

# On the Young Badiou – Questions of Theory

Jan Weise

**Abstract:** The article reconstructs Alain Badiou's early engagement with Louis Althusser through a close reading of his 1967 review "The (Re)Commencement of Dialectical Materialism." The analysis seeks to delineate how the (re-) can be conceived as a specific form of repetition. By tracing how Badiou diagnoses the erasure of the epistemological cut in the Marxist tradition, the article argues that his early intervention simultaneously reconstructs and exceeds the Althusserian framework.

**Keywords:** Louis Althusser; Post-Hegelianism; (Re)commencement; Epistemological cut; Dialectical materialism;

*...la philosophie n'est que la repetition pulsionnelle de ce >rien<...*  
– Louis Althusser<sup>1</sup>

### **To begin: The crisis of *Critique***

Relatively recently, Alain Badiou encapsulated his intellectual endeavor in the slogan: "Re-commence, somewhere else, in another way, but re-commence."<sup>2</sup> If we wish to return to the point where everything (re) began for Badiou,<sup>3</sup> we must start with his extraordinary article "The (Re) Commencement of Dialectical Materialism," published in 1967 in the prestigious journal *Critique*, founded by Georges Bataille.<sup>4</sup>

This text is extraordinary for several reasons – let us name just a few. On a first, anecdotal level, what stands out is that it immediately provoked controversy. Yet this controversy did not – contrary to what one might expect – come from the author under review, Louis Althusser, whose work is assessed in a far from uniformly positive manner. Quite the opposite: Althusser embraced Badiou's text with enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup>

Instead, polemics arose from the editorial board of *Critique* and was not motivated by a primary dispute over the content, but rather over the form of the text: Badiou's review tested the implicit norms upon which *Critique* itself was founded – and did so to such an extent that it placed the journal *Critique* itself in a critical condition.<sup>6</sup> Put briefly: Badiou's review raised fundamental questions about the very form of the review and of critique itself, as well as about the stance of *Critique* as a revue. This was due primarily to its "unappealing" (Roland Barthes) polemical tone toward his contemporaries – mainly towards Foucault, who invited Badiou to write the review in the first place and although ferociously attacked insisted on the rapid publication of the text.<sup>7</sup> As Jacques Derrida, another editor, noted, what is so "irritating" are the "grades" that Badiou distributes, "as on the day of the general inspection or the Last Judgment."<sup>8</sup> And the list of those graded is indeed long and almost a complete enumeration of the intellectual landscape of France back then: Lucien Goldmann, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Sartre, Derrida himself, Michel Serres, Lévi-Strauss and Michel

Foucault. Yet both Barthes and Derrida insisted that Badiou's article be published because of its "exceptional quality of thinking" (again Barthes)<sup>9</sup> and its philosophical significance – thus separating tone from content, which is remarkable given how central questions of style and tone were for both these thinkers. So, because the article far exceeded the usual scope and expectations of a review, Badiou's text not only problematized the genre of the review itself, but also compelled the editors to acknowledge the necessity of its publication: its quality was simply so high that they could not not publish it, despite their disregard for it.

The exceptional quality of the essay lies, in Althusser's own words, "both in its rigour and in its richness."<sup>10</sup> In barely thirty pages, Badiou not only reconstructs with insight and precision the complex line of argumentation in two of Althusser's major texts, but does so by reframing them within his own conceptual terms. The article thus constitutes a powerfully original intervention in its own right, advancing several independent conceptual proposals – or, as Althusser again puts it: "There are at least twenty other 'ideas' of importance, and even more important ones, in your text—ininitely more important ones."<sup>11</sup>

What is lastly astonishing about the text and what will form the departure point for the following reflections is another feature of the text, which may have escaped the attention of careful readers precisely because it is so impossible to overlook: the title. What immediately stands out: Although Badiou claims in a different context that he "never concealed anything [he has] done or written [...], but [that he] believe[s] that everything that was public should remain so",<sup>12</sup> it is precisely in this text – and to the best of my knowledge this is the only case –, in which he not only left out two of the conceptually most innovative pages, but of which he also altered the title for the republication from "The (re-) commencement of *dialectical*" to "The (re-)commencement of *historical materialism*"<sup>13</sup> – which is, as we will see no minor difference but rather a difference that makes all the difference.

But is this observation not pedantic and obsessively precise? After all, is not "the title [...] really a trifling thing [?] What is easier to change than the title?"<sup>14</sup> – as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing already had it.

