



BADIOU'S SOCIAL ONTOLOGY: ANOTHER THEORY OF THE SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT

This article tackles a thorny issue within the reception of Badiou's philosophy, i.e., the question of the role of the "social" within the ontological framework it outlines. Acknowledging that the question of the social is underdeveloped in Badiou's system, the paper argues that there are resources in it to develop a social ontology, and attempts to flesh it out through an original and sustained reading of Badiou's key formula on the distinction between democratic materialism and materialist dialectic: "there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths".

Keywords: Truth; History; Materialistic Dialectic; Mathematics

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INTRODUCTION

The following paper addresses the being of subjects that are faithful to the appearance of a truth. It follows upon the work Badiou lays out in his *Logics of Worlds* (2009a) regarding the appearance of trans-historical and eternal truths, truth-processes that result from an event which nonetheless require the fidelity of particular subjects who are neither bound by community, nor reducible to individualities. I claim that only a social ontology can give a convincing account to the subject of truth Badiou describes in his sequel to *Being and Event* (2005). In response to the seemingly absent, or shrunken, social in Badiou's work and its relation to the subject, I will argue for rendering explicit and *manifest* in Badiou's ontological, polemical, (meta)political, and philosophical writings is more generally implicit: a social ontology. This is not singular, so we are not observing the return of the one, any more than a suture of philosophy to any of its conditions of truth. A social ontology, and the social more generally, marks a site and names where Badiou's ontological, political, historical, and philosophical concerns come together. Social ontology is the knot that makes generic truth processes, or the conditions for them to be compossible. To be clear, social ontology provides a robust account for thinking the four conditions together without suturing them to one another or separating them without any interaction. The four truths are of the same world. They are, moreover, held together by social ontology. It is this social ontology that facilitates the subject's fidelity to the truth process.

To that end, this paper follows in four parts. I first turn to the historical conditioning of social ontology. I highlight elements from philosophers or militants that have inspired Badiou: Hegel, Marx, and Althusser. In the second part, I turn to the relation between ontology and transitory ontology, the relation between Badiou's *Being and Event* and his *Briefings on Existence* (2006). Following this, I examine the second volume of *Being and Event*, his *Logic of Worlds*. I offer a reading for a formula that comes to define his philosophical project there, following from the ontological *Being and Event*. I emphasize, via a close reading, that his formula of the materialist dialectic invites an account for social ontology, one which is absent from (marginalized or erased by) the democratic materialist. After that section, I go to more topical, contemporary, and polemical pieces Badiou has written in response to the reactionary tenor of the times and where he triumphantly calls for a return to a certain form of philosophy. There I engage with the social ontology of those polemical pieces, written in direct response to political events or pseudo-political reactionary moments, as a way of showing what it is that social ontology accomplishes. I conclude with an extended account

unpacking the imperative to (re)invent a social ontology. I claim this *reinvention for the first time* follows from Badiou's own philosophical project. Reinvent what has never been. Invent what will never be twice.

Subjects are rare in Alain Badiou's worlds. The rarity of a subject — any subject that exercises fidelity to the four truth procedures of science, politics, art, and love — is matched, if not exceeded, by the rarity of almost any mention of the social. Given that the social is conspicuously absent how might we initially approach social ontology? In this introduction, I wish to address (the absence of) Alain Badiou's social ontology in two ways. The first, a brief account through the history philosophy, by tracing social ontology through proper names Badiou refers to and that are usually indexed to social ontology, in one form or another. The second way examines several formulas Badiou has provided that speak ill, against, or in the stead of the social, generally, and social ontology in particular. I will begin with Badiou's own formulations before moving on to the structure of the paper. I will, then, in the following section, turn to the problem of social ontology introduced by the history of philosophy.

One approach to the social and social ontology is by looking briefly at several formulas from Badiou's writings. I call "formula", following Badiou's own analysis of formulas, to be the sayings of philosopher and anti-philosophers alike that invite and demand an interpretation. Badiou's own formulas regarding the social invite and require an interpretation of the absence of the social rendered conspicuous and the social as that which demands criticism. I will end this introduction by briefly responding to the imperative-invitations of Badiou's formulas, after which the brief outline of the paper will be given.

Social ontology, provisionally then, can refer to the being of a certain civil society, an account of the "whatness" regarding a particular civil society that is given, on hand, there. It is curious that neither ontology alone, conditions, nor philosophical reflection on those conditions ever comes close to naming or deriding either civil society, or a social ontology. It is the conspicuous absence of such a category that invites reflection that it may be implicit and present.

Another way to rephrase the above initial reflections on social ontology and Badiou, to make its claim stronger and more categorical: it appears to be a category mistake to invoke the term "social ontology" following Alain Badiou's name. Or rather, following the proper name Badiou, social ontology seems improper, a mistaken reading. This is for a number of reasons, all of which relate to different aspects of Badiou's complicated and complex philosophical system. Taking his work, at least since the publication of *Being and Event* (1988), we

can observe the following. Starting with *Being and Event* in 1998, Badiou declares — or makes the *decision*, as A.J. Bartlett will emphasize, regarding — the identity of mathematics and ontology (Bartlett 2011, 19).² Badiou writes:

It follows from this thesis that philosophy is not centered on ontology — which exists as a separate and exact discipline — rather, it *circulates* between this ontology (thus, mathematics), the modern theories of the subject and its own history. The contemporary complex of the conditions of philosophy includes everything referred to in my first three statements: the history of “Western” thought, post-Cantorian mathematics, psychoanalysis, contemporary art and politics. Philosophy does not coincide with any of these conditions; nor does it map out the totality to which they belong. What philosophy must do is to propose a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibility of these conditions can be grasped (Badiou 2005a, 3-4).

Badiou identifies mathematics with ontology. This is itself not an ontological claim, but a meta-ontological one. Philosophy must respond to the event of its conditions, ontology, and circulate between them and its own history. These conditions are generic truth conditions, encounters with a non-symbolizable real that tears through symbolic systems of knowledge. The real is an encounter with a truth-condition. Further, philosophy neither discovers nor invents truths; the repetition and paraphrasing of the question that had dogged mathematics for so long should not be lost on the reader. Indeed, the question as to whether mathematics is invented or discovered — in other words, what sort of existence, if any, do mathematical objects have — is used by Badiou in order to reflect upon and self-examine philosophy and what one can expect from it. Badiou, as I will highlight later on, will also respond to the question about mathematics and the kind(s) of existence it has in a separate text that relates to his overall philosophical agenda. Importantly for us at this stage, philosophy for Badiou is not that which creates, discovers, or has ownership of truths. Truth, in other words, while existent, is not a property of philosophy. Rather, it belongs in the autonomous, separate, yet compossible realms of the generic truth-procedures engendered by the four conditions: science, art, politics, and love. And while Badiou will at times reduce certain conditions to particular expressions — science to the *matheme* or art to the *poem*, for example — I consider it at this stage important to maintain their generic titles, without reducing them to contemporary instances.

