor effect' seems unmissable, as does the reinforcement of a scepticism we have seen in a number of contexts as to philosophy's capacity to express what Merleau-Ponty terms, in his distinctive lexicon, 'this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh'. He goes even further, in fact, declaring that 'one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate [flesh]'.[147]

Returning once again to the final line of the *Tractatus* it would seem that any attempt to find true representations in the mirror finds instead only two surfaces reflecting one another until the 'couple' formed becomes no more or less real than either image on its own. Each reflects the other reciprocally and neither seems able to claim priority when neither can meaningfully claim primordiality. This seems like the place of ontological uncertainty wherein, as with the poetry of Trakl and Celan, sophists and/or poets hide, so as not to be tracked or hunted down by the philosopher. Related challenges to philosophy's sovereignty are, as we have seen, presented in the work of both Derrida and Levinas. 'Derrida's heterology,' as Gasché characterises it, 'is the setting out of a law that is written on the tinfoil (the 'tain', the reverse) of the mirrors between which thought can either maintain the separation of fact and principle in an endless reflection of one another, or sublate them in an infinite synthesis.' It may well be, as Gasché speculates, that 'the structures [Derrida] develops are in a relation of a certain alterity to the discourse of philosophy.'[148] This also seems, however, every bit as true of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, which is what marks them out as more than philosophical, and as sophistico-poetic

[146] Merleau-Ponty (1968), p. 139.
[147] Merleau-Ponty (1968), p. 139.
[148] Gasché (1986), p.318.

descendants of Nietzsche. In this light Badiou's breaking of the mirror might justifiably be presented as either the petulant final gesture of a fallen tyrant, or an expression of some form of psychosis, or both.

PART TWO: SYNAESTHETICS

3. A throw of the dice: Mallarmé

> *Mallarmé is a definitive source for my thought […] in the context of questions concerning the relation between Absoluteness, Finitude, and the plurality of Infinities. I maintain that in a sense, in the space of poetic concentration, Mallarmé said it all.*[1]

Poetry as thought

Badiou's 'compossibilisation' project is ostensibly an attempted *rapprochement* between philosophy and its literary truth condition but also, simultaneously, a continuation of their 'ancient quarrel'. It culminates with Celan's late poetry, in particular with his supposed 'completion' of Heidegger. The context for all this is, however, indisputably Mallarméan. As Lecercle puts it:

> [T]he poetry that Badiou calls for, and finds in Mallarmé […] has two singular characteristics: it is a poem of logos, a poem concerned with thought, and it is a poem capable of naming the event, of extracting from the advent of the event not affects and percepts but truths (where it appears that Badiou's poetics is the inverse of Deleuze's aesthetics).[2]

[1] From an interview with Alain Badiou published as '"Mallarmé said it all": Alain Badiou', in Robert Boncardo and Christian R. Gelder, *Mallarmé: Rancière, Milner, Badiou* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017), p. 157.
[2] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Badiou and Deleuze Read Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 107.

Lecercle highlights a fundamental dispute with Deleuze that runs through Badiou's thought; an ontological paradigm of truths, conditioned by the matheme, set against a Deleuzean paradigm conditioned by biology. Whereas Badiou thinks the event nonsensibly, as with the subtracted/abstracted constellations of Mallarmé, Deleuze's is a 'logic of sensation' and of ethical becomings emergent therefrom. Ultimately, it is my contention that a Deleuzean approach takes us away from this Mallarméan nonsensibility of Badiouian ontology which then dovetails very elegantly with a hermeneutics of becoming as it emerges in Celan's poetry. As always with Badiou, there seems, in fact, to be an oddly conservative agenda in his 'rowing back' on Deleuzean rhizomatics. His is really an attempt to reimpose philosophical sovereignty, to 'banish the poets in order to establish [philosophy's] own royalty'.[3] Lurking in the shadows, as always, is a Platonic ontotheology and a persistently Maoist political agenda underscored by familiar, if covert, Messianic fantasies.

As Lecercle also recognises, its success or failure notwithstanding, Badiou's attempt to enlist Mallarmé as the poet who thinks 'the (his?) event' is nothing if not audacious. For Lecercle, Badiou is

> the thinker of poetry as thought. In this he has truly found a fourth path, or site, for the relationship between poetry and philosophy, beyond the *aporia* of the contrast between *pathos* and *logos*, between auratic or lyrical vaticination and the exclusion of thought from poetry or poetry from thought. Badiou is one of the rare people, perhaps the only one, capable of making a decision, of solving the paradox the two terms form by firmly excluding one of them, the unexpected one, and turning the other, *logos*, into the very stuff that poetry is made of.[4]

In short, Badiou finds in Mallarmé, at the advent of the age of the poets, and Celan, at its

[3] Badiou (2008), p. 42.
[4] Lecercle (2010), p.111.

culmination, nothing less than the thought that will pave the way for the return of the king: philosophy 'itself.' Summing up Badiou's reading of Mallarmé, Rancière writes that,

> The inscription of the name and the declaration of the maxim are posited as effects of the poem-form – which is to say, of an apparatus of naming – and following good Althusserian logic, philosophy is then summoned in order to discern the truths encrypted in the poem.

The truths it finds, of course, happen to be philosophy's own, regardless of Badiou's protestations that philosophy produces none.

The result, suggests Rancière again, is that the Mallarméan poem,

> which is already an allegory of the poem, becomes in Badiou an allegory of the form of the event in general and of the courage of the thought that withstands its ordeal in particular. Which also means that in this regard it is comparable with every other poem that allows itself to be bent to the same demonstration, to be assigned the same task of speaking twice, to say the same event of the Idea twice: the first time as a maxim, the second time as an enigma.[5]

Rancière is surely right that Badiou persists in presenting Mallarmé as something of a prophet of event(u)al revelation. It is as recently as 2017 – in anticipating the publication of *L'immanence des vérités*, the final volume of his *Being and Event* trilogy – that Badiou declares Mallarmé 'a definitive source for [his] thought'.[6] Even in his early engagement with Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* in the late 1960s Badiou claims to have recognised in that poem the symbol of the suspension of the mathematical axiom of foundation which 'cannot integrate the aleatory notion of the possible that is conveyed by the event'. This recognition came at a time when he was

[5] Rancière, in Hallward, ed. (2004), p. 227.
[6] Badiou, in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 157.

'already struggling against a purely structural theory of the subject, which made the subject the empty or void point of the structure'.[7]

In making this declaration of Mallarmé's crucial role for his thought, however, Badiou's use of the qualifying phrase 'in the space of poetic concentration' appears significant. Boncardo and Gelder's suggestion that Badiou reads Mallarmé 'as an exemplary thinker of the structural dialectic which [he] then purport[s] to circumscribe and transcend in the direction of an historical dialectic', is accepted by Badiou but only up to a point. In fact, he rather ascribes this development to the limited nature of his own early reading of Mallarmé, even up to his *Theory of the Subject* (1982). Badiou is prepared to admit that he did not, at that point, 'see that […] there is, in a number of [Mallarmé's] poems, the possibility given by Chance, and that there is […] an opening in the dialectical division of the place on the basis of a radical event.'[8] In other words, while he was beginning to understand the significance of the Mallarméan dialectico-poetic idiom, he had not yet formulated his own distinctive philosophy of the event to a sufficient extent to find it reflected in the poet's work. He would, he suggests, rectify this oversight six years later with, on his terms, the more complete reading of *Coup de dés* that we find in 'Meditation 19' of *Being and Event* (1988).[9] There are those, however, myself included, who would argue that Badiou's tendency to read his philosophy of the event *into* works of poetry prevents him from reading them other than as reflective, to one extent or another, a quasi-Platonic agenda. Badiou's dialectical method is, indeed, always distinctively Platonic; it is, if you will, Platonism, as Raymond Williams puts it, as 'the method of determining the interrelation of ideas in the light of a single principle'.[10] What he finds in Mallarmé, therefore, he finds in the reflected light of this specifically Platonic principle.

[7] Badiou, in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 141.
[8] Badiou, in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 144.
[9] Badiou (2013b), pp. 201ff.
[10] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 106.

The One-of-meaning

In light of Mallarmé's claim that syntax is the poem's 'guarantee', Badiou makes the uncovering of meaning in the poem primarily a process of 'flattening out' (*aplanissement*) its interwoven, multi-layered, syntactical drama so that a direct semantic route to a singular destination can be constructed.[11] This could be seen as a form of 'planifying', perhaps; 'planification' being, in Laruelle's terms, the 'major, properly philosophical activity of Badiou', who he describe as 'the greatest planifier since Plato'.[12] As Lecercle remarks, if, for Badiou, 'meaning is univocal and syntax is complex, a clarification inevitably takes the form of an unravelling of the syntactic complexity in order to make the one and only meaning entirely explicit.'[13] In *Theory of the Subject*, therefore, Badiou gives us, in his own words, 'punctuated, stretched out, a-poetic, and flattened' prose translations of two Mallarmé sonnets: 'A la nue accablante tu' and 'Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx'.[14] In each case his stated intent is, thereby, to break the poem's 'code'.[15] Mallarmé proclaims 'the magic spell that poetry will always be' and the 'intentional vagueness' with which 'the literary sorcerer' evokes 'the mute object, using allusive words, never direct, reducing everything to an equivalent of silence'.[16] Badiou seems ever willing to conjure the extra-linguistic subject from the alchemy of the event, and his admiration for Mallarmé's work *as* an artistic event is clear. Nevertheless, he cannot allow any putative *epoché* grounded in catachrestic substitutions to undermine his Platonic faith

[11] Mallarmé (2009), pp. 234 - 5.
[12] Laruelle (2013), p. 36. See Ch. 1, n. 41, above.
[13] Lecercle (2010), p. 98. Badiou seems, in many ways, actually to read 'syntactic' and 'semantic' as near synonyms when it come to the poem – that is, meaning is unlocked by means of syntactical re-organisation.
[14] Badiou (2013a), p. 77. 'Hushed to the crushing cloud' (see Mallarmé (1996), p. 83) and 'Her pure nails on high displaying their onyx' (see Mallarmé (1996), p. 69) also known as 'Sonnet en -ix' or '"Ptyx" Sonnet'.
[15] Whatever disagreements occur in their respective readings of Mallarmé, Badiou and Meillassoux (see Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren: A Decipherment of Mallarmé's Coup de Dés* (London and New York: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2012)) seem to agree on this, at least; that Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* requires 'deciphering'.
[16] Mallarmé (2009), p. 264. There is perhaps an echo, in Mallarmé's characterization of the poet, of Nietzsche's insight that '[e]verything profound loves masks [and] the most profound things go so far as to hate images and likenesses.' Perhaps, in this way, the Mallarméan poet could also be the one whom Nietzsche describes as '[s]omebody hidden in this way – who instinctively needs speech in order to be silent and concealed'. Nietzsche (2002), p. 38

in the completeness of post-Cantorian mathematics as *the* means of *un*concealment (*alethia*). It is a faith which appears to sit somewhat uneasily with Badiou's repeated assertion that truths are generated generically and, by implication, autonomously. It also seems, as it happens, equally incompatible with any post-Wittgensteinian claim that traversing the boundaries separating distinct 'language games' can only produce a succession of category errors.

Going on the offensive, however, Badiou dismisses as pure indolence any suggestion that we leave the poem's 'enigma' intact:

> We must put an end to the laziness that has so many readers bypass the obstacle in order to claim that the enigma's virtue consists in allowing a hundred underlying answers. This absolute dialectician does not present any 'polysemy'. One should not take for an erratic chaos whatever is given multiple echoes, based on the firm and consecutive encipherment of the One-of-meaning, by those remarkable stampings with which the poem illuminates and extinguishes itself.[17]

Badiou thus seems to present us with a binary – 'erratic chaos' or 'the One-of-meaning' – which denies any possible third position. In a 1988 review of Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* he argues that Mallarmé's 'effectuation, by thought, of Chance […] does not give rise to 'incompossibles' or whimsical chaos, but to 'a Constellation, an isolated Idea […] matching the Hegelian dialectic and the Platonic Intelligible.'[18] In other words, whatever the machinations of the poem's syntax, and however many 'echoes' there might be, its meaning is singular, identifiable, and expressible in clear, unambiguous prose. For Badiou, suggests Lecercle, 'the very complexity of the syntax guarantees that there is a meaning in the text, and a single meaning [and the] combination of prose summary and syntactic parsing allows Badiou

[17] Badiou (2013a), pp. 74-5.
[18] Badiou (2012), p. 264.

to develop the semantic structure as a series of metonymic chains.'[19]

The Mallarméan enigma

Badiou identifies 'three regimes of negation' in Mallarmé's work, these being: '*vanishing*, which has causal value, *annulment*, which has conceptual value, [and] *foreclosure*, which has null value'; he suggests that Mallarmé's question is not 'what is being?' but rather 'what is it "to take place" [*avoir lieu*], what is it for something "to happen" [*se produire*]? Is there a being of that-which-takes-place insofar as it takes place?'[20] It is in this way that the Mallarméan poem is presented as an exemplary Badiouian event. Mallarmé's modus operandi, therefore, according to Badiou, is the conjuring up of that which has happened but for which the only 'clues' are the traces that have been left, in the manner of concentric ripples on a pond into which a stone has been pitched. Badiou puzzles over Mallarmé's description of himself as 'a man habituated to dream' when he has previously described dreams as 'his function's enemy'.[21] This apparent paradox is declared to be 'a prohibition bearing upon imaginary totalization [that] authorizes a symbolic subtraction, from which is fixed a point of the real' so that 'any poem by Mallarmé describes the place of an aleatory event, which we are required to interpret on the basis of its traces'. That is to say, we will require the uniquely philosophical skills of the meta-sleuth in order to succeed in 'the detection of that which has *taken place* [*ce qui s'y est produit*], in the text' but which is, by definition, absent from it. Badiou's role, then, as he sees it, is to effect this painstaking reconstruction.[22]

Badiou must, then, it seems, put his forensic skills to work in determining precisely *what* is

[19] Lecercle (2010), p. 94.
[20] Alain Badiou, 'Is it exact that all thought emits a throw of the dice?' *Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, 9 (2016a), 18 [originally published in *Les conférences du Perroquet*, No. 5 (1986), 3-20].
[21] Badiou (2016a), 17 and 18.
[22] Badiou (2016a), 19.

absent. ‘Poetry suspects being of not releasing the event it has put behind bars’ he suggests, in a rather laboured metaphor of his own, adding:

> If poetry is an essential use of language, this is not because it is devoted to Presence, to the proximity of being; on the contrary, it is because it submits language to the maintenance of that which, being radically singular, pure action, would without it have fallen back into the nullity of the place. Poetry is the assumption of an undecidable: that of action itself, the action of the act, which we can only *know* has taken place by wagering on its truth.[23]

For Badiou, it seems, it is necessary to ‘wager,’ to gamble on truth, because not only has all trace of the event vanished, so has all trace of its vanishing; it has been annulled, as in the second form of negation that Badiou finds in Mallarmé. In ‘A la nue accablante tu’ we have – just as, later, in *Coup de dés* – the quintessential Mallarméan metaphor of the shipwreck:

> What shipwreck sepulchral has bowed
> (You know this, but slobber on, foam)
> The mast, supreme in a crowd
> Of flotsam and jetsam […][24]

According to Badiou, it is not, however, the shipwreck itself that we are given in the poem because,

> even its last piece of wreckage is abolished [so that] the shipwreck itself (and not only the ship) is also put into question. […] The first subtraction figures the vanishing of the supposed evental term under the foam that re-traces it. The second *cancels out this*

[23] Badiou (2016a), 20.
[24] Mallarmé (1996), p. 83.

vanishing itself.'[25]

The abolition, 'annulment,' or 'cancellation' of the abolished is the mark of the event's undecidability, and finally 'it may be that there is something in the place or situation that is so *withdrawn* as to be simply unnameable.'[26] As always, undecidability demands a specifically Badiouian fidelity, and unnameability demands that the philosopher assume responsibility for naming the event, after it has taken place, and after even its negation.

According to Badiou, then, a poem by Mallarmé 'always fixes the place of an aleatory event: an event to be interpreted on the basis of the traces it leaves behind', and poetry, therefore,

> is no longer submitted to action, since the meaning (univocal) of the text depends on what is declared to have happened therein. There is a certain element of the detective novel in the Mallarméan enigma: an empty salon, a vase, a dark sea – what crime, what catastrophe, what enormous misadventure is indicated by these clues.[27]

There is a case to be solved, it would seem and, furthermore, there *is* a solution. The two elements of Badiou's metaphor seem, however, rather to draw attention to a *dis*similarity between the 'Mallarméan enigma' (or 'poem') and any putative crime scene; the site, that is, where an injustice might have perpetuated itself had 'the event [been] prohibited from being.'[28] The essential assumption with regard to the latter, for our investigating detective, would seem to be that the event in question must be far from 'aleatory', and is instead informed by

[25] Badiou (2008), p. 52.
[26] Badiou (2008), p. 55.
[27] Badiou (2013b), p. 201. Interestingly, T. S. Eliot, while denying that a poem is a 'cryptogram', offers a similar(ly confused) analogy in the Preface to his translation of St.-John Perse's *Anabasis*, suggesting that its 'arrangement of imagery requires just as much "fundamental brainwork" as the arrangement of an argument […] [and that] the reader of a poem should take at least as much trouble as a barrister reading an important decision on a complicated case.' At the same time, in apparent contradiction, he counsels the reader to 'allow the images to fall into his memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment; so that, at the end, a total effect is produced.' One can only imagine what would happen were his 'barrister' to adopt such an approach. T. S. Eliot, 'Preface' to St.-John Perse, *Anabasis* (New York and London: Harvest/HBJ, 1977), p. 10.
[28] Badiou (2016a), 21.

premeditation, means, motive, and all the other elements necessary to the claim that what are investigating is a 'crime' rather than some chance occurrence. But then Badiou muddies the pool even further: 'crime', 'catastrophe', and 'misadventure' are surely very different things.[29] If a crime has been committed, of what kind is it, and, again, perpetrated by whom, against whom, and with what motive and what intent? If there has been a catastrophe – a sudden, unforeseeable turn for the worse, that is – then there is actually nothing to declare except an 'act of God' which, as explanations go, amounts to not much more than a shrug of the shoulders and a glance to the heavens. And if this turns out to have been a misadventure, what could then be said about what is 'declared to have happened therein' – that what took place was entirely *un*intended, presumably? Or would we be forced to accept multiple interpretations after all, and record an open verdict – once this case came to trial, that is? As Derrida describes it – again with reference to 'Mimique' – as far as the Mallarméan '"operation"' is concerned, nothing happens that could be grasped as a present event, a reality an activity, etc. 'The Mime doesn't *do* anything; there is no act (neither murderous nor sexual), no acting agent and hence no patient. Nothing *is*.'[30] 'There is only', he attests, 'the memory of a crime that has never been committed', […] because on the stage we have never seen it in the present (the Mime is recalling it)'.[31] Badiou, oddly, might well accept this, given that the event is, in his terms, 'indiscernible,' and what emerges from it 'undecidable', but his need to establish that 'there *are* truths' forces him into convoluted attempts to maintain their existence, not simply *against* all evidence to the contrary, but against the very *possibility* of such evidence.

Macherey, for one, questions the validity of such attempts to tease out of the 'secret' hidden in

[29] Interestingly, in what seems to have been an earlier (1986) draft of the passage that will eventually appear in *Being and Event* (1988), 'enormous misadventure' appears as the seemingly more precise, and more recognisably Badiouian/Lacanian, 'major lack': 'This empty salon, this vase of flowers, this eventail, this tombstone, this sombre and deserted sea, of what crime, of what catastrophe, of what major lack are they indicative?' Badiou (2016a), 19.
[30] Derrida (1981), p. 216.
[31] Derrida (1981), p. 214.

the poem:

> Mallarmé is not hermetic, in the sense of a well-hidden secret that ought to be found out; he is only difficult because, as an essential poet, he is a producer of enigmas that elicit thought. Not in order to make a truth, pre-existing its decoding, see the light of day, but to insinuate the truth itself in the act by which it occurs and literally produces itself in the form of an enigma and, at the limit, of nonsignification. The secret is, finally, that there is no secret, since all the poem has to say is displayed, scattered, dispersed, properly spaced out, black on white in the constellation that the text is for eternity, once the dice is thrown.[32]

For Macherey, any 'decoding' of Mallarmé must inevitably 'fail to attain the truth of the thing' (although this reading would presumably be another 'lazy' one, in Badiouian terms). From this perspective, and this is particularly true in the case of *Coup de dés*, the erasure of the calculated whiteness in which the poem is dispersed seems to remove something essential from it. But then Badiou does not accept the charge of hermeticism levelled against Mallarmé either, labelling such accusations 'the slogan of a spiritual incomprehension of our times.'[33] 'The poem teaches us, Badiou argues, that the world does not present itself as a collection of objects', but that it is rather 'that thing whose presence is more essential than objectivity.'[34] So, rather than a struggle to make out the objects to which the poem refers, but which are hermetically sealed from view, we should follow the 'movement' of the poem as it 'operates between the eclipse of the subject and the dissolution of the object [and thus] produces […] an Idea'.[35] This 'Idea', however, as Badiou presents it, is still the secret wrapped in the poem's enigma, and it is difficult not to suspect the process by which it is revealed as being, yet again, an anamnetic one,

[32] Macherey, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 111.
[33] Badiou (2005), p. 30.
[34] Badiou (2005), p. 29.
[35] Badiou (2005), p. 30.

and that this inevitably leads Badiou to contradict himself.

'What the poem says, it does', Badiou concedes, however, and the Mallarméan poem does what it does, he claims, through these distinctive subtractive procedures – vanishing, foreclosure and annulment – in the absence of even so much as a trace of the vanished object.[36] As Mallarmé himself writes:

> in the empty room: no ptyx,
> Abolished shell whose resonance remains […][37]

'Nature has taken place', Mallarmé states elsewhere, and nothing is added to it; even when cities are built nature remains materially unaltered, and can be understood only 'according to some interior state that one wishes to extend, in order to simplify the world. Equal to creating: except that the notion of object, escaping, is lacking.'[38] Badiou reads this as suggesting that romantic poetry is no longer possible:

> It is essential to understand that, at the antipodes of the connection between dream and Nature, in which the Romantic vision had its origins, and which Baudelaire had only half disentangled, since he remained nostalgic for it, Mallarmé holds that, in the epoch of the reign of technology, and of the accomplishment of Cartesianism in its effective possession, Nature has ceased to be of value as a referent for poetic metaphor.[39]

Mallarmé's point, however, is surely that object*ivity* does not escape nature, in the sense, perhaps, of what Deep Ecologists are wont to call a 'total-field image', a blurring of that clear distinction between objective and subjective (*doxa*) underpinning Platonic metaphysics that

[36] Badiou (2013a), p. 81.
[37] Mallarmé (1996), p. 69.
[38] Mallarmé (2009), p. 187.
[39] Badiou (2016a), p. 18.

returns us to reflections of reflections.[40] That the *Idea*, pre-existing the world of objects, is what 'escapes', through the poem, as truths, seems rather *too* parsimonious a simplification, and that that Idea, once discerned, then constitutes the subject, through faith, seems questionable at best

In identifying Mallarmé as the poet of the Idea Badiou seems really to seek a familiar re-establishment of an ontotheological dominion – *logos* over *mythos* – by the back door. While he treats subtraction as a poetic necessity, it also appears to represent an indirect challenge to philosophy's authority, its capacity to divine a 'single meaning.' It is, Badiou says, a Lacanian paradox, that poetic language, in 'neutraliz[ing] both affirmation and negation' can actually 'have no other aim than the production of the concept', thus returning such language to the 'forbidding dictatorship under the effects of which the real can be said in its necessity.'[41] Lacan himself, however, declares his commitment to a 'discourse […] intended precisely to destroy [the notion of expression] where the thing, that which one refers to, is expressed by a word regarded as a label.'[42] With regards to metaphor, and opposing a naïve notion of the 'phenomenon of language', Lacan asks: 'how does it happen that language is at its most effective when it manages to say something by saying something else?'[43] Lacan also does not hesitate to declare 'the limit of poetic metaphor […] surrealist, even though we didn't have to wait for the surrealists to make metaphors.'[44] Rhetoricians, Lacan declares, never arrived at a 'satisfactory definition' of either metaphor or metonymy and although metonymy 'makes

[40] 'Organisms [are understood] as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept – except when talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication.' Arne Naess, 'The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary', *Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1973), p. 95.
[41] Badiou (2013a), p. 93. Dictatorship, significantly, comes from the Latin '*dictare* meaning "say often, prescribe," frequentative of *dicere* "to say, speak", so has the sense of an authoritarian prescribing of what can – and proscribing what cannot – be said or written. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/dictator>
[42] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III, The Psychoses 1955 – 1956* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 222-23.
[43] Lacan (1997), p. 224.
[44] Lacan (1997), p. 226.

metaphor possible [nevertheless] metaphor belongs to a different level than metonymy.'[45] Lacan had begun his discussion of metaphor by wrestling with a line from Victor Hugo's 'Boaz Asleep': '*His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful*'. This is far more than a 'latent simile', he suggests, in that it 'presupposes that a meaning is the dominant datum and that it deflects, commands, the use of the signifier to such an extent that the entire species of preestablished [that is] lexical connections comes undone.'

Crucially, however, Lacan concludes by saying that 'the use of a language is only susceptible to meaning once it's possible to say, *His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful*, that is to say, once the meaning has ripped the signifier from its lexical connection.'[46] Clearly, for Lacan, metaphor requires a uniquely human process of generating meaning; it also requires that this meaning is more than univocal and, in fact, more than equivocal also. He writes,

> It may be said that the sense is in some way renewed. Whatever effort the poet may have made to push it in the direction of a demonstration, one is at every instant a hair's breadth from a poetic metaphor. It belongs to a register that is no different from what arises as natural poetry as soon as a powerful meaning is involved.[47]

The 'powerful meaning' to which Lacan alludes implies, in fact, a 'metalanguage, language speaking of language […] a system of positional coherence [that] reproduces itself with an extraordinary and frightful fecundity.'[48] Felstiner very much sees this 'language about language' as the element of Celan's work that has found him linked to Mallarmé from the beginning, citing contemporary critic Hans Egon Holthusen's 1954 review of the 1952 collection *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (translated by Michael Hamburger as *Poppy and Memory*) in which he 'welcomed a talent that "translates certain principles of modern French lyric into the

[45] Lacan (1997), p. 227.
[46] Lacan (1997), p. 218.
[47] Lacan (1997), p. 226.
[48] Lacan (1997), pp. 226-7.

