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Foreword



Alain Badiou (1937-)

This special issue on the thought of Alain Badiou edited by Kent den Heyer presents the relevance and significance of one of France's most distinguished living philosophers: a student of Althusser, formerly chair of philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure, author of more than twenty books, and a thinker in the Marxist tradition. As an Athusserian Marxist strongly influenced by Lacan, Badiou engaged in fierce debates with both Deleuze and Lyotard in the 1970s. Badiou's (2005) Being and Event translated into English seventeen years after its original French publication indicates something of the cultural delay in the reception of work in the English-speaking world. significance, it has been compared monumental Heidegger's Being and Time and Deleuze's Difference and metaphysical outlook and also its *Repetition* in its willingness to engage with fundamental ontology on the basis of modern set theory with the famous formulation 'mathematics = ontology' (p. 4), which is not a thesis that suggests being is mathematical but rather declares what is expressible of being, and thus is a thesis about discourse. This is also, after structuralism and poststructuralism, some would say a reengagement with the philosophy of the subject and in this sense already a thesis important for politics, art and education, as a number of the contributors to this collection indicate.

As the biography posted on the Faculty Page at the European Graduate School where Badiou teaches notes:

Trained as a mathematician, Alain Badiou is one of the most original French philosophers today. Influenced by Plato, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze, he is an outspoken critic of both the analytic as well as the postmodern schools of thoughts. His philosophy seeks to expose and make sense of the potential of radical innovation (revolution, invention, transfiguration) in every situation.

Unlike many of those schooled in the anti-humanist principles of Louis Pierre Althusser and Jacques Lacan, Alain Badiou has never been tempted to celebrate the apparent end of philosophy, to question the possibility of metaphysics, or to qualify the classical attributes of truth: rigor, clarity, and eternity.

Badiou is someone who positions himself against the tide of anti-Platonism. Johannes Thumfart (2008) helpfully indicates:

Badiou writes that today's most important political and theoretical values – Becoming (Nietzsche), Language (Wittgenstein), Sociality (Marx), Existence (Sartre), Process (Heidegger) and Political Pluralism (Popper) – can be identified by their differing forms of modern Anti-Platonisms.

The most influential inconsistency is probably the analytical philosophers' Anti-Platonism. Wittgenstein and Carnap especially attacked Plato because of his granting an eternal and unchangeable status to mathematical objects. Badiou notes that the analytical project of reducing all properties of mathematical and other objects

of formal language to mere conventions is still to be debated and that the analytical philosophers too quickly eliminated any idealistic concept of language. The Anti-Platonism of analytical philosophy must, therefore, be rethought (http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?p=64).

Badiou is also someone who has increasingly found himself surrounded by controversy: for his publication in 2005 of 'The Uses of the Word "Jew"' and more recently for his *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (Badiou, 2008). He appeared recently on the BBC program HardTalk where he was interviewed about his support for 'communism' replying that that the mere fact that the 'first attempts' to achieve communism 'failed' does not in any way amount to a proving of the idea itself to be false or in itself impossible to reach. Ramsey (2009) reviewing his interview positively taking Badiou's comment—'Never accept something as legitimate [just] because it is dominant'—as a starting point to suggest:

Badiou has done brilliant work exposing the contradictions, limitations, and hypocrisies that are embedded in dominant modes of contemporary thought, (including electoralism, liberal multiculturalism, and humanitarianism, including the discourse of human rights). 5

While undoubtedly an important and influential philosopher and certainly one that also belongs in a special issue for this book, it is also the case that Badiou is written little on education. As Thomas Petersen and other contributors acknowledge it is only in the essay 'Art and Philosophy' from Handbook of Inaesthetics, that Badiou addresses education directly discussing the link between art and philosophy in terms of the 'pedagogical theme', which has collapsed. I shall not repeat the analysis better performed by the contributors except to note that Badiou declares 'the only education is an education by truths'. As A. J. Bartlett (2006:

53) comments, in this light Badiou invents a threefold analytical schema:

The didactic schema operates a pedagogy of surveillance, the romantic, a pedagogy of authentic identity as alienation, and the classical, a pedagogy of public service or state ethics. Thus, we can say, subtracting from otherwise occupied Badiou's assessment. that surveillance. identity. and ethics the make pedagogical forms inherent to the 'saturated' 20th century.

And he goes on to comment:

On Badiou's terms, education is that which makes the necessary arrangements for the manifestation of truths which are not opinions and which signify therefore the for some other. (political possibility new configuration. In fact using Badiou's analysis it is not going to [sic] far to claim that as our democracies are manifestations of the organized rule of opinion then the state system of education for which our democracies are responsible is without truth, without thought, and thus cannot operate other than as either 'oppressive or perverted' or indeed as both (p. 54).

