

Phantom of Inconsistency and Spectre of the Void

Lorenzo Chiesa

Abstract: Taking my cue from what Alain Badiou, in *Being and Event*, refers to as “phantom of inconsistency” and “spectre of the void”, in this article, I ask whether his understanding and use of set theoretical ontology can be mapped onto a general Lacanian framework for which the unconscious is sets. My overall claim is that the degree of compatibility between Lacan’s and Badiou’s set theoretical ontologies depends on what Badiou makes of the unconscious. Does Badiou presuppose the unconscious in his basic distinction between any ordinary situation and the state of that situation? If that is the case, namely, if a situation is the unconscious of its state, and this is what is presented by set theory as an extra-ordinary situation without state, then Badiou’s convergence with Lacan proves far more remarkable than usually assumed. In the present contribution, which is part of a much wider project, I will simply look at how Badiou himself seems to invite such enquiries, only allusively but insistently.

Keywords: phantom of inconsistency; spectre of the void; danger of the void; wandering of the void; fixing of the void; count-as-one; second count; total part; situation; state of the situation; unconscious; set theoretical ontology.

As I argue at length and substantiate with a close scrutiny of the sources in my current book project, for Jacques Lacan, the psychoanalytic unconscious is sets, ontogenetically and structurally.¹ Unbeknownst to itself, axiomatic set theoretical ontology writes this already formal fact in a formalised fashion and renders it, up to a point, readable, if not perceptible. It writes the unconscious qua sheer letters, or unary traits, or also “the trait that counts” as operationally, in Lacan’s own phrasing, “count as ‘one’”.² Such a one “undoes itself” and must be opposed to the “unifying One”,³ the semblance of which nonetheless necessarily arises. Better said, set theoretical ontology thus writes fantasy, given that, strictly speaking, the unconscious is constituted only in fantasy through the repression of fantasy as primal repression. Even more precisely, it writes the primal ontogenetic and structural “logic of fantasy, namely, a logic that preserves in itself”, independently of repression, “the possibility of accounting for what is at stake in fantasy and its relation to the unconscious”.⁴ While, of course, for the unconscious “to be-there as unconscious” I cannot “think it as a [conscious] thought”, fantasy as what anchors the unconscious tout-court “is in a much more rigorous way than the rest of the unconscious structured as a language” and can set theoretically be written.⁵

Taking our cue from what Alain Badiou, in *Being and Event*, refers to as, significantly, the “phantom of inconsistency”,⁶ and other cognate phrases I will inspect, the question then is whether his understanding

and use of set theoretical ontology can be mapped onto this Lacanian framework. The initial answer would seem to be straightforwardly negative. In Lacan, what is ultimately at stake in set theoretical ontology is the writing of the logic of fantasy as the subject of the unconscious. Through set theory we formalise what is by itself “the strictest relation of the subject of the unconscious with [...] [the logic of] fantasy”.⁷ Instead, as is well-known, for Badiou set theoretical ontology not only remains de-individuated, a stance with which Lacan would agree, but also does not concern the process of individuation. Bluntly put, unlike for Lacan, for Badiou, set theory is not a theory of the subject. This is despite their corresponding meta-ontological treatment of letters that are sets as functioning as these sets – in short, Lacan’s unary trait and Badiou’s count-as-one.

In my project, I aim to challenge and overcome this apparently neat division. My general claim is that the degree of compatibility between Lacan’s and Badiou’s set theoretical ontologies in the end depends on what Badiou makes of the unconscious, which is far from clear. Is the unconscious only the specific “situation of psychoanalysis”, as he contends at times?⁸ Or is it rather presupposed in his most basic distinction between any ordinary situation and the state of that situation? If the latter is the case, namely, if a situation is the unconscious of its state, and this is at bottom what is presented by set theory as an extraordinary situation without state, then Badiou’s convergence with Lacan proves even more remarkable.

In this brief intervention I will simply look at how Badiou himself seems to invite such enquiries, only allusively but insistently.⁹ Elsewhere in my project, I also closely investigate, among other related and underestimated connections between the two thinkers, the way in which:

- a) Badiou’s meta-ontological theory of situations and their state enables, intrinsically hints at, and even requires for its own consistency a set theoretically ontological theory of the ontogenesis and structure of the subject, which, so to speak, is not yet the subject of the event.
- b) Lacan’s embryonically mathematical writing of the logic of fantasy calls for a stricter set theoretically ontological interpretation of the ontogenetic and structural subject of the advent, which also diagnoses the limits of such enterprise, and set theoretical ontology in general, in view of a psychoanalytic subject of the event.

