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Badiou's Relation to Heidegger in *Theory of the Subject*

Graham Harman

Badiou's references to Heidegger are surprisingly infrequent, given his obvious admiration for the great German thinker: 'Our epoch can be said to have been stamped and signed by the return of the question of Being. This is why it is dominated by Heidegger' (D 18). He does not build his philosophy atop Heidegger's own, as might fairly be said of other recent French thinkers such as Derrida, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty or Sartre. While Badiou's references to Heidegger are often tantalising, they are never quite central to his own ambitions, which emerge more explicitly in dialogue with Hegel and Lacan. At times his admiration for Heidegger resembles that of a jazz saxophonist for a jazz drummer: two performers working in the same idiom and sometimes able to collaborate, but generally incapable of direct technical influence.

It is interesting that this attitude is shared by Badiou's kindred spirit Slavoj Žižek, who also speaks admiringly of Heidegger without doing so frequently or centrally. We need only look at Žižek's jacket endorsement of Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*, which concludes enthusiastically as follows: '... you hold in your hands proof that philosophers of the status of Plato, Hegel, and Heidegger are still walking around today!' (TS dust jacket). Whether or not one agrees that Badiou belongs in such illustrious company, the point here is that Žižek takes it for granted that Heidegger does. In short, Badiou and Žižek (surely the world's most prominent living continental philosophers as of 2011) both salute Heidegger as the dominant thinker of the past century, while also showing little aspiration to follow in his lineage. This fact is so striking that it might even serve to guide all interpretations of Badiou and Žižek. Given that the major thinker of the twentieth century so clearly fascinates them, why does he matter so little for their own declared philosophical

paths? Or is it really the case that he does matter so little to them?

The present article will consider this question only with respect to Badiou, and only in connection with his 1982 *Theory of the Subject*, the first of his three major systematic books so far (the others, of course, are *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*). As with most thinkers of consequence, this first systematic effort already contains the major themes of Badiou's later and more emblematic works, and articulates them with an energetic youthful candour. Here as usual we find Badiou spending much more time on Hegel than Heidegger. In fact, Hegel is listed among those names so ubiquitous in *Theory of the Subject* that Badiou does not even bother listing them in the index (TS xl). By contrast, Heidegger is mentioned only three times, one of them a passing reference of little importance (TS 69). But the other two citations are of great interest. In the first, Badiou situates Heidegger's pivotal concept of the ontological difference amid the key ideas of *Theory of the Subject* (TS 7). In the second, Badiou claims that Heidegger wishes to put an end to 'the guarantee of consistency by the cause' (TS 234-5), a project endorsed by Badiou as well. At this point some interesting questions can be raised in connection with these passages: Is Badiou's interpretation of the ontological difference in Heidegger correct? What does it mean that Heidegger wishes to end 'the guarantee of consistency by the cause'? And more generally, what are the true points of congruence and tension between Heidegger and the Badiou of *Theory of the Subject*?

Hegel and the Ontological Difference

For Badiou (as for Žižek), the major partners for philosophical dialogue are Hegel and Lacan rather than Heidegger. In *Theory of the Subject* Badiou's attitude towards these partners is ambivalent, despite his admiration for both. At times he treats them as masters who saw everything essential in advance, while at other times he openly announces his deviation from them. The question for us is what role in such deviation can be ascribed to the silent background influence of Heidegger. In the present section I will consider this topic in connection with Hegel, and in the next section with Lacan.

In the opening pages of *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou claims that Hegel's dialectic is subtler than usually believed. 'There are

two dialectical matrices in Hegel' (TS 3). We must take Lenin's hint, he says, and read Hegel as a good materialist. But Hegel is not just a materialist who happened to have a lamentable idealist side into which he accidentally stumbled. Instead, both the materialist and idealist sides belong to the dialectic itself: 'At the heart of the Hegelian dialectic we must disentangle two processes, two concepts of movement, and not just one proper system of becoming that would have been corrupted by a subjective system of knowing' (TS 3). The idealist dialectic gives us the Hegel of the textbooks; by means of alienation, an initially immediate term gives way to a movement of negativity before returning in higher, sublated form. But Badiou asserts that there is also a 'materialist' side of Hegel that operates according to 'a dialectical matrix whose operator is scission, and whose theme is that there is no unity that is not split. [Here] there is not the least bit of return into itself, nor any connection between the final and the inaugural' (TS 4). On the one hand, Badiou refers to the 'idealist propensity' of Hegel and describes his philosophy with mild sarcasm as a 'journey through the galleries of the One' (TS 4-5). On the other, Badiou asserts nonetheless that with the dialectic between something and something other,¹ Hegel is already aware of the never healed 'scission' in being that is the hallmark of Badiou's own position (TS 5). But if Hegel 'is right, as always', there are still 'all sorts of contortions on [his] part that serve to mask [his] recognition' of the fact that the dialectic must be based on the incurable Two rather than the unified One, and that scission rather than completion should be viewed as the true pillar of Hegelian philosophy (TS 4-5). If Hegel is always right, he never fully realises why.

