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PIERRE MAURY: Socially responsible downsizing!
Unemployment, but only if it's socially responsible!
Absolutely socially responsible integration! Immigrants,
provided they're socially responsible, not social work cases!
No discrimination, unless it's socially responsible! Europe,
but only if it's positively socially responsible! Social
responsibility as the life-blood, the ultimate purpose, the
entelechy of democratic society as a whole! My horse for
social responsibility!

Alain Badiou, *Incident at Antioch*

En fait, il existe aussi une secrète jouissance d'entrer ainsi
dans la cuisine spéculative, au sous-sol des appartements
d'accueil que tout philosophe aménage pour les invités
pressés. [There is in fact also a secret pleasure in entering
this way in the speculative kitchen, in the cellars of the
formal greeting rooms that all philosophers appoint for
those of their guests who are pressed for time.]

Alain Badiou, "Le Séminaire. L'Infini:
Aristote, Spinoza, Hegel (1984-1985)."

Alain Badiou's *Seminar: The One - Descartes, Plato, Kant (1983-1984)* inaugurates "The Seminar," the collection of transcribed and edited seminars that Badiou chose for publication from the sessions he held over his career. To its place opening "The Seminar" other, perhaps more important functions should be added, however. *The Seminar: The One* serves, with the companion seminar on the Infinite (1984-1985), as a bridge between Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* (1982) and the work for which he is best known, *Being and Event (L'Être et l'Événement)*, 1988; English translation, 2005).¹ (His play *Incident at Antioch*, whose first drafts are written during the years that Badiou holds the seminars on The One and The Infinite, builds another, rather different,

bridge.²) At once quite technical and rather chatty, *The One – Descartes, Plato, Kant* offers a genealogy for two decisive steps in Badiou's thought: his description and his axiomatization of the operation "counts-as-one." It also – rather against the grain of these two steps; inchoately, controversially – offers a tentative engagement with the dangerous mode of *parody*.

Offers it, retracts it, forecloses it: *parody* remits neither to the "central metaphysical concept – the One," nor to the "operation named 'counts as one.'" It flashes up in the *Seminar: The One* and flickers at the edges of Badiou's unfolding project, in unexpected places – for instance, whenever Badiou considers the practices and the philosophical import of translation.

Take Badiou's affirmation, echoed with relief by some of his translators, that "the transmission of thought is indifferent to language," an affirmation to be hedged; ironic and ironized; controversial; perhaps uttered tongue in cheek; perhaps with some malevolence; parodically – Badiou is summarizing Descartes' justification for writing and publishing in French rather than Latin the *Discourse of Method*. The context of Badiou's phrase: the entry "Français" in the *Vocabulaire européen des Philosophies: Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles* edited by Badiou's intimate friend and frequent collaborator Barbara Cassin. Badiou writes in full, after citing Descartes' wonderful lines: "Autrement dit, la transmission de la pensée est indifférente à la langue," *in other words, the transmission of thought is indifferent to language*. A great deal follows from this, but we are licensed to think that just here Badiou is saying, otherwise, *autrement*, that the intimate clarification of ideas and their exposition as intuitable immanent ideas minimally can be and is said in two ways in French – once as Descartes says it, and once as Badiou says it, *autrement*, summarizing and translating. Does saying something twice, *autrement*, make a difference? The two statements are not identical; Badiou does not repeat Descartes, but rather says what he believes Descartes says, only *autrement*. But why *autrement*? Whence the need to say otherwise what has been said already, if the thought has made its way already, indifferent to the language in which it is used or cited? Now, the *Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles* is staked on the proposition that translation, translatability, and untranslatability are not supervenient to thought that is "indifferent" to the language in which it takes place – but rather are linked, as its condition, to that language's details, uses, histories, modes and moments of enunciation: to its specifying differences – even (at the extreme) when these differences obtain *within* one, One, language (Descartes', Badiou's, we might say).

On the tenth anniversary of the *Vocabulaire*'s appearance Barbara Cassin edited a collective volume marking the event, and wrote that for the *Vocabulaire* "it is a matter of understanding, and making understood, that one philosophizes in languages: just as one speaks, as one writes, and – this is the point – as one thinks," *il s'agit d'entendre et de faire entendre que l'on philosophe en langues: comme on parle, comme on écrit et – c'est là le point – comme on pense*.³ Badiou knows Cassin's position on "philosophizing in languages" (her plural

is decisive), and by advocating the *indifference* of the transmission of thought to natural language he is either polemicizing against the idea that organizes the *Vocabulaire*, from within the project; producing a *parody* of it; or performing in the *Vocabulaire* the inscription of a minimal difference, the smallest deviation between how he and Descartes *say* what Descartes *thought* nearly four hundred years ago. The undecidable and unanswerable question – polemic? parody? performance? – must of course guide Badiou's eventual translators, in the form of a more-than-usually attentive ear and eye for Badiou's own non-indifference to linguistic *effects*. (That is, Badiou's translators *must*, the obligation here is ethico-cognitive, be indifferent to Badiou's claim that "the transmission of thought is indifferent to language.") More: the parodic mode perilously on display in the Seminar *The One*, like the range of untranslatable linguistic effects Badiou will also disavow, are the signature of something other-than-one in the order of thought.

"What is the seminar's concern?" asks Badiou.

