

**ETHICS AND AESTHETICS  
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALAIN BADIOU**

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May, 2005

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## ABSTRACT

### ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALAIN BADIOU

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The supposed impossibility of achieving a form of rational agency for action is the prevailing critique against contemporary theories of representation. Alain Badiou's philosophy appears to solve this problem by assigning a subject-*form* and not a substantial subject as such as rational agency and by filling in the space of *truth* left empty by the declaration of the end of philosophy with a new universality of truth subject to temporality. Yet this apparent duality of form and content pertaining to subjectivity, and the manner in which time and history are constructed in Badiou's theory of truth signal the return of a certain transcendence, and the very abolishment of the time which appears to be thus constructed. This thesis aims to make a critical discussion on Alain Badiou's philosophy through his fifteen theses on art, as the return of classical philosophy and to rise the ethical stakes involved in putting forth a philosophy based upon truth.

**Keywords:** Art, Ethics, Truth, Difference, Subject, Event, Mathematics, Singularity,

Universality

## ÖZET

### ALAIN BADIOU'NUN FELSEFESİNDE

#### ETİK VE ESTETİK

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Rasyonel bir eylem aracı oluşturmanın imkansızlığı, çağdaş tasarım felsefelerine yöneltilen eleştirilerin başlıcasını oluşturur. Alain Badiou'nun felsefesi ilk bakışta bu soruna, rasyonel bir araç olarak tözsel bir özne yerine bir özne *formu* getirerek ve felsefenin sonunun ilan edilişiyle beraber boş kalan *gerçek* kavramının yerine zamansızlıkla kurulan yeni bir evrensel gerçek öne sürerek çözüm getiriyor gibi görünmektedir. Bununla beraber, Badiou'nun gerçek üzerine kurulu felsefesinde öne sürülen form ve içerik ikiliği, ve zaman ve tarihin kuruluş şekilleri aşkınlığın geri dönüşüne ve bu şekilde kurulan zamanın yeniden yıkılmasına işaret etmektedir. Bu tez, Alain Badiou'nun felsefesini, sanat üzerine on beş tezini ele alarak klasik felsefenin geri dönüşü olarak eleştirmeyi ve gerçek kavramı üzerine kurulan bir felsefe öne sürmenin kaçınılmaz olarak getirdiği etik sorunları sorgulamayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Sanat, Etik, Gerçek, Fark, Özne, Olay, Matematik, Tekillik,

Evrensellik

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To all my friends, the best of friends, without them life would be unbearable.

And to my father Mehmet Vahit Yalım (1951 – 2000). If only I could have believed in myself as much as you did... I will never walk alone.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This thesis has as its main concern, bringing a critical approach towards Alain Badiou's philosophy through his fifteen theses on contemporary art as a center of focus for investigating his general philosophy on the basis of ethics and aesthetics. Philosophy, since Hegel has been declaring the end of philosophy and with post-structuralism it has taken a turn towards difference and otherness, as the contemporary concept of the subject does no longer have a substantial identity and the very thing put at stake is the representational process, as both the constituting and the de-constituting movement itself resulting from the being in language. However, Alain Badiou's philosophy seems to take a re-turn towards a philosophy of truth, maintaining all the time the modern doctrine that "the subject can no longer be theorized as the self-identical substance that underlies change, nor as the product of reflection, nor as the correlate of an object" (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004, 3). The specific inquest and interest of this study is to engage in a questioning of Badiou's philosophy – especially when he presently is hugely popular in Europe and the States – regarding specifically his theory of truth in its ethical aspect via critically undertaking his fifteen theses on contemporary art. This, also arising from the fact that he has published an entire book on ethics, that is, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* and that his general philosophy has serious implications regarding aesthetic and ethical matters in their intricate relationship.

For Alain Badiou, philosophy is an identification of mathematics and ontology and in his view, mathematics is that which conditions or should condition philosophy and as

such, “it is the infinite development of what can be said of being qua being” (Badiou, TW, 38). Thus his entire philosophy is based on mathematics and more specifically on set theory. Considering the complex nature of the mathematical implications deriving from set-theory and its great relevance for Badiou’s philosophy, a relatively extensive and detailed elaboration of this theory allows us to understand his main concern with mathematics and the manner in which he relates a modern doctrine of the subject with ontology. The subject-form in Badiou emerges in four domains, namely art, science, politics and love and the emergence of the subject-form is to be elaborated via its implications. The critical approach of this paper will rather concern the implications to be drawn from the artistic domain, as his fifteen theses constitute a queue for his general philosophy, as well as because of the intimate relation between aesthetics and ethics that this study pre-supposes. This thesis, despite appearances, is in no way a putting to the test of Alain Badiou’s philosophy, especially considering the complex nature of the relation he establishes between mathematics and his theory which requires a certain level of expertise in that domain, but rather a critical look at the stakes involved for contemporary art in putting forth the idea of art as a medium of truth-procedure and by implication, the stakes involved for ethics in putting forth the idea of the universality of a truth.

The aforementioned relationship between aesthetics and ethics is taken for granted in this study, so as to question the “value” of the value of the theses Badiou lists and in this respect, post-structural stakes, mainly those put forth by Derrida, and Deleuze whom Badiou affirms has been highly influential on his theory and both of whom Badiou uses, albeit distortedly, in the construction of his own discourse, as well as Lacoue-Labarthe, will be taken advantage of as points of reference involving the

critique of Badiou's theory. Considering the general inclination for reading post-structural theories as devoid or incapable of accounting for "responsible action" and Badiou constituting the highlights of such a reaction, my main motivation for this study is to rethink the implications of both and to inquire upon whether Badiou's framework is actually that far from the conventional conception of ethics that he opposes in stating as deriving from the "consensus upon a radical Evil" while replacing it with the idea of a universality of truth (Badiou, E, 2001).

## **1.2 CHAPTERS IN BRIEF**

Following a brief Introduction, in the second chapter a general account of Alain Badiou's philosophy as a whole and the concepts he makes use of are given, following the trajectory of Badiou's *Theoretical Writings* starting from set-theory which provides the basis for Badiou's ontology as the thinking of being as pure multiplicity. The introduction to *Infinite Thought* is often referred to, for a more comprehensible explanation where complex mathematical propositions are involved. The "event" is the experience of the real ground of being which "happens" by pure chance to someone, in that it disrupts the order of the world which is the world of appearance. Differences pertain to the world of appearance whereas, the Same is what may come to be through the post-evental procedure of a truth which is not totalizing but a localized truth, yet one which is universal in that it is subtracted from all particularities and presents itself as a singularity. This truth procedure is assigned to four domains, namely art, politics, science and love. The subject, which is not a subject as such but a "form" of subject, is also what comes to being through this truth

procedure which involves fidelity to a genuine event. And what Badiou conceptualizes as the ethics of truth is this condition of fidelity to a truth.

The third chapter, pre-supposing the intimate relation between aesthetics and ethics, aims to direct a critical approach to the ethical value of Alain Badiou's claim to universal truth in its relation to aesthetics as the complex network of relationships between form and content, subject and subject-form and as the very process of representation that is involved in a truth procedure as such, referring mostly to Badiou's *Theoretical Writings* and *Ethics* for their elaboration and to Marc De Kesel's *Truth as Formal Catholicism* as regards their critique. It involves an attempt at critically questioning the steps taken by Badiou in order to come up with distinctions between form and content, between truth and simulacrum, as well as between indifference and difference. This chapter attempts to point out that although "subject" is present as form and not as substance in Badiou's theory of truth, this form already implies a certain content regarding truth because of the initial assumption of the accomplishment of a truth procedure – even though truth itself is subject to temporality and thus can never be fully accomplished.

The issue of difference and indifference is also reviewed in a critical manner in the context of the claim for the universality of truth which is essentially carried out by a simultaneous reading between Badiou's and Marc De Kesel's above mentioned works. It discusses upon the argument of De Kesel, that a universal truth's claim to being indifferent to the differences that are in the world, is based upon an originary difference or exclusion pertaining to the universal which also accounts for the denial

of time in the temporality of the infinite truth procedure and rises certain stakes as regards the ethical implications.

Another main argument of this chapter involves the question of mimesis. Art is one of the four truth-generating domains and a procedure of truth is carried out insofar as it provides a break with knowledge, according to Badiou. This is argued as a taking for granted of the problem of mimesis which is later elaborated in chapter four with a brief reference to Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typography*.

The fourth chapter, which is an attempt at a further and in depth elaboration of the above mentioned essential points of critique, is based upon Badiou's *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art* where Badiou posits the formal criteria of contemporary art according to his theory. As art is one of Badiou's four truth-generating domains, the theses are questioned through their identification with the truth procedure, again referring to critiques of De Kesel. The critique of Badiou's distinction between a genuine event and a false event is one of the central arguments based upon his elaboration of them in *Ethics* and is accounted for with reference to the problem of mimesis.

The theory on the void is later taken up as another essential point of critique and argues that the void itself is based upon a certain duality which is established at the cost of exclusion. This duality is argued in relation to the other points of critique in order to draw the ethical consequences deriving from them.

In this thesis certain aspects of the ethics of deconstruction which have been subject to Badiou's harsh criticisms have been made use of as lines of reference regarding this critique of aesthetics and ethics in the philosophy of Alain Badiou.

## 2 THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALAIN BADIOU

### 2.1 SET-THEORY

The core of Alain Badiou's philosophy and framework revolves around his essential belief in the universality of truth, albeit in the plural form of "truths". This truth procedure is assigned as a potentiality to four privileged domains, these being art – which constitutes the main concern of this study – , science, politics and love. To question the distinction of these four domains, to understand how this procedure works and the structure underlying his fifteen theses on contemporary art, it is necessary to give a general account of his philosophy, with set-theory as a basis for its framework. In Badiou's thinking, the subject is subordinated to the emergence of the event and to the contingency of the "being multiple" which is effectuated by set theory. This theory of multiples (Badiou adopts Cantor's version of set theory) stands in the intersection between mathematics and ontology.

He states the five conditions for the ontology of pure multiplicity in *Theoretical Writings* (2004, 15). According to Badiou, being is inconsistent multiplicity and ontology is the thinking of this inconsistent multiplicity. There are, accordingly, only multiples of multiples and since no limit can determine multiplicity, there is no originary principle of finitude. Badiou, in any case criticizes modern philosophy as subordinating the subject to finitude, which only serves to reinforce the power of the One, ultimately paving the way for mysticism and the idea of God. The multiple is thus, infinite and there are an infinity of infinities, that is, an infinity of infinite multiplicities. When a multiple is not a multiple of multiples, it is essential to say that

it is a multiple of nothing and this constitutes the void that is the center piece for the conception of the theory of the event because it is this thinking together of the inconsistent multiplicity and of the void that helps Badiou build the relation between set theory and the multiple situations. Badiou then states the fifth and final condition that every effective ontological presentation is necessarily axiomatic. This necessity of axiomatic thinking arises because “claiming to access the multiple exposition of being from the perspective of a definition, or dialectically, by means of successive delimitations, is in fact already operating in the ambit of the metaphysical power of the one” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 43). According to Badiou, the dilemma of ontology resides in setting out the thinkable character of the pure multiple without stating under what conditions a multiple can be recognized as such. Axiomatic thinking allows for a kind of thinking that never defines what it thinks, never makes a definition of its terms nor of what they are not. “Even though the primitive term or terms may be inscribed, it is not in the sense of naming whose referent would need to be represented but rather in the sense of being laid out in a series wherein the term subsists only through the ordered play of its founding connections” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 43).

As regards set-theory, when positing its outlines, it is again a case of five conditions (Badiou, TW, 2004, 46). First, a set has no essence besides that of being a multiplicity, “it is without external determination because there is nothing to restrict its apprehension with reference to something else; and it is without internal determination because what it gathers as multiple is indifferent”. This means that the multiples do not consist of individuals which brings about the second condition; every element of a set is itself a set. This attests to an absolutely open infinity because these are not only infinite sets but there is an infinity of such sets and there is no set of all



sets which amounts to saying that these sets do not belong to an all-inclusive universe. As is mentioned in the introduction to *Infinite Thought* (Badiou, 2004, 18), the flexibility of set theory resides in the fact that once identity is removed from multiplicity, a multiplicity can belong to any number of other multiplicities. All multiples of multiples are woven from a set of nothing, which is the empty set, a pure mark, the void. And finally, the thinking of the pure multiple necessitates axiomatic decision and not a dialectical principle. In such a theory, identity and difference is founded not on quality, but on extension. Badiou conceptualizes such a “difference” in the following manner:

If a set differs from another, it is because there exists at least one element which belongs to one but not the other. This ‘at least one’ localizes the difference and prohibits purely global differences. There is always one point of difference. This is a crucial trait, particularly because it undermines the appeal (whether Aristotelian or Deleuzian) to the qualitative and to global, natural difference. In the Platonic style favoured by the set-theoretical approach, alterity can always be reduced to punctual differences, and difference can always be specified in a uniform, elementary fashion” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 57).

