

Other works of police critique, such as Mark Neocleous' recent *Pacification*, Anna Feigenbaum's *Tear Gas* or Leah Cowan's *Why Would Feminists Trust the Police?* show a level of sophistication in discussing this question that cannot be wholly rejected by Lamb's account. What is

more, these accounts often include the corollary, and show how resistance also exists within a dialectical relationship between the spaces of the colony and the metropole, something that is largely absent in Lamb's analysis.

Oscar Talbot

The consequences of infinity

Mohammad Reza Naderi, *Badiou, Infinity, and Subjectivity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023). 350pp., \$125 hb., 978 1 66693 104 4

It is likely that we have only seen the beginning of English-language scholarship on the work of French philosopher Alain Badiou. Though his work has been in circulation in the Anglophone world for close to thirty years, the third volume of his imposing systematic philosophy *Being and Event* (*The Immanence of Truths*) was only translated into English in 2022, and translations of his seminars continue to trickle in from Columbia University Press every couple of years. We are only just beginning to grasp the full picture of Badiou's thought.

Mohammad Reza Naderi's book, *Badiou, Infinity, and Subjectivity*, is a singular contribution to this project. It goes far beyond mere exposition – it unearths the at-times submerged coherence and the necessity of the various stages of Badiou's intellectual development, revealing the reasoning behind some of the claims and positions he stakes out in his mature philosophy that could otherwise appear arbitrary. But, as he does this, a new concept emerges as itself necessary for holding together Badiou's project – and not only that, but for understanding what thinking calls for now, as a consequence of Badiou's philosophy. This is the concept of *discipline*. Disciplines are areas of being – such as Badiou's four conditions for philosophy (love, science, art and politics) – marked out for thought through the use of axioms. They are underwritten ontologically by the axiom of infinity, meaning they can be infinitely stratified to both account for new 'events' in their thinking and overcome their own ideological impasses 'in interiority'. Axioms give disciplines their 'productive constraints' that allow them to think novelty while remaining within their disciplinary boundaries – and, if being is infinite according

to the axiom, there is no 'natural' end to the thinking of a discipline; the resources in being for new thinking are properly endless. But this also means there is no proper beginning to thinking (or philosophy). Thus, with his theory of discipline, Naderi is making a strong claim about what form, in the wake of the event of the axiom of infinity and significantly informed by Badiou's theory, thinking must take.

Naderi's book has three parts. Part I addresses the debate between Badiou and Jacques-Alain Miller in the pages of *Cahiers pour L'Analyse* in the 1960s. Part II is an illuminating but extremely dense analysis of the early work *Theory of the Subject*, which entails a creative reworking of Hegel and Lacan that lays the groundwork for Badiou's mature understanding of the subject. Part III is focused on the consequences of infinity and axiomatic thinking for Badiou's conception of the subject, touching on *Being and Event*. This is also the section where Naderi coheres much of the previous work of excavation into his own constructive concept of discipline.

Naderi is untangling a knot of questions that Badiou's work addresses, the answers to which ultimately make up his mature philosophy. These include the question of the 'beginning' of philosophy, the relation between being and thought, and the possibility of thinking the new. But I want to say that, at the core of Badiou's system, there is a basic *political* question, which Naderi articulates as the stakes of even the seemingly arcane debate between Badiou and Miller that opens the book: 'What was at stake was a theory that could show how ordinary people could leave their places in society and form a collective agency together with a new, common

objective'. This seems right to me, and it points to the fact that so much of what Badiou is doing through his 'red years' and into *Being and Event* is navigating between two poles: that of the metaphysical tradition of Plato, Descartes and Hegel, on the one hand, and that of structuralism, particularly the Lacanian variety, on the other. Naderi helpfully articulates the position Badiou feels the need to stake out as 'beyond metaphysics and *prior* to the concept of structure'. This is what so occupies him in *Theory of the Subject*, the analysis of which makes up the heart of Naderi's book. Badiou, as a disciple of Jean-Paul Sartre but a student of Louis Althusser, had no interest in returning to the sort of humanism Sartre (for some time) advocated, but he also could not tolerate the totalising structure of Althusser, which left little room for subjective action. (And getting beyond the latter was ultimately what led Badiou away from that stodgy Marxist-Leninism characteristic of the Parti Communiste Français and toward the more practical and effective politics of Maoism.) He sees in Lacan a structuralism for which the subject is not only an important element but positively essential and does not fall back on the traditional subject of metaphysics. But Badiou still sees a problem in how Lacan formulates the relation between the structure, or symbolic order, and the real.