In the famous beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, being and nothing turn out to be mutually indistinguishable.² In their sameness they vanish into one another in the movement of becoming, though not because they are in any way different: 'Alterity has here no qualitative support' (TS 6). This 'indexical stasis' of contradiction gives us the same term twice: 'It is the same A twice named, twice placed. This will more than suffice for them to corrupt one another' (TS 6). But there is some ambiguity in Badiou's presentation of this point. The observation that there is no qualitative difference between being and nothing in Hegel would indeed yield the claim that we have A and then A once again, the same name twice. But although Badiou does put it this way more than once, his true interest lies not in such contradiction between A

and another A, but rather in the 'constitutive scission' between any term A in its specific place and A 'in its pure, closed identity' (TS 6). Stated differently, what really fascinates Badiou is not the repetition of two indistinguishable As, but rather A considered in relation with the world and in independence of any such relation. In other words: 'the givenness of A as being-itself [splits] into: its pure being, A [and] its being-placed, A_p ' (TS 7, punctuation modified). It is not a matter of two indistinguishable As, but of A in its own right and A for another.

Having told us that A splits into A and A_p , Badiou immediately adds a surprising parenthesis: 'Heidegger would say [that A splits] into its ontological being and its ontic being . . .' (TS 7). The reason for surprise is that Heidegger never sees himself as a Hegelian. Instead Hegel is treated, for all his greatness, as one of the most desolate thinkers of the forgetting of being, which for Heidegger means the reduction of being to presence. None of Heidegger's key terms for what being does – concealing, withdrawing, veiling, sheltering, preserving – could possibly be of interest to Hegel, for whom any supposed reality-in-itself is no better than an abstract exteriority produced in the heart of an internal movement. For Heidegger, Hegel's description of being as 'the indeterminate immediate' is not just a provisionally deficient opening move that is later redeemed in the subtly enfolded draperies of the *Logic*. Instead, it is a doomed approach from the start, since it reduces being to its series of manifestations for the logician who describes them. Stated in terms of the Badiouian scission between A and A_p , Heidegger would describe the Hegelian dialectic as unfolding entirely within the realm of A_p : being as placed or present with respect to something else, not being in its own right.

What then are we to make of Badiou's unlikely bundling of Hegel and Heidegger? One possibility is that Badiou is simply another Hegelian, blinded by the forgetting of being. Another is that Heidegger has merely reinvented the wheel, failing to understand that Hegel's dialectic has already done a sufficient job of undercutting presence. A third possibility is that Badiou mimics Heidegger without realising or admitting it. A fourth is that Badiou subtly draws on Heideggerian resources to escape Hegel's shadow, establishing a new philosophy somewhere between these two great predecessors. This question can be left to the end of the article; for now we will simply follow Badiou's model of scission and see where it leads.

For Hegel, 'something' always splits into 'something-for-itself' and 'something-for-other'. Badiou takes this for 'proof that in order to think anything at all, something no matter what, it must be split in two' (TS 6). Every thing is necessarily both A and A_p . Nonetheless, 'what Hegel does not state clearly' (TS 7) is that the contrary of A is not A_p , but P itself. The thing is not contradicted by another thing, but by the fact that it is placed anywhere at all. To give one of Badiou's own political examples, the contrary of the proletariat is not the bourgeoisie but rather the bourgeois world. Here Badiou coins the portmanteau word 'splace' [*esplace*, or space/place] to designate any thing's structural-relational place in a situation, and 'outplace' [*horlieu*] for its non-placed reality outside the situation. These poles are not to be treated in isolation. If we attempt to assert the 'lost purity' of an outplace outside all places, this is just as bad as the opposite tactic of asserting that everything is thoroughly determined by its current situation (TS 11). Badiou calls the former the 'Leftist deviation' (Deleuze in philosophy, China's Lin Biao in politics) and the latter the 'Rightist deviation' (Lévi-Strauss in philosophy, the revisionist French Communist Party in politics). Thinkers of flux and desire can no more assert the purity of A than structuralists can insist on the dominance of A_p . Things are neither entirely inscribed in a given place nor liberated into a placeless nowhere. Instead, in overtly Hegelian fashion, Badiou proclaims that the thing is *determined* by the indexical effect that place has upon it, while the resulting determinate thing is *limited* by an indeterminate excess capable of subverting it. This two-faced reality of each thing is nicely expressed in 1982 by a pair of terms familiar to readers of Badiou's 1988 classic *Being and Event*: namely, 'belonging' and 'inclusion'. Belonging refers to elements explicitly contained in the structure of a situation, while inclusion is a matter of parts exceeding the literal terms of that situation even while pertaining to it in some way. As Badiou puts it: 'Everything that belongs to a whole is an obstacle to this whole insofar as it is included in it' (TS 12, emphasis removed).

