## Lacan's Anti-Philosophic Act

In this paper I discuss both Lacan's real and Freud's transferential unconsciouses and present an exposition on two of Badiou's books. I analyse his dispute with Lacan with a focus on Lacan's psychoanalytic act, which is, as Badiou states, an anti-philosophic act.

Is Lacan's theory of the real unconscious the beginning of the end for Platonic philosophy? This paper works towards answering this question.

## 1 Unhappy about Philosophy's Demise

In his 2019 book *Happiness*, Badiou presents some surprising statements. He is unhappy about twentieth century philosophical developments with "the great linguistic turn." He thinks this relates to sophism, which like Plato, he is vehemently against. Philosophies, other than his own, influenced by the turn, have made language central and caused the near demise of Platonism. Such philosophies "announce the end of metaphysics and therefore .. the end of philosophy, at least [in] its classical [or] destinal" sense. The true idea that represents univocity has been abandoned and because these philosophies cannot face up to "the challenge" of the State, he states that his universalism and "logical" revolutions are incapacitated and "inappropriate" against the State. "Philosophy, evidently in peril, ... is sick, this is not in doubt." (Badiou 2019 pp. 51, 52, 49, 50, 46, 41, 44, 59)

At issue here is sophism and two types of universalism. He claims sophism changes comprehensible language into "fragmented knowledge" or "illogical communication." And philosophy's universalism is becoming confused with the State's because, although the State's is different because it relates to its control of "infinite .. commodity circulation," philosophy's universal proposition *is* disarmed by the State. (Badiou, 2019, pp. 44, 54)

If .. the category of truth is abandoned or inoperative, philosophy cannot face up to the challenge of an existence in servitude to commodity circulation or to the illogicality of communication. (Badiou, 2019, p. 54)

Sophism undoes sense, which presents a dilemma for philosophy's universalism because it already relies upon generally *incomprehensible* scientific mathematical language - "nothing indicates *a priori*" that universality is integral to the "constituting character" of such language. This leaves philosophy exposed to sophism as well as the State because mathematics "does not permit [it] to sustain the challenge opposed to universality," philosophy's universal "address to all." (Badiou 2019 pp. 54, 52, 57) It is exposed because mathematics alone cannot fend off sophists such as Lacan with his anti-philosophic act or the State's opposition to philosophy's universality.

Although twentieth century analytic philosophy appropriated science's logical language to make mathematics more comprehensible, Badiou goes further. He "appropriates" Lacan's idea that the matheme is universally transmissible, and consequently he can assert that his philosophy grants universality *a posteriori* to mathematics because it "construct[s] its own element, its own figure of universality." On behalf of mathematics, it establishes "a fixed point in discourse," a "modern eventality, the category of truth," which is an "element that authorizes the thought" of such a point. And it supposedly interrupts the "incoherence" of sophism. (Badiou, 2019, pp. 54, 57, 58)

Badiou's universalism is like the State's because the State *also* relies on the comprehensibility of discourse. However, one of the differences between the two universalisms, given his concern that philosophy's universalism cannot fend off the opposition of the State's, is that philosophy confers its universalism didactically – it seeks to master via its university discourse the student and/or proletariat who are its labourers. (Tomšič, 2015, p. 210) This mastery over students and/or proletariats is more apparent with Badiou's political truth procedure and its subjective emergence. In *Being and Event*, he points briefly to this mastering of such an emergence via, as I discuss below, a mathematized knowledge of the real.

A Subject ... forces the undecideable to exhibit itself. ... It is thus assured that the impasse of being is the point at which a Subject convokes itself to a decision. ... [S]ubjective emergence forces the event. (Badiou, 2005, p. 429-30)

Although he assumes the Subject's convocation supposedly *forces* philosophy's mathematization, that is, "forces the undecideable," the subjective emergence ends up mastered

as cannon fodder for his universalism and mathematization of the event.