German language"'. This is language, Holthusen suggests, '"kindled not by an object confronting it, but by itself"', composed of "purely lexical configurations", "Mallarmé… Mallarmé… Mallarmé."'[49]

Badiou, on the other hand, claims, that the 'clues' left by the poet, in that manner of a 'detective novel', can be 'unified by one hypothesis alone as to what has happened'.[50] He is also witheringly dismissive of the way in which, as he sees it, 'the famous "hermeticism" of Mallarmé […] has led many literary exegetes to gloss, and to the all-too convenient doctrine of polysemy, by virtue of which a certain entitlement is given to arbitrary interpretations.'[51] In reading 'A la nue accablante tu' Badiou claims to have plotted the only possible path through the poem's 'architecture', to have joined the links in its metonymic chains in order 'to gain access to the elucidation of its lack, that is the dialectical logic in person'; or rather '*en personne*', in the form, that is, of 'logic as impersonified reason.'[52] On this reading a poem becomes, in the poet's own hands, a type of 'dialectical machine', and the operation of the dialectical process enacted by Mallarmé, the particular form of 'subtraction' at work, conceptually speaking, is 'annulment'.[53] Badiou quotes from *Igitur* in which Mallarmé writes: 'blow out the candle of being, by which all has been. Proof.' In response, Badiou declares that the poem 'is this retroactive proof of blown-out being',[54] but what we see in this interpretation

[49] John Felstiner, '"Here we go round the prickly pear" or "Your song, what does it know?" Celan vis-à-vis Mallarmé', in *Mallarmé in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert Greer Cohn (New Jersey and London: Associated University Press, 1998), p. 203. The quotations from Holthusen are translated by Felstiner and taken from 'Fünf junge Lyricker,' *Merker* 8, no. 74 (spring 1954), 378-90.
[50] Badiou (2013b), p. 201.
[51] Badiou (2016a), p. 19. What I am calling *ambisemic* reading particularly applies to Mallarmé, however.
[52] Badiou (2013a), p. 75; p. 344, n.12. Leo Tolstoy, incidentally, declares this poem specifically, as well as the rest of Mallarmé's oeuvre, completely 'incomprehensible', stating unequivocally that it has 'no meaning whatever'. Of Mallarmé's prose work in *Divagations* Tolstoy says: 'It is impossible to understand any of it. And that is evidently what the author intended.' Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), p. 92.
[53] Badiou (2013a), p. 82.
[54] Badiou (2013a), p. 82. While the 'Igitur' passage carries apparently Buddhistic undertones that seem to recur throughout Mallarmé's work he claims, in a letter of 1866, to have arrived at this idea of the Nothingness/Void (*le Néant*) with no prior knowledge of that tradition. 'L'un est le Néant auquel je suis arrive sans connaître le Bouddhisme', he tells Henri Cazalis in a letter dated April 1866 (*Correspondance*, ed. Henri Mondor and Lloyd James Austin (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 207).

could be, in many ways, yet another manifestation of a political expediency traceable, again, to a relentlessly totalising Platonism. Necessity, in the form of this *only* possible reading of the Mallarméan poem, is really only necessity in the sense of expedience, as in 'doing-the-necessary,' in consequentialist terms. It is also necessary (politically expedient, in other words) that the philosopher pretend otherwise, and that he is just as convincing in his act of extinguishing all doubts as to whether his is *the* definitive reading as Socrates was in convincing his acolytes that the poets must be banished.

An upsurge of truths

Rather than dealing with questions of what *has* taken place – and of causality, willed or otherwise – we are *actually* confronted, here, with that other staple of detective fiction known as 'following a hunch.' From Badiou's point of view, as he puts it,

> If poetry is an essential use of language, it is not because it is able to devote the latter to Presence; on the contrary, it is because it trains language to the paradoxical function of maintaining that which – radically singular, pure action – would otherwise fall back into the nullity of place. Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure undecidable, against a background of nothingness, that is an action of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth.[55]

Again, then, we find Badiou demanding fidelity (*fides*, a gesture of pure faith) in the peculiarly antiphilosophical form of a Pascalian gamble. In response to Meillassoux's suggestion that the Mallarméan 'PERHAPS' should be 'celebrated for itself' rather than for its 'participation in a truth procedure', Badiou only re-emphasises the importance of subjective fidelity:

[55] Badiou (2013b), p. 202.

> With respect to the upsurge of an event, its becoming-truth cannot be declared necessary. In fact, the event opens onto the 'perhaps [*peut-être*]' of a truth, and not onto its being. The *peut* of the *peut-être* in fact signifies: 'contains the possibility of.' Of what? Of the existence of a truth. You must wager that such will be the case and thus decide, at the point of the undecidable, that you will choose to become a faithful subject of the event, and to incorporate yourself into a procedure of truth, regardless of the risks of failure.[56]

Clearly a gamble could not really be a gamble – and certainly not an *ultimate* gamble – were failure not a genuine possibility. For Badiou, the gamble involves wagering on the outcome of a (language?) game that may or may not have taken place, and the rules of which no-one has yet (or could have) established. As he puts it, 'the terms that compose the site *qua* multiple-presentation are not themselves presented.'[57]

The interpretation of what is, in effect, a double subtraction, an echo of an echo, surely offers almost limitless scope for unscrupulousness, however. The game in play could so easily involve the forceful presentation of an 'interpretive intervention' where any distinction between a simulation and 'the real' becomes moot, the point being the spectacle itself and a certain performative panache. Badiou tells us that '[t]he paradox of an evental site is that it is identifiable only on the basis of what it does not present in the situation in which it itself is presented' which seems, fortunately, to grant him *carte blanche* in inventing that which has disappeared, without fear of contradiction.[58] When he uses these words 'chance' and 'undecidability' he tends, I would suggest, to mean 'opportunity,' and his purpose is to tacitly accuse a range of opponents of failing to take their opportunities through insufficiency of faith; to condemn all thrice-deniers of the revelation/revolution of May '68. What he himself denies,

[56] Badiou, in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 155.
[57] Badiou (2016a), p. 20.
[58] Badiou (2016a), p. 24.

however, ironically enough, is any reading – such as that offered by Meillassoux – which implies that Mallarmé has himself made a principle of radical contingency into an article of faith. This would be faith, as Badiou puts it, in 'a God of the 'perhaps' […], a weak and infinitely good God [who] exists only in the perilous trembling of inexistence.' Badiou summarily dismisses such an idea as 'a very beautiful fiction, but one I am unable to share', yet Badiou's own 'truths [that] are contingent on their point of origin, but "will have been" necessary in their infinite becoming' are also, surely, best understood as a creed. That is, they too can be arguably be unveiled as 'simulations' which deny their own 'causal nature'.[59]

In a 2005 interview with Bosteels, in fact, Badiou refuses to make any apology for the quasi-Pauline character of his commitment both to philosophy itself and to the events of May '68. He openly admits that his 'fidelity to what happened in that period is unshakable', and expresses his dismay at 'the many cases of disloyalty, backlash, and abandonment.'[60] This is hardly surprising given that – as Bosteels points out elsewhere – Badiou had begun 1975's *Théorie de la contradiction*, by stating outright: 'I admit without reticence that May '68 has been for me, in the order of philosophy as well as in all the rest, an authentic road to Damascus.'[61] Thirty years on, talking to Bosteels, he shows no sign of having recanted:

> Subjectively, not only does this loyalty [to the sequence initiated by May '68] not present any problem, but I continue to think that the complete elucidation of what took place there, together with the invention of ways of remaining loyal to those events, is the real task of contemporary thinking. I, for one, *cannot see any other task*. That being said, I also would not like to make a virtue, or an heroic exception, out of this fidelity. For me, in any case, *it is probably abandonment that would be difficult*, and not loyalty

[59] Badiou, in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 157.
[60] Badiou, in conversation with Bosteels, 'Can Change be Thought? A Dialogue with Alain Badiou', in Riera ed. (2005), p. 237.
[61] Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), and quoted in Bosteels (2011), p. 78.

[emphasis mine].[62]

Along with that telling phrase 'I […] cannot see any other task', this last sentence in particular seems a quite extraordinary admission. It is tantamount to a confession on Badiou's part that his fidelity to May '68 is tantamount to a form of wistful nostalgia for the lost idealism of his youth. It seems to require something akin to a properly sanctified angel of history, who sees, everywhere, missed opportunities for conviction, and who is thus able to continually reinvent the 'event' that was May '68 as a sacred memory, and cast all future 'events' in its shadow.[63] He manages to declare the responses of all bar himself, and perhaps a select band of others, 'unfaithful' to an imagined alternate history, 'decidable' only as a subjectively determined hypothetical. Also, by his own tacit admission, this does not seem to be much of a gamble after all, given that fidelity to the supposed ideals of May '68, by his own admission, represents not 'the courage to hold steady in this equivalence [that] enables us to be the political subject of this new era', but the only available path in ameliorating an unbearable sense of *personal* loss.[64]

Badiou seems more than happy, in a related fashion, to reinvent Mallarmé as his messianic leader, his prophet, the bulwark against his abiding disappointment in the French people. As Boncardo and Gelder remark, making it clear precisely how the poet is being repurposed,

> Only the illuminating power of the poem can [for Badiou] preserve and reveal the revolutionary capacity of the French people, surrounded as they are by the corrupt parliamentary mediocrities of the Third Republic. For Badiou, Mallarmé therefore

[62] Badiou, in conversation with Bosteels in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 238.
[63] 'His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.' Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 257-58. Felstiner also connects Celan to this image (Felstiner (1995), p. 82).
[64] Badiou (2013a), p. 95.

> occupies a position analogous to that of a militant leader, who similarly enlightens the people to their political potential.[65]

That Badiou presents Mallarmé in this way seems to betray a welter of confusion at the heart of his ultra-Platonic project. From Plato, it appears, he inherits an elitist contempt for parliamentary democracy, which he attempts to persuade us is really a faith in 'the people' themselves, as a latent revolutionary force, although his innate elitism would seem more naturally inclined towards a Nietzschean 'transvaluation,' and Badiou seems to be forced into implicit condemnation of the *actual* French people, whose failure to discern the opportunity presented by the May '68 event has proved so catastrophic. Ultimately, he is forced to embrace a form of *realpolitiking*, a manufactured consent that traces a line through Plato's Guardians and Mao's Cultural Revolution, to the *Union des communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste*.

An act of faith

There is, however, a certain antiphilosophical gesture of his own, Pascalian in nature, that emerges in Badiou's reading of Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* as – retrospectively, philosophically, and subjectively – *the* site for the production of truths. The poem constitutes, claims Badiou, a unique site for the aforementioned 'upsurge of truths' because

> mathematics thinks being as such, being qua being, but cannot integrate the aleatory notion of the possible that is conveyed by the event. The effective sign of this point is that the event suspends a fundamental axiom of the mathematical theory: the axiom of foundation. This upsurge of the unfounded obviously finds its poetic symbol in

[65] Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 46.

Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*.[66]

The limitations of classical mathematical models suggests that only philosophy, in the odd guise of an intuitionistic, Cohen-esque forcing – the 'generic procedure of fidelity' – seems, in Badiouian terms, equipped to tie off the loose end created by this unfounding, to compossibilise truths thus generated according to 'the law of the subject'.[67] Philosophy can apparently achieve this because it can put into sharp relief the structuralism inherent in Mallarmé's dialectic – in effect, his (proto)linguistic turn – and how it falls short of the truths generated by a genuinely materialist dialectic such as that of, for example, Mao. A great deal of mathematical 'rigour' is expended in justifying the theoretical basis of this leap in the dark.

As Meillassoux explains, a prior commitment we could perhaps describe as 'almost testamentary' is required in order for Badiou to subsume Mallarmé's dialectic into his philosophy of the event:

> The event can only be apprehended from the point of a statement that […] reverses it originally in the series of inquiries and of the truth to which it initiates us. If I am not already engaged in inquiries by means of a statement of the subject-language, oriented by the series to come and driven to make investigations, I cannot even conceive that an event perhaps took place. This is why Badiou subordinates, in Mallarmé, the motif of the in itself undecidable event to the motif of forcing – that of knowledge […].[68]

The Mallarméan 'statement' to which Meillassoux alludes is one that links something like an intuitive affinity for pattern recognition common to the poetic and the mathematical via the

[66] Badiou, in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 141.
[67] Badiou (2013b), p. 539.
[68] Quentin Meillassoux, 'Badiou and Mallarmé: The Event and the Perhaps', translated by Alyosha Edlebi, *Parrhesia*, 16 (2013), p. 38. 'Forcing' is a term drawn from Paul Cohen's response to Cantor's 'diagonal argument,' in set theory, which demonstrates that the continuum hypothesis can be neither proved nor disproved and is thus 'undecidable.'

essential undecidability of the event. 'It's not arbitrary', Mallarmé declares,

> that there should be similarities between poetry and ancient proportions; some kind of regularity will last because the poetic act consists of seeing that an idea can be broken up into a certain number of motifs that are equal in some way, and in grouping them'.[69]

Mallarmé thus unwittingly opens the door for a patented Badiouan mélange of set theory and intuition. Once again, from a Badiouian standpoint, only the mysterious faithful subject, by definition, comes equipped with the special insight required to discern that an event *has* taken place. Bosteels suggests that this is, in fact, the lesson to be drawn from antiphilosophy; he argues, that is,

> that the real danger, including for Badiou's own philosophy, is not the religion of meaning but rather the radicalism of the pure event as absolute beginning, or the treatment of the event as some kind of archi-event, that is to say, in the end, the conflation of the event with the act.'[70]

That apparently fideistic impulse inherent in the philosophy of the event, its implicit ontotheologicality, is once more evident.

Badiou, however, refuses to accept that Meillassoux's critique in any way undermines his attempt to co-opt Mallarmé for his own – essentially Maoist – ends. The crucial thing, once more, is that one retain the courage of one's convictions as the event unfolds in its pure undecidability, its aleatoric openness. Pascal, too, had no doubt that his gamble went infinitely beyond measurable probabilities:

> Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game

[69] Mallarmé (2009), p. 206; Badiou (2013b), p. 86.
[70] Bosteels (2008), p. 177.

> is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.[71]

Faith, or fidelity, is no less demanded by Badiou, and that *his* creed is quasi-Maoist rather than Nicene changes little or nothing in the nature of the demand. The alternative is the impotence of *in*decision, which characterises the reactionary subject in response to an event such as May '68, and in his 'meditation' upon Mallarmé Badiou invokes Hamlet as the embodiment of this hesitation before 'the last fires of undecidability'. In Mallarmé 'a siren and a rock emerge – poetic temptation of gesture and massivity of place – which this time will vanish together.' This 'poetic temptation', however, that causes both to 'evaporate', presented as a '"false manor" which pretended to impose a "limit upon infinity"' could, I believe, just as easily describe the recurring *philosophical* impulse and its outcome, even as Pascal understood it.[72]

'Pascal's particular genius', Badiou states. approvingly, 'lies in his attempt to renovate and maintain the evental kernel of the Christian conviction under the absolutely modern and unheard of conditions created by the advent of the subject of science.'[73] He, Pascal, recognised that 'the Christian God could only remain at the centre of subjective experience if it belonged to an entirely different logic',[74] and it is just such a development of an entirely different logic, a logic that transcends logic, that Badiou seeks to replicate. For Meillassoux, Mallarmé's notion of divinity invokes a similarly forceful immanence:

> Mallarmé did not cease to aim, throughout his work, for a sublation of Christian religion and cult through poetry: [instead] he sought, and this is the material of the notes he left

[71] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Gutenberg, 2006) III, p. 233.
[72] Badiou (2013b), p. 205.
[73] Badiou (2013b), p. 225.
[74] Badiou (2013b), p. 225.

> us in the *Book*, to constitute a ceremony through which the community, delivered from every belief in a transcendence, could contemplate the immanence of its own divinity.[75]

There is, though, a grand 'PERHAPS' at the heart of this divinity, and this 'PERHAPS', Meillassoux suggests, 'has meaning only from the standpoint of the poetry that, in the heritage of Romanticism, claims to be an absolute and the source of a new religion.'[76] Mallarmé incorporates 'this dimension of doubt, of uncertainty' as 'the object of a paradoxical religion', suggests Meillassoux, which becomes 'an immanent religion (without beyond nor transcendent God), but also one that makes doubt in its own regard the object of its very cult.'[77] Badiou, however, is crushingly dismissive:

> It is incontestable that Mallarmé wanted to compete with religion, notably Catholicism, at the level of what could be called a ceremony of the Absolute. But in itself this is not very interesting; it is a point of history, shared in fact by many nineteenth-century creators. All of this refers to the death of God. It should also be noted that this effort in the direction of a mimetic religion was a total failure. The Mallarméan ceremony does not exist.[78]

For Badiou, to read Mallarmé as Meillassoux does amounts to not much more than a 'historicist and academic regression' which does a disservice to the poet's 'contribution to dialectical thought.'[79]

In his own reading of Mallarmé, however, Badiou arguably fails to acknowledge the extent to which he too might be said to be 'competing with religion'. Take, for example, his invocation

[75] Meillassoux (2013), p. 40.
[76] Meillassoux (2013), p. 42.
[77] Meillassoux (2013), p. 43. There is also Bertrand Marchal's *La Religion de Mallarmé: Poésie, mythologie et religion* (Paris: José Corti, 1988) to consider in this context but this work has not, as yet, been translated into English.
[78] Badiou in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 150.
[79] Badiou in Boncardo and Gelder (2017), p. 152.

of the image of 'the solitary feather' from *Coup de dés* which, Badiou tells us, is

> the purified symbol of the undecidable [that] did not signify the renunciation of action. […] As an un-founded multiple, as a self-belonging, undivided signature of itself, the event can only be indicated beyond the situation, despite it being necessary to wager that it has manifested itself therein.[80]

Badiou finds, in *Coup de dés*, with further obviously Pascalian echoes, an exemplification of 'the impossibility of rational choice – of the abolition of chance' and thus the eternal undecidability of the event:

> Since it is of the very essence of the event to be a multiple whose belonging to the situation is undecidable, deciding that it belongs to the situation is a wager. […] As Mallarmé says, wagering that something has taken place cannot abolish the chance of it having-taken-place.'[81]

A little later he admits that,

> It will […] always remain doubtful whether there has been an event or not, except to those who intervene, who decide its belonging to the situation. What there will be are consequences of a particular multiple, and they will be counted as one in the situation, and it will appear as though they were not predictable therein. In short, there will have been some chance in the situation; however, it will never be legitimate for the intervenor to pretend that the chance originated in a rupture of the law which itself arose from a decision on belonging concerning the environs of a defined site.[82]

Badiou is also at pains to stress that while the intervention 'generates a discipline: it does not

[80] Badiou (2013b), p. 207.
[81] Badiou (2013b), p. 211.
[82] Badiou (2013b), p. 217.

deliver any originality' and that there is, as a consequence, 'no hero of the event'; and the 'vigilance […] of becoming' that is required is, he tells us, as much a question of 'the anxiety of hesitation' as it is 'the courage of the outside place'.[83] He reads Mallarmé's text, in fact, 'as a text of thought [and] as the greatest theoretical text that exists on the conditions for thinking the event.'[84] Once again it becomes evident how essentially fideistic, and how soteriological, but also how self-serving Badiou's theory of the subject must ultimately be; placing, as it does, the kind of faith that can move mountains in *his own* capacity to calculate the name of the unnameable. Faced with a bet without odds, categorically beyond the laws of probability, he must take the lead, must legislate extra-legally, in offering an absurd gesture: 'Decide from the standpoint of the undecidable'.[85] And it is a gesture that, however ontotheologically dressed, once again amounts to a calculated *political* gamble: even a 'coup d'état' of sorts

The window of opportunity will always be small, however, and there is the ever-present need for courage, insight and decisiveness in recognizing and seizing emergent truths. For Badiou, the central paradox – a 'paradox of action', as he describes it – seems to be that, in spite of a characteristically Socratic reluctance to endorse poetry's supposed mimetic tendencies, it can only be its definitive refusal to allow the object to become fixed in language, to be held/framed in the mirror, which will allow an unnameable truth to emerge. As Badiou writes,

> if the essence of the event is undecidable, the decision annuls it as an event. From the standpoint of the decision, you no longer have anything other than a term of the situation. The intervention thus appears – as perceived by Mallarmé in his metaphor of the disappearing gesture – to consist of an auto-annulment of its own meaning. Scarcely has the decision been taken than what provoked the decision disappears in the

[83] Badiou (2013b), p. 208.
[84] Badiou (2016a), p. 22.
[85] Badiou (2013b), p. 208.

uniformity of multiple presentation.[86]

As we have noted several times, and as we shall later see with Celan also, the poem escapes the fate of philosophy, in the teeth of the evental storm, by always gesturing towards self-annihilation, by always having, in other words, silence at its core.

Perhaps

Badiou believes Mallarmé's poetry to be possessed of the necessary *hauteur* to rise to the Socratic challenge precisely because of its rigour and its purity of thought. This is because, Lecercle suggests, Badiou subscribes to 'a poetics of the anti-lyrical, of the impersonal, as opposed to the effusions of an affected subject'.[87] Could, however, that which Badiou calls subtraction be more akin to loss, or absence, in the most complete and personal sense; not so much subtracted by the poet as threatening to consume him or her? Witness 'the shadow buried in the deeps' that cannot be 'sum[med] up' of which Mallarmé writes in *Coup de dés*. Syntax is particularly complex in *Coup de dés*, but if the 'alternate sail', that acts as a covering in the poem, refers to syntax, then the implication must be that it is only the specific *form* of syntactical veiling to be uncovered that alters. The 'gaping maw' to which Mallarmé refers need not, surely, be *merely* an intellectual depth, an intellectual puzzle to be solved?[88]

Badiou seems to present only two alternatives – univocity or chaos – whereas, I would contend, an apophatic third way (or even 'middle way,' in a Buddhist sense) could better match Mallarmé's intent. 'What caused a medium extent of words, under the gaze's comprehension, to take on definitive traits, surrounded by silence?' Mallarmé asks, rhetorically.[89] Could this, in

[86] Badiou (2013b), p. 212.
[87] Lecercle (2010), p. 111.
[88] Mallarmé (1996), p. 128.
[89] Mallarmé (2009), p. 206

fact, be what Celan means, in his notes for the 'Meridian' speech, when he says,

> Poems supposedly consisting of words – *no, n'en déplaise à Mallarmé* [no, with all due respect to Mallarmé]: The poem is, also in terms of its semantic meaning, the place of the singular, the irreversible; it is, to say it differently, the cemetery of all synonymics. ([I]t resides beyond all synonymics […]).[90]

By 'synonymics' I take Celan to mean the putting of one word in place of another, so that a Badiou will see his task as being merely to uncover, as it were, the *original* words, whereas Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Celan, Heidegger, of course, Derrida too, are prepared to accept something fundamentally hidden, or at least *half*-hidden, or veiled, in this process. We find Celan, in this connection, underlining the phrase 'the poem has only itself' before adding, in reference to the classical Taoist text, the *Tao Te Ching*, that it is 'The self-evident, the natural'.[91] Badiou does not seem entirely averse to such an interpretation himself, making his determination to uncover the single meaning in the poem seem rather at odds with how he understands its genesis. Mallarmé's 'little nothing […] *which exists*' is, Badiou tells us, 'made for the express purpose of causing the whole of the poem'.[92] The 'vanishing term, the support of the causal effect of lack' returns us to the paradox of Plato's sun and the shadows it casts, the source of the whole of knowledge (truth) which cannot itself be an object of perception.[93] That which causes the poem cannot be seen without ceasing to be, and 'exists' as its own absence: or else exists obliquely – 'never direct[ly]', in Mallarmé's words – but just out of sight, a falling shadow.[94]

Badiou takes Mallarmé's 'nothing [will have] taken place but the place, except, on high,

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[90] Celan (2011), p. 118.
[91] He also gives the phrase 'the poem has only itself' as 'the poem *begins with* itself –' (emphasis mine). The Lao Tzu, *Tao te Ching*, James Legge translation, referenced in Celan (2011), p. 95.
[92] Mallarmé (2009), p. 177; quoted in Badiou (2013a), p. 69.
[93] Badiou (2013a), p. 69.
[94] See n. 16, above.

perhaps, a constellation'[95] and strikes out 'on high' and 'perhaps', which seems, ultimately, to leave us with that distinctive, unequivocally Badiouian 'there are truths'.[96] As Meillassoux makes clear, however, the Mallarméan 'PERHAPS' of *Coup de dés* is not, for the poet himself, simply a placeholder for some deferred event(u)al resolution. It is, as he puts it, 'not so much a promise as a pure actuality', in itself, and a necessarily poetic one at that. An etymology of the origins of 'perhaps', in fact, gives us 'by (*per*) + chance (*hap*),' as in its archaic precursor 'perchance,' which could suggest a now rather unfashionably pre-modern willingness to accept the idea that events ('acts of God') can defy *all* explanation.[97] Returning to that 'almost testamentary declaration' of Wittgenstein's, then, Mallarmé, we might say, writes not so much philosophy in the form of poetry or poetry as a form of philosophy, but poetry that does what philosophy can never do, which is to leave the 'PERHAPS' unresolved.

The crux of Meillassoux's thesis, and his critique of Badiou, is that 'Mallarmé […] established the eternal undecidability not only of an event, but of a truth procedure: *that of poetry*. This is to say that he bore to ideality the possibility that poetry does not exist.'[98] In this way Mallarmé may indeed be a Nietzschean 'philosopher of the dangerous perhaps', except that Nietzsche's real meaning is that 'perhaps' is *the* definitively *anti*philosophical word; an anti-Platonic and anti-Cartesian word.[99] The 'danger,' however, as far as Badiou is concerned, but as Meillassoux sets it out, is that

[95] Mallarmé (1996), p. 142 and p. 144.
[96] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 4.
[97] Meillassoux (2013), p. 38.
[98] Meillassoux (2013), p. 42.
[99] 'Whatever value might be attributed to truth, truthfulness, and selflessness, it could be possible that appearance, the will to deception, and craven self-interest should be accorded a higher and more fundamental value for all life. It could even be possible that whatever gives value to those good and honourable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same. Perhaps! – But who is willing to take charge of such a dangerous Perhaps! For this we must await the arrival of a new breed of philosophers, ones whose taste and inclination are somehow the reverse of those we have seen so far – philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps in every sense. – And in all seriousness: I see these new philosophers approaching.' Nietzsche (2002), p. 6

> [t]here is a risk of engendering a vague reverie, full of bad effusion and sterile musing: of fascination for a 'perhaps, perhaps…' whose indefinite points of suspension leave us powerless – in contrast to the sober and painstaking labour of the inquiry required by the event.[100]

Badiou would doubtless consider this yet another example of a 'lazy' reading which abdicates responsibility and renounces that key Socratic virtue by which philosophy establishes its dignity: rigour. Meillassoux, however, gives us a singularly radical and anti-ontotheological Mallarmé. Mallarmé's originality resides precisely in accepting that we have murdered God, a deed that cannot be undone, but that that is far from the end of the matter.

