

## CREATION IN THE VORTEX OF THE REAL: BADIOU AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

**Carlos Gómez Camarena**

[carlos.gomez@ibero.mx](mailto:carlos.gomez@ibero.mx)

**Universidad Iberoamericana**

Our epoch can be said to have been stamped and signed, in philosophy, by the return of the question of Being. This is why is dominated by Heidegger. [...] When all is said and done, there is little doubt that the century has been ontological, and that this destiny is far more essential than the 'linguistic turn' with which it has been credited.

Alain Badiou, *Deleuze, The Clamor of Being* (1997: 18)

The purpose of the present text is to show the possible contributions of the French-Moroccan philosopher Alain Badiou for discourse analysis; this will be an antecedent for the use of the ideas of the Rabat born. It is possible to list these contributions as following: the real as creative power, a new conception of being, discourse analysis for Badiou's the four conditions in philosophy and the poeticity or nomination of the event.

What is written in this chapter is deducted from the critique made to Alain Badiou by Ernesto Laclau; behold here the dispute:

The limits of his analysis [Badiou's] are provided, from my perspective, with what I consider an insufficient exploration of that which is structurally implied in a radical interruption. This is the point where my hegemonic approach differs from his, based on what he qualifies as 'fidelity to the event'. It is also the point where his ontology –mathematical- differs from mine –rhetorical-. (Laclau, 2008, p.11).

It is not our pretension to take sides in this dilemma among rhetoric language and mathematical ontology, but making more explicit in what could the mathematical formalization in general and the badiouian thinking in particular contribute to the discourse analysis. Let's say that, strategically, the starting point to tackle Badiou's thinking for the discourse analysis is the dilemma among language and ontology.

To achieve the prior, we won't do an extensive journey through the philosophy of *Being and the event's* author; instead we will make an outline of the most important aspects to settle this issue. We will assume the reader has had general contact with his work or will do its own part to make what's coming intelligible.

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<sup>1</sup> A versión of this paper originally appeared as Chapter 17 in Parker, I. and Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (eds) (2014) *Lacan, Discourse, Event: New Psychoanalytic Approaches to Textual Indeterminacy*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge.

## Badiouian ontology

German Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927) denounces what he would call 'oblivion of being', this is to say, each time philosophy asks about the being, it answers with an entity, with a thing. Physics, God or Reason were the three answers in ancient Greece, middle ages and modernity respectively, to the matter of being. For Heidegger, the only way of not 'entify' or objectify being, is activating the powers of language, not in the primitive myth anymore –as in the pre-philosophic antiquity– but through poem. Poetic language can scratch or almost touch the being without thinking it as an entity, without objectifying it.

After Heidegger, philosophy has had the challenge to create a thought that does not fall on this oblivion of being, which is denominated metaphysics. For clarifying: starting from Heidegger, metaphysics is something that has been had the worst reputation. For its own part, Badiou follows the German in its criticism to the metaphysics of identity and presence (variations of entification of being). For the French, there are other types of metaphysical threats instead, like the metaphysics of One and sense.

Badiou's suspicion is that the attempts to free philosophy from metaphysics by means of poem are, precisely, what makes Heidegger fall on the metaphysics of sense, and all metaphysics of sense is therefore a metaphysics that resides in the One, the one of sense<sup>2</sup>. For this reason Heidegger ends in a search for the sacred and crying out for a return of the gods (Badiou, 1998: 34).

Our philosopher will be opposed more and more to the 'linguistic turn' and taking sides on the 'ontological turn', which he considers more essential. He claims that the only way of affirm a true ontology without falling on metaphysics are founded on mathematics, to such an extent that leads him to formulate the following equation: ontology = mathematics (Badiou, 1988: 15), or even to talk about the 'ontological vocation of mathematics' (1998: 59). But, what does this mean?

For Badiou, philosophy had to wait for the modern set theory (post-cantorian) to be able to deploy a subtractive ontology, in other words, an ontology not based on the identity, the One, the sense, the presence or any form of entification of being. This means the last reality substratum (*being-qua-being*) is multiplicity. This multiplicity is not constituted of some one or atom but of a void. Starting from theorems and axioms is possible to postulate, even seize, the inconsistent pure multiplicity or *being-qua-being*.

But from this inconsistent multiplicity we can only have news by means of a mark, the count-for-one. For example, a person can be taken as a unit, but can also be a group of organs and the organs can at the same time be a group of cells, and so on. In the last term, there would be a multiplicity of multiplicities until reaching the last reality: a void set. All multiplicities are multiples of voids. To 'stabilize' this inconsistent multiplicity, void has to be taken as a mark<sup>3</sup>: 'it would be in this instance

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<sup>2</sup> 'Nothing ties me more to Lacan's teaching than his conviction that the ideal of any thinking is that aspect of which can be universally transmitted outside of sense. In other words, that senselessness [*l'insensé*] is the primordial attribute of the True' (Badiou, 2006: 522).