Although the State's universalism also relies on comprehensibility with discourse, it uses the *first* count in a contrasting way to philosophy. Badiou's universalism in *Being and Event* does not place the errancy of the void with a speaking being - he only describes the errancy as that which threatens a loss of fixity, which causes an opposition between the first and second counts, "that *something*, within presentation, escapes the count: this something is nothing other than the [first] count itself." (Badiou, 2005, p. 93) He believes his mathematicised evental point in the comprehensibility of discourse overcomes the loss of fixity. However, it is crucial for philosophy that the loss of fixity is utilized *as well as* overcome. As Milner explains, it is retained because it "guarantees truth and authorizes discourse," but *then* it is overcome, covered up, "recouvrement," for the sake of holding a "reign of unshakable knowledge."

[It is] as if, at the end of [Plato's] *Sophist*, it was necessary to turn around and go back and erase non-being itself in discourse, even though it had been necessary to make it present there to ground the properties of truth. (Milner, 2012, pp. 112, 117)

In other words, although both universalisms depend on comprehensibility in discourse, they nevertheless differ significantly.

In different ways, both foreclose aspects related to a speaking being's belonging with the first count. For example, despite that Badiou declares that the State's "elementary coercion" amounts to an individual not *belonging* to society because individuals are only "*included* within society," that the State is "indifferent to belonging yet it is constantly concerned with inclusion," philosophy's universalism also forecloses something related to an individual's belonging. It *includes* those who partake in Plato's form, a symbolic "Oneness" of humans, but it is forecloses their errant immanence which relates to *belonging*. In different words, as I imply below, Lacan states that "form is a knowledge of being," "but for Lacan this knowledge does not represent being – it forecloses the real." (Lacan 1998 p. 119) (Braungardt 2017 p. 6-7) Neither philosophy nor the State are "concerned" "when it is a matter of people's lives." (Badiou, 2005, p. 107-8)

The State has a different way of foreclosing the *belonging*. Although capitalism exploits errancy in the belonging it does not seek to overcome the loss of fixity between the counts. Rather, it forecloses the castration of a speaking being, such that she incessantly demands for more commodities to satiate her desire. As Lacan states, the logic of the capitalist State amounts to "the exploitation of desire." (Lacan, 1973, p. 97) It treats desire "as if it is a demand." (Vanheule, 2016, pp. 6, 7) 1 The cause for the surfeit is *unknown* to a speaking being - the errancy is apropos her unknown real unconscious. She authorizes her own truth with "a little inversion simply between S1 and S," only to be dissatisfied with what that produces as a. So, when with speech she cannot "disjoin" the errancy from its aims, she demands again on the wheels of capitalism's discourse. (Lacan, 2017, p. 418-9) The capitalist's discourse is "the cleverest discourse we have made."

[However,] it is no less headed for a blowout. This is because it is untenable. A little inversion simply between S1 and \$\sigma\$ ... suffices so that that goes on casters, indeed that cannot go better but that goes too fast, that consumes itself so that it is consumed. (Lacan, 1972d, p. 11) 2

"Casters" in "ça marche comme sur des roulettes" can be "wheels" - it "is enough for it to run as if it were on wheels." (Vanheule, 2016, p. 7)

Badiou is right to be concerned. Capitalism's "small masters (S2)" have disarmed philosophy's university discourse, which was the "modern form of domination." The university, capitalism, and science were intertwined, and philosophy's labourers became objectified as "helots" of capitalism,  $S2 \rightarrow a$ . (Lacan 2007 p. 208) Its labourers became the "subject of science," and with capitalism a labour-power "quantifiable and measurable." The productions of its labourers (students and/or proletariats) are disarmed by the State. (Tomšič, 2015, pp. 216, 211) In short, capitalism uses the errancy with the belonging of the speaking being to oppose philosophy's universalism along with any of its left-wing protestations. It is the State's use of a speaking being's non-fixity between the counts that *disarms* philosophy's universalism.

And furthermore, just to be clear, sophism's threat to comprehensible signification, specifically with Lacan's kind of sophism, produces what can be held in place as a new S1, which undoes

both the State's and philosophy's universalisms.