A single thing

'The only one', Mallarmé declares, alluding to a Messianic-poetic figure, and returning to his characterisation of poetry as magic, 'would have to be as fluid as [a] sorcerer […] and piercing'. […] Luminous, to the point of being dazzling.'[101] Metaphor has just that fluidity, exchanging one semantic field for another so that meaning is transformed in (ambisemically) jumping language games, like a leap from a moving train, one with a specific destination, onto another going who-knows-where. It has, in fact, claims Mallarmé, the fluidity, the 'floating, palpitating, scattered ecstasy' of dance: another favoured trope, and one that Badiou himself is happy to co-opt.[102] It is no surprise then that rhyme and meter are to be, as Meillassoux suggests, the 'secret' starting points from which the poem is begun:

> The true poet, in effect, begins with the intuition of rhymed words – herein resides the

[100] Meillassoux (2013), p. 39.
[101] Mallarmé (2009), p. 138.
[102] Mallarmé (2009), p. 138; see also 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', in Badiou (2005), pp. 57-71.

> source of his genius – and only afterward constructs the verses, which have no other function than to showcase their consonant ends.[103]

In this way a poem can be a leap over the boundary wall separating one language game from *all others*. As Derrida puts it, in his essay on Mallarmé, 'the identity of entire words disappears in a game which nevertheless seems to leave them intact'.[104] Again this seems to be Mallarméan subtraction as a form of alchemy, or magic, or even sophistry:

> It remains, therefore, that the 'word,' the particles of its decomposition or of its reinscription, without ever being identifiable in their singular presence, finally refer only to their own game, and never really move toward anything else. The *thing* is included, as *the effect of the thing* in this long *citation* of the language. Simply, the signifier (which we refer to as such out of convenience, since strictly speaking it is no longer a question of the 'sign' here), without ever being present for itself, is marked, in its place, in its powers and its values.[105]

Derrida's example is the homonym '*or*', used by Mallarmé in a semantically ambiguous fashion sometimes as 'now', at other times 'whereas,' at others 'gold'. In English, as a connective, in everyday speech as well as in propositional logic, 'or' tends towards ambiguity, as in 'either… *or* both… *or* neither,' or in Boolean algebra it would be used to refer to the 'union' of two sets, thus marking yet another movement in the direction of expansion and *in*clusion, rather than *ex*clusion. The changes of meaning and function suggest reading the homonym differently each time, and yet, Derrida suggests, 'this diversity crosses itself and goes back to an appearance of identity which has to be taken into account' so that the 'simple nam[ing]' admits 'neither homonymy nor synonymy.'

[103] Meillassoux (2013), p. 41.
[104] Derrida (1992), p. 117.
[105] Derrida (1992), pp. 120-1.

This ‘disarms’ the ‘classical rhetorician’, claims Derrida, because

> we are not dealing here with any of the essentially semantic relations with which [the rhetorician] is familiar. There is neither a metaphorical relation (there is no similarity between these instances of *or*); nor one of metonymy (besides the fact that the unities are not nouns, no identity is stable enough, of itself, to give rise to relationships of the whole and the part, of cause and effect, etc.).[106]

We should note that Badiou also regards his ‘inaesthetics’, too, as rejecting the ‘classical’ Aristotelian position; however, Derrida’s account of the uses of ‘*or*’ might suggest that Badiou’s approach to metaphor and polysemy, in relation to Mallarmé’s work, actually has more in common with classical aesthetics than he is prepared to admit. Here is Derrida, again:

> Aristotle, whose *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* inaugurated the traditional praise of metaphor (in that it enunciates and makes known the same or the similar), also said that not to signify a single thing was to signify nothing. Mallarmé’s text does not only break this rule, it eludes its false transgression, its symmetrical inversion: the polysemy which continues to *make a sign – in* the direction of the law.[107]

Derrida’s point about the limitations of classical aesthetics when it comes to reading Mallarmé could, therefore, easily be re-directed against Badiou’s univocal readings of him.

It is *Coup de dés*’s metaphor of the ‘shipwreck’ that Badiou, Lecercle suggests, ‘privileges in his reading [as] the poetic inscription of a Badiou event’, and it is essential that it *is* seen to ‘signify a single thing’. Badiou places the shipwreck at the centre of his univocal (and therefore, definitive) reading, as *the* symbol of the evental gesture of annulment. It is, Lecercle continues, ‘the metaphor for the fact that any evental site is on the edge of the void’, in the form of ‘a

[106] Derrida (1992), p. 125.
[107] Derrida (1992), p. 116.

deserted horizon hanging over a stormy sea.'[108] Paraphrasing a little we might extract, from Mallarmé's complex, 'prismatic' text, a statement of principle of sorts: 'A throw of dice will never, even when launched in eternal circumstances, from the depths of a shipwreck, abolish chance.'[109] As far as Badiou's commentary goes, that is *the* extractable maxim:

> [T]he event will not only occur *in* the site, but will do so by summoning that which the site contains of the unpresentable: the ship 'buried in the deep,' whose abolished plenitude – since only the Ocean is presented – authorizes us to announce that action takes place 'from the depth of a shipwreck.' For any event, in addition to being localized by its site, produces the ruin of the site *with respect to the situation*, since it retroactively names its interior void. The 'shipwreck' singlehandedly gives us these allusive debris of which is composed, in the one of the site, the undecidable multiple of the event.[110]

Badiou would have us believe, as we have seen, that a polysemic reading of the shipwreck is no reading at all, but rather an implicit acceptance that the poem cannot be read or, which amounts the same thing, can be subject to multiple, equally valid, and therefore, from his perspective, equally meaningless readings. In *The Century* he complains that, under what he terms 'the second Restoration', Mallarmé's 'unique number that cannot be another' which operates, in the poem, as 'the cipher of the concept' becomes instead a number that 'may be substituted by any other number without the slightest drawback'. In effect, he argues, this 'transforms the cipher of the concept into an indifferent variation.'[111] This is the 'convenience' of the polysemic reading, which Badiou then dismisses with withering contempt: 'Its essence is arbitrary variability, it is the floating number.'[112]

[108] Lecercle (2010), p. 92.
[109] Mallarmé (1996), p. 121.
[110] Badiou (2016a), p. 24.
[111] Badiou (2007), p. 27; Mallarmé (1996), p. 130.
[112] Badiou (2007), p. 27.

In *Being and Event*, therefore, Badiou is ready to make clear the nature of the 'intervention' that is the Mallarméan metaphor:

> [I]f the essence of the event is to be undecidable, the decision annuls it as event. From the standpoint of the decision, you no longer have anything other than a term of the situation. The intervention thus appears – as perceived by Mallarmé in his metaphor of the disappearing gesture – to consist of an auto-annulment of its own meaning. Scarcely has the decision been taken than what provoked the decision disappears in the uniformity of multiple-presentation.[113]

Derrida, in *his* reading of *Coup de dés*, sets off from a similar starting point before, unsurprisingly, taking us in an entirely opposite direction:

> All of Mallarmé's text […] is organized in such a way that at its strongest points, the meaning remains *undecidable* […] What suspends the decision is not the richness of meaning, the inexhaustible resources of a word, it is a certain play of the syntax […]. [T]he undecidability is no longer attached to a multiplicity of meanings, to a metaphorical richness, to a system of correspondences. Something takes place, something 'more' or 'less,' as one likes, in any case the angle of a certain *re-mark,* which prevents polysemy from having its horizon: the unity, the totality, the gathering of meaning.[114]

There would, it is true, seem to be some agreement here regarding the fact that 'undecidability' is key, except that for Derrida, crucially, all meaning *remains* undecidable; for him, the 'play of the syntax' removes all semantic – all disseminative – limits, thus preventing any Badiou-esque gathering or harvesting of a *single* meaning; any single name.

[113] Badiou (2013b), p. 212.
[114] Derrida (1992), pp. 114-5.

‘Let us not forget’, continues Derrida,

> that these chains, which are infinitely vaster, more powerful and intertwined than is even possible to hint at here, are as if without support, always suspended. It is the Mallarméan doctrine of *suggestion,* of undecided allusion. Such indecision, which enables them to move alone and without end, cuts them off, in spite of appearances, from all meaning (signified theme) and from all referents (the thing itself, and the conscious or unconscious intention of the author). Which leads to numerous traps for criticism, and numerous new procedures and categories to be invented.[115]

If ‘truths’ *are* to be some kind of transgressive break with the very laws of corporeality and signification for which Badiou seems to wish, then once again we are cast into the realms of faith. Perhaps, recalling Hume, the faithful subject can enact ‘a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding’.[116] If so, a certain fundamental ontotheological dichotomy between philosophy and its antithesis makes for an unbridgeable gap in understanding.

Mallarmé himself, in his preface to *Coup de dés*, tells us that, in the poem, ‘[t]he “blanks,” in effect, assume importance and are what is immediately most striking.’[117] Derrida expands further upon what part he understands the space, the whiteness, to play, making clear that he too sees something more than a banal polysemy in them:

> The white of the spacing has no determinate meaning, it does not simply belong to the plurivalence of all the other whites. More than or less than the polysemic series, a loss or an excess of meaning, it folds up the text toward itself, and at each moment points out the place (where “nothing will have taken place except the place” [...]), the

[115] Derrida (1992), pp. 120-1.
[116] David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 142.
[117] This is Weinfield’s translation from Mallarmé’s ‘Preface’ to the poem (Mallarmé (1996), p. 121). Derrida himself refers to the *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 455.

> condition, the labour, the rhythm. As the page *folds in* upon itself, one will never be able to decide if *white* signifies something, or signifies only, or in addition, the space of writing itself.[118]

If he is right that 'one will *never* be able to decide' the significance of the 'empty' spaces on the page, then perhaps it forms a necessary background against which the poem rests – something 'whereof one cannot speak', as it were, as resistant to any single nomination as it is to none; to meaninglessness, that is. Mallarmé himself writes of 'prismatic subdivisions of the Idea, at the instant they occur and for the duration of their concurrence in some exact mental setting', strongly suggesting something mysterious that would resist any extraction of an outright statement of meaning: the sophist that the philosopher is unable to 'track down,' perhaps?[119] 'For Derrida,' writes Derek Attridge, in his brief introduction to the former's essay on Mallarmé,

> the crisis that Mallarmé provokes and symptomatizes is both new—we are still developing critical methods adequate to it—and very old, at least as old as the rhetorical understanding of language and truth held by the sophists and driven to the margins of Western thought by Plato and Aristotle.'[120]

The sheer relentlessness of this repeated, systematic marginalisation – as an *originary* philosophical gesture – of all dissenting voices has been at the core of my thesis from the very beginning, and indeed at the core of Badiou's need to take ownership of Mallarmé.

Badiou concludes 'Meditation 19' of *Being and Event*, and brings to a conclusion his thoughts on *Coup de dés*, by referring to his own *Theory of the Subject*: 'Ethics, I said, comes down to the following imperative: "Decide from the standpoint of the undecidable."' He continues,

[118] Derrida (1992), pp. 115-6; quotation also from Mallarmé (1945), pp. 474-5; see also Mallarmé (1996), p. 142.
[119] Mallarmé (1996), p. 121.
[120] Derek Attridge, from his 'Introduction' to Derrida (1992), p. 111.

citing Mallarmé's 'Every thought emits a cast of dice.'

> On the basis that 'a cast of dice never will abolish chance', one must not conclude in nihilism, in the uselessness of action, even less in the management-cult of reality and its swarm of fictive relationships. For if the event is erratic, and if, from the standpoint of situations, one cannot decide whether it exists or not, it is given to us to bet; that is, to legislate without law in respect to this existence. Given that undecidability is a rational attribute of the event, and the salvatory guarantee of its non-being, there is no other vigilance than that of becoming, as much through the anxiety of hesitation as through the courage of the outside-place, both the feather, which "hovers about the gulf", and the star, "up high perhaps".[121]

The 'standpoint of the undecidable' is surely, once again, a code for the privileged position from which the philosopher is able to decide in a form akin to a Gnostic demiurge whose fidelity marks him out as exclusively capable of declaring an event as opposed to a mere breakdown of sense.[122] Yet even *he* cannot discern or articulate the truths nascent in the event since, by virtue of their 'inexistence', the language in which these will be couched is, by definition, not yet available. The 'courage of the outside-place' is, after all, a courage of conviction, another test of fidelity to the ideals of May '68.[123]

Derrida finds in Mallarmé the embodiment of all the poetic qualities Plato most feared: 'a very great rhetorician; a sophist, doubtless, but a sophist who is not deceived by the image of himself which philosophy has wanted to hand down to us by holding him in a Platonic speculum and at

[121] Badiou (2013b), p. 208.
[122] This in spite of egregious, self-confessed errors of political judgment on Badiou's part, such as his public expression of support for the Khmer Rouge in an article published in *Le Monde* on 17 January 1979, for which he would later express 'regret' ('Je le regrette', *Le Point*, 14 May 2012).
[123] It could also, lest we miss the implication, reaffirm that standard totalitarian justification, first suggested Plato for the suspension of the rule of law in a time of crisis: that it is sometimes necessary to 'legislate without law' for the good of all, that the philosopher's privileged insight, his infallibility, grants him license to be a law unto himself, to lift the weight of the moral law from himself for the good of the people. See Introduction, n. 88, above.

the same time, which is in no way contradictory, by making him an outlaw'. Mallarmé, Derrida feels, would undoubtedly not be prepared to 'submit[…] his discourse to the correct rules of meaning, philosophy, philosophical dialectic, or truth', nor would he be prepared to be accepted by allowing 'philosophical rhetoric' to impose 'its rules of decorum' on him. He has, in fact, Derrida suggests, 'broken with the [classical and philosophical] protocols of rhetoric' so that '[h]is text escapes the control of this representation, it demonstrates *in practice* its nonpertinence.' Derrida feels sure that Plato, faced with a Mallarmé, would have felt the same – if not greater – sense of 'active incomprehension' (a la Tolstoy, perhaps?), albeit mixed with 'a declared admiration', that led him to ostracise Homer.[124] Badiou, on the other hand, comes to Mallarmé with a very Badiouian set of preconceptions masquerading as dialectic, or as questions. He is ever ready to act out the ultra-Platonic charade, methodologically at least, of seeking an authentic subjectivity through the poem's language. It can hardly be a surprise that Badiou continues to find confirmation of his own ideas in Mallarmé's poetry, to find himself subjectivized in what is absent from Mallarmé. As Lecercle notes,

> the literary critic may well argue that Badiou finds in Mallarmé exactly what he wanted to find in him, namely the concepts of his philosophical system, and that the result of the analysis precedes the analysis itself.[125]

As with Plato, however, he also seems to have established a pre-determined, 'gold-cast' subject – whole and complete, in terms of an ontotheological creed of immanent, eternal truths waiting to be uncovered anamnetically.[126] This 'subject' is the faithful subject, and also Laruelle's Quixotic defender of Philosophy's sullied virtue.[127]

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[124] Derrida (1992), p. 126.
[125] Lecercle (2010), p. 102.
[126] Socrates endorses the necessary propagation of the following myth: '"You are, all of you in this community, brothers. But when god fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those of you who are qualified to be Rulers […][This] should serve to increase their loyalty to the state and to each other."'. Plato (2007), 415a. It is a creed that also seems, in many ways, fundamentally Hegelian.
[127] Laruelle (2013), p. 26.

Thinking Mallarmé through to the end

The possibility, in Celan's words, of 'think[ing…] Mallarmé through to the end', is Badiou's primary concern in attempting what he terms 'inaesthetic' judgments.[128] Such judgments, in Apter and Bosteels' assessment, are implicitly 'triangulated by politics'.[129] Badiou is quite prepared to beat the Mallarméan poem flat, forcing it, as it were, under interrogation, into confessing its univocity, prosaically revealed in a breaking of the 'melodic encipherment' – to use Mallarmé's own, rather sophistic term – with which the poem attempts to 'disguise' itself.[130] Badiou himself has described this method as a 'reconstruction in which the poem is withdrawn from poetry and rendered in its latent prose, enabling philosophy to *return* to it from prose for its own ends.'[131] According to that simile, of which Badiou seems excessively fond, the Mallarméan poem is like a crime scene: sealed, cordoned off, and awaiting a properly forensic *explication*. This seems to go somewhat against the grain of Barthes' suggestion, endorsed by Badiou for the most part, that 'Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile […] In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered'; itself drawing a direct line from Mallarmé's:

> the Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx
> with this sole object that Nothingness attains'.[132]

Pierre Macherey, rather than seeing this approach as further evidence of an authoritarian streak in Badiou, chooses to accept his claims at face value. He argues that a certain reciprocity in the

[128] Paul Celan, *The Meridian: Final Version - Drafts – Materials* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 5.
[129] Apter and Bosteels, in Badiou (2014), p. viii. Lest we forget, 'politics' has tended to mean Maoism.
[130] Mallarmé (2009), p. 188.
[131] Badiou (2008), pp. 50-51.
[132] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 147; Mallarmé (1996), p. 69.

Badiou's engagement with Mallarmé ensures that 'philosophy and poetry dialogue as equals; one of the conditions of this dialogue being that poetry is withdrawn from the purview of aesthetics and installed in the order of […] "in-aesthetics."'[133] Badiou as we have noted previously, presents this 'inaesthetic' approach as 'mak[ing] no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy',[134] but in practice there seems little actual room for reciprocity or rapprochement in Badiou's arbitration, rather a repeated expectation of submission. Even Bosteels suspects that, whatever his *stated* commitment to artistic autonomy, 'it is far more doubtful that he lives up to this promise in his writings on the likes of Mallarmé, Valéry, or Beckett.'[135] What he really seems to be saying to poets is that 'the truths you produce are fine, but stating what they actually *are* is our business, not yours.' And given that 'aesthetic' derives from the Greek '*aisthēta*', 'perceptible things,' are we to assume that *in*aesthetics is concerned with the *im*perceptible? If so, there may be a form of Cartesian paradox here; that is, how precisely do 'independently existing' works of art (material objects, objects of perception, empirical phenomena) *cause* 'intraphilosophical effects' (mental phenomena, percepts and affects, ideas)? What is the nature of such an interface? Does this not once again require some kind of occasionalist, metaphysical (that is, divine) exemption (or even intervention)? Or does inaesthetics, in effect, amount to another form of transcendental idealism in the end?

If, though, we were to forego these 'truths' – refuting Badiou's exceptionalism – and concern ourselves only with corporeality ('bodies') and signification ('languages') in all their richness, nuances, and resonances, might we not cultivate a more sympathetic, *synaesthetic* approach to art that does not require that it produce 'truths' at all, in some reductive sense?[136] Badiou's

[133] Macherey, in Riera, ed. (2005), p. 109.
[134] Epigraph, Badiou (2005).
[135] Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 397, n. 42.
[136] 'It is no more than a moral prejudice that the truth is worth more than appearance; in fact, it is the world's most poorly proven assumption […] and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and inanity of many philosophers, someone wanted to completely abolish the "world of appearances," – well, assuming you could do that, – at least there would not be any of your "truth" left either!' Nietzsche (2002), p. 35.

reconstructions of poetry sometimes feel like acts of violence which – by extracting the 'Idea' as the relevant unit of meaning from the multi-faceted, chiasmic experience that is the poem – aim at precisely the objectification and instrumentalisation that he claims to be the antithesis of his approach. They certainly seem take us a long way from Joris's weary acceptance, for example, that his exegesis of a Celan poem could never be definitive because a poetic thought 'does not translate into, say, philosophical thought, or literary-critical thought'. For Joris, as we will see my final chapter, this is why a Heideggerian such as Gadamer fails to understand 'Todtnauberg', the poem Celan wrote about his visit to the philosopher's mountain retreat. 'A poem', writes Joris, 'can only translate into another poem – maybe a completely other poem, in a completely other language, in a completely other century.'[137]

[137] Pierre Joris, 'Celan/Heidegger: Translation at the Mountain of Death' (Binghamton, NY, 1988). <http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>

4. An encounter: Celan

In the order of the poem the event is Paul Celan's work, in and of itself as well as through what it holds from the entire Age of Poets at its ultimate edge. It is symptomatic that it is in reference to Celan's poems that ventures of thinking as diverse as those of Derrida's, Gadamer's or Lacoue-Labarthe's pronounce the ineluctable suture of philosophy to its poetic condition.[1]

Celan's drama

Badiou assigns Celan's poetry, in its capacity of responding to the thought of Heidegger, the central role in inaugurating his 'artistic configuration,' the new regime that will come to govern the relationship between poetry and philosophy. 'Everything hinges,' declares Badiou, 'on the sense we give to the encounter between Celan and Heidegger. A quasi-mythical episode of our epoch.'[2] Celan's work, claims Badiou, 'states, at the terminal edge, and from within poetry, the end of the Age of Poets. Celan completes Heidegger.'[3] For Badiou, Celan's work represents a final rectification of the wrong turn taken by (or against) philosophy, under the influence of romanticism, Nietzschean anti-Platonism, Wittgensteinianism, poststructuralism, and a number of other 'antiphilosophical' strands. Celan, he argues, relieves the poem, once and for all, of the unbearable strain placed on it by the philosophical suture, under the exhausted didacto-romantic, Parmenidian, Heideggerian regime. Poetry can supposedly be freed from the burden placed upon it by philosophy's abject surrender of its proper functions, and at the same time philosophy is freed to erase the mark that has tainted it ever since Nietzsche's declaration of

[1] Badiou (1999), p. 86-7.
[2] Badiou (1999), p. 86.
[3] Badiou (1999), p. 77.

Plato's 'error'.[4] These are clearly huge claims that Badiou makes, sweeping across entire epochs with a chutzpah worthy of Nietzsche himself, though with little of the latter's irony, scathing wit, or sense of mischief. And Celan, as Badiou presents him, is not so much a poet *of* the age of the poets, as the poet who closes the circle, who brings the age to a close by formulating 'the poem of the end of the Age of the Poets'.[5] It is Celan who rips open (if that is the right term?) the poetic suture, re-opening a space (an old wound?) in which philosophy might re-establish 'compossibility' with its 'conditions': that is, make it once more possible for philosophy to philosophize and poetry poeticize within their respective 'magisteria.'[6]

Celan's work, Badiou declares, *is* the event 'in and of itself as well as through what it holds from the entire Age of the Poets at its ultimate edge.'[7] 'In the final analysis,' Badiou tells us, 'the pertinent unit for the thinking of art as an immanent and singular truth is neither the work nor the author, but rather the artistic configuration initiated by an evental rupture.'[8] The 'interruption' of art is not, as he presents it, an interruption of poetry *per se*, but of the particular form of poetry that was forced, for a time, to fulfil the philosophical remit of making sense of history. 'Celan's drama', he suggests, has been 'to have had to confront sense in the non-sense of the epoch, its disorientation, with nothing but the solitary resource of the poem.'[9] The 'artistic event' is described as that which is 'signalled by the advent of new forms', and this is not a matter of individual works by individual artists but 'the subject constituted in art by the artistic event [that consists] precisely of the system of works […] constituted by works or by groups of

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, Or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (Indianapolis, IN.: Hackett, 1997) pp. 23-4.
[5] Badiou (1999), p. 86.
[6] This is a slightly tongue-in-cheek reference to Stephen Jay Gould's theory that science and religion can cohabit as 'non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA).' See his *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams & the Diet of Worms* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), p. 271.
[7] Badiou (1999), p. 85.
[8] Badiou (2005), p. 12.
[9] Badiou (1999), p. 86.

works.'[10] This artistic event is always, he declares, 'the accession to form, or the formal promotion of a domain that had been considered extraneous to art.'[11] It would seem, accordingly, that the radical, cryptic, formal innovations that characterise Celan's work – particularly his late poetry, from 1963's *The No-one's Rose* (*Die Niemandsrose*) onwards – are credited, by Badiou, with having pushed the poem beyond its previously sutured condition, beyond poetry as a form of philosophy, beyond, even, poetry itself, and thus beyond that mutually debilitating suture.

Celan, then, is credited, by Badiou, with no less an achievement than liberating both poetry and philosophy from the restrictions each had come to place upon the other. Badiou concludes the essay 'The Philosophical Status of the Poem after Heidegger' with the following:

> The poem liberated from philosophical poeticizing, no doubt, will always have been both of these thoughts, or both of these gifts: the presence of the present in the traversing of realities, and the name of the event in the leap outside of calculable interests.[12]

In 'presencing' the present, therefore, Celan supposedly leaves the retrospective configuring of seized truths to the philosopher.[13] It also seems, despite Badiou's assertion that it is 'neither the work nor the author' that matters, that Celan's survivor status is of paramount importance in his counter-intuitive recruitment as an ally of philosophy. Celan's identity – his Jewishness – appears to lend his poems a moral heft that could not be borne by the work of a poet who had not lost so much: family, people, language, home. In Celan's case, furthermore, there *is* the additional factor of the sheer formal audacity that 'that which happened' demands of him.[14]

[10] Alain Badiou, with Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 69.
[11] Badiou, with Tarby (2013), p. 68.
[12] Badiou (2014), pp. 42-43.
[13] Jameson's remarks regarding poetry and schizophrenia might also be of interest in the light of this notion of poetry as 'presencing.' See n. 118, below.
[14] Badiou, repeatedly and explicitly, links such formal innovation with 'the artistic event', making clear that it is this *formal* aspect of Celan's oeuvre that is crucial. (Badiou, with Tarby (2013), pp. 68-69.)