The contradiction between A and P is never symmetrical, since 'one of the terms sustains a relation of inclusion to the other' (TS 13). Stated differently: 'It is A that is indexed in A_p according to P. The inverse makes no sense' (TS 13). Badiou claims that Hegel misses this asymmetry and always returns to the idea of a whole that includes both terms. Hegelian circularity needs to

be reworked as a periodicity or spiralling movement in which nothing ever returns to the same place without a difference. We find an example of Hegel's circularity in his treatment of Christian doctrine, a treatment that Badiou otherwise deeply admires. If God is A or the outplace, and the world is P or the splace, God is indexed in the incarnation as A_p , or father-placed-in-the-finite (the Son). As we know, this principle was established as orthodoxy in the Nicene Creed. It is flouted by the Arian heresy in which Christ has no divine transcendence but is purely immanent in the world ('Right deviation'), and Docetism in which the worldly suffering of Christ is treated as illusory ('Left deviation'). Badiou favours the orthodoxy over the deviations, but laments nonetheless that the passion of Christ followed by the resurrection merely leads us to a heaven with 'a God who reconciles in himself . . . the finite and the infinite' (TS 16). Here Badiou proposes dividing Hegel yet again, offering a materialist periodisation in place of idealist circularity (TS 18). In circularity 'the outplace finds a space in the place' (TS 20), without excess or remainder. What is called for instead is a principle of 'the irreducibility of action' (TS 19), and of 'discontinuity, even [of] failure' (TS 20). The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 is not a mere come-full-circle return of the Paris Commune, but a periodisation of it, which 'Lenin seals by dancing in the snow when power is held in Moscow for one day longer than had been the case in Paris in 1871' (TS 20). To escape the circularity, one of the terms of the new contradiction needs 'to become the bearer of the intelligibility of the preceding sequence' (TS 20), and this is how 'it comes about as subject' (TS 20). Here the decisive break with Hegel is announced: 'Now that Hegel has been given the proper salute . . . we must think periodization through to the end' (TS 21).

The key to periodicity lies in distinguishing between the One and the Whole: 'in this gap lies the whole question of the Subject' (TS 30). This occurs by breaking free from structure towards something outside the splace that is admittedly difficult to express, given that 'every discourse fixes the splace of the very thing that it passes over in silence' (TS 31). Consider the supposed case of the duality between active and passive, which Badiou views as mistaken. The idea of an actively malevolent government abusing a passively innocent populace is said to be the root of an 'anti-repressive' humanitarian politics that Badiou associates with the 'indignant petit bourgeois' (TS 31). For Badiou this sells short

the genuine outplace represented by the masses. Insofar as this anti-repressive vision interprets the masses as docile clay in the cruel hands of the state, 'the splace . . . [still] fixes the place of the outplace' (TS 31). Nonetheless, this correlation between the active and passive terms not only marks an imprisonment in the structural conditions of the splace; for Badiou, it is also the gateway to a deeper speculative profundity. For even though the structural dialectic tolerates nothing but 'vacillation' (TS 34) or correlation between two terms, 'correlation is force against force. It is the *relation of forces*' (TS 31). Whereas Hegel claims to derive force from the very oscillation between the terms, for Badiou 'force is only the [oscillation's] essential, originary, and undeducible overdetermination' (TS 34), with 'overdetermination' meaning something like 'surplus' rather than what it usually means. Force is what escapes the correlate, remaining irreducible to it. In short, force belongs to what Badiou calls the historical rather than the structural side of the dialectic. It 'keeps in movement the parts of the whole' (TS 34), by remaining outside the terms of the current structure. The singular force of anything, even of an individual person (TS 35), requires a 'radical anteriority of practical existence' (TS 34).

Force comes from the outplace, but is not identical with it: 'force is impure because it is always placed' (TS 38). This contrasts with the Left deviation of the pure outplace, which Badiou describes in barbed terms aimed obviously at Deleuze: 'the metaphysics of desire, that is, the substantial and nomadic assumption of the outplace from which place itself comes to be inferred . . . Nothing new on this end ever since Spinoza' (TS 37). In Badiou's eyes the impurity of force even explains the need for Stalinist purges: to say that the Party is strengthened by purges is 'an understatement', even if 'on this bloody path Stalin arrived at nothing but disaster' (TS 38). An image even more to Badiou's liking is Mao's 'struggle of old and new', since 'every rightness and every justice are, in principle, novelties' (TS 39). What is always needed between thinkers in quest of truth is not a tepid harmony, but 'an essential nonlove'. If you want to be a subject you must resist the dead splace of pedagogy (TS 39) and form a Party of your own (TS 41). This also leads Badiou to a new definition of subjective and objective: 'Inasmuch as it concentrates and purifies itself *qua* affirmative scission, every force is therefore a subjective force, and inasmuch as it is assigned to its place, structured, splaced, it is an objective force' (TS 41). And inevitably, 'the being of force is to

divide itself according to the objective and the subjective' (TS 41). We can neither deduce nor predict the emergence of force but must wait for it. By contrast, Hegel '[takes] up his position at the end of time, whereby the circle is traced, in order to know who is who in the unity of the progressive and the retroactive. One remains dismayed by the fine arrogance to which Hegel thenceforth bears witness' (TS 49).