To put in question the central metaphysical concept – the One – which connotes in general the existence of God, and to replace it with the operation named "count-as-one," which is nothing more than a particular, and secondary, determination of the multiple. It is thus a critical stage on the road that has taken me to an ontology of the multiple "without-One," which is to say, the inconsistent multiple or inconsistent multiplicity. (2)

Just what *was* "the One" at the time that Badiou held his Seminar? What did the term mean and what did it connote, in what circles, for whom, to what ends?⁴ Badiou addresses what has gloriously worn the mantle of the One throughout the history of Western philosophy, yes, but under the aspect of its appearance and many functions in the early 1980's, in Paris, and to concrete ends.

The *Seminar: The One* offers something more than a *formal* deposition of "the central metaphysical concept – the One – which connotes in general the existence of God," and its *formal* "replace[ment] with the operation named 'count-as-one.'" Remarkably and rather unexpectedly, Badiou's project is historical *as well as* formal. The relation between these two registers, subtle and definitive, inaugurates Badiou's historical dialectics, which work from what he will call, in *Being and Event*, the requirement that philosophy *here* "become a circulation through the referential." This constraint is unexpected in the *Seminar*, because – read backward from *Being and Event*, that is, from the systematic exposition of Badiou's program of subtractive ontology – the presentation of the axiomatic form of the counts-as-one operation should *almost* be able to dispense with the encumbrances of the history of philosophy.

Almost, but not quite. *Being and Event*, Badiou writes in his Introduction to that work, consists of three sorts of "meditations" –conceptual (these

“expose, link, and unfold the organic trajectory of the proposed trajectory of thought”); meta-ontological (“meditations based on fragments of mathematical – or ontological – discourse”); and what he proposes to call “textual”: “Meditations [that] interpret, on a singular point, texts from the great history of philosophy.” (18). The *Seminar: The One – Descartes, Plato, Kant* (1983-1984) prepares the way for a subset of these “textual” meditations. Like the later, fully formalized work, it addresses a “singular point” in the work of Descartes, Plato, and Kant (and prepares the fully elaborated sense that the concept “point” will have in Badiou’s later work: “But that,” as he says in 2015 of *The Seminar: The One*, “is a different story, which, in 1983, had barely begun”).⁵

The *Seminar*’s priority with respect to *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event* is double. To understand the operation counts-as-one requires seizing what “the One” is. This means understanding what the One has meant, how it has worked, what it has set in motion, and so on: all matters to be sought meditating on “texts from the great history of philosophy.” Badiou turns to the canonical works of Descartes, then Plato, then Kant, each taken up according to an internally chronological order, though the three figures are presented out of order historically. Descartes, who “inaugurates his thought with a radical displacement of the point of departure: no longer being, but the Subject,” a subject of certainty who, as a singular point of certainty, counts-as-one and sets the path for moving toward the One (God; certainty regarding the world).⁶ Plato’s dialogues the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* offer “the justification for what will be one of the fundamental principles of [Badiou’s] ontology: *the One is not, there is only the counts-as-one.*” The movement here is in the contrary direction to Descartes’ – from the One, toward the counts-as-one. Finally, the “singular point” that Badiou stresses in Kant’s work regards a “characteristic of Kant’s works that, given a problem, each of the conceptual solutions he proposes generates a more radical problem than the one previously addressed. The solution at the same time opens an abyss, a new fault-line, a new schize – hence the need for a new bridge each time.” Only the third *Critique*, Badiou suggests, manages to “count as one, without subsuming them in the One, the sensible and the supersensible, science and morality, the legislation of true knowledge, and that of just action.”

But to “seize” what “the One” is (what it has meant, etc.) requires passing a “singular point” from the history of philosophy (in Descartes, in Plato, in Kant) through conceptual and meta-ontological meditations. Just what are the formal means by which this is accomplished? A high degree of systematicity will be required of the axiomatization of the operation “counts-as-one.” We will want to know (looking backward from *Being and Event*) what the figure of “circulating through the referential” means. *The Seminar: The One – Descartes, Plato, Kant* lays the ground for just the systematicity we will then find in *Being and Event*.

Certainly “the central metaphysical concept” of “the One” connoted more than one thing in the philosophical and non-philosophical scene in Paris in the early 1980’s, and addressing it stitched together any number of uses and senses, technically philosophical as well as colloquial. Badiou’s *Seminar* was dictated in two tightly related contexts, one academic, the other more generally political. For a sense of these and of how they were related, here, stenographically, is Jacques Derrida in 1982, in a brief to Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the new Minister for Research and Industry, proposing the foundation of a Collège international de philosophie: “One sees taking shape today, on all sides, what could be called an awakening of the philosophical or a return to philosophy” [On voit s’annoncer aujourd’hui, de tous côtés, ce qu’on pourrait appeler un réveil du philosophique ou un retour à la philosophie].⁷ This hyperbolic project, conceived by Derrida, François Châtelet, Jean-Pierre Faye and Dominique Lecourt (and joined by Badiou as *Directeur de programme* from 1989 to 1995), answered to a marriage between the perceived “return to philosophy” in the early 1980’s, and the turn to what many sectors of the French Left hoped would be expansive social and cultural policies under the government of François Mitterrand. (Many sectors – but not Badiou himself. About *Antioche*, for instance, he writes: “I began writing the first version of this play – a tragedy – during the summer of 1982, in the atmosphere of solitude that surrounded me and my activist friends at the time owing to our firm opposition, right from the start, to the government of François Mitterrand...to which everyone around us had eagerly rallied.”⁸) A story is implied in Derrida’s compact phrase, if not two rather different stories: at some point “the philosophical” had slumbered, or at some point “the philosophers” had strayed from their path, or subject, or source; now “the philosophical” woke or now “the philosophers” returned to their proper subject. (Derrida has quite a bit more to say about his expression “retour à...” in “Titres.”) *Le philosophique*; *la philosophie*. There’s a symptomatic, deliberate blurring of the distinction between concept and discipline here, hanging on the differently-gendered nouns. Too – the dates of slumber and awakening – unspecified, unnecessary, perhaps unspecifiable. (Sometime after and as a result of May ‘68? With the advent of Thatcher and Reagan? The election of Mitterrand? For reasons of strategy as well as historical responsibility, the event could not be consigned to or saturated by a date.) The “return to philosophy” or “reawakening of the philosophical” would, at least to a degree and for some at least (certainly not for Badiou), flourish practically with the State’s support; and (so the reciprocal fantasy held) a return to or reawakening of the socialist State might practically and conceptually be advanced by philosophy, working at the level and by means of institutions such as the schools, universities, the GREPH, the Collège international de philosophie, and so on.⁹

