



A FOOTNOTE ON ALAIN BADIOU'S CRITIQUE OF PLATO'S *SOPHIST*

Keylor Murillo Moya¹

Independent Researcher

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ABSTRACT

In his second book on being and event, *Logics of Worlds*, Alain Badiou describes Plato's late dialogue, *The Sophist* as "one of the first transcendental inquiries in the history of thought". In this dialogue, Plato introduces what he calls the Idea of the Other, the possibility of a being of non-being, an inevitable break with the Parmenidean tradition. However, according to Badiou, Plato fails to provide an example of how this Idea of the Other can manifest itself or be effective in a world, or in other words, appear. This paper argues that not only there is such an example in Plato's *Sophist*, namely, the *phantasma*, but also that it can be strongly related to Badiou's philosophical system.

Keywords: Phantasma; Phantasia; Appearances; Difference; Otherness; Identity; Images.

¹ keylormm@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In *Logics of Worlds* (2009), Alain Badiou addresses the problem of appearance, and more specifically, the possibility that truths appear or manifest themselves in a certain form, that they not only *are*, but that they also *exist*. By moving from ontology and set theory, the two focal points of his first book on *Being and Event* (2006), to logic and category theory, Badiou finds a successful path that links the multiplicity of being-qua-being to the singularity of a world.² However, in this transition from being to beings, and from event to worlds, Badiou encounters an important obstacle, one that “has haunted philosophy from its very origins”, “the difficulty – clearly recognized by Kant himself – of making negation appear” (Badiou 2009, 63). In other words, how does *non-being* appear in a world, if it ever appears at all?

Badiou credits Plato with the first non-Parmenidean attempt to answer this question, one that goes beyond the mere affirmation of the impossibility of appearance of non-being. This is, according to Badiou, “the first transcendental inquiry in the history of thought, culminating with the introduction in the *Sophist*, of the Idea of the Other” (Badiou 2009, 63). For Badiou, the problem with Plato’s proposal is that “although he establishes that the Other allows us to think that non-being can appear, he says nothing about the way in which this appearance is effective” (2009, 63). By introducing the notion of the Other not as the opposite of being, but as difference, as the *other-than-being*, Plato manages to avoid the issue of the manifestation or existence of non-being, of the complete lack of being. However, Badiou believes that Plato fails to provide an example of how this Other appears in a world, of the possible form that it may take to become visible, to *show itself under the light*, to *appear before the eyes*.³ “Plato’s effort, as is often the case”, continues Badiou, “only results in a fable which tells us that while the ‘ontological’ problem is soluble (how can we think that non-being is?), the ‘phenomenological’ problem (how can non-being appear?) is not” (2009, 64).

The aim of this paper is not only to question Badiou’s criticism of Plato and to show that in *Sophist*, Plato does offer a solution to the phenomenological problem of the appearance of non-being, but also to discuss the repercussions that

² A good introduction to the thinking of Alain Badiou, by Badiou himself, can be found in *Alain Badiou par Alain Badiou* (Badiou 2021), or in *Sometimes We Are Eternal* (Badiou 2019).

³ As will be shown, the ideas of “showing oneself under the light” and “appearing before the eyes” are strongly connected to the notion of *phantasma*.

such solution has within Badiou's philosophical system, especially as it is described in his trilogy on being and event.

The first part of the paper focuses on defining and differentiating the notions of *phantasma* and *phantasia*, two concepts that tend to be assimilated to one another, but that in Plato play a different role, one linked to images (*phantasma*) and the other to perception (*phantasia*). This distinction will help to think of the *phantasma* as an entity that appears to a subject in a world, and not as the result of a mental faculty of an individual, or in Badiou's terms, the *site* of an event that demands the fidelity of a subject, not his or her knowledge. The second part discusses the role that the concept of *phantasma* plays in Plato's *Sophist*, especially as a type of phenomenological manifestation of the Idea of the Other, addressing Badiou's claim that this is precisely what is missing in Plato. The third section focuses on the relationship between Plato's concept of *phantasma* and the philosophy of Badiou, who also mentions and discusses the *Sophist* in each of his books on being and event, namely *Being and Event* (2006), *Logics of Worlds* (2009) and *L'immanence des vérités* (2018). There is, as will be shown, a strong connection between the idea of "an unfavourable point of view" in the *phantasma*, and Badiou's notions of *truth procedure*, *forcing* and *subject*. This third section will also explore a possible relationship between Plato's *phantasma* and Badiou's own idea of *œuvre*, as it appears in his book *L'immanence des vérités*. The fourth and final section proposes a connection between the manifestation of the Idea of the Other and non-being, under the Platonic notion of *phantasma*, and Badiou's own views about art, and especially poetry. The paper concludes with a final reflection on Badiou's critique of Plato's *Sophist*, and with the suggestion that the *phantasma*'s unfavourable point of view might not be that unfavourable after all.