<sup>3</sup> Each set has at least one element, this element is void:  $\emptyset$ . To produce number one, you have to build it starting from void, which is represented like this:  $\{\emptyset\}$ . This means that by

of the letter –an instance borne out by the mark of the void– that the thought ‘without-One,’ or without metaphysics unfolds’ (Badiou, 1998: 42). The mark allows to turn the inconsistent multiples (voids) into consistent multiples. This is the presentation, the symbolic structure that allows handling with the inconsistent multiplicities by making them consistent.

However, at the same time of making a presentation of the inconsistent multiplicity, is possible to represent it. Here is where the ‘State’ figure appears, that is to say, the language regime that reduplicates the presence (it re-presents it), legislating what counts and what does not count. This means there are multiples that even though they exist, are not accounted for by the State, the regime. The concept of State doesn’t refer to a political issue only but to any institution, discourse, regime or established order that legislate what is accountable and what isn’t.

The previous explains why, for example, immigrants (which do exist) are not accounted for by the State laws in which they work: they are presented (since they clean bathrooms and take care of the Nation’s children) but they are not re-presented (since they don’t count for the State). Having say that, it can be understood that for Badiou three types of multiples exist (Farran, 2010: 82):

multiples that are presented and re-presented, called normal  
multiples that are presented but not re-presented, called singulars  
multiples that are re-presented but not presented, called excrescencies

In the third case, there’s a dislocation between the ‘reality’ structure and the excess of re-presentation. We will call this dislocation ‘lack’ or ‘failure’ which is lived as excessive or excrescence. In Badiou’s terms, this is what is called ‘event’: that lack in the ontology structure that allows it to change its own coordinates, that allows making unexpected heterogeneous connections: the realization of a sequence by the chance of encountering.

From the previous derives that there are three levels of ‘reality’: the ontological-mathematical, the situational-logical-ideological and the eventual-generic. These three levels don’t match completely with the three types of multiplicities discussed before, but rather refer to the way of explaining how the changes and novelties occur. It is about the ontologic foundation to account for the emergency of the events in art, science, love and politics<sup>4</sup>.

These three levels of ‘reality’ (what is, how it appears and how the changes happen) can be thought as, like Farran suggests (2010), borromean knotting (*à la* Lacan) in specific situations but never as a

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the void, there’s a trace (the letter) that surrounds it, the result is one. We can then say that  $1 = \{\emptyset\}$ . Number two is built like this:  $\{\{\emptyset\}\}$ , a void with double trace. If  $2 = \{1\}$ , then  $1 = \{\emptyset\}$ , and therefore  $2 = \{\{\emptyset\}\}$ . It can be observed how all numbers are built starting from multiple voids.

<sup>3</sup> It is about what Badiou calls philosophy ‘conditions’. For the Frenchman, philosophy doesn’t produce events (truths) but philosophy, to stay up to date, has to humble itself before these events that emerge in other places. Philosophy creates concepts and makes thinkable what happens in these other four fields. Badiouian philosophy is an excellent example of it: it submits to the Cantor event (set theory) to think and make a new philosophy possible.

fixed theory that could account for everything: Badiou's proposal is a systematic but open philosophy: failures, dislocations and discontinuities are productive. We will come back to this point near the end.

### **Ontology, linguistics and lacanian registries**

We find an heuristic value in the three lacanian registries (real, imaginary and symbolic) to be able to appreciate the differences between ontologic and linguistic approach to discourse analysis. For that we will differentiate, through lacanian registries, the theory of discourse in Ernesto Laclau of that which allows Badiou's philosophy.

Laclau assumes the way the social practices and relationships are configured by significant structures, so that the political discourse analysis expects to account for the way the symbolic reality and the political effects are structured. From there, it is possible to explain the political changes in terms of change and discursive structure. Contrary to social constructivism, in Laclau's thought discourse coincides with the structure, which, on the other hand, has its internal limit (or antagonism).

The Argentinean shows that his approach to discourse analysis is separated from essentialism since the moment in which the political reality is constituted by a significant structure (as thought by the 50's Lacan), but at the same time these structures have a limit to all relativism. This is what he called 'antagonism' and describes this way:

The limit of the social must be given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence. Society never fully manages to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality. (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 127).