Badiou’s position concerning this double context is not simple. (Nor is Derrida’s, but that is another story.) As to the first context, the intellectual frame in which “the philosophical” was said to (re)awake in France, in which

the Collège international de philosophie was built, and the frame in which Badiou drafted and held his seminar on "The One." Michael Scott Christofferson has referred to the "anti-totalitarian moment" of the mid-to-late 1970's in France – the moment just preceding these years when much of the French Left, he believes, rejected the most extreme positions of the *soixante-huitards*¹⁰. The "anti-totalitarian moment" had seen the brief fashion of the "nouveaux philosophes," André Glucksmann, Bernard Henri-Lévy, and the score or so of philosophers that the *Nouvel Observateur* and the publishing house Grasset sought to mobilize against a fabulous front of *maîtres penseurs* whose coherence as a front (indebted to the first generation of *maîtres*, Fichte, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche) with shared leftist politics and a shared "post-structural" philosophical stance, indeed a shared conception of "the philosophical" the *nouveaux philosophes* largely produced. Champions in their way of the One – of the tactic of making one figure serve masterfully to represent a multiplicity of divergent thoughts – the *nouveaux philosophes* and their fantasmatic foe of the "moment anti-totalitaire" staged the conflict between visions of singularity or of singularization, since the great and constitutive conflict the moment diagnosed at the heart of *pensée-maîtresse* concerned the function of capital, reflected and inverted in the One of a countervailing state power. This is how Glucksmann sketched that function of singularization, under capital and, correspondingly, in the theoretical language that would serve as its critique, Marxism:

The modern world as a whole is under the sway of a single system of domination: Capital is *the master, the vampire*. More soberly put: capital has only one property, that of bringing together the mass of arms and instruments which it finds before it. Capital assembles them all under its command - that is all that it really accumulates.¹¹

The Parisian academic echo-chamber of the early 1980s, though, could hardly be said to fall under the sway of a single system of domination – indeed it was noisier and more fractious than it had been in perhaps a decade. The idea of a *totalitarian* front formed by *maîtres penseurs* and ephebes seemed ruinously passé, in part because the principal target of the *nouveaux philosophes*, Louis Althusser, had himself passed from public view—for his killing of Hélène Rytman in 1980 and subsequent confinement, and because the group of his students most closely identified with him and his work – Étienne Balibar, for instance, but also Pierre Macherey and Jacques Rancière – had published works establishing them as quite different thinkers from the *maître*. As had of course Alain Badiou, whose study of mathematics and model theory in the middle to late 1960's had already begun to draw a clear line of difference with Althusser and with other of Althusser's students.¹² (In quite a different vein, by 1976 Badiou had completed an arc separating himself from Althusser on the understanding of ideology with his publication, with François Balmès, of *De l'idéologie*.)

Badiou's *Seminar: The One*, then, was held when the *discipline* of philosophy and the *concept* of the "philosophical" in France were manifestly, clamorously, anything *but* One. Major titles published between 1980 and 1984 spoke to very different understandings of "philosophy," the discipline, and "the philosophical," that substance or substantive to which the discipline attended—many barely compatible with one another. (Hence Derrida's compressed formula "de tous côtés:" something, a return or a revival, is announced *on all sides*, from all sides.) Deleuze published *Spinoza - Philosophie pratique* with Éditions de Minuit in 1981, then the two volumes of *Logique de la sensation* with Éditions de la Différence in the same year. Two years later, in 1983, he published the first of the Film books, *L'image-mouvement. Cinéma 1*, with Minuit. Derrida, who was offering his own seminars on "La Raison universitaire" (in 1982-1983), on "Du droit à la philosophie" (1983-1984), and the seminar that became *Geschlecht III* (on Heidegger) at the École Normale Supérieure, published *L'oreille de l'autre* and *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie* in 1983 (Galilée), and in 1984 *Otobiographies. L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre* (also Galilée). The period sees the publication of what are arguably Luce Irigaray's philosophically most important works, *Le Corps à corps avec la mère* (La Pleine lune, 1981), *Passions élémentaires* (Minuit, 1982), *L'Oubli de l'air - chez Martin Heidegger* (Minuit, 1983), *La Croyance même* (Galilée, 1983), and *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Minuit, 1984); Jean-François Lyotard publishes *The differend* in 1983; Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires* in 1981 and *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres* in 1983, both with Fayard. Pierre Bourdieu, elected to the Collège de France in 1981, remains in dialogue with Rancière and with former colleagues from the École des Hauts Études en Sciences Sociales.