1. THE CONCEPTS OF *PHANTASMA* AND *PHANTASIA*

The possibility that Badiou overlooked the presence of an example of a phenomenological manifestation of non-being, in Plato's *Sophist*, might not be that surprising, if it is considered that the concept of *phantasma*, by means of which such manifestation is designated, is etymologically related to the idea of how things appear to someone, how they come to light, or in Badiou's case, how they do not. As Cornelius Castoriadis said with respect to *phantasia*, a notion that will also be discussed here, the *phantasma* is "in its essence rebellious against determinacy" (Castoriadis 1997, 214), which is why it is important to consider first the etymological and philosophical relationship between both notions of *phantasma* and *phantasia*, as well as their dependence on appearances. This differentiation is important because it shows that the Platonic *phantasma* cannot be thought of as a mental faculty, or as the result of an individual's sensorial perception. On

the contrary, the Platonic *phantasma* represents an image that appears to someone, an independent entity that demands something from a subject, a feature that is crucial if a connection to Badiou's own philosophical system and his idea of a truth procedure is to be established.

It is interesting to note, firstly, that the concept of φάντασμα (*phantasma*) has often been eclipsed by that of φαντασία (*phantasia*). The latter has received most of the attention, especially since Aristotle defined it as “the faculty in virtue of which we say that an image (*phantasma*) presents itself to us” (1907, 125).⁴ According to several authors (Cassin 2014, 773; Sheppard 2014, 2; Barnouw 2002, 2; Manieri 1998, 17-18), the term *phantasia*, and consequently also *phantasma*, seem to be etymologically related to φαίνω (*phainō*), “to make appear in the light”; φῶς (*phōs*), “light”; φαίνομαι (*phainomai*), “to come into the light, to appear”; φαντάζομαι (*phantazomai*), “to become visible, to appear, show itself”; and finally, also to φαντάζω (*phantazō*), “to make visible, present to the eye or to the mind”, and to φαντάζεσθαι (*phantazesthai*), “to have visions or to imagine”. However, although it is true that the concept of *phantasia* will be later Romanised and translated as “imagination”,⁵ it is also important to highlight the fact that the active mood of the verbs *phainomai* and *phantazesthai*, as in “to imagine”, does not appear until the first or second century CE (Cassin 2014, 773). This indicates that, initially, the notions of *phantasia* and *phantasma* are more to do with the idea that something appears to someone, and less with the idea that someone imagines something.⁶ Instead of being an active producer of images, an individual becomes a receptive point of *phantasmata*. This idea will be fundamental not only to Plato's approach to perception, truth and images, but also to Badiou's notion of *truth procedure*, where a subject comes as a consequence of an event, not as its agent.

The concepts of *phantasma* and *phantasia* are mentioned by Plato in several of his works, including *Republic* and *Theaetetus*, but most importantly in *Sophist*, where the question of images dominates an important part of the dialogue. Aristotle inherits these concepts and develops them further in many of his writings, focusing mainly on *phantasia* as a faculty related to perception.⁷ After

⁴ In her book, *The Poetics of Phantasia*, Anne Sheppard states that “it was Aristotle's usage, particularly in *De Anima*, that was of crucial importance for later thought” (2014, 1).

⁵ The link between *phantasia* and imagination is explored by Gerard Watson in his book *Phantasia in Classical Thought* (1988). Sheppard (2014), already mentioned above, also discusses the connection between these two terms.

⁶ “We cannot identify it with our modern “imagination”, a notion that has in addition the disadvantage of emphasizing an activity on the part of the subject, whereas in Greek it is rather a matter of receiving” (Cassin 2014, 774).