There is a logic of places and a logic of forces (TS 53), or a structural dialectic and a historical one. Despite the generally dismal role ascribed to structure in his book, Badiou praises the dialectical correlation between two terms within structure for upholding 'the primacy of process over equilibrium, of the movement of transformation over the movement of identity' and for its 'primacy of the Two over the One' (TS 54). There is the structural/horizontal dialectic between two correlated terms, but also the deeper historical/vertical dialectic between force and place in which the outplace wrecks havoc on the structured world. For Badiou, 'everything that exists in thought is the result of weak differences' (TS 60, emphasis removed), but only because of the 'retroactive effacement of the cause' (TS 63), in which the outplace vanishes in favour of its surface legibility within a given structure. As Badiou puts it: 'In the structural dialectic, any term is split into its place, on the one hand, and its vanishing capacity for linkage, on the other.' He continues: 'For us, this is as good as place and force. But, as I said before, the structural dialectic is reluctant to *name* the force, and breaks its back trying to keep it in place' (TS 71). All terms are split between old and new. And we now come to an unusually intriguing part of Badiou's model, one already prefigured in the treatment of correlations as composed of forces surging up from the outplace. Despite the vanishing of forces as they are filtered into the world of structure, the outplace is not completely erased from the visible figures we encounter: 'A term is that which presents the vanishing term to another term, in order together to form a chain' (TS 72). One split term has the remarkable ability to signal depths to another, rather than meeting it in a purely structural embrace in which nothing lies beneath the surface of their relation. Or stated differently, 'to function as a combinable element amounts to presenting the absent cause to another element' (TS 72). But this obviously cannot be done in a direct manner, since that would entail a reduction of each term to mere structure in the eyes of the other. And thus, according to

Badiou, we must learn from the poetry of Mallarmé that if we are always dealing with an absent cause, 'the effect of its lack lies in affecting each written term, forced to be "allusive", "never direct" ... The allusive is the vanishing border of the written term' (TS 72). Force is force and not just a placed force, precisely because force is allusion.

Badiou's approach to the ontological difference can now be summarised. There is a tension between any term A and A_p as placed in the world, or between the outplace of non-relation and the splace of relation. The former affects the latter by means of force, which never occurs in pure form but is always placed, though thanks to the ineffaceable depth of this force any term can be present to another term through indirect allusion. Circularity is abandoned in favour of a spiral or periodic movement, in which one of the terms of the new contradiction bears witness to the previous one. There is a structural/horizontal dialectic between two correlated forces that gives way to a historical/vertical one in which the outplace affects the splace via force. Badiou has already told us how he thinks this model differs from Hegel's. We can leave until later our reflections on how it resembles or differs from Heidegger's ontological difference.

Lacan and Topology

We have seen that Badiou claims a similarity between Heidegger's ontological difference and Hegel's dialectic, though in doing so he partly concedes that his interpretation of the dialectic is unorthodox. Badiou's major objection to the Hegelian version of the dialectic is that it falls into circularity, rather than accomplishing a spiralling movement or periodicity in which something unpredictable is held in reserve behind the visible figures correlated in any structure. We have briefly followed Badiou's exposition of what he thinks the dialectic ought to entail.

The present section turns to a related Heideggerian theme: the critique of ontotheology. It is well known that for Heidegger, being itself is not a being. No privileged entity can be taken as the explanation for being as such. Badiou glosses this principle as follows:

Heidegger intends to deconstruct metaphysics, previously defined as the concealment of the [ontological] question by the [theological

question]. I say that he seeks to dissipate the algebraic precision of God, localization of simple belonging, placed being from which all beings take their place. It is a question of opening up onto the topological unlimitation of being, for which it is not for nothing that Heidegger evokes ad nauseam the dialectic of the near and the far. Heidegger would like to put an end to the philosophical idea of a *guarantee of consistency by the cause*. (TS 235)

Here we encounter a number of new terms: algebra, topology, consistency and cause. In order to explain what Badiou means by these, we need to consider the remarks in *Theory of the Subject* concerning Lacan, which show the same mixture of praise and deviation as Badiou's statements about Hegel.