As "philosophy" and "the philosophical" seemed to runnel off in many different rivulets in the early 1980's, so the debate regarding the teaching of philosophy, and the institution and the instituting of philosophy in French schools and universities, meshed with a broad program seeking to reform all levels of the national curriculum – from public crèches, primary and elementary schools, to high schools and universities. The so-called Savary reforms to the French education system (after Alain Savary, the Minister of Education) formed part of Mitterrand's ambitious electoral platform. The reforms were debated during the three Mauroy governments (1981-1984) – where they finally took the shape of a "grand service public unifié et laïque de l'éducation nationale" or "grand SPULEN" that would have radically diminished the autonomy of private and religious secondary schools throughout France – but the legislation failed finally to be enacted in 1984, after opposition consolidated on the Right (religious and private schools) and on the Left (to what were seen as the reforms' tepid versions of *laïcité*). Mitterrand withdrew the *loi Savary* in July of 1984, and Savary, followed in brief by the Prime Minister, Pierre Mauroy, resigned shortly after.

By 1983-84 the early promises of Mitterrandisme had indeed largely given way to increased austerity programs, a freeze on nationalization, and (as Badiou's character Pierre Maury, Mauroy's stand-in, puts it in *Antioche*) "Socially responsible downsizing! Unemployment, but only if it's socially responsible! Absolutely socially responsible integration!" ("Plan social! Du chômage, mais social! Une insertion entièrement sociale!"). On March 21, 1983, the "tournant de la rigueur" is announced; the modifier "social" parroted by Maury (and Mauroy in the Assemblée Nationale) itself announced the turn from Mitterrand's *gauchiste* program toward third-way social market economy – *soziale Marktwirtschaft* – in the Christian Democratic vein.

"*Mon cheval pour du social,*" says Badiou's Maury. More fully: "Social responsibility as the life-blood, the ultimate purpose, the entelechy of democratic society as a whole! My horse for social responsibility! [*Le social comme âme, comme finalité, comme entéléchie, de tout le corps démocratique! Mon cheval pour du social.*]" Maury is Pierre Mauroy's stand-in: an "homme politique de gauche," a leftist politician. (Just as the character Paule in *Antioche* is also, among other things, a stand-in for several "Paul's," Christian and Jewish as Kenneth Reinhard has suggested.)¹³ For Mitterrandism post 1983 – and for Maury/Mauroy-ism, its mouthpiece and figure in *Antioche* – "le social" in the years of "tournant de la rigueur" works *comme âme*. As the soul works with regard to the body, so does *le social* work with regard to the social body, *le corps social*. Or it works this way in the register of Christian (Thomist especially) readings of Aristotle for which the soul's immaterial and indivisible sovereignty over the body can serve both to figure Providence, and to found the legitimacy of sovereignty in the human realm. Badiou's character offers – parrots – the schema of the state-market-culture's mystic matrimony – the three-in-One that European post-War Christian Democracy offered when faced with the threat of Socialist revolution.

A covert trinitarianism, a default Thomism, drove and animated the *political*: "*le social comme,*" the *social as* that to which disaggregated and contentious, even conflicting claims could and should be subordinated; from which all should draw value; the *social as* the term or even the empty signifier serving to suture the otherwise threateningly discontinuous field of the state-market-culture. Pierre Maury's expression *le corps démocratique* offers the audience at Badiou's *Antioche* just that, a "democracy" of the body or of *mere* embodiment; a democracy wanting spirit; a democracy requiring one singular, suturing, indivisible – *One* – soul or signifier toward which it tends, as matter tends toward its form, its entelechy, in this case "the social."

We see on offer here, compressed, one avenue toward a *political* and philosophical One: take "the social" as, *comme*, the soul of democracy, and the battle is won; marginal unemployment becomes a necessity ("Du chômage, mais social!"); a degree of inequality can be excused and explained; and the hegemony of the State-market-culture's sovereignty will be naturalized. What

is the operation that *Antioche* carries out with regard to this position? Critique, certainly, of a sort, but what are its specific devices? What is its dramatic toolkit, its genealogy? Right away, theatrically, Badiou runs Pierre Maury/Mauroy's words ("*Mon cheval pour du social*") through those of Shakespeare's notorious theatrical villain (Richard III: "*Mon royaume pour un cheval*," in any of the conventional translations), as well as through those of Sartre's Égisthe, from *Les Mouches*, who also echoes Richard: "Did I say I was sad? I lied. Neither sad nor gay is the desert—a boundless waste of sand under a burning waste of sky. Not sad, nor gay, but sinister. Ah, I'd give my kingdom to be able to shed a tear." (*Ah! je donnerais mon royaume pour verser une larme!*)¹⁴ Let's say, with Nietzsche as regards his *The Gay Science*, that something is announced here – a performance of and an identification with a singular voice, that also discloses an unbridgeable distance from and within that singular voice, and even, we might say, *transvalues* it: "*incipit parodia*, no doubt," *es ist kein Zweifel*, writes Nietzsche.¹⁵ *Antioche* parodies (Latin *parōidia*, Ancient Greek παρωδία [parōidia, "parody"], παρά [pará, "besides"] + ᾠδή [ōidē, "song"]) the Mauroy- Mitterrandiste position. Here – in *Antioche* – the theatrical event works not to express the hegemony of the unitary sovereign, but to the contrary to "vent sarcasm" upon him, as Nietzsche says that Zarathustra does, and thus *parodically* to cleave that position and that figure, to show its always-already operating cleft – to run a counter-voice next-to or through it, to run Maury/Mauroy's words through with the image of a defeated, hollowed-out, deadened sovereign bereft of a kingdom, or possessed of a kingdom he values less, it seems, than one tear.¹⁶ (The counter-voice is Paule-David's; Paule-David offers the formula of a "politics to come" "founded ... on a tautology," and evoking, as the proximity to the dates of the Seminar lead us to expect, Parmenides.¹⁷)