This view, later in this study, will be elaborated as one of the problematic aspects regarding ethics. As regards singularity, the multiple plays an essential role. It is the inconsistent multiple-without-oneness which identifies singularity *from within*, in its strict actuality and stretches thought towards the point where there is no difference

between difference and identity. Ultimately there is singularity because both difference and identity are indifferent to it (Badiou, TW, 2004, 79).

## **2.2 THE EVENT**

Badiou introduces the theory of the event as “the vast question of that which subtracts itself from ontological determination, the question of that which is *not* being qua being” (Badiou,, TW, 2004, 98). To see to it that the One does not come to re-establish itself on a global level, the ontological field should at some point be de-totalized. And it is this point that constitutes the event in Badiou. Badiou asks the question: “What subtracts the sheer ‘what happens’ from the general determinations of ‘what is’?” At this point, the chapter entitled “The Event as Trans-Being” in *Theoretical Writings* (Badiou, 2004, 97) is the main reference. An event is a fragment of being. Badiou explains that what composes an event is always extracted from a situation, which is a singular multiplicity, the state, or the language, etc. of the event. The fragment of the event is its evental site. But the peculiar trait of such a site is that none of its elements belong to the site, or better, “all of whose elements are on the edge of the void”. According to the axiom of foundation which presupposes that in every multiple there is at least one element that ‘founds’ it, the decomposition of a multiplicity does not assume an infinite descent (it can be infinite in extension but not in depth), but comes to a halt at some point. At this point the multiplicity encounters something that is no longer itself. The consequence of this axiom is that no multiple can be an element of itself and also that no multiple can be a multiple of itself. Whereas the event, according to Badiou, ‘is composed of the elements of a site, but

also by the event itself, which belongs to itself” which means that the event is an unfounded multiple and thus turns it into a happening of pure chance.

With the happening of the event, what comes to the surface, displacing the logic of appearance, is being itself in its creative ‘inconsistency’, its void. Badiou explains: “We will call that aspect of a being which is linked to the constraint of a local or situated exposition of its being-multiple, the ‘appearance’ of this being. (...) All being is being-there: this is the essence of appearance” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 170). It is the localization of being which constitutes its appearance and thus implies another particular being which is its site or situation. Appearance is what binds a being to its site. As being qua being is absolutely unbound as a pure multiple, and no multiplicity is linked to any other, the beingness of beings presupposes nothing. It is appearance that superimposes the world of relation upon ontological unbinding. Badiou admits of a kind of reversal of Platonism when he proposes that as opposed to Platonism, it is the immediate world, the world of relation and of appearances, which is solid and consistent in which being is held-prisoner by the being-there, whereas it is being in itself which is “anarchic, neutral, inconsistent, unbound, indifferent to signification, having no ties with anything other than itself” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 170-171). This is how the event, as the rising to the surface of being itself, in its happening by pure chance, is the ecliptic experience (because immediately it disappears) of an encounter with reality.

### 2.3 TRUTH

Here is adequate to introduce the truth procedure at work in Badiou because it is what begins “after” an event “happens”. But it does not happen by itself because it is not enough that an event happens, it must also be recognized by someone and named “as an event whose implications concern the nature of the entire situation. This initial naming of the event as an event, this decision that it has transformational consequences for the entirety of a situation, is what Badiou terms an ‘intervention’” (Clemens and Feltham, IT, 2004, 27). This intervention is the point where “fidelity” or a “generic truth procedure” starts. This procedure “is basically a praxis consisting of a series of enquiries into the situation made by militants (to be subjects – my addition) who act in fidelity to the event. The object of these enquiries is to work out how to transform the situation in line with what is revealed by the event’s belonging to the situation” (Clemens and Feltham, IT, 2004, 28). Through an act of truth one comes to know the void of being, Badiou remarks. This question of truth procedure is equivalent to the question of the “new”, of how a set comes to be new. What constitutes this act of truth is “subtraction” as four operations to undergo, namely the undecidable, the indiscernible, the generic and the unnameable. These are also the links that Badiou establishes with language, because in order to face the question of the “new” ontology has to be, once again, de-totalized and for this end, language turns out to be the solution. Here a short explanation of the four operations of subtraction will be given.

The undecidable is “that which subtracts itself from a supposedly exhaustive classification of statements, realized according to the values ascribed to them by a

norm” and it is valueless. The indiscernible is “what subtracts difference as such from all remarking. The indiscernible subtracts the two from duality” which means that when permuting two terms is “in vain”, the two terms are indiscernible. The undecidable being the subtraction from a norm, the indiscernible is subtraction from a mark. The generic subset, on the other hand, - unlike a constructible set which assumes that there exists in the language a given expression which constructs a subset of a given universe – is not constructible. It is subtracted “from every identification effected by means of a predicate of the language” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 106). It is “‘new’ insofar as it cannot be discerned by that language” (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004, 30). As to the unnameable, Badiou states that “a term in the universe is ‘unnameable’ *if it is the only one in that universe that is not named by any expression*” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 108) which assigns uniqueness to it and which can be formulated as subtraction from the proper name or “as a singularity subtracted from singularization” (TW, 2004, 109). As already mentioned, Badiou insists on four types of truth: scientific, artistic, political and amorous and philosophy’s declared task is in a way, to render them compossible through a formal concept of truth.

The trajectory of truth is defined in the following manner (Badiou, TW, 2004, 112): something must happen because the place as such gives nothing but repetition. This advent is the event. An event surges forth which constitutes the basis for the undecidable, or else it would be subject to the norms of repetition. As soon as an event surges forth, it disappears and this is why it is necessary to say that it took place, that it was given in the situation. To say that it took place is a deciding of the undecidable and it is an axiom, since it is subtracted from the norm of evaluation. It is at this point that “fidelity” is introduced as the process of a new multiple’s coming

into being. “The ontological model of the numerous practical enquiries that subjects who act in fidelity to an event make while they are attempting to bring about the change entailed by the event” (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004, 31) is called “forcing”. In Badiou’s words, “it is the infinite procedure of verifying the true”, and “the successive choices that make up the verification are devoid of any aim that would be representable in the object or supported by a principle of objectivity” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 112). This is pure choice in Badiou’s view – which will also be problematized later in this study – and this situation goes under the name “freedom on indifference” which is to say, that it is not governed by any distinguishable difference. Badiou formulizes this as such: “If there is no value by which to discriminate what you have to choose, it is your freedom as such which provides the norm, to the point where it effectively becomes indistinguishable from chance. The indiscernible is the subtraction that establishes a point of coincidence between chance and freedom” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 113). In this instance, as is mentioned in the introduction to *Infinite Thought* (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004, 31-32), it is important to emphasize that fidelity inevitably comes in different shapes, especially when truth is to emerge in the different domains of art, politics, science and love. But the main point for Badiou is that in each case it is the coming into being of the “new” that matters and the relation that it entertains with the established situation is one of indiscernibility, that is, the established discourses cannot serve to discern its nature. (A remark not to be forgotten here and which is stated in the same page, is that ontology does not serve to discern the “nature” of any situation either, but its “structure”, in Badiou).

## 2.4 SUBJECT

Still following the trajectory of truth, it is this indiscernible which co-ordinates the subject.

A subject is that which disappears between two indiscernibles, or that which is eclipsed through the subtraction of a difference without concept. This subject is that throw of the dice which does not abolish chance but effectuates it as verification of the axiom that grounds it. What was decided at the point of the undecidable event will proceed through *this* term, in which the local act of a truth is represented – without reason or marked difference, and indiscernible from its other. The subject, fragment of chance, crosses the distance-less gap that the subtraction of the indiscernible inscribes between two terms. In this regard the subject of a truth is in effect genuinely in-different: the indifferent lover (Badiou, TW, 2004, 113).

This is how, the subject that assumes no pre-supposed identity and the ground for autonomous rational action are reconciled by Badiou. Badiou defines his notion of the subject as “to be understood, not as the empty centre of a transcendental realm but rather as the operational unity of a multiplicity of effectuations of identity. Or as the *multiple ways of being self-identical*” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 142). The act of a subject being necessarily finite, the trajectory of truth is an infinite process, actuated little by little through successive indifferences and eventually, the infinite subset that would have come into being, were it possible to complete it, would be a generic subset. The coming into being of the subject is in no way a predestination but a consequence of

pure chance encounters between people and events. Badiou also mentions that “The event is also what grounds time, or rather – event by event – *times*” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 93). Thus time is constructed event by event, yet this does not condition the coming encounters between future subjects and future events. Because of its being dependent on a local order of verification and moreover, because there is no expression for truth – it cannot coincide with any given expression - a truth is scarcely-said according to Badiou. Its taking place is also its re-lapsing into the domain of knowledge. A truth, since infinite in its being and finite in its act, can only be represented in the future perfect. This derives from the fact that were it to be completed, it would have been as a generic infinity and the verification process entails the “possibility of a fictive disposition of the effects of its having-taken-place” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 114). A truth’s being infinitely generic in future perfect is what Badiou calls “forcing”. He adds that the obstacle facing the generic being of a truth is that, at some point, this forcing encounters its radical limit and eventually may result in a truth’s giving its own name to the unnameable. This desire to name the unnameable is where Badiou perceives Evil or this is what constitutes one of the figures of Badiou’s notion of Evil.

#### **2.4.1 ETHICS OF TRUTH**

“The ethic of truth is thus, fully subordinate to the particularity of *a* truth” (Hallward, E, 2002, XIV). “To identify a truth with total power is Evil in the sense of *disaster*”. (Badiou, E, 2001, 71). Evil has two other figures in Badiou’s view. The other two being: “To believe that an event convokes not the void of the earlier situation, but its



plenitude, is Evil in the sense of *simulacrum*, or *terror*; to fail to live up to a fidelity is Evil in the sense of *betrayal*, betrayal in oneself of the Immortal that you are” (Badiou, E, 2001, 71). In other words, betrayal consists of not living up to the fidelity required; simulacrum is the confusion of a whatever event with a genuine event and disaster is to impose a totality to a truth. Following these principles, as mentioned in the introduction to *Ethics* (Hallward, E, 2001, XII) the ethics of a truth respectively involves three conditions, namely, discernment, in the sense that the true and the false are not to be confused; courage and endurance, in the sense that one should “keep going” despite the difficulty of a fidelity and finally; moderation and restraint, in the sense that one should resist the idea of identifying a truth with total power and of naming the unnameable.

It is of importance to mention that a truth is not a pre-given norm, nor is it a matter of revealing a truth as if it were a secret because there is no depth which would have constituted but another name for transcendence. This resulting from the fact that it has its origin in a disappearance, the disappearance of the event which ensures its not being repeated in presence. The fact that a truth is always local resides in its only being a sub-multiple of a multiple called “situation”. Thus a truth is the truth of its being “included in that which it is the truth of” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 122). On the other hand, knowledge is the act of naming the subsets of a situation, as well as the interweaving of the forms of knowledge. Establishing the predicative trait inscribing a truth to a given subset is, in other words, what Badiou defines as knowledge. What distinguishes truth from knowledge is that the subset that truth constitutes within a situation cannot be inscribed by a predicative trait. “A truth is an indistinct subset” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 124), as well as being infinite insofar as it remains immanent and

hence only insofar as touches upon the real – explains Badiou. Or else, were it transcendent, it could easily go under the name “God”, or “Other”. This experience of the real ground, borrowed from Lacan, is here what constitutes the limit, but with a difference from Lacan ignored by Badiou according to Marc de Kesel in *Truth as Formal Catholicism on Alain Badiou* (Kesel, TFC, 2004). That is, according to Kessel, whilst for Lacan the real is that which, should it break into the ordinary world, would cause evil and disaster, turns into an attestation to the belief in being’s inherent goodness in Badiou. This also to be later elaborated in this study. Badiou distinguishes between being and the real (Badiou, TW, 2004, 129) by referring to Lacan who claims that three fundamental passions – love, hate and ignorance – can be inscribed ‘only in the realm of being, and not in that of the real’. Thus love of truth is directed toward the being of truth but encountering its real, it falters, that is, something which evades language is maintained in the errancy of the excess through the power of the forcings. What is meant by the experience of the real is a single point where the power of truth comes to a halt. It is a term which does not allow prescription in such a way that it could be conditioned by truth and this unique term is what Badiou calls the unnameable. This oneness in the real is what constitutes truth’s powerlessness; how to think that which subtracts itself from every veridical naming? The consequence is that one term only in a given situation, remains unforceable and the real of the situation is thus attested to. In the final analysis, this term displaces love from the love of the generic – pertaining to the appearance of a truth – to the love of the unnameable – pertaining to its essence- and it is this love of the unnameable “that allows the love of truth to be maintained without disaster. (...) For where truth is concerned, only by undergoing the ordeal of its powerlessness do we discover the ethic required for assuming its power” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 132).