Celan the artist characteristically refuses to do anything other than rise to this challenge (ultimately, it might be said, at the cost of his mental health and, ultimately, his life), but that he does so in the form of presencing the present and thereby opening up a future, rather than seeking to make sense of the past, seems to be the aspect of his work that confirms his status as the poet to end the age of the poets. As Badiou has put it more recently, in responding to revolutionary movements in Ukraine and Egypt, 'every true present is a twist from the past to the future.'[15] 'Yes,' he states on Celan's behalf, 'the poem demands to be relieved of the poem'; that is, 'the poem-thought arrived at the breaking of its support, of its song, demands to be reopened onto the pure dimension of its meaning or sense [which] can be said as follows: the age of the poets is closed.'[16]

Perhaps the most plausible way to interpret Badiou's claims is to read him as saying that Celan's late poetry, with its relentless 'poetic disobjectification,'[17] becomes the primary means by which poetry and philosophy might be uncoupled. A poetry such as Celan's can achieve this in spite of this poetic disobjectification being the very means by which the two were previously sutured, apparently, as the result of a poetic 'destitution of the category of the subject' along with that of the object whereby, for 'philosophies sutured to the poem', thought seemed able to function without either category. It might be that Badiou believes Celan's figuratively elusive language to have somehow re-inverted the linguistic inversion instigated by the early Wittgenstein, so that the poem now becomes – instead of a vehicle for thought in the space left by the abdication of philosophy – a vehicle for a pure non-thought, or non-knowing. Presenting himself in the pseudo-Nietzschean guise of one who asks questions, Badiou places this 'problem of the *subject without object*' at the very centre of his philosophical 'renaissance'

[15] 'The immanence of truths (2)', March 12th 2014, *Seminar of Alain Badiou (2013-2014)* <http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/13-14.htm> [Accessed 29th October 2019].
[16] Badiou (2014), p. 12.
[17] Badiou (1999), p. 91.

project; a reversal of the 'disobjectification, disjoining truth from knowledge, [which] founded the Age of the Poets'.[18]

Badiou has claimed that it is only 'the generic procedure'– poetry, that is – which is able to 'subsume[…] the disobjectification of truth and of the subject, making the subject appear as a simple finite fragment of a post-evental truth without object.'[19] Badiou claims that it is 'only on the route of the objectless subject that we can simultaneously re-open the "Cartesian meditation" and remain faithful to the assets of the Age of Poets'. This, he adds, is 'a specifically philosophic fidelity [and] thus a desutured one.' Celan, as we have seen, is already the pivotal figure in this procedure:

> It is […] to such a movement of thought, I am convinced of it, that Paul Celan's poetry convened us, and particularly the mysterious injunction, combining the idea that the approach to being is not the disclosed and royal route of objectivity, and that of the subtractive prevalence of marks, or the inscription, on the misleading expanse of sensible offering: 'A sense also looms / along the narrowest trail / fractured by / the most mortal of our / erected markings'.[20]

In other words, Badiou believes that Celan's poetry invites us to participate in a uniquely daring subjectivity requiring the engagement of a radically subtractive and fragmented sensibility; it

[18] Badiou (1999), p. 91-93. This chapter (pp. 89-96) has the title 'Questions'. I have previously made clear that I share with Nietzsche the belief that philosophers, beginning with Socrates, only engage in the pantomime of asking questions when they believe they already have the answers, so that the questions are never really questions, but opportunities to present pre-conceived ideas. Other than Socrates, Descartes' pretence of 'doubt' in his *Meditations* might well be the most egregious/audacious example of this pseudo-literary tendency.

[19] Badiou (1999), p. 93.

[20] Badiou (1999), pp. 93-4. The lines quoted here (initially, in French translation, in 1989's *Manifeste pour la Philosophie*) are from a poem published in Celan's posthumous collection *Zeitgehöft* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976), but it is unclear, in the absence of any citation, whose English translation is used in the *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Badiou returns to the poem, some three years after *his* first use of it, in the essay 'L'Âge des poètes', published in 1992's *La politique des poètes: pourquoi des poètes en temps de détresse?* ed. Jacques Rancière (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992), pp. 21-38. Translating this essay into English, in 2014, as 'The Age of the Poets', Apter and Bosteels use Pierre Joris's translation of the poem ((Badiou (2014), p. 12; see also Paul Celan, *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014), p. 443)).

requires an entirely human commitment to *un*certain outcomes, with no objective certainties upon which to take a stand, and thus no salvific guarantees. This is, quite properly, a quasi-Kierkegaardian leap *to* faith, since there is nothing *discernible* to which these subjects might pledge themselves (other than Cantorian transfinite multiples, perhaps). Thus does Badiou mobilises Celan as a principle weapon in the quest to desuture philosophy from its poetic condition, and he is believed to be equal to the task by his having absolved the poem of any responsibility for making sense of events that have fundamentally exhausted sense.

Of course, a range of 'antiphilosophers,' not least among them Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida, have used Celan's poetry to announce that philosophy *has* finally surrendered its power to poetic condition but Badiou, unsurprisingly, demurs:

> The sense I grant to [Celan's] poems (but already, in a certain way, to those of Pessoa and Mandelstam) is exactly the inverse. In them I read, as poetically stated, the avowal that poetry no longer suffices to itself; that *it* requests to be relieved of the burden of the suture; that it hopes for a philosophy relieved of the crushing authority of the poem. Lacoue-Labarthe had the diverted intuition of this request when he deciphered with Celan an 'interruption of art'. The interruption in my view is not of poetry, but of the poetry *philosophy has handed itself over to*.[21]

Philosophy 'sutured to its poetic condition' and the 'poetry philosophy has handed itself over to' are synonyms, or codenames, for two antiphilosophical trajectories seemingly converging on one another from different directions: philosophy-as-poetry and poetry-as-philosophy. The former is, in effect, Wittgenstein's philosophy written 'as if one were writing poetry', while the latter stands for the poetry of the age of the poets as these poets are forced into the role of stand-

[21] Badiou (1999), p. 86-7.

ins for a neutered philosophy. Where Badiou is fundamentally at odds with Lacoue-Labarthe, Derrida, and Gadamer is in believing that Celan's work facilitates the re-emergence of a newly reinvigorated, Platonic, philosophical objectivity purged of poetic ambiguities. Poetry itself, apparently, even craves a return to the subservient position of handmaiden.

Celan's work, therefore, appears to 'interrupt' art itself and is thus anti-art every bit as much as it is anti-philosophy. In my view, Celan certainly renounces the cauterized conclusiveness of the concept in favour of the ambisemic, elliptical, endlessly reverberating implicities of a particular kind of metaphor that carries across without arriving. I would also argue, however, that the real significance of Celan's work seems much better served by Lacoue-Labarthe's positioning of the Celanian poem as 'the interruption of the 'poetic',' in the Kristevan sense of 'becoming abysmal,' perhaps. As Lacoue-Labarthe puts it,

> All 'real' poems, all that are effectively poems, seem to aim at nothing other than being the place where the 'poetic' collapses and becomes abysmal. The task of poetry seems to be tirelessly undoing the 'poetic' […]. In the highly rigorous sense that the term has in Heidegger, poetry would thus be the 'deconstruction' of the poetic […].[22]

For Lacoue-Labarthe, then, restricting what is meant by 'the poetic', as Badiou attempts to do, to those poems that philosophy has 'handed itself over to', does not really come close to the radical vision that Celan embraces. 'Real' poems, Lacoue-Labarthe is suggesting, are those that strive to 'undo' the poetic altogether, to 'reduce the image to pure perception, that is, […] to empty or hollow out the image.' Lacoue-Labarthe recognises that this task is 'perhaps impossible', measured against 'the impossibility of a language without images' or in

[22] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999 [1986]), p. 68.

Benjamin's terms, '"pure language," that is, the language of names.'[23] Though Benjamin is an obvious reference point, there also seems to be something of the early Wittgenstein here: both in the stripping back of language to the bare bones of naming, in the revelation of epistemological problems as grammatical problems, and in the desire to destroy the intellectual ground upon which it is generally supposed we stand.

Celan facilitates the desuturing process, Badiou suggests, by showing that 'there is indeed a fixed point', a *punctum archimedis*, as it were.[24] For Badiou this point is established, Lecercle suggests, by 'carefully separat[ing] natural language, a hindrance to philosophy, from the language of ontology, which is the language of mathematics.'[25] It is a separation which supposedly provides a bulwark against the sophistries of a Wittgenstein or a Lyotard, or even a Cassin; as Badiou puts it:

> Not everything is caught in the slippage of language games or the immaterial variability of occurrences. Being and truth, even if now stripped of any grasp upon the Whole, have not vanished. One will find that they are precariously rooted precisely at the point where the Whole offers up its own nothingness.[26]

'A truth is unbound,' claims Badiou, 'and it is towards this unbound, toward this local point where the binding is undone, that the poem operates – in the direction of presence.' He adds that, for Celan, what is 'fixed', what 'remains and endures', in the poem, is the 'transport toward, or playing in, the unbound'; it is this poetic movement in the direction of

[23] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 68-9. Lacoue-Labarthe is here referring to Benjamin's 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,' found in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA. And London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 62-74.
[24] Badiou (2005), p. 33. Perhaps, like Kafka, Badiou should be forced to use the fixed point against himself and his ontology of the void? 'He has found the Archimedean point, but has used it against himself. Evidently it was only on this condition that he was allowed to find it.' Franz Kafka, *A Hunger Artist and Other Stories* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 201.
[25] Lecercle (2010), p. 104.
[26] Badiou (2005), p. 33.

'unboundedness' that Badiou calls 'the murmur of the indiscernible, and he gives us the closing line of the poem 'I have cut bamboo…' (1963):

> The cane that roots here, tomorrow
> will still be standing, wherever your
> soul plays you in un-
> boundedness.[27]

Yet when Celan tells us, in his 'Meridian' speech, that 'the poem would be the place where all tropes and metaphors want to be carried ad absurdum' it would seem a little perverse for Badiou to then suggest that what is found, or founded, in this perpetually extensive movement is something 'fixed.'[28] It is, however, by means of this movement, claims Badiou, by a willingness to go beyond the 'bounds' of knowledge, that the subject is founded, and Celan is thereby charged with reconciling the event with new truths through a commitment to whatever form these truths may take. Existing epistemological norms, all previously existing knowledge, founders at the subtractive point where truth splits from the plane of reality.

A murmur of the indiscernible

It is characteristic of the demands Badiou makes upon Celan that the truths that emerge are characterised in such seemingly paradoxical terms; that is, they are 'fixed yet unbounded points of reference' and they 'exist but are not discernible.' Philosophy, as ever, it seems, depends upon – I might go even further and say: is *parasitic* upon – the poetic, until it threatens to be rent asunder under the resulting aporetic strain. Could this be the real nature of the suture,

[27] Badiou (2005), p. 33. See also Celan (2001), p. 185.
[28] Celan (2011), 39b, p. 10.

perhaps? Badiou's rather crude 'lumping together' of Heidegger and Wittgenstein finds both accused of having effected an 'escape' into poetry/mysticism as nostrum for the Platonic affliction. These two (anti)philosophers are thereby held responsible both for the sutured state of philosophy and for the burden thus placed on the poets forced to fill the resulting onto(theo)logical vacuum. Heidegger and Wittgenstein stand accused, then, of an approach to language that asks it to function 'for itself as its own linguistic activity, its own proof of power.' Celan, too, is accused of taking language to the edge of sense, but it is as if by doing so as the *purest* of poets he can recover a space for an 'ontological articulation'. For Badiou, then, Celan can be cleared of being a member of that derided class 'modern sophists'.[29] Furthermore, as 'the last poet of an epoch of the poem whose distant prophet is Hölderlin […] and which begins with Mallarmé and Rimbaud', neither is he, for Badiou, so much a poet *of* the age of the poets as the poet who brings that age to a close.[30]

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that a Heideggerian conception of art's strangeness, its 'not-at-homeness' (*unheimlichkeit*) is an important aspect of Celan's specific response to Heidegger:

> For Heidegger, art and the work of art are equally *unheimlich*. Celan was no doubt fully aware of this – one respect (though certainly not the only one) in which [his work] is a response to Heidegger.

However, as we have previously suggested, Celan wants to go further than Heidegger, further even than art, by showing poetry to be 'the interruption of art,' or what Lacoue-Labarthe sees as a liberation and, 'very probably, a certain kind of "end of art."' At the same time, Celan recognises that, as Lacoue-Labarthe argues, 'if the task or destination of poetry is to liberate itself from art, this task or destination is nearly impossible. One is never done with art.'[31] That

[29] Badiou (2005), p. 33.
[30] Badiou (2005), p. 32.
[31] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 44-45.

Celan's later poetry might be claimed as so many kinds of 'ending' or 'completion' seems curious, in fact, when its primary concern seems to be the possibility of continuing – as a poet, as a thinker, and, far more fundamentally, as a human being. This must be what Celan has in mind when he says that the poem 'calls and brings itself […] ceaselessly back from its already-no-longer into its always-still.'[32]

Badiou's ontological claims on Celan, however, do not seem to bear much scrutiny, and his 'faithful subjects' who are set the task of reclaiming philosophy from the poem once again appear to be not so much straw men as balloon animals, breathed into existence by what Laruelle satirically identifies as 'that most traditional supplement, […] the philosopher as *deus ex machina*'.[33] As Laruelle further comments,

> [the ontology of the void] here meets with the same difficulty as deconstruction: [in each case the] inspiration is, despite everything, still religious, for reasons of hyper-philosophical transcendence, even if Badiou fiercely denies this.[34]

Celan's 'unnameable', however, is even more radical than Badiou's. It does not, that is, as a quintessentially anarchic movement, *allow* itself to be subsumed – planified – within an ontotheological hierarchy to which its entire existence will always be external. Instead, it more closely resembles a Wittgensteinian attitude to language, verging on the apophatic – 'Like you it has no name'; 'Praised be your name, no one' – not, however, as a nihilistic abdication, but rather as that same limit that has always forced philosophy to relinquish the only truly distinctive characteristic, as Aristotelian 'first philosophy,' to which it can lay claim.[35] In 'becoming' poetic, philosophy finds itself replacing 'the One' with, as Laruelle puts it, 'the

[32] Celan (2011), 32b, p. 8. Felstiner's translation gives the phrase as 'it ceaselessly calls and hauls itself from its Now-no-more into its Ever-yet.' Celan (2001), p. 409.
[33] Laruelle (2013), pp. 52-53.
[34] Laruelle (2013), p. 51.
[35] Paul Celan, *Poems* (London: Anvil Press, 1995), p. 189 (see also Badiou (2014), p. 42) and p. 179.

subject as determined by the (here ontologico-mathematical) Other that condemns the subject to an evental dispersion or to transitory identity'. In the final analysis, Badiou's subject is empty of content: a conceit, immaterial, a nothing that comes from nothing and goes nowhere. '[W]ho subtracts?' asks Laruelle, in this 'silent ontology that is mathematics'.[36] Badiou's answer is always 'the philosopher,' that product of a distinctively Platonic sleight-of-hand who is rendered no less magical a being by the lip service paid to mathematics.

If we were to seek a single word as emblem of the place, in Badiouian terms, where the incision must be made in order to desuture the philosophical from the poetic, 'inconsistency' might well be that word. It is 'without a doubt Celan', Badiou states, 'who offers the maxim to which the philosopher has nothing to add, the central maxim of all intervening thought in the conditions that are our own: "Lean yourself / On the inconsistencies."'[37] Badiou sees Celan as rejecting the tendency inherent in lyric poetry to '*cross* in an ordered fashion the strata of signification, to unfold, as story or initiation, an order that would appease the chaos and console the lamentation.' Badiou's own version of the maxim might be the phrase by which he characterises the modus operandi of the poets of the age of the poets: 'think detotalization, the separate, irreconcilable multiplicity.'[38] Toscano, in translating Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, makes use of Felstiner's much freer translation:

> Creeping up close
> to lost footholds:
> two fingers
> snap in the abyss, in

[36] Laruelle (2013), pp. 51-52.
[37] Badiou (2014), p. 15. Celan's original German is: 'An Die Haltlosigkeiten / sich schmeigen'. Badiou here uses Martine Broda's French translation: 'Sur les inconsistances / s'appuyer'. Apter and Bosteels seem to erroneously attribute what appears to be a very literal English translation of Broda's French to Felstiner, whose actual translation takes far greater liberties with Celan's original, and will be further discussed below.
[38] Badiou (2014), p. 14-15.

scribblebooks

a world rushes up, this depends

on you.

Toscano notes that 'where Felstiner's translation gives "rushes up" the French opts for *se met à bruire*, a 'rustling' that plays into Badiou's thematization of the "murmur of the indiscernible."'[39]

Badiou is thus able to find in Celan 'the mysterious letters of the poem […] the knot that binds together inconsistency, the indiscernible, the letter, and the will' all of which, Badiou argues, 'should interrupt all consistency and any foothold'.[40] We must here note two, for Badiou, significant aspects of Celan's work to which he draws our attention: firstly, he notes, we find in Celan's poems the Buberian pronoun '*du*' or 'thou', the 'subject as other […] on whom Celan bases his hope in language' and from whom he implores a response to the world that 'rushes/rustles up' on him or her.[41] Secondly, we find Badiou linking the reader who 'must will his or her own transliteration' directly to *his* concept of the 'faithful thought [that] makes a hole in whatever knowledge is concentrated in significations.'[42] In Celan's 'Bremen Prize Speech' (1958) he makes reference to an 'event, movement, a being underway' suggesting in this way that a poem 'can be a message in a bottle (*ein Flaschenpost*), sent out in the […] belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps.' Celan then answers his own question as to what it is toward which a poem is 'underway': 'Toward something

[39] Badiou (2005), translator's notes, p. 146, n. 12. Toscano notes here only that this is a 'new translation' by Felstiner. I can find no record of the publication of Felstiner's translation elsewhere, except that Jason Barker claims that Felstiner provided it specifically for his translation of Badiou's *Metapolitics* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 106, n. 7). Curiously, however, Barker then opts for a much closer re-translation of the crucial first two lines in the text itself, perhaps because Felstiner's version seems almost perversely tangential to the original.
[40] Badiou (2005), p. 34.
[41] Badiou (2014), p. 17. The reference is to Martin Buber's 1923 work, *I and Thou* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). Felstiner notes that Celan uses this word – '*du*' – 'some 1,300 times in over three decades of verse.' Felstiner (1995), p. xvi.
[42] Badiou (2005), p. 34 and (2014), p. 16.

standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable Thou, toward an addressable reality. Such realities, I think, are at stake in the poem'.[43]

It seems clear enough why Badiou might find the 'murmur of the indiscernible' in Celan's work, but are we not approaching something more radical than inconsistency here? Andrew Gibson suggests 'unsteadiness' or 'unfoundedness' as more exact translations of '*Haltlosigkeit*'; Pierre Joris prefers 'instabilities' and his preference for 'huddling' over 'leaning' as a translation of '*schmiegen*' seems to convey a sense of fearfulness absent from the Broda translation used by Badiou.[44] In the context of 'irreconcilable multiplicities', and even 'unfoundedness,' the choice of 'inconsistencies' that must be 'leaned on' seems oddly weak. We appear to be discussing the ground upon which one stands when making knowledge claims of the most fundamental kind. There is surely no 'inconsistency' in, for example, transliteration, any more than there can be mistakes involved in transgressing the boundaries of a language game. Consistency might be important in order to retain sense in transliteration, but then so might be cultural sensitivity. Celan himself seems to intend something stronger, and 'unfoundedness' would once again invoke the central paradox of Badiou's thought which always seems to place equal emphasis on the *a priori*, anamnetic, ontological Truths of Platonism and the indiscernible truths emerging from the event, the latter tending, I believe, to be disguised as the former. Celan seems to take us closer to a Wittgensteinian position regarding unfoundedness i.e. that philosophy *ought* only be written 'as if one were writing poetry', because the quest for solid ground upon which to stand is an unhelpful distraction, as opposed to simply embracing flux. Badiou is, characteristically, at great pains to avoid such implications, given that the interruption of the poem by the matheme, the 'exercise of deduction, which is

[43] Paul Celan, 'Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen', in *Selected Poems and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 396.
[44] Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 104, n. 54. Joris renders the opening lines as: 'To huddle against / the instabilities'. Celan (2014), p. 423.

fidelity to being as such, as named by the void' is, in his terms, the *sole* means by which 'the Greeks opened up the infinite possibility of an ontological text.'[45] Once again the question, metaphorically speaking, of what can be said to be 'opening' and what 'closing', seems rarely off the table, and Celan's closing of the age of poets seems crucial to the possibility of re-opening this space for ontological articulation.

An encounter

It is perhaps worth noting what seems to be one apparently dissonant note. Badiou puts great store in the effects of these particular 'poets of the age of the poets,' and Celan most of all, in the suturing and desuturing of philosophy. He also declares a desire to avoid the 'fetishization of the creator [as something] totally sterile [that] serves as a substitute for an in-depth comprehension of what is taking place.' But the figures of Celan the creator, the writer with a distinct biography, and Heidegger the philosopher, with an equally distinct biography, seem to loom rather large in Badiou's rhetoric. Too much becomes incomprehensible about 'the process' if one knows nothing about the lives of these central figures, and this includes Badiou himself. To return to Badiou's analogy of the crime scene, what might we learn regarding what has taken place there if, rather than simply focussing on the mechanics of the act, we include psychological profiling in our investigation? Badiou cites the 'contemporary idea' that 'there is a sort of anonymity in the work': 'There is never anything to be gleaned from the creator', he declares, emphatically.[46] Does he weaken his own argument, however, by over-stating his claim in a way that exposes his own 'fetishization' of Celan? He insists that

> The proper name intervenes […] as a substitute: it testifies to the fact that one doesn't

[45] Badiou (2013b), p. 132.
[46] Badiou, with Tarby (2013), p. 72.

> exactly know what can be said about the subject. For the subject is the process of the works themselves. This is particularly clear in art and constitutes a great part of its interest.[47]

However, what is of 'interest' in Celan's work – for Badiou as much, if not more than, anyone else – is that *Celan* wrote them; Badiou is undeniably concerned with *why* Celan writes what he writes in the way that he does, and what *he* intends. Celan himself seems to implicitly endorse the Nietzschean notion that what appears in metaphysical language is always, in reality, 'a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir [so] that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown.'[48] Writing in 1958, on the subject of post-war poetry, Celan claims that it 'does not transfigure, does not "poetize" […] it is never language itself, mere language at work, but always an I speaking from a particular angle of inclination, its own existence [and] reality must be sought and won.'[49]

It is certainly dangerous to place too much emphasis on intention, or 'inclination,' but, as Henry Staten suggests, the danger of over-asserting in combatting what he calls 'the ideal adequation or precise correspondence without residue of noesis and logos' can itself be damaging.[50] Staten makes a crucial distinction in outlining what Derrida – one of those most closely associated with this 'vanishing creator' idea – actually intends (and the irony in this should not be lost):

> Derrida does not deny intention or the possibility of communicating an intended meaning; what he denies is the possibility of *saturation* of language by intention, the

[47] Badiou, with Tarby (2013), p. 73.
[48] Nietzsche (2002), p. 8.
[49] Paul Celan, from a 1958 entry in a Paris bookshop's almanac and quoted by Felstiner in Greer Cohn, ed. (1998), p. 204.
[50] Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 119.

> possibility that meaning can be absolutely *full* in the sense of the precise correspondence [between intention and word].[51]

Badiou, though, again seems to overstate *his* case when he says: 'I am interested […] in the work, on the one hand, and in the listener or the spectator, on the other. I'm Mallarméan on this point: the creator is a vanishing cause.' This seems to suggest, in the conversation of which the text becomes part, that he is interested in 'the listener,' as an idea, but not in actually 'listening' to anyone or placing any value in how they understand their experience. We might be more than willing to concede Badiou's point that '[s]crutinizing the souls of the creator' will yield nothing of significance about the work, but there is surely a difference between presuming to peer into the depths of another's 'soul' and taking seriously what they say, how they say it, and what their experience means to them as they understand it.[52] Perhaps one might even attempt, in a Buberian engaging one's sympathies for the other, or in adopting the more empathetic form of Heideggerian phenomenology espoused by Edith Stein, to understand the range of conscious and unconscious meanings through which his or her sense of identity is woven, and even how it is interwoven with one's own.

It seems safe to presume that Badiou himself writes with the *intention* of conveying his meaning to the reader and with the confidence that he can do so; it is certainly hard to find any sense in which he is prepared to consider *himself* to be 'vanishing'. In that sense I would not be afraid to explore this philosopher's biography in search of (sometimes well-hidden or unexpressed) motivations, but I would not expect to exhaust my understanding of Badiou the person or the philosopher through a list of objective facts about his 'life,' or presume to have distilled him to his essence by such psychologizations. We must note, then, how often he uses the significant biographical detail of the poet's Jewishness and consequent relationship to 'that which

[51] Staten (1984), p. 119.
[52] Badiou, with Tarby (2013), p. 72.

happened' as a reference point in discussing the work. That the text exists in a hyper-dimensional context which takes us beyond both authorial intention and crude determinism does not preclude, for example, reading Celan's work as suffused with the emotional impact. The effect of *that* event on the psyche of *this* human individual is deeply significant, even if we should be wary of reducing the work as a whole by means of pseudo-psychoanalysis.

It does seem difficult, however, to overstate the symbolic weight of the much-analysed *actual* meeting, in July 1967, of Celan and Heidegger. Badiou, certainly, could never be accused of underplaying its 'quasi-mythical' status. It is a relationship intensified and magnified by Auschwitz, which Badiou refers to as a 'black consuming fire, a referent at once universal and grimly intimate'. He has also described Heidegger's silence on his Nazi past as not only 'most deeply offending the Jewish poet' but also a philosophical failure 'because it brought to its peak, and to the point of the intolerable, the reductive and nihilating effects of the suture'. Badiou presumably means that Heidegger's abdication of responsibility becomes philosophy's failure, and Celan is forced to fill the resultant void. It is undeniably, tantalisingly significant that the two did actually meet, and that the mystery of what transpired at this meeting has been further mythologised by the 'exceedingly enigmatic' poem, 'Todtnauberg,' which commemorates the encounter.[53]

Celan and Heidegger, it must be said, multiply 'encountered' one another through their respective works, and Werner Hamacher is clear as to which takes precedence:

> The real meeting between the poet and philosopher was not the empirical historical meeting between Celan and Heidegger but rather their encounter in the poem. The

[53] Badiou (2007), p. 87.

conversation between them happens in 'Todtnauberg,' not in Todtnauberg.[54]

Celan's poem repeats – 'with significant changes' – the lines he wrote in Heidegger's guest book, but the dialogue between that book, the philosopher's entire *oeuvre*, and the collection *Lichtzwang* (1970) in which the poem appears far surpasses what might or might not have been said in person. Celan's poem, Hamacher suggests, 'speaks' and also 'thinks' from 'another place'; and, moreover, it is, he asserts,

> Only from this other place—and from something other than a place— [that it can] become clear in what sense Celan's meeting with Heidegger in 'Todtnauberg' denotes the epochal, in what sense it denotes a drastic change in the language of philosophy and of poetry, a change in language *sans phrase*.[55]

Celan, then, could be said to instigate a 'linguistic turn' of a more profound kind than the one that sees philosophy's focus shift from ontology to etymology, and this is primarily because he has seen the devastation of which language is capable when deployed with genocidal intent. In short, words *in themselves* mean more for Celan as 'poet, survivor and Jew.' Celan does not merely 'complete' Heidegger, as Badiou claims, so much as *outstrip* him, taking language to a place which Heidegger – as a philosopher – can only theorise.[56]

In 'Todtnauberg' Celan writes of

> a hope, today

[54] Werner Hamacher, 'Wasen: On Celan's "Todtnauberg"', *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, 57 (2011), 20.
[55] Hamacher (2011), p. 20.
[56] Heidegger's own attempts to poetize his ideas call to mind Mallarmé's apocryphal response to Degas' claim that he has many ideas for poems: '*Mais, Degas, ce n'est point avec des idées que l'on fait des vers […] C'est avec des mots*.' ('But Degas, you can't make a poem with ideas. … You make it with words.') Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960). There is also Wittgenstein's remark (Wittgenstein (1984), p. 54e) that 'An observation in a poem is overstated if the intellectual points are nakedly exposed, not clothed from the heart.' Heidegger's poetry staggers under the weight of the ideas it tries, clumsily, to carry.

of a thinking man's

coming

word

in the heart,[57]

which is widely interpreted as a reference to the ultimately thwarted 'hope' of hearing, from Heidegger's own mouth, an unequivocal, public renunciation of Nazism and an expression of regret for any past affiliation.[58] But Hamacher wonders about the adequacy of reading the poem as a passive 'waiting' for a word from the philosopher. The poem, he suggests, becomes 'a conversation with any conceivable "Heidegger"' and, as such, 'it speaks with them and speaks for another, coming, but not-yet-come language.'[59] Hamacher goes on to say, provocatively, that the poem

> thinks in its poetic unfolding, thinking the 'thinker' forward in thought itself. Thus it inverts not only the generational relationship between Heidegger and Celan but also the prevailing rational and idealistic hierarchy of philosophy and poetry, and affirms the primacy of poetry over philosophy, which Heidegger's own writings on language and aesthetics stress again and again, from the 1930s on.[60]

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[57] Celan (1995), p. 301.