Parody in this Nietzschean sense is the work that Badiou's *Seminar: The One – Descartes, Plato, Kant (1983-1984)* will carry out with respect to the history of Western metaphysics, or rather to the philosophy of that history, or – to be even more precise – to the modern, Cartesian philosophy of the history of metaphysics. Cartesian modernity and the enduring philosophemes it sets in place constitute – especially in France, for the French academy – a sort of ecology that Badiou tasks himself first with facing and redescribing – and then with running-through with an alternative song. In that field Étienne Gilson's work, especially his 1948 *L'Être et l'essence*, serves as *Seminar: The One's* spectral (because unacknowledged) antecedent and antagonist – the Maury/Mauroy to Badiou's Paule-David, a work that served to usher in French neo-Thomist philosophy (the late 20th century reception of Descartes in particular, specifically the work of Jean-Luc Marion) and to shape it as an answer, specifically, to the Plotinian reduction of being to pure essence. This is how Gilson describes Plotinus's rendering of Plato in 1948. (Gilson revised the description significantly four years later, when translating *L'Être et l'essence* into English – but that version is not itself available in French.)

La cosmogonie plotinienne traduit, sous une forme presque tangible, l'inconcevabilité dont souffre l'être lui-même, lorsqu'on le réduit à l'état d'essence pure. L'intellect ne trouve plus alors en lui de quoi le justifier. Il lui faut donc en prononcer la déchéance au bénéfice de quelque autre dont il se déduise; d'où ce paradoxe d'une ontologie où l'être n'est plus l'étoffe dont le réel est fait, puisque au-delà de l'être, et comme à sa source même, il y a ce non-être qu'est l'Un.¹⁸

[Plotinian cosmogony translates, in an almost tangible form, the inconceivability that being itself suffers when reduced to pure essence. The intellect then finds in it nothing that can justify it. It must declare it forfeit to another from which it may be deduced – hence the paradox of an ontology in which being is no longer the fabric from which the real is composed, since beyond being, and as its very source, there is this non-being that is the One.]

It is at this juncture that Badiou's *parody* begins its work – where Gilson forfeits the game rather than dwell either on the parody of the existential proposition, “il y a ce non-être qu'est l'Un,” *there is this non-being that is the One*; or on the form and axiomatic that this “deduction from some other” would have to take. For whereas the paradox of the ontology he signals has, as Gilson mentions, strictly *mystical* solutions (Proclus is, for Gilson, the avenue into modern Platonic mysticism), properly *philosophical* solutions, Gilson maintains, require turning instead, by means of Thomas, to an Aristotelian consideration of substance, attribution, accidentality, and – eventually – modern mereology.¹⁹

This is not the direction that Badiou will take. In order to get under way himself and to face, redescribe, and set aside the great and influential tradition of Thomist, Cartesian modernity that Gilson represents and mobilizes, he begins his seminar offering his readers a very different account of Descartes. “Tout se joue,” writes Badiou in *Being and Event*, as if directly addressing Gilson, “dans la maîtrise de l'écart entre la supposition (qu'il faut rejeter) d'un être de l'un, et la thèse de son 'il y a'" (“Everything turns on mastering the gap between the presupposition [that must be rejected] of a being of the one and the thesis of its 'there is.'”)²⁰ Rather than presuppose or supposit the existence-beyond-being of the non-being, the One, as antecedent (“comme à sa source même”) to the being of the beings we can count *as being*, Badiou places the operation counts-as-One in and as the name of the dynamic of mastering the gap, *la maîtrise de l'écart*. (It is hard to count the name of this operation *as one*: in this phrase of Badiou's, for instance, I hear or see, anagrammatically, Meister Eckhart's name; I see or hear Descartes, too.) What is counted-as-one, or *for one* (the French *pour* allows both senses), is the multiple; or, since the use of the definite article “the” seems captious (“the” multiple surely means a single multiple, that is, *one* multiple, a multiple already counted as one), multiplicity; or (since “multiplicity” is a *single* concept, thus as above), just what's more-than-one. The discomfort we may

feel sorting out just what this "more than one" is that is to be counted-as-one has a hoary ancestry: it arises from the first problems addressed *as* problems in philosophy (the problem, so-called, of "the one and the many," or the question, "what is the proper mode of being of one constituted by manifold?"). (And it concerns how, if at all, we can without contradiction formulate the question, "Are philosophical problems, problems *for* some one thing called 'philosophy,' *part* of philosophy?") From pre-Socratic formulas this train of questions and attendant discomfort find their way eventually into the heart of Scholastic debates concerning the nature of the Trinity and into contemporary mereology (Leśniewski, Leonard and Goodman, Lewis and many others).