² Bartlett interestingly, and correctly I find, highlights the analogy or similarity between Badiou's *decision* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *choice* from the latter's *Being and Nothingness* and early existentialist-phenomenological writings. We can locate, perhaps, another similarity between the two: Badiou's account of a subject faithful to a generic truth-procedure and the later Sartre's account of the group-in-fusion from the latter's first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

How is it then with the social? Paraphrasing some of Bruno Bosteels' translated titles of Badiou's works, which are themselves in response to claims Badiou makes, let us ask: can social ontology be thought? The initial answer is a negative one for the following reasons. In Badiou's theoretical account, anything one would require for the social seems already provided for by other conceptual territories. A couple of critical questions present themselves before even raising the possibility of a social ontology being part of Alain Badiou's philosophical *œuvre* and concern. The first question concerns what is meant by social ontology? And the second question is why would one claim that such an ascription of social ontology to Badiou is a "category mistake?" The second invites a third, what might social ontology provide that is either missing or left unsaid? I will first address the second and third questions before ending this introduction with a provisional answer to the first as a way to transition to the next section, a survey of the Western philosophy's answer to such a problem.

Again: why would ascribing a "social ontology" to Alain Badiou's thought be a category mistake? Firstly, did Badiou not claim in his 1988 opus *Being and Event* that ontology, the study of being qua being, was properly the mathematics of set theory?³ Does it not seem that one is simply qualifying ontology grammatically by saying "social ontology", a qualification not allowed, and further reducing the study of being qua being to a particular set of multiplicities, thus limiting what otherwise presents itself infinitely, the infinite multiplicity of multiple sets? In response to this, I claim in the manner of a dogmatic thesis that a social ontology neither qualifies ontology, however we understand it, nor is it a derivative of ontology as such. Social ontology is what makes compossible the four conditions. It is what enables the circulation of philosophy between it conditions, while also providing what Alenka Zupančič called Badiou's "fifth condition." Zupančič perspicuously notes, "One could say that there is also a fifth condition of philosophy: philosophy has to pull itself away from the immediate grip of its own conditions, while nevertheless remaining under the effect of these conditions" (Zupančič 2004, 191). Social ontology precisely is that unsaid fifth condition, that which operates as a condition of compossibility (not a transcendental, or condition of possibility).

³ See Badiou, 2005a. This does not mean that "mathematics" are ontology. Rather, Badiou situates mathematics as a science, which for him is a condition (of truth). Among the different mathematical schools and developments, set theory is alone in providing Badiou an ontological account. This does not mean, however, that there are no other possible mathematical schools to offer a foundational approach — and thus a founding — to ontology. In his *Briefings on Existence*, Badiou addresses the two mathematical approaches vying for such an ontological perspective, set theory (his own position) and category theory. And while set theoreticians might not, at the level of their daily activities, be working on ontology, it is philosophy's reading of set theory that provides the meta-ontological account for such ontological readings.

Second, and following from the first reason for how “social ontology” can be perceived to be a category mistake from the perspective of Badiou’s philosophy: other formulas in Badiou’s thought. Below is a brief survey of instances where the social is broached and immediately critiqued. These surveys come from responses Badiou wrote to his main philosophical treatise, *Being and Event*. They are commentaries to consequences and statements made in the first and second volume, and are helpful in parsing out what is involved in many of his theses and more complicated formulations. Badiou’s *Metapolitics* initiates this critique. There, we find social ontology part of what Badiou critically evaluates as “political philosophy”. This branch attempts to define politics, demarcate a sphere of the social, and render the relation towards politics one of knowledge. In response to this, and following the work of Sylvain Lazarus, Badiou marshals an understanding of politics that must be thought but is not knowledge (Badiou 2005c, 25-57; Lazarus 2015, 1-3). As Hallward notes,

Like his friend Sylvain Lazarus, Badiou rejects the very category of ‘society,’ and with it every reference to a social “totality,” “world,” or “historical world.” Why? Because the concept of society — in particular the variant known as “civil society” articulates the subjective and objective together, as components of a single dialectic. Society implies some sort of interconnection of “politics and History, the subjective and the state.”...To dwell on the forms of such mediation is by Badiou’s criteria simply to depoliticize the situation in advance. (Hallward 2003, 279).

Hallward provides, then, an initial warning. If one is to find social ontology in Badiou’s philosophy it cannot be equated, as I suggested earlier, with civil society. There is an additional suggestion: social ontology might refer to something more than, and less than, society as such. They are, in any case, incommensurable with one another. Finally, one must be careful to neither suture nor reduce the social or social ontology to politics.

Further, a thinking of politics is a thinking of the encounter with the real of collective action. One cannot define, for Badiou, from the outset what politics is or might be. Not unlike Kant’s account of reflective judgment, from his *Critique of Judgment*, politics is a particular event for which there is no universal, and one seeks the universal (Kant 1987, 18-19). In the Preface to *Metapolitics*, responding to Canguilhem’s posthumous celebration and estimation of the mathematician and resistance fighter Jean Cavaillès, Badiou writes:

Canguilhem concludes: “Cavaillès was resistant *by logic*.” This “by logic” contains the connection between philosophical rigour and political prescription. It is not moral concern or, as we say nowadays, ethical discourse that have, it seems, produced the greatest figures of philosophy as resistance. (Badiou 2005c, 6)

Insofar as politics is collective action and in its collective action must be thought, philosophy is called upon to think “the situation”. Again Badiou: “It is on the contrary the non-thinking of the situation that prevents the risk, or the examination of possibles. Not to resist is not to think. Not to think is not *to risk risking*” (Ibid., 8). Social ontology, according to this view risks not risking, as opposed to risk risking. Further, social ontology seems all too quickly appropriated, or appropriatable, by contemporary morals or the social sciences that reduce politics to definitions or knowledge. This raises the following question: if social ontology is not politics, then in order for it to be placed within Badiou’s philosophy without regressive or reactionary implications, what must it be?

Badiou’s critique continues in his *Rhapsody for the Theater*, published in French prior to *Metapolitics* and retaining some of the language from *Theory of the Subject*, the subject-effect in particular. Badiou makes the following schematic observations, concluding with an axiomatic claim:

In fact, we could argue that there is politics when three things form a knot: the masses who all of a sudden are gathered in an unexpected consistency (events); the points of view incarnated in organic and enumerable actors (subject-effects); a reference in thought that authorizes the elaboration of discourse based upon the mode in which the specific actors in question are held together, even at a distance, by the popular consistency which chance summons them. The third point separates politics from everything that is blind fury or nondiscursive impulse. The latter is only the material for politics, not its essence. The social as such is not politics, even if it may be required; nor is the institutional dimension, when taken separately, or the national as the instinct for a place or for an identity. (Badiou 2013, 7-8).