Having succinctly sketched this broad context, let us turn to Badiou’s text. As early as the second Meditation of Being and Event, Badiou tells us that Plato’s Parmenides already sensed how “the inconsistent multiple is actually unthinkable as such” and can be “glimpse[d]” only

as a “dream”, or more precisely, as a “dream within sleep”.¹⁰ “Wakeful thought”, Badiou paraphrases, presupposes a situation, or structure, or count-as-one, in which the multiple is consistent.¹¹ From within a thus understood (dormant) situation the inconsistent multiple is then obtained retrospectively as an “ungraspable horizon of being”.¹² The inconsistent multiple is obviously accessible as a dream only through an abrogation of the (unsleeping) being-of-the-one. But a situation in which the consistent multiple is always, by definition, given does not itself grant any being to the one: indeed, the count-as-one amounts to a purely operational – unsurprisingly in inverted commas – “there is” (“il y a”) of the one and can thus posit the inconsistent multiple as an un-thinkable dream.¹³ Or also, I would contend in a not merely analogical manner, a situation *qua* consistent multiple is the sleep from within which the inconsistent multiple can be dreamt. For Badiou, the crucial step forward accomplished here by axiomatic set theory is having turned Plato’s dream of “a multiple disseminated without limits”, which points in the right direction yet remains pre-Cantorian, into a formalised ontological theory.¹⁴ Set theory has given Plato’s dream “the fixity of thought”.¹⁵ More colourfully, we may add that, for Badiou, Cantor interpreted Plato’s dream, in the sense that set theory presents it. Still, as importantly put in *Briefings on Inexistence*, the set theoretician thereby binds his thought to being solely insofar as, by writing situations in a formalised way, he is himself “unconscious of being” bound to being, he has no consciousness of it.¹⁶ Or also, as put in the “Introduction” to *Being and Event*, working mathematicians are “ontologists without knowing so”.¹⁷

In the fourth Meditation, Badiou introduces the “phantom of inconsistency” and, in close connection with it, the “‘non-consciousness’ of the void” (“‘inconscience’ du vide”).¹⁸ For him, this refers to presentation in any ordinary situation and is exclusively presented as such by set theoretical ontology as an extra-ordinary situation that presents presentation.¹⁹ On the one hand, all that is presented in ordinary situations is counted as one, as one-multiples, that is, consistent multiples: there is in this sense no “lacuna” through which the inconsistent multiple could positively be presented.²⁰ Not only that, but the effect of the operation of the count-as-one, namely, one-multiples as result, is also and especially “complete” because, as explained in the seventh Meditation, through the so-called “forming-into-one” the count-as-one is indefinitely repeated, that is, it “appl[ies] itself to a result-one”, a one-multiple it has already produced.²¹ But, on the other hand, and concomitantly, the absence of thus understood lacunae in ordinary situations goes together with a structural “gap”.²² This is the gap between “the one as result and the one as operation”.²³ Badiou already summoned it, more abstrusely, with respect to Plato’s dream as the gap between “the supposition of the one’s being and the operation of its ‘there is’”.²⁴ Basically, this means that in ordinary situations the one as result of the one as operation points

at “a must-be-counted”²⁵ that precedes it, and this structural vacillation evokes a phantom of inconsistency. Here we additionally need to stress that even on the level of the forming-into-one, which is not really distinct from that of the count-as-one, situations confer no being upon the one. However, the phantom of inconsistency remains just a phantom. It is in turn unrepresentable in ordinary situations. It only points at the inconsistent multiple qua being as being-nothing in ordinary situations.²⁶ The being of an ordinary situation is subtracted from its count. The void is the situation’s subtractive suture to its being. And the void cannot itself be encountered in “the normal regime of structured situations”, which dictates the “‘non-consciousness’ of the void”.²⁷

In the eighth Meditation, Badiou complexifies all the above in a way that further strengthens my attempt at bringing it closer to a fundamentally psychoanalytic line of reasoning. There is no ordinary situation without a state of that situation. De facto, ordinary situations are only given retrospectively by their state. The latter amounts to counting as one the operation of the count-as-one, and not simply forming-into-one, that is, re-counting as one the one as result, or one-multiple, the one as operation has already counted. Counting as one the operation of the count-as-one can be achieved by counting as one the parts, or subsets, of an ordinary situation. Such second count, the count of the count, is necessary to ward off the void in ordinary situations. Faced with what Badiou himself, far from coincidentally, does not hesitate to designate as the “situational anxiety of the void”, structure’s own anxiety, the state of the situation as meta-structure successfully establishes that “the one is”.²⁸ Such “One-One”²⁹ can then be unmasked as a semblance only from the standpoint of an event, or better, of a truth-procedure following an event.