⁷ Aristotle discusses the link between *phantasia* and perception on several occasions, especially in his book *On The Soul*, but also in his *Metaphysics*, his *Rhetoric*, and *On The Motion*

Aristotle, the notion of *phantasia* reappears in the texts of Epicureans, Stoics, Neoplatonists, and it is also mentioned by thinkers like Augustine, Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, Husserl and Heidegger,⁸ for example. The difference is that, whilst in Aristotle the presence of the notion of *phantasia* is strikingly frequent (Watson 1988, 14-15), in Plato, especially in *Sophist*, the concept of *phantasma* seems to assume not only a predominant role, but also a more independent one:

However, '*phantasma*' (apparition) as a semi-technical term in the division of the image-making art should be strictly distinguished from '*phantasia*'; for *phantasma* is a kind of image which does not represent the true proportions of the original, while *phantasia* is said (...) to be a kind of cognitive state which is either true or false. (Notomi 2007, 252)

Within the *Republic*, for example, there are several passages that discuss the nature of appearances (*phantasmata*) without any specific reference to the notion of *phantasia*. In one of these passages, Socrates discusses the possibility of gods assuming various shapes and forms to appear to men without ever revealing their true appearance or identity (Plato 2013a, 381e-382b). In another well-known scene from Book X (Plato 2013b, 598b), a painter is described as an imitator of appearances (*phantasmatos*), three steps removed from reality, since what he imitates is not the Idea of a bed nor the bed of the craftsman, but only how the latter "appears" to him, from a certain point of view or angle.⁹

This last reference to a specific point of view or perspective, when it comes to appearances and perception, is also made in *Sophist*, and it is essential for understanding the nature of the *phantasma*. It is thanks to the imitation of appearances, not realities, that the painter is not only able to produce a bed, but also to create all the plants, the Earth, the skies, the gods and all the living things on Earth, even himself (Plato 2013b, 596c-e). Appearances, for Plato, are more than just a source of deception and falsity; they are there to indicate the gap that exists between the Idea and its manifestation in a world,

The purpose of his coinage (derived from "phainesthai", "to appear", meaning appearance in contrast to reality or being) was to embody the confusion of "it seems to me" and "it is" and so to show up the fundamental error of those who rely on the senses as revealing reality. To

of Animals. Astolfi (2011) and Scheiter (2012) have both made interesting contributions on the topic.

⁸ Heidegger (2003) has dedicated a whole book to the study of Plato's *Sophist*.

⁹ "Like this, take a bed. If you examine it from an angle, or straight on, or any other way, does it vary within itself, or does it not vary at all, but just look different, and similarly with the rest?" (Plato 2013b, 598a).

trust the senses as a basis of knowledge opens one to distortion from perspective and the illusory character of objects that never are the same. (Barnouw 2002, 2)

In some ways, this is also Badiou's main motivation behind his second book on being and event, *Logics of Worlds*: to fill the gap that exists between the mathematical ontology of beings and truths, and their logical manifestation in a world, the possibility that beings and truths not only are, but that they also appear.

2. AN UNFAVOURABLE POINT OF VIEW, *the SOPHIST*

For Badiou (2018, 534), Plato's *Sophist* is a dialogue of "a rare subtlety, philosophically equivalent to the discoveries, in set theory, made by Gödel, Cohen, Woodin, and some others."¹⁰ In it, Plato discusses several themes, from the problem of being and non-being and the nature of images, to the figure of the sophist as a false philosopher, deceiver, and corrupter of the youth. Both Theaetetus, and the so-called Eleatic Stranger, embark on the task to define and identify what a sophist is, what he does and most importantly, how he does it. The sophist is described as an illusionist who, by virtue of a single art (the *phantastikē technē*)¹¹ gives the illusion of being the maker of all things, like a painter who uses his art to create imitations of real things and then shows his pictures at a distance, deceiving and making a fool out of everyone. The sophist takes advantage of words to "bewitch the young" while "they are still standing at a distance from the realities of truth", luring them with 'spoken images of all things' (Plato 1921, 234b), images that give the impression of being true.

The Stranger identifies two different types of image-making art or mimetic art, although without yet being able to tell in which of these two the sophist can be found. The first one is called *eikastikē technē*, which focuses on the production of images that are similar and faithful to their model. The *eikastikē technē* produces images that respect the proportions, dimensions and even the colours of its model (Plato 1921, 235d), an art closer to the truth than the second type, the *phantastikē technē*. This second form of mimetic art distances itself from the truth and produces images that do not follow the real proportions of things but only "those which seem to be beautiful" (Plato 1921, 236a). This part of the dialogue is worth quoting in its entirety,

¹⁰ My own translation. At the moment of writing this paper, the English edition of Badiou's *L'immanence des vérités* (2018) was still due to be published by Bloomsbury Academic. All other quotations and texts from this book have been translated by myself.

¹¹ One that does not respect the true proportions of its model, as opposed to the *eikastikē technē*, which does. The difference between these two arts will shortly be discussed in more detail.