For Badiou, Lacan 'for us French Marxists is today's Hegel – the only one whom it is our task to divide' (TS 113). In fact Badiou is even closer to Lacan, whose challenge to Hegel's key term *Aufhebung* he cites rather approvingly. Badiou also maps his own interpretation of the dialectic directly onto Lacanian terminology: the structural dialectic is the Lacanian 'symbolic', and the historical dialectic is the Lacanian 'real' (TS 114). He adds another pair of new terms, telling us that the symbolic is 'algebra' and the real is 'topology' (TS 133). By working out the relations between algebra and topology, Badiou aims to push philosophy a bit further than Lacan, another hero who falls somewhat short of bona fide materialism: 'Lacan . . . is our Hegel, that is, he presents the (idealist) dialectic of our time' (TS 132).

Badiou also begins to clarify what 'subject' means in the title *Theory of the Subject*: 'We must reserve the name *subject* for that which cannot be inscribed on the splaced ground of repetition except destructively as the excess over that which keeps it in place' (TS 141). As that which tears free from the current configuration of beings, 'subject' plays a role for Badiou not unlike 'being' for Heidegger. For Badiou there are not two opposing subjects locked in a duel, since this would lead only to a correlation and thus to a mere structural dialectic. In any given predicament there is at most *one* subject. And here we note the first appearance in the book of a key Badiouian term: 'Just as there is only one subject, there is also only one force, whose existence always surfaces as an *event*. This *event*, trace of the subject, crosses the lack with the destruction' (TS 142, emphasis added). Or as he puts it later, 'the subject placed as force can force the excess over the place' (TS 157). We

see this happen, for instance, in both justice and courage: 'Justice names the possibility that what is nonlaw may function as law' (TS 159), while 'courage is insubordination to symbolic order at the urging of the dissolutive injunction of the real' (TS 160). Justice and courage are not equally distributed, but emerge along with a specific political class: while 'the dominant class derives its position from keeping the space as is', the proletariat 'is the political name of the truth that is not-all' (TS 173). And this is where Badiou thinks that Lacan falls short: 'Regarding the double division which determines the subject effect, it would be fair to say that Lacan has exhaustively named only one half' (TS 174). We will soon see why.

Unlike typical idealist philosophies of the subject, Badiou's theory of the subject is diametrically opposed to any model of the subject that would treat it as the site of an elucidating transparency. 'Immediacy and self-transparency are idealist attributes . . .' (TS 180). For Badiou the subject is a scission without reconciliation. He claims to offer a 'conceptual black sheep – a materialism centred upon a theory of the subject . . .' (TS 189). This materialism entails a much stronger sense of the real than the 'idealinguistry' or 'language' function as non-idealist alibis for what is in fact an idealist position. In response to those who accuse Badiou of mimicking Kant in his focus on the borderlands between representation and that which exceeds it, he counters that at least he does not make *one* of the two terms of the correlate into the subject (TS 191): the subject is not one region of being among others. For 'we are materialists' (TS 192), and thus we follow 'the axiom of the crossing' (TS 200) in which knowledge is not merely the cause of the subject but is rather a knot tying thought to the real.

In what is surely his least Heideggerian moment, Badiou declares that 'there exists no intrinsic unknowable' (TS 201). He describes a tension between the accessible space of 'reflection' and the elusive zone of the 'asymptote' of knowledge (TS 201), but insists that this is different from Kant's noumenal vs. phenomenal pair. While Kant sets a mournful limit to human knowledge, Badiou holds by contrast 'that the sphinx is nameable, once the questioning limit from where Oedipus's answer provisionally appeared to be well adapted, through a forced event, comes to the light of history' (TS 202). While the real of knowledge is impossible to know at any given moment, it 'asymptotically fixes the future of the reflection.

This impossible, therefore, *will be known . . .*' (TS 202, emphasis added). In fact, the whole point of what Badiou calls justice is that 'forms of knowledge previously considered as absurd can now function as reflections' (TS 204). Any time we untie the knot of knowledge, this 'makes for a revolution, by positing a name for the impossible of the subject' (TS 204). What currently has no name will someday find one.

We now return to the theme of algebra vs. topology, already familiar to us as the difference between the structural dialectic of space and the historical dialectic in which the outpace exerts destruction on the space. Algebra deals with the explicit elements belonging to a set, and is thus the domain of structure without remainder: 'It excludes all thought of tendencies and asymptotes. Homogeneous identity of belonging, elementary structuring, species distinguished in terms of types of legal constraint: the algebraic universe is limited to combinatory materialism' (TS 210). Algebra deals with both individuals and relations, which Badiou takes to be partners: 'Algebra explores [the Whole] under the aegis of the individuals that belong to it and the rules according to which they relate to one another' (TS 215). By contrast, 'topology [explores the Whole] under the aegis of the varied subsets of which each individual makes its site within the Whole' (TS 215). If algebra deals with belonging, topology is a matter of 'adherence'. But once again we are told that *individual* things belong entirely on the algebraic side of the fence: 'The "micro-revolutions" of the desiring individual . . . stay in their place. No individual has the power to exceed the era and its constraints, except by the mediation of the parts . . .' (TS 219–20).