The Platonic mantra, that philosophy starts *not* from language, but from things in themselves, exposes philosophy's reliance on comprehensible signification, that it is necessary to support its *for-us* correlation. The prerequisite for its objective to be "addressed to all" supposedly provides common comprehensibility. There are two co-joined issues here. In *Cratylus* rule-setters name things suitably and Badiou's mathematical ontology names the real via mathematization – as he states, "we can absolutely know the in-itself through mathematics." (Plato, 1997, p. 108, 489d) (Badiou, 2009a, p. 589) This knowledge, "the symbolic in the real, Plato's good, to call it by its name, is nothing other than number." (Lacan, 2002d, p. XXIII, 6) It sticks a name/number onto the real. This cojoins with an avoidance of the real hole in discursive semblance, the hole in the symbolic which is disjunctive for a speaking being. Philosophy's universalism conceals and invalidates the disjunction. Sense in language, the crux of the problem, reveals "something radically unassimilable to the signifier. It is quite simply the subject's singular existence," that is, "the suffering of the signifier is not with the collective but with the individual." (Lacan, 1993, p. 179) (Lacan, 1992, p. 143)

## 2. Lacan's Anti-Philosophical Act

In a series of lectures 1994-95, published as *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*, which are exclusively about the later Lacan, Badiou defines the fall of semblance as an "act" in the Lacanian clinic. Although he seems hesitant, for the sake of philosophy, he defines this psychoanalytic act as an anti-philosophic act. He states that this is tricky to do: firstly, to equate the two acts; secondly, to ascertain "whether it's the emergence of psychoanalysis that puts an end ... to philosophy, exposing it as a sham;" and thirdly to clarify whether psychoanalysis is reducible to the psychoanalytic act. He describes the psychoanalytic act as what happens with the fall of the "subject supposed to know," that it is the fall of semblance. 3 It is anti-philosophical because it is a fall of knowledge. 4 This is the opposite to Badiou's philosophy where thought thinks being and knows the truth behind the world of appearing. 5 He explains that "every anti-philosophy [gesture] involves the destitution of the philosophical category of truth," anti-philosophers want to discredit "truth in its philosophical sense." 6 And he states that Lacan "set[s truth] aside in favor ... of the analytic act." (Badiou, 2018, pp. 6, 25, 8, 23)

His dispute with Lacan is that Lacan unlinks truth from knowledge, and sidelines philosophical truth in favor of a different knowledge. As such, there are two kinds of knowledge - he cites two Lacanian statements that incapsulate these two knowledges. Firstly, Lacan states that "there is a relationship about being that cannot be known." And secondly, "knowledge about truth can be constituted." (Lacan, 1998, pp. 119, 91) (Badiou, 2018, p. 24) The first statement and the first kind of knowledge is about the real hole in knowledge, the symbolic. This hole relates to the psychoanalytic act. Badiou says that the second is knowledge *about* the unknown and it is related to the matheme, that is, the matheme renders thinkable what cannot be known. 7

He thinks the two knowledges represent two different reals: the first being a real that involves the unsayable real and the second is "what can be *said* of the real." (Badiou, 2018, p. 33) **8** 

The matheme will be at a point of impasse, but this point of impasse is the point of the real. So, the matheme will be at the real point of the mathematizable, which is "what can be taught of the real." (Badiou, 2018, p. 31-2)

He asserts that the second real has "mastery" over the first, because it is what makes being in Lacan's psychoanalysis "thinkable." (Badiou, 2018, p. 24, 25) **9** 

Although he knows that according to Lacan, the matheme is stuck in an impasse because "the real is determined by the absence of the sexual relation," he nevertheless thinks that he can turn Lacan's theory around to philosophy's advantage. **10** Although "the matheme is what inscribes the real as an impasse," Badiou posits that it is left up to the matheme and philosophy to write the *sense* of the real, because, after all, the other real, "must be kept silent." **11** It can only be written about, and thus for Badiou, his philosophy's matheme does the writing. (Badiou, 2018, p. 32)

[The matheme] is therefore at the point of impasse of science and not *in* science. [It is] what can be scientifically said of the real. ... True things can be said about the real: that's what science is. (Badiou, 2018, p. 33)

He states there is a torsion in "a double occurrence of the real" with science and the matheme.

