
The contributors to this collection operate within the framework, and acknowledge the power, of Alain Badiou’s philosophical system, while also seeking to clarify, criticize, or extend it. As conveyed in editor Marios Constantinou’s more striking language, they are ‘partisans of the swerving affirmation’ (36). Those who share this perspective are tasked, as Constantinou asserts in the brief preface, ‘to reclaim the anti-imperialist event as the principal orientation of political fidelity that focuses the intellectual tasks of our age’ (x).

The intended audience for the book already has some understanding of Badiou’s philosophical system and political commitments. It will mostly interest readers who come to Badiou via political philosophy, rather than through broader debates in continental philosophy. The essays pointedly engage with some of the central questions confronting Badiou’s political thought, as well as the relationship between his politics and his views on art, love, and psychoanalysis.

Constantinou, in his introductory essay, sets the tone for the volume by engaging with one of the more puzzling dimensions of Badiou’s recent work. Specifically, while identifying as a Marxist, and despite his ‘profound respect for the revolutionary tradition, his acknowledgement of the singular institutional accomplishments and organizational inventions of the communist movement,’ Badiou calls for ‘a new idea of politics without a party as well as at a distance from the state’ (1-2). How can Badiou, as a self-proclaimed materialist, seemingly abandon these facts of the contemporary situation? Badiou focuses much of his work on the conditions that allow for the occurrence of that which is *truly* new. But, where does one begin? Regarding the role of the philosopher, Constantinou cites Badiou: ‘when we feel that a truth-event interrupts the continuity of ordinary life, we have to say to others “Wake up! The time of new thinking and acting is here!” But for that, we ourselves must be awake. We philosophers are not allowed to sleep’ (15). Indeed, more generally, Badiou theorizes politics in and through subjectivity.

Constantinou elaborates upon this through Badiou’s use of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. The journey recounted by Xenophon is one of disciplined invention as the Greek troops struggle to find their way; while both collaborating with and resisting imperial power, ‘Anabasis as an evental signifier of the egalitarian becoming of freedom proceeds by forcing itself against the imperial logic of sheer necessity. Anabasis is this egalitarian commitment to the anti-imperial becoming of freedom, affirmed and reaffirmed against the necessity of corruption and the persistent temptation of empire’ (19-20). Subjectivity created through faithfulness to freedom as distinct from material comfort is essential. Badiou’s Marxism stands as far removed as possible from productivist versions. Recognizing the opportunity to choose egalitarian commitments (and avoiding what may be conservative simulations) is presumably the immediate task. Ultimately, however, Constantinou’s reading of Badiou provides no master key for determining what is to be done.
The remainder of the book is broken into two parts. The first focuses on criticism and extension of Badiou’s political categories, raising important questions concerning Badiou’s politics, while the second relates these categories to other dimensions of Badiou’s thought. A short but important essay by Badiou himself gets part one underway. In it, he claims, ‘The fundamental problem in the philosophical field today is to find something like a new logic.’ Badiou means a new dialectics, ‘a new philosophical proposition adequate for all forms of creative novelty,’ which he identifies with ‘the problem of negativity’ (45). Badiou wants to move beyond two opposing views: on the one hand, Adorno, who sees classical dialectics as too affirmative, and on the other, Althusser and Negri (after Spinoza) who assert a kind of pure positivity. Both of these, he argues, are, in this historical moment, essentially conservative positions. Adorno’s hyper-negativity leads to an idea of the suffering victim compatible with ‘humanitarian’ imperialism, while Spinozism in this context suggests that what is (capitalism) is itself infinitely creative, internally generating the possibility of radical change. Badiou proposes something else. Affirmation comes first (the evental Subject). Negativity comes afterward and is the work of the militant already committed to the (positive) event. This represents a reversal of traditional dialectical logic. With the essay, Badiou also explicitly embraces the use of the word ‘democracy’ about which he has shown some reluctance in the past.

Badiou’s concept of democracy, and more particularly, his criticisms of ‘democratic materialism’ provide the focus for strong essays by Frank Ruda and Ed Pluth. Ruda nicely illustrates how Badiou’s materialism seeks to recover the materialist dimension of idealism. Retrieval is needed insofar as contemporary materialism has itself become idealistic: ‘Democratic materialism forcefully forgets, denies and represses the very existence of the dialectic and consequently becomes amnesic of the idea’ (59). Ruda shows how Badiou’s return to Plato is essential. Hence, Badiou’s revamping of ‘the idea of the idea,’ especially in his ‘hyper-translation’ of Plato’s *Republic*.

