

Fall 2009 Badiou course / John Protevi / Department of French Studies / Louisiana State University  
[www.protevi.com/john](http://www.protevi.com/john) / [protevi@lsu.edu](mailto:protevi@lsu.edu)  
26 August 2009 / Classroom use only. Not for citation in any publication.

## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

BIBLIOGRAPHY: To prepare these remarks I've consulted a number of introductions to B's thought. I list them in inverse chronological order, not in order of importance or quality:

Christopher Norris, *Badiou's Being and Event* (Continuum, 2009)  
Oliver Feltham, *Alain Badiou: Live Theory* (Continuum, 2008)  
Jason Barker, "Translator's Introduction" in *Metapolitics* (Verso, 2006)  
Oliver Feltham, "Translator's Preface" in *Being and Event* (Continuum, 2005)  
Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens, "An introduction to Alain Badiou's philosophy" in *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy* (Continuum, 2004)  
Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minnesota, 2003)  
Peter Hallward, "Translator's Introduction" in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Verso, 2001)  
Norman Madarasz, "Introduction" in *Manifesto for Philosophy* (SUNY, 1999)

DELEUZE AND BADIOU: Reading Badiou is often described as a "breath of fresh air," and as having cut across the "analytic-continental divide." I can whole-heartedly affirm both of those evaluations. But I need to get this out of the way right at the beginning: those are the exact words I've been using for the past ten or so years to describe reading Deleuze. So it will be a challenge to me to bracket my Deleuzian perspective and to try to teach Badiou on his own terms, w/o constantly referring him to Deleuze.

This is especially tricky in that Badiou himself and his commentators often refer to Deleuze or at least to their take on Deleuze. Now sometimes I don't really agree with that interpretation (as in my review in *NDPR* of Peter Hallward's book on Deleuze), but sometimes I do agree, but just think, "yes, that's right, that's what Deleuze says, but pointing that out is not a criticism, but just indicates how B and D are different."

But that's hard to say too, because Badiou often says you have to make a choice, and that a relativistic acknowledgement of difference is not enough. So if I'm backed up and have to make a choice, then right now I'm going to say, yes, this is how B and D are different, and that's why D is better. Now you could say that's just a function of me being formed as a Deleuzian subject, all the positive feedback I've gotten in terms of publications and invitations and so on, for writing on Deleuze. (NB: This is not what Badiou says being a subject is all about; it's just a standard way of talking.)

If so, then so be it. The point is that I'm going to try to bracket all that and just teach what Badiou writes, and we can leave the Badiou vs Deleuze stuff for later.

THEMES we will track in Badiou:

1. Mathematics is ontology. Cantor was an event, and axiomatic set theory (ZF = Zermelo-Fraenkel formulation) is the truth procedure of that event (we'll discuss these terms below). What that means is that ZF set theory is for Badiou the science of being qua being. Being is pure or inconsistent multiplicity, that is, the being of things with all qualities stripped away. That is, mathematics deals with beings as nothing other than presented; presented, but not qualified. So math "isolates the pure gesture of presentation as such" (Hallward 2003: 57). Math is the "presentation of presentation." In this case, B has a "subtractive" ontology: it abstracts from, or subtracts itself from, all qualified presentation.
2. This does not mean that being is mathematical, i.e., composed of mathematical objectivities. Instead of saying that being is mathematical, B says that mathematics is ontology. Thus B does not have "a thesis about the world, but about discourse" (BE 8). Math says that which is sayable (*dicible*) about being; it "organizes the discourse of what subtracts itself from any presentation" (BE 8).
3. Philosophy as meta-ontology: math doesn't realize that it is ontology. Philosophy's task is to recognize and to explain how it is that math is ontology. Philosophy is conditioned by math as the first break with opinion or *doxa* (showing): B often goes back to this as a Platonic inheritance. But his is a Platonism of the multiple.
4. Unlimited or infinite multiplicity: the foundation of any multiple is the void (the null set in ZF). There's literally nothing at the bottom of a multiple. At the same time, there is no One that gathers all multiples: there is no set of all sets. So being as pure or inconsistent multiplicity is withdrawn or inaccessible to any counting as one, any unification.
5. The one is not: unification is the result of a process, whose material is inconsistent multiplicity. So being is pure multiplicity and the one "is" not. So B is resolutely atheist: there's no God as hidden One behind the multiples.
6. Presentation: now although being is pure or "inconsistent" multiplicity, everything is presented as A multiplicity. There's always a "counting as one" in any presentation, a counting that produces a "consistent" multiplicity. So although being is pure / inconsistent multiplicity, presentation of being is done via a "counting as one," a gathering of multiplicity that presents it. In this way, pure being is "indifferent" to its presentation.
7. Situation. Being appears in situations or sets of beings; a situation is a "structured presentation of a multiplicity" (Hallward 2003: 64, citing EE: 34-35). Situations or consistent multiplicities are structured as the result of counting operations. As such a result, they presuppose inconsistent multiplicity as that which is counted and thus presented as the elements of a situation (elements of a consistent multiplicity). But since presentation implies counting, that which is counted cannot appear as such, as prior to its having been counted. But it can "haunt" the

