

# Interview with Alain Badiou: A Renewed Universality

**Crisis and Critique:** First of all, we would like to briefly ask you about the current situation of your work. The “Being and Event” trilogy - with its precursor “Theory of the Subject” -, which forms one of the very few contemporary systems of and in philosophy is complete. This year, 2025, you ended your public seminar of, overall, over forty years (you had ended it once in 2017 and began it again in 2021). You ended the seminar with a quote from Pindar, from the *Nemean Odes*, which you took as formulating a maxim that allows to account for how to maintain the difficult unity of any philosophy (a unity that is established on the basis of the effects that its conditions - art, politics, love and science - have on it and its relation to the history of philosophy itself). You proposed that there is a maxim for how to uphold the unity of philosophy despite its unavoidable inner multiplicity. This maxim reads in English - we here translate from the French version you use: “What we saw in front of us / is exactly what we hoped to say / at its highest level.” Could you say a sentence or two about why this is the maxim of (the unity of) philosophy? What does it mean for you that Pindar - a poet - has the last word (in your seminar)?<sup>1</sup>

**Alain Badiou:** I do not take philosophy to be a unity of transcendental consciousness, but always as conditioned by a singular multiplicity, of which the primitive form can be traced back to the contemporary figures of the constituting givens that are science, love, politics and art.

The unity of a philosophical proposition is always discernible in this multiplicity that, in my language, is called, the multiplicity of truth procedures. One can therefore say also that, rather than speaking of a truth of philosophy, one must speak of its active existence in a multiplicity of the truths resulting from these procedures. Philosophy is therefore an activity of thought, so that the traversal of the multiple of truths produces singular concepts. This is also, as I want to say in passing, the reason as to why philosophy merges with its history and works within its history – from ancient Greek thought to the contemporary constructions. Philosophy is thus engaged in each moment in the operations that consists in traversing the multiple in favour of a singularity: “What we saw in front of us / is exactly what we hoped to say / at its highest level.”

This is what explains why philosophy is, in a certain sense, contemporary with its entire history – which is expressed in the formulas: “philosophy *is* the history of philosophy” or equally “philosophy is timeless / untimely.”

To practice philosophy therefore always involves, with regard to a question addressed to it, the construction of a

dialectical operation, unitary in the multiplicity, and contemporary in history – so that philosophy is the discipline of through which is simultaneously untimely and immediately present to / in the world.

You construct philosophy with the help of philosophy, bringing its ancient forms back to this presence.

Leaving the last word to the poet springs from a dialectical determination of philosophy which concerns, more fundamentally, the relation of its creative identity to the set of human thought, in its history. Everyone has experienced a philosophy resorting to something that is not itself, often, it is inscribed in between the poem and the matheme. One is tempted to call philosophy that which is capable of treating the poem like a theorem (which also means a truth) or, encore, a theorem as a poem (which also means a creation).

**CC:** It seems to us that what you have repeatedly described as the non-world of capital is linked to specific forms of obscurantism. Frank Ruda recently tried, following your work, to analyze “the automatic subject”, which for Marx is famously another designation of capital, as what you call an “obscure subject” (insofar as capital seeks to bring history to a halt by seemingly suspending all possibilities for change and brings with it all the regressive effects that are linked to what you call “generic fascism” that we witness almost everywhere today). You once suggested to escape the dominance of obscurantism, we must “create a symbol of... humanity that exists beyond itself”, “a heroic figure”; because heroism, for you, describes the appearance of what takes humanity “beyond the natural limits of the human animal”, something inhuman within the human. It is a new symbolic form of and for collective action. Do you see elements or traces of such a novel symbolic heroic figure emerging anywhere today?

**Badiou:** It is difficult to answer this question because philosophy, from the point of view of its actual history, has always had to deal with a threatening figure of human history. This is only saying that, in one form or another, perhaps particularly clear in Plato, Descartes, or Hegel, philosophy is also the grasping and critique of the misfortune that takes hold of the dominant thinking of its epoch. This is the case today, where we are threatened with a complete disorientation, a symptom of which is the desire to reduce thought to a mechanical construct. As was the case in the Middle Ages with the transformation of philosophy into religious belief, a threat that also shaped its critical task.

Today, the negative figure that stands in the way of the creative development of a new symbolic that would take humanity beyond its animal limits is undoubtedly the force of identitarianism. So, if there is anything new and heroic, it lies in the resolute criticism of this figure and the proposal of a renewed universality.

**CC:** If philosophy, since Socrates, has been an - always risky - attempt to corrupt the youth, i.e. to alienate them from the dominant opinions and somehow give them back to themselves, what are for you, today, the best ways of doing so? What are the best modes of, maybe we could risk saying in line with you once describing philosophy as creative repetition, creatively corrupting the youth today?

**Badiou:** Any contemporary example of philosophical corruption of youth conforms to what has just been said.

**CC:** You announced with the end of the seminar, you will devote yourself rather to writing than to public exchanges. What are you writing right now (there are rumours that a book on communism might be in the making - probably taking up your account of capitalism as belonging to the Neolithic age - but we are not sure if these rumours are true)? There is also a book on the concept of nature coming out soon. What can we be looking forward to in the more or less nearby future?

**Badiou:** It would be absurd to commit to projects that I don't know at this point whether they will exist.

Thank you, dear friend.

Translated by Frank Ruda

<sup>1</sup> Part of this question was inspired by a question Daniel Barry and Jan Weise once raised in an interview with Alain Badiou that has never taken place.