[58] Heidegger seems tainted not so much by his association with National Socialism as by a refusal to publicly *dis*sociate himself from past sins or seek atonement. The publication of Victor Farias's controversial *Heidegger et le Nazisme* (Paris: Editions Verdier, 1987), in French translation (from the original Spanish), seemed to consolidate this association. The remarks in the so-called 'black notebooks', published in 2014, on the insidious role of 'world Judaism' (*Weltjudentum*) in the development of Western modernity, confirmed his anti-Semitism for many, rendering it more explicit than any previously published works. Dennis J. Schmidt has suggested that Celan's 'need to find a way to answer to Heidegger's own political engagement with the Nazis' was due to 'his perceived kinship with Heidegger […] on a point which was essentially a direct and unambiguous criticism of the very kind of political engagement about which Heidegger remained stubbornly silent after the war.' (Dennis J. Schmidt, 'Black Milk and Blue: Celan and Heidegger on Pain and Language', in Fioretos ed. (1994), p. 119). Schmidt also suggests (p. 128, n. 29) that, the 'furor' (*sic*) over 'Farias's researches' notwithstanding, Celan was always one of those (along with Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas) dedicated to 'interrogating the possibilities of political and historical life after Heidegger' and to keeping open 'the possibility of political questioning.'

[59] Hamacher (2011), p. 29.

[60] Hamacher (2011), p. 29.

This 'inversion' seems to be entirely what Wittgenstein intends by the aphorism which I began, and also to be Badiou's reason for denouncing both Wittgenstein *and* Heidegger. Once again, however, Celan, as a poet of extraordinary ingenuity and sensitivity, is able to take this process one step further by enacting, or performing, said inversion, by poetizing rather than philosophizing. As Charles Bernstein writes, in Celan,

> things are never what they appear to be. The poems avert representation: *they are anti-representational*. Anti-representational poetry is marked by its struggle with representation, its questioning of reality, its refusal to be satisfied with description, its nausea in the face of the given, and its evisceration of the settled order of things. Words are neither cudgels nor comforters but probes of a reality we need to pierce so that we are not suffocated by it.[61]

This 'reality' is a place that is inaccessible to writing such as Heidegger's for the simple reason that it is always possible to challenge or refute his propositions. Even Heidegger's *poetry* is never quite 'poetic' because, as we have intimated, it is led by ideas rather than affections and perceptions, and thus cannot actually *perform* his insights on the nature of the poetic. 'Todtnauberg,' on the other hand, asserts nothing and therefore expects no rejoinder.

The debt Celan's poem owes Hölderlin becomes obvious once one reads Hölderlin's '*Friedensfeier*,' via Heidegger's 1936 lecture on that poem.[62] The key idea Celan takes from Hölderlin is the notion of the conversation as, in Hamacher's words, 'the minimum verbal occurrence articulated in the collective pronoun "we"'. Celan adds to this, however, the image of a speaker 'choking' on fragments of a common language. Hamacher writes,

> 'We' means: language is what we cough up, what – because 'we' are this language –

[61] Charles Bernstein, 'Celan's folds and veils', *Textual Practice*, 18:2 (2004), p. 201.
[62] Hamacher (2011), p. 29.

> coughs us up, what coughs up every speaking 'I' and, as the speaker in Celan's poem puts it, language 'that I / cough up / three times, / four times,' likewise many times since we have been a conversation, and not only once and for all, but again and again, because and as long as 'we,' as language, is a movement of self-expulsion.[63]

This 'choking' is to be found in the sounds of the opening lines of 'Todtnauberg', in what Hamacher calls 'the cumulative phonetic effect of uvular fricatives and occlusives in the poem's opening lines: in *Arnika, Augentrost, Trunk, Brunnen, Sternwürfel,* and *drauf,* glottal stops and choking sounds'.[64] As Hamacher observes, Celan, in a 1959 letter to Bachmann, generously suggests the possibility that Heidegger is 'choking on past transgressions', that he may not *now* be the man who delivered the infamous Rector's Address.[65] There is more here, however, than the philosopher's (lack of) remorse or the poet's complex relationship to his 'mother tongue'; there may be, in fact, something akin to a de-suturing after all, though not one that can re-establish philosophy's sovereignty, as Badiou hopes. There is, as Hamacher astutely recognises, something in 'Todtnauberg' that 'enacts a turning-back in the conversation between philosophy and poetry'. That is, what we might have here, is

> the speaking-each-other-apart of language and of that which it speaks [so that] poetry and philosophy must also split from each other and from themselves, and even from the way they, in the dissociation of their common ground and their own separate actions, articulate their (verbal) *being*.[66]

To elucidate more fully the implications of this 'dissociation' we need only return once more to those 'testamentary' words of Wittgenstein and suggest that we have seen philosophy, as far

[63] Hamacher (2011), p. 31.
[64] Hamacher (2011), p. 33.
[65] Hamacher (2011), p. 16.
[66] Hamacher (2011), p. 32.

back as Plato himself, *becoming* poetry whenever it confronts its own limits; to put this another way, we could say that if one takes language forward one will find oneself continually circling back *behind* philosophy, and to a particular *kind* of poetry that breaks language open by perpetually returning to its living source; to conversation.

What is entailed in this is as much a collapse of romanticism as it is a collapse of classical philosophy – that is to say, it dramatises the 'untenability of the transcendental forms of our representation itself', as Hamacher puts it, and this then becomes, in contrast to an artistic *con*figuration, 'the vertiginous vortex of disfiguration in which nothing can any longer mean what it says.'[67] This is, in effect, encapsulated in Celan's later work, as much antipoetry as antiphilosophy; note, in this regard, Celan's admission that 'the poem shows, unmistakably, a strong tendency to fall silent.'[68] Indeed, Badiou too acknowledges that the poets of the age of the poets have previously been 'forced to subtract the poem, in its role as thought, from its romantic definition.'[69] This is what Bernstein means when he writes of finding, in Celan, 'a struggle against the reification of lyric poetry, a radical calling into question even of questioning'.[70] So, rather than reading Celan's meaning, in 'Todtnauberg', as a trite 'hope in the heart' for repentance on the part of the compromised philosopher, both Hamacher and Joris – considerably more sensitive readers of Celan than Badiou, and better qualified to trace the complex etymologies of his *German* lexical choices – find a much deeper pessimism in the poem. Hamacher, in fact, finds only a suffocating conversation, 'an event much more dispersed from itself, cast off from each and every selfhood from the beginning, an event that cannot provide any 'ground' to bear 'our' *Dasein*.'[71] And Joris seems to agree, homing in on the

[67] Hamacher, 'The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry', in Fioretos, ed. (1994), p. 233. Again, this could almost stand as a definition of what I intend by the term 'ambisemic.'
[68] Celan (2011), 32a, p. 8. Felstiner gives a very similar translation in Celan (2001), p. 409.
[69] Badiou (2014), p. 104.
[70] Bernstein (2004), p. 201.
[71] Hamacher (2011), p. 31.

couplet (as he translates it) 'forest sward, unlevelled, / orchis and orchis, singly'.[72] Gadamer's determinedly hagiographical interpretation of this line has Heidegger and Celan walking together but alone across a 'forest glade' until, eventually, as Joris characterises it, 'the poet [is] sent back [to Paris] with succour in his heart, having "finally understood the great philosopher's words."'[73] While Badiou's reading of Celan is never quite so simplistic, his notion of Celan's work having the capacity to recompossibilise poetry and philosophy, to provide the completion that Heidegger cannot, seems ultimately every bit as banally disappointing as Gadamer's reading.[74]

In contrast, Joris follows the unusual word '*Waldwasen*' into the depths of its uncanniness: first into a 'network of underground roots' and then, within this 'unlevelled' ground, 'the ditches heaped with the gassed victims' of the extermination camps, before finally exploring an etymological relation between '*Wase*' and 'fascism'.[75] Hamacher too takes *Wasen* for quite a walk, finding in it 'a place of decomposition' so that every *Wesen*, every putatively single, essential being becomes 'thought of this *Wasen*, Being out of Other than itself and toward this Other, its place and its word out of and approaching an "un-where."' *Waldwasen* forms the core of Hamacher's exegesis of the poem – as it does Joris's – and in echoing Celan's 'Bremen Speech,' and in particular its description of poetry as 'underway', he finds in 'Todtnauberg' 'something older than old, exposed to what has not yet come, some newer than new, something

[72] Celan, in Joris (1988). <http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>
[73] Joris (1988). <http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>
[74] Lecercle, in examining Rancière's critique of Badiou's reading of poetry, summarises the issue thus: 'In fact, the term "compossibilise" is the site of a problem: why should the truths of art, politics, science and love need to be "grasped together", if not in order to produce a general concept of truth (a possibility which Badiou denies, even if his philosophy's main task is to construct it)? It seems to me we are back with the conception of philosophy defended by Third International Marxism under the name of dialectical materialism: one claims to respect the capacity of each science to produce its type of knowledge independently, and the task of philosophy is to produce the general laws (the laws of the dialectic) that apply to every science and compossibilise all sciences. By this means philosophy, which claims to be the servant of science, "miraculously" recovers its position of superiority, as the science of generalities.' Lecercle (2010), p. 137.
[75] Joris (1988). <http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>

that cannot be grasped in any word, something that still (or already) belongs to Being.'[76] Hamacher is certainly in agreement with Badiou that something 'epochal' is encapsulated in this poem, but the difference is that it amounts to so much more (and so much less) than the historic meeting it commemorates, suspending a Heideggerian 'topology of Being' via 'the form of compression that is [thought-as-]poetry'.[77]

> Just as *Waldwasen* is a word of the epoché of the being of Being, 'Todtnauberg' is, as a poem of the epoché of the 'being of poetry,' epochal in a much broader sense than the mere biographical.[78]

Joris, in turn, actually wonders whether he might have gone too far: 'Is the reader, or translator, or exegete, or hermeneut digging too far below the surface of the poem's word?' That ultimately he thinks not is because Celan's choosing of words is every bit as meticulous as any exegete's or hermeneut's analysis, taking account of so much more than the 'music' of the poem. There is, Joris suggests, a 'movement of a more general economy, a *mise-en-abîme*, where 'meaning', 'reference' etc. begin to leak, to 'bleed' into an unconstrainable chain.' This is the poetic function rendered not as a metonymic sequence but rather as a pervasively interwoven and re-woven structure: the transference of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination, in Roman Jakobson's terms.

There is, ultimately, an inevitable 'darkness' at work in this poem – as there is in Celan's *oeuvre* as a whole, increasingly so as he matures as a poet – that will not be easily lifted by any banal expression of regret from Heidegger or by these two men reaching some reconciliative moment of 'understanding' or 'clearing of the air.' As Joris writes,

[76] Hamacher (2011), p. 40.
[77] Hamacher (2011), p. 38.
[78] Hamacher (2011), p. 42.

> Celan does not simply reduce the questions that haunt him to bad or good communications between humans, to misunderstandings that a better 'understanding,' philosophical or other could sublate. For Celan, that ominous darkness pervades, is inherent in, the world. Beyond the contention with Heidegger's specific ideological aberrations, the poem points towards a radical pessimism that includes, but does not originate in Heidegger or Nazi ideology.[79]

This suggests it is quite absurd to read the poem, as Joris finds Gadamer doing, as a 'hymn to an overcoming of (ideological) differences' – there can no more be 'closure' here for Celan than there could be a closure of the age of the poets that renders philosophy once more possible, as if 'that which happened' had never happened, as if Ideas can once again be raised to the level of *anamnetically*-derived truths devoid of political bias. As Hamacher writes,

> Celan's poetry is not only 'on the way to language,' it is on the way to a language that *has* no language, toward what is in no sense a language. But it is also on the way to the muteness violently robbed of speech […] and to the silence of what must speak, even if it 'chokes' on the words, of this muteness and silence.[80]

Bodies and languages

Badiou describes Celan as 'tak[ing] the imperative of the weakness of sense all the way to the point of breakdown of song, because in the intimacy of song there still remains something like an excessive deposit of sense.'[81] It seems, then, that Celan is regarded as separating, or desuturing, the physical sensualism of the language of the poem from the crystalline clarity of

[79] Joris (1988). <http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>
[80] Hamacher (2011), p. 45.
[81] Badiou (2014), p. 11.

thought as it is presented in Platonic and Cartesian systems. But when Celan refers to 'the entire sphere of human expression' he seems to be embracing an immersion in physical immediacy that has, since Plato, been anathema to philosophy.[82] Terry Eagleton describes poetry as 'one of the seams between mind and body […] a place where meaning is bound up with such somatic aspects of language such as tone, pitch, pace, texture, volume and rhythm.'[83] It is easy to see how an 'excess' of this physicality, such as Badiou finds in romanticism, might find meaning itself drowned in a sensual soup; composed of too many conflicting significations to properly signify anything other than an unfocussed and self-indulgent ennui. Celan may also be acknowledging a 'saturation' of didacto-romanticism when he writes of human expression 'groan[ing] under and age-old load of false and distorted sincerity' and Badiou does seem to find, in Celan's poetry, an antidote to the self-indulgence of romanticism.[84] 'For Celan,' he suggests, 'the clear and unblinded thought supposes the breakage of the poem as aesthetic ethos, the immanent annulment of numerous or rhythmic thought'.[85]

Badiou presents, as evidence for his thesis regarding Celan's breaking of the poem, and the implications thereof, the opening poem from the posthumously published *Zeitgehöft* (1976):

> should someone who
> shattered the songs
> speak to the rod now,
> his and everyone's
> blinding

[82] Celan (2003), p. 6.
[83] Terry Eagleton, *Materialism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), npg.
[84] Celan (2003), p. 6.
[85] Badiou (2014), p. 11.

wouldn't happen.[86]

Celan supposedly claimed, in conversation with the Austrian poet Hugo Huppert, that 'I don't musicalize anymore', and he does offer his 'shattering of songs' as a combination of unfiltered directness and polyperspectival unclarity that seeks something akin to the authentic, raw confusion of the senses.[87] This all appears in stark contrast to the 'univocity of meaning' so consistently sought by Badiou and described by Lecercle as the 'first axiom' of Badiouian poetics, to wit: 'There is one and only one meaning in the text and it is the object of the reading to disclose it.'[88] Celan, again by contrast, tells Huppert of an 'undissembled ambiguity' that he claims could best be termed 'moments of realism'; his claim is that he '[tries] to reproduce cuttings from the spectral analysis of things, to show them in several aspects and permeations at once'.[89] In the absence of univocity, Badiou feels justified in finding a 'weakness of sense' in Celan, but the poet himself seems happy to claim this ambiguity as a strength.

A Badiouian reading of Celan, then, cannot, surely, succeed in re-establishing philosophical sovereignty over sense and the senses except by ignoring the distinctively heuristic, tacit, *synaesthetic* processes at work in Celan's poetic method.[90] In other words, as with Mallarmé, Badiou appears to require that Celan's living, breathing poems be beaten flat if they are to be fit for (his) purpose, but this requires a circumvention of the critical processes in Celan's work, a short-circuiting of the usual order of Kantian synthesising mechanisms that would attempt to

[86] Celan (2014), p. 403. This is Joris's translation. Apter and Bosteels in *The Age of the Poets…* (2014) seem to oscillate between his and those of Michael Hamburger, possibly because not all of Joris's translations were available to them as they went to press.
[87] Felstiner (1995), p. 232.
[88] Lecercle (2010), p. 97. Perhaps it is the syntax-shredding equivocity of Celan that, ultimately, effects the desuturing?
[89] Felstiner (1995), p. 232.
[90] My reference point here is, once again, the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but also that of Michael Polanyi, in particular his *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), and *The Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983). Perhaps *syn*aesthetics, if developed as a consistent multiperspectivity, might offer a more sympathetic reading of Celan than Badiouian *in*aesthetics?

translate multi-perspectival prismatics into univocal and unilinear decryptions. Badiou himself notes that '[t]he polemic of the poem is aimed against everything that would pretend to make sense of these effects'.[91] The 'poem-thought', he continues, resistant as it is to such apophenic impulses, 'demands of its subject that it proceed from turmoil as its base' so that what remains is 'an anonymous and disoriented speech.'[92] Badiou, however, seems only able to find anonymity in the precognitively personal, and only disorientation in the multiperspectival. What is suggested by Celan's work, on the other hand, I believe, is not a closure but an opening up and a release from the restrictions engendered by the philosophical method. Might this be the 'synthesis, in agency, of action and passion' that Marjorie Grene finds in Merleau-Ponty, the later Wittgenstein, and Michael Polanyi?[93] 'It is', Grene admits, 'a difficult synthesis in our philosophical situation, at the deadend of the Cartesian tradition in both its branches, or even at the close, as many insist, of philosophy itself.'[94] It is this for which Celan strives, however, and it would seem a little perverse to find a re-birth of philosophy by default here.

It is noticeable that Badiou's reading of Celan is much concerned with the possibility of 'making sense' of twentieth century cataclysms, or rather with Celan's refusal to draw sense from them, as the key to the break with philosophy Celan facilitates. It is equally noticeable that Badiou's concern with sense lacks a sense of the senses. I do not here refer to any form of empiricism, which would return us to the limiting mechanisms of logical positivism and verificationism (the 'scientific suture,' in Badiouian terms), but rather what has come to be known, in social theory, as 'tacit knowledge,' or perhaps even, in the cognitive sciences, 'embodied cognition'. In this context insights emerging from the unconscious can already be

[91] Badiou (2014), p. 9. Albeit Badiou is referring, in this instance, to Mandelstam and 'the conditions of a thought that embraces in all its effects the seism of 1917'.
[92] Badiou (2014), p. 10 and p. 11.
[93] Marjorie Grene, *Philosophy In and Out of Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 121-22.
[94] Grene (1976), pp. 121-22.

said to be 'known' and are not, therefore, simply waiting for someone to rationalize them.[95] This is why Wittgenstein's method, his style, in writing as he does, and in admitting that he could not write otherwise, is integral, rather than accidental: 'writing in the right style is setting the carriage straight on the rails', he suggests, and in his case this means writing as 'private conversations with myself[,] […][t]hings that I say to myself tête-à-tête.'[96] This may also be that which ceases to be poetry in being paraphrased – such as Badiou's prose renderings of Mallarméan sonnets. It is not simply that the poetry is lost, but that what poetry understands can only be understood poetically and in the fullness of the poetic act. This may be what Zwicky has in mind when she talks of 'lyric' understanding, a Gestalt grasp of form that is prior to other forms of understanding and is whole in an ecological and biospheric sense.

What we find in Badiou, however, are apparently wilful misreadings of Celan in order that the poet might be shown implicitly to support Badiou's own thesis. Given that Celan's poetry says so many things in so many ways, to stubbornly and repeatedly beat him into such a shape demonstrates, as clearly as one could possibly desire, the philosopher's tin ear. Shades of meaning and nuance have always been a problem for philosophy's engagement with art, given that the former has to be, by its very nature, ambiguity-averse. Another poem from *Zeitgehöft* (1976) seems to illustrate the issue well:

> There are two suns you hear,

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[95] Celan seems to be deliberately allowing unconscious associations to emerge, and one is reminded of Jung's warning on the subject of 'the association method': '[It is] possible to strike a concealed (and indeed unconscious) complex by means of a stimulus word; and conversely we may assume with great certainty that behind a reaction which shows a complex indicator there is a hidden complex, even though the test person strongly denies it. One must get rid of the idea that educated and intelligent test persons are able to see and admit their own complexes. Every human mind contains much that is unacknowledged and hence unconscious as such; and no one can boast that he stands completely above his complexes. Those who persist in maintaining it do not see the spectacles which they wear on their noses.'
Carl Jung, 'The Association Method (1910), first published in *American Journal of Psychology*, *31*, 219-269. <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Jung/Association/lecture1.htm>

[96] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 39e. and p. 77e.

Two,

Not one -

Yes and?[97]

Badiou is, of course, alive to the significance of positing 'two suns', in a Platonic context:

> This [restrictive paradigm of the object […] succeeded by the pure dispersion of existence] is also the meaning that I think we should give in Celan's poetics to the unstable multiplicity of that which is the most fixed, the most illuminating, which Plato even makes into the very metaphor of the One: the sun.

That Celan is exploring an 'unstable multiplicity' and the resultant implications for what is fixed in a Platonic system – albeit metaphorically – seems undeniable; but what is *not* clear is why the 'dispersal of the one' and the 'dissipation of the recourse to this one that might put some order in objectivity' should lead existence *itself* to be dispersed. Why would it not be the opposite – that existence is embodied, sensually, diurnally, but not necessarily subjectively?

Badiou argues that we are, through such poetry as Celan's, 'extract[ed …] from the pressure of sense', but there seems little justification for suggesting that this then renders us insensate or incorporeal.[98] Indeed, in this poem, there is a strong emphasis upon seeing and hearing; upon scepticism and appeals to empirical verification:

I hear, we were

a heavensgrowth,

that remains to be shown, from

[97] Badiou (2014), p. 17. Joris translates the final '*ja und?*' as 'so what?' (Joris (2014), p. 451). While his translations are often excellent I must confess that, in this instance, I prefer the more literal translation, which seems to offer a direct challenge to the reader rather than something more akin to a fatalistic shrug of the shoulders.
[98] Badiou (2014), p. 17.

above.

Moreover, the ‘place change’ that occurs is a *substantial* change which is both seen ‘by […] earthlight’ and either *heard* or *shown* ‘along / our roots’. The poem may well relieve us of the ‘pressure of sense’ – of making sense, that is – but it is far from insensible, and while it may play with the *idea* of two suns it is ‘*in* earthlight’ that ‘you go to yourself’.[99] Tellingly, Badiou also discovers, in the poem ‘Erratic’, from *Die Niemandsrose* (1963), a justification for describing the ‘unstable multiplicity’ in entirely disembodied and insubstantial terms. He writes of ‘the soul find[ing] its ether only if it is withdrawn from any objective correlate and is linked only to inconsistency.’ In Celan’s poem itself, however, as quoted by Badiou, we find the following:

> Near all
> Dispersed
> Suns, soul,
> You were, in the ether.[100]

Why might these prepositional expressions – ‘near all’, ‘you were’, and ‘in’ – contra Badiou, not indicate a body finding its feet *on* the earth, in tremulous uncertainty, and lungs finding themselves able to draw breath, to live? Celan, I would suggest, repeatedly uses ‘breathing’ to denote a *physical* rather than an *ethereal* transformation.

Badiou’s biggest blind spot (tone deafness might be better, but either should do) always seems to concern sensuality and physicality, *bodies* rather than *truths*, or a flesh and blood existence.

[99] Joris (2014), p. 451.
[100] Badiou (2014), p. 17. The German original is: ‘bie allen / versprengten / Sonnen, / Seele, / warst du, / im Äther.’ The translation reproduces language and syntax very precisely and must be assumed, in the absence of any citation other than the original German text, to be Apter and Bosteels’ own. It might be interesting to note that ‘Aether,’ a primordial personification of the rarefied air breathed by the gods that Badiou has the soul finding only in ‘inconsistency,’ is variously described as either the brother or the son of Chaos, a near synonym for ‘erratic.’

In yet another poem from *Zeitgehöft* (1976) for example, we find the following lines:

> There also comes a meaning
> down the narrower cut,
>
> it is breached
> by the deadliest of our
> standing marks.[101]

Here, in Celan's recognition of a now broken lyricism Badiou finds further confirmation of the 'poem-thought's' desire for a philosophy that will relieve it of its unwanted burden in order to be 'be reopened onto the pure dimension of its meaning or sense.' If, argues Badiou,

> the canticle's song is broken, if the poem is relieved of the poem, if we accept the narrowest cut of a single deadly mark (and I recognize in this 'narrow cut' the breaching, the subtraction of Mandelstam), a mark without aura or echo, then a *new* meaning arrives, at the height of the defection from all presence.[102]

Badiou reads 'mark' as 'without aura or echo' – he rather ignores its 'standing' erect (in German, *stehenden*) – and as symbolic confirmation of the arrival of a '*new* meaning', as subtraction, the closure of the age of the poets 'at the height of defection from all presence'.[103]

In truth, Celan's intention may, I believe, be both more crudely physical *and* more covertly mystical than Badiou allows. Note that Joris offers an alternative 'erotic reading' of the poem

[101] Celan, quoted in Badiou (2014), p. 12. This is Joris's translation (from *Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 142), also to be found in Paul Celan, *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014), p. 443. The latter has 'narrow*er*' rather than 'narrow*est*', suggesting that Joris slightly revised the earlier version from which Apter and Bosteels were working
[102] Badiou (2014), p. 12.
[103] Badiou (2014), p. 12.

by Bernhard Böschenstein, linked to 'the sexual symbolism of the Kabbalah,' in which the 'standing marks' are 'phallic' and represent 'the just one, the Zaddik' who is 'in the void [and through whom] flows the vital flux.'[104] Joris also notes that 'Böschenstein refers us to Gershom Scholem's *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*' in support of his interpretation. We know, from Felstiner, that Celan had immersed himself in a detailed reading of Scholem's work immediately upon its publication in late April 1967, finding in it much fascinating symbolism and many 'reassuring "meridians"', as Felstiner puts it.[105] Scholem's 'blending of erotic and spiritual rebirth' immediately found its way into his work, including particularly explicit reference to Zaddik (or Tsaddik) in a poem begun in May 1967:

> OUT OF ANGEL-MATTER, on the day
>
> of the ensouling, phallically
>
> united in the One
>
> – He, the Enlivening-Just, slept you toward me,
>
> Sister […][106]

Joris, in his notes on this poem, quotes Scholem's account of Tsaddik, the 'Enlivening-Just', as one part of a triad of 'creative forces […] operat[ing] together through the living force of God' and 'the force of procreation, represented through symbols of male sexuality'.[107]

Returning, then, to the 'standing marks' of the *Zeitgehöft* poem (begun in late 1969) we might detect in that image something not so much erotic as priapic, even pornographic. If the standing

[104] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. 623.
[105] John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 235-6.
[106] Celan (2014), pp. 193-94. Oddly, Felstiner's translation (Felstiner (1995), p. 236) is almost identical with only a few minor differences and the substitution of 'the Enlivening-Righteous' for 'the Enlivening-Just' for the German '*der Belebend-Gerecht*'.
[107] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel (Schocken, 1997), pp. 42-43. Quoted by Joris in Celan (2014), pp. 531-32.

mark is phallic, the narrow 'cut' or 'path' (*die engere Schneise*) that is 'breached'(*erbricht*) by it is surely yonic.[108] Furthermore, Joris suggests that this word *erbricht* can have two meanings, 'one describing an infraction, a breach, the other referring to an act of vomiting, of expelling like vomit'.[109] Could this not, therefore, if the context I have established seems plausible, refer to ejaculation? If so, the adjective 'deadliest' (*tödlichste*) must surely be intended satirically when applied to a penetrating phallus, presenting us with the priapic penis as thrusting sword or dagger.[110] The linking of ejaculating and vomiting, if that is what is intended, can only serve to heighten the absurdity as well as the 'abjection' inherent in the image.[111] Certainly, the idea that an impulse as indiscriminate as the masculine libido might be 'the force of procreation', or might represent a viable source (or symbol) of 'meaning,' probably *should* strike one as risible.