STR. I see the likeness-making art (*eikastikē technē*) as one part of imitation. This is met with, as a rule, whenever anyone produces the imitation by following the proportions of the original in length, breadth, and depth, and giving, besides, the appropriate colours to each part.

THEAET. Yes, but do not all imitators try to do this?

STR. Not those who produce some large work of sculpture or painting. For if they reproduced the true proportions of beautiful forms, the upper parts, you know, would seem smaller and the lower parts larger than they ought, because we see the former from a distance, the latter from near at hand.

THEAET. Certainly.

STR. So the artists abandon the truth and give their figures not the actual proportions but those which seem to be beautiful, do they not?

THEAET. Certainly.

STR. That, then, which is other, but like, we may fairly call a likeness (*eikon*), may we not?

THEAET. Yes.

STR. And the part of imitation which is concerned with such things, is to be called, as we called it before, likeness-making?

THEAET. It is to be so called.

STR. Now then, what shall we call that which appears, because it is seen from an unfavourable position, to be like the beautiful, but which would not even be likely to resemble that which it claims to be like, if a person were able to see such large works adequately? Shall we not call it, since it appears, but is not like, an appearance (*phantasma*)?

THEAET. Certainly.

STR. And this is very common in painting and in all imitation?

THEAET. Of course.

STR. And to the art which produces appearance, but not likeness, the most correct name we could give would be “fantastic art” (*phantastikē technē*), would it not?

THEAET. By all means. (Plato 1921, 235d-236c)

The passage is particularly important for various reasons. Firstly, because it describes the *eikon* as an image that respects the proportions of its model, a likeness to the original, the result of a process called *eikastikē technē* or likeness-making art. Secondly, the text reveals the double nature of the *phantasma*, not

only as an image that does not reproduce the true proportions of “beautiful forms”, but which also depends on what the Eleatic Stranger calls “an unfavourable point of view”, for its effectiveness. Finally, this part of the dialogue shows a fundamental difference between the *eikastikē technē* and the *phantastikē technē*, namely, the inclusion – or not – of a point of view, and consequently, of a subject, a gaze. While the *eikon* imitates objects and real beings, which is why it manages to maintain the proportions and symmetries of its model, the *phantasma* is more ambitious, it presents ideas, the very Idea of the Beautiful. The problem is that, in order to be able to do that, the *phantasma* has to rely on trickery, on a mechanism capable of imitating the inimitable, the inaccessible: on an unfavourable point of view.¹² If it were possible to see the *phantasma* from an adequate point of view, something very difficult when it comes to Ideas or Forms, then it would become evident that the appearance that the *phantasma* presents has no likeness to what it claims to be like. The *phantastikē technē* creates an image that claims to be like the beautiful, like a Form, and it does this by presenting an appearance that, if seen from an adequate point of view, is not beautiful at all. By claiming to be a likeness of the Beautiful, and then being something else, something that might not even be beautiful at all, Plato's *phantasma* makes non-being appear. However, non-being here must be understood as difference, as what being is not or as the being-other of being, rather than as its complete opposite, the absolute absence of being. If the Idea of the Other is to manifest in a world, it can only do it by appearing as “an-other”, by resembling something that it is not. Plato's *phantasma* represents a problem for the processes of referentiality and signification, because although the *phantasma*'s referent is not exactly lost, it is always slipping away in the form of “an-other”. The *phantasma* is, and at the same time, is not.

Unlike the *phantasma*, the authenticity of the *eikon* favours communication and meaning, referentiality. It is an image that not only preserves the symmetries and proportions of its referent, but that also does not demand anything from anyone, because the image that it produces is objective, faithful to its model, and can be viewed from any perspective, without any particular consequence. The *phantasma*, on the other hand, requires an unfavourable point of view. Its fidelity lies not on side of the model but on the side of the subject, who needs to assume that particular point of view. One of the most striking aspects of the *phantasma* is that, despite the discrepancy between its appearance and what it claims to be like, the promise of an “adequate point of view” is always there, from where the real being of the Beautiful could be properly seen. However, if seen from such

¹² In another edition of Plato's *Sophist*, Brann et al. (1996) translate the same phrase as “an unbeautiful point of view”, which suggests the thought that to see the Beautiful, one must assume an unbeautiful perspective. However, this translation also suggests an opposition of two terms, not a difference.

adequate position, the *phantasma* “would not even be likely to resemble that which it claims to be like” (Plato 1921, 236b), or in other words, there is no correspondence between being and appearance.¹³ While the accuracy and fidelity of the mimetic movement of the *eikon* can be confirmed just by looking at its model, the same thing cannot be said about the *phantasma* because its paradigm, being the Idea of beauty, is inaccessible through perception. Sonja Tanner (2010) has underlined this difference. For her the *phantasma* involves “a metaphorical imitation of its paradigm”, a distortion made “to compensate for the perspective of its viewer” (Tanner 2010, 98).