Apart from the fact that it has been changed, the title itself raises many questions: When discussing why Badiou speaks of "(re) commencement" – a term which is only mentioned two times in the text itself, without any further comment<sup>15</sup> – two explanations are usually given: On the one hand, this is clearly a re-formulation of Althusser's slogan of a return to Marx. On the other hand, reference is usually made to Bachelard and to the fact that Badiou committed himself to a rationalist position from the outset. Although both explanations are indeed correct, the perhaps all too obvious question of why Badiou changes the expression almost imperceptibly – by a minimal difference – from Bachelard on the supposedly superficial level of graphics is never

asked: Why the brackets?<sup>16</sup> Is this difference from Bachelard, indicated by the interpunctuation marks, a supplement, an extension or simply an accentuation? Is it just a question of emphasis, of style and rhetoric? Are we dealing here, to use Badiou's vocabulary, with a category, a notion or a concept?<sup>17</sup> Simply put: What do the prefix "re-" mean? What does the marks "()" "indicate"? Posed in more fundamentally: Are these brackets *really* marks? Do they really *indicate* anything at all?

Without venturing too far into the realm of the paratextual research of titology, we can categorise the title, which is part and not-part of the text, as thematic:<sup>18</sup> The title functions like a metacommentary that, to speak in Althusserian parlance, is a question in the form of an answer. So asked again: What does it mean for dialectical materialism to (re)commence with Althusser? What renders this modification of Bachelard all the more questionable is that Badiou highlights the "re" with a hyphen – e.g. "re-inscription",<sup>19</sup> "re-presentation" – to identify operators of ideology functioning through its main mechanism, that is repetition. What is then the difference between "re-" and "(re)"?

There are, as far as I know, only three other cases,<sup>20</sup> in which Badiou uses this (re), amongst others at another decisive re-commencement of his thinking, that is in the conference "Le (re)tour" – yet another figure of a different mode of repetition – "de la philosophie elle-même."<sup>21</sup> Althusser was and to a certain extent still is crucial for Badiou's thinking, because "he was" – as Badiou should write on a later point – "unlike Lacan, Foucault or Derrida, who were all antiphilosophers, a philosopher" and thus maintained the statement: "There is philosophy"<sup>22</sup> and to side with him in the 1960s<sup>23</sup> – despite all the disagreements and harsh criticism – already meant in this time on the most fundamental level to declare "the end of the end [of philosophy]"<sup>24</sup>

If one not only keeps in mind that Dialectical Materialism is the name of the philosophy after Marx for Althusser, that Badiou was above all around that time part of the infamous, clandestine "Spinoza Groupe",<sup>25</sup> whose objective was literally re-doing Spinoza's *Ethics*<sup>26</sup> – with whom (at least for Hegel) modern Philosophy begins<sup>27</sup> or one could say Philosophy as such (re)begins – we are justified in presuming that it is this specific (paradoxical) structure of (Re)beginning that shall account for the question of the beginning within and thus the history of philosophy.<sup>28</sup> And in this sense every (re)commencement is an "infinite (re)commencement."<sup>29</sup> To state the obvious: The brackets introduce a fundamental linguistic ambiguity that only works at the level of writing. Is the part in brackets situated on the same level as the rest of the word, or does it form a metatextual element? Can the word be read just as well with brackets as without? The brackets introduce a double reading, a certain indistinguishability that causes the reader to stumble – one first reads "(re)commencement", then one recommences reading and reads "commencement", then one commences again and reads "recommencement" and so it goes on and on – whereby the word

mimics that what it names. The (re)commencement is – or rather can only be – a (re)commencement, or a beginning *tout court*, if and only if it goes together with a different kind of *repetition* than (ideological) repetition, namely a repetition of *difference* instead of a repetition of (difference as) the given.<sup>30</sup> (Re)commencement is the name for the couple repetition *and* difference.<sup>31</sup> It is a repetition that is altering that what undergoes repetition. (Re)commencement thus designates both at the same time: A beginning is only a beginning if it is repeated (differently), i. e. if there is a rebeginning, and at the same time, the rebeginning retroactively establishes the beginning as that which is repeated, i. e. the return is the production of that to which it returns to. To repeat Marx and return to the sources of Marxism means to change it – so that it can finally begin.

This article aims to outline what it might mean to interpret Althusser's return to Marx as a recommencement, even though Badiou ultimately judges it a failure by his own standards – and thus only a commencement. But exactly as such a commencement Badiou could have said the same thing about Althusser that Althusser once said about Machiavelli: "And if [...] I overstep his field of thought, let us say that he opened up this space [...] to us."<sup>32</sup>

What will thereby be shown is that from the (re-)beginning on, albeit differently, Badiou's thinking revolved around "a repetition of another order,"<sup>33</sup> a "creative repetition," which precisely is not a "circular repetition."<sup>34</sup> Or, as he already has it in 1967: "*Far from being circular*, Dialectical Materialism is the first philosophy that is *intrinsically incomplete*."<sup>35</sup>

This undertaking is obviously way too big for an essay, and I ask the reader to understand it strictly as tentative "questions of theory", i. e. theoretical questions posed by theory. So, I have to excuse in advance the shortcomings that are almost inevitable in such a project – however, modesty is as little a philosophical virtue for Badiou as it was for Althusser; quite the contrary.