Perhaps Celan is really censuring himself for his earlier co-opting of Kabbalistic symbols, or at least finding black humour in the gulf between sexual imagery as mysticism, something profound, and his own 'base' sexual urges. This may be part of what Joel Golb calls 'a self-censuring thematic at play throughout Celan's oeuvre: the creative impulse as a reflection of the fall from grace' which, at its most extreme, he 'expresses as a moralistic condemnation of his own work as pornographic *Kunst*.'[112] Even taking the poem's imagery at face value we might still find something much more carnal, far more concupiscent, than the ethereal interpretation offered by Badiou. Celan's intentions need not even be entirely satirical.

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[108] This might also call to mind the tension between the '*at once* vicious and sacred' in Derrida's discussion, in *Dissemination*, of the image of the 'hymen' as Mallarmé employs it: 'Nothing is more vicious than this suspense,' Derrida suggests, 'this distance played at; nothing is more perverse than this rending penetration that leaves a virgin womb intact. But nothing is more marked by the sacred, like so many Mallarméan veils […].' Derrida (1981), p. 216.

[109] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. 623.

[110] Joris refers to Celan's 'biting sarcasm' which is, he believes, 'often overlooked by critics, who tend to approach the work all too piously.' Joris (2014), p. lix.

[111] '[T]he uncertainty that I call abjection […] illuminates the literary scription of the essential struggle that a writer (man or woman) has to engage in with what he calls demonic only to call attention to it as the inseparable obverse of his very being, of the other (sex) that torments and possesses him.' Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 208

[112] Joel Golb, 'Reading Celan: The Allegory of "Hohles Lebensgehöft" and "Engfürung"', in Aris Fioretos, ed. (1994), pp. 209-210. Golb is discussing the poem 'Engfürung' at this point, and finds there, among other things, 'a disturbing, implicit interweaving of the poetological and pornographic'.

Certainly, he can be understood as implying that there is often more truth – perhaps 'honesty' is a better word – in our sexual appetites than in our pretensions to spiritual transcendence. Could this be an aspect of the 'undissembled ambiguity' for which Celan strives – namely, the ambiguity of a human being with a body who cannot deny his own embodiment, nor the physical urges which more often than not motivate him, without also denying his own humanity? If so, it seems symptomatic that Badiou's reading of the poem founders on a two-dimensional interpretation of 'mark' that has the effect of both flattening and exsanguinating the image.

Language at the edge of the world

Badiou provides us with his justification for tarring Wittgenstein and Heidegger with the same brush:

> In order to clarify [what is meant by the] 'poetic' conviction, it is not excessive to compare Wittgenstein and Heidegger. For one as for the other, the poetic proposition installs language at the edge of the world and the sense of the world. And, above all, it functions for itself as its own linguistic activity, its own proof of power. […] To the ontological articulation, Wittgenstein like Heidegger opposes the prophetic schiz of poetical-thinking.[113]

It is not at all clear what the 'poetic proposition' might be, but this is nevertheless a recurring Badiouian trope: the 'dogma' that is the 'sovereignty of language', even though there is, he claims, 'more than one misunderstanding about the essence of language' to be found between

[113] Badiou (2011), p. 178.

'the "exact language" which the positivists dream of, and the Heideggerians' "poetic statement"'. He attacks, in familiar fashion, the iniquities of 'what Lyotard calls the "Great Linguistic Turn" of Western Philosophy', and in this regard Heidegger and Wittgenstein together stand accused of using language imprecisely, and with insufficient concern for that 'ontological articulation'.[114] They appear to stand accused of replacing mathematical rigour with the fug of mysticism and of a reliance, as Bosteels characterises Badiou's position, on 'a radical gesture that alone has the force of destituting, and occasionally overtaking, the philosophical category of truth.'[115] Bosteels cites 'Pascal's "wager," Kierkegaard's "leap of faith," Nietzsche's "breaking in two of history," or Lacan and Žižek's own notion of the "act"' in this regard, contrasting the latter with 'Badiou's treatment of the "event," with which it is sometimes conflated [in that] what matters in this "act" is not its impersonal truth so much as its – cathartic of therapeutic – effect on the subject.'[116] The charges here, then, are that Heidegger and Wittgenstein have both been complicit in peddling some kind of woolly mysticism, and/or philosophy as a form of therapy.

These would seem, on the face of it, as Bosteels seems to accept, peculiar and contradictory things to level at Heidegger who, more than any other twentieth century philosopher, sought to re-focus post-Nietzschean philosophy on the question of '*the meaning of Being*' through painstakingly forensic readings of Plato, and who viewed the articulation of this meaning as philosophy's '*fundamental task*.'[117] It may be true that a 'linguistic turn' of sorts did become central to that quest in his later work, which arguably took him closer to a Wittgensteinian

[114] Badiou (1999), p. 94. See also Richard Rorty, ed. *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, reprint edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1967]).
[115] Bosteels (2008), p. 167.
[116] Bosteels (2008), p. 168.
[117] '*Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task*.' Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (London and Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell, 1962), p. 31.

approach, in the broadest sense of being concerned with language and its use; however, the phrase 'prophetic schiz' carries the implication that both philosophers are actually delusional, and that even then they present their delusions as revelation rather than argue for them coherently.[118] It is difficult to see how such an accusation might be justified, however; Wittgenstein's late philosophy is unquestionably concerned with language, but it is difficult to see how it is either delusional or 'prophetic' even if it lacks Heidegger's rigorous scholarship and exegesis of classical texts, in which he has no interest.

Celan's links to Heidegger are well documented, and he delivered his influential 'Meridian' speech – generally read as a poetological 'conversation' with Heidegger – on October 22nd 1960. In it he describes poems as 'blueprints for being perhaps, a sending of oneself ahead toward oneself, in search of oneself … A kind of homecoming.'[119] 'Homecoming' is a central concern of Heidegger's. Tom Betteridge finds, in Badiou's 'Anabasis' essay, Heidegger as 'a very specific target encoded beneath its subtle resonances and allusions.[120] Betteridge also finds in Celan 'the movement of homecoming' that Heidegger draws from Hölderlin's poetry. 'It is', he suggests, 'the intensity with which Celan's poems respond to the dynamics of identification evinced in Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin which elevates them as conditions for Badiou's philosophy.'[121] Badiou's demand is for a subject that is *not* pre-identified – the undecidable, the prior-inexistent – and yet emerges, undetermined, from an evental encounter. As always, however, it is unclear what could be meant by fidelity without an *ex post facto* identification

[118] Hallward (2003), p. 20. Jameson finds an intriguing link between poetry and schizophrenia in Lacan. He argues that the schizophrenic experience of a perpetual present intensifies immediate experience of the world. This leads, he suggests, to a new kind of relationship to language and 'a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose "schizophrenic" structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone – what I will call "intensities" – which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime […]'. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) p. 7.
[119] Celan (2011), 46, p. 11.
[120] 'Alain Badiou's Anabasis: Re-reading Paul Celan against Heidegger', *Textual Practice*, 30:1 (2016), p. 46; Badiou (2007), pp. 81-97. See final section, 'An unprecedented return', below, for further discussion.
[121] Betteridge (2016), p. 64.

that seems to depend on *a priori* assumptions even if they are not *named* in advance.

There may also, however, be unexplored routes to establishing a link between Celan and Wittgenstein, in 'The Meridian' and elsewhere. In *Philosophical Investigations*, published (posthumously) seven years prior to Celan's speech, Wittgenstein says the following:

> When philosophers use a word – 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name' – and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? – What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.[122]

Celan's 'bringing words home' would, of course, have an added dimension in that it is specifically *German* words that he strives to bring home – albeit, at the same time, and this is equally true of Wittgenstein, to emphasise their strangeness, *unheimlichkeit*, not-at-homeness. It may be no more than coincidence that sees these two Hapsburgian, German-speaking Jews, after *the* cataclysmic event of the twentieth century, appearing to share such a fundamental concern with 'rescuing' language from its abusers. It may be coincidence that both seek to do so by re-socialising it, by examining the meanings it constructs through shared use, by refusing to allow it to 'bewitch their intelligence' in the manner of a propaganda machine. Nevertheless, they certainly do seem to share a suspicion of the nefarious uses to which language can be put.

James K. Lyon claims that Celan strives to return, through poetry, to a 'language connected to and responding to what is current or of immediate human concern.'[123] In a 1958 letter to Rudolf Hirsch Celan explains that the title of his collection *Speech-Grille* (*Sprachgitter*, 1959) 'voices both the difficulty of all speaking (to one another) and at the same time its structure.'[124] In his

[122] Wittgenstein (2009), #116.
[123] James K. Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951-1970* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 130.
[124] Quoted in Felstiner (1995), p. 107.

radio essay 'The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam', broadcast on 19th March 1960, we also find the following:

> The place of the poem is a human place, 'a place in the cosmos,' yes, but here, down here, in time. The poem – with all its horizons – remains a sublunar, terrestrial, creaturely phenomenon. It is the language of a singular being that has taken on form, it has objectivity and oppositeness, sub*stance* and presence. It stands into time.

Celan finds this humanness embedded in the very language itself, 'free of neologisms, word-concretions [and] word-destructions.'[125] The Heideggerian influence seems clear, but Wittgenstein, as previously discussed, is engaged in the related pursuit of returning words to lived experience, that 'diurnalization' process to which Cavell refers.'[126] There may be some small irony in finding Celan – inventor of so many neologisms, portmanteaux, and compound words – praising the unadorned plainness of Mandelstam's language, but he is clear that this '*phenomenal*' language may be earthbound. It is not its plainness, nor any conservatism in lexical choices, that he endorses, but rather

> language 'actualised,' voiceful and voiceless simultaneously, set free under the sign of an indeed radical individuation which however also remains mindful of the limits imposed on it by language and of the possibilities language has opened up.[127]

In positioning language as *the* boundary of experience Celan seems to evoke, consciously or unconsciously, the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus, who famously states that '[*t*]*he limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.'[128] However, Celan does not, any more than Wittgenstein, find these limits limiting *per se*; they simply *are* the limits of one's world in a

[125] Celan, 'The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam' in Celan (2011), p. 215.
[126] Cavell (2013), p. 23, see Introduction, n. 101, above.
[127] Celan, 'The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam' in Celan (2011), p. 215.
[128] Wittgenstein (2001), #5.6.

sense we could perhaps link to a form of Sartrean 'facticity'.

In the early prose work 'Edgar Jené and The Dream About the Dream' (1948) Celan offers us an enigmatic figure who describes himself as 'cut[ting] through the objects and objections of reality' so as to be able to go beyond 'the sea's mirrored surface' into 'the huge crystal of the inner world.' The speaker goes on to say, 'Now I am a person who likes simple words. […] I had believed I could shake the foundations if I called things by their proper names'.[129] Lyon has noted that Celan's language, here, seems surprisingly Heideggerian given that he had not yet read Heidegger, but the language seems to me to have an even more Wittgensteinian flavour.[130] It is possible the influence of both philosophers on Celan can, in fact, be traced to his relationship with Bachmann, with whom Celan had embarked upon a passionate relationship in Vienna in May 1948, three months prior to the publication of the Jené essay. Bachmann and Celan would undoubtedly have had far-reaching conversations on the subjects of language and poetry, with which both were already concerned to the point of obsession, and her ideas might easily have found their way into Celan's post-1948 work; indeed, it would seem surprising had they not. Bachmann's thinking is already well-developed at this point; her doctoral thesis, 'The Critical Reception of Martin Heidegger's Existentialist Philosophy', advances a Wittgensteinian critique of Heidegger. In particular, she comes to utilise Wittgensteinian thought as a means of navigating *around* both Heideggerianism and positivism. Barbara Agnese persuasively credits Bachmann with extraordinary insight in this regard. She suggests that, as early as her 1953 radio essay '*Sagbares und Unsagbares*' ('The Sayable and the Unsayable'), Bachmann had already moved from a positivistic interpretation of Wittgenstein, towards recognising 'his discovery that philosophical problems lay in language itself, that is to say,

[129] Paul Celan, 'Edgar Jené and The Dream About the Dream' in *Collected Prose* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), p. 4.
[130] Lyon (2006), p. 2.

within our use of language.' Agnese notes Bachmann's prescience here, this being 'one of (the later) Wittgenstein's most significant and relevant ideas concerning the purpose of philosophy' which would have been 'not at all self-evident' at this juncture.[131]

In the Edgar Jené piece Celan's speaker continues by suggesting that a return to 'absolute naïveté' may be necessary in order to uncover a 'primal vision purified of the slag of centuries of hoary lies about the world.'[132] Felstiner characterises the speaker as 'an "unappeasable discoverer," a blend of William Blake, Alice in Wonderland, and Wittgenstein'.[133] He is also, it seems, a purifier of language, someone who, again, sees how we choke on our words because of the violence done to and with them:

> I realised that man was not only languishing in the chains of external life, but was also gagged and unable to speak – and by speaking I mean the entire sphere of human expression – because his words (gestures, movements) groaned under and age-old load of false and distorted sincerity. What could be more dishonest than to claim that words had somehow, at bottom, remained the same! I could not help seeing that the ashes of burned-out meanings (and not only of those) had covered what had, since time immemorial, been striving for expression in man's innermost soul. How could something new and pure issue from this? It may be from the remotest regions of the spirit that words and figures will come, images and gestures, veiled and unveiled as in a dream.[134]

Echoes of a Wittgensteinian 'bewitchment' of language are surely unmistakable.[135] Celan could

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[131] Barbara Agnese, 'Bachmann on Wittgenstein' in Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Markus Zisselsberger, eds., *"If We Had the Word": Ingeborg Bachmann: Views and Reviews* (Riverside, CA.: Ariadne Press, 2004), p. 97.
[132] Celan (2003), p. 4.
[133] Felstiner (1995), p. 52. Interestingly, Felstiner make no mention of Heidegger.
[134] Celan (2003), p. 6.
[135] Wittgenstein (2009), #109. See Ch. 2, n. 41, above.

be said to be implicitly endorsing Wittgenstein's claim that we get into trouble when we fail to realise that the struggle we are engaged in is 'a struggle with language' and that its resolution requires 'a new form of expression'.[136] There may also be an echo of Benjamin's conviction that language is the medium in which we live, that 'all communication of the contents of the mind is language, communication in words being only a particular case of human language and of the justice, poetry, or whatever underlying it or founded on it', so that an immersion in what is, simultaneously, a synaesthetic indeterminacy and an immediacy of communication is the poem's métier.[137]

Celan's equal concern with the 'limits of language' can be seen throughout his oeuvre. Almost twenty years later, in the collection *Lichtzwang* (1970), we find the following untitled poem:

> Wan-voiced, ha-
> rassed from the deep:
> not a word, not a thing,
> and of both the single name,
>
> fall-true in you,
> flight true in you,
>
> sore gain
> of a world.[138]

Felstiner sees here not only an echo of Psalm 130 in this 'voice from the depths' ('Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord') but also a focus on the 'single name' as 'the Hebrew

[136] Wittgenstein (1984), p. 11e and p. 48e. See Introduction, n. 55, above.
[137] Benjamin (1996), p. 62.
[138] Joris (2014), p. 295 and p. 569. Written in 1967, but published posthumously in 1970. See also Felstiner (1995), p. 247.

davar meaning both "word" (sacred or secular) and "thing".'[139] This poem and the Edgar Jené piece also seem to share a certain apophatic, mystical sense of that 'single name' being something beyond representation, mimesis, or comparison. There is also the following extraordinary admission, apparently from a conversation that took place in March 1970, barely a month before the poet's death:

> At bottom my word formations are not inventions. They belong to language at its very oldest. My concern? To get free of words as mere designations. I'd like to hear again in words the names of things.[140]

Perhaps we can hear, in all of the above, an intensely Wittgensteinian (but, at the same time, much older Kabbalistic/Scholemic) mysticism, a desire for a mythemic language that predates philosophy's draining of all blood from words until they find themselves barely adequate stand-ins (*tenants-lieux*?) for things-in-themselves. In this regard, Celan is as anti-Platonic as Nietzsche, and is in search of a language that will do more than signify. He requires, instead, a language that will invoke and resonate, will bring *things* to life and life to a world objectified as a poor substitute for a pure subjectivity of thought, for a mind that, tautologically, thinks itself and exists because it thinks. The purification of language seems to demand, in this way, that the poem too, as mimesis, is broken.

With regards to the difficult question of whether Celan had actually read Wittgenstein, there appears to be no definitive record of his having done so until at least the late 1960s. Bertrand Badiou *et al*., editors of the collection of letters between Bachmann and Celan published as *Correspondence,* note that he did own a supplement to the first German edition of the combined *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations* which was published in 1960.

[139] Felstiner (1995), p. 247.
[140] Felstiner (1995), p. 324, n. 17.

That edition came about largely, as Badiou *et al.* also note, 'through [Bachmann's] initiative', and it is mentioned by her, in passing, in a letter to Celan dated 5th August 1959.[141] Celan's reply, sent on the 10th August, does not mention Wittgenstein at all, but the familiarity with which Bachmann makes reference to 'the German Wittgenstein edition' suggests that it is unlikely to be the first time she has mentioned Wittgenstein, the book, or her involvement in it. The editors of *Correspondence* also suggest, at the same time, that *Celan* 'only [became] aware of the Austrian philosopher […] in 1967 through Franz Wurm'.[142] This hardly seems credible, as I've already intimated, given Bachmann and Celan's lifelong intimacy – albeit much of it epistolary. We have already noted that Bachmann had certainly begun to divine an antidote to Heideggerianism in the enigmatic puzzles of the *Tractatus* before she met Celan. We also know that she stayed at Celan's Paris home in October 1950 on her way to give a reading at the London 'Anglo-Austrian Society' in February 1951 and that whilst in Britain she would attempt to meet Wittgenstein, only to be thwarted by the latter's ill-health.[143]

Although we can only speculate, therefore, it seems eminently possible that Bachmann might have discussed Wittgenstein with Celan in some detail on *at least one* of three particular occasions: firstly, during the first flush of their romantic relationship in 1948, when she was in the process of completing her doctoral thesis; secondly, during the aforementioned visit to Paris in 1950; and thirdly, in 1959, on the occasion the publication of that German edition of Wittgenstein's work, which would have been just prior to Celan delivering his 'Meridian' speech. If I am right, Celan would have had an at least second-hand acquaintance with Wittgensteinian ideas almost a decade before the editors of *Correspondence* allow. Lyon makes a great deal of what he considers to be an uncanny similarity between Celan's thought and that

[141] Bertrand Badiou, Hans Höller, Andrea Stoll, and Barbara Wiedemann, eds., *Correspondence: Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan* (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), p. 180.
[142] Bertrand Badiou *et al.*, eds. (2010), p. 178.
[143] Wittgenstein died on the 29th April 1951.

of Heidegger *prior to* the poet actually beginning to read the philosopher in 1951:

> What Bachmann could not realize, when discussing Heidegger with Celan, and what he himself could not know, is that at this stage in his development as a poet, and without having read him, he was already a nascent Heideggerian. […] Edgar Jené and The Dream About the Dream' illustrates some reasons for this claim.[144]

However, it would seem much less extraordinary to detect the influences of both Heidegger *and* Wittgenstein, and from the late 1940s onwards, if one allows that it might have actually been *Bachmann herself* who was the influence on Celan's thinking. Felstiner does recognise that Celan's 'friendship' with Bachmann 'mattered vitally' and that the dissertation she was writing on Heidegger made her 'sensitive to the limits of poetic language, especially after fascism.'[145] Bachmann's influence could, then, explain the mingling of Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian tropes in Celan's work during the two decades between his meeting her and, supposedly, his reading Wittgenstein for the first time. Celan's work clearly exists in perpetual dialogue with Heidegger's but it may well be a dialogue triangulated with Bachmann, and therefore with Wittgenstein, once removed, also.

It is also notable how much a concern with communicating, but a concomitant scepticism – or is it fear? – regarding the possibility of reaching a wider audience, or anyone at all, is shared by Wittgenstein, Celan, and Bachmann. Perloff quotes Bachmann as saying: 'I have nothing against poems but […] there are moments when, suddenly, one has everything against them'. At these times, Bachmann claims, we must be suspicious of 'every metaphor, every sound, every rule for putting words together' and that suspicion must be cultivated until – and this is another shared concern of all three writers – 'someday, maybe, something New can come into

[144] Lyon (2006), p. 3.
[145] Felstiner (1995), p. 53.

being'.[146] Celan seems to endorse this sentiment when he declares his poem 'Speech-Grille' to be his farewell to 'the game of hide-and-seek behind metaphors'.[147] He intends by this, Felstiner suggests, a replacement of art-as-mimesis with 'a fus[ion of][metaphor's] two halves, outer and inner reality [so that] words would not refer but would themselves act and suffer.'[148] The attitude of suspicion towards poetic metaphor evinced by both poets may seem counter-intuitive, but perhaps makes more sense when we read Wittgenstein suggesting that

> People are embedded in philosophical, that is to say, grammatical confusion. In order to liberate them, one needs to tear them away from the unbelievable multiplicity of connections in which they are trapped. […] the process of tearing away occurs only to those who live with an instinctive rebellion against language. It does not happen to those who, according to their entire instinct live in *the* herd which has taken this language to be its *actual* form of expression.[149]

Celan's notion of the *Flaschenpost* seems to present the poem as something sent forth in hope, perhaps, but without a great deal of optimism. Wittgenstein claims to offer his 'elucidatory' propositions in a similarly forlorn hope, writing that '[someone] who understands me [might] finally recognize[…] [my propositions] as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it).'[150] Perloff argues that the strangeness of the ladder's rungs is the 'strangeness of the language we actually use – Wittgenstein's own language and that of the poets and artists who

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[146] Ingeborg Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews* (Munich: R. Pier and Co., 1991), p. 111. Translated by Marjorie Perloff and quoted in her *Wittgenstein's ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Ch. 5.
[147] Felstiner (1995), p. 107.
[148] Felstiner (1995), p. 108. Incidentally, another key component of the quality I am terming 'ambisemic.'
[149] From the 'Philosophy' section of *The Big Typescript: TS 113* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Wittgenstein's reference to those who do not rebel as following a 'herd instinct' also carries an obvious echo of Nietzsche which it is hard to believe is not deliberate.
[150] Wittgenstein (2001), #6.54.

have climbed through, on, and over the rungs of his ladder'.[151] In short, we find in Celan, Wittgenstein, and Bachmann alike an inescapable need to make something new of language, yet all three also reaching the rather melancholy conclusion that they will inevitably be misunderstood by the vast majority of readers, and find themselves accused of being wilfully and perversely hermetic.

A circle

Encounters with poets tend to feel personal in a way that encounters with philosophers rarely are. I was born just before dawn on 23rd November 1965 on the day that Celan, celebrating his own forty-fifth birthday, completed the poem that begins 'All your seals broken open? Never'; a poem begun almost a month previously on a train journey between Montpellier and Avignon.[152] On the manuscript he added a motto, taken from Psalm 45, which can be best translated as 'ride for the Truth'. As Felstiner comments, a poet 'for whom certain dates and dates as such held more than natural significance, was marking his birthday with an ancient motto that renewed his task.'[153] In his essay 'Shibboleth For Paul Celan' (1984) Derrida, takes this significance of dates and formulates a central Celanian question: 'To what date do we ascribe ourselves, what dates do we appropriate, now, but also, in more ambiguous fashion, turned towards what dates to come do we write ourselves, do we transcribe ourselves?'[154] Crucially, Derrida's final question must be left open, and there is a strong implication in the final lines of the poem itself, in the image of

[151] Perloff (1999), 'Preface.'
[152] This journey was on October 26th according to Pierre Joris in Celan (2014), p. lviii and p. 511. See also Felstiner (1995), p. 228. The poem would eventually appear in Celan's 1967 collection *Fadensonnen* (*Threadsuns*).
[153] Felstiner (1995), p. 228.
[154] Derrida, in Fioretos, ed. (1994), p. 10.

[…] the electron-

idiot, who fabricates

dates for

menetekeling

apes[155]

that we might collect all the 'data' – a pun on 'date' possibly intended by Celan, according to Joris – or information, we wish but it is to no avail in the final analysis.[156] Given that Celan's use of 'menetekeling' is an allusion to the biblical Book of Daniel, we might well say that, could we read the writing on the wall, we would know only that we have already been judged and found wanting.[157] Future-oriented Celan's poetry may be, but there is a perpetual circling-back to one's origins, as well as that all-encompassing pessimism running through much of his work. These themes address me, the reader, as I encounter, meridian-like, a poem written at the time of my birth that also signals a new turning of the wheel for Celan.