And here we begin to approach the heart of Badiou's position, which works simultaneously in two paradoxical directions. The paradox of the algebraic or structural realm is that while it is supposedly the zone of discrete individuals, these individuals are initially defined without remainder by their place in the structure, thereby depriving them of individuality. Conversely, the paradox of topology is that it supposedly points to that which exceeds all relational structure. And while this ought to be autonomous and individual, it turns out that we cannot really speak of topological individuals at all: 'One sees how topology is *disidentifying* in nature' (TS 223). Everything is connected more or less closely with everything else, linked through a series of neighbourhoods and sub-neighbourhoods: 'In topological thinking there exists no

neighbourhood in exteriority' (TS 221). This is what 'establishes a link between the elements of a set, which is the basis of belonging for algebraic materialism, and the surrounding adherence by which the elements are locatable, [the] basis for topological materialism' (TS 221). In this way the elements in a set are not just hopeless structural encrustations without a future, but '[points] of flight for a set of collectives' (TS 221). This is Badiou's attempt, following Lacan, to solve 'the supreme problem of materialism, which is correctly to tie together its own division according to algebra and according to topology' (TS 228). The set that is close to you includes you as well. 'If you are part of two processes, you are part of their crossing . . .' (TS 222). A factory revolt may begin with the working class but then spread to some nearby collectives and not others. History is never universal; the contagion is never limitless. These processes of topological expansion, intersection and constriction show how topological neighbourhoods can do the work of the traditional concepts of universal and particular (TS 221). Lacan already has two concepts of the real: the vanishing cause (algebra) and the knot (topology) (TS 228). And this properly double sense of reality on Lacan's part 'shows the extent to which the real is the unity of the algebraic and the topological, unity of the cause and the consistency. It is object, but *not only*' (TS 230).

With this move towards the model of neighbourhoods, Badiou also tries to account for the periodisation that he deployed against Hegel's circularity. As Badiou puts it, 'we thus pass from the algebraic punctuality, by which a materialist domain opens itself up to knowledge, to the topological adherence, which saturates the recurrence of conflict with memory and neighbourhoods' (TS 231). And this is where Badiou tries to settle his accounts with Lacan for not having a sufficiently vigorous sense of the real: 'because the Lacanian concept of consistency is too restrictive. By failing to oppose and conjoin explicitly the algebra and the topology, he exposes himself to the risk of thinking of consistency only as an attribute of algebra' (TS 231). This can be seen not only in the early Lacan's view that the subject has access only to a certain structural syntax rather than the real itself, but even in the later Lacan's fascination with the 'Borromean knot' linking symbolic, real and imaginary, in which cutting any one link makes the whole knot come undone. In Badiou's eyes this comes 'dangerously close to being a simple principle of existential interdependence'

(TS 232), turning everything back into correlates within a structure rather than leaving room for the excessively real. Badiou on the other hand insists on a distinction between 'weak' consistency which 'is resolved in structural cohesion' and 'makes a knot of what is only a chain' (TS 232, emphasis removed), and 'strong' consistency which rightly 'overdetermines the algebra, as consistency of neighbourhoods' (TS 232). In other words, Lacan does not have a sufficiently powerful sense of 'destruction', and thus he becomes 'the norm of his own errancy' (TS 234). Badiou follows with an expression of 'disdain' for 'Lacan's sectarians' who 'boast about being daring antiphilosophers . . . [but rather] protect the algebraic indivisibility of the object' (TS 234). What is needed instead is a strict division between what Heidegger calls the 'ontological' and 'theological' questions. It is interesting that at the precise moment when Lacan supposedly entangles himself in the weave of his own algebraic fate, and hence in ontotheology, Badiou turns with admiration to Heidegger.

The Proximity of Heidegger

It is often the case that important philosophy begins as a deviation from one or more selected ancestral heroes. We see this happen between Aristotle and Plato, Heidegger and Husserl, and many other pairs. In *Theory of the Subject* Badiou sketches his relation to his own philosophical models: Hegel and Lacan, whom he both endorses and subverts. It is remarkable that in both cases Heidegger can be found in the vicinity, despite just three occurrences of his name in the book.

Let's begin with Hegel. By interpreting the dialectic as a tension between any term A and its relational placement A_p , and by associating both Hegel and Heidegger with this idea, Badiou ventures to interpret both philosophers as anti-relationists. But this is far from the standard reading of either. Hegel is generally credited with taking Kant's world of fixed determinations of the understanding and setting it into motion by showing the internal relations that every determination has to every other. As for Heidegger, his critique of presence-at-hand often takes the form of equating presence with non-relationality. For this very reason, it is said, his first step in *Being and Time* is to dissolve the world's apparently autonomous chunks of presence into a global, relational system of tools in which everything has its being in relation to human Dasein.

