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Badiou's Dispute with Lyotard

Matthew R. McLennan

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An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

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First published 2015

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-47257-416-9
ePDF: 978-1-47257-418-3
ePub: 978-1-47257-417-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NN

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Acknowledgements

Any book is a team undertaking. Though any inaccuracies and omissions in the text are my own, the success of this project has depended at each step upon the gracious contributions of others.

First and foremost I would like to thank my family for their love, support and encouragement. In particular I would like to thank Anna Seifried, Leo McLennan, Susan McLennan, Doreen Richmond, Audrey Lundy, Louise Legault, Pierre Legault, Louise Guay and Christopher Seifried.

My gratitude also extends to my greatest philosophical teachers and mentors: Denis Dumas, Jeffrey Reid, Daniel Tanguay, Paul Forster, Brian Keenan, Diane Gall, Karim Dharamsi and George Fulford.

I would also like to acknowledge the patience and good will of Bloomsbury editors Frankie Mace and Liza Thompson; the indispensable labours of my assistant Thérèse Barrett, who formatted the manuscript, created the index etc.; the inspiring enthusiasm and insights of Deniz Guvenc, with whom I read *Being and Event*; the support of my friends, as well as my wonderful colleagues at Saint Paul University; and lastly the contributions of my students, too many to name, who have inspired and challenged me.

This work is published thanks to a grant by the Aid to Publication Program at Saint Paul University.

I dedicate what follows, with boundless love, to Anna and Leo.

Introduction

Philosophy's present

Now, as ever, the question of philosophy's definition is intimately bound to that of its survival.

Without pre-deciding the issue, let us assume for now the kind of broad definition of philosophy proffered in undergraduate courses: philosophy is an activity of higher-order questioning, a search after truth. Thus construed, in the present conjuncture philosophy is threatened on two fronts. It is in fact subject to a double bind: if unable to plead its utility, philosophy is existentially threatened; pleading its utility, it is threatened no less.

In the first place, philosophy as pure pursuit of truth is widely considered impractical or useless, and its claims to the intrinsic value of its labours tend to fall on deaf ears. But this is nothing new; Thales, traditionally considered to have been the first Western philosopher, was already subject to the ridicule of the Thracian maid when he fell in a well while gazing at the stars. More interesting is the fact that philosophy also and increasingly flirts with absorption into the very discourse of economic efficiency that undermines it. It finds a place at the table by pleading its utility, as training for the flexible, lateral thinking often said to be essential to economic and professional success. Philosophy may also be tapped for its therapeutic value, to the effect that the wisdom of the great philosophers alongside yoga and other techniques helps to cultivate the contentment, health and productivity of economic contributors. Moreover, the philosopher increasingly finds a role in practical ethics training, an explosive growth field by which she contributes not only to genuine ethical deliberation, but to the alibis of institutions and the individuals who populate them.

This economic operationalization of philosophy is of course part of a global trend with much wider implications. Where the economic winners in a globalized post-Fordist system see flexibility, dynamism and opportunity, the vast majority of Earth's labourers – adjunct philosophy faculty included – see precariousness, pressure, displacement and the permanent threat of obsolescence. Frequently, formally educated labourers must retrain midstream to stay

swimming, and the increasingly irrational demands on one's time and one's spatial locations push many to top up their credentials with night classes and online certification. Less and less frequently one locates the philosopher in the comfort of the ivory tower, pursuing pure research. It is increasingly common to find her on the adjunct treadmill, or at the intersection of diverse digital applied humanities courses in programmes targeting non-philosophical professionals. To this extent the philosopher becomes more than ever a facilitator who helps others – the real producers, the real drivers of the economy, it is said – to think differently; to look at alternative points of view; to cultivate intuition, understood as an openness to unthought-of solutions to practical impasses (and it goes without saying that such solutions are – at least on paper – to be ethically sensitive if not ethically sound).

In sum, philosophy – where tolerated – is increasingly tapped for its productive potential rather than its millennia-old and, arguably, essential link to truths. In a general way, this poses with a new urgency the question of philosophy's survival. But it also raises a more focused question: whether or not present conditions, by insisting on economic efficiency, encourage philosophy to distance itself from the standard, broad definition and even, perhaps, to slide into sophistry.

Why sophistry? Compare Socrates to Protagoras. It is widely known that Socrates took no money for his philosophical craft, and that ultimately he martyred himself for the truth. Though arguably he was Socrates's intellectual equal, the craft of Protagoras was linked in perhaps an essential way to economic and political survival and flourishing. In Plato's *Protagoras* (1992a) – tendentious though we may assume it to be – the character Protagoras pulls shy of the anti-democratic conclusions to which he is pushed by Socrates's rigorous questioning. He thereby demonstrates a political savvy placing him squarely and ably in the realm of *doxa*, mere opinion. He is no partisan of truth, but seeks above all to cause effects with language, and this with a view to human flourishing.

Certainly, high-quality philosophical work in the Socratic/Platonic tradition of fidelity to truth continues to be produced internationally. But the existence of a hungry, desperate intellectual underclass – the army of adjunct faculty and the reserve army of underemployed and unemployed philosophy graduates seeking a toehold in the academy – favours the unmooring of philosophical *technē* from this fidelity. Since philosophy is tied to money through the university, it is at any rate fair to question whether or not this tends to corrupt it at the pedagogical level. Adjunct philosophical under-labourers are more competitive

to the extent that they can balance the demands of challenging, even titillating their millennial students, with the demands of telling the latter what they want to hear. To be safe, one usually assumes a basically liberal-democratic framework for discussion, in which thought experiments are brought out to show instinctively liberal-democratic students the minute inflections of applied liberal-democratic thought. One challenges, but only mildly; acts the benevolent eccentric, the clown even, the fondly remembered philosophy professor, within this familiar space. On a cynical reading, one does so to gain favourable student evaluations by which to secure one's incumbency, and with which to pad one's portfolio in pursuit of increasingly rarer tenure-track positions. The razor-thin difference between Socrates and Protagoras has perhaps never been so important, since it is precisely by Protagorean political instinct and flattery, not through fidelity to truth, that the professional philosopher increasingly wins and keeps her place at the table.

The question of philosophy's survival, then, is tied up with its potential slide into sophistry, broadly construed as the politically astute practice of creating effects with language for a fee. But this poses anew the ancient question of whether the definitions of philosophy and sophistry here assumed are sound, and to what extent the line between the two can or should be drawn in any rigorous way. Indeed, not all thinkers in the ballpark of philosophical practice agree that sophistry should be quarantined from philosophy; Hegel notably assimilated sophistry to the history of philosophy and Heidegger, far from defending philosophy against sophistry, charged sophistry rather with provoking the fall of Greek thought into philosophy. In a more contemporary vein, Keith Crome has drawn attention to the crucial distinction between *sophos*, *sophistēs* and *philosophos*, roughly wisdom, sophistry and love of wisdom. His indispensable *Lyotard and Greek Thought: Sophistry* is a promising reflection on the possibility of a positive definition of sophistical intelligence, as distinct from both pre-Socratic *sophos* and Platonic–Aristotelian *philosophos* (Crome 2004). And not only the rich written corpus, but also the very career trajectory of Barbara Cassin, troubles any neat distinction between the craft of the philosopher and that of the sophist (Cassin 2014). The standard definition of philosophy is, in other words, question-begging according to some scholars on the grounds that it degrades, implicitly or otherwise, sophistical intelligence either by assimilating it to a stop on the road to philosophy, or to the status of a lesser rival. Is the story of sophistry parasitical upon that of philosophy? Is sophistry essentially autonomous? Or is the distinction between the two insufficiently nuanced to begin with?