## 2.4.2 UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH

The universal in Badiou “can be experienced only through the production (or reproduction) of a trajectory of thought, and this trajectory constitutes (or reconstitutes) a subjective disposition” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 143). Badiou explains that the universal is not a transcendental and that the possibility of a universal is what preconditions a subject-thought at the local level. The subject is a specific point in the procedure through which the universal is constituted. According to Badiou, its central dialectic is that of the local as subject, and the global as infinite procedure. Furthermore, it is an incalculable emergence and not a describable structure. Badiou makes a distinction between “particular” and “singular” in the following manner: “I will call *particular* whatever can be discerned in knowledge by means of descriptive predicates. But I will call *singular* that which, although identifiable as a procedure at work in a situation, is nevertheless subtracted from every predicative description” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 144) and that “every universal presents itself not as a regularization of a particular or of differences, but as a singularity that is subtracted from identitarian predicates; although obviously it proceeds via those predicates. The subtraction of particularities must be opposed to their supposition” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 145). In other words, the universal singularity is that decision about an undecidable and to reach it, it is necessary to draw the consequences of the eventual statement which obviously, always has a declarative structure. And what is intended by the univocity of the universal is as such: the decision made upon the undecidable is an act and it is this register of the act that is univocal. The subject is bound to the act in such a way of initiating a radical modification of the logic of the situation. The being-multiple of the situation remains unaltered while the logic of its appearance

(appearance is the system that evaluates and connects all the multiplicities belonging to the situation, in Badiou's words) gradually is transformed. Of course, this transformation is never complete because, as has been mentioned before, the univocal act is localized and initiates the process of fidelity, an invention of consequences which are infinite. It is in this respect that the relationship between subject and the ontological law of being-multiple is established and that universal singularity is bound up with the infinite. The infinite generic multiplicity that the universal constructs would be, remarks Badiou, 'something for all time'. Badiou's essential criticism regarding human rights lies in his claim that these rights are rights of finitude, that is, the rights of death, and thus construct the subject either as a passive, pathetic, suffering subject as victim, or as the determining subject of judgment.

### **2.4.3 PLURALITY OF TRUTHS**

Badiou introduces the plurality of eternal truths in the following passage, as opposed to Hegel who posits that "There is nothing but the Whole":

In our case, the inexistence of the Whole fragments the exposition of thought by means of concepts which, however tightly linked, all lead back to the fact that situations, or worlds, are disjoined, or to the assertion that the only truth is a local one. As we shall see, this culminates in the complex question of the plurality of eternal truths (Badiou, TW, 2004, 221).

While sharing with Hegel the idea of the identity of being and thought, for Badiou this identity does not occur on a global level but remains a local occurrence. On the other hand, while again sharing with Hegel the conviction of a universality of truth, Badiou says his kind of universality is guaranteed by the singularity of truth-events and not by the fact that the Whole is the history of its immanent reflection (Badiou, TW, 2004, 223). It derives from the axiom “there is no Whole” that it becomes impossible to order worlds hierarchically, because there is no norm as such. The theory of the non-Whole also requires a different distribution of thought. These three operations are namely, the thinking of the multiple (mathematical ontology), the thinking of appearance (logic of worlds) and true-thinking (post-evental procedures). Badiou adds a fourth by stating that “in order for truths (3) to supplement the worlds (2) of which the pure multiple is being (1), we need a vanishing cause, which is the exact opposite of the Whole: an abolished flash, which we call the event, and which counts as 4” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 224). Thus the plurality of truths is what arises from the fact that the theory of the non-Whole brings about the disjunction of being-there (degrees of identity, theory of relations) from the ontology of the pure multiple (the mathematics of sets).

## **2.5 DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY**

Badiou declares that all discourses dealing with difference based on the Other in the form of “respect to the other” as in varieties of humanism, or post-colonial discourses where all ethical predication is based on the recognition and the impossible experience of the Other, should be abandoned because the core of the matter, he

claims, is the status of the Same. The Same is what takes on the figure of equality as what “may *come to be* through the disciplined adherence to a universal truth, whereas differences *are*” (Hallward, E, 2001, XV). The existence of differences is simply the way of the world we live in is how Badiou puts it. Stated in the same passage of *Ethics An Essay on the Understanding of Good and Evil*, in Badiou’s view, as differences are simply a question of what there is, “what ought to be” must concern what is valid for all, at a level of legitimacy that is indifferent to differences. This is because truth is not founded on a privileged part of the situation or on collective privileges or differences. On the contrary, it renders them insignificant and its “site” is determined by proximity to what is most vulnerable, most anonymous in the situation (i.e. what is perceived as empty or *void* from the perspective adopted by those who dominate the situation) (...) It is always Evil to justify (as opposed to a truth ‘founded’ only on what is most empty of substance, i.e. on the *void* of the situation) the assertion of substantial or communal conformity, and with it to justify the aggressive liquidation of difference (as opposed to a reserved indifference to differences)” (Hallward, E, 2001, XV). The void of the situation is the “real ground” where access must be achieved only through an encounter with the event. Whereas in Lacan, the void, that is, the unsymbolizable Real is generally directed towards death and disaster, for Badiou it is “situation-specific”, as mentioned by Hallward and death can never be an event because the distinction between the living and the dead is a matter of indifference. Badiou, in this respect, says “to die simply means to cease appearing, in a determinate world” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 204).

There remains the question: “How does the difference between being and appearance offer itself to thought?” The ontological notion of difference which says that two sets

are the same if and only if they possess the exact same elements has nothing to do with the situation, that is, with appearance. The theory of difference according to appearance is what Badiou terms the *transcendental*:

(The transcendental is) The entire apparatus which must be presupposed in order to be able to think difference within appearance. Obviously, these differences within appearance will differ from the differences within being. What is at stake in the transcendental is the difference between the differences in being and the differences in appearance. As in Kant, there will also be a connection between the two, except that for us the thing in itself is perfectly thinkable. There are indeed a noumenon and a phenomenon, but the noumenon is knowable (Badiou, TW, 2004, 182).

Appearance, in other words, is what is thinkable about  $x$  insofar as it belongs to a situation  $S$ . It is because ontologically,  $x$  is said as a pure multiplicity that leaves the question of its existence undecidable. The conclusion that the only being to be admitted is a situated one, derives for Badiou, from the following Cartesian requirement: "In order to argue that everything which exists possesses an idea, it is necessary to maintain that something exists. This existence is not empirical, it is a decision of thought" (Badiou, TW, 2004, 180). An instance of axiomatic thinking. Thus there is no natural place as in Aristotle, the site is not inferred from its constitutive properties. In being there are no degrees of identity, it is either the same or not, whereas, as mentioned before, degrees of identity are allowed in the law of appearance since situation introduces difference within difference, considering that there is no whole. The transcendental itself is an element of the situation and is an

ordered set but is not a structure of the situation, it appears. The degrees of identity is that it appears “more or less”, and there is the principle of minimality which comes down to not appearing. The scale varies between an almost nil identity, absolute difference and a total identity, in-difference. Thus, something that is can not appear, meaning, there is the existence of a minimum which corresponds to non-appearance. Appearance is the consequence of there being no whole. And logic provides “a protocol of identification for the object but there will be no identity of the object since this would belong to the register of empirical givenness” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 185). Ontological identity does not differ from itself nor from another by degree but by a single element and by this single element, it differs absolutely. Furthermore, the rational comprehension of differences in being-there is not deducible from the ontological identity of these beings because ontological identity says nothing about the localization of beings. An important point is that “the transcendental organization of a world is in fact the degree of intensity of the difference of appearance between two beings in this world, and not an intensity of appearance considered ‘in itself’” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 202) which is another way of saying “the non-apparent is a case of a nil-degree of relation, and never a non-being pure and simple” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 203).



### 3 AESTHETICS AND TRUTH

#### 3.1 FORM AND CONTENT

There is an essential distinction in the philosophy of Alain Badiou regarding form and content. The whole conception of truth, or plurality of truths is based upon truth's being situated or localized within a situation and universality is achieved through the act of fidelity, and in doing this, axiomatic thinking is necessary as the only means of maintaining such a fidelity. Therefore a truth's truth cannot be attested to by way of identification and one cannot speak of a universal truth in itself. That is also how one can speak of a truth that has been true at a certain time and also how we can accord that something is true in the present day. Thus Badiou emphasizes that his approach toward a truth is absolutely formal and his formal criterion is universality as is mentioned in De Kesel's *Truth as Formal Catholicism on Alain Badiou*. The subject-form that comes to establish itself through this act of fidelity, is also not a pre-given subject but one that comes to being in the event, through the event. Badiou's distinction between form and content is apparent also in the case of being (the real) and appearance, the Same and difference. That is to say, differences are those that subsist in appearance, in the world that there is, whereas the Same is what comes to happen through the void in the event of a situation and becomes a generic subset, testifying to the equality in being. And according to Badiou this is why a truth can be scarcely-said and is in need of axiomatic thinking, because the event which initiates a truth disappears as soon as it happens and the post-evental truth procedure supposes an "immanent break" because what it enables, according to Badiou, meant nothing for the previous situation or for the prevailing language. One of the

essentially problematic aspects of this kind of axiomatic thinking, lies in fact in its conception of the prevailing language as a kind of whole – even though Badiou insists on there being no Whole - assuming no problems prior to the event, as regards representation and mimesis and the problematic of enunciation. And this is also the reason why he claims that the linguistic turn taken by contemporary philosophy does not provide an efficient thinking of singularity, or of the new. The complete distinction between a thinking of the formal and of a thinking of appearance is essentially based on the thinking of language as a whole but which is nevertheless susceptible to “breaks” and flows thanks to the event. This is also the fact underlying the concept of identity and difference in the level of appearance. It is by means of language that one can come to terms with the degrees of difference prevailing in being-there, that is, appearance. It remains the case that art, politics, science and love are the four domains of truth insofar as they provide a break with the prevailing language, insofar as they bring about the void, the experience of the real as being, the empty set, that they pave the way for a subject-form or fidelity, insofar as they constitute a break with the taken for granted concept of “mimesis” as he mentions in *Theoretical Writings* (2004, 239). There he mentions that the thought of poem is not a mimesis, that true poetry is not imitation. This passage states:

It could be thought that as the founder of philosophy, Plato *invents* the conflict between the philosopher and the poet. Yet this is not what he says. On the contrary, he evokes a more ancient, even immemorial conflict: ‘there is from old a quarrel between philosophy and poetry.’

What does this antiquity of the conflict refer to? Often, the reply is that philosophy desires truth; that the poem is an imitation, a semblance, which

distances truth. But I think this is a feeble idea. For true poetry is not imitation.

The thought of the poem is not mimesis.

The thesis of imitation – of the illusory and internal character of the mimetic – is not, in my view, the most fruitful avenue for us. (...) The poem possesses no imitative rule. The poem is separate from the object (Badiou, TW, 2004, 239).

He then goes on to say that Plato's principal argument is that poem ruins discursiveness and that what it philosophically opposes to the poem is not directly philosophy but the discursive thinking that connects and argues; a thinking whose paradigm is mathematical against the poem which might indeed be a properly incalculable thought and that it might be the case that poem disconcerts philosophy because the operations of the poem *rival* those of philosophy (Badiou, TW, 2004, 240). According to Badiou the whole conflict arises because of the relationship between philosophy and poetry. Thus he comes to the conclusion that to give up the rational mathematical paradigm is fatal for philosophy, which then turns into a failed poem; and accordingly, to return to objectivity is fatal for the poem, which then turns into a didactic poetry, a poetry lost in philosophy (Badiou, TW, 2004, 241).

The main reference of this whole issue concerning Badiou's philosophy is his thinking of Plato as if there were such an initial question of the undecidable for Plato, as if his chasing away the poet from the city was in fact a testimony to poetry's rivalry with philosophy and his not taking into consideration the decision in Plato regarding mimesis. This whole issue on mimesis is extensively present in Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typography*. The same problem goes for Badiou when he himself does not take into account any questioning of the mimesis but considers it as a given case, already

decided upon, and in each case, the same decision is taken over and over again, without giving any account for the problematic aspect of its operation. This unproblematic handling of mimesis is what governs the whole philosophy of Badiou and provides the basis for coming to terms with a safe and sound distinction between form and content.

Therefore, when Badiou mentions the coming into being of the “new”, the break as a truth procedure initiated by the event that happens to someone by pure chance, this conceptualization of the new becomes immediately a matter of content too and governs his philosophy, as mentioned by De Kesel, secretly.

The act of deciding the undecidable which constitutes the axiomatic process of the truth procedure, of being faithful to a truth, is thus taken in itself as what constitutes the “new” and the ethics of a truth, of the new is the only real ethics that can be achieved according to Badiou. But what comes to appear and to be recognized as an event, if it is recognized and named as such, provided that one achieves the three conditions of the ethics of truth, can very well go under the name of truth regardless of its content, because the real that is encountered at the point of the event, is supposed to be inherently Good – the argument of Marc De Kesel. And to decide upon the undecidable is also, to decide on a truth and on its universality without even being yet a subject and at the same time while becoming a subject in a paradoxical manner. This paradoxical “nature” of the subject-form arises to avoid the very consideration of a content in the first place but nevertheless, in the last analysis the forming of the subject-form is subordinated to an inherent Good. Alain Badiou’s critique of post-colonial or post-structural discourses on ethics, roughly as conceptualizing the other

for the sake of the other, puts at stake the consideration of the other as difference which operates in mimesis as the process of representation or in language. It completely ignores that what comes to secretly sustain or govern a discourse on truth against all good intentions and therefore, his own too, for that matter. The claim to universality, in that it consists in being indifferent to differences and realizing itself in the act of deciding over and over again on the undecidable, rather than being indifferent to differences, becomes a matter of repressing an originary difference, not only from the differences that are already in being-there but also from the difference that constitutes itself with all surging forth of a universal subject-form. The problem of the process of identification is not so much what the subject *comes* to be identified with upon a principle of identity or difference, than what evades the process itself.

