
orientations represented by two twentieth-century figures avowedly influential for him in his youth: Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser. In terms of the topic of subjectivity, a topic Badiou insistently keeps on today's intellectual agenda despite so much talk of "the death of the subject" surrounding deconstructionism and the various "post" movements (post-modernism, post-structuralism, and so on), the former (i.e., Sartre) represents a notion of the subject as a kinetic negativity of absolute autonomy free from ultimate determination by nature, nurture, or any combination thereof; by contrast, the latter (i.e., Althusser) represents a notion of the subject as the heteronomous, reified by-product of trans-subjective socio-historical mechanisms, namely, the subject as subjected to ideologies, interpellations, etc. One of the central philosophical matters separating phenomenological existentialism from Marxist structuralism is, obviously, the enigma of freedom. As Badiou remarks, for him, "the decisive philosophical task... would be to complete the Sartrean theory of liberty with a careful investigation into the opacity of the signifier".¹

In an interview with Bruno Bosteels, Badiou discusses his interest in finding a way to surmount the apparent antinomy between Sartrean-style existentialism and Althusserian-style structuralism. He states:

...I have always been concerned in a privileged way by the question of how something could still be called 'subject' within the most rigorous conditions possible of the investigation of structures. This question had an echo for me of an even older question, which I had posed at the time when I was fully Sartrean, namely, the question of how to make Sartre compatible with the intelligibility of mathematics... I remember very clearly having raised the question, having formed the project of one day constructing something like a Sartrean thought of mathematics, or of science in general, which Sartre had left aside for the most part. This particular circumstance explains why I nevertheless have always been interested in the question of structural formalism while sustaining a category of the subject.²

A certain question Badiou poses in the introduction to *Being and Event* should be understood in relation to the above statements—"pure mathematics being the science of being, how is a subject possible?"³ Articulating himself in this fashion, Badiou makes clear that his efforts to figure out how to remain faithful to the insights of existentialism regarding autonomous subjectivity while nonetheless fully embracing the framework of structuralism—Peter Osborne is not without justification in seeing Badiou's philosophy, especially its recourse to mathematics, as fundamentally structuralist in inspiration⁴—are at the very heart of his protracted endeavors across the full range of his many writings. He thus puts himself forward as taking on the task of resolving one of the great unresolved tensions bequeathed to contemporary thought by twentieth-century Continental philosophy; and, like Jacques Lacan, he strives to do so by formulating a model of subjectivity compatible

¹ Badiou (1995, p. 7).

² Badiou (2005a, p. 242).

³ Badiou (2005b, p. 6).

⁴ Osborne (2007, p. 25).

his writings in the form of attacks upon not only epistemologies of finite subjective knowledge, but also upon promotions of mortality, of death-bound being, as philosophically foundational and ultimate.¹¹ Second, Badiou balks at Kant's invocation of the ostensible "limits of possible experience" insofar as this boundary-line partitioning noumena from phenomena entails the prohibition of constructing a rational ontology.¹² The Kantian critical-transcendental apparatus insists that only a de-ontologized epistemology is philosophically valid and defensible, which, in light of Badiou's post-Heideggerian ontological ambitions,¹³ is a position that must be eradicated. Third, for Badiou as a committed materialist, the idealism of Kantian transcendental idealism is simply unacceptable. Badiou's transcendental is both asubjective and (materially) immanent to the world of which it is, at one and the same time, both a structuring scaffolding as well as an internal component. With implicit reference to the Kantian gesture of enclosing subjects within the prison-houses and shadow-theaters of their own cognition, Badiou sneeringly dubs Kant "our first *professor*,"¹⁴ the initiator of a sterile academic orientation in philosophy whose very theoretical content reflects the alleged practical fact of its lack of substantial connections to any sort of (so to speak) real world.

In the course of beginning to sketch the contours of his peculiar conception of the transcendental, Badiou poses a series of questions to which this conception supposedly answers. He enumerates them thus:

...how is it possible that the neutrality, the inconsistency, the indifferent dissemination of being *qua* being, comes to consist as being-there? Or again: how can the essential unbinding of multiple-being present itself as local relation, and, finally, as the stability of worlds? Why, and how, are there worlds, rather than chaos?¹⁵

The terminology used in this quotation from *Logiques des mondes* cannot be exhaustively elucidated in the present introductory discussion; considering the range of connotations and functions with which this terminology comes to be endowed by Badiou, a thorough exegesis of these remarks isn't possible in this current context. Nonetheless, a few things can and should be said here. Badiou carries out a radical de-phenomenalization of ontology in *Being and Event*.¹⁶ Therein, being *qua* being (*l'être en tant qu'être*) is said to be the infinite infinities of inconsistent multiplicities-without-oneness "subtracted" from any and every field of consistency-dependent presentation.¹⁷ Given that he also remains an opponent of idealism, he is thereby left with the mystery/problem of how phenomena (i.e., "being-there" [*être-là*], in Badiou's more recent philosophical vocabulary)¹⁸ arise from

¹¹ Badiou (1999, pp. 123–124; 2006c, p. 30; 2006f, pp. 283–284).