### **To rebegin: From Post-Hegelianism to Post-Hegelianism<sup>36</sup> or the Critique of critique**

Before we begin once more, let me briefly foreshadow the end: As we shall see in greater detail what structures Badiou's text is the repeated differentiation of different kinds of differences, whereby it does what it states: it *produces* "the system of pertinent differences that both and at the same time disjoins and joins science and ideology"<sup>37</sup> and is thus in line with the concept of philosophy that Althusser and Badiou attempted to develop together around that time, namely: "Philosophy has as its object a conjuncture of which it is both the effect and an element, and of which it can only provide 'cognition in the form of an intervention.'<sup>38</sup>

Badiou begins with a diagnosis of the *political* conjuncture, which he renders as the "theoretical silence" of the communist parties, which –

a condensed rephrasing of what Althusser calls a symptom – completely structures that of what they speak of. What remains unthought in and thus forgotten by all the seemingly opposed, “deviant” – yet another difference – forms of Marxism are silent and thus speak about, is a “erasure”, “annulment” or “abolishment”<sup>39</sup> of a specific kind of difference. It is this very difference – going by the name of the “epistemological cut” – which is constitutive of and thus marks the *commencement* of the science founded by Marx that is erased by being “*presented in the form*” of another difference, the difference between Hegel and Marx.<sup>40</sup> To put it differently: The difference which the “epistemological cut” *is* – the difference between the real object and the object of knowledge and thus the construction or production of the object of knowledge on its own grounds – is omitted by being identified with another difference that between Hegel and Marx.

What can be said so far is that there is difference and there is difference. There are (three) different ways of avoiding the difference, that science *is*, by displacing one difference for another. Now these differences are characterized as differences that make no difference and are thus indifferent differences exactly insofar as they repeat this avoidance of difference. These forms of difference are what Badiou designates as “variants” of (Vulgar)Marxism. He defines “variants” elsewhere as differences that “are different, but by virtue of a difference that relates them to one another as variations of the *same* theme”<sup>41</sup> – “theoretical silence” in this case. What is already said thereby is that the “theoretical silence” is not to be understood as a silence of a specific theorem, but of (the constitutive difference of) science and that is of theory all together.

Secondly – and this brings us closer to our overall question – we have to note the particularity that there are only “variants”; “deviations” is all there is. We are thus confronted here with the paradox configuration of a “deviations without a norm”. Badiou thus reads the history of Marxism as a history of deviation– of a difference erased through substitution (for another difference). This reading becomes possible only because he confronts that history from a perspective grounded in a re-examination of its (re)beginning, a standpoint that is itself absent from the tradition it interrogates. By omitting this very difference, we could say, (Vulgar-) Marxism is *post-hegelian*, instead of being *post-hegelian*. To be truly *post-hegelian*, that is Marxist in the full sense of the term, is to posit a difference between Marx and Hegel in the sense of their non-relation:<sup>42</sup> The dialectics of Marx and Hegel have nothing in common, between both exists a non-relation. Thus, they are situated in a fundamentally different theoretical fields – and are based on completely different problematics to speak with Althusser. In framing the constellation this way, Badiou underlines a subtle, but crucial point, regularly overlooked: For Althusser, the problem does not lie in Hegelianism as such, but in the various misguided ways in which thinkers sought to overcome it. By elaborating

on the specificity of Marx's dialectic – that is thinking of contradiction as overdetermined – Althusser is less concerned with differentiating Marx from Hegel than with differentiating him from Feuerbach. The problem is not primary Hegel, but Feuerbach – because Feuerbach is the name for the assumption that there is a relation (*qua* inversion) between Marx and Hegel.<sup>43</sup> This is the reason why in Althusser's view, Feuerbach represents the "horizon" of contemporary French philosophy<sup>44</sup> – "phenomenological idealism" as well as its seeming opposite "structuralism" are direct heirs of Feuerbach. Feuerbach's *Post-Hegelianism* is only a *Post-Hegelianism* insofar it regresses back to a *Pre-Hegelianism*, whereby it precisely and paradoxically becomes contemporaneous.<sup>45</sup> Put differently: the problem is that Feuerbach puts an End to classical German philosophy, but the wrong way. To end it properly, one must first end this false ending. The second, opposing strategy of Lévi-Strauss as the prominent proponent of structuralism consists in refusing to engage with Hegel altogether in a direct way, which only ensures his return in a still more powerful form.<sup>46</sup> Hence the necessity of returning to Marx: not because Marx was misidentified with Hegel, but because he was conflated with Feuerbach. What is thus needed is a critique of this wrong critique of Hegel.