It is about a sort of internal limit we could compare to the notion of real in Lacan or that which cannot be symbolized. Any attempt of building diverse discursive formations is found with a limit where symbolic goes into contradiction and can't move forward any more. We will add that this internal limit is also a condition to prevent the symbolic from solidifying.

It is in this way that the discursive formations configure our relationships and social practices. As in Freud and Lacan, the dream, an image, phrase or word articulate or condense diverse meanings, so the significant structures that configure our social relationships are precarious and starting from multiple remissions allows over determination (multiple senses), articulations can always be overflowed and reconfigured. The sense and no-sense that allow the organization of a new sense are always at stake in the structures. But there's another cause of the no-sense: antagonism. For Laclau, Antagonism is that which is found in the registry of real, is that which is presented as an absent cause (the socio-symbolic is structured and turns around a traumatic fissure) and as an internal limit (but a limit never the less).

On the other hand Badiou finds that in the articulation of the registries, two elements of the order of real are at stake: so the ontological-mathematics structure as the eventual-generic dimension.

Both elements of the real are thinkable through mathematics, not any kind of mathematics, but through literalized mathematics (based on the power of the letter). We will come back to this point further on. For a start we can say the Gallic philosopher's main concern is the change issue, the novelty (Badiou, 2011a). This change could only be produced through a failure in the structure, in the appearance of a multiplicity or excrescence called event.

We were saying that there are multiple inconsistencies at the ontology-mathematics level that are later presented at what Badiou calls *the count-as-one operation*. This presentation is later re-presented, now we are at the symbolic level, that which counts for the State, the hegemonic discourse or regime, in a way that as the presentation represents excrescences are produced, that is to say, structure failures. This real of the event enables changes in the own structure and, therefore, a new re-presentation: the event is something from the order of real that modifies the coordinates of the symbolic.

It can be said that the ontology-mathematical real works in a similar way that the antagonistic real in Laclau, this is, absent causes and internal limits; but the real in the event has another function: the creation of novelty through the production of an unknown that inaugurates new sequences.

This is why the ontological turn is more important and fundamental for Badiou than the linguistic<sup>5</sup>, since this last one is incapable to account for (or even avoid) the emergency of a risky supplement, if not always ready to fall on the metaphysics of sense. The mathematical *forcing* technique and creation of generic sets wouldn't produce such mistakes. This means in practical terms, that the only thing a discourse analysis based on the linguistic turn aspires to is to move within the limits of the signifier combinations. The real would be only that which would allow the change from one discursive regime to another, from one structure to another, but never the emergency of unprecedented structures. The 'new' will always be in the horizon of the symbolic and as a combination of the already existent.

This is where it is important to highlight the difference between signifier and letter. The signifier is defined by the place it occupies in the system and so it is impossible to displace it, but it is possible to displace a letter because it is a trace, therefore the letter operation is the permutation by excellence (Milner, 1998: 135). There is a more basic change when letters permute than when the signifiers are exchanging in a combination movement. But that's not all, the letter, being a trace and mark (which can be erased, crossed out or abolished) has access to the ontologic structure<sup>6</sup>. The letter allows making the inconsistent multiples (voids) into multiple consistent by producing the one starting from the void ('marking' the void). The mathematical letter allows basing the ontology outside the One:

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<sup>5</sup> Badiou's posture on this point is firm since the Project in *Cahiers pour l'analyse* journal where he criticizes Jacques-Alain Miller article (1966), which he calls 'the first great Lacanian text no to be written by Lacan himself' (Badiou, 1990: 25), precisely on the point of 'logic of the signifier' (1969). For Badiou (2002), logic has to be mathematicized or it will incur in the same mistakes as the linguistic turn (pp. 119-120).

<sup>6</sup> That the letter can touch the ontological structure is one of the characteristics of what Milner (1998, 2002) calls 'hyper structuralism'.

We were now to refer Lacan, it would be in this instance of the letter –an instance borne out by the mark of the void– that the thought unfolds, that is, the thought ‘without-One,’ or without metaphysics, of what lends itself to mathematical exposure as an immemorial figure of being (Badiou, 1998: 42).

But, what about the evental dimension and the letter? If ontology is a dimension of the real touched, plowed through the letter, then, the evental dimension (also of the order of the real) appears as a rupture or impasse localized (traceable) by the letter. Here Badiou follows Lacan:

The real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization. This is why I thought I could provide a model of it using mathematical formalization; in as much as it is the most advanced elaboration we have by which to produce signifierness. The mathematical formalization of signifierness runs counter to meaning I almost said ‘à contre-sens’. (Lacan, 1972-1973: 93).