Pluth hopes to unpack, as well as criticize, Badiou’s claim that, politically, ‘in order to think the contemporary world in any fundamental way, it’s necessary to take as your point of departure not the critique of capitalism but the critique of democracy’ (76). This, Pluth effectively argues, is related to Badiou’s focus on ‘the subjective dimension’ (77). Economic, sociological, and historical categories limit subjective possibility, insofar as they relate to objectivity and to what he calls ‘passive number.’ This also accounts for Badiou’s rejection of voting, which in a way makes a fetish out of simple counting: ‘if voting is the paradigm of political activity, this means that politically one is content with the dominance of mere opinion over truth—a dominance, he points out, that we would never allow in other domains such as art, science and love’ (81). Badiou favors a notion of ‘active number’, essentially people in motion opening up the possibility of a new subjectivity. Passive number, by contrast, always potentially involves counting those doing nothing politically. Pluth argues that Badiou overstates his position on at least two counts: first, that the critique of capitalism may be more closely related to developing new subjectivity than Badiou allows, and secondly that it isn’t fully clear that Badiou effectively shows why the mere act of entering a voting booth undermines what is admittedly more important activist political work elsewhere.
Essays by Dominick Hoens and volume editor Constantinou conclude part one by considering Badiou’s frequent and serious engagement with religious thought. Both argue that Badiou’s atheistic materialism may break insufficiently from these religious perspectives. Hoens points to Badiou’s extensive engagement with religious ‘anti-philosophers’, such as Kierkegaard and Pascal, as well as Saint Paul. With regard to Pascal’s wager in particular, and through a careful comparison with Lacan’s reading of Pascal, Hoens argues that the courage and discipline of Badiou’s political militant may too closely align with the same ‘masochistic’ subjectivity that Lacan locates at the center of Christianity. Specifically, the Christian is ready ‘to embrace self-effacing sacrifice in the name of the commandment to love.’ More generally, Lacan reads this gesture as an instance of perversion: ‘identifying with the object instead of becoming a subject.’ Hoens argues that because Badiou ‘avoids positing the category of the object as a correlate of the subject’ (108), instead understanding subjectivity mainly as fidelity, his notion of subjectivity may be too thin to avoid the same sort of masochistic perversity.

Constantinou begins his piece by stating, ‘According to Badiou, the fundamental task of political anti-nihilism in the present is to expose and challenge the Western state fetish that “only designates imperial comfort”’ (112). Constantinou considers Saint Paul in the context of the Roman occupation. For Constantinou, Paul becomes a political figure for Badiou ‘because the material course of fidelity to the post-evental truth of resurrection he initiates entails an immanent break with the imperial situation.’ Importantly, this is politics ‘as a procedure that is by definition, and not by implication, anti-imperialist’ (126). Problematically, though, Badiou ‘underestimates the strategic uses of deception and sophistic devices of rhetorical subtlety that Paul employs and which are amplified by an entire tradition of biblical Machiavellianism’ (134). Manipulation and backroom secrecy are, for Badiou, incompatible with egalitarian politics and the communist hypothesis. Has Paul returned to the logic of empire? The issue is ‘whether the political form of (Paul’s) theology of resurrection, as reclaimed by Badiou, is universalisable without its self defeating limits’ (137). As Constantinou sees it, Badiou takes a step forward on this matter in The Meaning of Sarkozy by analyzing the form of the state that simulates ‘the logics of change and revolution.’ Counteracting this requires ‘a universal reorientation and reconstitution of courage as an anti-imperialist ethos’ (139). At stake is more than the choice to not support capitulation to empire in the guise of change. Rather, egalitarian politics necessitates a kind of lived ‘disgust’ (141).

The articles comprising part two are mainly concerned with the relationship between politics and, what for Badiou are, philosophy’s other possible truth conditions: art, love, and science. Essays by Jan Voëlker and Christopher Norris reflect on the relation between art and politics, especially the sort of truth that is available through art.

Through an analysis of Badiou’s critique of twentieth century avant-gardes, which themselves parallel political movements organized militantly and via manifesto, Voëlker aims to understand the idea of ‘militant art.’ Voëlker sees Badiou as reading these failed avant-gardes through their varying attacks on classicism, roughly the idea that art does not contain truth and functions
therapeutically through beautiful form. This has been done through differing failed attempts to bridge the gap between romanticism (truth immanently unfolds, but is not singular) and didacticism (there are singular truths, but they are external, not immanent). Badiou proposes a kind of reversal of the romantic position: ‘truth is not exposed in the sensible, rather truths are produced in it.’ This, Voelker shows, is also a reversal of the didactic position, in that ‘the truths of art are coextensive with the material procedure and no longer extrinsic’ (153). Through these reversals, art conceivably resists the confusion between mere novelty and political significance. Art plays an educational, though non-didactic role in relation to politics. It can be a kind of ‘subjective preparation for the reception of a political event, because art is really an effective subjective process, the transformation of subjectivity’ (161-2). This has special significance in periods like our own, where political procedures are weak.