### **3.2 SUBJECT-FORM**

Badiou explains that there is not one single subject but as many subjects as there are truths and as many subjective types as there are procedures of truths and that the four fundamental subjective types are namely: political, scientific, artistic, amorous and therefore there is only ethics as *the ethics of* – of politics, of love, of science, of art. The reason for this is that if the other does not matter, it is because what matters is the Same and “the Same is not what is (i.e. the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what *comes to be*. “I have already named that in regard to which only the advent of the Same occurs: it is a *truth*. Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*. (...) A truth is *the same for all*. (...) It is our capacity for truth – our capacity to be that ‘*same*’ that a truth convokes to its own ‘*sameness*’. Or in other words, depending on

the circumstances, our capacity for science, love, politics or art, since all truths, in my view, fall under one or another of these universal names” (Badiou, E, 2001, 28). He claims that every human animal is inscribed in one of the four by participating in a given singular truth. And philosophy’s task is to construct a space of thought in which these subjective types, expressed by singular truths of its time, co-exist. But this is not a unification, he mentions. It is then, a matter of compossibilities of truths. Philosophy’s task is thus also subordinated to determining a space where singular truths are compossible. Therefore, determining the form that arises from the compossibility of different subject-forms, only not a priori but post-eventally. And as time or times is what is constructed event by event, philosophy, in the final analysis, amounts to a kind of verification of the history of the events. But this is already jumping to conclusions, therefore, returning to the four fundamental subjective-types, the stakes that Badiou implicitly rises in coming up with the four domains, requires further elaboration.

The essential point is, when Badiou is referring to politics, he is referring to the “act” of politics and the subjects of politic truths are “militants”; when he refers to science, he means the act of making science such as the act of inventing a new formula in mathematics and the subject of scientific truths are scientists (in any case one can scarcely get to be inscribed in the domain of scientific truths without already being a scientist); when he refers to love, it is the amorous scene that is his concern where a singularity of sexual difference can get to be inscribed as a singularity and thus, the subjects of amorous truths are true lovers; and in the domain of art, the subjects of artistic truths are strangely works of art because the artist is rendered anonymous by the truth that surges forth in the art work and it no longer matters whether it is an artist

A or an artist B. One of the arguments could be brought as to the element of pure chance regarding the event which “happens” to someone who then carries the potentiality to become a subject. It is only obvious that a person A cannot get to be inscribed in the domain of a scientific subject-form if he or she is not already a scientist because he or she would not have the adequate means to draw the consequences of a genuine event that would happen to him or her – and would it ever happen to this person A anyway, by pure chance?- whereas it is quite possible that, by chance, he or she can get to be inscribed in the domain of the amorous subjective-type. Badiou does not give a clear account of why the truth procedures are restricted to these four domains but seemingly, one reason is because these spheres are potential activities where a human animal can encounter the event or undergo the experience of the real ground as distinct from the prevailing order of the situation. That is the being-there in itself, is possibly too general for the initiation of a truth procedure and it is better to determine some distinct grounds. As truth is a formal procedure, we are in need of formal grounds for a truth to emerge. As a whatever event is not necessarily a genuine event, and as a truth can be assigned the value of truth only through its formal aspect, these four domains may be the adequate ones to provide a structural evaluation to be sought out. This, excluding the amorous scene, which, in Badiou’s context, seems as a means of assigning accessibility to truth for “the rest” of the human-animals. Because, love is only mentioned as the “ideal’ amorous encounter between two people and remains somewhat undignified for that matter, although it is mentioned as the only situation where a genuine singularity regarding sexual difference can be inscribed (Badiou, E, 2001). This is also to place the matter of sexual difference as an “already there” where only that which comes to be as new counts, and to reduce the problems regarding sexual difference and differentiation

outside the political or even, scientific and artistic domains. It is mentioned in the introduction to *Ethics, An Essay on the Understanding of Good and Evil* that this move of Badiou is related to his seeking to 'free generic humanity' from the manipulations of the state, to subtract a *truth* of sexual difference from all positive or culturally validated indicators (i.e. from what can be *known* of sexual difference), to pursue the extra-legal or illegal solidarity of a universal truth (Hallward, E, 2001, XXVIII). But this nevertheless results in genuine singularity of sexual difference's being restricted to an 'ideal' amorous scene. In any case, when the four subjective-types are distinguished in this manner, a truth in one domain becomes specific to that situation and can accord a merely vague relationship with other situations in other domains. Even though one may become a subject in various types or situations, the problem of remaining faithful to different truths at the same time remains and considering that every truth is situation-specific, the question of the subject becomes more problematic when a collectivity is involved. The relation between the ontological unbinding of multiples and truth's being localized are not elaborated to the point of being clear. It is then left to philosophy to come up with the matters of their co-existence.

This may also be related to the initial non-consideration of the language-situation and mimesis. Badiou does not waste time in questioning concepts or given conceptual domains. As is stated in the introduction to *Infinite Thought*, "the relationship between language and being is that, although language bestows identity on being, being is in excess of language" (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004, 22). That is why Badiou adopts set theory as the language of being, simply because it has nothing to say about beings themselves. If one is to separate out a subset, it is on the condition of a pre-



supposition of a set's already being in existence. Yet mathematics serves as a basis for ontology in Badiou and this implies that there still remains something to say. The transference of set theory to ontology already says something when there is a claim to a universality of truth.

Achieving the form of subject, of course, requires the fulfilment of the three conditions mentioned in the chapter "Ethics of Truth" of this study, which are discernment; courage and endurance; moderation and restraint. As has been noted above, discernment means not confusing a true, genuine event with a false one. Courage and endurance involves bearing fidelity to a truth and finally, moderation and restraint is about resisting the idea of imposing a totality or substantiality to a truth. Here, it should be mentioned that a subject's coming into existence, is in itself paradoxical. Marc De Kesel, in *Truth as Formal Catholicism on Alain Badiou, Saint Paul: La Fondation de L'Universalisme*, approaches this paradoxicality in the following manner:

It is the subject of a belief, not in what already exists – not a belief in one of the existing 'sets' - , but in a truth based upon an unseen event, having the power to disturb the totality of particular sets. The subject is the bearer of a belief in an empty set, which, unlike the existing sets, claims universality. It is a subject, in other words, of a set still *to come* or to be realised. Thus, the proper locus of the subject lies in the future, too. Paradoxically, it does not precede its own fidelity to an event; it does not precede the truth of which it is the subject. It comes into existence only *through* fidelity and truth. It is an effect both of the event and of the fidelity to that event. Only through fidelity

does truth come into being (in what Badiou calls a ‘truth-procedure’). Truth is, by definition, ‘post-evental’. In the same paradoxical way, Badiou asserts that the subject of fidelity is fidelity’s own effect, its own product (De Kesel, TAFC, 2004).

If one is to consider the three conditions of the subject-form, the whole picture becomes even more paradoxical. A subject of fidelity, as it is to remain faithful, is in need of some kind of a subjecthood, but it is his or her faithfulness that at the same time, precedes the forming of the subject. As not yet a subject, it remains a “mystery” as to how a whatever human animal comes to discern a true event from a false one. Furthermore, considering that true singularity is indifferent to differences, in that it is subtracted from any predicative trait, how does this singularity, to be initiated by the advent of the event initially as an empty set, to achieve its singularity all the time remaining indifferent to differences? If an empty set is indifferent to differences, it remains a question as to why it should ‘bother’ achieving any fidelity to a true – or false, for that matter – event. If indifferent to differences, fidelity, together with the two other conditions involving courage and endurance on the one hand, moderation and restraint on the other, without a consideration of an initial “exclusion” of differences, rather than indifference, become rather arbitrarily handled processes. What is more is that, if truth is a break, how can a break remain as such, when the post-evental procedure is a process in itself, involving time? Considering that truth can be scarcely-said, and the subject is in a continuous becoming – as fidelity in itself is an infinite process –, how is it possible to assume that fidelity (its maxim is “Keep going!” ) assures the de-totalizing universality of a truth, when time is involved in such a manner? But the main point obviously, is not whether such a subjective type

can be achieved or not. It is rather the question of what kind of subject-form appears in such a conception and of the stakes involved in it. To follow this thread, Badiou's fifteen theses on contemporary art will be elaborated with a critical approach.

## **4 ALAIN BADIOU'S FIFTEEN THESES ON CONTEMPORARY ART**

### **4.1 Art is not the sublime descent of the infinite into the finite abjection of the body and sexuality. On the contrary, it is the production of an infinite subjective series, through the finite means of a material subtraction.**

This first thesis could be considered as a compact summary of the general procedure of truth and also implies that art is not divine but of human of production. A general problem with this criterion is that, vis-a-vis an art work, in this case, one would be faced with two – and only two – types of analysis. It should be established, from the outset, that a given work of art either surges forth a truth, or not. Because the case is that an event is supposed to happen by pure chance, and is supposed to disappear as soon as it appears. Thus one does not have all the time in the world to decide the undecidable. The undecidable means, that whether the event that disrupts a situation belongs to the situation or not is strictly undecidable on the basis of established knowledge. Badiou explains that the subject, which is born of such a decision, is not limited to the recognition of the occurrence of an event but extends into a prolonged investigation of its consequences and this investigation entails not only the active transformation of the situation but also the active transformation of the human being, which is the process of subjectivization (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004). Thus, as mentioned in the introduction to *Infinite Thought*, some human animals become subjects only some of the time and often they break their fidelity and lose their subjecthood. Yet, the first decision to be taken when an event happens regards its truth or falsity and this act itself constitutes the initialization of the subjectivization process. Considering that it is the event which constructs time or times, event by

event, the initialization of the subjective process is also susceptible to initialize a construction of time “counter” time. This means when one decides on an event’s truth and recognizes it as such, by recognizing the event, one also adds a brick to the construction of time but this brick abolishes time itself. This could also be said to amount to a destruction or denial of time, as the temporary truth procedure is there to secure the universality of truth from being affected by temporality. Therefore, how does such a subject avoid being imperial, as the event, should it go unrecognized, disappears in anonymity and the truth procedure is to take time in order to be accomplished, which actually is an infinite process? It is only through the event’s recognition and through the post-evental procedure that truth is temporal, yet this very procedure is to be carried out *against* time in order to secure truth’s universality. Although, truth is situation specific and necessitates restraint and moderation on the side of the subject against imposing a total power, the fact of time remains an unavoidable obstruction. At this point, another reference to Marc De Kesel is relevant regarding this issue of temporality:

Yet, how precisely is time involved in a truth procedure? Doubtless in the way that it takes time, once there has been a fidelity to an event, to build up the subject of that fidelity as well as its object (truth). But is not time essentially employed here *to keep time out*? Is it not used to *deny* the inherent temporality of ‘eternal truth’? Can we not say the procedure is temporary only insofar as it takes all the time to deny that the eternal truth it is fighting for, is affected by time? Remember, Paul (reference to Badiou’s theory on Saint Paul) explicitly links difference with time. It is precisely because the truth – universal salvation – was marked by difference (by a holy/unholy remainder, by Israel

as origin/remainder) that it took time to be realized. It took literally *all* the time. In his eyes, the actualized universal salvation coincides with a destruction of time itself. To Paul, the destruction of differences equals the destruction of time. Is this not the case in Badiou as well? Truth is beyond existing differences and, in that sense, ‘eternal’. However, isn’t truth’s eternity and infinity most especially the result of a truth-procedure’s continuous exclusion of time? This is what certain passages in Badiou literally say. For example, in his book on Deleuze, we read: “It is in the abolition of time that truth’s eternity emerges” (Badiou, 1997b: 97). Are truth and truth procedure ever possible then, without either taking all the time to exclude time, or, in a purely *formal* way, to exclude it imaginarily, i.e. to act *as if* time does not – or does not *yet* – affect the truth we are fighting for? (De Kesel, TAFC, 2004).

It is necessary to mention the stakes involved in handling such a conception of truth and of time. Eventually, the condition of being indifferent to differences amounts to an exclusion of an originary difference which in its turn, amounts to an exclusion of time. In other words, a truth which should be universal, and the truth procedure’s own time which is infinity, works “counter” the time of the world. It is only by its continual denial of time that it can assert itself as a universal truth. Here, a return to the citation by De Kesel that comes immediately after the aforementioned passage is necessary:

If being is temporal, if being is at times turned over by revolutionary events, why should truths escape that rule? They do not, Badiou would reply. Truths, too, are susceptible to revolutions. However, they cannot take this into

account, precisely because they are based upon revolutions. A revolution is the effect of history's contingency but, once started, it can no longer take into account its own contingency. This would shatter its militancy in advance. It can only unconditionally promote the truth to which it is faithful. No truth procedure can pretend to install once and for all the ever-lasting true society, but they nevertheless speak in the name of a truth that is different from all the differences society is made of, a truth that is the one and indivisible truth of those differences. It is in this sense that truth can be eternal (De Kesel, TAFC, 2004).