The social is not politics. That is the takeaway. On the one hand, then it appears that “social ontology” encroaches upon two distinct conditions, or threatens the suturing of philosophy to two other approaches. It appears that social ontology, provisionally understood as *civil society* or the being of *the social*, encroaches upon politics as condition. Additionally, it also seems that social ontology, dealing with the *being* of the social, encroaches upon the *matheme* (scientific condition) or the claim that mathematics, set theory in particular, is ontology.

Third — among the examples of Badiou’s formulas that respond to the conspicuous absence of the social — we find that “social ontology” seems from the perspective of Badiou’s 2006 *Logics of Worlds* to correspond to what Badiou calls democratic materialism and what the democratic materialist thinks today: “*there are only bodies and languages*” (2009a, 1). This is the contemporary *doxa*, the unquestioned opinions of the times that Badiou philosophically critiques. In-

deed, it appears that social ontology can best be described in the democratic materialist manner with the slogan that, there are only bodies and language. In response to this claim, Badiou deploys a statement, or formula, of a materialist dialectic: “*there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths*” (Ibid., 4). Is there, then, still a place for social ontology in Badiou’s worlds, and, if so, how might it manifest itself? How, in other words, can we take this absence of the social and social ontology not as a lack in Badiou’s thought, but an invitation to reflect on what is left unsaid, or unexplored. I claim there is an unexplored social ontology in the statement of the materialist dialectic, one that we can locate with the *except*.

In keeping with the spirit of, and following with, that “except”, each of the following sections advances by impasses (Plato’s famed *aporias*); these impasses and exceptions will at once clarify what social ontology is not, while also clarifying how social ontology makes explicit what is left unsaid, or under-emphasized, in Badiou’s philosophy. If what follows, at times, occurs like a repetition or refrain, I wish to highlight how such refrains should be heard: much like the additional voice in a Bach piece, or a layer of sedimented memorial rock in Freud’s mental Rome, so too each repetition in what follows aims to be heard in an additive, though not simply serial manner. Just as deduction in Badiou’s work never operates as simple subtraction from pre-established whole that might keep the whole and its parts intact, but rather ruptures individual constitutive parts and the structure of the whole, so too these additions on what social ontology is in Badiou’s work and worlds aim to reframe the structure of how social ontology is to be interpreted. An aporia, in each case then, calls for a repetition simply because the stumbling block acts as a moment to pause, repeat, and reinvent again, even if for the first time. An aporia is less the acknowledgment of ignorance, than the ignorance-knowledge couple’s encounter with truth. And it is with such encounters, that repetition is never simply repetition. Social ontology is the friend that facilitates such aporetic moments, while aporia is that which facilitates a transition to Badiou’s social ontology.

1. HISTORY AND SOCIAL ONTOLOGY

The history of philosophy offers a number of approaches to considering the strange history of the social, or social ontology. First, how does social ontology fare within the history of philosophy, as Badiou reads it? There is a trajectory of the social that goes through three proper names, often times referred to by Badiou: Hegel, Marx, Althusser.

An initial reference to social ontology can be found in Hegel, a thinker who is as much a focal point for Badiou’s philosophical work as Plato and Heidegger are. In Hegel, the social takes the form of as civil society. According to Hegel’s

Philosophy of Right, civil society forms the intermediate stage of ethical life, which is comprised of the family and eventually the state. For Hegel, this intermediate civil society has three moments. First, Hegel writes, we have the “mediation of *need* and the satisfaction of the *individual* through his work and through the work and satisfaction of the needs of *all the others* — the system of needs” (Hegel 1991, 226). This first moment concerns the system of all needs and desires within a social group extending beyond blood relations and the family. The second moment is the “actuality of the universal of *freedom* contained therein, the protection of property through the *administration of justice*” (Ibid.). The third is precisely “[p]rovisions against the contingency which remains present in the above system, and care for the particular interest as a *common* interest, by means of the *police* and the *corporation*” (Ibid.). Hegel identifies a moment of antagonism connecting, or mediating, the family and the state. Civil society, according to this framework is nothing but social antagonism, the antagonism of needs and interests, freedoms, and how the necessity to honor those needs and freedoms can be protected from their undermining or usurpation, encroachment or exploitation (this is the “provisions against contingency”).

Two initial lessons immediately arise for the Marxist reader and reader of Badiou. The very framework Hegel uses, as the young and later Marx emphasize, is a theory of the bourgeois state. We do not get, in other words, a reading of politics as the scene of partisan conflict, or what Badiou calls: “organized collective action, following certain principles, and aiming to develop in reality the consequences of a new possibility repressed by the dominant state of affairs” (Badiou 2008b, 11). In another text, “Philosophy and Politics”, while invoking the militant discovery of his friend Sylvain Lazarus whereby politics must be distinguished from the state, Badiou writes the following: “the approach by which philosophy is placed under the condition of politics *necessarily involves giving a philosophical definition of politics*. Politics, as a form of thought, however, does not proceed in a definitional way” (Badiou 2008a, 154). Following these two accounts, and the inspired moment from Marx, we can claim the following about Hegel in a manner close to Badiou: Hegel sutures politics to the state, and as a condition for philosophy it is necessary that politics be kept separate from philosophy and the state. That is the very logic of *Philosophy of Right*. Marx, who for Badiou is not a philosopher (properly speaking), critiques the philosophy of right by making civil society the terrain of political struggle (Badiou and Nancy 2018, 34). It is not that Marx, generally, is not a philosopher or one who cannot think philosophy. The issue remains with how Marx approaches politics. Marx does not approach politics in any manner other than politically. Rather than being a philosopher for Badiou, Marx is a militant that *thinks politics politically*. For Badiou, following Lazarus, philosophy must think politics as thought rather than suturing philosophy to politics (Badiou 2005c, 27).