This is how, contrary of what could be assumed, mathematics don’t constitute a body of full knowledge, but that are constantly at a break point. This encounter with the impasse, with the unknown is equal to the advent of the unexpected at the cut and interruption of sense. In those moments where the possibility of creating something new and unexpected in the breaks of the ontologic structure exists: ‘As we know, these moments are conventionally termed ‘crisis’ or ‘foundation crisis’” (Badiou, 1998: 50).

There, where the structure fails, where the interruption in the sense occurs, there’s the occasion for thinking: It is about making a decision in a moment in which knowledge is completely indeterminate. Other possible declinations for these decisions include: suspension of a structure, propose an axiom, making a bet, creating a new concept that didn’t exist before the situation or a mallarmean throw of dice (*coup de dés*). We don’t have to be confused here; thinking is not a cognitive ability, the construction of an argument starting from an existing knowledge or a conclusion deducted from any chain of ideas.

Some examples of the mathematical field include the paradoxes of the group theory, the irrational number in pitagoric mathematics, the problem of the manipulation of infinitely small numbers, the indecidible character of Euclides’ postulate about the parallels or the appearance of bigger infinite numbers (of greater cardinality). In these moments, mathematics has to come up with or create something unexpected, make an unguaranteed decision and assume the consequences. Success or failure can come from there, but only in retrospective is possible to say it. If it was possible to calculate the consequences, it would mean that we find ourselves at the coordinates of the previous knowledge or the previous ontological structure, and therefore a denial of the unknown and unexpected. Mathematics rigorously shows the breaking point, the cut in the sense and an act of thinking should be done there:

It can thus be said that there are moments when mathematics, abutting on a statement that attests in a point of the impossible to come, turns against the decisions by which it is orientated. (Badiou, 1998: 54).

In the case of the evental-generic dimension, mathematics shows the power of the letter so an impasse is found through a localization movement, inaugurating a new sequence, producing unprecedented relations (is what the creation of generic groups through the *forcing* technique points at). *The real doesn't stay only as an internal limit or absent cause, but as a place for the creation of unprecedented knowledges, inedited sequences and new relations.* This is what Badiou refers to (1992) when he talks about de 'humanity' function further castration or phallic function (pp. 195 and 227). Our philosopher emphasizes the construction of a new generic group or the incorporation of an evental supplement that the impasse or event.

### **Subject and ontology**

The badouisian idea of creation from the real has a new correlative type of subject; this subject is not the same as for Laclau. For the later, the subject is the place taken in a discourse and therefore is an effect of the structure. Since discoursivity is contingent and experiences hegemonic and dislocation moments, identity is always precarious. For the author of *Logiques des mondes* instead, the subject, even if it is a structural effect, It is not reducible to it. The subject is the effect of a bet and a thinking decision; subject is what rises in retrospective if the throw of the dice modify the coordinates of the symbolic; subject is, like Badiou likes to say (1985), the result of the fidelity to the event: '[a subject] is what an event represents to another event' (p. 101).

Following from this, depending on the way the relationship between the real and symbolic is thought, there would be different types of subjects. Even if Laclau and Badiou share the idea of a subject that opposes to an autonomous self, their concepts of subject differ. While Laclau's subject is over determined by the subjective structure, Badiou's subject is the effect of a 'leap in the dark', an unguaranteed decision. Let us use the Zapatista Movement in Mexico as an example. In the case of Laclau's hegemony, the empty signifier 'indigenous' organizes in a node point a chain of equivalencies starting from a dispersion of fragmented demands (homosexual struggles, immigrants, unemployed, battered women, etc.), which acts as opposition to another chain of equivalencies that threatens the prevailing order. Starting from a combination of signifiers discourse changes (a new master-signifier establishes a new configuration or equivalency between other signifiers).

Differing from the Argentinean, from Badiou's perspective, zapatism not only shows a fissure or failure within the structure but also constitutes a thinking decision, an unguaranteed bet about how a society should be organized out of the thin air, almost from nowhere. Zapatism finds an impasse, a risky supplement to which new parts are added (environmentalism, technology, feminism, fights for immigrants, etc.) to take the bet further: any multiplicity that wants to share the same adventure will be subjectively stated. Badiou could even say zapatism is a series of inquiries or researches of the communist hypothesis, whose third sequence (the first one consists of Paris commune and the second the State communism) expects a communism with no State (Badiou, 2007: 105-112). Nobody knows how this communist organization would be, but all of them will share the same wish and the same adventure of a

series of inquiries to create new ways of social bonds, a new kind of social organization.