But what is the problem with Feuerbach? Why exactly does Feuerbachianism lead to misunderstanding the epistemological cut, Marx's science and, beyond that, science in general? To put it briefly: because Feuerbach is the pioneer of what Althusser calls "empiricist ideology,"<sup>47</sup> which consists in reducing the difference between the real and the object of knowledge precisely by thinking of the real, and thus of the difference itself, as a given – or one could say by dehistoricising, i. e. naturalising the given,<sup>48</sup> whereby its cognition turns into the ideology of its legitimacy. As ideology number 1 the empiricist ideology poses mainly the "myth of the given": For empiricist ideology the real object and the object of knowledge are identical – the real object virtually *is* the object of knowledge –, thus there simply is no difference, all that science does is extracting and purifying that which is already *given* within the real object. This has two tremendous implications: If empiricist ideology denies the difference between real object and the object of knowledge because it is mainly an ideology of givenness this difference itself cannot be (a) given, but has to be produced and reproduced – by what? By philosophy. Philosophy, to jump ahead, is the production of the difference between difference and indifference.

Thinking of the epistemological cut as such means, to anticipate again here, understanding knowledge as production. And to do so, to think of thinking as production, and thus to (re)turn to the theoretical event that goes by the Name "Karl Marx" means to return to the difference that the epistemological cut is and this is only possible, so the second crucial thesis, if one conceives the "exceptional situation of Marx within the *history of knowledge*"<sup>49</sup> in founding at the same time a new science, historical materialism, the science of history – "the epistemological

cut” –, as well as a new philosophy, “dialectical materialism” – “the epistemological rupture.”<sup>50</sup> In other words: The difference which is erased by Marxism refers back to another difference that is consequently also annulled, because it is logical prior and thus without it the former would be inconceivable, namely the difference between philosophy and science. While the different varieties of Marxism either reduce philosophy to science, science to philosophy or pose a relation of correspondence, Althusser claims that the whole task is to think both theoretical disciplines “in the unity of their distinction” [*dans leur unité de disjonction*]<sup>51</sup> – and as should become clear in a bit, both terms (unity, distinction) as well as their relation will be problematic. What Badiou now stresses in this context is of central importance: The difference between science and philosophy is an intra-philosophical difference, a(n) (impure) difference that is only conceivable from the perspective of philosophy – thus the astonishment about the aforementioned title change should get be clearer by now.

To understand why this difference between science and philosophy is so important we have to consider two further differences which are crucial here: the difference between ideology and science as well as between theory and practice. Here we have to posit two central assumptions: Philosophy is nothing but the difference between science and ideology, that is to say it has to constantly and repeatedly differentiate itself from science as well as from ideology in order to be what it is. By constituting the difference between ideology and science, philosophy is that without which science runs the risk of collapsing into ideology. So, at that point of our reconstruction a textual strategy of Badiou’s review becomes evident. The article is right from the start implicated in the conjuncture it makes intelligible, precisely by (actively) being implicated in it.

To understand philosophy as distinct from science and ideology—and to grasp science and ideology in their own right—we must conceive all three as different modes of practice. And this means to consider yet another difference, that is a classical topos of Marxist tradition, *but now* – dialectical twist – *not* to remember it, *but* this time *to omit it*, namely the difference between practice and theory. To simplify things a bit: only if we understand that practice is already a mode of the appropriation of the real object, which contains theoretical elements, i. e. a kind of cognition and if we understand theory as a kind of practice, only then we are capable of truly understanding what differentiates science and ideology as well as philosophy from both. What then is a practice? And what kind of practice is theory or more precisely science and philosophy and ideology? Practice, so we learn, is a production, which operates on a certain material, uses certain means of production, has its own kind of process and a certain kind of product as a result. So in line with these criteria we are now able to differentiate the different types of practices.

To speed up things a bit, let’s be even more schematic as we already are: Science is a mode of production producing the “knowledge effect”,

by *transforming* its material, i. e. ideology, while ideology produces an “effect of recognition” – or we could say “re-cognition” – by *repeating* its material. To reformulate this slightly: By being a process of transformation – literally a change of form – science is determined as a production of difference in the strong sense that it brings about something new. In light of the “epistemological cut,” and given that truth is defined immanently by scientific practice, the *production* of science—its transformative process as well as its product, the object of knowledge – cannot amount to a *reproduction* of the real object.<sup>52</sup> That mistaken identity is precisely the hallmark of empiricist ideology, which assumes that the object of knowledge simply mirrors the real object. While, from the perspective of philosophy, science produces through transformation the product as produced, i. e. as historical, ideology produces through repetition the product as unproduced, that is as given, i. e. as natural.