**4.2 Art cannot merely be the expression of a particularity (be it ethnic or personal). Art is the impersonal production of a truth that is addressed to everyone.**

Art cannot merely be the expression of a particularity, be it ethnic or personal, according to Badiou because it is a matter, yet again, of being indifferent to differences. But here, another problem arises as regards the matter of this indifference toward differences. In the introduction to *Ethics, An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, this problematic aspect is elaborated as such:

Arguably, however, Badiou's consequent characterization of all human situations, individual and collective, as *immeasurably* infinite multiplicities (and thus as bundles of pure and immeasurable 'differences', such that 'there are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young

Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself') dramatically *simplifies* these situations, leaving no space for the acknowledgment of effectively universal structuring principles (biological, cognitive, linguistic...) in the one hand, or of certain 'specifying' attributes (based on culture, religion, class, gender...) on the other. Instead, we are left with 'generic human stuff' that is ontologically indistinguishable from pure mathematical multiplicity and effectively endowed, in its praxis, with a kind of indeterminate 'fundamental freedom'. (...) The potential risk, as I have suggested elsewhere, is the effective 'despecification' (or 'singularization') of situations in general, to say nothing of the truth-processes that 'puncture' them. Some readers might prefer to settle for a slightly more 'impure' range of possibility were it informed by a more determinate, more *specific* understanding of the situation as such (Hallward, E, 2001, XXXII).

Obviously, more stakes are involved in this, than a problem of settlement but this could be a slightly ironic approach to a kind of "conformist" reading. This problem of indifference is not a minor one, considering that the world is a world where differences simply *are*, as Badiou states. "The Same is what may *come to be* through the disciplined adherence to a universal truth. For truth is not founded on some privileged part of the situation, on the basis of some particular class or community of people; rather its 'site' is determined by proximity to what is most vulnerable, most anonymous in the situation (i.e. what is perceived as empty or *void* from the perspective adopted by those who dominate the situation)" (Hallward, E, 2001, XV). A point has previously been made as to the problem of the coming into being of the "new" after an event. In other words, it could be said that the question remains



regarding how an event comes to “disrupt” the being-there at the level of content, whereas what asserts a truth’s value of truth is its formal structure. This new, coming into being initially as an empty set, disrupts the prevailing language and the prevailing knowledge of beings, that is, identities and differences, without assuming any relevance to these differences. If a truth is to maintain indifference to differences through a subject’s fidelity, courage and restraint, this already implies an *act* of resistance but what resistance is to be expected if not towards difference or differences that, although they could have been denied initially, come to re-inscribe themselves in time? The aforementioned exclusion or denial of time, therefore, also adds up to an exclusion of an originary difference. In any case, one could say that, indifference cannot maintain itself as indifference if it is not somewhat based on an originary difference (whether a predicative trait could be inscribed to this difference or not). Indifference itself, which comes about with the advent of the event and disrupts the way things are, is in itself a difference from the differences that *are*. And it is only through remaining faithful to its own difference – based on the exclusion of all other differences - that it can become a truth-procedure. Regarding Badiou’s conceptualization of indifference, pertaining to the order of A or B “becomes indifferent with respect to the kind of ‘being’ the experience of the event has revealed, mentions De Kesel, and both A and B – i.e. everyone in the whole universe – share in the fact that ‘gap’ being is founded on, which is not a sign of death’s dominion, but of the radical possibility named life” (De Kesel, T AFC, 2004). This is where the inherent Good that De Kesel talks of, resides.

In the more specific context of art, it is very difficult to talk about works of art in the contemporary world. It seems today that one could rather talk about moments of art. It

is at this point that a very short citation from Felix Guattari's *Chaosmosis*, could shed a bit more light on this matter:

One creates new modalities of subjectivity crystallized into structural complexes, but from a creation which itself indicates a kind of aesthetic paradigm. One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette. (...) Everything which can contribute to the creation of an authentic relation with the other. (...) This multi-faceted theatrical aspect allows us to grasp the artificial and creative character of the production of subjectivity. (...) We are faced with an important ethical choice: Either we objectify, reify, "scientificise" subjectivity, or, on the contrary, we try to grasp it in the dimension of its processual creativity" (Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 1995, 9-13).

Obviously this passage refers rather to a production of subjectivity. Still, its relevance to contemporary art is in its approaching the subjective and artistic processes as similar in their operation, that is to say that artistic process is no longer that distinct from a production of subjectivity, not as the formation of a subjecthood but itself, in the manner of an artistic experience. This, not to assert a counter-definition to Badiou's as to what art should be but in order to grasp a contemporary aspect of the domain of art. To say that art cannot merely be the expression of a particularity is, in a way, re-inventing the wheel because this is actually already what art is all about, yet its being at the same time an expression of a particularity is what makes it possible to derive its singularity. If art were to be a strictly impersonal production of a truth, subtracted from all ethnic, personal particularities, the empty set would remain empty,

or else art would become a domain as rigorous as mathematics (which Badiou does not fail to mention in thesis no.12 as one of the qualities art should possess). In the contemporary context, art could no longer be restricted to a sphere that specific to art. What is more, it already involves politics, science and love, with reference to Badiou's four privileged domains of truth procedure. Is it possible to say that art can not be political? Therefore, such a distinction between politics, science, love and art is already taking away the possibilities of their being together, separate yet not that distinct from each other, in a tense relationship. To say, on the other hand, as regards politics, that in order to initiate and carry on a political truth procedure is to be actively involved in politics as "militant" subjects, is also to restrict politics to active "militancy" , which in any case, does not at all seem like a random choice of word.

**4.3 Art is the process of a truth, and this truth is always the truth of the sensible or sensual, the sensible qua sensible. This means: the transformation of the sensible into an happening of the Idea.**

In the roughest analysis, this seems to be – not an overturning, which Badiou does not agree with anyway – but a reversal of Platonism, such as mentions Deleuze in his works. A direction taken no longer from the Idea toward the sensible, but from the sensible toward the Idea. A question could be rised in this case, as to what secures "the sensible transformed into Idea" from haunting the sensible in its turn? How does this new Idea not get to be established as a pre-existing Idea? Or rather, as a pre-established value and what becomes of the value of value? It seems that when Badiou talks about art, he mostly implies poetry, this also could point to the content of the last

chapter of *Theoretical Writings* entitled “Language, Thought, Poetry”. There, what he writes on the subject of poetry is relevant for his general thought on art as truth procedure:

The poem contains no anecdotes, no referential object. From beginning to end, it declares its own universe. (...) Not only does the poem not have an object, but a sizeable part of its *operation* aims precisely at denying the object; at making it so that thought no longer relates to the object. The poem wants thought to declare what there is through the *deposition* of every supposed object. This is the heart of the poetic experience conceived as an experience of thought: to gain access to an ontological affirmation that does not set itself out as the apprehension of an object. In general, the poem attains this result by means of two contrary operations, which I will call ‘subtraction’ and ‘dissemination’. Subtraction organizes the poem around a direct concern with the retreat of the object: the poem is a negative machinery, which utters being, or the idea, at the very point where the object has vanished. (...) This is a kind of pure, disobjectified and disenchanting thinking of the object. (...) Such is the subtractive operation of the poem, which forces the object to undergo the ordeal of its lack. Dissemination, for its part, aims to dissolve the object through an infinite metaphorical distribution. Which means that no sooner is it mentioned than the object migrates elsewhere within meaning; it disobjectifies itself by becoming something other than it is. The object loses its objectivity, not through the effect of a lack, but through that of an excess: an excessive equivalence to other objects. This time, the poem loses the object in the pure multiple (Badiou, TW, 2004, 237).

In other words, the poem starts by an initial indifference toward the object or objects which brings about the void in their being, only in order to make way for the Same which comes to be through poetic operation and thus it is in the Same that all objects are treated equally, in equivalence. The poem's declaring its own universe from beginning to end, refers to the the new pure multiple that is generated from the empty set, that is, the void of the object. At this point, the last paragraph of the passage in *What is Philosophy?* where Deleuze shortly mentions Alain Badiou's general theory, constitutes a compact critique of Badiou's elaboration of the artistic as well as the three other types of truth procedures:

By starting from a neutralized base, the set, which indicates any multiplicity whatever, Badiou draws up a line that is single, although it may be very complex, on which functions and concepts will be spaced out, the latter above the former: philosophy thus seems to float in an empty transcendence, as the unconditioned concept that finds the totality of its generic conditions in the functions (science, poetry, politics and love). Is this not the return, in the guise of the multiple, to an old conception of the higher philosophy? It seems to us that the theory of multiplicities does not support the hypothesis of any multiplicity whatever (even mathematics has had enough of set-theoreticism [ensemblisme] ). There must be at least two multiplicities, two types, from the outset. This is not because dualism is better than unity but because the multiplicity is precisely what happens between the two. Hence, the two types will certainly not be one above the other but rather one beside the other,

against the other, face to face, or back to back (Deleuze and Guattari, WIP, 1994, 152).

Obviously Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is not the point of concern here but what this passage points to is, Alain Badiou posits art, science, love and politics in such a manner that thinking being becomes, once again, no more than the means of establishing a correspondence upon a pre-given "structure" of the universality of truth. That is why, Deleuze and Guattari find Badiou's philosophy to be floating in an empty transcendence. The concepts of such a philosophy, as they are based upon mathematical propositions, do not provide an opening to a movement of thought on the one hand, while on the other, art, science, politics and love become a means of assuring the coming into being of a certain subject-*form* if not of a certain subject.

In *Theoretical Writings*, in the chapter entitled "Eight Theses on Universality" Badiou objects to criticisms that may be raised against this universality: "One common objection to the idea of universality is that everything that exists or is represented relates back to particular conditions and interpretations governed by disparate forces or interest. (...) Still others insist that there is no common denominator underlying what various cultural groups choose to call "artistic activity"; or that not even a mathematical proposition is intrinsically universal, since its validity is entirely dependent upon the axioms that support it" (Badiou, TW, 2004, 148). But Badiou objects to this in the following manner:

Nevertheless, even they will have to admit the universality of the form of implications as such. In other words, even they will have to admit that if the

event is subjectivated on the basis of its statement, whatever consequences come to be invented as a result will be necessary. On this point, Plato's apologia in the *Meno* remains irrefutable. If a slave knows nothing about the eventual foundation of geometry, he remains incapable of validating the construction of the square of the surface that doubles a given square. But if one provides him with the basic and he agrees to subjectivate it he will also subjectivate the construction under consideration (Badiou, TW, 2004, 149).

An objection to Badiou's objection could be as such: If geometry is something that is learned and then subjectivated, can cultural difference also not be considered as something learned and subjectivated? Does this not take one back to the point where mathematics is considered as the rigorous authoritative domain where a truth can emerge via axiomatic thinking whereas cultural differences are to be seen as the way things simply are and which have no relevance whatsoever to a truth procedure.

The *formal* aspect of the impersonal production of a truth, moreover, is based upon an initial distinction between form and content which is parallel to the distinction between being and being-there, that is between the real and appearance. As was mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari, this also testifies to a return to an old conception of the higher philosophy. Whereas as Badiou mentions, in Plato it is the being of appearance which is chaotic, disjunctive, anarchic, in Badiou it is being or the real which assumes this aspect, and in Badiou it is appearance which is the being of relations, organized according to degrees of identity. Moreover, the anarchic nature of being, for Badiou, does not bring about death as another genuine event, but on the contrary, brings about the radical possibility of life, quite similarly to the Idea. This is

what Marc De Kesel means by the secret content of being's inherent generosity and goodness in Badiou's philosophy. It thus, seems more clear to what ends Badiou makes use of the distinction between form and content. It is a way of not spelling out the content but providing the grounds for its invisible reign. In any case, how is it possible to make sure that the form of something has nothing whatsoever to do with its content? The empty set which is empty insofar as it possesses no content relating to any predicative trait has its contours strictly drawn out in the generic subset that it will come to be were a truth procedure to be completed, in that it possesses its own "form" as its very "content".

**4.4 There is necessarily a plurality of arts, and however we may imagine the ways in which the arts might intersect there is no imaginable way of totalising this plurality.**

In the light of set-theory, this is art, in Badiou's philosophy, as an infinite multiple of multiples without any external or internal determination, necessarily possessing common and different elements but this, in no way, amounts to a truth's assuming a totalizing power. Whatever truth comes to being through art, it is specific to its situation and cannot account for a totalizing "truth of art".

This too, rather than being a thesis on art, could be mentioned as a thesis on philosophy, or on the accountability of the nature of truth: that is to say, a truth of art cannot be accounted for in philosophical terms. Only the ground of the compossibility of those plurality of truths can be established. But if we are to consider philosophy in



this aspect, once again, how will it be possible for it to avoid establishing or “totalising” an Idea which in its turn, will come to haunt the sensible? If to account for art, philosophy cannot make use of art itself (which is precisely what philosophy must avoid, according to Badiou in the chapter “Language, Thought, Poetry” of *Theoretical Writings*), how will it be possible for philosophy to grasp the movement of transformation which is mentioned by “the transformation of the sensible into an happening of the Idea” ? (Thesis no. 3).