However, he then decides it would be "too .. dialectical" to have two reals. **12** He therefore asserts that "it's not a cleavage of the real" with the two knowledges - it is a double occurrence of science and the matheme, and "the matheme is the key to this tension," "to the act." (Badiou, 2018, pp. 33, 24, 33)

However, the psychoanalytic act cannot be dominated by philosophy's universal matheme because, even if supposedly its mathematization is in torsion with science, it is nevertheless an organized extension of language, which forecloses the immanence of a speaking being. As Lacan states, "mathematical formalization, [such as the] matheme, ... only subsists if I employ, in presenting it, the language I make use of." (Lacan, 1998, p. 119) For him, the real point as the impasse for the matheme, is not a new thing that occurs with set theory, or for that matter, Badiou's set theoretical mathematics = ontology. The scientific mathematical discourse "begins with Euclid" not Cantor, because all set theory does is bring us "face to face with the impossible," the point of the real impasse for mathematics. And then we say, 'that's not it,' which is of course our appeal to the real. Mathematics is a discourse, not in its language as per "the unconscious, structured like a language," but because a language of mathematics within analysis comes back to a discourse. (Lacan, 1974, p. 40)

Set theory mathematical ontology, or the significance of ontology for philosophy, leads us to the heart of the matter for Badiou - the psychoanalytic act *is* anti-philosophical because when it cuts the sequence of signifiers it cuts the fixity between the counts - it is an "ontological disaster." (Badiou, 2018, pp. 239, 46, 32, 239) *If* the chain holds together, then the signified is thinkable for science. *If* it is cut by the psychoanalytic act, metaphysics is excluded or becomes destitute. The cut is therefore an anti-philosophical act because, as Lacan states, it is "taken as a fact of debeing," *désêtre*. (Lacan, 1970b, p. 1) **13** It is an ontological disaster, which Badiou describes as "a dis-being of meaning." Thus, Lacan's anti-philosophical act cuts the knowledge of mathematical ontology because ontology is dependent on comprehensible signification. It's not a matter of mathematical propositions being true, or that mathematics can say the unsayable, or write the sense of the real, because as Badiou cites Lacan, after the cut "no meaning will be held to be self-evident." (Lacan, 1966, p. 403) (Lacan, 1970b, p. 1) (Badiou, 2018, p. 46) What is relevant for the act is the signified effect of the real unconscious, not signifier meaning.

Philosophy's assumption since *Parmenides* is that "Being thinks," but for Lacan this thinkability is where being is absent. Where the transferential unconscious thinks, the real unconscious is not, where the real unconscious *is*, the real unconscious does not think. Hence, there is a "destitution of philosophy's pretention to be a theory of the real." (Badiou, 2018, p. 137)

To Badiou's credit, he lists Lacan's main objections to philosophy: philosophy's "love of truth is a love of impotence" "with respect to the All;" the sexual rapport exists with respect to a philosophical fantasy, and as such, philosophy with the master's discourse puts a stop to the turn of the discourses; and philosophy won't recognize "the real is the ab-sense of the sexual relationship." In fact, it forces ab-sense into sense. Also, "philosophy doesn't want to know anything about jouissance." Here is the return to Plato's *Cratylus*, philosophy starts with things, not words. It doesn't want to know of the jouissance of the speaking being. "It is this 'not wanting to know anything about it' that makes [philosophy] compulsively declare the imperative of returning to things themselves." (Badiou, 2018, pp. 135, 139, 140)

While philosophy claims, a truth of the real "as knowledge," the psychoanalytic act is radically opposed to it. This is because the real unconscious undermines the knowledge of philosophy, as well as *the claims* that the transferential unconscious makes about a truth of the real. And this *also* means the real unconscious undermines Badiou's torsion with the mathema and mathematization. The undermining is a real act.

Lacan's analytic discourse provides a place for a potential access to the real. As he states in ... or Worse, it "is not a denied universal. The not-all is not none." (Lacan, 2018, p. 6) The access is a non-negated knowledge of the real unconscious. Badiou points to this when he cites Lacan – that "the real makes a function in knowledge." (Badiou, 2018, p. 145) Lacan also states that the real as such functions in the act. (Lacan, 1970b, pp. 27, 28) This function of the real ensures it sustains itself and adds to itself, to act as impossible with the transferential unconscious, that is, to act as contrary to the possibility of sexual rapport, that "sex does not define any relation in speaking beings." (Lacan, 2018, pp. 5, 8-9) (Lacan, 2002k, p. I, 8) It demonstrates via an error, "where we would simply fail" with phallic jouissance. (Lacan, 1974, pp. 65, 67) As such its act confirms it as the real unconscious.