The other, or last, mode in which social ontology, or civil society, arrive in the history of philosophy is via Louis Althusser's account of ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses (Badiou 2008b, 7-8). As Badiou will emphasize in relation to Althusser's ISAs, "It is crucial to note that ideology, whose materiality is provided by the apparatuses, *is a statist notion*, and not a political notion. The subject, in Althusser's sense, is a function of the State. Thus, there will be no political subject, because revolutionary politics cannot be a function of the State" (Badiou 2005c, 63). With Althusser, then, a different problem arises. Rather than suturing politics to the state, Althusser will suture philosophy to politics and also abandon the subject. Badiou thus provides, in critiquing both Hegel and Althusser regarding sutures a rather interesting interpretation of Marx's famed 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it (Marx and Engels 1978, 145). Althusser had, from Badiou's standpoint, interpreted the need to change the world as an injunction for politics to no longer be sutured to the state (Hegel and interpreting the world); rather, the need was for philosophy to become (sutured to) politics (Althusser and changing the world). The persistence of Marx is thus a persistence of the need for philosophy to think its condition, politics. Marx, as mentioned above, thought politics in a political (i.e., militant) manner. The very indeterminate aspect of social ontology, however, remains. It has either be excised from politics (sutured to the state), been sutured to historical contingency (whereas politics is ahistoricist), or the social is seen as the real (irreducible antagonism) of bourgeois order. The history of philosophy, then, seems to confirm that the focus should be politics, and not social ontology.

A recent criticism of Badiou's (social) ontology arrives precisely from such an Althusserian register, however. Panagiotis Sotiris claims that a limitation of Badiou's ontology remains his (that is, Alain Badiou's) inability to approach the social as such and the relationality embedded within social antagonism itself. Sotiris writes, "Badiou tends to underestimate the importance of exactly that aspect of social reality which enables not only "count-as-one" operations, but also different societal configurations, namely *social relations as dialectical contradictions*" (Sotiris 2011, 37, emphasis in original). Another way to phrase this could be, following Hallward, an "ontological suspension of relation" (Hallward 2003, 275-278). A number of important consequences result from this underestimation, including: a formalistic account of politics that cannot adequately distinguish progressive from reactionary political subjects; a non-dialectical account of antagonism that cannot deal with historically developing contradictions; and the limitations of a subtractive politics that neither believes in representative politics nor in interventionist collective responses. Inspired by Althusser's reading of Marx, Sotiris reminds Badiou that social relations ought to be read as dialectical contradictions. Moreover, forgetting this aspect of the social (along with the

social understood as the field of relations), entraps Badiou in the logic of antagonism, whereas the evolution of Marx's works leads to an account of the logic of (historical, political, and social) contradictions.

I think there are a couple of responses to this criticism, and some responses Badiou can provide for the absence of "social relations", all the while offering a riposte to Sotiris' Althusserian criticisms aided by Hallward's reading of Badiou. Firstly, we must disentangle social ontology from the social, whether it be (civil) society or social relations. Social ontology has less to do with the latter than indeed it might appear. Social ontology is less an account of the being of social relations — what the early Marx might have referred to as *species being* — and more to do with the compossibility of generic truth procedures while also keeping philosophy separate from, or un-suturable to, those generic truth procedures. Though Sotiris does not refer to 'species being', the logic of contradiction he provides in response to Badiou's lack of social relations and overemphasis on the logic of antagonism involve an interesting reversal. In attempting to critique the limitation of Badiou's theory of a subject (a lesson Badiou takes from both Lacan and Althusser's account of subjectivity without a subject), Sotiris inverts Althusser's account to claim we instead have subjects without subjectivity. This reversal of Althusser as criticism of Badiou presents an overly humanist account of social relations; in other words, in an effort to criticize Badiou's lack of social relations, Sotiris humanizes the otherwise anti-humanist Althusser. Second, just as Althusser sutures philosophy to politics, Sotiris sutures the social to the political realm itself. Once that operation is done, it is easy to emphasize that Badiou's avoidance of the social itself reveals a limitation in the very manner in which politics is thought. Just as the social is not to be equated with social ontology, the social itself is not related to what Badiou calls the political. Social relations belong, if anywhere, in the field of political science (Badiou 2005c). Third, following this suturing operation, Sotiris also reduces Badiou's thinking of the event (for the purposes here) to a thinking of politics. There is no mention of the other truth procedures. And one wonders whether it is even possible, given this account, to think social relations in any manner other than simply an expression of the political antagonisms. If we do not find here the Althusserian suturing of philosophy to politics then we are left with the expansion of politics to cover over and occlude all other truth procedures, or at least the claim that none of those offer an insight into what social ontology might be.

This brief account of the history of social ontology, read as civil society, shows how fraught a categories the social, and social ontology, are. I shall now turn to the relation between ontology (mathematics) and transitory ontology in order to show the persistence of social ontology that, following Zupančič, acts as "fifth condition", but more importantly is the condition for the compossibility of truth conditions. Not a condition of possibility, but a condition of compossibility.

Two questions follow this claim: what is the difference between a transcendental (as condition of possibility) and a condition of compossibility, and how does such a condition refer to social ontology, understood as distinct from ontology and transitory ontology?

2. ONTOLOGY AND TRANSITORY ONTOLOGY

The first meditation of *Being and Event* provides, alongside a re-reading of Plato's *Parmenides*, an introduction to the question of the meaning of being. It is, as it was with Heidegger, also an inquiry into the meaning of the question of being. Part of this has to do with the fact that being, whenever thought about, always presents itself, or gives itself away, as a question. The meaning of being is a meaning to the question of being, that being is sought after as a One, whereas all that one sees is multiplicity. We are back not just at the start of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which *Being and Event* in name and ontological attunement harkens to, but to the famed *gigantomachy* from Plato's *The Sophist*, the battle of giants between a Parmenidean view of *logos* equated with being and the ontological demand for univocity and the Heraclitean view of world as flux, where only change is permanent. In contrast to both of these views, Badiou cuts diagonally with his axiomatic statement: "My entire discourse originates in an axiomatic decision: that of the non-being of the one" (Badiou 2005a, 31). Badiou's solution to the *gigantomachy* and hermeneutic circle Heidegger had deployed are responded to by way of rejection of the being of the one. Badiou is, above all, concerned in undoing the suturing of One to Being. To do this, Badiou introduces specific terminology: situation, structure, inconsistent multiplicity, and consistent multiplicity. Badiou writes:

Let's fix the terminology: I term *situation* any presented multiplicity. Granted the effectiveness of the presentation, a situation is the place of taking-place, whatever the terms of the multiplicity in question. Every situation admits its own particular operator of the count-as-one. This is the most general definition of a *structure*; it is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one. (Ibid., 24).