Furthermore, there is in Badiou, a hierarchy of problems. This is most apparent in the following passage in the context one of his critique of Deleuze:

The wealth of the empirical is correctly treated in by Deleuze as a wealth *in problems*. That the relation of the virtual to the actual has as its paradigm the relation between the problem and its solution (rather than between the possible and its realization) in my view represents one of the strengths of the Deleuzian method. But what should follow from this is the falsity of a maxim that Deleuze nevertheless practises and teaches: that we can begin from any concrete case whatsoever, rather than from the ‘important’ cases, or from the history of the problem. If we consider the notion of problem in its original context, mathematics, it becomes immediately apparent that the consideration of a case taken at random precludes any access to those problems that have power, that is to say, to those problems whose solution matters to the dual becoming of thought and what it thinks. Galois once said that the problem was constituted reading ‘the unknown’ into the texts of one’s predecessors: it is there that the *deposits* of problems were to be found. By not following this

logic of the unknown, which functions like a strict selection principle for productive forms of thought, empirical prodigality becomes something like an arbitrary and sterile burden (Badiou, TW, 2004, 77-78).

Leaving aside Alain Badiou's lack of grace in criticizing Deleuze, by attributing to him the committing of the error of following a false maxim, while on the other hand, offering him his appreciation vis-a-vis the strengths of his philosophy, one is left with this problem of "problem". Again leaving aside the assigning of originality to mathematical problems, there is only an obvious hierarchy of problems. Moreover these problems are hierarchized not only according to a degree of importance as regards the "unknown", but also according to a historicity, that is, the "unknown" of the predecessors. But whose predecessors? And what becomes of the factor of pure chance vis-a-vis a true event and vis-a-vis its decision? How is one to assign a degree of importance to a problem if the differences between me and myself is about the same amount as the differences "between a Chinese peasant and a Norwegian professional"? Obviously degrees of "importance" should pertain to the order of being, but there exists no degrees at the level of being, degrees are specific to being-there. How is philosophy to establish the compossibility between a truth procedure of a Chinese peasant and that of a person X if it is to establish first a hierarchy? And what kind of relation is philosophy to establish vis-a-vis the predecessors of a Chinese peasant? Naturally, degrees in hierarchy are not distributed according to a problem explicitly at the level of content, nevertheless, they are hierarchized which amounts to there being a criterion of hierarchization which makes it possible to "make a judgment" regarding its level of importance. This decision to be made at the point of the initialization of a truth procedure, makes the situation of the subject-to-be even

more paradoxical. Mathematical problems obviously are not-preoccupied by cultural or sexual or social matters, but that is precisely the reason why, the transference from mathematics to philosophy may not be such a smooth operation.

**4.5 Every art develops from an impure form, and the progressive purification of this impurity shapes the history both of a particular artistic truth and of its exhaustion.**

This is again the procedure of truth, in different words. The truth procedure itself, which involves drawing the necessary consequences deriving from the happening of an event, is a progressive purification towards the accomplishment of a truth which, because it involves finite means, can never be accomplished as such. But the universality is accomplished in this very act. It is this assuming of the accomplishment which is the decision regarding the operation of mimesis. Because although truth, in its coming to being, is scarcely or very little said, its totality is already assumed and this is why it involves “fidelity” as “militancy”. The idea of progress is one of its unavoidable outcomes. In such a conception, one comes about a point of intersection where not only pure chance and freedom coincide (Badiou says that the decision of the undecidable is also an act of freedom because this decision does not involve prevailing knowledge and therefore, prevailing judgments) but also where the idea of progress also gets to be inscribed. In the case where time or times is constructed by events, event by event, even though truths may be exhausted at some point, the left-over is supposed to be history itself as progress. (And this is despite a truth procedure’s continuous denial of time on another level). And in the final

analysis, time constructed as such, event by event, is supposed to advance always with a plus one value. In this context, if history is also the history of a progress, the factor of pure chance seems somewhat questionable because looking retrospectively into the past (although the past is not of relevance according to the theory of the event, it is the event which makes history), and considering that events imply progress (also keeping in mind that the real ground that is being, is inherently good), it is as though in the trajectory of history, all the bricks should fit into the place they are supposed to be in. This leaves a question mark as to in what way pure chance subsists. But one could thus argue that in such a conceptualization of time, the idea of pure chance cannot subsist vis-a-vis the idea of progress. Furthermore, the value of singularity is again put at stake when the idea of universality is what internally sustains such a theory in its implying the idea of a progress, while on the other hand, destructing time for the sake of saving the temporality of eternal truth. This contradictory aspect of Badiou's truth procedure could also account for his ability to "maintain" singularity via "militant" action.

#### **4.6 The subjects of an artistic truth are the works which compose it.**

This is because in the case of a work of art, what emerges as truth derives from the work itself and the artist as subject is thus, no longer of any relevance, has an anonymous status. But this is a strange positing of the subject of truth which Badiou does not extensively elaborate. It is strange because the subjects of politics are militants, those of amorous truths are lovers and subjects of science are scientists, whereas subjects of artistic truths are works of art. He gives the example of Homer's

*Iliad* as one of the prime examples. This may be argued as a manner of freeing a subject-form from its embodiment, that is the being subject of an artist, for example, does not mean that the artist him/herself is that subject but the subject is what is accomplished through an “act”. An artist, therefore, is not the creator of a truth procedure in all of his or her works but some of his or her works may or may have not accomplished a truth procedure. Therefore, the emphasis is yet again on the *form* of the subject and does not regard any process of identification or difference. It is as Badiou mentions, its being identical to itself in infinitely multiple ways. “Life itself, like the subject, is other and multiple” (Badiou, TW, 2004, 237). The subject-form is what matters because it is in this form that it is addressed to all and that universality is achieved. Yet it falls upon philosophy to account for this universality because apparently, not “all” gets involved in an evental experience and in the same way, it falls upon philosophy to account for what is *ethical* in a situation, because the subject-form falls under its authority too. Philosophy gives the account of what counts-as-one as the Same in a truth procedure but does not give an account of what remains “excluded” from this process. Therefore, singularity also gets to be inscribed only in this process of achieving the universality of truth and does not get to be inscribed where an originary “exclusion” is involved.

#### **4.7 This composition is an infinite configuration, which in our own contemporary artistic context is a generic totality.**

As has previously been mentioned, in order to face the question of the coming into being of the “new”, Badiou introduces the notion of “the generic” or in other words,

what he calls “indiscernibility”. It has previously been mentioned that it is explained in the introduction to *Infinite Thought* (Feltham and Clemens, IT, 2004, 28-30) that since set theory ontology does not recognize ‘time’ and ‘history’, the reference point turns out to be language. With reference to the same passage, one can have ‘models’ of set theory which are interpretations that flesh out the bare bones of sets and elements by giving value to the variables (such as  $x = \text{green apples}$ ). The model, as a structured multiplicity, can be treated itself as a set. As further explained, for every property that one formulates, even the most general, the generic set has at least one element which does not share that property. The ground model schematizes an established historical situation before an event arrives. One can define a concept of a generic subset within such a situation but cannot account for its existence because it is not presented at the level of belonging to a site and cannot be shown via its properties. Badiou’s method of overcoming this obstacle is via adopting Cohen’s method of “forcing”.

This leads us back to a previous argument regarding the denial of time for the sake of securing the temporality of eternal truth, in the following line of thought: According to the previous paragraph on the generic subset, one could say that in order for a generic subset, that is, for the “new” to come into existence, one is first and foremost, in need of a history with its prevailing knowledge and language and values put into place. Taken for granted that degrees of identity exist in the world as differences and that is the way the world simply is, a generic subset is that which is, far from being indifferent to differences, almost based upon those existences. Because the event as the experience of being, can only happen if there exists the being-there of the world, that is the world of appearance, with its history, its differences and its language such

as they are but only at the cost of denying all of them. To repeat the previous argument, in order to deny the inherent temporality of truth, time which is seemingly being constructed, actually is abolished.

In this seventh thesis, it gets more clear that art itself, just like politics, science and love is one of the modalities of a subject-form implied by Badiou's theory. And this is the reason why Badiou writes fifteen thesis on art in the mode of imperative, which will be more explicit in the following theses. As such, contemporary art for Badiou, becomes a means of elaborating this subject-form, rather than an enquiry into the new possibilities brought about by contemporary art. As such, in the following theses, it becomes subject to dictations as to what it should and should not be which may be a questionable attitude, considering that there are no stakes involved for contemporary art in such dictations. If there is to be an ethics of art, which Badiou insists upon, it is insofar that stakes are involved and bears no dictations that it could be ethical.

**4.8 The real of art is ideal impurity conceived through the immanent process of its purification. In other words, the raw material of art is determined by the contingent inception of a form. Art is the secondary formalisation of the advent of a hitherto formless form.**

This eighth thesis is another formulation of thesis no.5. In the context of art, the concepts of "ideal impurity" and "progressive purification" somewhat require a more problematic enquiry. Art as a process of the emergence of truth, therefore, is secondary regarding the ideal impurity, the advent of a hitherto formless form, which

is the experience of the real ground as event. Secondary temporality-wise. Considering that death does not constitute an event in Badiou, it becomes even more difficult to account for such a conception of art where death has no – truth-generating – singularity to it. But the issue of death as not possessing the value of event, is later to be further elaborated in this study.

The progressive purification of a hitherto formless form brings one back to the question of mimesis and to the stakes it rises in Alain Badiou's theory. According to Badiou, one of the three forms of Evil is delusion, that is to say, the "confusion of a mere simulacrum of an event with a genuine event". This assumed point where ideal impurity is achieved is the happening of an Idea (as was mentioned in thesis no. 3) and it constitutes as such, one of the essential points that the theory is based upon. Whereas one, if one carries ethical considerations, is supposed to be faithful to a genuine event, Evil resides in being faithful to the "simulacrum". To shed more light on what Badiou understands by simulacrum, an extensive passage from the chapter entitled "Outline of a theory of Evil" in *Ethics, An Essay on the Understanding of Good and Evil*, will be cited:

When a radical break in a situation, under names borrowed from real truth-processes, convokes not the void but the 'full' particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a *simulacrum of truth*. 'Simulacrum' must be understood here in its strong sense: all the formal traits of a truth are at work in the simulacrum. Not only a universal nomination of the event, inducing the power of a radical break, but also the 'obligation' of a fidelity, and the promotion of a *simulacrum of the subject*, erected – without



the advent of any Immortal – above the human animality of the others, of those who are arbitrarily declared not to belong to the communitarian substance whose promotion and domination the simulacrum-event is designed to assure. Fidelity to a simulacrum, unlike fidelity to an event, regulates its break with the situation not by the universality of the void, but by the closed set [*ensemble*] (the ‘Germans’ or ‘Aryans’ – here Badiou is referring to the case of the Nazis). Its invariable operation is the unending construction of this set, and it has no other means of doing this than that of ‘voiding’ what surrounds it. The void, ‘avoided’ [*chasse*] by the simulacrous promotion of an ‘event-substance’, here returns, with its universality, as what must be accomplished in order that this substance can be. This is to say that what is addressed ‘to everyone’ (and ‘everyone’, here, is necessarily that which does not belong to the German communitarian substance – for this substance is not an ‘everyone’ but, rather, some ‘few’ who dominate ‘everyone’) is death, or that deferred form of death which is slavery in the service of German substance. Hence fidelity to the simulacrum (and it demands of the ‘few’ belonging to the German substance prolonged sacrifices and commitments, since it really does have the form of a fidelity) has as its content war and massacre. These are not here means to an end: they make up the very real of such a fidelity (Badiou, E, 2001, 73-74).

Another rather long citation from Badiou, which comes right after the abovementioned passage in the same book, seems at this point, extremely necessary as regards the ‘nature’ of the ethics of truth that Badiou opposes to the “simulacrum of truth”:

But even in this respect we have to recognize that this process mimics an actual truth-process. *Every fidelity to an authentic event names the adversaries of its perseverance* (my emphasis). Contrary to consensual ethics, which tries to avoid divisions, the ethic of truths is always more or less militant, combative. For the concrete manifestation of its heterogeneity to opinions and established knowledges is the struggle against all sorts of efforts at interruption, at corruption, at the return to the immediate interests of the human animal, at the humiliation and repression of the Immortal who arises as subject. *The ethic of truths presumes recognition of these efforts, and thus the singular operation of naming enemies* (my emphasis). (...) Every invocation of blood and soil, of race, of custom, of community, works directly against truths; and it is this very collection that is named as the enemy in the ethic of truths. (...) For however hostile to a truth he might be, in the ethic of truths every 'some-one' is always represented as capable of becoming the Immortal that he is. So we may fight against the judgments and opinions he exchanges with others for the purpose of corrupting every fidelity, but not against his *person* – which, under the circumstances, is insignificant, and to which, in any case, every truth is ultimately addressed. By contrast, the void with which those who are faithful to a simulacrum strive to surround its alleged substance must be a real void, *obtained by cutting into the flesh itself* (my emphasis). And since it is not the subjective advent of an Immortal, so fidelity to the simulacrum – that appalling imitation of truths – presumes nothing more about those they designate as the enemy than their strictly particular existence as human animals. (...) This is why the exercise of fidelity to the simulacrum is

necessarily the exercise of terror. Understand by terror, here, not the political concept of Terror, linked (in a universalizable couple) to the concept of Virtue by the Immortals of the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety, but the pure and simple reduction of all their being-for-death. Terror thus conceived really postulates that in order let [the] substance be, *nothing* must be (Badiou, E, 2001, 77).