¹² Badiou (1982, pp. 136–137; 2006c, pp. 133, 141, 163).

¹³ Badiou (2005b, pp. 1–2).

¹⁴ Badiou (2006f, p. 561).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁶ Toscano (2004, p. 202; Tarby 2005a, p. 79; Hallward 2005, pp. 12, 16; Brassier 2007, p. 24).

¹⁷ Badiou (2005b, pp. 10, 24–25, 52–53).

¹⁸ Badiou (2006f, p. 608).

processuality of things and the world: Simmel perceives processes as something life-like and life as process-like. The principle of life draws attention to that in living things which cannot be understood in mechanistic terms (KAGOE). Here, life becomes the very condition of experience, “the metaphysical, foundational principle that generates subject and object from itself” (GgwPPh 387).²² This marks a liberation from the Kantian epistemological “chains” (GgwPPh 383). The opposition of subject and object appears as nothing but a “retroactive construct, a crystallization of thought emerging from the flow of life that misunderstands itself as an original epistemological problem.”²³ In Simmel’s mature phase, epistemology is subordinate to the ontology of life.²⁴

Goethe, the author most cited by Simmel after Kant,²⁵ represents a significant signpost and milestone in Simmel’s intellectual journey from Kant’s philosophy and the debates about neo-Kantianism toward an ontology of life. According to Josef Bleicher, it was by immersing himself in the life and work of Goethe that Simmel moved more and more toward a manner of thinking that places the notion of life at its metaphysical core. Simmel employed this notion “to unlock the conduct and philosophy of Goethe’s life and of his own work and to investigate the intermeshing of the two.”²⁶

Goethe’s writings, however, not only lack philosophic systematicity but also any philosophical intention; according to Simmel, Goethe does not have a metaphysics but *is* metaphysics (KAGOE 125–126, 133). In fact, for Simmel, it was Schopenhauer rather than Goethe who was the first modern *philosopher* to philosophize about life itself. Schopenhauer did not confine himself to asking the meaning and value of all manner of things in life. Rather, he was curious about the meaning and value of life itself. Nevertheless, according to Simmel, the question of life did not receive a fully conscious treatment until Nietzsche (GgwPPh 384; KMK 188). Finally, via Bergson, Simmel found a route beyond cultural phenomena all the way to the cosmos. In Bergson’s philosophy, the principle of life as constantly striving for “more-life” (*Mehr-Leben*), which for Nietzsche only concerned human existence and its values, translates into something cosmic: for Bergson, all existence is specific development of *élan vital* (HriBgs 58–59; GgwPPh 385). Like Bergson, Simmel not only concerns himself with cultural or “spiritual” life, but also, attempts to establish a continuum between the sheer biological-vital life and spiritual life. As

²² Translated by Bleicher (2007, p. 150).

²³ Bleicher (2006, p. 344).

²⁴ Following others including Landmann and Léger, it can be claimed that there are indeed some important germs of ideas already in Simmel’s writings that lead from the philosophy of life to existence philosophy, although often, as in the case of Sartre, it is a question of analogies and parallelisms in ways of thinking, and the exact degree of influence is hard to measure (Landmann 1968, p. 15; Léger 1989).

²⁵ Kösser et al. (2003, p. 520). Simmel’s interest in Goethe continues throughout his entire career, dating back to the time before he had yet to write anything about Goethe. Simmel’s suggestions for his inauguration lectures in 1884 and 1885 were to deal with Goethe, and he was interested in Goethe’s work already as a student, probably inspired by his teacher Herman Grimm (see Köhnke 1996, pp. 41–42, 154–155). Besides the books *Kant und Goethe*, published in 1906, and *Goethe* from the year 1913, Simmel wrote fourteen essays on Goethe in all, and three on Goethe and Kant.

²⁶ Bleicher (2007, p. 139).



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