The count-as-one, for Badiou, is precisely how the one maintains its function; the count-as-one makes of the situation of inconsistent pure multiples become a structure with consistent multiples, those that are presented as countable. Rather than the one having being, we find the count-as-one as an operator of pure multiplicities. Ontology is the science of the multiple (or of the multiples of multiples), and the count-as-one operates in a manner to transition the inconsistent multiple to a consistent one. Rather than claiming ontology, or being, has a structure, Badiou claims the following: "I will maintain, and it is the wager of this book, that *ontology* is a situation" (Ibid., 27). As Peter Hallward notes, "strictly

speaking, we cannot even know that inconsistency is actually multiple at all. Hence the unavoidable primacy of that naming of the void (which is all we can present of pure or inconsistent being) as multiple” (Hallward 2003, 91). Insofar as ontology is a situation, and the science of being is the science of the multiples (of multiples), social ontology cannot be such a *situation*. Social ontology is not a presented multiplicity. While that may in fact be the way an ontology assessing the social can be presented, as a presentation of multiples of people, collectives, and bodies, social ontology in Badiou must operate differently.⁴

It is from the reading of Plato and the gigantomachy that Badiou emphasizes his “decision” that mathematics, set theory in particular, is ontology. Set theory is the only discipline (and condition) to be able to think the multiple. The multiple is no longer thought of *a* single multiple, or *the* multiple as such, but is instead multiples of multiples, multiplicities of multiplicities, infinite sets with infinite sets contained within them. Badiou writes:

To be more exact: ontology can be solely *the theory of inconsistent multiplicities as such*. “As such” means that what is presented in the ontological situation is the multiple without any other predicate than its multiplicity. Ontology, insofar as it exists, must necessarily be the science of the multiple qua multiple. (Ibid., 28).

Being is that which gives itself as multiple (of multiple); being is the “there is” (*es gibt*, or *il y a*). This is also one of the reasons why, for Badiou, the statement of the democratic materialist (“there are only bodies and languages”) is so close to the materialist dialectic (“there are only bodies and language, except that there are truths”). While it appears they have so much in common, namely bodies and language, what they actually have in common is rather the givenness (the *il y a*) of these, since the “except that there are truths” renders inconsistent the consistency of bodies and languages. The bodies and languages in the former statement, in true dialectical spirit, change in how they appear by way of the exception of truth procedures, the generic void that ruptures through the given systems of knowledge. It is not that bodies and language are in common; rather, their givenness in the world is in common. Truth, moreover, changes their very situatedness. The given is as much a gift as that which also gives itself away, slips between consistency and inconsistency.

We already are provided with quite a bit by the above schematic account and axiomatic decision with regard to ontology. Ontology is situation. Ontology is the science of being multiple qua multiple. The purpose of unsuturing the One from Being is to make sure the inconsistent multiple (or inconsistent multiples

⁴ An interesting point of comparison would be to see to what extent Badiou’s account of the situation is indebted to, while departing from, Sartre’s in *Being and Nothingness*, a specific chapter wherein Sartre describes freedom and facticity, and the non-identity of consciousness.

that are retroactively discovered as non-one from the subsequent count-as-one) not be reduced to its appearance, the consistent multiple (the count-as-one presentation of Being). Given this, the situation is no longer an ontological category for the non-identical being of the subject, as it had been for Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological existential philosophy (Sartre 2018, 629-718). Furthermore, the situation is not wherein the multiple of species being, for example, would reveal itself. In other words, the situation is separated from the social, or social ontology. We can take this separation as an invitation to separate the social from social ontology. Social ontology is not a being of the social. Social ontology is not simply an ontological condition for the ontic presence of the social, and here it presents a departure from a Marxist politics that sees social antagonism as the site for radical change. For Badiou, the social is less a site for change than precisely part of the knowable order, an order that cannot and does not provide the condition for the possibility for an event. Put differently, a social class (bourgeoisie or proletariat) does not in itself constitute political subjectivity.

Badiou's argument is very similar to Marx's from the *Manifesto*, and it is with this similarity that the difference between the two come to the fore. For Marx, not all proletariat are communists, whereas all communists are practically (if not socio-economically) proletariat. For Badiou too, there appears that not all proletariat are political subjects, whereas political subjects are practically proletariat. It is here, however, that the difference with Marx manifests itself. For Badiou, one cannot suture philosophy to politics. That is precisely what Althusser had done, while also abandoning subjectivity. For Badiou, the subject is subtracted from the given social order. Social ontology is subtracted from the social. In other words, the social and social ontology are different in kind, in Badiou's thinking. Moreover, social ontology is neither a qualification of ontology (the science of multiples qua multiples), nor a derivative (read structure, count-as-one) of the situation of ontology. So, while social ontology is to be removed from the social, it also cannot be seen as close to or as a derivative of ontology as such.

What, indeed, would legitimate thinking of such a perspective of ontology alongside the social? One might be tempted here to refuse the social entirely from such a thinking of the multiple. Indeed, that is one way of going forward with social ontology and un-suturing social ontology from the social. The social is a particular appearing at the intersection of ethical life, politics, and the state. It can comprise and envelope classes, popular and populist movements, collective action that is tenuous in its constitution, and state services and apparatuses. Social ontology, however, is much more ephemeral. It is, in comparison with the social, empty. The ephemeral emptiness does not make it akin to early modern theories on the aether, the mediating space between objects. To accuse social ontology of being such an aether-like entity would substantialize it. Social ontology is not,

however, any such (one) substance. Rather, social ontology facilitates the circulation of philosophy between conditions, ontology (so that philosophy can provide a meta-ontological perspective), and philosophy's own history. The latter element, philosophy's own history has a particular consistency different from other histories. In other words, the history of philosophy that philosophy has a relation towards is not historicist. It is rather an interpretive unpacking of sayings, or formulas, that remain co-present without being contemporaneous with philosophy currently. Philosophy's history is sedimented in its continuing conceptualizations.

While helpful in un-suturing the social from social ontology, the purpose is not to contribute to a minimization of the importance of the social, a forgetting as Heidegger might put it. Indeed, the social is too important a concern to be left to sociologists, positivists, or political philosophers. As Alberto Toscano emphasizes in a different context, this time related to sociology's impasse when it comes to approaching economic crises from the perspective of reformism:

[The] habit of mind that impairs sociological thinking on the crisis...has to do with the often unreflective tendency in sociology to think of the social, and, in the post-war period, the social *state*, as that which "embeds" the abstractive, de-socialising dynamics of capital. (Toscano 2014, 1028)

Toscano continues in a manner almost inspired by Badiou's tone: "sociologists and social theorists are bound to share much of the historical common sense of their epoch. Taking the intellectual challenge of the ongoing crisis seriously involves doing some violence to that common sense" (Ibid., 1027). The violence done to the historical common sense is precisely the occurrence of the generic truth procedures.

In Badiou's philosophical account, the social is the space and place where either where a political procedure can manifest itself in an eventual manner, or where reactionary and regressive tendencies undo the possibility for the subject-effect.⁵ One indication of how we can get to social ontology, after having un-sutured, or unsealed it, from the social, on the one hand, and kept it distinct without being derivative of ontology, on the other, is to turn to Badiou's *Briefings on Existence*, his *Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*. Badiou introduces this treatise in the following way:

⁵ Two interesting authors to read in this context, and who read populist movements themselves in a political register, directly in contrast and opposition to sociological and positivist statistical tendencies are Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. See, in particular: Ernesto Laclau. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso; Chantal Mouffe. 2018. *For a Left Populism*. New York: Verso.