Let us investigate these intricate passages more thoroughly. The phantom of inconsistency that remains just a phantom in the normal regime of ordinary situations nonetheless does not rule out the “danger of the void” in them.³⁰ Badiou now calls it a “spectre” of the void which thus “must be exorcised”.³¹ What is this danger? Why is there a lingering danger? And how is it exorcised?

First, the danger is that the void may still be “fixed” in situations.³² That would cause the “catastrophe of presentation” in the situation, “the ruin of the One”.³³ More precisely, if the void as the situation’s subtractive suture to its being were encountered, if, that is, the void ceased to merely stand as the situational “name of inconsistency” or, which is the same, if the spectre of the void were no longer confined to the status of a “phantasmatic remainder” of “what ‘would be’ the presentation itself, the presentation ‘in-itself’” and directly pointed at inconsistency as “the being of consistency”, then the inconsistent multiple as unrepresentable would be presented as such.³⁴ That would be “Chaos”, Badiou says.³⁵ And we should specify: that would be chaos from the vanishing perspective of the situation alone, for outside of presentation being is not a multiple

chaosmos according to Badiou. Very importantly, as commentators usually miss this Ur-meta-ontological point, without which we are exegetically lost, “being is not multiple [...] strictly speaking [...] because being is only [inconsistently] multiple inasmuch as it occurs in presentation”.³⁶

Second, despite the effect of structure being complete in a sense, to the extent that the count-as-one leaves no lacunae in the situation, there is a persistent danger of the void because after all “something [...] escapes the count”.³⁷ Badiou speaks of this danger as having two “poles”.³⁸ Predictably at this stage, one pole amounts to the count-as-one itself, its “pure operational transparency”.³⁹ As considered, the one as result, the consistent multiple, always points at a must-be-counted in the operation, which evokes the phantom of inconsistency. Here the danger of the void perpetually “haunts” the situation, Badiou says.⁴⁰ Yet, at this pole the danger of the void cannot be localised, not to mention warded off, for evidently the count-as-one, or structure, as such pole, is not a term of the situation it structures, and a fortiori cannot count itself as one. At this pole the danger of the void haunts the structured situation simply as a “wandering of the void” (*errance du vide*) in it.⁴¹ Or, on closer inspection, although Badiou falls short of putting it so explicitly, structure is itself this spectral wandering of the void. It is structure that haunts itself. In other words, as rapidly conceded by Badiou, structure, the count-as-one, is nothing but a “doubt” with respect to the one.⁴²

The other pole of the danger of the void gives us instead a localisable “place of the danger of the void”.⁴³ This place corresponds to those parts included in a situation that nonetheless remain uncounted by the count-as-one and thus as such unrepresented or in-existent in the situation. For Badiou, following axiomatic set theory and specifically Cantor’s theorem, inclusion in a situation as a part, or subset, or sub-multiple always exceeds belonging to a situation as a term or element. There are parts of a situation that are not terms of that situation. Or better, although all parts are compositions of terms belonging to the situation, namely, of terms counted as one and thus consistent multiples, and although some of the parts are themselves counted as one and therefore reducible to the status of terms of the situation, other parts are as parts “non-one compositions”⁴⁴ of consistent multiples and thus inconsistent multiples included as such in the situation without belonging to it. These uncounted parts are the place where the wandering spectre of the void might give way to an encounter with the void that fixes it and ruins the situation. Or, as Badiou has it more technically, it is in these parts that the “void [...] could ‘realise’ itself within the inexistence of a composition of consistent multiplicities upon which structure has failed to confer the seal of the one”.⁴⁵ Moreover, it is only in these parts, as lying outside the normal regime of ordinary situations qua belonging, that the void could take place: the however irrepressible spectre of the void that is structure, or the count-as-one, could not give way to an encounter with the void as one term of the situation – since the

void is locally that which is subtracted from the count, “the not-one” term of the count – or as the whole of the situation – since the void is globally “the nothing of this whole”.⁴⁶