It is not, therefore, a date *per se* that matters, for Celan, but 'the poetic experience of the date, that which a date, this one, ordains in our relation to it' and how that relation is bound up in 'a certain poetic seeking' as we attempt to orient ourselves, somewhat futilely, towards an uncertain future.[158] What followed for Celan, from that 1965 turning point and leading up to his suicide in 1970, would be the 'late' poems that makes up the five collections translated, anthologised, and annotated by Joris as *Breathturn into Timestead* (2014). These poems are the

[155] Felstiner (1995), p. 230. Felstiner later changes 'dates' to 'date fruit' (Celan, trans. by Felstiner (2001), p. 289), heightening the sense of something coming to fruition.
[156] Joris, in Celan (2014), pp. 511-12.
[157] Felstiner wisely chooses to transliterate the neologism '*menetkelnde*' as the present participle 'menetekeling'. Joris (Celan (2014), p. 137), rather crudely, and oddly, chooses to gloss the term as 'portentous'. This hardly seems to do the range of allusions here. In Dan 5: 24-27 Daniel has been invited to Belshazzar's feast and is able to read the writing on the wall (*Mene Tekel*, 'your days are numbered, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting') in order to foresee the fall of Babylon. There is a clear portent here, but a more thoroughgoing and contemporary pessimism is also at work and it suggests what in current parlance would be called a 'reboot'.
[158] Derrida, in Fioretos, ed. (1994), p. 8.

culmination of what Joris calls Celan's 'truly radical calling-into-question of art […] to which all of today's poetry has to return if it wants to question further'.[159] In a similar vein to Derrida Joris too stresses the need to be 'mindful of the dates of [Celan's] poems in the compositional procedure of the late work […] if we want to understand the cyclical nature of these books' which are, he argues, assembled in an increasingly biographical way and constructed as 'a series of cycles building up to individual volumes'.[160] This also happens to be the body of work, so Badiou believes, that most conclusively carries us beyond the age of the poets.

If I find myself bound up in this poem and this date with 'more than natural significance' it is because there is no detached, impersonal way of reading this poet. Celan demands a response from me, the reader, the unspecified 'Thou' (*Du*) he repeatedly addresses. He suggests, in his notes on Heidegger, that 'the Thou of the poem, even when it answers "literally," never gives an answer.'[161] I, however, *do* find myself answering Celan, in some sense, and this seems to connect with his characterisation of the poem as a 'desperate conversation', a reaching out to an unseen 'other' which demands that one reach back. Of equal importance, also, are the numerous 'cycle' metaphors – meridians, turnings, re-turnings, revolutions, and re-connections – that characterise the poet's work, particularly the post-1960 work. Significantly, he tells the Georg Büchner Prizegiving audience towards the end of the 'Meridian' speech, and describing the trajectory of the speech itself: 'I took this route, here too, in your presence. It was a circle.'[162] Joris admits that the 'concept of "dated" poems' has limited use when 'thinking theoretically through the historical or philosophical dimensions of Celan's polyverse' but, equally, he suggests, our knowledge of the dates on which these poems were composed allows us 'to understand the cyclical nature of these books.'[163] They are effectively collections of poems built

[159] Celan (2011), 19, p. 5.
[160] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. lx. and p. lxi.
[161] Lyon (2006), p. 106.
[162] Celan (2011), 42f, p. 11.
[163] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. lx.

as a chronological series and yet with a cyclical movement, a constant circling back, built into their overarching structure. To read these poems attentively, therefore, is to be caught up in something like a vortex that returns one again and again to oneself, but also to a state of self-forgetting. The process is one of perpetual self-renewal rather than 'closure.'

Principle among these cycles is the 'meridian' itself, a line that reconnects with itself by girding the entire globe. It is an image Celan admits to finding 'consoling' even though it represents '[an] impossible route, [a] route of the impossible'.[164] It is on this impossible path, however, that he finds

> what connects and leads, like the poem, to an encounter. I find something – like language – immaterial yet terrestrial, something circular that returns to itself across both poles while – cheerfully – even crossing the tropics (and tropes): I find … a *meridian.*[165]

We have seen that the term 'encounter' plays a central role in any reading of Celan's work, and my own encounter with his work can be found on these same paths which forge connections by repeatedly describing irresistible 'circles in language and experience'. These circular paths are those that return me to a portentous poem, written at the precise time of my own birth, just at the time when a different kind of cataclysm seems imminent. As Celan writes, in 'The Meridian' itself – a text described by Otto Pöggeler as a 'phenomenology of poetry':[166] 'I am back where I started from […] searching for the place of my origin', before he goes on to admit that he does so 'with a no doubt very imprecise because fidgety finger on the map – a child's map, I have to confess.'[167]

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[164] Celan (2011), 50a, p. 12.
[165] Celan (2011), 50c, p. 12.
[166] Pöggeler, from a June 18th, 1999 interview, and quoted in Lyon (2006), p. 105.
[167] Celan (2011), 49b-c, p. 12. This 'lostness' is also reflected in yet another crucial metaphor: 'anabasis,' the return journey 'upward and back' through unfamiliar territory, which I explore more fully below, in the final section.

Cartographical imprecision also, inevitably, involves the kind of circular trajectories; sometimes intersecting, sometimes concentric, but always returning to something pre-linguistic and corporeal that will trace further circular paths on the 'child's map', or on the globe girded by meridian lines. Following these circular, paratactical trajectories will also inevitably involve an 'interruption' of the Hegelian tendencies – 'the work of the Spirit that produces concepts, works, cultures, and the end of history', as Bruns calls it – that continue to play out in Badiou's readings of literature.[168] In part this simply means that Celan's concerns are more personal – and arguably less grandiose – than Badiou's. That is to say, Celan gives us '*the mystery of the encounter*' rather than the 'event,' and a self-transformation wrought by 'go[ing] with art into your innermost narrows'[169] rather than invoking a 'collective subjectivity'.[170]

Paradoxically, however, through this inward movement of Celan's there emerges an opening up towards the 'other' who is also oneself, a movement that seems simultaneously mystical, anarchic, and quintessentially poetic. It is in this way that Celan appears as one more prime mover in a cultural shift that is not merely sceptical regarding the value of philosophy, but rejects it outright, and seeks to undermine its hegemonic grip. Whereas Badiou has claimed that 'the poem is addressed to everyone' or even 'destined to everyone' Celan, crucially, seems to say that it is addressed to any *one* (the 'other', who is also oneself, who will be asked to seek himself of herself *through* the poem) and he thus seems implicitly sceptical of revolutionary

[168] Bruns (2006), p. 21. Bruns uses Blanchot's term *désœuvrement*, 'aimlessness,' to characterise the interruptive event with specific reference to Celan's use of language.
[169] Celan (2011), 34b, p. 9 and 42e, p. 11. We might describe what Celan alludes to here, after Michel Foucault, as 'ethopoietic transsubjectivation' or 'self writing' (see Michel Foucault, *The hermeneutics of the subject: lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005, p. 237; see also *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. P. Rabinow (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 209) which could, perhaps, provide a key to the narcissistic/Manichean personality disorder at the core of Badiou's theory of the subject. It seems ironic that Badiou accuses antiphilosophers of something like schizoid personality disorders while remaining blind to the manner in which the idealized faithful subject must 'split' from the obscure/reactionary subject (in what amounts to an ironically obscurantist gesture of its own) in order to preserve its supposed purity of purpose.
[170] Badiou (2005), p. 17.

ardour.[171] Celan, that is, clings to the rather modest hope of reaching *someone*; recognising, as Nietzsche did before him, that his work cannot be for everyone even if its effects can be felt everywhere.[172] It would hardly seem surprising, given Celan's personal history, not least the unimaginable trauma of his parents' murder, that his refusal to address the crowd rests upon a sensitivity to the ever-present potential of the collective to mutate into the unthinking brutality of the mob. Felstiner recounts Celan's response to the drawing of parallels, in 1968, between the Paris security police and the Waffen SS: 'It's not all that simple,' he is reported to have said, ever alert, Felstiner suggests, to 'the dangers of revolutionary fanaticism'.[173]

To put all this in another way, in Celan, Perloff suggests, 'irony is carried to its logical conclusion, which is to say he refuses to define, to assert, to take a stand. Under these circumstances,' Perloff continues, 'language constructions, as Wittgenstein took such pains to demonstrate in his later writings, become increasingly equivocal and the reader's role more demanding.'[174] For both Celan and Wittgenstein, therefore, it is the anonymous yet individual reader, the solitary being who might be prepared meet their demands, to whom they address themselves. And, of course, it is also, in a fundamental way, themselves they address, striving to improve themselves, to be 'better' in a deeply moral and unconventionally religious sense. We seem, in this regard, to be a long way from Badiou, for whom 'the Crowd is 'the condition for the presence of the present.' Badiou here echoes Mallarmé's dictum that 'a present does not exist [u]nless the Crowd declares itself'.[175] Elsewhere he speculates, specifically referencing the 'Arab Spring' of 2011, as to whether we may be at the stage where this 'declaration' might

[171] Badiou (2005), p. 31.
[172] Nietzsche recognises, in declaring *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 'a book for everyone and no one', that he is, of necessity, writing for a narrow readership. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he makes the characteristic claim: 'Books for the general public always smell foul: the stench of petty people clings to them.' Nietzsche (2002), p. 31.
[173] Felstiner (1995), p. 258.
[174] Marjorie Perloff, *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 143.
[175] Badiou (2005), p. 31.

be possible, namely a global revolutionary moment that he has optimistically called the 'reawakening of history'.[176] For Celan, however, the Crowd, and the idea that, as Badiou puts it, 'the poem is addressed to the egalitarian crowd', must surely be anathema.[177] How could he be other than horrified by the notion of a crowd, 'egalitarian' or otherwise? What, after all, was National Socialism if not an 'egalitarian crowd' formed from the warped rhetoric of a fraternal vision for the future? Positive transformation, for Celan, must be achieved individually and incrementally: 'not', as Perloff puts it, '[through] political revolution, the change of the social or political order, but a change of consciousness'.[178]

Marx, of course, reserves his most withering criticism for such Hegelian revolutions 'supposed to have taken place in the realm of pure thought'.[179] Celan's socialism, however, may well be similar to the version he attributes to Mandelstam, a socialism 'with an ethico-religious stamp […] via Herzen, Michailovski [and] Kropotkin': a form of religio-anarchism, in other words.[180] He also, in the same text, describes revolution as 'the dawn of the other, the uprising of those below, the exaltation of the creature – an upheaval of downright cosmic proportions [that] unhinges the world.' If there is any hope of anti-authoritarian transformation it must begin, he tells *Der Spiegel* in early 1968, 'with individuals', and he simply asks: 'may we be spared a Fourth [Reich]'.[181] Equally significant in this regard is Bachmann's disdain for grand political statements. As Perloff writes, Bachmann, 'with what is evidently a reference to [Wittgenstein's]

[176] 'The immanence of truths (2)', March 12th 2014, *Seminar of Alain Badiou (2013-2014)* <http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/13-14.htm> [Accessed 29th October 2019]. Badiou acknowledges that movements like the Arab Spring generally founder on a failure to reach a consensus, since the movement contains so many disparate agendas which happen to have coalesced for that 'moment'.
[177] Badiou (2005), p. 31.
[178] Perloff (2016), p. 5.
[179] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 2nd edn, ed. by C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p. 39.
[180] Celan, 'The Poetry of Osip Mandelstam', in Celan (2011), p. 217.
[181] Felstiner (1995), p. 257.

Philosophical Investigations #116[182] […] cautions that the writer must stay away from the Big Words of the public sphere—words like Democracy, Economy, Capitalism, or Socialism—the aim of writing being, so [she] insists, not to tell but to represent.'[183] Perloff quotes Bachmann as stating, in the same work: 'In Vienna we were always waging a fierce fight against German metaphysics'.[184] Even leaving Celan's Jewishness to one side, he and Bachmann, coming of age in the late 1930s and early 1940s, share an understandable suspicion of 'Big Words', of grand political gestures, of ideology, and of the overtly public and political, preferring not so much the private, as the (inter)personal movement that returns us to ourselves.

For the other

In terms of this (inter)personalism Celan is careful to make clear that the poem 'speaks' but that it does so 'only on its own, its very own behalf.'[185] The poem, Celan tells us, is engaged in a perpetual struggle from the brink of its extinction, and its continuation is accomplished only 'in the work of the poet who does not forget that he speaks under the angle of inclination of his Being, […] his creatureliness.' A poem, argues Celan, is 'one person's language-become-shape, and, according to its essence, presentness and presence.'[186] This means that to write a poem is to engage in a form of communion, a commitment to being, and to that other to whom the poem speaks, which could be anyone able to give it his or her 'attention', but also, at the same time, oneself, in the act of writing.[187] There is a self-exposure, a vulnerability, in this offering up of

[182] That is, the business of 'bring[ing] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.' See n. 122, above.
[183] Perloff, (1999), Chapter 5; see also Bachmann (1991), p. 91.
[184] Bachmann (1991), p. 136, quoted in Perloff (1999), Chapter 5, n. 5 (her translation).
[185] Celan (2011), 31a, p. 8.
[186] Celan (2011), 33c-d, p. 9.
[187] Celan, in this regard, cites 'Malbranche, via Walter Benjamin's essay on Kafka – "Attention is the natural prayer of the soul."' Celan (2011), 35d, p. 9.

poems in the manner of penitential prayer that leads Celan to describe the poem as 'lonely and *en route*.'[188] As Giorgio Agamben puts it: '[L]anguage stands before [Celan], so alone, so abandoned to itself that it can no longer in any way impose', adding that 'The emptiness of words here truly fills the heart.'[189] This is the mysterious encounter towards which the *Flaschenpost* is despatched; but the word Celan most often chooses for this process, which seems to suggest words sent out more in hope than expectation is, again, oddly, 'conversation' (*Gespräch*). That the poem is presented as a conversation rather than 'language' or 'speech' (*Sprache*) *per se* is important, and again emphasises that this is not 'the poem on the page', but the poem 'underway' towards the other.

Heidegger, in reading Hölderlin, recognises, as we have already noted,[190] something essential to being in language as conversation:

> We – human beings – are a conversation. Man's being is grounded in language; but this actually occurs only in *conversation*. Conversation, however, is not only a way in which language takes place, but rather language is essential only as conversation. […] Being able to talk and being able to hear are co-original. We are a conversation – and that means we are able to hear from one another. We are a conversation, that always also signifies that we are *one* conversation. […] Conversation and its unity support our existence.[191]

This is language as it humanises, as it attempts to communicate from that 'angle of creatureliness' to which Celan refers. As Celan asks, 'doesn't the poem […] already at its

[188] Celan (2011), 34a, p. 9.
[189] Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), p. 49. Referencing Celan's 1969 aphorism, dated March 26th, 1969. *L'Éphémère* (Paris), No. 14 (1970), p. 184, and written in French this time: '*la poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose.*'
[190] See n. 62, above.
[191] Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000), pp. 56-7.

inception stand in the encounter – *in the mystery of the encounter*?'[192] The fact that the word 'conversation' itself can be traced back through Old French and Old English to the Latin *conversationem*, meaning 'living with' or 'keeping company with' others (only developing its narrower association with 'talk' towards the end of the sixteenth century) might make even more explicit what both Heidegger and Celan seem to have in mind. Celan repeatedly insists on the dialogic nature of poetry; that is, an interactive rather than didactic, monologic character, much as Wittgenstein also writes in an imagined dialogue with someone/himself.

To put this another way, Celan is far less interested in primordial language, than in the capacity for poetic language to establish interpersonal connections. There is, in his work, a distinctly Buberian forging of 'routes of a voice to a perceiving you, creaturely routes'.[193] The following passage is quoted at length because it seems to offer something of a manifesto, and a particular manifesto of 'openings' that runs counter to Badiou's metaphorical emphasis on 'closure':

> The poem becomes – under what conditions! – the poem of someone who – always still – perceives, is turned towards phenomena, questioning and addressing these; it becomes conversation – often a desperate conversation. Only in the space of this conversation does the addressed constitute itself, as it gathers around the I addressing and naming it. But the addressed which through naming has, as it were, become a you, brings its otherness into this present. Even in this here and now of the poem – for the poem itself, we know, has always only this one, unique, momentary present – even in this immediacy and nearness it lets the most essential aspect of the other speak: its time. When we speak with things in this way we are also always confronted with the question of their where-from and where-to: a question that 'stays open,' 'does not come to an end,' that points

[192] Celan (2011), 34b, p. 9.
[193] Celan (2011), 46, p. 11. See also n. 40, above.

> toward the open, empty, free – we are far outside. The poem, I believe, searches for this place too.[194]

'The Meridian' is generally understood to be in dialogue with Heidegger, and we have previously noted the debt it owes to Buber, but it is surely also possible to again find echoes of Wittgenstein in this notion of language as something embedded in specific, shared forms of life, in a 'unique, momentary present' that establishes meaning in communication, and in use.

Celan and Wittgenstein share, with Buber, an interest in personal and moral transformation that is not so much a question of language as of communication: one might even go so far as to say they seek a form of communion. But all three also share an investment in silence; not for its own sake, rather for the sake of clarity and sympathetic communication, a focus on *listening*, perhaps. We have given enough space already to Badiou's repeated misappropriation of the final line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, but in 'The Meridian' there is also that ever-present inclination towards silence that Celan finds in the poem, and in a preliminary draft he writes that '[t]o fall silent [is] as clear ([and as] unmistakable) as … [the …s]ounding of language amid the information system'.[195] The echo of the *Tractatus* in this seems inescapable enough, but there is an even stronger similarity to the admonition found in Wittgenstein's *Zettel*: 'Do not forget that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information.'[196] As Buber writes, 'O accumulation of information! It, always It!'[197] If 'The Meridian' is in dialogue *with* Heidegger, which it certainly is, it is also a dialogue with 'the other'; one that comes *through* Buber, and perhaps Wittgenstein too.

'[P]oetry says existence: the human',[198] writes Lacoue-Labarthe. This 'human', he makes clear

[194] Celan (2011), 36a-d, pp. 9-10.
[195] Celan (2011), p. 61.
[196] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), #160, p. 28e.
[197] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.
[198] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 51.

is not 'man', it is rather '*das Menschliche*.' The distinction is crucial:

> The human, not man. And not the humanity of man. But the human as what allows there to be one man or another – *that* man there, singular – in the here and now, says Celan. The human, then, as the singular essence (a pure oxymoron, philosophically untenable), the singularity of man or of being-man.

Lacoue-Labarthe adds that 'it is not simply the subject in the metaphysical sense that is at issue.'[199] He thus provides us with the basis for what could perhaps be described as a communitarian critique of the Badiouian 'subject' who, rather than being any particular human, seems to reside in a metaphysically neutral space (the realm of the Forms, perhaps?) as a preconceived notion, awaiting the event towards which he or she will be called to respond (faithfully), as an autopoietic act. Paradoxically, this event that calls the subject into being could be an artist's own work, which would surely be, therefore, not so much a single event as a steady, cumulative, evolutionary process of working, learning, adapting, and producing (yet with a vanishing producer). This surely begs the question as to whether the artist becomes the faithful subject at the point at which he or she has accumulated enough faith in his or her own work. For instance, is 23rd November 1965 Celan's 'event'; the moment, that is, at which his body of work 'becomes' the event? Does the creator reappear – or perhaps vanish altogether, *into* the work – as the work that he or she has (not) produced invokes him or her as its subject?

In terms of the poem as, above all, a form of communication with an other (who is also, in a Buberian sense, oneself) these terms – meridian, *Flaschenpost*, conversation – rather than functioning as distinct concepts in a philosophical sense (they are often 'untenable' as such, as Lacoue-Labarthe points out) are inextricably interwoven, helical – or chiasmic – strands deep

[199] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 47.

in the DNA of Celan's work. Woven into these strands Hamacher sees a 'progression of phases' that is again recognisably Buberian, but is also clearly drawing on a Mallarméan hermeneutic of the 'perhaps.' Hamacher writes that

> the paths are not only toward a You; they are also toward oneself, toward another and toward an I, hence toward the other as an I or toward the I as another; they are paths, finally, in search of themselves. Indeed, there is no guarantee that they are paths; they move in the mode of "perhaps," more exactly, in the mode of suspending all modalities: "projects of existence *perhaps*," Celan says.[200]

The 'progression' to which Hamacher alludes is, therefore, I would suggest, a combination of sometimes desperate attempts to open lines of communication and to forge connections. There is absolutely *nothing* of the philosophical in this. Nothing, that is, of the philosopher's inexorable, vertiginous upward ascent into the clarity of sunlight followed by resolute return to the shadows, armed with the newly acquired clear-sightedness and moral certainty of an agent of truth. To put this yet another way, for Celan, as Levinas explains it,

> the poem is situated precisely at that pre-syntactic and […] pre-logical level, but a level also pre-disclosing: at the moment of pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing – which is, perhaps, a way of giving, right up to and including the hand that gives. A language of proximity for proximity's sake, older than that of 'the truth of being' – which it probably carries and sustains – the first of the languages, response preceding the question, responsibility for the neighbour, by its *for the other*, the whole marvel of giving.[201]

[200] Werner Hamacher, *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p .41.
[201] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Paul Celan: From Being to the Other' in *Proper Names* (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), p. 41.

This '*for the other*' that characterises the primordiality of language is suggestive of a moral commitment somehow inherent in language itself, as conversation; it may be what Bauman means by saying that '[m]orality is the absolute beginning.'[202] It is, I would suggest, precisely this hyper-sensitivity to the synaesthesis of language, conversation in that empathetic sense of 'living with' – as, in a sense, a form of communion – which would have prevented both Celan and Wittgenstein from ever embracing Maoism, as Badiou has done previously; any more than either, self-evidently, could have joined Heidegger in embracing National Socialism.

An unprecedented return

We know, by now, that Celan's key role in paving the way for philosophy's de-suturing from its poetic condition forms a cornerstone of Badiou's thesis. For Lacoue-Labarthe, however, Celan has played an equally important role in what he terms 'closing the circle of what the philosophical West has called […] "knowledge". That is, *technê*.'[203] The question, for Lacoue-Labarthe, concerns poetry's role in recovering 'what has been forgotten or rejected in the midst of this completion' so as to 'clear a path to a possible future.'[204] This – built on the 'multiperspectivity' Joris finds 'so pervasive throughout [Celan's] late work'[205] – may relate to what Zwicky calls 'a gestalt shift: the dawning of an aspect that is simultaneously a perception or reperception of a whole.'[206] Adorno is perhaps saying something very similar when he writes of a 'melancholy of form' that 'seeks to bring the particular to speech through the whole.'[207] Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that Celan, rather than opening a path for philosophy to re-establish

[202] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell,1993), p. 74.
[203] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 7.
[204] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 7.
[205] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. xlix.
[206] Zwicky (2014), #32, p. 21.
[207] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 144.

itself, shows us the way to a post-philosophical future – or perhaps a post-*critical* philosophy?[208] Both Badiou and Lacoue-Labarthe seek to claim Celan for what amount to diametrically opposite purposes. Badiou might even agree with Lacoue-Labarthe that Celan 'clears a path to a future,' but Badiou also seems to believe that Celan does so as something like the prophet of that 'fourth modality of the link between philosophy and art.' Lacoue-Labarthe's hope, which he admits to be 'fragile, tenuous, and meagre', and couched in rather more Heideggerian terms, seems at once more tentative and more far-reaching: more 'Celanian,' in fact. The 'clearing of a path' requires a thought that will 're-inaugurate history, reopen the possibility of a world, and pave the way for the improbable, unforeseeable advent of a god' who might ''save' us.' Ultimately, the most that Lacoue-Labarthe seems prepared to claim on poetry's behalf, in this regard, is that it is 'perhaps able to provide some signs.'[209]

Badiou's essay on Celan's poem 'Anabasis', which appears in 2005's *The Century*, is specifically dated, on its title page, '10 November 1999'.[210] Badiou actually examines two 'Anabasis' poems – one by Celan and the other by Saint-John Perse (1887-1975) – which, he says, will act as 'support[s] for a meditation on [the twentieth] century.'[211] The term itself is taken from a c. 370 BC poem by Xenophon and is defined, by Badiou, as 'a re-ascent towards the source, an arduous construction of novelty, an exiled experience of beginning.'[212] Xenophon's poem has as its subject the return journey undertaken by a 10,000 strong army of Greek mercenaries – whose expedition objectives have suddenly been rendered redundant and their army leaderless – from Northern Mesopotamia to the shores of the Black Sea, improvising

[208] This is Michael Polanyi's term, and he explains it thus: 'I had this turning point in mind. The critical movement, which seems to be nearing the end of its course today, was perhaps the most fruitful effort ever sustained by the human mind. The past four or five centuries, which have gradually destroyed or overshadowed the whole medieval cosmos, have enriched us mentally and morally to an extent unrivalled by any period of similar duration. But its incandescence had fed on the combustion of the Christian heritage in the oxygen of Greek rationalism, and when this fuel was exhausted the critical framework itself burnt away.' Polanyi (1962), pp. 279-80
[209] Lacoue-Labarthe (1999), p. 7.
[210] Badiou (2007), p. 81.
[211] Badiou (2007), p. 82. The Perse poem need not detain us too much here.
[212] Badiou (2007), p. 81.

tactical decisions *en route*. Celan's vision here, as with 'The Meridian', becomes one of returns home that are not merely retracings of steps but re-encounters with oneself during long and difficult journeys that come full circle and yet find everything changed: revolutions in a very personal sense, in fact. As a reader of Celan's poems one once again recognizes that one is bound to seek one's own 'origins' in language, in circular paths that – though they lead home – are rarely clear, or mapped out, and demand the most acute attentiveness.

In terms of 'Anabasis' itself, an 'unprecedented return' through uncharted territory surely seems an understandable preoccupation from the vantage point post-war Europe, but it also seems the very essence of the desire to come to terms with the confusions that arise through language and its inadequacies; something with which Wittgenstein, for one, had been struggling since at least 1913. In Celan's case the language is, as noted previously, specifically German, and, as Joris points out, this is 'both mother tongue, and thus firmly anchored in the realm of the dead, and a language the poet has to make up, to reinvent, to bring back to life.'[213] Felstiner suggests that, with his 'mother tongue' having become 'the murderers' tongue', Celan

> took on the task of writing poems that might themselves purge this same language by their strange newness. Mallarmé's recognition of Poe for purifying common speech, "*donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*," applies to Celan a century later with unpredictable force.[214]

Here, then, we have a circling back that leads us – 'meridian-like' – round 'behind' the abuse of the German language in order to reinvent it poetically. As Badiou puts it: 'the century foundered upon a darkness so real that it was forced to change the direction of [its] movement,

[213] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. lxx. Perloff questions the designation of German as Celan's 'mother tongue' on the basis that he 'was *not* German' (Perloff, (2016) pp. 129-130) but it seems perfectly legitimate given his *actual* mother's apparent insistence that 'correct literary German' always be spoken at home (Felstiner (1995), p. 6).
[214] Felstiner, in Greer Cohn, ed. (1998), p. 205.

as well as the words that would articulate it'.[215] It is in this context of finding a way home for language and of bringing it back to life that Wittgenstein's work is similarly grounded. It is, though, a return home that seems to find language – what Badiou calls the 'impassability of the inherited language' – an impediment.[216]

Crucial to the 'return' home in Celan's 'Anabasis' is

> […] the
>
> tent-
>
> word growing free:
>
> Together.[217]

which suggests, for Badiou, a Celanian '"axiom of fraternity" [that is] the conviction that any collective undertaking supposes the identification of an "I" as a "we"'.[218] Badiou's contention is that the possibility of fraternity, in the twentieth century, 'ran aground on the shores of competitive individualism'. It is surely just as valid, however, to say that it foundered on the rocks of a disastrous faith in collective idealism that instrumentalises individuals, such as that which confines them within the strictures of a faith in the 'faithful subject'.[219] Whatever the case, Badiou argues that '[t]he "we" enjoys an aleatory dependence on an anabasis that reascends – outside of any pre-existing path – towards this "together" that still harbours alterity'.[220] Badiou goes on, in *The Century*, to look back over the twentieth century and draws some typically quixotic, Badiouan conclusions about the shape it took, the events that shaped it, and Celan's specific relationship to them. He declares that,

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[215] Badiou (2007), p. 90.
[216] Badiou (2007), p. 89.
[217] Badiou (2007), p. 89; Celan (1995), p. 203.
[218] Badiou (2007), p. 90.
[219] Badiou (2007), p. 91.
[220] Badiou (2007), p. 96.