I call “transitory ontology” the ontology unfolding between the science of Being *qua* Being, that is the theory of the pure manifold, and the science of appearing, that is, the logic of consistency of actually presented universes. It is a trajectory of thought. (Badiou 2006, v).

In that work, Badiou examines the milestones in transitory ontology, operating between ontology and logic. He additionally provides a critique of the mathematical school other than set theory that also could provide an ontology: category theory. In the penultimate chapter, addressing “Group, Category, Subject”, he writes: “It is now high time to say that the group works as a *matheme* for a thought on the Subject. It is formally adequate to what Freud and, later, Lacan attempted to record in its fleeing identity” (Ibid., 150). Badiou continues in the following manner, connecting psychoanalysis to the question of group:

The obstacle is that everything seems to lead one to surmise the following: a subject-group is infinite. Perhaps it is even proper to a subject that the different ways it has of being identical to itself is infinite in number. The upshot of this is that psychoanalysis is incompleteable as such...Psychoanalysis lifts the infinite life of the subject-group to the height of the letter naming it. It is a vivification of the letter. (Ibid., 151)

A couple of things stand out. First, psychoanalysis is incompleteable, what Freud had called in a late paper, in an almost dialectical manner, as “terminable and interminable”.⁶ Second, insofar as psychoanalysis participates in the naming of the infinite subject-group, it addresses the vacillation of the subject-group between consistency and inconsistency, a vacillation between the infinite possibilities of a subject-group being identical with itself.

It is here, as exception, that social ontology enters in the dialogue ontology and transitory ontology. On the basis of its etymology, I propose reading social ontology as indicating not a separate, disparate, or transitory ontology. Rather, it involves being a friend to and engaging in friendship with ontology. It respects the space as much for ontology, transitory ontology, and the circulation without suturing of philosophy with its conditions and history. Finally, in its “act” of friendship, social ontology is, in a non-transcendental or finite manner, the condition of compossibility for the generic truth conditions. As a condition of compossibility it avoids the suturing that a transcendental (understood as condition of possibility) accomplishes between the event and a specific truth procedure. A condition of compossibility keeps open the space for the co-existence of non-mutually exclusive truth procedures. Between being and appearing we find the movement from ontology to transitory ontology. Transitory ontology registers

⁶ See Sigmund Freud. 1964. “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII*. Edited and Translated by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud. London: The Hogarth Press.

the appearance, in particular moments, of multiplicity. It registers the not-yet consistent inconsistent multiples. Alongside this, however, one finds the four truth conditions and subjects that are faithful to the eventual occurrence of truth-procedures. An indication for what social ontology may *be* and how it may *appear* presents itself in Badiou's second volume of *Being and Event*, in a formula that distinguishes Badiou's materialist dialectic from the contemporary *doxa* of democratic materialism. The aporia facing social ontology, in other words, is the following: how does social ontology provide an account for that which distinguishes the materialist dialectic from democratic materialism? How to distinguish the militant philosopher from the reactionary sophist?

3. READING A FORMULA: BODIES, LANGUAGES, TRUTHS

A way of entering the debate regarding whether or not "social ontology" is appropriate for Alain Badiou's philosophy, or at least considering whether it relates to a region of its concerns, is by looking to a more recent formulation of his philosophical position. In *Logics of Worlds*, he claims the following: "*There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths*" (Badiou 2009a, 4).⁷ This is presented following his account of democratic materialism: "*There are only bodies and languages*" (Ibid, 1). I wish to propose at the outset, in keeping with Badiou's insistence (following Althusser) on thetic or thesis-driven writing, a provisional thesis: If the "except that" in the above formula *exists qua* subject, the "except" in the above formula is social ontology. I introduce this to be faithful as much to the English translation — along with Badiou's insistence that philosophical truths can be translated to other languages (Badiou 2009a, 33) — while also attempting to think through the *sinon*, that which can also be translated as "otherwise" or "alternately". Social ontology, in other words, is the exception or exceptional space for the subject's appearing to be faithful to a truth condition. It is not a transcendental, nor is it concerned with the conditions of possibility for a subject that is already here. The subject, as Badiou already had indicated in *Theory of the Subject*, is a subject-effect that arrives (Badiou 2009b, 279). Social ontology preserves the space for this subject's arrival without providing the conditions (as a truth condition does and is) for the subject-effect's arrival.

It is important to highlight how social ontology is not reducible to what Badiou claims "democratic materialism" is. It is, after all, all too easy to mistake the two, the democratic materialist and the materialist dialectic. They have much in common. Invoking Plato's argument from *Euthyphro* — an argument that claims piety is a part of justice — we could almost also claim that Badiou's account makes democratic materialism a part of the materialist dialectic, and that

⁷ In its French original, Badiou writes: "*Il n'y a que des corps et des langages, sinon qu'il y a des vérités*".

which goes beyond the democratic materialist is the “except that there are truths”. This, while correct, is misleading. It is certainly correct to think truths are absent from the democratic materialist point of view. Truths have no existence, or givenness, and one needs not much more than languages and bodies to give an account of the world, or multiple worlds. However, the rupture introduced by truths undoes any similarity or repetition between the democratic materialist and the materialist dialectic. Even in their framing, the former appears to be located within a person (body and language), a democratic materialist. On the other hand, with the latter, we have with the materialist dialectic a discourse in search of a subject, a discourse that cannot be reduced to the bodies and languages that pre-exist or co-exist with the event and ensuing truth-procedure in response to which a subject arrives. Bodies and languages, in other words, for the materialist dialectic are different than the bodies and languages named by the democratic materialist. This difference is antagonistic and subtractive (the “except that”), rather than synthesizable and reconcilable. Irreconcilability provides distinction without substantializing the subjects that will have been the bodies and languages excepted from the given order.

Moreover, rather than think of the one (democratic materialism) as a part of the other (materialist dialectic), one should see in them an opposition. This opposition between the two is not unlike the difficulty faced, and taken up admirably, by Plato in staging the opposition between philosophers and sophists. It is not just that sophists take money in exchange for their teachings, or that they are able to make the stronger argument weaker and the weaker argument stronger. Instead, the difficulty lies in a shared etymology, their relations toward *sophia*, wisdom. This reference to Plato is instructive for entering Badiou's formula. The democratic materialist is a sophist in the sense that they either reduce wisdom (truth) to knowledge, or suture philosophy to any one of its conditions. In addition, the sophist entertains — via their making the stronger argument weaker and the weaker argument stronger — a relation to relativism and perspectivism that opposes any mention of universal or the infinite. As is shown, however, time and time again in Plato's dialogues, whether *The Symposium* (love) or *The Republic* (politics and art), the philosopher's relation to wisdom is precisely to undermine, undo, and poke a hole in common opinion (*doxa*) and in (the logic of) knowledge.