Old battle lines redrawn

The book you are reading offers no final word on the possibility or desirability of maintaining the philosopher–sophist distinction; nor does it pronounce in any definitive way upon the true definition and vocation of philosophy. It seeks rather to treat the question of this distinction as it emerged in the late twentieth century, in a heated and surprisingly underexplored dispute between Alain Badiou and Jean-François Lyotard. The interest in doing so should be readily apparent, and for two reasons.

First, analysis of the battles in which philosophers engage often provides a good deal of insight into their concepts, arguments and systems. Analysis of Badiou and Lyotard in dispute is highly instructive as regards their respective ideas, and for this reason I believe the text should be of interest to readers invested in Badiou, or Lyotard, or both. This is, moreover, a newer and exciting corner of scholarship in contemporary French philosophy. Though much has been done to explore the Badiou–Deleuze dispute, for instance, Lyotard is less often recognized as one of Badiou's major interlocutors. This, I believe, should be rectified, and I hope the present volume contributes to that reassessment.

Second, and more substantively, the Badiou–Lyotard dispute puts the importance and the complexity of the question of philosophy's definition into extremely sharp focus. Not only is philosophy in itself interrogated at a very high level of abstraction, but so is its relation to ethics, politics, art, science and love. The dispute may also be taken as an exemplary if rather complex contemporary enactment of the ancient, perhaps perennial philosopher–sophist drama.

Badiou has in recent times, perhaps more than anyone working in philosophy today, insisted upon the importance of drawing and redrawing the philosophy–sophistry distinction. His entire project may be interpreted as an attempt to reinvigorate philosophy in a broadly Platonic mode, which to his thinking requires that philosophy distinguishes itself from poetry and sophistry, its two 'adversaries of origin' (Badiou 2008a: 13). Indeed, for Badiou 'Every definition of philosophy must distinguish itself from sophistry' (ibid.: 8). For his part, Lyotard long played openly with sophistical resources, notably in his seminar on Nietzsche and the sophists, an article in the issue of *L'Arc* devoted to him and preparatory texts of the late 1970s such as *Rudiments païens* (Lyotard 1977b), *Instructions païennes* (Lyotard 1977a), and *Just Gaming* (Lyotard and Thébaud 1999). His take on the distinction is to render it rather less clear than Badiou would allow. But this is, perhaps, to place Lyotard in the camp of the sophists,

as Badiou had on repeated occasion to charge. The aim of this book is to guide readers through the path of this dispute, ultimately giving a slight edge to Badiou in the conclusion – and a slight edge may be everything – but taking pains to do justice to both thinkers.

In sum, Badiou and Lyotard offer striking and original contributions to thinking philosophy's vocation, as well as its margins. I hope that readers will find much of value in this text both in relation to the history of contemporary French philosophy, and more broadly, to metaphilosophy.

A note on method and sources

Badiou and Lyotard have given us vast, rich corpuses from which to reconstruct the essence of their dispute. To do justice to both thinkers in critical comparison is an enormous undertaking, one which I hope to have achieved in these pages. But any such attempt necessitates a sharpening of focus, a paring down of source material and a number of difficult decisions regarding how best to frame and present what the author deems to be important. Naturally then, the reconstruction of the dispute in the pages which follow obeys methodological choices that should be defended.

Regarding Lyotard, a thinker notoriously heterogeneous in his styles, interests and modes of argumentation, I have attempted to draw from as wide a selection of texts as possible without losing the thread of my argument. However I have made the decision to privilege 1983's *The Differend*, likely to an extent that will raise red flags among a number of Lyotard scholars. In this I follow my own judgement, certainly, but also that of Badiou, who claims that the text is the 'point of equilibrium or maturity of Jean-François Lyotard's enterprise' (Badiou 2009b: 552). Indeed Lyotard called it his '(only) book of philosophy', (ibid.: 553) both in conversation with Badiou and in his intellectual autobiography *Peregrinations* (Lyotard 1988a). In a dispute over the definition of philosophy, this would appear to be highly instructive if not decisive. Nonetheless, Lyotard's self-interpretation does not allow us – especially in light of his repeated and insistent authorial self-effacement – to take him at his word. Objections could be raised to giving *The Differend* pride of place in what follows, the most pertinent of which are perhaps the following: (a) Lyotard developed a challenging and robust post-*Differend* thinking until his death in 1998; and (b) as a process-based thinker, for whom philosophy is absolutely activity and not doctrine, there is no 'last word' on his philosophy in any case.

To address point (a), there is indeed an emerging if late-in-coming consensus in Anglophone Lyotard scholarship that the 'late', post-*Differend* period was fertile and important. In any case the late works remain underexplored in Anglophone scholarship, and there is already an abundance of interpretations favouring the period of *The Differend*. I cheerfully grant this, but also believe the late Lyotard to have been above all concerned with working out the political implications (in the broadest sense) of the thinking of being explored in *The Differend*. As I have argued in Bickis and Shields's recent volume devoted to encounters with Lyotard's later works, he pursues an additive political strategy therein – something like Adorno's determinate negation – but does not substantively alter his philosophical vision (McLennan 2013a). Regarding point (b), the process-based character of Lyotard's philosophy – its provisional, interminable character – nonetheless derives from a thinking of being which is broadly, if self-critically, Heideggerian, and the terms of which, though fleshed out considerably, remain relatively stable from *The Differend* onward (*ibid*.).

As I will explain below, this speaks to an important philosophical reason to privilege *The Differend* in these pages: to use Badiou's terms, it guides the reader down the path of thinking being as unstructured or inconsistent multiplicity. This is precisely the gesture of Badiou's 'mathematical turn' in the 1980s, and for this reason *Being and Event* may quite plausibly be interpreted, among other ways, as a sustained response to *The Differend*. Indeed, as Badiou relates, Lyotard was anxious that he, Badiou, be one of the book's readers: 'it was my commentary he was waiting for' (Badiou 2009b: 553).

Granted, this emphasis raises an important point, flagged by Badiou himself and developed by Bruno Bosteels: that the Anglophone reception of Badiou has been split, emphasizing either the ontological thinking of *Being and Event* or his meditations on *subjectivation*, which would belong, perhaps, more comfortably in the realms of ethics and politics. Bosteels makes a persuasive case for a dialectical reading of these two aspects of Badiou's thought (Bosteels 2011a), and for this reason – though I do not pretend to offer anything like a comprehensive, dialectical overview in these pages – I have devoted a chapter to the ethical and political aspects of the dispute, by way of the element of *subjectivation* which these contain. So while *Being and Event* and the writings on philosophy that surround it will be privileged in what follows, this is a function of their hitting closest to the stakes raised by *The Differend*. This choice neither precludes a reading of the dispute along the lines of later developments nor in terms of the theme of *subjectivation*, but rather leaves room for it and offers some suggestions on how to go forward by reconstructing what is most basic to the dispute.