The unconscious, one sees, is only a metaphoric term in designating the knowledge that only sustains itself as presenting itself as impossible, so that from that it is confirmed as being real. (Lacan, 1970b, p. 15)

- 1 Also, crucially it circumvents Lacan's non-rapport of the sexual relation. (Tomšič, 2015, p. 219-20) (Lacan, 1990, p. 30)
- 2 The little inversion is one of three differences between the master and capitalist discourses. The other two are with an arrow pointing down on the left and the omission of the top arrow.
- 3 He also posits later in the lectures with a quote from Lacan that the psychoanalytic act is "the emergence of a speaking that is not always able to exist with respect to what has been spoken." (Lacan, 1998, p. 22) (Badiou, 2018, p. 60)
- 4 He states that what he wants to achieve with these lectures is to explain what Lacan means when he says, "Truth may not convince, knowledge passes in the act." (Lacan, 2001) Lacan's 'Allocution sur l'ensignement,' in *Autres Écrits*, was originally published in *Scilicet* 2/3, 1970. Badiou is inferring that Lacan's points to an anti-philosophical act. (Badiou, 2018, p. 7) 5 Thought annihilates "the void of being by the radiance of what is." (Badiou, 2018, p. 13) 6 They do this as Nietzsche puts it, "to cure humanity of the Plato-disease." (Badiou, 2018, pp. 21)
- 7 And he thinks it is the matheme Lacan is alluding to in another text: "knowledge constitutes the truth of our discourse." (Lacan, 2001, p. 302)
- 8 My italics.
- 9 Philosophy seeks to demarcate being as the "presence of the Idea." "This comes about because the idea is counted as one," which makes for a "simple commonality [common reason] under the normative authority of the One." "The idea ... causes being to be thought." (Badiou, 2018, pp. 50, 52, 50) Immanence is demarcated by the idea as therefore thinkable. It is "force[d] to be thinkable only in the guise of what-it-is." In other words, it is therefore turned into "a normative position." Badiou's posits that instead of "a coming to self of its own essence or of the return to self of unconcealment," his philosophy is the demarcation or fixing, "delimitation" of the idea,

such that being becomes "the very norm of what is ... in the guise of the "what-it-is."" (Badiou, 2018, p. 50)

10 He knows Lacan calls the philosopher "the master's fool," and that the philosopher aspires to "science with consciousness, so he's blocked as a result by mathematics [because] mathematics is science without consciousness." Badiou is "absolutely opposed" to Lacan on this. He asserts that since Plato, it is philosophy that has been unblocking mathematics. As "a locus of thought," mathematics blocks itself because it is "unaware of its ontological significance." Mathematics apparently blocks itself even as one of his truth procedures, that is, the hole of mathematics blocks it. He is positing that if mathematics is a truth procedure philosophy is required to formally uphold the significance of mathematics as ontological. The other conditions (art, love, and politics) do not require such help. However, the other big "ongoing task of philosophy is to help reopen the hole of politics." The block in politics is not created "by itself, which is the case with mathematics." Politics is blocked by "very powerful people." He is also adamant that *philosophy* is not blocked by mathematics or blocked like politics, because his philosophy formally clarifies the true ontological nature of mathematics and assists politics also on a formal level. (Badiou, 2018, pp. 29, 36-7)

11 As I stated above, in *Happiness*, he appropriates Lacan's for naming of the matheme as what is universally transmissible –that this means "that the ideal of philosophy must in effect be the matheme." (Badiou, 2019, p. 57)

12 This theory of the double torsion goes back to his lectures in the late 1970s. (Badiou, 2009b)

13 Lacan uses the term *désêtre* to indicate the ontological disaster, "metaphysical destitution." He also uses the term in other places such as in ... *or Worse*. (Lacan 2018 p. p. 210)

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