Holbein’s famous painting, the *Ambassadors*, might serve as a good example of the consequences that this “compensation” might have for a subject¹⁴. There, the anamorphic hidden skull of the painting demands a truly unfavourable point of view, one that is not beautiful at all and from where the subject is forced to sacrifice all the knowledge and assurances of his/her world. In order to gain access to the visibility of the *phantasma*, a subject is expected to abandon the passivity and comfort of the *eikon* or in other words, “to lose the whole picture”, which is precisely what the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus try to avoid in Plato’s *Sophist*, and also the source of their frustrations. One of the most interesting aspects of Plato’s dialogue is the idea that beyond the paradox and opposition of being and non-being, lies a third possibility, that of the Idea of the Other, which traverses and permeates all other Ideas or Forms (Plato 1921, 255e). Identity (the Same), and difference (the Other) permeate all the other Forms or Ideas, including themselves, which is why it is possible for the Eleatic Stranger, to say, without any fear of contradiction, that “motion is the same and is not the same” (Plato 1921, 256a), and also that “motion really is not, and also that it is” (Plato 1921, 256d). At the end of Plato’s *Sophist* non-being becomes, not the opposite of being, “but only of something different” (Plato 1921, 257b), “the other of being, and nothing more” (Plato 1921, 258b). Badiou’s own interpretation of the dialogue will focus on this idea of non-being as difference and otherness.

¹³ “A possible correspondence would mean, therefore, the modification of the point of view taken with respect to what appears. What appear are Φαινόμενα, in other words, not false likenesses, but the visible aspect of things” (Másmela 2006, 58) (my translation). [“Una posible adecuación supondría, por tanto, la modificación del punto de vista asumido con respecto a lo que aparece. Lo que aparece son los Φαινόμενα, esto es, no falsas semejanzas, sino el aspecto visible de las cosas”].

¹⁴ Buci-Glucksmann, in her book *The Madness of Vision: on Baroque Aesthetics* (2014, 8-13), discusses this perspective aspect of Holbein’s painting and relates it to what she calls the “anamorphic gaze of the baroque”.

3. BADIOU AND THE *SOPHIST*

There are several references to Plato's *Sophist* in each of the three books dedicated to being and event. Initially, these references are very brief, but by *L'immanence des vérités* (2018), the dialogue becomes an important part of his thinking. In his most famous text, *Being and Event* (2006), Badiou mentions the *Sophist's* relationship to his own maxim, "the one is not" (2006, 23), a maxim that constitutes an essential part of his philosophy. In *Sophist* Plato introduces what he calls his "five great Forms or Ideas": being, movement, rest, the same and the other. However, according to Badiou, "the idea of the one is not included, for no other reason that the one is not" (2006, 37). "The one", continues Badiou, "may solely be found at the principle of any Idea, grasped in its operation -of participation- rather than in its being" (2006, 37). The *Sophist* is a text about difference, not about oneness, which is why Badiou considers it to be "the first great example of what could be called a transcendental inquiry" (Badiou 2009, 70). In *Logics of Worlds* (2009), Badiou addresses the problem of difference, of otherness, and Plato's *Sophist* seems to be, for him, an important text to reflect on the subject. There, Plato realises that to understand the difference between two Forms or Ideas, it is impossible to appeal to empirical evidence, precisely because they lie beyond the practicalities of this world. What constitutes the essence of two Ideas, like movement and rest, is the fact that they are Ideas, and not mere objects or qualities that can be observed and described. Plato's Idea of the Same helps with the distinction between two Ideas, but it does not solve the problem, because saying that two beings are equal to themselves does not explain why they are different to each other. Here, according to Badiou, Plato makes a "remarkable decision": he decides that "difference cannot be thought as the simple absence of identity" (Badiou 2009, 71), and the consequences are inevitable,

It is in the wake of this decision, in the face of its ineluctable consequences (the existence of non-being), that Plato breaks with Parmenides, contrary to what is argued by the Eleatic philosopher, the law of being makes it impossible for Plato to think difference solely with the aid of Idea of the same. There must be a proper Idea of difference, an Idea that is not reducible to the negation of the Idea of the same. Plato names this Idea "the Other". (Badiou 2009, 71)