What emerges then in the following pages is an interpretation of the Badiou–Lyotard dispute anchored in the thinking of being hammered out in *The Differend* and *Being and Event* (Chapter 1) which orients their respective definitions of philosophy (Chapter 2), thereby opening onto the dispute over philosophy's distinction from sophistry and antiphilosophy (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 takes broadly into account the elements of *subjectivation* at play in the dispute by meditating on the thinkers' relations to ethics and politics (love, science and art could also have been broached, but escape the scope of the book and will therefore be addressed only in passing). As promised, the conclusion will provide a short overview of the book's argument while – no doubt controversially – giving Badiou a slight edge in the dispute.

1

The Thinking of Being

Badiou's eulogy to Lyotard is starkly beautiful, giving an account of the striking similarities and profound divergences of the paths carved out by their thought. 'Ultimately, this is a differend about infinity, I think. Or about its correlation with the finite' (Badiou: 2009c: 111).

Badiou's comment gives an important indication of how we might get our bearings. To get at the fundamentals of the dispute, we should begin with what is itself most fundamental, i.e. the thinking of being. Through it we may find the clearest path to Badiou's and Lyotard's disagreement over the definition of philosophy.

To speak of the 'thinking of being' evokes Heidegger, and this is no accident. The phrase is well-considered, since the stunning novelty of Badiou's mathematical turn is to have thought being against the grain of a certain Heideggerianism all but saturating poststructuralist thought in the 1980s, and of which Lyotard himself – perhaps, in spite of himself – was exemplary.[1] This reading, however, will have to be nuanced considerably in what follows.

On the one hand, Lyotard appears to embody, albeit in a highly refined and perhaps negative way, the 'poetic' ontology that Badiou ascribes to Heidegger. In Badiou's terms, poetic ontology conceives of 'nature' as 'the appearing, the bursting forth of being itself', in other words the 'presentification of presence, offering of what is veiled' (Badiou 2007a: 123). Poetic ontology conceives being, in short, as sending or donation, evoking the *sophos* of the pre-Socratics certainly, but also something like the nostalgic, Romantic conception of nature as autopoiesis and source of truth (ibid.).[2]

Lyotard, in Heideggerian fashion, does conceive of being in terms of event, if not as 'sending'. But at the same time, he denies that being may be thought in any way either as 'sender' or as pure presence, since presentation is always already *a* presentation, i.e. situated. There is no 'fullness of being', no 'nature' into which the poem invites us, but rather the latter's disappearance, or better

yet its eternal absence: an unbridgeable chasm between what is presented and presentation itself. This means that for Lyotard, what Badiou considers poetry-ontology hearkens back to no origin;[3] it is *of necessity* rather than nostalgically an ontology of absence, of lack, and the impossible work of mourning. As we will see, if being is event, and therefore pure multiplicity, the multiplicity of multiplicity, then for Lyotard, beings – that is, everything that is of the order of the presented – cohere and are thinkable only ever tentatively and only ever by virtue of *rules*, not by truths or by immemorial, pre-Socratic mysteries. But to Badiou's thinking, this adherence to the rule in Heidegger's wake is precisely what puts Lyotard in the camp of the sophists rather than that of the philosophers.

Badiou, for his part, places himself in the lineage of Greek philosophers who 'interrupted the poem with the matheme' (Badiou 2007a: 128), and who ceaselessly drew and redrew the line between philosophy and sophistry. As Francois Wahl puts it,

> Matheme is used in the strictest sense of the word. If there is a 'before' of philosophy, a pre-philosophical moment that from the outside holds forth in the interior of philosophy, then it is ontology: for Badiou, the science of being prior to every quality, the science of being *qua* being, has always been – that is, since Plato – and only ever will be *mathematics*. (Badiou 2008a: x)

The clause 'since Plato' cannot be stressed enough, since Badiou's project is essentially a latter-day Platonism. Badiou tells us that Plato,

> is the one we need first and foremost today, for one reason in particular: he launched the idea that conducting our lives in the world assumes that some access to the absolute is available to us, not because a veridical God is looming over us (Descartes), nor because we ourselves are the historical figures of the becoming-subject of such an Absolute (both Hegel and Heidegger), but because the materiality of which we are composed participates – above and beyond individual corporeality and collective rhetoric – in the construction of eternal truths. (Badiou 2012a: xxxi)

Thus, while Heidegger seeks an appropriative, positive return to the possibilities inherent in pre-Socratic *sophos* through a methodological destruction of the history of ontology, Lyotard, in his wake, 'sophisticates' Heidegger's thinking of being as a thinking of the rule. Badiou, for his part, insists that we remain faithful to the mathematical rupture inaugurated by Plato, and thus in his thinking of being prioritizes the matheme. Expanding upon Keith Crome's concise and excellent discussion on the difference between *sophos*, *sophistēs*

and *philosophos* (Crome 2004), by virtue of how they position themselves with respect to the question of being (and hence the notion of truth), we may tentatively if not unproblematically conceive of Heidegger, Lyotard and Badiou as enacting the ancient division between pre-Socratic, sophistical and philosophical modes of thought.

This will all be unpacked in what follows. Suffice it to say for now that the Badiou–Lyotard dispute may be approached from the following angle: both thinkers in the 1980s attempt to think being in relation to event, which is to say, in terms of the presentation-presented distinction made important by Heidegger. But Lyotard militates under the sign of the rule, while Badiou militates under that of the matheme. Thus, even on so basic a topic as the thinking of being, the impression is given of Lyotard's playing the sophist to Badiou's philosopher.

I will begin then by reconstructing Lyotard's thinking of being. For reasons already stated, *The Differend* will be a privileged text in this analysis. Subsequent to this I will reconstruct Badiou's parallel trajectory.

Lyotard's thinking of being

As I have argued elsewhere,[4] Lyotard's ontology for much of his career is broadly that of Heidegger in the 'Letter on "Humanism"'. It bears however a unique stamp and is radicalized in terms of its negativity as well as its antihumanism.

For Lyotard as for Heidegger, being is *Ereignis*. The term is usually rendered in English as 'event', but in Heidegger's particular usage it is being as 'propriating event', an event that gathers being to itself and clears/conceals it to itself (some Anglophone commentators also speak of *Ereignis* as 'en-owning' (Heidegger 1998a: 254 (footnotes))[5]). Differently put, being as *Ereignis* is pure 'there is' or 'it gives' (ibid.: footnotes). From at least the 'pagan' writings of the 1970s to his death, Lyotard is indeed favourable to thinking being in terms of 'there is / it gives' but denies that there is any stable recipient of ontological donation or sending. He thereby further denies humanity the special dignity and destiny reserved for Heidegger's crypto-humanistic 'shepherd of being' (ibid.: 260) – the region of being in which the question of being is posed ever anew, and which guards against its forgetting. The human being is rather, for Lyotard, structured or given place entirely by the event – and is entirely contingent upon each event – and bears no special destiny or dignity. Put differently, neither the human

being nor the human as such are necessarily the addressees of being *qua* event. The event is therefore not a sending, if sending implies a pre-existing addressee.