Socratic questioning is but one insistence that attempts to think philosophy's conditions, without having those condition reduced to cognitive expressions or definitions. Philosophy, or the philosopher, can only arrive as a result of an encounter with these conditions; there is no pre-existing knowledge or account of them. The famed *aporia* in Plato's dialogues assumes a different import here, extending beyond mere pedagogic function. *Aporia*, traditionally understood, aims to show the standard way of providing an account, or definition. Indeed, the arc, or structure, of the early aporetic Platonic dialogues is the movement from

unacknowledged ignorance to acknowledging one's ignorance. This acknowledgement, however, does not aim — read through Badiou's philosophical lens — to provide a “better” or more concise account (Badiou 2012). The acknowledgement of one's ignorance is an attempt to *think* the hole in knowledge itself, the hole established by any generic truth procedure. Knowledge, or definitions and accounts, cannot function with truth conditions, except generically and in response, in a manner that does not provide content for the truth condition beforehand.

The opposition between democratic materialism and the materialist dialectic is further brought into relief when one considers the phrasing Badiou provides in his formula, the addition of the “except that there are truths”. The truths are given, an *es gibt* or *il y a*. This givenness of truths further changes the “except that”, the subject-effect of subjects that are faithful to any of the generic truth procedures. Within this, however, we further observe a tear, an encounter, an exception. This exceptional space that honors the possibility of a subject's arrival in response to an event is social ontology. Social ontology is the “except”. As an “except” social ontology operates in a manner to preserve space. One way to think about this “except” is by turning to contemporary events where the derivate of social ontology, the social itself, becomes a situation wherein the contest of the subject-effect, a contest between perhaps political subjects and reactionary non-subjects, plays itself out. Recently Badiou has written a number of texts, polemical and political, local and global, addressed to high schoolers and college students, about precisely this social situation. Social ontology can be located via an attempt to understand what Badiou's purpose is when discussing contemporary times regarding the infinite, universal truths that occur.

4. THE TIMES, TODAY

Before arriving at Bob Dylan's hopeful, if not outright optimistic, *The Times They Are-a Changing*, one should at least consider the times themselves. And indeed, when comparing the tone of Dylan to that of Badiou we notice a certain shared inevitability, a shared courage, and a shared confidence that the times will change.

However, as they are now, the times are not good, for Badiou. “Time,” as Hamlet says, “is out of joint.” Unlike Hamlet, however, Badiou does not think it falls to anyone, any subject, to set it right, and one should certainly not bemoan the times.⁸ Badiou confirms the tenuous and reactionary tenor of the times at

⁸ See Badiou on the need to avoid tragedy from *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Badiou 2005b, 72-77).

multiple points throughout his career, in writings of various genres. The following is a brief chronological catalogue of this summative judgment.

- In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou begins by deriding the rise of the new philosophers, the failure of May “68, and the overall ossification of the political subject-effects (Badiou 2009b, xxxviii-xli). This book begins with a tone of desertion that is almost the exact opposite of the tone of courage and hope from his later *Manifesto for Philosophy*.
- The prologue from *Metapolitics* begins with the reactionary state of philosophy and the nation-state of France, its mourning of what Badiou calls Pétainism (Badiou 2005c, 1-2). Later on, he refers to the contemporary reactionary state akin to the “Thermidorian Reaction” (Ibid., 124-140).
- In *The Century*, Badiou continues this thread by highlighting the failures of 20th Century attempts to realize the communist hypothesis. He calls this attempt to realize it, the “passion for the real” (Badiou 2007, 48-57).
- The tone is followed through in his more recent *occasional* writings on reactionary figures, such as Sarkozy and Trump. In *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, Badiou situates the times within a second reactionary history of France, one described by “transcendental Pétainism” (Badiou 2008b, 3). The two speeches he gives following immediately and two weeks after Donald Trump’s election continue the general reflection, while choosing to focus on democratic fascism and capitalo-parliamentarism (Badiou 2019).
- Even when discussing possible revolutionary moments, Greece and Tahrir Square, the overall tone is restrained, and hope is situated within a horizon conditioned by reactionary politics.

Following all of this, it would be easy to assume that philosophy, much like the formula “death of god”, has been embalming itself in mourning and melancholy, nostalgia and a threnody for too long. It has become incapacitated, stifled under an assumed impotency — such sexual(ized) metaphors are not necessarily absent from Badiou’s account of philosophy. Philosophy attempted to absolve itself of sins, sins that Badiou thinks are not entirely, if at all, related to philosophy’s mode of activities and responsibilities.

Although the texts assembled above chart a course of Badiou’s writing from among his earliest and theoretical (*Theory of the Subject*) to the most recent and public (*Trump*), and their general account of the situation is one that expresses the reactionary nature of the times, Badiou nonetheless remains a spirited optimist, courageous, and confident. He maintains faith and belief in a change in

direction. These virtues — courage, confidence, and faith — help orientate his philosophical outlook. The most heroic and celebratory declaration is found, in a fitting manner, in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, written shortly after in order to summarize *Being and Event*. There, Badiou is unapologetic in his call for thinking and call for action.

These are all, following Rimbaud's imperative, calls for reinvention: reinventing the subject, and reinventing all the conditions (reinventing love, art, politics, and science). How, then, is this reinvention to come to pass? What does it have to do with Badiou's more theoretical writings on the conditions? And finally, how does it relate to what I am calling Badiou's "social ontology"?

Social ontology is neither to be reduced to the ontic structure of the social, examined by sociologists, economists, or statisticians; nor should it be identified with philosophy's condition, generic truth-procedure, of politics. Following the materialist dialectic claim of "there are bodies and languages, except that there are truths," we can identify subjects (of truth) with the "except that". Further, it is the "except" within "except that" where we find social ontology — I make this claim of subdividing the English translation ("except that") from the French (*si-non*) based upon Badiou's own claim on the trans-linguistic aspect of his account (Badiou 2005a, xii-xiii). The "except" of social ontology acts at one and the same time to make compossible the conditions of philosophy. Furthermore, as condition of compossibility, it keeps them distinct from one another while obstructing possible attempts to suture philosophy to any of its conditions. Finally, it grants philosophy the possibility for circulating among its ontology, the conditions, and its own history. Given this, following the impasses that preceded this section, where can we go from here? As "social ontology" is not a category found within Badiou's philosophy yet is present as unsaid that performs certain functions, it must be invented. This leads to the next aporia, or obstacle: How then are we to invent "social ontology", and what would such "invention" mean?