By going against a Parmenidean tradition that had remained unchallenged in Plato until this point, the risk of committing parricide¹⁵ seems inevitable: non-being exists, not as the negation of being, but as a positive difference (movement is other than rest, not its contrary). The problem is, and this is the critique that Badiou makes of Plato's Idea of the other (Badiou 2009, 63, 164), that if the

¹⁵ "Do not assume that I am becoming a sort of parricide", says the Eleatic Stranger in *Sophist* 241D.

universality of all beings in a sensible world comes from their participation in the world of Ideas (a bed participates in the Idea of bed, for example), the same cannot be said of a relationship like difference. It might be possible in the case of identity, since all beings and objects are equal to themselves, which means that they do participate in the Idea of the same. But what about non-being? What object or being from a world participates in the Idea of the other, being and at the same time, being not? For Badiou, Plato fails to provide a proof of this, an example of how non-being can appear or manifest in a world.

What Badiou forgets, or fails to see, is that it was precisely the existence and manifestation of such non-being in a world (in the form of images, sophists, false *logos*, but in particular, the double nature of the *phantasma*), that prompted Plato's quest for non-being and the subsequent emergence of the Idea of the Other.

Badiou returns to Plato's *Sophist* one more time, in his third book on being and event, *L'immanence des vérités* (2018). There, Badiou makes a correlation between Plato's two Ideas of Same and Other, and the set theoretical axioms of extensionality and foundation, respectively (Badiou 2018, 377). The axiom of extensionality states that two sets are identical if, and only if, they share the same elements, which is why Badiou links it to the Idea of the same, of identity. The second axiom of foundation prohibits self-foundation, the possibility of a multiple being a member of itself, and it does so by declaring that among all the multiples that make up a given multiple, there has to be one which has nothing in common with that multiple to which it belongs (Badiou 2018, 377). In other words, in any given set A , if $x \in A$ and $y \in x$, then $y \notin A$. The multiple x "founds" the multiple A in the sense that, although x is present in A , none of its members are. This is why Badiou sees a clear connection between this second axiom and Plato's Idea of the Other, since at the heart of any multiplicity, there is an alien element, an-other multiple without which all the edifice of being would collapse. However, Badiou's commentary on Plato's *Sophist* in *L'immanence des vérités* does not end here. In *Suite S22* (2018, 529-537), wholly dedicated to Plato, Badiou finds in his master an early indication of his own idea of absolutisation of truths, an anticipation of his own theory about the hierarchy of infinities towards the absoluteness of truths. According to Badiou, it is in the *Sophist*, a dialogue of "rare subtlety, philosophically equivalent to the discoveries, in set theory, of Gödel, of Cohen, of Woodin and some others" (Badiou 2018, 534), that Plato introduces "the Idea of difference as such". When Plato describes his "four great Forms or Ideas" (Being, Same, Movement and Rest), and then decides to add a fifth one, the Other, he distances himself from his own master, Parmenides, and at the same time anticipates the absoluteness of the Other. In the first case because, as Badiou explains (2018, 534), the Idea of the Other implies the existence of something that is other than being, the possibility of a being of non-being,

a statement that cannot be accepted within the Parmenidean thought. In the second case, the absoluteness of the Idea of the Other comes from the fact that if there were to be an Idea of the Idea, an entity from where the aforementioned five supreme genres would obtain their "ideality", then this Idea of Ideas must be *other than* an Idea. In other words, and this is where Badiou sees the 'subtlety' of Plato's discovery, the Idea of the Other makes it possible to think the existence of an Idea that is not itself an Idea, that cannot be an Idea, since this would introduce an inevitable paradox in the process. Badiou again finds a justification for his own thinking in Plato, but this time in a different dialogue, the *Republic*.

-You will agree, I think, that the sun not only gives things that can be seen the ability to be seen, but also their generation, growth, and nurture without being the generation itself.

-No, for how could it be?