In sum, Lyotard departs from Heidegger inasmuch as the latter

> … persists in making 'man' the addressee of the giving which in *Ereignis* gives, and gives itself while withholding itself, and [he] particularly persists in making the one who receives this giving into the man who fulfills his destiny as man by hearing the authenticity of time. Destiny, addressee, addressor, and man are instances or relations here in universes presented by phrases [i.e. events], they are situational, *tô logo*. The *There is* takes place, it is an occurrence (*Ereignis*), but it does not present anything to anyone, it does not present itself, and it is not the present, nor is it presence. Insofar as it is phrasable (thinkable), a presentation falls short [Geoffrey Bennington's translation: 'is missed' (Bennington 2008: 86n.)] as an occurrence. (Lyotard 1988b: 75)

As Bennington interprets this passage,

> Lyotard distinguishes his thinking about time from the later Heidegger on the *Ereignis* on the grounds that the latter still thinks time in terms of gift and destination, i.e. in terms of instances situated within a *presented* phrase-universe, rather than as the bare 'occurrence' of the event of presentation of that universe. (Bennington op. cit.: 86n.)

As bare occurrence, being does not give itself (as question, or clearing, or event) to the human being, without *generating* or having generated the human being. In fact, the formulation of *Ereignis* as 'there is / it gives' is already loaded: it is for Lyotard, simply, a matter of the 'there is', the '*il arrive*' (note this strange formulation frequently used by Lyotard, where one would expect '*cela arrive*' or '*ça arrive*'). As he puts it, '[p]resentation is not an act of giving (and above all not one coming from some *Es*, or some *It* addressed to some us, to us human beings)' (Lyotard op. cit.: 75). Being is the pure 'it happens' (ibid.: para. 113). This does not entail a stable, pre-existent, transcendent structure that structures by donations or sendings the human being as or via language. It entails, rather, being in terms of the particular phrase or utterance: i.e. 'one being, one time', every time (ibid.).

Such radicalization of Heidegger's antihumanism cannot but seem to constitute a blanket denial of 'human rights', 'the dignity of Man' and the like. It therefore seems paradoxical coming from an anti-totalitarian thinker like Lyotard, until one bears in mind that it is rooted in the Left-Nietzschean critique of transcendence, which was ambient in Paris in and around May 1968. Proceeding from the immanentist conviction that transcendent concepts

nihilate concrete particulars, Lyotard argues that 'Man' nihilates particular human beings both conceptually and in practice. Thus the trauma of Stalinism bears witness to 'Man, the most precious capital', elevated over the particular and, were it not for the micrologies of writers like Solzhenitsyn, historically erased victims of the gulag. On this basis Lyotard defends particular humans precisely by stripping the human *as such* of the destiny and dignity afforded it not just by humanism, but by Heidegger's nominally antihumanist departure.

This, then, is the bare picture: Lyotard's thinking of being may be quite plausibly interpreted as a radicalized Heideggerianism – thinking with Heidegger and against him. But in terms of the dispute with Badiou, the details matter greatly. Gérald Sfez has nicely fleshed out Lyotard's thinking of being by meditating on three succinct and helpful formulae. With reference to *The Differend*, I will presently expound upon these. But as will become clear, the thinking of being along the lines suggested by Sfez injects negativity into the heart of being, and this raises the question of Lyotard's relation to the Hegelian dialectic. This will prompt a discussion of how Lyotard attempts to evade the dialectic; specifically, by giving substance to his Heideggerian framework via *détournements* of the later Wittgenstein and the Kant of the Third Critique (to say nothing of Freud, who remains a near-constant and important point of reference). Once a basic grasp of this operation has been presented, the groundwork will be laid for a discussion of Lyotard's definition of philosophy, as an eminently anti-dialectical, interminable peregrination between heterogeneous faculties.

L'Être est événement (being is event) (Sfez 2000)

Echoing Heidegger, Lyotard arrives at his thinking of being *qua* event by means of a short, usually unremarked detour through Descartes.[6] In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1993), Descartes methodologically employed doubt to peel away and bracket any belief of which he was not certain. The goal was to arrive at an indubitable foundation from which to build a reliable natural science eschewing the Aristotelian formal and final causes. What he found he could not doubt was the very fact that he doubted; hence the doubting/thinking subject was itself the irreducible foundation he sought.

Lyotard however disputes the central claim of Descartes's second meditation, that 'the thinking or reflective I … withstands the test of universal doubt' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 94). In *The Differend* Lyotard theorizes the event in terms of *phrases*. He holds that '[i]t does not result from the phrase, *I doubt*, that I am, merely that there has been a phrase' (ibid.). To say 'I doubt' is to

presuppose '*I* and *doubt* or *I* and *think* and so on. And each of these "terms" presupposes in turn other phrases: definitions, examples of "usage"' (ibid.: para. 95). In other words, each presupposes language, as the 'totality of phrases possible in a language' (ibid.). It should be noted though that this totality itself is not presentable (since the phrase 'and this is language' is presumably part of language, but fails to refer to itself) (ibid.).[7]

Lyotard also points to the fact that to take 'I doubt' (or any other particular phrase) as 'first phrase' presupposes 'the ordinal series of events from which the predicate *first* derives its sense' (ibid.: para. 95); and this ordinal series results not from the phrase itself, but from 'a general form of passage from one proposition to another' (ibid.).[8] Hence 'the affirmation that a phrase is first presupposes the temporal series of phrases of which this phrase presents itself as the first' (Lyotard op. cit.). So for there to be a first phrase presupposes at least one other phrase already: that with reference to which it is first. In this respect, Lyotard notes that 'I doubt' presupposes also 'a prior phrase onto which it links', namely, '*What is not doubtful?*' (ibid.: para. 96). This phrase, in turn, presupposes any number of other phrases such as '*I name this feeling "doubtful"*', '*This is the definition of "doubtful"*' or '*Do you believe this?*' Each preceding phrase presupposes a prior phrase, ad infinitum; that is, each phrase opens onto an infinite regress. Hence logically speaking, there can be no 'first phrase'. Being does not begin.

It appears however that a slippage has occurred here, from 'first phrase' as transcendent or grounding or guarantor phrase, which was Descartes's object, to 'first phrase' as temporally first phrase; Lyotard has perhaps shown that the latter is impossible, but has he shown the same of the former? Arguably this perceived slippage is not a problem for Lyotard. According to him, the transcendent/grounding/guarantor phrase, since it is a phrase, an event, is like the supposedly temporally first phrase, in being a function of other phrases; this means that transcendence is not a position distinct from phrases; rather, *transcendence is immanent to phrases* (ibid.: para. 39). And this means that transcendence is not really transcendence (being more like an illusion that arises within phrasing). In order to see how this argument works, we need to discuss the precise nature of a phrase – or, to put it differently, what is given in a phrase.