The mereological problem has a well-know basic form. The table at which René Descartes sits to compose the *Meditations*, Badiou's first topic (to take an example that's simultaneously at hand and massively overdetermined), is both *one*, one table; *and* a collection of many parts composing it (legs, screws or pegs, glue, top, etc.). So, we might say, is a "seminar" consisting of sixteen sessions both *one* seminar *and* a collection of complete sessions, each of which is also not-whole, in being part of the seminar. Or to back up and take my own example: there is "*le philosophique*" and "*la philosophie*" to which France circa 1982-1983 "everywhere returns." "*Le philosophique*" and "*la philosophie*" in France (etc.) are *not* just *one* (one discipline, a single concept, practice, agreed set of protocols, common history, whatever constitutes the "one"-ness of "philosophy"), as Descartes' table is not just one (it is "one" *and*). Neither is any of a table's parts one, or a discipline or a substance (philosophy...): they are both *one* (one leg, screw, etc.) *and* "part" (of a table); they are *one and* (very obviously, in Derrida's words, "*Le philosophique*" *and* "*la philosophie*"). And every intervention that participates in the return-to or awakening-of these is as above: both *one and* part (participant-in). This way of phrasing the problem of the *one*, or of the one-ness of the multiple, flows from a number of confusions the concept lends itself to, cropping up at different levels – a confusion between wholeness, self-identity, and numerability; confusion regarding the expression "its parts," which supposes an unspecified and prior relation between the terms "table" or "intervention" and "parts"; confusion regarding *composition* (is "being composed of X" a quality additional to a whole? Of what sorts of elements is this necessarily, accidentally, or contingently true? The matter has been non-trivially debated since Aristotle.)

This, which brings us to contemporary mereological approaches to the ancient problem, is not the form that interests Badiou. The operation counts-as-one takes place as it were *before* we distinguish this table or that from its legs, its screws or pegs or any of its many parts, or before we distinguish "*Le philosophique*" *and* "*la philosophie*" from whatever counts as a "philosophical" intervention at one or another moment. To put it slightly more formally, the operation counts-as-one takes place before we predicate

anything l of any T , including that l is "a part" of or participates in T ; or, of T , that it is such a thing as "has parts" or "bears composition," or, even more basically, indeed most basically, of any T , that anything, including existence or non-existence, is predicable of it: that "given T " or "if T " or "there is T " are *themselves* well-formed expressions. About T , all that can or need be said at this point is that it is a place holder for discontinuous multiplicity whose singularity will be determined as a result, as an effect, or better as the operation counts-as-one. In all this, "before" has a structural sense rather than a temporal one (the operation counts-as-one is not antecedent to there being One), though a chronology may be superimposed upon the structure. And nor should the *force* of the gesture be ignored. Badiou's goal, he says, is "To put in question the central metaphysical concept – the One – which connotes in general the existence of God, and to replace it [*la remplaceur*] with the operation named 'count-as-one,' which is nothing more than a particular, and secondary, determination of the multiple." The *deposition* of the central metaphysical concept does not replace it with another concept (substance, noun, name), but with an operation that takes place in, and as, a situation.²¹ The gesture, which, as Badiou's *Seminar* shows, is as old as the problem, is one of *mastery*; of *mastering*. Incomplete, the gesture of mastering the gap – *écart* – between the Scholastic *supposition* (which can, indeed *must* be, rejected as *merely* supposititious) and the Greek *thesis*, posing or positing, what is axiomatically affirmed – spins off, in its impatience, nothing less than the figures of subjectivity from Descartes to Kant. Counting-for-one is "mastering the gap between presupposing [or supposing, or suppositing] a being of the one and the thesis of its 'there is.'" This "mastering" takes place throughout the history of mathematics, in and alongside the history of such determinate circumstances as the publication of *Antioche* or the dictation of the Seminar "The One," or the parodic "return to" or "reawakening of" "*le philosophique*" and "*la philosophie*" in Paris at a certain date. "Mastering" takes place as the formal event that this referential circuit parodies, the circuit of reference to determinate events happening on certain dates, with the introduction of the "absolute purity" of the empty-set operator "and on the absolute absence of any determination," with the discovery-invention-event that allows "Being to be non-represented in mathematical discursivity," Badiou says. (32) "Ontology" is what *then*, catching up with itself at the point where it masters the difference between these two sorts of events, the "absolutely pure" and the determinate, determining, circumstantial event, "builds determinations from non-determination. It is what's built from the indeterminacy (of the empty set), and what organizes this very indeterminacy in the network of the One and the multiple."