-And that therefore in objects of knowledge, not only is the ability to be known present, thanks to the Good, but also being and reality is in them because of it, although the Good is not being, but reaches even farther beyond it in rank and power. (Plato 2013b, 509b)

Badiou offers his own translation of this passage (2018, 536), and he renames Plato's Idea of the Good as "the absolute Idea, the Idea of Ideas, the Truth" (2018, 537). Like the sun, which not only makes things visible but also makes them grow and generate, without being generation itself, the Good provides being to all objects of knowledge, including Ideas, without being a being itself, or to put it differently, being non-being, being *other than* being. It is thanks to the Idea of the Other that "the Good is not", that it can be *other than being*, something that reaches "even farther beyond it in rank and power". The Idea of the Other traverses not only all other Ideas, but even the absolute Idea of Ideas, the Good, an Idea that is not an Idea itself. The absoluteness of the Good, of Truth, is also the absoluteness of the *phantasma*, the manifestation of the Other in a world. In *L'immanence des vérités*, the manifestation or appearance in a world of the absoluteness of the Truth will take the form of what Badiou will call an "*œuvre de vérité*"¹⁶, a finite but also dynamic fragment of a truth procedure, a fragment that bears the mark of an event, in the form of an "index"¹⁷ (Badiou 2018, 516). For Badiou, an *œuvre* is a finite element that belongs to the world, that has a substance and a materiality composed of "precise" and well-defined elements, but which also carries the mark of non-being (an event), of the absoluteness of a truth, of something that escapes the materiality of its elements. On one hand, an *œuvre*

¹⁶ A work of truth, as in "a work of art".

¹⁷ Another concept that Badiou introduces in *L'immanence des vérités* and which, just like that of *œuvre*, is part of a more complex and wider proposal that will not be discussed here as it would go beyond the scope of this paper.

belongs to the situation, it can be inscribed by the language of the world in which it appears. On the other, an *œuvre* is always "indexed", it bears the mark of infinity, of an element that is indiscernible, and which cannot be covered by the totality and language of the world. Like Plato's *phantasma*, Badiou's *œuvre* questions the process of signification and referentiality of a world, it carries the mark of the Other. The intricacies of Plato's *Sophist* have reached into each of the three parts of Badiou's thought on being and event.

4. PO-ETHICS OF THE *PHANTASMA*

What are the ethical implications of the *phantasma* for a Badiouan subject? What role could Plato's notion of *phantasma* play, as manifestation of the Idea of the Other and of non-being, within the philosophical system of Alain Badiou? Here, art, and particularly poetry, might hold the key to this question. As has been mentioned, the *eikon*, the image that respects the symmetries and proportions of its model, behaves passively as a faithful copy of such model and guarantees, in this way, not only the existence of a referent, but also the possibility of its access, of its visible and tangible manifestation. The *eikon* is, in this sense, strongly connected to *dianoia*, to the fluidity of thinking, to understanding and re-presentation (Tanner 2010, 100-101). The *eikon* is transparent, it distinguishes between models and copies, it keeps the path to meaning and understanding clear of any obstacles. The *phantasma*, on the other hand, appears to be like its model but if it could be seen accurately, it would not even resemble what it claims to be like. The *eikon* depends on perception, on the senses. It follows symmetries, colours, and shapes, whilst the *phantasma* relies on the eye of thought, of *nous* (Másmela 2006, 137). Ironically, one of the main features of the *phantasma* is that it asks for the viewer to be able to see beyond appearances, to take an unfavourable point of view, to accept a "metaphorical imitation of the paradigm" (Tanner 2010, 98), a poetic perspective. The *phantasma* is on the side of *poiesis*, of creation. Its real being depends on its otherness, on being other than what it appears to imitate. Not only does it make the impossible visible, like the Idea of beauty, but at the same time it forbids and confuses its access. The image of beauty that the *phantasma* reveals is very different from the real one and yet, the *phantasma* makes Beauty appear. Unlike the *eikon*, the *phantasma* connects and entangles being and non-being, it is the otherness of being and consequently, it impedes the fluidity of *dianoia*, a notion that Badiou describes as "the thought that traverses, the thought that links and deduces" (2005, 17). Hermeticism and obscurity are a crucial part of its nature. In the *Sophist*, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger know this very well, which is why their discourse, just like Plato's or even Aristotle's, is full of metaphors and poetic imagery that compensate for the unnameability and contradiction of the *phantasma*. Whilst the *eikon* is on the side of *dianoia*

and reasoning, division, mathematical thinking (Tanner 2010, 117), the *phantasma* is on the side of poetry, metaphorical imitation, false discourse.