situation as its remainder, as that which, from w/in the situation, cannot appear, but that the situation presupposes. This is B's take on Lacan's notion of the Real.

8. Void. The being of this "nothing of the situation" is the void, that which "sutures" a situation to its pure being. IOW, the void is the name for the inconsistent multiplicity a situation has counted into existence as elements of the situation. The void is "just the name of inconsistent multiplicity within a situation" (Hallward 2003: 66).
9. Event: Access to this void happens, retrospectively, via an "event," which comes to disrupt the normal operation of "counting as one" which structures the situation.
10. Truth and subjects. Events can become truths for subjects who pursue an "investigation" that tests the haunting of a situation by its void.
11. To recap: Elements belong to a situation. The situation "counts as one" its elements so that situation is consistent multiplicity. The one "is not"; it is the result of an operation. That is, situational counting presupposes a null set or void. IOW, consistent multiplicity, the result of a counting operation, presupposes inconsistent multiplicity, as that which is counted. But you never get a presentation of inconsistent multiplicity, except in the sense that in an event it can be presented as non-presentation, as that which presentation presupposes.
12. However, ontology itself is a situation, that is, a structured presentation. But what it presents is presentation. In other words, the structure or counting as one of ontology is "the system of conditions through which the multiple can be recognized as multiple" (BE 29). To recognize the multiple as multiple entails that there be no unification or definition of the multiple. This is only accomplished via axiomatics (BE 30).
13. State of a situation. Re-presentation of what is presented in a situation. A second counting, after the primary counting that presents a situation. The state of a situation is all the ways of grouping together the elements of a situation into subsets or parts. So parts or subsets are *included*, whereas elements *belong*. There is an immeasurable excess of subsets / representation / state over set / situation / presentation. This is the power-set axiom.
14. Situations are punctured by truth procedures or generic procedures, which try to establish whether an event has taken place. An event cannot be recognized within a situation, but it can be named and pursued by subjects constituted via their fidelity to the event. The truth procedures of subjects test the event, seeking to expose the generic elements of situations, those that are presupposed but not presented in the situation.
15. Now it can be that that which is the generic for a militant subject is re-presented by the state of the situation as something denigrated or abjected or ridiculed. But it's never, by definition, re-presented as that which the situation presupposes.
16. In fact, even the militant subject of a truth procedure cannot / should not (there's a lot to talk about here) re-present the void. For that's exactly what evil is, the re-presentation of the void,

the going to the bitter end of a truth procedure to name all the elements of a presentation. The void can only be ethically named *as void*, as “unnameable.”

17. In political terms, evil would be naming the void as a substantial being, that is, giving a definition of humanity that can serve as the basis for division, hierarchy, exclusion. Politics is the collective investigation of the truth of a revolutionary event that consists in exposing the generic subset of a situation as the barest form of generic humanity, humanity w/o qualification, but that's not at all the same thing as re-presenting the void.
18. Philosophy is conditioned by four generic procedures: science (matheme); art (poem); politics (revolution); love (the Two). Philosophy does not produce truths; it articulates the compossibility of truth procedures for an epoch. For us, that means the generic: post-Cantorian (Paul Cohen) set theory; poetry as non-useful language; revolution as declaring the rights of man with no national, racial, gendered qualification; love as revealed in Lacanian psychonanalysis as the impossibility of sexual *rapport*.