### **Contributions from badiouian thought to discourse analysis**

This is how we find in Badiou some elements that could be explored for discourse analysis: the real as creative power, a new conception of being, poeticism of event and discourse analysis for Badiou's four conditions of philosophy.

About the real as creative power, we've extended ourselves in the previous entry. To this creation starting from the encounter with a risky event, to this unguaranteed bet we said belongs to a new kind of subject. We only have to add that for the Gallic thinker, there would be four places where this new subject could emerge: love, art, science and politics. This subject is not in any way an individual; the subject in art is the work of art (painting, sculpture, building, etc.), in love It is the couple, in politics is the mass and in science It is a corpus of knowledge (laws, theories). These subjects are rather an effect of the event than of the structure.

We've seen that the mathematics based in the letter enclose or delimit the number of readings and then find the impasse in the structure so a bet can be thrown from there, constructed from real. This procedure is crystal clear from mathematics for Badiou, but it would only be about the formal writing of the location-forcing operation. It would seem to us that this formalization would point at a new way of thinking discourse analysis, s mathematicizing discourse analysis. This reading comprising formalizing operation and location of the rupture can of course be used in the four conditions of philosophy: art, love, science and politics. It would be possible to make an analysis of the loving, artistic, scientific and politic discourses, both, to find the impasse and to show, in retrospective how new sequences emerged from unguaranteed bets<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, poeticism or the nomination of the event. It is not that Badiou doesn't take into account the power of language, but he subjects poetry and language to the power of the letter and what ontology can open. In his last seminars, the author of *Theory of Subject* speaks about a double rupture:

This first rupture, systemic, is a critical rupture that identifies as such the ontological field (the dominant regime of opinions and appearances). The second rupture involves in itself an act, the act of going out to encounter a little of the real, an act which requires a certain dose of violence (specially on oneself) and whose nature is evental. It should be possible right here and right now for the vanity of representations to be itself represented, the borrowed linguistic paradigm is poetic and no longer mathematic, because what this is about is that something should begin. The language of the event is poetry; poetry is the intensification of language adapted to the nomination of the impossible. (Badiou, 2009).

When a bet is thrown in the vortex of real, It is made through a nomination first: a poem nominates what (before) was impossible. Naming, already since Heidegger, does not imply putting a word to a

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<sup>7</sup> To see how Badiou treats riots in Europe and uprisings in Arab world as possible new sequences see *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (2011b).

thing, but the creation of a fiction with discursive effects. But for Badiou, this nomination signals de gap in the structure and is necessary for the creation of new sequences (of new generic sets)<sup>8</sup>. This would imply that the nomination of the gap is in the registry of imaginary. How is it possible that the imaginary has effects in the ontological structure? In one of Badiou's last conferences about communism he states the following: 'the communist Idea is the imaginary operation whereby an individual subjectivation projects a fragment of the political real into the symbolic narrative of a History' (Badiou, 2010: 5). This leaves the door open as signaled by Farrán (2010) to a borromean knot, which also allows oneself to use the three lacanian registries and the borromean knot for discourse analysis. Let's incidentally say that the proposal of a structure including the three lacanian registries is something that characterizes the already mentioned hyper-structuralism which Milner mentions<sup>9</sup>. We think the borromean knotting is one of these types of structure, that it is to say, an ontological structure that you can access to through a literalized mathematics (i.e., topology).

## Conclusion

Up to here, we've offered the reader a few inklings of what could be a discourse analysis from Badiou's philosophy. For that, we made use of the three lacanian registers. That's how we showed how the real is thought in Laclau's theory and how Badiou considers that the real is not only an internal limit, but a place to construct from. For the real to be conceived as the place where it is possible to build, It is necessary to make the real equivalent to the ontological impasse, a rupture in which novelties are produced easier through mathematics based on letter. The previous has effect as a new conception of subject, the emergency of truths on what the Frenchman calls 'philosophy conditions' (art, love, politics and science) and in the nomination (poetic) as a way of forcing what's real, that is to say, naming the impossible. May this work be useful as a first step into the way of a badiouian discourse analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> More details on the relationship between structural failure, event, nomination and generic group creation (or sequences starting from a risky event), see chapter 'Conference about subtraction' from the book *Conditions*, specially the *gamma scheme* (Badiou, 1992: 121).

<sup>9</sup> This hyper-structuralism according to Milner (1998, 2002), is a result of the inquiries made in the *Cahiers* journal project, where the opposition between the linguistic and ontological turn began, but is also the time that Althusser o Pêcheux have as a discourse analysis tentative (Williams, 1999: 103). This will even have effects on the four conditions of philosophy in Badiou as mentioned by Livio Boni in this book.

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