Badiou discusses the opposition between poetry and *dianoia*, especially in relation to Plato's *Republic*. In "What is a poem?, Or, Philosophy and Poetry at the Point of the Unnamable" (Badiou 2005, 16-27), he underlines the fact that the poem "forbids any access to the supreme principle" (2005, 17), because it represents an obstacle to the Idea of truth. Poetry is not opposed to thought (*nous*), but to understanding (*dianoia*), to the fluidity of meaning. Just like the *phantasma*, poetry acts like "a nonthought that presents itself via the linguistic power of a possible thought" (Badiou 2005, 18). It is an appearance that makes the invisibility of its being visible via the presentation of a disguise, of non-being. The poem is, in this context, an affirmation, an offering that "dwells on the threshold" (Badiou 2005, 17), its hermeticism and obscurity contradict the intelligibility of the *eikon*, the comforting image where "the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding" (Jowett 1936, 316). The intimate connection between poetry and sophistry suggested by Badiou in this essay on poetry, also reveals the *phantasmatic* nature of the poem as "a nonthought that presents itself via the linguistic power of a possible thought" (Badiou 2005, 18-19). The indiscernibility of the *phantasma* is also the indiscernibility of the poem, the conjunction of being and non-being, the trace of a presence that appears as an absence. However, this apparent contradiction present in the poem is supported by what Badiou calls a 'set of operations', a mechanism in which, as mentioned before, "the role of the poem is to engineer the sensory presentation of a regime of thought" (2005, 20).

It is important to remember here that even in the case of Plato's *phantasma*, where the struggle between being and non-being is apparent, there is also a whole dispositive that organises its appearance, its own being. Those large works of sculpture and painting, given as an example of *phantasmata* in *The Sophist* (Plato 1921, 235e), are disproportionally made (the upper parts smaller and the lower parts bigger) to create an effect, an appearance, to "engineer the sensory presentation of a regime of thought", that of the *phantasma*. There is an apparatus, a mechanism, that makes the *phantasma* visible, a device that places the subject in an unfavourable position and asks for its fidelity. In order to have access to the Idea, to the Beautiful, the *phantasma* demands an ethical decision from the subject, the act of being faithful to an "unfavourable point of view" from which the true Form of the beautiful cannot be seen, but it can be "forced":

I will term *forcing* the relation implied in the fundamental law of the subject. That a term of the situation *forces* a statement of the subject-language means that the veracity of this statement in the situation to come is equivalent to the belonging of this term to the indiscernible part which results from the generic procedure. It thus means that this term, bound to

the statement by the relation of forcing, belongs to the truth. (Badiou 2006, 403)

It can be said, in this sense, that the *phantasma* acts as a term of the situation (it uses elements from within the situation) that manages to *force* (it introduces another element alien to the situation) the appearance of being, of an Idea, through the presentation of non-being and the “mechanics” of the Other. Its promise, the possibility of the beautiful, of the absoluteness of Ideas, is always on the future anterior: the beautiful will have appeared, it will have been.¹⁸

The *phantasma* looks asymmetrical and untrue to someone who tries to look at it from an adequate point of view (in Badiou's terms, the *phantasma* is not veridical because it does not correspond to the “encyclopaedia” of the situation). From within the situation, from the point of view of an inhabitant of the situation (Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger, for example), the *phantasma* presents a distorted, fragmented, illogical, and senseless appearance. The so-called unfavourable point of view that the *phantasma* forces into a situation is not that unfavourable after all, if seen from the perspective of a subject of a truth, of a generic set. A faithful subject is an inhabitant of the situation who assumes the unfavourable point of view of the indiscernible, “To be faithful”, says Badiou, “is to gather together and distinguish the becoming legal of a chance” (2006, 232). This is precisely what the *phantasma* demands, an unfavourable point of view from where to gather together the becoming legal of an Idea.

CONCLUSION

Although the word *phantasma* is not explicitly mentioned by Badiou in his trilogy on being and event, the thinking behind Plato's notion of *phantasma*, as manifestation of the Idea of the Other, is somehow present in each of those books and has a strong connection with Badiou's philosophical system. The main objective of this paper was to address Badiou's critique of Plato's *The Sophist*, of the supposed absence in Plato of an example that explains how non-being can effectively manifest itself in a world. If Badiou overlooks the presence of the *phantasma* in Plato's dialogue it is possibly because Badiou himself, just like the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus in the *Sophist*, fails to assume the “unfavourable point of view” required by the *phantasma*, by an appearance that demands to be seen as what it is not. However, as this paper has also shown, the mechanisms of the *phantasma* are already operating in Badiou's philosophical system, whether it is in the form of an event, of a truth procedure, of an *œuvre*, or even, as a poem. If

¹⁸ “I say “will have been” because the veracity in question is relative to that *other* situation, the situation to-come in which a truth of the first situation (an indiscernible part) will have been presented.” (Badiou 2006, 400)

the sun, as Plato says, makes things grow and generate, without being generation itself, then Badiou can be excused for not noticing what he himself has contributed to make apparent, namely, the non-being of the event.

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