Although it seems dubious to me that Badiou uses the term 'materialist' to describe his position (I have similar misgivings in the cases of Žižek and Meillassoux), his purpose in doing so is clear. Every thing marks a twofold scission; every thing is out of place. There is never one world as the set of all sets, but always an excess or remainder over what explicitly belongs to any apparent whole. Now, in Badiou's eyes Hegel is a materialist no less than an idealist. There is not just the dialectic between correlated terms in a structure, but also a 'historical' tension between the terms in a situation and something that is always held in reserve but never fully thematised. While Badiou celebrates this 'materialist' side of Hegel, he charges him with emphasising circularity over periodicity or theory over praxis. Here again, non-relationality is the standard to which Badiou holds himself and others, with Hegel apparently not going quite far enough in this respect. Hegel now stands accused of a robotic dialectic in which each moment passes without remainder into its successor. He does not appreciate the obscure kernel of praxis that no theory can fully master, and which entails that history at any moment might go in one of several possible directions rather than automatically leading in just one.

In some respects Heidegger is an even more unlikely candidate than Hegel to be read as a non-relational thinker who distinguishes profoundly between A and A_p . After all, Heidegger is the great critic of presence in philosophy, and as already mentioned he often seems to equate presence with self-subsistent reality apart from all relation. In these moments relationality is treated as the great hero that frees us from metaphysics in the bad sense. Indeed, Heidegger might seem to abolish autonomous individual entities altogether and dissolve them into a holistic network of equipment in which each thing gains reality only from a total system of meaning. But despite the unorthodox flavour of Badiou's brief remarks on Heidegger's ontological difference, his instincts are basically correct. In fact, Badiou and I are practically alone among readers of Heidegger in viewing him as a champion of non-relational being.³ What Heidegger shows is not that non-relational presence is grounded in the relational usefulness of tools, but that the presence of entities to humans *and* the presence of tools to other tools are both forms of relation, and are equally deficient for this very reason. Both theory and praxis are able to be subverted by surprises, because both are relations undergirded by an obscure surplus or reservoir: the being that is not itself a being.

But regardless of how he interprets Hegel and Heidegger, the real question is whether Badiou remains true to his program of a non-relational outplace that is irreducible to splace even while exerting forces of destruction upon it. In one sense he remains entirely faithful to the cause, given the lesson he draws from Mallarmé: that forces signal their depths to each other through an indirect or allusive form of contact. Yet this insistence on indirect contact creates tension with the other Badiou, the one who holds that nothing is intrinsically unknowable. Though in *Theory of the Subject* he claims to insist on a difference between thought and being, it is not clear that he does so in sufficiently vigorous fashion. All that Badiou really means when he insists on a gap between thought and being is that the subject is a special rip or tear in the cosmos rather than just one entity among others. Continuing the Cartesian tradition with its two distinct substances, Badiou holds that being has sufficient independence from thought as long as it continues to exist in the absence of that thought. Yet when he says that nothing is inherently unknowable, he risks the same idealist backslide of which he accuses both Hegel and Lacan. For if the outplace is supposedly treated by Badiou as an asymptote to be approached but never reached, the claim that nothing is unknowable clearly means that whatever is now asymptote will eventually be reflection, with a new asymptote simply replacing the old one. For Badiou there is an unknown at any given moment, but nothing remains unknown forever. And here we must question whether Badiou breaks free from splace and structure as much as Heidegger himself does: for if Badiou thinks *nothing* is inherently unknowable, Heidegger holds that *everything* is, given the permanent rift between being and any form of presence. And this seems even more true to Badiou's stated principles than Badiou's own conclusions are. If A is not inherently unknowable and comes to be known, then precisely by being known it is converted from A into A_p, since by being known it is now in relation to us. Here Badiou loses his Mallarméan commitment to indirect allusion.

It is similar with Lacan, the man Badiou describes as 'today's Hegel' (TS 113) who 'presents the (idealist) dialectic of our time' (TS 132). Since 'idealism' is never used by Badiou as a complimentary term, we can take this to be a moment of critical distancing from his admired psychoanalyst forerunner. Recall that Badiou identifies the Lacanian symbolic with 'algebra' and the Lacanian real with 'topology'. Recall further that Badiou criticises not only

the early Lacan for claiming that the subject has access merely to a syntax rather than to the real, but also the later Lacan for treating the imaginary-real-symbolic as an intertwined Borromean knot that verges dangerously close to an existential interdependence of three terms, and thus to a relationally determined structure of the sort that Badiou is so keen to avoid. The figure of the knot is viewed positively by Badiou, but only if the knot ties together two terms (thought and the real) that are genuinely *distinct* even as they frequently interact.