Third, the danger of the void inherent to every ordinary situation is exorcised by the state of that situation which counts as one all the parts of that situation. The state of the situation thus stands as the meta-structure of structure and the representation of presentation. It is therefore transcendent to the situation insofar as it counts as one also the parts that do not belong to the situation. But it is also immanent to it insofar as what is in this way counted as one in excess of the situation’s count-as-one, the place of the danger of the void qua inconsistent multiples that in-exists in the situation as included in it, is nonetheless composed of terms that belong to the situation from the outset. Summing up and following closely the powerset axiom: there necessarily is a state of every ordinary situation whose terms are the parts of a given ordinary situation. Or better, everything that is included in a situation, including that which is not counted as one in it yet is composed of terms that are counted as one in it, belongs, as counted as one, to its state.

Here the difficulty lies in understanding how both poles of the danger of the void are thus warded off by the state of the situation. The count-as-one of one pole of the danger of the void, that of the previously uncounted parts of a situation, concomitantly counts as one its other and more elusive pole, that of the count-as-one itself, or structure. Namely, counting as one the place of the danger of the void, the second count that plugs “the breach [...] via which the wandering of the void could have fixed itself”,⁴⁷ equally counts as one the count-as-one, the first count, as, again and importantly, nothing but the spectral wandering of the void. This is the case because, as Badiou ingeniously explains, if the second count counts as one all the parts generated by the first count, then it must also count as one the “total part”, that is, the part to which belongs everything the first count counts as one.⁴⁸ The first count, which could not and cannot count itself as its own term, is counted as one term in the second count, and structure is counted as such by the meta-structure of the state. In other words, the completeness of the one-effect of structure, its absence of lacunae, is in turn counted as one. Structural completeness is itself numbered. This is the count of the count.

However, very significantly, note that the count of the count, the count-as-one – as parts – of the count-as-one – as terms – is not the count-as-one of the operational count-as-one but of the count-as-one, of the one-effect. Here Badiou might easily be misapprehended. Bluntly put, that the one-effect of structure is not only complete but now also counted as such does not mean that structure itself is now complete. At bottom, the crucial kernel of Badiou’s overall meta-ontological argument – as almost invariably overlooked or misconceived by both Badiouian commentators and Lacanian detractors of Badiou – is that “the nothing

is the operation of the count”, which, furthermore, is “exactly the same thing” as to say that “the nothing is the pure multiple upon which the count operates”.⁴⁹ Hence the operation of the count that is nothing – and in turn is thus the, purely retrospective, pure inconsistent multiple on which it operates – cannot be reduced to the “is-one” of the count.⁵⁰ I insist: the count “is-one” but it still is nothing. The state cannot obviate this. If, instead, structure were completed by the state, that is, if the second count were to really count the first count as operation, then the One-One of the state would not ever eventually turn out to be semblance. The state would be God. Badiou in fact reminds us that, in the end, “the countering of the void [...] is apparently complete” and that, as soon as completeness is numbered, “it seems” that “the peril of the void [is] banish[ed]” and replaced by “the universal security of the one”.⁵¹

The related, subtle, and initially counterintuitive point to bear in mind in this context is that the spectral wandering of the void must at the same time both be counted as one, in its effect, and let free to wander. It is counted as one by the meta-structural state of the situation because, as we just saw, the latter counts as one the structured situation itself, which, again, is nothing but what haunts itself. It is left free to wander on the level of the structured situation – now counted by the state – because otherwise the void would fix itself and the ensuing ruin of the situational One would also obviously ruin the state’s One-One. Badiou does not unwrap this. He never systematises the “wandering of the void” (or “spectre” of the void, or “phantom of inconsistency”, which he tends to loosely treat as synonyms), although he repeatedly refers to it at crucial moments in Being and Event, in seven quite different Meditations. More to the point, Badiou does not overtly address how the situational wandering of the void is consolidated as the spectre of the void by the state, starting from the latter’s emergence. But he nonetheless clearly states that the wandering of the void is a “requirement” to prevent its fixing.⁵² And this applies to, so to speak, before and after the state counts structure’s haunting itself, as one in its effect. Badiou indeed tells us, just in passing in the sixth Meditation, that the void “is confined by the state” to its wandering.⁵³

We should expand on this difficult argument by leveraging on its spatial coordinates. First, Badiou claims that, in ordinary situations, the void as wandering is “nowhere and everywhere”.⁵⁴ It is nowhere because the void is the subtractive suture to the being of the situation. It is everywhere for the same exact reason: the void subtractively sutures the situation to its being – namely, inconsistent multiplicity. From a slightly different angle, the wandering of the void is equally nowhere and everywhere because the subtraction of the void from the situation sutures it to its being exclusively as the name of the void, or void set, that is, however, following axiomatic set theory, included in every ordinary situation.