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- ¹Alain Badiou, *Seminar: The One - Descartes, Plato, Kant (1983-1984)* (Paris: Fayard, 2016). See also Badiou's seminar on the Infinite, *Séminaire: L'Infini - Aristote, Spinoza, Hegel (1984-1985)* (Paris: Fayard, 2016). Both Seminars were held between the dates of appearance of Badiou's *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: 1982; English tr. Bruno Bosteels, *Theory of the Subject* [New York: Continuum, 2009]), and the work for which he is best known, *L'Être et l'Événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988; English tr. Oliver Feltham, *Being and Event* (New York: Continuum, 2005).
- ²Alain Badiou, *The Incident at Antioch/L'Incident D'Antioche* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6-7.
- ³Alain Badiou, "Français," in Barbara Cassin et al., eds., *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (Paris: Seuil, 2004). In English, "French," in Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood, eds., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Cassin's comments ten years on, in Barbara Cassin, "L'énergie des intraduisibles - La traduction comme paradigme pour des sciences humaines," in Barbara Cassin, ed. *Philosopher en langues: Les intraduisibles en traduction* (Paris: Rue d'Ulm/ENS, 2014), 10. In English, Barbara Cassin, "The Energy of the Untranslatables: Translation as a Paradigm for the Human Sciences," *Paragraph* 38 (2):145-158 (2015). See also Cassin's "Traduire les intraduisibles, un état des lieux," *Cliniques méditerranéennes* 2014/2 (n° 90), 25-36.
- ⁴An important recent contribution to the literature on the subject of the One, in Stathis Gourgouris's *The Perils of the One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), offering, in Gurgouris's words, an answer to the question how to produce "otherness" "without presupposing a transcendent standpoint that enables it – even in *potential* – and at the same time without producing (performing) a semblance or assumption of a transcendental point as a result; that is, neither a transcendental end point (*telos*) nor a transcendent point as a priori (*arche*) (enabling, potential) of alteration." (xiii-xiv).
- ⁵On Badiou's "theory of points" (in *Logics of Worlds*) see recently Alexander Galloway, "Mathification," *Diacritics* 47:1 (2019), pp. 96-115, especially 101-106.
- ⁶See Peter Hallward's account of Descartes' importance for Badiou's thought in Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Hallward's book – with which I have some deep differences – remains to my mind indispensable for approaching Badiou's work.
- ⁷« Rapport présenté le 30 septembre 1982 à M. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, ministre d'État, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Industrie, par François Châtelet, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Pierre Faye, Dominique Lecourt ». Reprinted in *Le rapport bleu - Les sources historiques et théoriques du Collège international de philosophie*, ed. Jacques Derrida, Jean-Pierre Faye, François Châtelet (Paris: PUF, 1998), and as "Titres," in Jacques Derrida, *Du Droit à la Philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990, 551- 576). The institutional history of the College International de Philosophie, in Isabelle Alfandary, "Un Collège sans condition," *Rue Descartes* 2020:1 (97), 94 -105. Badiou's reflection on the Collège, in his "What is a Philosophical Institution? Or: Address, Transmission, Inscription," tr. A. J. Bartlett. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 2 (1-2), 2006. Online at:
<https://www.cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/26/52>
 The French original is in Alain Badiou, *Conditions* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 83-90.
- ⁸Reinhard, "Badiou's Theatre: A Laboratory for Thinking," *Antioche* vii. The literature describing the new context—political, economic, academic, social, religious—of the Mitterrand moment is immense and fractious. I have found my bearings with these works among others: Anthony Daley

The Mitterrand Era: Policy Alternatives and Political Mobilization in France (London: Macmillan, 1996); Alain Bergounioux and Gérard Grunberg, "L'Union de la gauche et l'ère Mitterrand (1965-1995)" in Jean-Jacques Becker, éd., *Histoire des gauches en France. Volume 2* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), pp. 275-294; Antoine Prost, "La loi Savary: les raisons d'un échec," in Serge Hurtig, éd., *Alain Savary: politique et honneur* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2002), pp. 261-286; Denis Pelletier, Jean-Louis Schlegel (dir.), *À la gauche du Christ. Les chrétiens de gauche en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris, Seuil, 2012; 2015);

⁹ Alain Badiou et al. *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

¹⁰ Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), especially pp. 184-228. Derrida's synoptic position regarding Marxism in these years is different from Christofferson's. Among the circumstances that favor the sort of thought that the CIPh will advocate he lists "Un certain retrait massif et récent des orthodoxies marxistes. » This « retrait » «a donné lieu dans les démocraties occidentales à deux mouvements apparemment contradictoires mais qui tous deux prennent la forme d'une sorte de poussée philosophique : a. Revenir simplement à des axiomatiques philosophiques que telle orthodoxie marxiste semblait avoir périmées, disqualifiées, ou du moins réduites à un silence intimidé. b. Tenir compte de ce retrait du marxisme et de ses conditions politiques comme d'un phénomène signifiant, certes, mais qui, loin d'être enregistré comme un acte de décès ou une page tournée dans un journal des modes philosophiques, doit provoquer une réélaboration rigoureuse de l'héritage de Marx, et une plus grande ouverture à des problématiques modernes contre lesquelles il s'était souvent protégé. Ces réexamens et ce nouveau débat, avec le marxisme ou en lui, peuvent et doivent prendre des formes originales dans la France d'aujourd'hui." (*Du Droit...*, 556-557)

¹¹ André Glucksmann, *The Master Thinkers*, tr. Brian Pearce (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 214. A complementary account of the *nouveaux philosophes'* rise, in Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 40.

¹² Badiou, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, ed. and tr. Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho (Melbourne: re.press, 2007).