The important thing is that for Lacan, the real is thought primarily in terms of the *inaccessible* – the traumatic, unsymbolisable region that also is the source or 'cause' of the structure itself. Lacan is trying to do the same thing Badiou wants to do – think what cannot be thought by the structure into the structure itself – but Badiou cannot accept Lacan's conclusion. Naderi articulates the difference between them as the difference between the real as cause (Lacan) versus the real as consistency (Badiou); for the former, the real constitutes the subject's limit, while for the latter the real is the support for subjective construction within a discipline. Whereas Lacan will turn that which is inaccessible to the structure retroactively into what causes it in the first place and establishes its dominance, Badiou (through Hegel) reads the structure and the real as mutually 'contaminating' forces, such that the real splits the structure – in a sense, converting the real as inaccessible into the real as indiscernible, a later Badiouan term. The real becomes a part of the structure as that which the structure does not already have a place for, and establishes a new role for the

subject that is different from Lacan's. These indiscernible regions of the structure require decisions, which are the work of a subject. In the first part of the book, Naderi explains how Badiou established that disciplines are capable of being developed *in interiority* through subjective acts – the real that is the source of such acts is internal to the structure. In the second part, Naderi shows the historicity of structure means there is not one 'structure' and one 'real' – instead, there are many structures with reals local to them, with the real being that which has not yet been thought within the structure and the source of novelty internal to the structure.



Earlier, we pointed out three questions Naderi believes Badiou's philosophy is addressing, and which the theory of discipline becomes necessary to answer, before turning to the relation between structures and reals: the question of beginning in philosophy, the possibility of thinking the new, and the relation between being and thought. Badiou addresses the first question through axioms. Naderi believes Badiou's mature ontology is called forth by his implicit proof of the existence of at least two disciplines in his early work – science in the debate with Miller, and politics in *Theory of the Subject*. Ontology is

the theory that can establish the condition and possibility of disciplines as such. But this necessarily entails questions of beginning – how does one begin a discipline? Axioms provide pragmatic tools for marking out existing regions of being for thought (disciplines) and give them a space within which to develop internally. It is similar to how rhyme and metre can be the very elements that enable the most interesting experiments in poetry. In this way, axioms allow Badiou to circumvent the problem of beginning – all thinking occurs *in medias res*, and axioms formalise that truth. While axioms establish how to begin, the axiom of infinity is what allows Badiou to address the thinking of novelty. If being is infinite, then each discipline is capable of infinitely stratifying itself in order to think new events that take place within it – including by coming up with new axioms. Finally, the subject is at the crux of the relation between being and thought. For Badiou, because he thinks of infinity mathematically rather than qualitatively, there is no region of being that is absolutely inaccessible to thinking – only provisionally so, until thinking gets ‘big’ enough to encompass a previously un-accessed region. The subject is precisely the operator that brings this previously unthought region of being to thought as the thought of the new. These three questions, and their answers, are all intertwined. The axiom of infinity retroactively makes axiomatic thinking itself a necessity, as there is nowhere to begin if being is infinite, and naturally, there are no consequences of the event of the axiom of infinity without the mathematical subject that thinks them. Behind the axiom of infinity and axiomatic thinking generally is Badiou’s call, echoed by Naderi, to ‘think maximally’. While it is at times diffi-

cult to tell if this is a normative or descriptive statement (do human beings naturally think maximally, or is thinking maximally an ethical imperative?) there is no doubt this impulse lies at the heart of Badiou’s project.

Badiou, Infinity, and Subjectivity is a truly necessary work, the first since Peter Hallward’s 2003 volume that attempts to articulate the internal logic of Badiou’s thought. It is ultimately successful in showing the inner necessity of Badiou’s at times shocking philosophical positions, and it convincingly argues for the necessity of a disciplinary mode of thinking if we are committed to thinking maximally. Though questions remain about the relation between discipline and philosophy – does discipline replace philosophy, or is it doing something different? – the more vexing aporias are those of Badiou’s thought, and not Naderi’s. For me, the primary one is the precise relation between the Ideas, including the axiom of infinity, and the local, earthy situations in which truths, according to Badiou, are actually created. In conversation with the author, we identified the unique challenge this poses in the context of the infinite. If infinity can only be posited axiomatically, ‘from above’, as it were, how is it that truths, which are a subjective work within a particular situation, through their universality in some sense ‘touch’ the infinite, as it seems there is no path to infinity from below? Naderi’s conception of the composing and disposing of truths is an attempt at conceptualising this process. While there is no space to go into it here, more work needs to be done in this area. One can only hope Naderi’s will be a prominent voice helping us to navigate Badiou’s later work with the same rigour and inventiveness he exhibits in this book.

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