Second, for Badiou, it is thereby set theoretical ontology as an extra-ordinary situation that presents the ubiquity of the wandering of the

void. Set theoretically, the wandering of the void is everywhere and not nowhere. Set theory shows that ordinary situations are not only “woven” from nothing but (the name of) the void in terms of belonging – starting from the void set’s singleton⁵⁵ – but also concomitantly “infect[ed]” by it via its universal inclusion.⁵⁶ So much so that, as Badiou specifies, in the situation of set theoretical ontology, which alone does not have a state, the “‘anti-void’ functions are not guaranteed” and, sooner or later, the fixing of the void is “inevitable”.⁵⁷

Third, this clarification sheds light on another proximate and tricky issue. Badiou says that the void cannot be a term of a situation, and as such it is not localisable as a point. It is incorrect to refer to the void as a point.⁵⁸ Yet, in another context, he also speaks of the void as a “pure point”.⁵⁹ Despite the rather confusing terminology, the tension is here only apparent: in ordinary situations the void is not a point (qua term) of the situation but, as such, it subtractively is its “point of being”.⁶⁰ Such point of being is, again, given only qua phantom of inconsistency through which alone the void wanders. Instead, in the ontological situation, the point of being is given as sheer wandering of the void, that is, as presented everywhere, and sooner or later fixed.

Fourth, the further, and crucial, complication is that, as we have exposed, in ordinary situations themselves the void may indeed be encountered and fixed somewhere. That is the case in the excessive parts of a situation that are included in it yet remain uncounted by it. In this respect, we need to be even more precise: the name of the void, or void set, is included in every situation as part; the name of the void also belongs to some situations and as such is counted as one by it; but some included parts of any situation – qua themselves situations in which the name of the void is always included – do not belong to the situation under consideration, that is, are not counted as one by it. Here the wandering of the void as phantom of inconsistency and the parallel universal inclusion of the name of the void may lead to a catastrophic encounter and fixing of the void. It is the state of the situation that prevents this from happening by counting as one all the parts of a situation and, specifically, the total part of the situation, whereby the situation as such is counted as one by its state. Most importantly for our current discussion, on the level of the state of the situation, the situation’s wandering of the void – which is the situation – is thus nowhere. It is, I dare finally say at this stage, repressed by the state. But, on the other hand, with the same move, the void now wanders everywhere in the situation as repressed. Or better, the void now wanders in the total part, that is, again, in the situation as counted as one by its state: the void is nowhere for the state but precisely as such spectrally everywhere for the (state’s) situation. It is everywhere in a somewhere. Or also, the – merely situational – phantom of inconsistency gives way to – and, strictly speaking, should now be distinguished from – the spectre of the void – as situational from the stance of the state of the

situation. Badiou himself hints at this distinction by referring to the merely situational wandering of the void as the “pure wandering of the void”.⁶¹ We are left to assume that there is also an impure wandering of the void.