¹³ Reinhard, *Antioche*, xxii

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mouches* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), II.4, p 192. The English, from Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Flies and In Camera*, tr. Stuart Gilbert (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946), II.2, p. 67.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, tr. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4. The German, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (Leipzig: Fritzsche Verlag, 1887), v. For Nietzsche's, and Badiou's, conception of parody (especially as it is understood in France in the post-war period), the arc formed by Pierre Klossowski's immensely influential article, "Nietzsche, le polythéisme et la parodie," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 63: 2/3 (1958), 325-348, translated as "Nietzsche, Polytheism and Parody," *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* 14 (2): 2004, 82-119; and his presentation at the Royaumont conference on Nietzsche in 1964 ("Oubldans l'expérience vécue de l'éternel retour du même" and especially his "Circulus vitiosus," first presented at the conference "Nietzsche, aujourd'hui? », Cerisy, 1972, which turned (again) on the question of *parody*, and in specific and as was made clear in the extraordinary debates that followed the paper (among Fauzia Assad-Mikhaïl, Deleuze, Derrida, and Klossowski especially), the question whether, as Derrida phrased it in the discussion of "Circulus vitiosus," Klossowski's thesis that "parody could become political, and that it was, ultimately, subversive." Derrida went on to ask whether a distinction should not be drawn between "[T]wo kinds of parody: the one which, on the pretext of being subversive, takes the risk of establishing a political order (which very much likes a certain type of parody and finds its own confirmation there) and, on the other

hand, a parody which can really deconstruct the political order? Is there a form of parody which actually marks the body politic, in contrast to a parody which would be a parody of a parody, which would play upon the surface of the political order, playfully teasing [*chahuter*] rather than destroying it?" Two avenues open here in the French reception of Nietzsche, and in the conceptualization of parody, after Klossowski: one "which can really deconstruct the political order," and to which Derrida's work, and Deleuze's, and Badiou's *Antioche* and *Seminar: The One* belong; the other, expressed in much the same terms as Badiou will imagine it but with considerably different, because radically *humanistic*, philosophical and political consequences, the "parody of a parody" (Derrida) which merely "plays upon the surface of the political order." This "parody of a parody" might be represented, for instance, by François Warin's *Nietzsche et Bataille: la parodie à l'infini* (Paris: PUF 1994), 16-22, especially 16-17: "Une *mimesis* sans modèle ou sans exemplarité, telle est sans doute la portée et l'enjeu de la notion de parodie qui joue déjà chez Nietzsche un rôle considérable. La parodie peut sembler d'abord être relative à un modèle dont elle est comme le double grotesque, l'imitation dérisoire, le modèle trompeuse. Mais la parodie a le pouvoir redoutable d'affecter son modèle, de dénoncer dans l'essence l'apparence, de révéler dans le modèle la copie de telle sorte qu'au terme, il n'y a plus ni premier ni seconde, ni fondement ni fonde et que s'effacent ordre et hiérarchie dans un effondrement généralisé sous la domination unique de l'image et du simulacre... C'est en introduisant dans la philosophie le jeu de l'homme de théâtre, le jeu parodique de l'acteur ou du comédien que Nietzsche se libère de la métaphysique, c'est à dire d'abord de la tyrannie de l'identique."

¹⁶ Sartre, *Les Mouches*, II.4, p 192: "ÉGISTHE: Je vais, je viens, je sais crier d'une voix forte, je promène partout ma grande apparence terrible, et ceux qui m'aperçoivent se sentent coupables jusqu'aux moelles. Mais je suis une coque vide."

¹⁷ *Antioche*, 15: "PAULA: The politics of the future initially only involves giving shape and substance to its own formulation. Politics is about uniting people around a political vision, free from the mind control exerted by the State. Don't ask anything more of me than that circle, which is the circle of any thinking at its inception. We're founding a new era on a tautology. That's only natural. Parmenides laid the foundation for philosophy for two thousand years merely by declaring, with the requisite clarity, that Being is, and that not-Being is not." See Badiou's reflections on *Antioche*, and on the nature of political organization in the exhaustion of the Mitterrand era, in *L'hypothèse communiste* (Paris: Lignes, 2009), 20-28.

¹⁸ Étienne Gilson, *L'Etre et l'essence* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), 48, my translation. When Gilson publishes his second, corrected and enlarged English translation (in 1952) he makes a substantial change to this passage, which now reads: "Thus, being begins only after the One, in and with the supreme Intelligence, so much so that, in Plotinus' own words, 'The Intelligence is identical with being.' In these words Plotinus is merely restating or, rather, quoting once more the oracle once issued by old Parmenides: 'To be and to know are one and the same thing.' True enough, Plotinus is here doing more than repeating Parmenides, but the Plotinian hardening of the formula merely sets in relief the intrinsic necessity which it entailed from its very origin. The doctrine of Plotinus clearly shows, to point of making it almost tangible, that, where being is posited as existentially neutral, it cannot play the part of a first principle, Q.E.D." Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), 27-28.

¹⁹ The indispensable link in this story is furnished by Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*, esp. the concluding Chapter 6 touching on "in what way there are essences in accidents, having said already how essences are found in all types of substances." In *Medieval Sourcebook: Thomas Aquinas: On Being and Essence*, Robert T. Miller, tr. Online at:

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/aquinas-esse.asp#n2>

²⁰ *Being and Event* (23E, 31F). The translation of *supposition* as "presupposition" obscures Scholastic antecedents as well as the active sense of the term; suppositing or sup-posing is preferable.

- ²¹ Lucid accounts of the concept of “situation,” in Badiou’s interview with Bruno Bosteels “Can Change be Thought?” in Gabriel Riera (ed.), *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 252-253; in Zachary Luke Fraser’s “Introduction” to *The Concept of Model*, pp. 35ff; Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens, “An Introduction to Alain Badiou’s Philosophy,” in Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. and tr. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 9-13.