In this context Badiou raises the crucial question: What is the status of philosophy in this context, if it is, as we said, nothing else then the production of this very difference – between science and ideology? The answer Althusser gives midst the 1960s is: As THEORY, as the theory of theoretical practice, as the practice that produces *the knowledge effect of the knowledge effect* and thus the cognition of theory as practice and thereby of practice as production, philosophy is itself a science, namely the science of the scientificity of science or also the science of science. This leads to the paradoxical effect: If philosophy is nothing other but the theoretical discipline which examines the forms of apodicticity, it loses its relative autonomy. To put it bluntly: as Althusser should have been the first to realise, it is not enough to reverse a problematic in order to escape it – which is precisely his criticism of Feuerbach – but only by putting forward a completely different problematic or as Althusser loved to say by changing the terrain. In other words, it is not enough to write “Historical Materialism and Dialectical Materialism” instead of “Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism’, that is to exit Stalinism through *inverting* it. If philosophy is understood as a “science of science” it becomes an ideology – exactly insofar as it does, what ideology does: it functions as the *mirroring* guarantee of the science of which it is the science of, i. e. “Historical Materialism”. In this way, philosophy tends to do the exact opposite of what it is supposed to do: by completing the science it closes off the theoretical field, whose openness it is meant to sustain.

This is precisely why it is not enough only to declare that one has moved beyond Hegel,<sup>53</sup> since this very concept of philosophy as a “Wissenschaftswissenschaft”, how Kant once mocked Fichte,<sup>54</sup> i. e. a theory of theoretical practice, known by the famous name of theoreticism, introduces a new version of absolute knowledge<sup>55</sup> insofar as it totalizes<sup>56</sup> the field of knowledge and thereby closes it off once again.

### To end: The critique of crisis

What ended this configuration of (re)commencement of philosophy and forced it to begin – again – is, as is well known, the “subjective *cataclysm*” of “May 1968 that will break [Badiou’s] [...] existence tout court in two”,<sup>57</sup> What follows this event is the inter-ruption of philosophy and the “*political essays*” of *Theorie de la contradiction* (1975) and *De l’Idéologie* (1976),<sup>58</sup> until philosophy is to begin again with *Théorie du sujet* (1982) – with yet another theory of repetition at its core.<sup>59</sup> It is in the interval between this and the new (re)commencement of *Être et Événement* (1988), in *Peut-on penser la politique?* (1985), that the (re)commencement is mentioned anew and again in the context of a discussion of Marxism. This time, however, Badiou (re)commences the (re)commencement differently, since this term now refers solely to politics<sup>60</sup> – after 1968 the locus of the cut shifted from the field of science to politics. The rupture between the two interpretations of Marxism is evident: While Marx was conceived in the 1960s in line with the Althusserian project of an epistemological reading of Marxism as an “theoretical event”, he is now primary understood as the name of a politics.<sup>61</sup>

Guy Lardreau undoubtedly spoke for a whole generation of French intellectuals when he wrote, “We all became at once Althusserians.”<sup>62</sup> The parallels are obvious: Did Althusser never do anything other but write “*Philosophical Manifestos*”<sup>63</sup> (how he himself coined Feuerbach’s texts) instead of writing a “Manifesto” or suggesting to rewrite it. Did Althusser himself then turn into Feuerbach against his own will?

The parallels are obvious: Just as Feuerbach failed to respond to the uprisings of 1848 and therefore remained confined to a critique of religion, Althusser likewise proved unable to engage politically with the events of May 1968. His reluctance to articulate an open critique of the French Communist Party, or to develop a substantive concept of politics, left him similarly restricted to a critique of ideology.<sup>64</sup> As Feuerbach could not have a clear concept of religion, so Althusser could not have a clear understanding of ideology without any understanding of politics and that is without an adequate notion of class struggle – as a struggle of class struggles.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, Marx needed Feuerbach to overcome the Hegelianism of his youth, as the young French intellectuals needed Althusser to overcome their orthodox Marxism and put forward their fundamental critique of the French communist party. As Jean-Claude Milner has it, “Althusser authorises both adhesion and rupture with the PCF”.<sup>66</sup> To put it very bluntly, the accusation goes like this: both thinkers remained on a fundamental level defenders of the order they claimed to critique and that not only because they used a wrong approach or premise, but because of their political (non-)practice.

In both cases, the interruption of a political event marked the rupture with the former students – an event that, to a certain extent, both figures prepared to conceived as such while simultaneously rejecting it. Calling

Althusser “our Feuerbach” is not marking his deficiency alone as not going far enough, but is also honoring his importance as someone who paved the way for the new to happen, which he helped to prepare but was unable to conceive. Identifying Althusser and Feuerbach also means that Althusser laid the conceptual foundations from which his students and followers were only able to criticize him. Just as, for Marx, everything had to pass through the “Feuer-Bach” so that the dialectics could finally become “critically and revolutionary”, the leading French intellectuals first had to be “Althussériens” to then claim “Al, tu sers rien!” To speak of Althusser as “Feuerbach” lastly also means that he was just a precarious, yet necessary beginning, so that one could finally return to Hegel. But I don’t even want to get started on that.