Fifth, when conceived in this way, namely, when grasped as mutually dependent with the state, the wandering of the void can more appropriately be defined as what I would call the wand-erring of the void. For the void to impurely wander as confined by the state in the total part, which alone makes it wander and prevents its fixing, there must be an erring about the void. The wandering of the void or, evocatively in Badiou’s French, the errance du vide required against its fixing in turn requires a structural errancy, as going astray, of the count. This coalesces in the error of the second count, the count of the count carried out by the state of the situation, that counts as one all the parts of the situation and hence also the situation itself qua total part. Badiou does not make this passage explicit, since there is no such error from the stance of set theoretical ontology as a situation that presents the merely situational wandering of the void as everywhere. As seen, this comes at the cost of not “expuls[ing]” the danger of the void, whereby such wandering can thus better be designated as, Badiou nicely says but does not unfold, an insidious void that “prowls” (*rôde*).⁶² But also note that, importantly, this set theoretical prowling of the void is, on closer inspection, de facto the only pure wandering of the void there is. That is the case because there is no ordinary situation without its state and therefore, after all, no pure wandering of the void in ordinary situations. Ordinary situations are only obtained retrospectively from their state. Or also, in them, there is no phantom of inconsistency that is not a repressed spectre of the void. In other words, as already discussed, it is only in set theoretical ontology as a situation without a state that, notwithstanding the second count, issuing into the powerset, all is still manifestly woven from the void, not the one. Badiou indeed unambiguously speaks of the state of the situation as establishing a “fictional being”, or “imaginary being”, through a “fictionalising of the count”.⁶³ Echoing Lacan’s “error of counting”,⁶⁴ which he associates with the operation of the powerset and even that of the void set’s singleton, for Badiou himself, in ordinary situations, the count necessarily makes a mistake, it mistakes itself for what it is not – namely, the one.

Sixth, de-fictionalising such fictional being necessitates an “evental occurrence” of the void that “proceeds ‘explosively’, or ‘everywhere’, within a situation”.⁶⁵ It is then a matter of assessing how, for Badiou, this both refrains from catastrophically fixing the void and lifts state repression.

Having highlighted how Badiou appears to tacitly encourage a reading of ordinary situations as the unconscious of their state, primarily regarding the spectral status of the void, the next step in my overall itinerary is corroborating the above from an openly Lacanian perspective. In other words, I dwell on the way in which Lacan himself meta-ontologically quadrangulates the questions of the void, the count, fantasy,

and the reciprocity of (self-)consciousness – the state of the situation – and the unconscious – the situation. The general “homogeny” Badiou himself detects between his meta-ontological orientation and Lacan’s, on a rare occasion of almost unconditional solidarity with him – “if that is psychoanalysis, then it is a philosophy homogeneous to mine”⁶⁶ – can at this stage, in this context, be rendered schematically as follows. In my own Badiouian-Lacanian terms:⁶⁷

1. The count-as-one, the first count, corresponds to the unary trait
2. The count of parts, the second count, corresponds to the S1, the master-signifier.
3. The (state’s) situation, (meta-structure’s) structure, or better, the repressed spectre of the void, corresponds to the unconscious fundamental fantasy.
4. The total part as itself repressed corresponds to the unconscious object a, the part-object.
5. The total part as a term of the state (of the situation), of the meta-structure (of structure), corresponds to the ego, or self-consciousness.
6. The state of the situation corresponds to the big Other.