One cannot help but think there is no wonder most of the philosophers against whose philosophies Badiou has raised critiques, have rather preferred remaining mute (in their life time) vis-a-vis these critiques and again, no wonder why he is presently so popular. Firstly, Badiou's choice of words regarding the names of his concepts, namely "militancy", "terror", "virtue", "immortality", all have a war-esque and religious ring to them, even something like a religious militancy, despite the fact of Badiou's being a self-acclaimed atheist.

Following this note, there is the problem of the genuine event vs. the simulacrum. This could easily go as the old conception of truth vs. copy but what is of concern to this study at this point is what kind of implications this conception suggests in the domain of ethics. As regards Badiou's ethics of truth, it is not based upon the recognition of a radical Evil but rather, upon the recognition of a radical or better, universal Good which he himself already states in *Ethics*. The putting forth of the void as the essential point of argument regarding the genuineness of an event brings about an obvious distinction between physical death as terror and the "good" concept named Terror that Badiou mentions which is death as life, death's eternal resurrection in the eternal destruction of time. The genuineness of an event is based upon its

bringing about the void as an empty set, upon bringing itself about as an empty set, whereas a simulacrum is that which brings itself about as the closed set while bringing about the “void” of the others by means of war and massacre.

The example of the simulacrum-event is that of the Nazi case (which is also mentioned as the ‘German substance’). As it is the Nazi example that Badiou gives in this context, this argument will also proceed by referring to the same example. According to Badiou, what the Nazi case brought about was the particularity of the abstract set of ‘Germans’ or ‘Aryans’ and the Nazi genocide itself does not constitute a truth as regards Badiou’s ethics of truth because this abstract set is in truth not empty, as it is erected – without the advent of any Immortal – above the human animality of the others, by those who are arbitrarily declared not to belong to the communitarian substance whose promotion and domination the simulacrum-event is designed to assure. Thus there is a closed set in the guise of an empty set called ‘Germans’ declared by the self-acclaimed Germans. But to speak of ‘Germans’ as a closed set does in no way imply that there exists as such, a false closed set of ‘Germans’ because obviously what this particularity under the name ‘Germans’ refers to is not ‘the’ Germans. When one refers to ‘Germans’ in the Nazi Germany (as one is to be situation-specific), one does not refer to the closed set of ‘Germans’ in the Nazi Germany because there were obviously Germans who were not Nazis as well as there were Germans who were Nazis and who called themselves ‘Germans’. This is to say that, the Germans who were Nazis *did* in fact constitute an empty set, because before that event which is Nazism, no prevailing set referring to ‘Germans’ who were Nazis was existent. So the ‘falsity’ of the closed set of ‘Germans’ can not be taken as a criterion for the inexistence of the empty set which is ‘Germans’ who were Nazis,

because it would be according a “truthfulness” to the ‘falsity’ of the closed set of ‘Germans’ but it is truthful insofar as the Germans of this set are the Nazi Germans which they are. But this decision on the *falsity* of the very *true* empty set of ‘Germans’ is the very decision taken by Badiou in order to come up with the distinction between truth and simulacrum based on not according genuineness to the event of death and securing the void as life in order to establish the difference between the void itself and its internal other which is death. Therefore, what is achieved by this move of Badiou, in a way, by attempting to take away the means of attributing the status of truth to the Nazi case, is actually to re-inscribe its ‘genuineness’ as event. But just as mimesis, although being decided upon and done away with by Plato nevertheless remained operative in his dialectics, the decision upon the truthfulness of an event is the movement by which it becomes all the more difficult to distinguish between truth and simulacrum. And the distinction between what is held to be genuine and what is not, becomes a rather – if not arbitrary – ‘manipulative’ gesture regarding the decision vis-a-vis an event’s truth. When multiples are nothing but multiples of multiples, and indefinite as such, even though it may be an ‘easier’ task to distinguish an empty set, it would perhaps involve making further inquiries as to how a closed set could be determined as ‘false’.

Death in its physical aspect is held to be a major criterion to establish a distinction between an event’s genuineness or falsity, yet somehow, does not, as such, achieve the status of a genuine event in Badiou’s philosophy. In such a conception, attacking a person’s judgments and a person’s *person* become very distinct acts, as does pointing the finger to an enemy by *naming* him or her and pointing a gun to him or her. Obviously, this is in no way an attempt of tracing an equivalence between the two, but

then the question is, how is one assured of the certainty of this border or of its maintenance as such? Where, in fidelity, is the line traced and is it until the point of physical death that one is allowed to take a faithful stance speaking in terms of *act*? If one has the allowance of detecting one's enemies in a truth procedure, this already assures the threat of the return through the back door, of one of the three forms of Evil that Badiou mentions as "the terror to impose the total and unqualified power of truth". If truth regards *formal* criteria, another question arises as to how the content of "enemy" is to be filled and as to why the 'name' of enemy should be mentioned in the first place. If false events do not inscribe subjects or subject-forms such as genuine events do, on what formal grounds is one to fight doxa when one is being faithful to an event? And in what terms are the grounds of fighting in the name of a truth is to be established vis-a-vis those who are faithful to false events considering that although their trajectories are almost indiscernible in their form, that is at the level of appearance, they are strictly opposed at the level of being, that is, at the level of content?

**4.9 The only maxim of contemporary art is: do not be imperial. This also means: do not be democratic, if democracy implies conformity with the imperial idea of political liberty.**

Art, in its strongest sense, cannot afford being imperial, and respectively, cannot afford being democratic either if it is to be art, but it becomes subject to these dictations because it constitutes a *form* of subject in Badiou's philosophy. Only if it is to be considered as a modality of subjecthood, can it be commanded to not be

imperial or democratic. Such dictations could bring about the abusing of any given situation or event. The artistic process itself could not afford dictations of this order.

As mentions Marc De Kesel in his critique of Badiou's *Saint Paul*, and as has already been argued in the previous thesis, the assumption of the abstract void of Badiou is a means by which death is eternally resurrected. The void is that which comes to establish the difference between itself and death, that is also, between the absolute empty void and a false closed set, and, between truth and simulacrum. Here I will refer once again to the passage already cited in page 35 of the thesis, only more extensively:

Truths, too, are susceptible to revolutions. However, they cannot take this into account, precisely because they are based upon revolutions. A revolution is the effect of history's contingency but, once started, it can no longer take into account its own contingency. This would shatter its militancy in advance. (...) For if truth is based in a revolutionary event, it is founded not on being (i.e. the totality of particular sets) but in *being qua Being*. And if truth is marked by time, it is by the kind of time that, on one level of being, intervenes destructively, but at the level of being *qua Being*, is positive and constructive. It is precisely ontological time – the time of being *qua Being* – that makes truth 'eternal'. Every genuine truth claim is anchored in this ontological foundation and in the type of time that reigns there as well. That is why a truth claim and its procedure are immune to the temporary differences that being is made of. Truths and truth procedures are embedded in a time in which destruction and death do not represent finitude, limitation, decline, beginning

and ending, the hallmarks of being at the level of life and society as they normally function. At the ontological level, however, there is neither beginning nor end, because, there, death equals resurrection, and destruction is only another word for the liberation of being's truth. At that level, there is only the presence of 'presentation', a presence radically different from the temporary differences characterizing the level of 'representation'. In this ontological and 'eternal' presence, death is always already resurrection. Except, you cannot put it the other way round: resurrection is not always already death. Death, life and death, temporality, finitude, etc. belong exclusively to the worldly time of being. Being *qua Being* has only life. There, even death is life, in the way immediately it turns into resurrection. And this is why we can trust the ontological level and make it the base of our truth (Marc De Kesel, TAFC, 2004).

Art, as it constitutes a means of achieving the universality of truth in Badiou's view, therefore, also becomes subject to fidelity to genuine events from which death is subtracted. It can only be involved in a truth procedure, as the abstract form of the void, as the radical possibility of life. This is because, it appears that the void is doubly inscribed in Badiou's theory. There is the abstract void which constitutes the empty set of a genuine truth and its concrete Evil counterpart which is the void brought about by the simulacrum event, which is physical death. The void of being, of being *qua Being* as cited in De Kesel, establishes its difference from death *so that* being, at the ontological level, can constitute the basis for such a truth procedure.



**4.10 Non-imperial art is necessarily abstract art, in this sense: it abstracts itself from all particularity, and formalises this gesture of abstraction.**

It is rather “imperial” to say that art, which is to say, non-imperial art, is necessarily abstract art. As the theses on contemporary art are cumulated, the concept of ‘art’ becomes more and more identified with Badiou’s concept of truth and still does not gain an aspect ‘singular’ to art. From this point of view, art, politics, science and love are like four fronts to be taken over by the truth-procedure, precisely in order to establish an ‘imperialism’ of truth and the formal character of truth is so dominant that it leaves almost nothing regarding the particularity of these domains. Obviously, a truth procedure is to be indifferent to differences and a possible explanation as to why Badiou precisely names these four domains may be because they are the only distinct processes of action as production and all involve certain processes of representation, yet their being distinct somehow has no relevance as to the kind of movement required for their being handled in the process of philosophy. Although Badiou claims that there is no ethics, other than the *ethics of* – of love, of politics, of science, of art – the manner in which he proceeds in their handling, amounts to one ethics, that of truth. In the context of thesis no.1, it has been argued that truth procedure becomes subject to two types of post-evental analysis, based upon the decision of its being recognized as truth or not. Therefore, ethics too, which is the ethics of truth itself becomes subject to two, and only two types of post-evental analysis, according to some event’s being either true or not. Thus, all the movement specific to art, to politics, to love and to science is fixated according to the requirements of one subject-form and its ‘ethics’. Which brings about the following thesis:

**4.11 The abstraction of non-imperial art is not concerned with any particular public or audience. Non-imperial art is related to a kind of aristocratic-proletarian ethic: it does what it says, without distinguishing between kinds of people.**

The ethic of truth or truths, which Badiou defines as “a kind of aristocratic-proletarian ethic”, which “does what it says” without distinguishing between kinds of people, resides in great proximity to the three forms that Evil can take in Badiou’s conception. That is to say, Badiou’s ethical maxim “Keep going!” (an understanding of ethics which does what it says) poses a not so slight threat vis-a-vis the condition of moderation and restraint. Moreover, it rings more like a military command than an ethical maxim, if ever a maxim could be adopted as regards ethics. Obviously adopting an ethical stance which is supposed to be indifferent to differences could only emerge as such but the problem is that, indifference to difference is what establishes the void as absolute difference, the difference of Being over the differences of beings. And with the truth procedure this difference operates as an indifference towards differences maintaining an absolute trust in Being. Therefore, to cite yet another passage from Marc De Kesel:

Paul’s formal ‘Catholicism’ is the ontological condition of truth as such. But this is not the ontological condition defended by traditional Christianity, Badiou stresses. For God is dead, and if truth is based in being as such, one can only claim this on purely formal, mathematical grounds. But the question I raised here is whether the dead God does not secretly return in Badiou’s supposedly atheist, formal ontology. Doesn’t the Christian God, being’s

Creator and therefore truth's ultimate base, secretly resurrect itself in Badiou's ontology? Isn't God, including his resurrection, simply ontologized? Is he still not responsible, despite his death for being's permanent resurrection? Does He not survive in the assumption that being's permanent resurrection – or, which amounts to the same thing, permanent revolution – is inherently good and generous? Is he not still the ultimate guarantee, enabling us to speak in the name of being *qua Being* so that we can remain settled in an eternal truth beyond being's contingency? (Marc De Kesel, TAFC, 2004)

In this light, and keeping in mind Badiou's choices of words, such as militancy, fidelity which is a matter of "being faithful", the eternity of truth, and the Immortal which every human-animal possesses at the level of being, militancy and his choices of genuine events, amongst which the major event is that of Saint Paul to which he has accorded a complete book, it comes only naturally to ask why these choices are made and why the ultimate subject-formation finds its voice in Paul's formal "Catholicism". Badiou obviously insists that although this formal "Catholicism" of Paul is the ontological condition of his conception of truth, it has absolutely nothing to do with Christianity as such. But when on the one hand, Badiou claims so loudly to be against being imperial, how can an account be given as to his "Christian" assumption at the level of content of his philosophy; that Christianity which is one of the most dominant, imperial discourses, if not the most imperial in the contemporary context.

