

In the last chapter of *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou investigates Lacan's relation to (what Badiou perceives as) his contiguity with the history of thought since Descartes. Badiou confronts Lacan with his overemphasis on the solidarity of the subject and her speech.

In order to show this, Badiou highlights Lacan's assertion of the subject's ex-centered dependency with regard to language. After all, isn't this already the Cartesian gesture embodied by the cogito? For example, when Lacan says it is our destiny to articulate a world—does he not aspire here to some transparency between thought and being, some (obviously imaginary) pure reflection between language and reality?

I understand Lacan to be saying that the world is not merely the background against which we pursue our destinies, but that our destiny is speech, is defined reciprocally by the social relation. Our response and responsibility is already to faithfully articulate (a/the) world.

Now, Badiou is making the case that, nevertheless, the intrusion of this third term (i.e., language) is “not sufficient to overturn this order which supposes that it is necessary from the standpoint of the subject to enter into the examination of truth as cause” (B&E 433) In other words, no knowledge, no matter how acquired, can be held to be certain without a (faithful) procedure of examining the truth of it oneself. A truth can only be a source of certainty, or veracity, once a subject “forces an undecidable,” that is, acts on the basis of a supposed future completion whose certainty is (ontologically) in a great deal of question.

Badiou is arguing that the position in which the subject finds himself is always the site of an event, that there are no subjects without events, that the subject is only a “finite local configuration” of a generic procedure aimed at discovering the truth of the being of the situation. The truths which a subject discovers/creates are found only through maintaining an active faithfulness to an investigatory procedure.

No amount of philosophical games will allow us “interpret” our way out of this crux: a truth is, in the end, neither decidable nor undecidable on the basis of its linguistic context—truth only exists insofar as it is indifferent [to language] since its procedure is generic inasmuch as it avoids the entire encyclopaedic grasp of judgments.” Thus, truth follows the trajectory of a given subject's truth procedure, a “faithful” thought which overturns and escapes the structure of a situation.

Therefore the subject is rare, Badiou suggests, and we should not think (with Lacan) of the subject-effect as a void-set, since this makes it identifiable from within the “uniform networks of experience.” Lacan errs because his very “gesture” is overly soldered to language alone: even though Lacan moves towards a conception of truth which is “at last” completely disconnected from what Lacan calls “exactitude” or “adequation,” Lacan is still attached to the Cartesian epoch of science—that is, by stressing the lack (and not the intervention) and thus structural permanence of the subject, we miss the event proper.

Lacan wants to “rescue” the truth but he ends up positing the subject in the absolute void of its own erasure. Unless we conceive of the genesis of the subject (argues Badiou) as its self-

constitution by an active fidelity to an event or truth-procedure, we maintain the (weak) conception of the subject as maintained in the pure void of its subtraction—all this to save truth.

By contrast, Badiou defines a truth as multiple, the gathering together of all the terms which will have been positively investigated by a generic procedure of fidelity supposed complete (and thus infinite.) This supposition of completeness is critical to understand what Badiou means about nomination, but right now what we're interested in is the fact that Badiou identifies this "generic" truth-procedure as the very constitution of the subject even as (and because) the truth is constituted by a subject's engagements and faithfulness to a generic procedure.

So, despite the fact that the void for Lacan is de-localized, and that its ineffability does not yield to any sort of pure reflection, in the end Lacan yields to what Badiou claims is the "empty and apodictic transparency of the cogito" by claiming the revelation of certainty about the subject (from the standpoint of the other) through psychoanalysis.

Badiou is attacking the possibility of a hermeneutics of truth (and so indirectly psychoanalysis, which claims it is a site where the truth of the subject emerges, transformed.) Psychoanalysis is shown to make a surprising presupposition: that "the truth of neurotic suffering is that of having the truth as cause." Badiou argues that it is not the truth which is the cause for subjective anxiety (which is actually a "false plenitude,") rather:

"The truth is that indiscernible multiple whose finite approximation is supported by a subject, such that its ideality to-come, nameless correlate of the naming of an event, is that on the basis of which one can legitimately designate as subject the aleatory figure which, without the indiscernible, would be no more than an incoherent sequence of encyclopaedic determinants."

What's going on here? There's a lot to unpack, but in essence: when we try to identify a "subject-cause," that is, some clear, distinct and certain conceptualization of the genesis of the subject, we tend to (incorrectly) think the subject in terms of a transparent, linguistic agency which unites being and thought through a gesture which maps the web of language onto the true.

The cogito gives language has a hidden capacity to poetically open up the world and verify it at the same time, revealing the subject through the very clarity and distinctness of truth itself (which is now revealed as the 'true cause' of the subject, and thereby the subject is identified completely with truth. Thus "truth" has been restricted to the whole of subjective existence.) Badiou says this is wrong; we cannot return to the truth, or to infinity, or simply to transcendence to find the cause of the subject. For that, we must return to the event (the truth, on the other hand, is just the "stuff" of the subject).

For Badiou, an event is composed of the elements of the site and the event itself; an event "interposes" itself between the void and itself. A part of a situation is said to be "indiscernible" if no statement of the language of the situation separates it or discerns it. This lack of separation is really an avoidance of falling into pre-existing determined categories that structure the situation. The truth IS that indiscernible multiple (or set) whose source is a generic procedure undertaken by a faithful subject.

A procedure of fidelity is generic by definition if, for any determinant in the “encyclopaedia” (a classification of the parts of a situation which can be discerned by a property,) it contains at least one enquiry, or line of investigation, which avoids that determinant. The four (and only four) types of generic procedure, and thus the only four sources of truth, are for Badiou: art, science, politics and love. (He has been criticized, rightly in my opinion, by Žižek and others for the brevity and oddness of this list of truth-investigatory procedures, most notably leaving religion out.)

So, a part is indiscernible if it does not fall under any encyclopaedic determinants, i.e., parts of the situation composed of terms which have a property in common which can be formulated in the language of the situation. It would seem that, without the indiscernible, our language would be quite boring—just a series of judgments without a qualifying investigator procedures, language as pure performance.

As the subject would be as well; without the mysterious capacity of the event to be “more” than the situation (Badiou says it is “ultra-one” relative to the situation, since it stands in a relationship with itself,) our speech would amount to no more than incoherent sequences of judgments about common properties of terms in the situation. Actually, the subject-language unfolds “in the future anterior”; the subject is the trajectory of the enquiries of the truth procedure. So when Lacan writes: “Thought founds being solely by knotting itself within the speech in which every operation touches upon the essence of language,” Lacan in fact secures a position within his theory for the enunciation and veracity of the cogito. Indeed, he retains intact the Cartesian discourse of ontological foundation which Badiou is attempting to reinterrogate.

More broadly, Badiou claims that the categories of the event and the indiscernible have been at work, unnamed, throughout the entire history of philosophy. Regarding the doctrine of the subject and his apparent overall position on Lacan (near the end of the book):

“With respect to the doctrine of the subject, the individual examination of each of the generic procedures will open up to an aesthetics, to a theory of science, to a philosophy of politics, and, finally, to the arcana of love; to an intersection without fusion with psychoanalysis. All modern art, all the incertitudes of science, everything, finally, which the name of Lacan designates will be met with, reworked, and traversed by a philosophy restored to its time by clarified categories.”

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