And here once more, Heidegger emerges as a key ally in Badiou's deviation from an admired hero. While Badiou laments that algebra 'excludes all thought of tendencies and asymptotes' (TS 210), and that it thereby remains tied to the relational world of individuals correlated as elements within a structure, he also credits Heidegger with wanting 'to dissipate the algebraic precision of God [and the] localization of simple belonging, placed being from which all beings take their place' (TS 235). The word 'God' is metaphorical here, referring to any privileged being of the ontotheological tradition in which philosophy forever attempts to replace being itself with one specific kind of being. In this sense Badiou endorses Heidegger's aim of trying to make room for a being different from all beings (the ontological difference), which Heidegger employs with the critical aim of a destruction of the history of metaphysics. Lacan apparently does not succeed in this, since as concerns 'the subject effect, it would be fair to say that Lacan has exhaustively named only one half' (TS 174).

On a related note, we have also seen Badiou distance himself from the usage of Kant and most other philosophers in which 'subject' refers specifically to the thinking human. Badiou's 'subject' is rather depersonalised, in much the same manner as Heidegger's *Sein*. Although Badiou does speak of individual humans freeing themselves from algebraic networks in order to attain their own proper force, for the most part 'subject' is mentioned only in connection with the proletariat (even though each proletariat is historical and local), and in *Theory of the Subject* 'proletariat' often verges on functioning as a name for being as such, not for a particular assembly of downtrodden humans.

Now, for Badiou, when algebra is treated as a free-standing realm in which vanishing terms have been entirely used up by structure, it becomes an ontotheological kingdom of the sort that he like Heidegger aspires to avoid. For Heidegger the non-algebraic

term is 'being', and with his ontological difference he tends to conflate two points that are in fact quite distinct. In one sense being is treated as that which resists presence, which Badiou reads (correctly, though unusually) as meaning: 'resists any sort of relationality at all'. Being is that which simply is what it is, rather than in its placement for something else: *Sein* is A rather than A_p . But in another sense, Heidegger also tends to interpret the ontological difference as a difference between one and many. Here, being is that which is not carved up into multiple individuals which are found only within the 'ontic' realm. In this way, individuality and relationality are treated as basically the same problem. This remains the case even in Heidegger's later period, when he moves towards a reflection on 'the thing' in which individual entities such as jugs and bridges are granted a foothold in a sort of sub-relational autonomy. For even here, this autonomy is treated in terms of 'earth', and earth is always treated by Heidegger as a one.

Despite his rejection of the 'one' in philosophy, Badiou shares Heidegger's basic assumption that individuality and relationality always come as a pair. We have already heard him say that algebra is concerned both with 'individuals' and with 'the rules according to which they relate to one another' (TS 215). He criticises the notion that individuals are capable of 'micro-revolutions' (TS 219–20) and tells us that topology, always his counterweight to algebra, is 'disidentifying' (TS 223). Yet this is where Badiou adds another possible solution that we never find in Heidegger. For Heidegger, the escape from identifiable and relational individuals occurs only by appeal to an ominous being that rumbles like a quasi-articulate lump, forever withdrawn from all access. There are times when Badiou seems to suggest the same thing. But what his theory of topology really says is that individuals belong to 'varied subsets' (TS 215); they are '[points] of flight for a set of collectives' (TS 221) and belong to multiple neighbourhoods and sub-neighbourhoods, none of which is entirely distant from the others. A subject becomes more universal by expanding outward from an initially constricted location, as when a factory revolt catches fire among ever wider collectives. Individuals are always specific and local, but by communicating through closer neighbourhoods towards more distant ones, they exert indirect force on an ever-widening circle of neighbours.

Badiou initially sides with Heidegger in countering encrusted relational individuals with a rather shapeless outpace, thereby

pointing outside structure altogether towards something that escapes it. But when it comes to the theme of topology he does not actually repeat this gesture. Instead, he enacts the rather non-Heideggerian programme of partially entangled horizontal collectives, for which change comes not by drawing on a vast indeterminate surplus, but by triggering chain reactions from one local neighbourhood to another. Instead of being undermined by an indeterminate mass of multiplicity, they are shaken up by lateral glidings between the current neighbourhood and others, which are partly but not entirely distant from one another. If there is a point where Badiou veers sharply away from Heidegger no less than from Hegel and Lacan, it is here. And if there is a point where Badiou most resembles Heidegger, it is with the rather different notion of an unformatted excess that undercuts all individual beings. It would be interesting to examine the future development of this tension, whose two sides both unfold in the vicinity of Heidegger. For the difference between eruptions from an unformatted outplace and lateral overlappings of various situations seems strikingly similar to the different emphases of *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*.

Notes

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969), pp. 114–22.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
3. See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002).