Here is a trenchant critique of state education every bit as forceful as Freire's 'banking' concept and one that teaches us that to educate is to transform, as Barlett (2006) remarks:

Thus education amounts to either 'being' or, 'to have been' transformed. The questions, of course, are: by what, from what, to what? Is it by the state whose goal is perpetuation and whose method thereby is predicated on meiosistic repetition or, in Althusser's more 'structural' terms reproduction (of the relations of production)? Or is it by truths and thus to be transformed without predicate, educated without? (p. 58)

I am grateful to Kent den Heyer for organizing and editing this special and to him and his contributors for gracing the book with the work and analysis of Badiou's philosophy.

Notes

- <u>1</u>. Photo credit is from the Faculty Page at the European Graduate School which lists his works including online works and also secondary sources at http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/biography/.
- 2. Badiou trained as a mathematician and he refers and uses Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory with the axiom of choice which is a standard axiomatic and foundation for mathematics, founded on a single primitive ontological notion namely that all individuals in the universe of discourse are sets. Axiom 9 is drawn from axioms 1–8 and is known as the 'axiom of choice' formulated by Ernst Zermelo in 1904 roughly to suggest that any collection of bins, each containing at least one object, it is possible to make a selection of exactly one object from each bin, even if there is an infinite number of bins and there is no 'rule' for which object to pick from each. See the entry on set theory by Thomas Jech (2002) at

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/set-theory/.

- 3. See http://www.lacan.com/badword.htm.
- 4. See http://video.google.com/videoplay?
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 docid=7936414602517427743&ei=57uRSqzxM6PE2wLBr6
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- <u>5</u>. See http://www.khukuritheory.net/j-ramsey-thoughts-on-badious-hardtalk-interview/.

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Introduction: Alain Badiou: 'Becoming subject' to education

KENT DEN HEYER

Welcome to this book thinking education through the work of the French philosopher, Alain Badiou. Since 2000, the increased pace of translating Badiou's books written in the 1980s and '90s into English has created growing interest. Current attention suggests that Badiou will soon join Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas as another major French philosophical influence on Anglo-American scholarship (Gibson, 2006). Indeed, given the traffic in English translation of his work and the number of special issues attempting to come to terms with what his work might mean for a diverse range of scholarly fields—including this one, the first to examine Badiou in relation to education—we might say he has already arrived.

If Badiou has 'caught on' outside education, it might be explained by the 'affirmative' thrust of his thought that freshly affronts the doxa both of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy and more popular media-ated interpretations of the broader context within which we think. As part of his philosophical intervention into this present situation—and for Badiou all 'live thought' constitutes a militant's intervention—Badiou first describes contemporary philosophy—'hermeneutics' and 'post-modern' approaches being his favorite targets—as but a form of 'conservatism with a good conscience' (Badiou, 2001, p. 14). He asserts

that the categories dominating contemporary philosophical work—of the Other, of difference, of language's trickster nature—lead either to a quasi-theology or observations of the obvious. In any case, and most importantly, Badiou argues that the categories of contemporary philosophy lack any ethical capacity to support people's potential to affirmatively invent 'the possibility of new possibilities' (Badiou, cf. in Cho & Lewis, 2005).

These claims are part of Badiou's broader project to rethink contemporary political subjectivity in an age he asserts is awash in a relativism on the one hand— in which every opinion is equal to every other—and run aground on an alleged 'end of history/Washington consensus' on the other in which each opinion is equally irrelevant to alter a situation dominated by political appeals to economic necessity. In support of people's capacities to affirmatively invent new realities, Badiou rehabilitates a concept of 'truths'. Let me briefly provide a brief overview of Badiou's work given better detail in each of this book's chapters.

Badiou. 'truths' are not actualities to acquire. properties of interlocking social regimes, temporalized ideals or authenticities, derivable from moral precepts, or facts entrapped within any dialectic (Balibar, 2004). As he interprets, a 'truth'—or, rather, a generic 'truth-process'—is absent of pre-specified content (as articulated by any number of religious orders or present appeals for our necessity to believe in the 'free hand' of the Market) or destination (as with a 'scientific' Marxist interpretation of history). This interpretation of truth is also unrelated to any communitarian identification race-thinking. (e.a. nationalisms, gender, sexual rientations). Rather, truths consist of the material traces (i.e. in speech, art, and social movements) a 'becoming subject' produces in 'fidelity' to a singular 'truth-process' instigated by an 'event'. It is for these situated truth-processes that Badiou argues ethics