5. CONCLUSION: INVENTING SOCIAL ONTOLOGY

"Social ontology" names the knot in Alain Badiou's thought bringing together — the actual compossibility of — the four conditions of truth, the four generic procedures of art, science, politics, and love. Social ontology is the precise name given to what otherwise occurs at times under the language of analogy and isomorphy in Badiou's thinking of the four conditions, and what he appears in his thought like a fourfold. In *Conditions*, Badiou makes the following claim regarding philosophy's relation to its four conditions:

As a fiction of knowledge, philosophy imitates the matheme. As a fiction of art, it imitates the poem. As the intensity of an act, it is like a

love without object. Addressed to all so that you may be in seizing the existence of truths, it is like a political strategy with not stakes in power. Through this fourfold discursive imitation, philosophy knots into itself the system of its conditions. (Badiou 2008, 23).

Philosophy occupies an imitative and (from the perspective of truth) derivative position. Badiou is clear in requiring philosophy neither assume itself to be a creator of truths nor be sutured to truths. The space that supports the irreconcilability of philosophy and its truth conditions is philosophy's friend, a social ontology that is the condition of compossibility for co-existing truth procedures.

Following the above quote, a number of Heideggerian tropes come to the fore. All of them are related to Heidegger's thinking of finitude. In examining these tropes, we should keep in mind Badiou's manifest invocative claims are the need for philosophy to abandon its malaise and give up its insistence of finitude. How, then, are we to think tropes associated with a philosophy of finitude in terms now un-sutured from the finite, that is, where philosophy is no longer sutured to one of its conditions, as indeed philosophy had been sutured to poetry in Heidegger? In *Briefings on Existence*, Badiou maintained that one of the meanings of the formula "death of god" was precisely the need to give up on finitude: "As for philosophy, the aim is to finish up with the motif of finitude and its hermeneutical escort. The key point is to unseal the infinite from its millenary collusion with the One" (Badiou 2006, 30). Paraphrasing Kant, and the motto of the enlightenment, we can summarize this in the following imperative: "Dare the infinite!"

First, the formula "love without object" — does this not echo the early Heidegger's insistence that the significance of the non-substantial *Dasein* is its finitude. *Dasein*'s finitude becomes apparent in fundamental moods that appear, or are given, in *Dasein*'s relation toward non-objects, primarily death. Unlike particular beings in the world that *Dasein* may intend and always have a relation with, there are certain relational, intentional attitudes that *Dasein* assumes without *Dasein* intending or relating itself to an(y particular) object. For the early Heidegger, this is precisely what death is in "being-toward-death", and what he calls "the nothing" (Heidegger 1993, 96-99). Both death and the nothing are what *Dasein* intends toward without them being objects. This non-objectal relation seems precisely to be at work in Badiou's account of "love without object". While such a parallel might indeed reduce Badiou to a Heideggerian account of finitude, it is important to reflect on at least two aspects. First, the subject for Badiou is not, as a subject, finite. The subject is not reducible to their personhood or biographical information. The subject, insofar as it is an effect that arrives, temporally appears yet is infinite. Second, the conditions that Badiou introduces as conditions of truth-procedures for the arrival of the subject-effect and its fidelity to that truth — these conditions are neither sutured to philosophy (as Heidegger will

later do with poetry), nor are they participating in the traditional subject-object distinction that Heidegger had been opposing and objecting to. For a subject that arrives, one requires a different account for (non-)objects.

Another Heideggerian trope appears is Badiou's mention of the fourfold. In Heidegger, this fourfold comprised earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Going back to Badiou's reading of the formula "god is dead", we can make a number of observations here. First, Heidegger's fourfold is situated within the suturing of philosophy to the poem. The fourfold, as a possibility for opposing the history of western metaphysics that contributes to the forgetting of being (due in no small part to science, for Heidegger), stems from within what for Badiou is a condition of philosophy. Second, Heidegger's fourfold is not even the first fourfold in philosophical accounting. We find in the history of Western metaphysics a number of occurrences for such a fourfold, including Schopenhauer's *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* and Aristotle's account of the four causes from *Metaphysics*. Third, Badiou's fourfold relates to the compossibility of conditions and truth-procedures. Insofar as it participates in that, Badiou's fourfold is also not concerned with finitude. And while Heidegger's conception of finitude is always already in a relation with the infinite, or unbounded, Badiou's account of the infinite, in direct contrast to finitude, opposes such limitations or limit-settings. This is all to say that one should not be persuaded by seemingly Heideggerian tropes into thinking Badiou's account is similar to Heidegger's. Importantly, it is precisely where we disentangle Badiou from Heideggerian enframings that we can get an idea of social ontology.

Social ontology answers the knotty question regarding philosophy's relation to its four conditions and their compossibility. Social ontology names that knot tying together philosophy to its conditions without suturing it. It names, in other words, a condition for compossibility, not a condition of possibility for philosophy, the four conditions, or ontology. Rather, social ontology names nothing but the condition of compossibility of the four conditions. This condition of compossibility, moreover, is what brings philosophy within the orbits of its conditions without suturing it to those conditions. In keeping with its etymology (*socius*), social ontology names not a derivative of ontology, generally, nor a qualification to ontology—rather, it is a friend of ontology. As a friend of ontology, it engages with ontology in the same manner that philosophy engages with wisdom, as friend, and in proximity to. Social ontology is the name given to the social circulation of philosophy among ontology, its conditions, and its own history (see Badiou 2005a, 3-4).

Furthermore, social ontology importantly names the vanishing mediator between eternal truths and their historical appearances. Just as the truths of the event are required to be in a relation to eternity and the infinite, so too they must also appear. While the movement between being qua being (ontology) and the

logic of its appearing (transitory ontology) had been mapped by Badiou earlier, social ontology answers the question about the compossibility of truth conditions and the arrival (as opposed to Deleuzian expression) of the subject-effect. Social ontology, without being reduced to the social or reframed as transcendental, is the situation that honors the possibility for the arrival — not of the gods — but of the subject. The arrival of the subject is, unlike the gods, never an arrival of finitude.

Given what is written above, it might be legitimate to ask: How does the plurality of compossible truths relate to multiplicity (the being of beings)? Social ontology answers this question. It knots together the infinite set of infinite sets (the multiplicities of multiplicities) together with that which tears through established knowledge regimes. Social ontology facilitates the circulation of philosophy between ontology, its truth conditions, and its own history. It names the compossibility of conditions, their autonomy without falling back on isomorphy, while also maintaining the non-reduction (or suturing) of philosophy to any of its conditions. Insofar as it is a condition of compossibility, social ontology is a condition of impossibility for transcendental suturing. It is here that its exception presents itself, in its rupture with the transcendental.

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