> As the poet-witness of those years, Celan closes the period – inaugurated by Trakl, Pessoa, and Mandelstam – in which poetry was put in charge of naming the century. After Celan there are certainly many more poems, but there are no more poems of the century. The century, thought as a meditation on itself, is poetically complete.[221]

The dating of the 'Anabasis' chapter positions it, definitively and chronologically, as Badiou's final word on and from that century.[222] Moreover, as I suggested in my introduction, it seems to provide a rather neat 'bookending' for that loose decade of work on poetry and literature that begins with the *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1989). The essay might even, in some senses, be considered a postscript to the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998), a final word on Celan and that 'closing' of age of the poets.

At the heart of this final word on twentieth century is Badiou's recognition of the 'supreme defiance' involved in Celan's 'forcing the German language, that of the murderers' to become a vehicle for a poetry 'capable of reckoning with what men (*sic*) underwent' at the hands of the Nazis.[223] Badiou, of course, is far from the only critic to see such significance in Celan's decision to continue writing in the language of the oppressors, and to fashion something new and remarkable from that language. Bernstein, for instance, has suggested that 'Celan's poems are not so much in German as *acts on* German. The directly expressive strata of his poems are

[221] Badiou (2007), p. 88.
[222] Badiou (2007), p. 98. The chapter that follows is dated '12th January 2000.'
[223] Badiou (2007), pp. 87-88. It is surely not so fanciful, in a related seam left unmined by Badiou, to see the autochthonic rhetoric inherent in Plato's *gennaion pseudos* (Plato (2007), 414a-414e) as a predecessor of the *Blut und Boden* nationalism of Richard Walther Darré. Indeed, the logic underpinning Socrates' '"magnificent myth that would in itself carry conviction to our whole community"' could as easily be attributed to Darré, or to Goebbels himself, as Plato. Socrates requires a '"convenient […] fairy story like those the poets tell and have persuaded people to believe about the sort of thing that often happened "once upon a time"'. Underpinning the story is the following claim: 'Earth herself, their mother, brought them up, when they were complete, into the light of day; so now they must think of the land in which they live as their mother and protect her if she is attacked, while their fellow-citizens they must regard as brothers born of the same mother earth.' Plato (2007), 414e. That Socratic maieutics is conceived, metaphorically, as a form of midwifery, might add yet another nuance to this complex myth of birth and belonging, and the fostering of deep-rooted fraternal bonds as political expedience.

not their destination but their material subject'.[224] Celan himself acknowledges that his poems 'had to pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech'.[225] Indeed, the 'darkness' upon which the century 'foundered' demands, according to Badiou, not just a 'change [in] the *direction* of the movement' but also a change in 'the resonance of the words that could articulate it.'[226] By describing Celan as 'poet-witness' as he does, Badiou seems to be explicitly linking Celan's 'closing' of the age of the poets with his survival of the Shoah, and the survivor's need to come to terms with 'that which happened.' Hallward has described Celan, perhaps somewhat reductively, as 'the poet who has leant form to what happened at Auschwitz, and who has registered the brutal evacuation of eloquence that this happening entails.'[227] Joris is likewise at pains to stress the centrality of the Shoah to Celan's work, but also the danger of reducing that work to 'holocaust poetry.' It is, Joris attests, 'core to [both] the life and work, even if Celan did his best to make sure that neither would be overdetermined by or become reducible to those events.'[228] Perloff is even more cautious regarding any potential 'overdetermination'. Referring to Lacoue-Labarthe's claim that what is *not said* in Celan's work always leads back to 'the unspeakable, which is, of course, Auschwitz' she wonders whether this 'signifier' can 'really encompass the complexity of a poetry like Celan's?' Her feeling, with which it is hard not to agree, is that to characterize Celan as a 'poet […] of the Shoah […] plays down *difference*' and does a disservice to the individuality of his voice.[229]

Hallward does, then, seems to be somewhat overstating what he takes to be Badiou's case, and Celan would surely have found repugnant the suggestion that any poetry, least of all his own, could 'lend form' to Auschwitz: if anything, his poetry is defined by the denial of any such

[224] Bernstein (2004), p. 199.
[225] Celan, 'Bremen Prize Speech' (2001), p. 395. Felstiner also notes that the German language thus 'passed through something that Heidegger never brought himself to mention.' Felstiner (1995), p. 116.
[226] Badiou (2007), pp. 89-90.
[227] Hallward (2003), p. 200.
[228] Joris, in Celan (2014), p. xxxi.
[229] Perloff (2016), p. 150.

possibility. In fact, as Adorno recognises, what Celan most craves is silence. In Celan's poetry, according to Adorno, 'the experiential content of the hermetic was inverted' in poetry that is 'permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation.' Adorno tells us that

> Celan's poems want to speak of the most extreme horror through silence. Their truth content itself becomes negative. They imitate a language beneath the helpless language of human beings, indeed beneath all organic language: It is that of the dead speaking of stones and stars. The last rudiments of the organic are liquidated; what Benjamin noted in Baudelaire, that his poetry is without aura, comes into its own in Celan's work.[230]

For Adorno it is the 'infinite discretion' of Celan's radicalism that 'compounds his force', and he explains the supposed hermeticism of Celan's work as 'the trajectory from horror to silence'. Celan's language, that is always on its way towards silence, towards the impossibility of making meaning, is the only language possible for these deaths 'deprived of all meaning.'[231] It is clear to see, therefore, why Celan's poetry, his *anti*poetry, could be exempted from Adorno's infamous prohibition of poetry after Auschwitz.[232]

What further complicates Badiou's account of 'the century,' and thus much of what he writes about Celan's impact on it, is that Badiou's 'century' is not a century at all, but what he somewhat perversely calls 'the short century', or 'the Soviet century', a roughly seventy-five year period beginning with the Great War (including, therefore, the Russian revolution of

[230] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 421.
[231] Adorno, p. 421.
[232] According to Felstiner, Adorno considered Celan 'the only authentic postwar writer to stand with Samuel Beckett'. Felstiner (1995), p. 107.

October 1917) and ending 'with the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War.'[233] Celan, so Badiou argues, 'can be legitimately considered as the poet who brings this [short] century to a close.'[234] He also claims that a 'second Restoration' has taken place in the final twenty years of the twentieth century; this 'Restoration,' he tells us, is – as if it were populated by the shadow-watchers in Plato's 'cave' – 'horrified by thought and lov[ing] only opinions; especially the dominant opinion'.[235] He again seems to see some kind of secular salvation in Celan while simultaneously mocking Heidegger for his own belief in 'a "saving return", or […] the thoughtful, poetic coming of a God.'[236] Commenting on philosophy's duty to 'make [truths] manifest' and to 'distinguish truths from opinion', he asks, contemptuously: 'Is there something besides opinion? In other words […] is there something besides our "democracies"?'[237] One might question why Badiou places the weight of history on the shoulders of Celan – a poet so few will have read, and fewer still will have understood – in this way. Why such a peripheral figure from the point of view of the popular consciousness and this ignoble democratisation of culture, rather than a genuinely public or political figure: Mikhail Gorbachev, perhaps? Are poets the 'secret legislators,' as Oppen says, even if no political community owes them its 'radical transformation', as Socrates mockingly puts it in Badiou's 'hypertranslation of the *Republic*?[238] It may be a tacit acknowledgment that public events or popular uprisings – the May '68 'event,' for example – are, as Badiou himself has admitted, inevitably compromised by a confusion of desired outcomes from the outset, rendering the event itself not so much 'undecidable' as indecisive, or confused. Badiou's faithful subjects, as befits their Platonic antecedence, seem to inhabit a privileged position in relation to actual historical human

[233] Badiou (2007), p. 1. If the Cold War ends with the meeting between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and US president George Bush on 3rd December 1989, that gives the seventy-five year period 1914–1989.
[234] Badiou (2007), p. 87.
[235] Badiou (2007), p. 26.
[236] Badiou (2007), p. 138.
[237] Badiou (2005), p. 15.
[238] See Ch. 1, n. 42.

communities in which events take place and are understood. They, the faithful ones, must wait to be formed by events, and can then recognize 'truths' and declare them to have emerged.

This privilege might be seen to render one of Badiou's central tenets antinomial, corroborated only according to terms defined by the philosopher himself. The faithful subject seems, that is, a paradoxical figure, marked by inexistence in relation to the pre-evental situation. Simon Critchley arguably captures the character of the process when he says that 'the subject is not something that one is, but rather something that one becomes.' This 'subject-in-becoming', Critchley suggests, 'shapes itself in relation to the demand apprehended in a situation' and we are 'simply the kind of animals claimed by circumstances to become a subject'. This may well give us, as he puts it, 'a grammar of moral insight' rather than 'a specific determination of the good'.[239] As a '*situated universality*', however, this 'ethics of *truths*'[240] seems to leave us – as Badiou himself cannot but confirm in his book on Saint Paul – in a position '"of which the only 'proof' is rightly that a subject declares it."'[241] This means, as Critchley acknowledges, that '[t]he event demands an act of faith that Paul rightly compares to folly.'[242] Badiou concedes that 'every fusion of the event and truth returns us to a 'Christly' vision of truth, because truth is then nothing but its own evental self-revelation.'[243] With that admission in mind, it is hard to see how truths can be derived from art *in*aesthetically except through a pre-disposition toward such truths, found and confirmed there by a form of confirmation-bias that might once have been called 'the eye of faith'.

Badiou may, then, find himself subject to a communitarian critique that finds his faithful subject an implausibly ideal figure rather than one formed by the recognisable morality of a specific

[239] Critchley (2008), p. 44.
[240] Critchley (2008), pp. 42-43.
[241] Badiou, quoted in Critchley (2008), p. 45.
[242] Critchley (2008), p. 45.
[243] Badiou (2005), p. 11.

social milieu; a social being, that is, that would seem a necessary condition for having *somewhere* from which to respond to an event. To put this another way: what is it that sets his or her moral compass? From what value system does he or she form a character from which to draw fidelity? By the same token, Badiou's emphasis on fidelity, especially given the indiscernibility of truths emerging from an event, seems to imply an unchallengeable authority and homogeneity of purpose not normally associated with human events and their interpretation, except where ontotheological *a priori* certainties are invoked. It is no coincidence that Badiou demands 'faith', and there are several ways in which he might find himself contradicting his own pivotal '(re)turn of philosophy itself' thesis, not least by a hard to avoid inference that works of imagination pre-conceive and shape rather than follow 'real' events, and that popular revolutionary movements are thus somewhat irrelevant compared to these subtler, less hyperbolic shifts in the 'unacknowledged world'. It is a characteristic of faith that it demands conviction, in the face of indiscernibility and undecidability, and it is equally characteristic of Celan's work that it immerses itself in a desperate uncertainty, in a rather forlorn hope far from the resolute, steadfast faith Badiou demands.

There seems, therefore, an inherent contradiction that emerges from Badiou's reading of Celan's 'Anabasis'. Badiou writes, for instance, that in the poem 'what must be brought about – in a tremulous uncertainty is the word "together", which is thus never a condition but only ever a hard-won result.'[244] It can be no surprise that Apter and Bosteels define anabasis as 'a trope signifying an errant path, an unedited return or *égarement*.'[245] Nor should it be a surprise that Andrew Gibson, in describing anabasis in Badiouian terms, should write that,

> what sets fidelity apart from knowledge is the fact that it is future-orientated and has no prior sense of its own direction. This is the case with […] anabasis in Xenophon, Saint-

[244] Badiou (2007), p. 90.
[245] Apter and Bosteels, in Badiou (2014), p. xviii.

> John Perse, and Celan (anabasis being a disciplined and inventive progress that is also hazardous and erratic). Fidelity does not confirm a given situation in its existence. It rather perceives the fractures in the situation, its singularities, its fundamental instability.[246]

As Badiou says in reference to Celan's poem, '[a]t the root of anabasis lies something like a principle of lostness.'[247] This 'principle' requires that one invent one's own destiny and does so in the form of what he calls '[a]n unprecedented return' via a route that did not previously exist.[248] It is a quintessential Badiouian balancing act: the twin demands upon the faithful subject being those of maintaining fidelity to a precedent truth while anticipating an uncertain future, never straying far from the edge of the void itself. Badiou's reading of Celan's 'Anabasis' seems relentlessly coloured by the failures of 'reactionary' and 'obscure' subjects to remain faithful to the 'event' of May '68, *the* moment, he seems to believe, when the twentieth century might have saved itself. Apter and Bosteels go so far as to suggest that anabasis itself 'becomes the name for a "small century" interrupted on the eve of May '68'.[249]

It is no surprise that Badiou repeats his claims regarding Celan's bringing things to a close, but this time it is this '"short century", the one preceding the Restoration of the last twenty years'.[250] Badiou professes a deep weariness regarding both the 'interminably reiterated motif of philosophy's radical impotence' in the face of Nazi atrocities and Adorno's infamous claim that poetry, too, is now impossible. A doctrine of the 'sovereignty of the individual' may form the basis of a late twentieth century 'restoration' that Badiou has identified, but the mid-century

[246] Gibson (2006), p. 100.
[247] Badiou (2007), p. 82. Hamacher seems to find a similar 'principle' underpinning 'Todtnauberg', paths there leading 'not into that-which-is-lost, that which once was, available, seen, or spoken of, but rather into "Lostness" itself, and likewise into that which has never been.' Hamacher (2011), pp. 44-5.
[248] Badiou (2007), p. 82.
[249] Apter and Bosteels, in Badiou (2014), p. xviii.
[250] Badiou (2007), p. 87.

atrocities and the recent rise of nationalist and far-right movements arguably have arguably emerged directly *from* this 'fervent desire' for collective identity; that is, such movements as *Volksgemeinschaft* and *Cheng Feng* give us some idea of a set of circumstances under which fraternal dreams 'run aground' on a warped dream of fraternity. There must be an argument that collective identity's collapse into organicism, followed by totalitarianism, has been axiomatic since Plato, and that Celan's embracing of a religiously-derived, Buberian 'I and Thou' specifically seeks to avoid this fate; replacing, perhaps the quasi-Hegelian determinism of dialectical materialism with what Badiou himself adroitly calls 'a nihilistic but creative purely wayfaring order, a fraternity without destination, a pure movement'?[251]

If we look for signs of this 'pure movement' in Celan's 'Anabasis' we find, in Hamburger's translation, the opening lines:

> This
> narrow sign between walls
> the impassable-true
> Upward and Back
> to the heart-bright future.
>
> There.[252]

This 'impassable-true' is described by Badiou as a 'disjunctive synthesis of will and wandering' and the 'undecidability' it entails is, for him, built into the etymology of 'anabasis,' involving as it does both 'to embark upon' and 'to return'.[253] 'The poem,' Badiou adds, must 'install time's truth within the impassability of inherited language.' What poetry such as Celan's must

[251] Badiou (2007), p. 93.
[252] Celan (1995), p. 203.
[253] Badiou (2007), p. 83.

then do, with regard to language, Badiou implies, is to strip it of eloquence – of adornment or ornament – because 'although the forties in no way made poetry impossible, they did render eloquence obscene' and this necessitates, apparently, 'a poetry without eloquence'.[254] Later in the poem we hear the 'lightbellsounds' (*Leuchtglockentöne*) of 'sorrow-buoys' (*Kummerbojen*) with their 'dum-, dun-, un-'. These unintelligible sounds heighten the sense of lostness and aloneness in terms of an absence of recognisable sense or meaning, as if one were listening to a conversation in an unknown language coming from the next room, and from which a Frostian 'sense' can be gleaned only by attending to modulation and rhythm. That these sounds are brought together under the peculiar collective noun 'espalier', however, suggests something akin to Wittgenstein's ladder, in that the poem could be said to be offering itself as a challenge, a frame upon which to 'climb' beyond itself.

In the case of 'espalier,' however, it seems crucial that the 'ladder' is not *actually* a ladder but an image of careful cultivation, a means of painstakingly training a climbing plant into the intertwined upward growth that suggests shared, *lived* experience. Badiou describes the onomatopoeic sounds of the buoys as 'indices of alterity'.[255] For him, the question implicit in Celan's rendering of anabasis is: how can we make this other 'ours', not by means of colonisation or subjugation, but by bridging a gap that we feel compelled to bridge now have become aware of its existence? Celan's answer is as ever, I believe, by making 'the other' *Thou*, and thus also oneself, through the kinds of movement that forge the bonds of kinship 'where hearts sigh' ('*unde suspirat cor*') – a 'coming word in the heart' perhaps? The blind upwards and forwards movement of anabasis is an organic 'climbing' – but without any of the banal teleology of a watchmaker God. No longer able to strive for a destination (*désœuvré*, as it were), but rooted in an unending process of an evolutionary symbiosis and shared need we are

[254] Badiou (2007), p. 89.
[255] Badiou (2007), p. 95

‘growing free, together’. Badiou frames the question he purports to share with Celan as: ‘How are we to move from the fraternal “we” of the epic to the disparate “we” of togetherness, of the set, without ever giving up on the demand that there be a “we”?’[256] What Badiou fails to see, however, is that his philosophy of the event is pre-determined to present the event as a process culminating in the forcing of emergent truths, and the formation of a subject faithful to it, whereas a Celanian ‘togetherness’ as sympoiesis must always leave the question open. To conclude, then, an ‘anabasis’ *does* involve, in Badiou’s words, ‘giving up on the demand that there be a “we”’, but only so that it can be

> re-
>
> leased, re-deemed, ours’.[257]

[256] Badiou (2007), p. 97.
[257] Celan (1995), p. 203.

Some conclusions

What conclusions can we draw, firstly, about this so-called 'age of the poets' and its 'closure'? An initial conclusion might be that the term itself is an example of misdirection, a legerdemainic flourish effected by Badiou in order to draw our attention away from what amounts to a 'power grab.' It may be an attempt to protect, at one and the same time, both a restricted, purified idea of philosophy, and a related utopic point. The reality is that everything serves a self-confessed nostalgia for a callow, youthful idealism compromised, and finally lost, in the aftermath of May '68. Drawing on Plato, a purified, covertly authoritarian philosophy inevitably depends upon dictatorship; in the strictest sense, that is, of prescribing the kinds of things that can be said or written.[1] Proscription and propaganda have been followed to some devastating conclusions in the twentieth century, and the cultural policies employed by Goebbels and Mao, to name two, depend heavily upon recognisably Platonic logics of organicism, censorship, and re-education. Badiou's avowed Platonism alone, therefore, should give us sufficient cause to find him disingenuous when he professes no desire to 'turn art into an object for philosophy', especially given Plato's granting of special dispensation to the philosopher when it comes to the telling of tall tales in the name of The Good. Laruelle, the 'anti-Badiou,' is surely right, therefore, to declare that 'beneath its clothing (of such a "modern" cut)' Badiou's thought is of a 'profoundly conservative character'.[2]

Badiou's battle, in the guise of self-styled defender of 'truths,' has been with that which he terms, dismissively, 'the linguistic turn,' and all its associated 'sophistries.' I however, have made clear my preference for more sceptical voices: those of poets such as Celan and Bachmann; those of more recent, less easily categorizable writers such as Lacoue-Labarthe,

[1] See Ch. 3, n. 41, above.
[2] Laruelle (2013), p. xxxviii.

Cassin, Irigaray; and a host of cross-disciplinary, creative-theoretical discourses 'outside philosophy', but with a memory of it, from which we continue to draw inspiration. In particular I have sought to present the notion of the *closure* of the age of the poets as an attempt to silence voices from the margins (from the 'tain of the mirror,' perhaps) that begins with 'non-Greeks'.[3] It is a repression that inevitably seeks to concentrate absolute power in the hands of yet one more unaccountable elite, with gold in their souls, and to establish yet another monopoly on truth(s), plural or otherwise. Badiou's attempts to 'seize' truths generated poetically should be resisted, and philosophy should, I contend, be prevented from naming and organising truths in order to have them better serve repressive political visions that pretend to preach emancipation.

And what conclusions might one draw from Badiou's readings of Mallarmé and Celan, in particular? The first, and possibly most important, is that the philosopher *qua* philosopher, at least in the restrictive terms in which Badiou understands the 'discipline,' seems hardly able to read poetry at all. What he finds in the poem will tend to be a paranoid-schizoid reproduction of himself with no possible independent existence beyond that, and a form of thought entirely purged of sophistic impurities by means of the matheme. I have attempted to argue that the philosopher *qua* philosopher reads poetry narcissistically, and indeed that philosophy is – *almost by definition* – blind to anything other than its reflected self. Philosophy's paranoia also incorporates its fear that it is being watched, implacably, by its 'bad other,' and even the uncanny thought that it might have *already* become this other and be watching itself in the mirror. That the philosopher is the 'lover of wisdom,' but also the personification of wisdom, means that his love can *only* be a doomed self-love. I have suggested, in fact, that everything the philosopher looks into becomes, in this way, a kind of distorting mirror. In this sense, paradoxically, ironically, the philosopher is also the antiphilosopher: this is his self-inflicted

[3] See Ch. 2, n. 110.

curse, and why he feels compelled to shatter the mirror in a fit of confusion and dread.

The philosopher inhabits this paradox primarily because faith in himself, fidelity *to* himself as philosopher and the power he possesses, is quite literally all he has, and he can only imagine, in his nightmares, what lies outside the frame of the mirror, beyond the self-imposed restrictions of a philosophy that amounts to an inverted 'will to power.' What he does imagine, devastatingly, even though he cannot really comprehend what he sees in his mind's eye, is the sophist. 'There are only bodies and languages – except that there are truths', Badiou claims, except that the philosopher's bind is, once again, that he believes he can only uncover these truths through self-destruction, by purging himself, by finally ascending to the beatific state of *res cogitans*; by, that is, transcending/destroying his physical form as a kind of doomed, Cartesian self-sacrifice. And, as always, it is the world in which he lives – language in the fullest sense – and the body through which he lives it, that must be denied. This irresolvable Manichean tension – this myth – makes evident that the philosophical vision has always, since Plato, at least, been a fideistic one, sanctified and renewed in the Church of Reason.

To say that the philosopher *is* an antiphilosopher leads us to another conclusion: that there is not *an* antiphilosophy any more than there is *a* literature or *a* philosophy. Antiphilosophy – and this is very much what Lacan seems to have intended – names nothing so much as an anarchic-discursive disposition, the same disposition signalled by Wittgenstein's 'as if one were writing poetry.' 'Poetic,' then, refers to an attitude to words that understands their power, certainly fears them for the things of which they are capable – in 'the wrong hands' – and yet resolves to confront this fear by continually seeking a new kind of relationship with them. Foucault, as we have seen, speaks of discourses that take place not '*within* literature' but '*outside* philosophy', and Derrida speaks of a 'dream' of writing that is 'neither philosophy nor literature'. Both writers alert us to the fact that antiphilosophy is, in fact, a negative designation, a name for

something discarded and left behind – like a shed skin. It is suggestive of an infinite broadening of horizons beyond a strictly delimited notion of 'the Truth' and 'the Good' that had its real origins in *Realpolitik*; in political expediency. Antiphilosophers, because they recognise that human history is the history of our language, and of our conversations with one another, are etymologists above all else, fascinated by words, and by the growth, cross-pollination, and flourishing of our self-expressive capacities and relationships.

This leads us to yet another apparently paradoxical conclusion: that philosophy is never philosophy, never '*itself*.' That is, when philosophy attempts to maintain the artifice of its strictly defined limits – as in Plato's original rejection of the mytheme in favour of the matheme – it is then mathematics, a practice whose entire business is the maintenance and refinement of its own axiomatic borders. When philosophy lifts these restrictions, then it becomes *everything* else, becomes whatever is outside and beyond philosophy, a discourse whose only limits are the imaginable limits of language. Yet another crushing irony, therefore, is that these points of departure tend to be the only points at which those who are called 'philosophers' tend to say anything that anyone beyond the artificially constructed boundaries of their discourse can hear. Philosophy has always 'envied' poetry, lived vicariously as poetry, and only comes to life when it *becomes* poetic; or, to put it another way, when it ceases to be itself. Even Wittgenstein seems to have spent his life in a state of envious self-recrimination as a philosopher who craved the imaginative freedom of the poet.

There is one final irony: given his belief that he is the faithful seeker of new 'truths', it seems to be Badiou's Sisyphean fate to read *into* every poem he comes across the same thwarted hope of event(u)al realisation, of that inevitably compromised, youthful idealism of May '68, his 'Damascene moment.' He finds in each poem the reflected image of himself in the form of his first and second loves, Plato and Mao: a purified philosophy as the ontology of the void and a

revolutionary consciousness to which he can pledge his undying commitment. Philosophy has now become the name for this endless recycling of thwarted hope, and for an increasingly bitter sense of betrayed ideals, and a treachery impotently projected onto the demonic, elusive figure of the sophist. Celan's poetry outflanks, circles around behind, these 'inaesthetic' attempts to constrain it. Its scepticism with regards to language, its invention of new words and new ways of using old words, is uncontainable. If the poem's code is broken it is not its meaning that is uncovered, but the poem that is lost, although only to the philosopher. The poem is not, as Badiou admits, a 'rule-bound crossing'. The neologisms I myself have attempted to coin, therefore – 'ambisemy' and 'synaesthetics' – are my attempts to invent and develop words that do justice to these processes: 'ambisemic' standing for the way Celan's metaphors are like buoys that have been torn from their lexical moorings and cast adrift on an open sea for anyone to find, and 'synaesthetics' for an ecological approach to the poem that reads with mind *and* body together. Each is an attempt to engage with writing that need not be understood as being within literature even when it is very definitely outside philosophy.

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