When a phrase happens, it presents at least one 'universe' (ibid.: para. 111). A universe is a concatenation or 'situation' (ibid.: para. 115) of four pragmatic poles: *referent* ('what it is about, the case'), *sense* ('what is signified about the case'), *addressee* ('that to which or addressed to which this is signified about the case') and *addressor* ('that "through" which or in the name of which this is

signified about the case') (ibid.: para. 25). A universe is distinguished by how its four poles are situated:

> The disposition of a phrase universe consists in the situating of these instances in relation to each other. A phrase may entail several referents, several senses, several addressees, several addressors. Each of these four instances may be marked [i.e. clearly indicated, 'occupied' or filled in by something definite] in the phrase or not. (Ibid.)

A phrase presents a situation; it cannot, however, present its own presentation, which is to say, its presentation is not itself situated in the universe it presents (ibid.). The presentation of a phrase may nonetheless be marked in the universe it presents by *There is*; since ordinary language can refer to itself, a phrase like 'There is a presentation in the current phrase' marks it, but does not strictly speaking present or situate it. The presentation entailed by a given phrase, however, may be situated in the universe of another phrase (ibid.). This is to say that when a phrase occurs, there is *what* it presents, as well as *that* it presents; the latter may be vaguely indicated in the phrase, but it can only be situated in another phrase (i.e. the fact that the phrase presented something becomes a referent in another phrase). To use the Heideggerian language indicated above, the phrase is thus being *qua* event, a pure 'there is / it gives', as long as it is understood that 'gives' implies no pre-existing sender or addressee.

As noted, besides having an addressor and an addressee, any phrase has a referent and a sense, regardless of whether these are marked or filled in (i.e. the universe of a phrase will contain them as constituent parts, regardless of whether they are clear or obscure). Hence the universe of a phrase always pertains to something prior, even where the sense or referent of the latter is unmarked, i.e. unclear; specifically, a phrase, in presenting a universe, refers to another phrase, more accurately the universe presented by or in another phrase. This disposes of the problem of the first phrase. But if there can be no first phrase, can there nonetheless be a 'final phrase' (temporally speaking, or perhaps in the sense of a speculative – read Hegelian – summing up)? Lyotard answers no. Neither first nor last, strictly speaking, is possible, since each presupposes a universe in which it is temporally or conceptually first or last – and this universe is the universe of another phrase.

What withstands the test of universal doubt is therefore neither doubt nor the thinking/reflective 'I', but rather, 'time and the phrase' (ibid.: para. 94) (note: time and being; here again, Lyotard labours in Heidegger's shadow). The bedrock of further philosophy is not the Cartesian subject, but rather the fact

that there is a phrase; this fact, as we saw, generates (rather than requires) time: 'One phrase calls forth another, whichever it may be. It is this passage, time, and the phrase (the time in the phrase, the phrase in time) that survives the test of doubt' (ibid.: para. 101).

Sfez is therefore right to say that for Lyotard being is event; the event is the 'is-ness' (*qu'il y a*: that there is) (ibid.: para. 111) of whatever is, insofar as what is, is by virtue of being presented in a phrase universe. But the event can only be called 'being' if we have in mind the specific Lyotardian sense of *Ereignis* and not some transcendent ground for particular beings, Heidegger's '*transcendens* pure and simple' (Heidegger op. cit.: 256). Being is rather that which is entailed by presentation (i.e. that there is at least one universe, hence that there is at least one universe *and a [next] universe*) (Lyotard, op. cit.). The phrase itself 'transcends' all particular beings – it is the being of beings – as well as transcendence itself, but we can only present this in a phrase. There is therefore nothing more basic than the phrase, including transcendence or the fact of its transcendence. A phrase happens, and anything that can be said about occurrence falls short of it.

In Lyotard's own words:

> Could the presentation entailed by a phrase be called *Being*? But it is *one* presentation, or what in a phrase-case is the case. Being would be a case, an occurrence, the 'fact' that happens to 'fall', that it 'comes running' … Not Being, but one being, one time. (Ibid.: para. 113)

L'Être est enchaînement (being is linking) (Sfez op. cit.: p. 67)

Recall that for there to be a phrase is necessary, since one cannot doubt that there is a phrase; also, there can be no first or last phrase since either could only be such within a phrase universe in which it was marked as 'first' or 'last' (hence neither would, really, be first or last). What this entails for Lyotard is that '[f]or there to be no phrase is impossible', but also that 'for there to be *And a phrase* is necessary' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 102). Put differently, Lyotard is arguing that since there is no last phrase, for every phrase, another phrase must follow (ibid.).

Granted, whereas '[t]o link is necessary', 'how to link is not' (ibid.). A man on the street asks me what time it is; I reply 'It's 6:30', or 'My watch is broken', or 'It's time for you to get a watch' or 'Sorry, I don't talk to strangers'. This means that being, *Ereignis*, is not so much a matter of syntax, but 'paratax' (ibid.: para. 100); that is, being *qua* being is a matter of pure, contingent and unstructured conjunction irrespective, and in any case logically and ontologically prior to, any logically secondary genre-specific notion of 'suitable' or 'pertinent' linkage

between phrases (ibid.: para. 41). The important thing, in any case, is that a phrase, the event, being, entails or contains as constituent of itself a linking.

Here one might make the obvious objection that a *silence* may follow a phrase; hence it would not appear that a phrase does in fact entail *And a phrase*. Lyotard argues, however, that 'For *And a phrase* to be necessary signifies that the absence of a phrase (a silence, etc.) or the absence of a linkage (the beginning, the end, disorder, nothingness, etc.) are also phrases' (ibid.: para. 105).[9] According to Lyotard, the only thing that distinguishes such phrases from others is their 'Equivocality' and their expression of 'feeling', of 'wishes' (ibid.: para. 105). A given silence is distinguished from other phrases by the fact that it presents a universe in an equivocal, mysterious way (or rather, it presents an equivocal, mysterious universe): in other words, it presents that there is something, but it does not clearly say/situate what it presents, nor does it say anything definite and/or positive about it (ibid.).

Elsewhere Lyotard states that silences are 'substitutes for phrases', insofar as they imply 'negative phrases' (ibid.: para. 22/24). A silence is a negative phrase insofar as it presents at least one universe, one or more equivocal concatenations of addressor, addressee, sense and referent, wherein one or more of these is negated, i.e. cannot be 'presented in the current idiom' (ibid.: para. 24).

> The negative phrase that the silence implies could be formulated respectively: *This case does not fall within your competence* [negation with respect to addressee], *This case does not exist* [negation with respect to referent], *It cannot be signified* [negation with respect to sense], *It does not fall within my competence* [negation with respect to addressor]. A single silence could be formulated by several of these phrases. (Ibid.: para. 24)

Hence a silence says something, even if the latter is not clear or definite, with respect to negation of one or more of the instances of the universe it presents.