- 1 In a hyperbolic admission of this, which should be taken with more than a pinch of salt, Lacan speaks of his “reduction of psychoanalysis to set theory” (J. Lacan, “Lacan pour Vincennes!”, in *Ornicar?*, 17-18, 1978, p. 278).
- 2 J. Lacan, Seminar IX, lesson of 13 December 1961, unpublished. J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX. Encore. 1972-1973* (New York: Norton, 2000), p. 47.
- 3 J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XIX. ... Or Worse* (Polity: Cambridge, 2018), p. 114 (transl. modified). J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XIV. La logique du fantasme. 1966-1967* (Paris: Seuil, 2023), p. 42.
- 4 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XV. L'acte psychanalytique. 1967-1968* (Paris: Seuil, 2024), p. 94 (my emphasis).
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 95 (my emphasis). J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XIV*, p. 386.
- 6 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 53-55 (my emphasis).
- 7 J. Lacan, Seminar XII, lesson of 12 May 1965, unpublished.
- 8 See for instance, with slightly different formulations, Alain Badiou, “Truth: Forcing and Unnameable”, in *Conditions* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 132-134. Alain Badiou, “Six propriétés de la vérité”, in *Ornicar?*, 32 (1985), p. 41. Alain Badiou, “Group, Category, Subject”, in *Briefings on Existence. A Short Treatise in Transitory Ontology* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), p. 151.
- 9 Here I take the opportunity to thank Frank Ruda, one of the rare philosophers I know who remains truly faithful to the Badiou-event. Our twosome and by now more than two-year-long meticulous rereading of *Being and Event*, which is for now on the whole proceeding in unison, has given me ample opportunities to test what I am henceforth proposing. I also wish to thank Moritz Herrmann for his comments on an earlier and slightly different version of this article, which I have taken on board and elaborated to the extent that this was possible in such a short contribution.
- 10 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 34 (my emphases).
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 See *ibid.*, p. 35. In English translation, where the “*il y a*” cannot but be rendered as “there is”, this subtle point is somewhat lost.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Badiou, *Briefings on Inexistence*, p. 57 (transl. modified) (my emphasis).
- 17 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 13.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 56 (transl. modified).
- 19 More specifically, set theoretical ontology presents the presented being of any ordinary situation insofar as it is a theory of the pure inconsistent multiple. In other words, it “form[s] into inconsistency all consistency”, that is, “deconstructs” every *one*-multiple as (*one*-*multiple* (*ibid.*, p. 30). Because of that set theoretical ontology thus also amounts to an extra-ordinary situation without state: it presents how representation (the state of any ordinary situation) is nothing but re-presentation (the state of any ordinary situation as itself a situation).
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 54, p. 91.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 26 See *ibid.*, p. 54.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 56 (transl. modified) (my emphasis).
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 93, p. 95.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 95 (my emphasis).
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 93, p. 53 (transl. modified).
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 24. Hence, all in all, “being is neither one [...] nor multiple” (*ibid.*), full stop. Attributing to Badiou’s philosophy an “absolute priority of the multiple over the one” seems to me inaccurate or, at the very least, simplistic (C. Norris, Badiou’s Being and Event. A Reader’s Guide [London: Continuum, 2009], p. 39, my emphasis). The same goes with similarly claiming that, for him, “Being [sic] is essentially pure multiplicity” (B. Baki, Badiou’s Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory [London: Continuum, 2015], p. 23, my emphasis). Imprecise, and by now almost hegemonic, readings like these tend to be contiguous with interpretations that, clarifying comparatively with other philosophers the actual stakes of the “absolute priority” and “essentially” above, are, in my opinion, just incorrect, which are advanced even by otherwise sophisticated and pathbreaking commentators: “Badiou shares with Deleuze the fundamental conviction that [...] being is inherently multiple”, “a pure multiplicity underlying, and preceding, any act of presentation” (S. Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty. Badiou’s Minimalist Metaphysics* [Melbourne: re.press, 2008], p. 3, p. 12, my emphases).
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 94 (transl. modified).
- 41 See *ibid.*, pp. 93-95. Oliver Feltham’s decision to translate this central phrase as “errancy of the void” is slightly misleading in my opinion. To the best of my knowledge, in French “*errance*” univocally refers to movement, in the specific sense of an aimless movement or roaming: it cannot easily be associated with “making a mistake”. In English, “errancy” is primarily associated with the latter, and only literarily with

movement. As we will see, the notion in question nonetheless has theoretical implications in terms of “making a mistake”, but that does not directly follow from the linguistic expression itself.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 96 (transl. modified).

44 *Ibid.* (transl. modified).

45 *Ibid.* (transl. modified).

46 *Ibid.*, p. 56, p. 95.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 98 (my emphasis). In axiomatic set theory, the total part is technically called an “improper subset”. It is *improper* in the sense that it is itself a set to which belongs all the terms that already belong to the original set. But, as *subset*, it is a term of the powerset of the original set. For instance, given the set $\{a, b\}$, its improper subset is $\{a, b\}$ in the powerset $\{\{a\}, \{b\}, \{a, b\}, \{\mathcal{A}\}\}$.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 55 (my emphases). In plainer language, we can say that the void, the *count-as-one*, and the inconsistent multiple are “exactly the same thing”. In my view, Lacan’s own general meta-ontological orientation is exactly the same. Linking this Badiouian tenet back to footnote 36, if one does not appreciate that being *qua being* is *not* the pure inconsistent multiple (as it instead is for, say, Deleuze), then one equally does not appreciate that the inconsistent multiple, the void, and the count can be said to be exactly the same thing – and vice versa. I wonder whether even a refined reader like Peter Hallward misses this, by himself granting a meta-ontological prevalence to inconsistent multiplicity and therefore breaking this triad: “Inconsistent multiplicity is the very being of being [...]. Every situation, however, includes a link to this ontological ground, namely that which, considered according to the criteria whereby the situation counts its elements, remains uncountable. This link is whatever can be counted in the situation only as nothing rather than a thing. Whereas inconsistent multiplicity, as the ‘stuff’ counted by any situation, is itself effectively meta-situational, this nothing or void is always void for a situation” (P. Hallward, “Introduction: Consequences of Abstraction”, in *Think Again. Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* [London: Continuum, 2004], p. 8). Although much more nuanced and detailed than that of the authors I quoted earlier, this stance still seems to imply a crypto-Deleuzian understanding of Badiou, which moreover does not dispel, and even encourages, the vulgar anti-Badiouian assumption that Badiou remains at bottom a Pythagorean mathematical realist: the very being of being is multiplicity, namely, number (Pythagoras), but this numericity, as inconsistent, is as such excessive (Deleuze). Such strand of interpretation then unwittingly leads Lacanian detractors of Badiou, like Adrian Johnston, to wrongly accuse him of being an