1 Althusser 1997b, p. 339.  
 2 Badiou 2023, p. 370.  
 3 As Badiou recently emphasised (once again), for him, philosophy *began* with Sartre: “Philosophy suddenly appeared to me in February 1954, as religious conviction might appear with the arrival of an angel. In this particular case, the angel’s message was a small book by Sartre, *Esquisse d’une théorie des émotions*.” (Badiou/ Fautrier 2025, p. 8) To my knowledge, Pascale Fautrier has conducted the most comprehensive study of Sartre’s role in Badiou’s philosophy: *Ibid.*, pp. 71-309. What is particularly interesting in this context is that it was Althusser, of all people, who, contrary to Badiou’s own account, had already emphasised in 1976 that Badiou “never disavowed Sartre’s philosophy of revolt.” (Althusser 1992, p. 399)  
 4 Badiou 1966, p. 438-467.  
 5 Letter from Louis Althusser to Alain Badiou, 19.5.67: Althusser 1957-1986.  
 6 Jessica Marian, Elliot Pastoura and Joe Hughes, who examine this controversy in greater detail and on whom I rely here, speak of a „Badiou Crisis“. See: Marian / Pastoura/ Hughes 2024, p. 111.  
 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117  
 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.  
 9 *Ibid.*, p. 114.  
 10 Letter from Louis Althusser to Alain Badiou, 19.5.67: Althusser 1957-1986.  
 11 *Ibid.*  
 12 Badiou 2012a, p. 8.  
 13 Precisely at the point where Badiou addresses the “second blanc” (Badiou 1966, p. 461) of Althusser’s project, namely structural causality, which he tentatively attempts to reformulate through a “*théorie des ensembles historiques*” (*ibid.*), there is a blanc of three missing pages in (Badiou 2012). For the English translation of “L’aventure de la philosophie française depuis les années 1960”, Bruno Bosteels restored the text to its original version. What makes the whole affair even more astonishing is that Badiou by omitting these central pages and changing the title without any comment or explanation is doing the very same thing as Althusser did as he among other things omitted the most controversial note revolving around the absent cause of structural causality, which is precisely the theorem that earned him the reputation of structuralism – whereby he “renders absent [...] the theory of the effectivity of absence” as Warren Montag aptly puts it (Montag 2017, p. 170) – and which is exactly the stumbling block of Badiou’s critique as well. Although I cannot go into detail, I would like to briefly point out that Badiou had objections to structural causality from the outset – which, as we recall, Althusser considered to be the core of what distinguishes Marx’s philosophy from the entire tradition. Thus, in *The autonomy of the aesthetic process* Badiou already states: “The

theory of structural causality is still very obscure. My impression is that such a theory is impossible, if one pretends to provide it with formal models. It is to be feared that only *regional* theories are possible.” (Badiou 1965, p. 39) Put simply, this is precisely the point of contention in the notorious debate between Alain Badiou and Jacques Alain Miller: Jacques-Alain Miller’s ‘structural causality’ or ‘metonymic causality’ from ‘L’action de la structure’ served as a conceptual template for ‘Lire le Capital’ – a text about Althusser admiringly said: “A 21-year-old lad... It makes you dream: a young man who, at 21, is stronger than almost any philosopher in France...” (Althusser 1998, p. 505)  
 In accordance with Althusser (cf. Althusser 1996a, 1996b), Miller argued that the “logic of the signifier” offers a theoretical foundation for structural causality. On this basis, the two discourses of overdetermination, psychoanalysis and Marxism (cf. Miller 1966, 1968), could be exactly formulated within one formal model. In other words, I understand the dispute between Badiou and Althusser as an *intra*-Althusserian dispute. In this context, one should give full weight to Badiou’s brief remark that the discourses of Derrida, Althusser, and Lacan—the three different discourses of difference—should be kept “as far apart from each other” as possible (Badiou 1966, 445). Since I cannot go into further detail on the dispute between Badiou and Miller, especially on the theoretical status of formalisation, I refer here to the work of Daniel Barry: Barry 2025.  
 14 Lessing 1767.  
 15 Badiou 1966, pp. 447, 464.  
 16 Obviously, I would not ask this kind of question and would not pursue the following reflections if it would not be for Comay/Ruda 2018.  
 17 Cf. Badiou 2007b.  
 18 See the fourth chapter of “Titles” of Genette 1997, pp. 55-103.  
 19 Badiou 1966, pp. 439, 449, 451, 459, 465 or Badiou 1969, pp. 160, 162, 165, 172.  
 20 Badiou 1985, p. 58-63; Badiou 2008 and Badiou 1990, p. 108.  
 21 Badiou 2008, pp. 3-22.