Lyotard illustrates this with the frequently noted silence of Holocaust survivors. Their silence is a phrase, or quasi-/negative phrase, insofar as it links on to an existing phrase or phrases, and constitutes one or more universes. With the respect to how it stands in for one or more negative phrases, it 'does not indicate which instance [i.e. which of the four pragmatic poles in a phrase universe] is denied, it signals the denial of one or more of the instances' (ibid. para. 26). It may signify that the *addressee* is unworthy to hear whatever is at issue, e.g. on the grounds of his or her incompetence, or that it isn't his or her business; that the *referent*, the situation in question, e.g. murder in the gas chambers, did not occur; that the *sense* is elusive ('the situation is senseless,

inexpressible'); that the *addressor* him- or herself has no business or is not worthy to speak of it; or, 'several of these negations together' (ibid.: para. 27).[10]

L'Être est polémos (being is conflict/contest) (Sfez op. cit.: 68)

Being – which is to say the event, or rather each event, each time – implies 'une dispute sur ce qui va s'ensuivre et une decision': a dispute over what comes next, and a decision as to what comes next (ibid.). Linking is not simply a linking, but also a 'slicing', a 'detriment'; to link in a certain way is to rule out an indefinite number of other linkages (ibid.). In Lyotard's own words, as we saw, '[t]o link is necessary, but how to link is not' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 102).[11] This agonistic picture entails that reflective judgement – in the Kantian sense, proceeding from the particular to the universal without knowledge of the rule or rules that have been used – is in a manner of speaking, constituent of being. At the very least, we can say that being, the event, implies an unprincipled search, i.e. a search without rule, for how to link onto the event. To the extent that multiple genres of linking phrases lay claim to the phrase in question, judgement with respect to the next linkage is extremely complicated, tenuous and, once effected, must carry with it a certain anxiety as to its justice or pertinence.

This anxiety signals something important. What has been said so far brings an element of negativity into the heart of phrasing and entails, on the face of it, a certain paradox with respect to being as event. Since being is event, which is to say linkage, which is to say *polémos*, being appears to entail nonbeing. On the one hand, the presentation entailed by a phrase is not itself presented by the phrase; there appears to be a cleavage in the phrase itself. On the other hand, each time a phrase happens, it also opens up an abyss between itself and the next phrase (ibid.: para. 188); being is event, which means being is also the negativity entailed by the correlative notions 'the previous event' and 'the next event', as well as that entailed by the battle to determine what, precisely, the next event will be. The phrase *qua* situated event therefore entails but lacks its very presentation, which the phrase by definition cannot itself present; it also entails but lacks that which came before it, and that which it is not yet but could be. The situated phrase implies, then, being as lack, or inconsistency, or that which in itself cannot be thought. In fact, that part of it which it *is not* – variously described by Sfez as event, linkage and *polémos* – is being. So if the situated phrase is 'one being', 'Being [itself] is not' (ibid.: para. 127).

Lyotard will have to address this implication, since if it is not a bare paradox, then it appears to set the dialectical wheels in motion; it may well lead us,

with Hegel, to the conclusion that being is becoming (and perhaps, ultimately, recuperable in/as a speculative-transcendent system). Lyotard responds to this worry by stating that

> … when an entailed presentation [i.e. the presentation of the current phrase, or of the previous or next phrase] is presented, it is not an entailed but a situated presentation. Or: Being grasped as an existent is non-Being … What Hegel calls determination and which is the mainspring of the passage from Being to non-Being is the situation of Being (or of presentation) in a phrase universe, that is, the passage from the presentation entailed by the first phrase to the presentation (of the first phrase) presented by the second phrase. This 'disintegration' (the passage from Being to existent or non-Being) only works, however, if the stakes of the second phrase are to present the presentation … There are many genres of discourse, though, whose stakes as prescribed by their rules do not involve presenting the presentation, and where 'disintegration' is consequently not necessary. (Ibid.: para. 127)

To phrase one's anxiety over the negativity implied by a phrase or by the linkage between phrases is, in short, to have already situated the presentation of that phrase or the phrases in question; it is already to operate under the dictates of a particular genre and, as Lyotard is at pains to emphasize, there are multiple genres for which the situation of a phrase's presentation and the 'disintegration' this implies are not at issue. Lyotard's strategy here is not so much to refute the claims of the speculative-ontological genre as to emphasize that it is heterogeneous with respect to other modes of linkage, and in any case is transcended by the event as such.

This, however, raises another problem: how can Lyotard appeal to the event this way, as in some way *determinant in the last instance*? In what sense can the event be the basis of an ontology that could defuse speculative-ontological discourse? How, in short, could a philosophy of radical immanence contain and rely upon a transcendence or rather a nothingness at its very heart? As I've already suggested, an ontology of the event as such seems to imply that the event is transcendent upon the phrase universe, i.e. the situated content of the event, as well as the linkages and the stable, temporally enduring structures that would issue from it. Lyotard attempts to grapple with this problem by showing that the relation of transcendence is actually immanent to the phrase-event.

To give an example of how transcendence is actually immanent to the phrase-event, consider space. Space is a transcendent condition of experience, as argued by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (2007); however, according to Lyotard, '[t]here wouldn't be any space … independent of a phrase' (ibid.:

para. 120). Space erupts from nothingness into being, as a category marked by transcendence, in a universe presented by a phrase. Without space, certain contents of certain phrase universes would be doubtless inconceivable; but without there being a phrase, there would be no universe within which space would transcend such contents. The event of the phrase presents space as constitutive of a universe, but this means that the event transcends space: space itself is only an instance of transcendence within a phrase universe, of which the pure 'it happens' of the phrase is the transcendental condition. But lest this appear to contradict Lyotard's immanentism, it should be noted that the transcendent relation of the phrase to space and its other transcendent instances only occurs with the phrase; hence, transcendence itself, far from being an *eternal* feature of being, is a feature occurring each time, when there is a phrase. The transcendence of the phrase over the transcendences it presents as constituent parts of its universe happens only when a phrase happens. That a phrase must happen is necessary, but this necessity does not transcend the phrases that happen; rather, it is a function of the fact that there is a phrase (and in any case the pronouncement of necessity is the pronouncement of a metalinguistic phrase, in the sense of a phrase about phrases) (ibid.: xiv).

What then of the other Kantian transcendental category of experience: time? Like space, Lyotard claims that there would not be time independent of a phrase (ibid.: para. 120). But does this not seem counterintuitive? A phrase happens, which is to say that 'there are events: something happens which is not tautological with what has happened' (ibid.: para. 132). Is time therefore a transcendent condition of happening? Lyotard disagrees: happening, in time, is itself utterable, 'situable' one might say, only within the confines of a phrase universe. As *pure* event, i.e. as *presentation*, the phrase does not occur in time; as the referent of a preceding, current or following phrase-event, i.e. as *situated*, it does ('That phrase that happened before this one'; 'The phrase I am uttering'; 'The phrase that will follow this one'). This entails that as pure event, the phrase cannot be captured – it cannot be transcended. But as the referent of another phrase, it is thus captured.