In his essay, Norris attempts to ascribe ontological status to the category of ‘political song’ through the application of concepts drawn from Badiou. Situating Badiou negatively in a space where he squarely rejects Kantian disinterest as well as the conventionalism of Nelson Goodman, he sees Badiou standing for the ‘truth telling power vested in art’ (185). More specifically, art can give expression to truths that ‘inexist’, that still lack the means of full conceptual articulation. So, it is with some political songs ‘whereby such songs are able to communicate…the idea of an as yet unachieved but achievable state of justice that finds voice in their words and music, and that thereby exerts a potentially transformative pressure on existing (conventionally inculcated) notions of the social good’ (184). Norris ably shows the fruitfulness of Badiou’s categories by taking them in a direction of which Badiou might be skeptical.

Norman Madarasz, in his contribution, points quite rightly to the formal similarities found in the conditions of love and politics: ‘love names a dimension of subjective experience enabled by an event’ (191). Specifically, a new subject is emergent from fidelity to the event, enabling a new perspective, the world experienced from the position of Two. Madarasz raises significant questions regarding the status of Badiou’s analysis of love within a future communism: ‘That communism would leave personal amorous relations as we know them today intact seems to be an error in expectation and projection of what justice and egalitarianism entails for the human ethos, the human background in a truly emancipated setting’ (190). In addition, Madarasz notes that some may see Badiou’s perspective as too ‘centred on the heterosexual, a heterologocentrism, despite this not being at any moment defined in Badiou’s specific and written assertions’ (205). Yet, despite these possible limitations, Madarasz argues, love necessarily joins with the communist hypothesis insofar as both open ‘the possibility of living as a new world is born’ (210).

Sean Homer considers Badiou’s relationship with Slavoj Zizek. Noting Zizek’s relatively unsystematic mode compared to Badiou, Homer deftly draws a number of contrasts between the two figures, locating much of this difference in Zizek’s failure to sufficiently engage with Badiou’s critique of Lacan. For example, Zizek sees novelty as emergent from repetition of the death drive, while for Badiou, ‘Everything that repeats … is invariably unjust and inexact, whereas justice and rightness are novelties’ (216). Furthermore, Zizek subscribes to an essentially Hegelian dialectic: for
Zizek, the problem with Badiou distancing revolutionary politics from the state is that while it is a negative gesture, it is not a negation of a negation, i.e. nothing changes. In contrast, Zizek calls for ‘a form of egalitarian terror that combines egalitarian justice, terror, voluntarism and trust in the people’ (226). Ultimately, Homer criticizes Zizek for defending static (repetitious) notions of ritualized violence and political party.

A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens also consider Badiou’s relation to Lacan, claiming that Badiou’s ‘philosophy will remain entirely incomprehensible if its relation to psychoanalysis remains unclarified’ (232). At issue again is Badiou’s idea of the subject, always only occasional and multiple. Such a concept, though, raises questions about the nature of this subject’s body. The authors work to clarify Badiou’s unusual concept of body as ‘body of truth.’ Their careful reading of Badiou’s discussion of Lacan in *Logics of Worlds* teases out Badiou’s agreements and disagreements with Lacan regarding the body. Central for both thinkers is a notion of the body at odds with a phenomenological perspective where the body is constituted as the ‘presence of consciousness to the world’ (237). For Badiou, a truth appears as an exception to the world as it is. As described by the authors, ‘This exception manifests as a new body, which is not, for all that, natural’ (232). In effect, Badiou’s materialism requires a conception of the body that breaks with all taken for granted reductionisms: ‘De-objectifying the subject is the task Badiou undertakes in order to re-forge the link of subjects and truths’ (245). The subject is not located in the place of the natural body. Rather, the subject is ‘woven out of truth’ and can be described as something that disrupts the given of nature: a ‘body of truth.’ Individuals are effectively participants in this body. The authors, like others in this volume, allow us to see, yet again, how Badiou plausibly breaks many of the rules of common sense and philosophical materialism.

The essays collected here are rich in content and, for those with interest in Badiou, worth attentive reading. Though they may pose some difficulty for those not acquainted with the technical languages of continental philosophy, each essay is thought provoking and worth the effort. However conversant the reader is with Badiou, much can be learned from this volume.

**Michael Principe**, Middle Tennessee State University