22 Badiou 2009b, p. 89. And perhaps Althusser was all the more relevant to Badiou not despite, but because of his proximity to anti-philosophy (which is most clearly evident in: Althusser 2015, pp. 327-336): “And it is very well possible that Althusser’s project, under the name of ‘materialist philosophy,’ came close to twentieth-century antiphilosophy” (Badiou 2011, p. 81). Of course, I cannot go into the highly convoluted concept of Anti-Philosophy in Badiou and would therefore like to refer to: Ruda 2024 as well as: Chiesa 2024. Towards the end of Althusser’s life, the relationship between master and student was ultimately reversed. On the occasion of Badiou’s review of Lyotard’s *Le différend* – once again a review – in a letter from 27.1.1985 he writes: “Once again, I admire the ‘sovereign’ rigour (the word is apt) of your thinking, its insight, its clarity and the fruitfulness that this analysis promises. Recently, a friend and I noted with concern the near-emptiness of contemporary philosophy, with two exceptions: Derrida and you, if you finally find the time to write. We have high hopes in you.” (Althusser 1957-1986, my emphasis)

23 This becomes most evident in “Philosophie et sciences humaines” from 1963. A text that is programmatic for the entire 1960s insofar as it maintains the assertion against the claims of the human sciences: Philosophy exists – with the all-important addition, as the other texts of that period are to show, that philosophy can only exist as a philosophy after Marx: Althusser 1998a, pp. 43-58. In this sense “For Marx” has to be read as a “For Philosophy” and since philosophy after Marx is like no other, namely insofar as it is philosophy as partisanship, that it was already in the 1960s I would claim, but I cannot go into this, “For Marx” has also to be read as “For the For”.

24 Such was the original name for “The (re)turn of philosophy itself”: Badiou 1999, p. 152.

25 From 1966 to 1968, the group consisted of Badiou and Althusser, as well as Pierre Macherey, Étienne Balibar, Yves Duroux and Michel Tort among others, and dissolved with Badiou’s departure after the upheaval surrounding May 1968. Published manuscripts related to this work include: “Trois notes sur la théorie des discours, 1966 (in: Althusser 1993, pp. 111-170) and “Notes sur la philosophie (1967-1968)” (pp 299-348) The unpublished contributions in the archive are inter alia: Macherey 1967; Tort 1967; Badiou 1967a; Badiou 1967b; Badiou 1967c. As a necessary prerequisite in the course of the disputes between the various political groups, the members were given pseudonyms: Louis Althusser became “Pierre”; Alain Badiou, “Gérard”; Étienne Balibar, “René”; Pierre Macherey, “Jean”; etc. pp. In addition of re-doing Spinoza’s *Ethic*, there were also political-theoretical interventions on all “decisive philosophical fronts”, as it was called back then, which included Lacan’s seminar as well as the

*Cahiers pour l’analyse* (Front 2). A sketch of the ‘Groupe Spinoza’ strategy by Michel Tort can be found in: Knox 2014, p. 176.

After their falling out in 1969, Badiou and Althusser resumed contact in 1976 on the occasion of the publication of *Cahiers Yenan*, edited by Badiou together with Sylvain Lazarus at Maspero (see: Althusser 1992, p. 541), in which Althusser was not only to be portrayed as an “octopus drowning in its own ink,” (Badiou 1975, p. 48) but also his “Self-Criticism” (1975) was criticized as arrogant, idealistic, irresponsible, hypocritical and metaphysical (Badiou/ Balmès 1976, p. 106-113). An important objection that Badiou raised against Althusser’s theory of ideology in the 1970s, and which has also been described elsewhere as “an alliance between Althusser’s “advanced” revisionism and Lacanian structuralism” (see the chapter: *Cahiers Yenan*, 1975, pp. 80-110) concerned a point that Badiou still shared in the 1960s, namely that there is a connection between ideology and the unconscious (Badiou 1966, p. 449). As many interpreters have speculated with regard to Badiou’s own interpretation of the ‘clinamen’ in *Théorie du sujet* (1982), Althusser’s debate with his “friend” Badiou (Althusser 2016, p. 48) is of crucial importance for what was to become Althusser’s late philosophy of ‘aleatory materialism’: Althusser 2015, pp. 106-107.

26 Althusser 1998b, p. 750. Of course, this is reminiscent of Badiou’s plan to re-write the Communist Manifesto (Badiou 1985, p. 60) which is of course reminiscent of Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s discussion of re-actualising the Manifesto: Adorno / Horkheimer 2010, pp. 33-61. 27 Hegel 2003, pp. 163-164.

28 It is hardly a coincidence that one of the discussions within the ‘Groupe Spinoza’ revolved around the “commencement of philosophy”. See Macherey 1967; Badiou 1967b.

29 Badiou 1990, p. 108.

30 This question is the direct result of long and intensive discussions and debates with my dear friend Daniel Barry, without whom this text would not have been possible in this form for many other reasons.