idealist “metaphysical realist” who “believe[s] in the ontological reality of mathematics” (A. Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism. Volume One. The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013, p. 84]. Against Johnston, whose position I extensively challenge in my current project, let us here simply recall that, for Badiou, very openly, “the thesis that I support does not in any way declare that being is mathematical [...]. It is *not* a thesis about the *world* but about discourse”, whereby set theory “pronounces what is *sayable* of being *qua being*” (Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 8, transl. modified, my emphases). Hence, again, outside of presentation, being *qua being* is neither one nor multiple.

50 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 95 (my emphasis). Pertinently, this is the only instance in which Badiou writes “is-one” with a hyphen.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 98 (transl. modified) (my emphases).

52 *Ibid.*, p. 94 (transl. modified).

53 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

55 That is, the set of which the void set is the only element, $\{\mathcal{A}\}$. In turn the singleton $\{\mathcal{A}\}$ equates with the powerset of the void set, $\mathcal{P}(\mathcal{A})$, and this in turn cannot but come with the powerset of the singleton of the void set, $\mathcal{P}\{\mathcal{A}\}$. Moreover, moving quickly here, but I do explain these passages in detail in my current book project, once $\{\mathcal{A}\}$ is obtained, via the forming-into-one, the forming-into-one can be applied to *any* existing multiple, via the axiom of replacement (*ibid.*, p. 106). If the void set, the multiple of nothing \mathcal{A} , has its singleton $\{\mathcal{A}\}$, then every multiple, as multiple-of-multiples, has its singleton. Given a singleton $\{a\}$ follows, that is, the multiple to which only a belongs, the result of the forming-into-one of a . The singleton of the singleton of a and the singleton of the singleton of the singleton of a – namely, $\{\{a\}\}$, to which only $\{a\}$ belongs, and $\{\{\{a\}\}\}$, to which only $\{\{a\}\}$ belongs – etcetera can follow too. My only (Lacanian) reservation regarding Badiou’s handling of these set theoretical passages, which he spells out and I also dwell on in my project, is that he does not seem to fully consider that the sheer void set, as name of the void, \mathcal{A} , cannot really be isolated from all these passages, namely, as I put it adopting Paris Lavidis’s felicitous expression, it comes in a “package”, the packaging of \mathcal{A} as $\{\mathcal{A}\}$, $\mathcal{P}(\mathcal{A})$, and, especially, $\mathcal{P}\{\mathcal{A}\}$ – and all that follows by means of the axiom of replacement. That has significant meta-ontological repercussions.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 59, p. 101.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 77 (Badiou’s emphasis).

60 *Ibid.* (Badiou’s emphasis).

61 *Ibid.*, p. 96 (my emphasis).

62 Ibid., p. 101 (translation modified).

63 Ibid., p. 98, p. 95.

64 See J. Lacan, Seminar IX, lesson of 7 March 1962. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XIX*, p. 143 (transl. modified).

65 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 74.

66 A. Badiou, "La psychanalyse a-t-elle des fondements philosophiques?" (unpublished and available here <http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/Chexbres.htm>)

67 I here still partly rely on my 2006 article "Count-as-one, Forming-into-one, Unary Trait, S1", in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 2006, pp. 68-93. It still informs some of the major coordinates of my present project. But there are also in this early attempt some errors that needed to be rectified: for instance, I tended to confuse Badiou's "forming-into-one" (the level of the singleton) with the count as one of parts, or second count (the level of the powerset) – however much the two are indeed closely related. More generally, there is at best little problematisation of the fact that, in Badiou, there is no direct link between his set theoretical ontology and a theory of the ontogenesis and structure of the subject.