**4.12 Non-imperial art must be as rigorous as a mathematical demonstration, as surprising as an ambush in the night, and as elevated as a star.**

This poetic approach towards art does not leave much to say, except that the surprise resides in the happening of the event, its rigor in axiomatic decision making and its elevation in its supposed accomplishment as a universal truth. Although axiomatic thinking which involves the operation of drawing the necessary consequences from a genuine event, itself, is subject to further questioning:

Considering that the post-evental procedure of truth involves temporality, it becomes a problem in itself to keep on drawing consequences without taking recourse in dialectics but sticking with a logic of axiomatics. It is because truth is said to be scarcely or little said that Badiou maintains that the truth procedure should not assume a dialectical operation. Referring to Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typography*, axiomatic thinking is revealed to be dialectical in itself. Dialectical in the case of Badiou, in the fact of its presupposing the mathematical theory of sets as an ontological basis and making use of language in order to establish its point of contact with what is considered as being-there, (the happening of the event as the coming into being of a generic subset and accounting for it as the following truth procedure), while operating between two opposite poles consisting of nature (the anarchic, disorganized, disjunctive as the real, natural ground) and culture (the organized world of appearance, the world of relations involving differences and degrees of differences where no object can be assigned a natural place, as Badiou puts it) and achieving a gradual process of purification upon a consensus on an ultimate Good. Dialectical, also because what is being dealt with is ultimately the concept of the infinite, of the

Immortal in all humans, of God which is dead but is resurrected in its death. Dialectical again and mostly because the most rigorous delimitation brought to this discourse is regarding its initial exclusion of “death” as a genuine event as opposed to the radical possibility of life, which is the genuine event. Thus what Badiou refers to as ‘general logic’, as the process of axiomatic thinking, reveals itself to be not that far from speculative logic, that is dialectical thinking. What Lacoue-Labarthe defines, in the context of Hölderlin, as dialectical thinking in *Typography* is as such:

Everything happens, therefore, as though we were dealing with a kind of immobilized attenuation of a dialectical process that marks time in an interminable oscillation between the two poles of an opposition, always infinitely distant from each other. The act of suspension is this: quite simply, the incessant repetition of the engaging of the dialectical process in the – never changing – form of *the closer it is, the more distant it is; the more dissimilar it is, the more adequate it is; the more interior it is, the more exterior it is.* (...) ...nothing would prevent us from recognizing in this paralysis affecting (without end) the very movement of the dialectic and the ontologic, and beyond the evident gesture of conjuration, the return effect of mimetology within the speculative, and, consequently, within the general discourse of truth and presence. (...) This is why the “logic” of *aletheia* can also be inscribed as the “logic” of *Ent-fernung* [(dis)distancing]. But who knows whether this “logic” itself (including, too, what ceaselessly carries it off in its most demanding moments) is not also penetrated throughout by (if not subject to) mimetology? (Lacoue-Labarthe, T, 1989, 230-231).

This could be accounted for in Badiou too, though not in the same terms, in his assigning an absolute point of indifference, which is the void as the difference of Being from differences of beings for the sake of the universal Good. The ever-repeating movement is the surging forth of a subject-form which fixates the ontological movement and secures the distinction between the genuine and the false, between truth and simulacrum, between original and copy, by assuring that death does not get to be inscribed within.

**4.13 Today art can only be made from the starting point of that which, as far as Empire is concerned, does not exist. Through its abstraction, art renders this in-existence visible. This is what governs the formal principle of every art: the effort to render visible to everyone that which, for Empire (and so by extension for everyone, though from a different point of view), does not exist.**

This thesis falls back upon the point of implying the totalizing in-existence of that which is taken for granted to be nonexistent in Empire, according to which one can thus also assume that which is existent as far as Empire is concerned. As is mentioned, yet again in De Kesel's article, it is the image of the other as based upon what is taken to be the non-existent, that supports Badiou's claim to universality. It is the eternal struggle of universality's denying its inner difference or inner exclusion. The void is therefore, in as much as it is the void of being, is the very gap which constitutes the split in universality's truth-procedure.

**4.14 Since it is sure of its ability to control the entire domain of the visible and the audible via the laws governing commercial circulation and democratic communication, Empire no longer censures anything. All art, and all thought, is ruined when we accept this permission to consume, to communicate and to enjoy. We should become the pitiless censors of ourselves.**

The fourteenth thesis has a puritan ring to it, in accordance with the somewhat religious tone of Badiou's philosophy. On the other hand, "becoming the pitiless censors of ourselves", though at first glance, seems to be contradictory vis-a-vis the ethical maxim "Keep going!", actually implies restraining the will to live according to the "human rights" that *we* "possess" which are assigned by Empire and which are accorded based upon *our* particularities. (my emphasis) The question mark regarding the first person plural could carry the argument right back to the initial point of set theory. At this point, a reference to a person named Sam Nico – who appears on the Internet site amazon.co.uk with a review he has written on the book *Infinite Thought* of Alain Badiou – will be given:

It is not a set among sets. (referring to "death" – my addition) It is not that the barber who shaves the beards of men is not part of the set; it is the error in assuming that the barber is male in the first place.

**4.15 It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent.**

One would think that “pure chance” would rather pertain to doing “something” rather than doing “nothing”. The conception of pure chance’s pertaining to the event’s happening as the emergence of the empty set’s existence, as far as ethics is concerned, limits the concept of ethics to the future advent of the event, that is to the future. This conceptualization of ethics as indifference to differences, does not fall that far apart from that conventional ethics which Badiou criticizes as the “respect for the other”.

Furthermore, the one thing which is invisible in Badiou’s theory and which should be rendered visible is the lack of “death” as a genuine event. Badiou, referring to his apparently one-sided relationship with Deleuze, writes in his introduction to his book *Deleuze The Clamor of Being*:

In late 1994, we decided that we had completed the task (referring to their alleged correspondence – my addition), that we would not go any further. For both of us, the work of clarification had been effected. Shortly afterwards, Deleuze wrote me that, after having re-read his letters, he found them too “abstract”, not up to the occasion. He announced, rather abruptly, that he had destroyed the copies of his letters and indicated unambiguously that he would oppose, if ever anyone should have the idea, any form of circulation, not to mention publication, of these texts.

At the time, viewing this final assessment as a sort of disavowal of our exchanges, I was somewhat bitter and, as we had still never met, given the



difference of our lives and the flux of our existences, I suspected that some external influence or some obscure calculation was to blame, just as do the jealous personae of Proust's novel, gnawed at by the enigma provoked by distance.

Then, suddenly, death – which transformed these letters into a private treasure, a *Tombeau*, an ultimate act of generosity.

This attestation on the part of Badiou to the singular transformational nature of death, has no trace in the elaboration of his theory. Without death, there could be no singularity to any event, no possibility of life, of art, of love, of politics, of science, of philosophy. Yet, death, which is also neutralized by the possibility of the experience of the real ground as the source of life, and which constitutes the other of the void in the truth procedure, is at the same time, the very void of Alain Badiou's philosophy. And this is also what results in the assuming that the barber is male.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This thesis was intended to approach in a critical manner the procedure of truth in Alain Badiou's philosophy through *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art* in its ethical and aesthetical aspects based upon the intricate relation between these two domains. Against the common conception that post-structural theory takes away the means for constructing an agency of rational action, the emergence of Alain Badiou's present popularity as an "alternative" to the "impossibility" of deconstructive ethics, has been questioned according to its ethical implications.

In Alain Badiou's philosophy, the idea of the universality of truth, the concept of the void which assures the distinction between a genuine event and a simulacrum, the assigning of a form to subjectivity through the unproblematic distinction between form and content and the assumption of a completed, totalized truth process, otherwise temporal and localized, all testify to an inherent operation in the theory of Badiou which re-inscribes that which is continuously warded off. Axiomatic thinking suggested by Badiou, as constituting the only means of carrying out a procedure of truth via different distinct operations of subtraction, in the final analysis, in its turn, amounts to fall back upon itself as a dialectical thinking. And the essential operation of subtraction turns out to be the subtraction of death as a genuine event. Its subtraction is what distinguishes between truth and simulacrum so as to verify the void as the radical possibility of life.

A thinking on being is a thinking of aesthetics even before that. And a thinking of aesthetics is a thinking of ethics. The question of mimesis itself is the ethical question

of this relationship. In his fifteen theses on art, the question of mimesis is taken for granted. Therefore, whereas ethics is a means of opening art to its possibilities, in Badiou's theses, the movement of art which is supposed to be singular in itself is fixated to a ground where it assumes compossibility with truth and with "the" ethics of truth. The fifteen theses remain in an "empty transcendence" vis-à-vis art and the process of art and as such, they have no singular significance in the context. Whereas Derrida when he mentions that art always moves in the manner of a ghost, there is no allusion made as to what ends art should serve and what is important in its stating is the essentiality of its movement. It is the movement singular to art and which already possesses the possibility of the ethical in itself as this "ghost" with no possible form that can be assigned to it, which one is even in doubt as to its existence, and that is related intimately to death in its being ghostly-like. Time, in art, is already deconstructed as such by art's moving in the manner of a ghost. It already assumes a crossing, or rather a continuous *shifting* of boundaries, and essentially between life and death, between identity and difference, between art and that which is not art. It places art in the middle of life as an immanently ethical experience of movement, constituting a *possibility* in itself. It is exactly the point where aesthetics and ethics meet in an essential question mark. Whereas in Badiou's fifteen theses it is inscribed as a full stop where it belongs to life in its difference from death, where a singular movement is long lost and it becomes a matter of an empty process of gradual purification and it is subordinated to the assumption of a truth.

In the contemporary context, art has nothing to do with such dictations as to what it should or should not be. In the contemporary sphere, art is already political. That is also why Badiou's distinctions between art, politics, science and love cannot hold if

politics is not subtracted from art, in this context. This is obviously a means of assuring that what is meant by politics is militant, active politics but this is also taking away the means of thinking politics as an essential trait of all contemporary art. Today it has no relevance for art to say that it should be as rigorous as mathematics, as surprising as an ambush in the night, as elevated as a star. What comes as contemporary art cannot be assigned a beginning and end to it, it is rather a movement peculiar to itself that brings about “artsy” moments, which constitute a political challenge by taking advantage from the “flows” of the representational and political processes for that matter. Art is contemporarily, already a thinking *on* art and *with* art, rather than *as* a certain thought of art which precedes post-eventally. It is rather a thinking where *everything* can be an event. Art is already simulacrum but not as opposed to a truth procedure, it establishes that everything is truthful as the challenging of an impossibility. Furthermore, it is through death as much as life that art *is*, that politics, science and love *are*. In Badiou’s conception where there is yet another distinction between culture (the being-there) and nature (the experience of the real ground), culture is already condemned to death, it assumes no challenges in itself. Its possible challenge lies in the future, and in the future it *is* possible, therefore art is subordinated to the future and to its pre-supposed accomplishment. Whereas, in the contemporary context, it is everything but a pre-supposition of an accomplishment.

It is of common conception that post-structural theories take away the means for constructing an agency of rational action, and this is also what is generally accounted for Alain Badiou’s present popularity in contemporary philosophy, but it seems that the point of ethics’ being a *challenge* in itself is being missed. The ethics of post-structuralism or rather, the ethics of deconstruction (Derrida already equates

deconstruction with ethics and mentions that one is to *love* what one deconstructs), far from taking away the grounds for the possibility of responsible action, by forcing to incessantly think its impossibility, creates a possibility of challenging this impossible without fixing thought's movement at a point where ethics can easily become an account of what should or should not be done. It is, as such, a thinking inclined to be *different* towards the slightest differences, without turning it into a "project" of art, or science, or politics, or romantic love; without either – and especially without – turning it into a simple matter of tolerance and simple respect. It is a *challenge* where art is political, science is creative, politics is ethical, etc. and it is its constituting a challenge regarding all possible relations which makes an ethics ethical. The fifteen theses, rather than positing art as a challenge in itself, offer it as a solution to achieve a certain subject-form. The supposition of concepts such as impurity and purification, imperial and non-imperial, rather than being thought upon themselves, remain as concepts taken for granted, when it is precisely the process which renders them undecidable that constitutes the groundless ground of contemporary art and the undecidable in that sense, is not what lies in the future in order to be decided upon but what comes to be undecidable through art itself.

The problem with post-structuralism, leaving its own problems aside, is also the problem of "reading" as a passive recipient expecting an agency to be detected and put into operation. If the problem is mere the problem of rational agency, it is that much a problem of "reading". Rational agency does not befall reading, it is already in reading. The solution to the problem of agency does not offer itself as something to be solved, it is rather something to be continuously challenged and to work considering its impossibility all the time. Alain Badiou's philosophy, in this respect, is one in

which rational agency is considered to be an incapability on the part of post-structuralism and not as the very problematization of rational agency and offers itself as a solution. An agency without substance is thus constructed, with a twist of singularity whereas the stakes involved in constructing such an agency itself, that is to say, the value of such a truth value is not questioned as delicately as one could say it is “unconventionally” ethical. The value of art, therefore, is subtracted from the value of truth, to borrow Badiou’s term, and is neutralized as a form of agency.

It is precisely because of a decision given on the part of Alain Badiou upon the “possibility” of an ethics as such that the ethical in his philosophy is cut short.

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