31 With this concise formulation, we refer to Slavoj Žižek’s reflections on ‘and’ as a category in Althusser:

“In Althusser, ‘and’ functions as a precise theoretical category: when an ‘and’ appears in the title of some of his essays, this little word unmistakably signals the confrontation of some general ideological notion [...] with its specification, which tells us how we are to concretise this notion so that it begins to function as non-ideological, as a strict theoretical concept. ‘And’ thus splits up the ambitious starting unity. It introduces into it the difference between ideology and science.” (Žižek 1996, p. 103) Simply put: Difference is that which

disambiguates repetition and splits it into ideological repetition of givenness and the non-ideological repetition of difference.

32 Althusser 1999, p. 4.

33 Badiou 2018, p. 149.

34 Badiou 2014-2015.

35 Badiou 1967c, my emphasis.

36 I owe this stylistic device, although he uses it differently obviously to Ruda 2015, pp. 56-68

37 Badiou 1966, p.146.

38 Althusser 1967a.

39 Badiou 1966, p. 442, 444, 446.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 442.

41 Badiou 2007b, p. 7, my emphasis.

42 Badiou 1966, p. 442.

43 What Althusser primarily demonstrates by showing that Marx's dialectic conceives contradiction as overdetermined is that Marx's dialectic cannot be conceived as a reversal of Hegel's dialectic, which is precisely what Feuerbach attempts to do: Althusser 1962.

44 Althusser 1997b.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

46 That is in a nutshell Althusser's critique of Lévi-Strauss in his Seminar *Lévi-Strauss à la recherche de ses ancêtres putative*: Althusser 1962-1963.

47 Althusser 1965b, p. 336.

48

49 Althusser 1966, my emphasis.

50 This distinction is due to François Regnault's contribution to the 'Cours de Philosophie pour scientifiques' 'Qu'est-ce qu'une coupure épistémologique?' dated 26 February 1968. Introducing this conceptual distinction here is premature, as Regnault made it in order to correct the 'theoretical deviation' criticised by him and Badiou, and later admitted by Althusser, according to which philosophy itself is science and can therefore be reduced to the "epistemological break". Regnault 1968; Althusser 1976, p. 68.

51 Althusser 1965a, p. 73.

52 As Pierre Macherey succinctly puts it: "The most simplified and comprehensive expression of empiricist ideology is therefore: to know is to reproduce a given real." (Macherey 1968, p. 10)

53 Badiou 1966, p. 465.

54 Kant Immanuel 1795-1803.

55 This is why Badiou states: "We will admit [...] that all *theoreticism* implies the existence of absolute knowledge, that is, a theory of theoretical practice, a science of the scientificity of sciences, etc." *Materialist dialectics*, on the other hand, *does not imply theoreticism, because it is not a "science of sciences"*: "any discourse that constructs a concept of science is philosophical. However, the philosophical process is 'relatively' autonomous and has its own non-scientific laws. *There is no philosophy of philosophy* (in particular: no "correct" philosophy of 'incorrect' philosophies. [...]). *There*

*is a science of philosophy* (in MH).  
- *The existence of a science of philosophy, since it is not itself a philosophy, in no way puts an end to philosophical practice* (there is no contradiction in the existence of a practice for which there is a science). *Philosophical practice, as it continues in the recognition of the scientific nature of MH, is MD.*" (Badiou 1967c, my emphasis)

56 In the introduction to his *Cours de philosophie pour scientifiques* of 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1967, Althusser responds to this criticism by rigorously stating: "Philosophy is not the science of science, nor the science of the crisis of science, nor the science of the All—the science of totality" (Althusser 1967b, p. 6).

57 Badiou 2023, p. 226, my emphasis.

58 Badiou 2007a, p. 7, my emphasis.

59 Badiou 2009a, pp. 121-124. I owe this reference to Daniel Barry.

60 Badiou 1985, p. 58-63.

61 As a sidenote, we have to mention that Althusser made the same shift from epistemology to politics, or rather, strictly speaking, never really adopted it in the first place. As he should say at the end of the 1970s: 'There are two essential paths for philosophy, when one is not immediately drawn to it for different reasons: either the path of epistemology (that of Yves [Duroux], Étienne [Balibar], Macherey), or the path of politics. My path has been and remains that of politics" (Althusser 1992, pp. 454-455).

62 Lardreau 1973, p. 20.

63 See: Feuerbach 1973.

64 There are compelling reasons to argue that Althusser's difficulty in formulating what he himself called a "political politics" (Althusser 1998b, p. 693)—a line of inquiry already emerging in 1966, in which Badiou was likely not without influence—and, above all, the rupture of 1968, forced him to radically reconsider his theoretical foundations – to such an extent that they will never again take on a stable form. These developments compelled Althusser to reconceive the state and politics from the standpoint of a theory of reproduction, and to distinguish political practice from state institutions in a far more rigorous way. See Althusser 2014 and, above all, Althusser 2006. My dear friend Julien Veh and I have attempted to trace this theoretical development and outline how a politics and political organisation outside the state might be conceived. See: Veh/Weise 2023.

65 See: Althusser 2018.

66 Milner 2009, p. 45.

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