The appeal to Kant here is not accidental, since Lyotard's work from the pagan period on is a critical (recall, basically Heideggerian) appropriation of Kantian philosophy. Lyotard adopts something like Kant's division of human cognition into different faculties, such as imagination, reason, and the like. Where he differs is with respect to the notion that these are faculties, properly speaking – that is to say, that they are powers comprising a thinking subject. Rather, 'faculties' are recast – roughly[12] – as the different phrase regimens (sets

of rules), or as genres vying to determine the pertinence of linkages between phrases (ibid.: xii). The 'faculty' of judgement, not itself truly a faculty in Kant but rather a power of finding and inventing criteria, of settling boundary disputes and forging links between the true faculties, is interpreted by Lyotard in like manner: judgement, in the sense of reflective judgement seen above, is not a power exercised by a subject, but rather it is the fact of passage between faculties as such.[13] Hence Lyotard's ontological thinking is likewise de-anthropologized; it is a series of events linked together, a 'pile of phrases' (Lyotard op. cit.: xv). It is not undertaken on the authority of a subject, i.e. by an 'author', but is of the order of the occurrence.

Consider the notion of presentation. Lyotard argues that the notion of presentation implied by a phrase is not to be confused, as it is in Kant's notion of presentation, *Darstellung*, with a 'given' (ibid.: 61). A given is necessarily given *to a subject*, whereas a presentation 'is the event of its (inapprehensible) presence' (ibid.: 61). In fact, whereas a presentation is nothing other than the event-ness of a phrase, or the fact of a phrase's happening, of its presenting a universe, the notion of a given formulated by Kant as *Darstellung* already implies two phrases (ibid.). In a given, an unknown addressor in the first place (quasi-)phrases something, it 'speaks matter … to an addressee receptive to this idiom, and who therefore understands it, at least in the sense by which he or she is affected by it' (ibid.: 62); in other words, something is phrased in which only the addressee instance is marked (ibid.). Then follows a second moment, wherein this addressee, this subject, 'passes into the situation of addressing instance and addresses the phrase of space-time [i.e. the Kantian categories of the Transcendental Aesthetic], the form phrase, to the unknown addressor of the first phrase, who thereby becomes an addressee' (ibid.).

This second phrase, called intuition 'in the Kantian lexicon', 'applies deictic markers onto the impressions procured by sensation' (i.e. an indistinct sensation becomes a referent locatable in space-time) (ibid.). Intuition transforms a feeling into a phenomenon (ibid.), but thereby 'the "first" addressor …, the one who affects the subject through sensation, remains unknown to the latter' (ibid.). This is because the subject links onto the 'first' phrase, which was phrased in the idiom of matter (I would suggest 'material', as in the material at hand), with its own idiom (space-time). Hence, Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon: the latter is the unknown material that is, so to speak, behind and before the intuition implied by *Darstellung*, by a given (ibid.).

The crucial thing to retain from this account of *Darstellung* is that '[t]he "immediacy" of the given … is not immediate' (ibid.). *Darstellung*, 'presentation'

in the Kantian idiom, is in Lyotard's view a misnomer: '[w]ith Kant, a *Darstellung* is not presentation, it is a situating', i.e. it conceives the pragmatic instances implied by a presentation in a particular configuration (it is a matter of *what* is phrased, not the brute fact *that* there has been a phrase) (ibid.: 65). Since *Darstellung* denotes a given, it already implies phrases, and hence, it already implies a logically and ontologically prior notion of presentation (specifically, Lyotard's).

Darstellung is therefore far from basic; it is 'the conjunction of two phrases from different regimens', 'in general, an adjoining, a conjoining, a setting side by side, a comparison, between an established or an unknown rule and an intuition (or whatever takes the place of an intuition)' (ibid.: 64). Two things are implied by this. First, Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic does not reach bedrock; there is something logically and ontologically prior to the interpretation of the noumena under the categories of space-time made by the subject, and this, precisely, is presentation, the phrase *qua* event. Kant thus falls prey to a 'metaphysical illusion', which 'consists in treating a presentation like a situation'; '[t]he philosophy of the subject', which Kant espouses 'lends itself to this', and so must be severely critiqued (ibid.: 61).

Darstellung also implies a 'passage apparatus' (ibid.: 64), a generalized 'power' of the subject to effect passages between heterogeneous phrase regimens (i.e. as was the case in the aforementioned passage from sensation to determinant judgement via intuition – specifically, the linking on to sensation from within the idiom of space-time). Lyotard explains this general passage apparatus as follows:

> The subject presents an object before a rule, determined or not, with a view to validating this rule, or discovering it, or evaluating the object. The presentation does not come from anywhere other than the subject [i.e. as we saw, the presentation is more accurately a given, a situating], it is the confrontation of the subject's works with other works by the subject, except that their joining together, whether regulated or not, takes place between heterogeneous faculties, that is, between phrases subject to different regimens or genres. (Ibid.)

To repeat, Kant splits the subject into faculties (reason, imagination), whereas Lyotard conceives of these as, roughly at best (ibid.), phrases obeying particular regimens (sets of rules) or genres (stipulating ends or stakes determining linkages between phrases obeying heterogeneous regimens as pertinent or not, opportune or not) (ibid.). Kant's problem was how to account for the presence of heterogeneous faculties in a single subject, and he endeavoured to solve it in

the *Critique of Judgment* (Kant 2000); Lyotard's problem is how, with respect to the fact that there is a plurality of genres, to judge passages or rather 'linkages' between phrases obeying heterogeneous regimens (i.e. the question of a 'just linkage'). The difference is crucial: whereas Kant assumes and therefore must preserve the facultary notion of a subject, Lyotard must only account for a power or, more accurately, a genre that allows for passages between heterogeneous regimens and genres by freely examining their rules, their compatibilities and their incompatibilities.

Against Kant, one can ask: how, precisely, is the subject, as an architectonic or facultary unity, able to affect passages *within itself*? This would seem to entail a further 'faculty' of effecting passages between faculties – but then who, or what, would be making (or would constitute) the reflective judgements that this 'faculty' would seem to imply? For Lyotard, the Kantian subject is

> neither active nor passive, it is both; but it is only one or the other insofar as, caught in the regimen of phrases, it pits itself against a phrase from another regimen, and seeks, if not their reconciliation, then at least the rules for their conflict, namely, the subject's forever threatened unity. (Lyotard 1988: 65)

But Lyotard uses the word 'subject' in two different senses in this passage: the subject (reflective judgement) is that which seeks to formulate and/or tentatively bridge the disunity of the subject (broader facultary Kantian subject). The Kantian-facultary subject would seem, then, to imply a logically prior subject, whose function is to effect passages and hence hold the greater facultary architecture together. Accordingly, Kant seeks in the *Critique of Judgment* to explain how the faculty of judgement holds the subject together.

This is perhaps not inconceivable. But Lyotard suggests that the 'prior' or minimal subject,[14] the 'faculty' of judgement that effects such passages, does not necessarily serve this harmonizing function. Indeed, when effecting a passage between heterogeneous regimens or genres (i.e. Kant's 'faculties'), the minimal, judging subject is always 'caught in one regimen of phrases' or another and is therefore charged with the paradoxical task of seeking their reconciliation or at least the rules of the conflict from within the purview of a particular set of rules (Lyotard 1988b: 64). Sentiment seems to be an exception, since therein the subject 'receives' something from a noumenal outside; we already saw, however, that this pure 'giving' is already 'transformed into a moment of exchange' by the phrasing of space-time (ibid.: 65).

It is here that Lyotard turns to Kant's analytic of the sublime for a stark demonstration of how the working of judgement, the 'passage apparatus', bears

witness to the heterogeneity of the faculties of the Kantian subject. Lyotard suggests that the sublime sentiment, described by Kant as a dispute between the faculty of reason and that of imagination, and supposedly resolved in favour of the unity of the subject, both fatally undermines the philosophy of the subject and trumps the speculative genre (i.e. Hegel) (ibid.: para. 126). While the second claim is as bold as it is fascinating, I will here restrict my attention to the first for reasons of scope and relevance.

According to Kant, natural scenes such as wind-tossed oceans and mountain ranges may call forth an immediate intuition of infinite magnitude or force or both. The *mathematically* sublime sentiment arising from such scenes begins from the fact that through reason one may realize that the concept of largeness and the numeric series may, logically if not logistically, be infinitely extended (Kant 2000). One may therefore arrive at an intuition or Idea of infinite magnitude without being capable of presenting this magnitude (i.e. imagining it, or re-presenting it for another, as a totality). The *dynamically* sublime sentiment, on the other hand, is such that through reason one may conceive of infinite force without, likewise, being capable of presenting it (ibid.).

In both cases, the subject is repelled[15] since there is something of which it can conceive but cannot present, hence a rupture between the subject and that which it feels and thinks, an anxiety of alienation and insignificance in the face of the infinite; however, Kant argues that the subject is also attracted, fascinated or pleased[16] in both cases of the sublime sentiment since the realization that reason can conceive of the unpresentable puts the subject in some sense above finite nature (since it has a kind of negative access to the rational harmony that it infers must lie beyond or underpin nature) (ibid.). The sublime is thus an agitated mixture of pleasure and pain in the spectator (ibid.), and can be considered a negative presentation of the unpresentable (i.e. a presentation that there is, *qu'il y a de l'imprésentable*, even though the unpresentable itself cannot be presented). For Kant, then, the infinite or 'something like an Absolute, either of magnitude or of power', 'the object of an Idea of Reason', is rendered 'quasi-perceptible' in the sublime situation (Lyotard 1988c: 136).[17] It is important to emphasize that it is not the natural scenes occasioning this mix of pleasure and pain themselves that are sublime, but rather this negative presentation, which is a mixture of pleasure and pain, rooted as it is in the interplay between reason and the faculty of imagination/presentation.[18]

For Kant, it is natural scenes of chaos that best provoke feelings of the sublime in the spectator, since disarray and devastation, on a great scale, call to mind intuitions of both absolute or infinite magnitude (the mathematically

sublime sentiment) and of absolute or infinite force (the dynamically sublime sentiment). In short, presentations of great chaos, since these best call forth both the mathematically and the dynamically sublime, suggest to the subject that there is (*qu'il y a*) something which is unpresentable. There is of course a perceptual distance proper to such intuitions; the spectator must stand out of harm's way, lest the sublime sentiment give way to panic or cringing fear (Kant 2000).

Interestingly, Kant's historico-political writings belong in the orbit of the analytic of the sublime as well. The enthusiasm of the safely distant spectators of great political upheavals, who nonetheless run the risk of censure from their own autocratic governments for expressing it,[19] counts as a negative presentation of the unpresentable infinite or at least indefinite moral potential of the human race and the unknowable historical logic underlying it:

> [the French Revolution] … finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race.[20] (Kant 1992: 153)

As Lyotard points out with regard to enthusiasm,

> as an extreme case of sublime affection, its value as a political sign is undeniable according to Kant. For the experience of the sublime feeling demands a sensitivity to Ideas that is not natural but acquired through culture. Humanity must be cultivated (and thus in a state of progress) to be able to feel, even in the crime perpetrated by the Jacobins, the 'presence' of the unpresentable Idea of freedom. (Lyotard 1993c: 71)

However, Kant's notion of indexes of progress in history, 'signs of history' or 'historical signs' (Kant 1963: 143), is employed by Lyotard in such a way as to index failures and to nourish, if not historical pessimism, then the anchoring of a radical, minimal hope in melancholy (Lyotard op. cit.). Melancholia with respect to history may itself indicate a kind of human progress, since it would betray a human sensitivity to the chasm between Ideas and realities, and hence to the Ideas themselves (Lyotard 1988b). Lyotard worries, however, that under pressure from 'the economic genre' – i.e. time is money, abandonment of the humanities for business/technical degrees and so on – 'culture, as a consumer of time, ought to be eliminated. Humans will no longer feel even sorrow before the incommensurability between realities and Ideas. They will become more and more competent at strategies of exchange, but exclusively so' (ibid.: para. 260).

Though he discusses the sublime in terms of nature and history, Kant scarcely treats feelings of the sublime provoked by human artifice except for remarks in passing about the great pyramids and St. Peter's Basilica (Kant 2000). These remarks are confined to speculations on a variation of the aforementioned proper perceptual distance, i.e. that at which one must view the monuments so as to experience the sublime sentiment; one cannot be too far or else the scale of magnitude is not evident, and one cannot be too close or else by the time the eye takes in the full monument the parts taken in earliest will have been extinguished from the imagination and there will be no immediate, holistic intuition of infinite magnitude (ibid).[21]

We can note that Lyotard's contribution here is in pushing Kant further along this line of thinking, and applying the analytic of the sublime to aesthetic judgements of contemporary avant-garde fine arts. For Lyotard, contemporary art invokes the sublime sentiment insofar as the ideas in which it trades outstrip the medium of presentation (i.e. the canvas, the photograph, etc.) (Lyotard 1988c). This is in fact the function of the artistic avant-garde: continuously questioning the media of presentation and pushing the boundaries of art further towards the unpresentable (and by extension continuously challenging art's inevitable co-option by the market or, to invoke Adorno (2001), the 'culture industry'). This pushing further can be expressed in a number of ways, from the dovetailing of art with philosophy (conceptual art) or the abandonment of art *for* the pursuit of philosophy, to the abandonment of the canvas for such avenues as body art, environmental art, performance, the 'happening', etc. Avant-garde artistic practice becomes increasingly important to Lyotard near the end of his life.

Ultimately, according to Lyotard, Kant's analytic of the sublime undermines the subject as conceived in the Transcendental Aesthetic, because it presents a case wherein the faculties of the subject are in irresolvable dispute. Kant's term for this dispute is *Widerstreit*, which Lyotard renders in French as *différend*. Lyotard's whole effort is to show, contrary to Kant, that the dispute cannot be resolved without doing a wrong to one or both parties; more specifically he reads Kant's *Widerstreit* between the faculties as pulling the supposed subject apart (leaving behind only the 'faculty' of judgement as a kind of free-floating, more accurately vacillating, fact of passage or equal attention – think here of Lyotard's reading of Freud's theoretical 'apathy' in *Rudiments païens*). Lyotard reads Kant against Kant, so to speak;[22] he emphasizes the threat that Kant's analytic of the sublime poses to the unity of the Kantian subject:

> … the grasp in 'one glance' of what is successive, which reason demands of the imagination in the judgment upon the sublime, and which must render intuitable the 'coexistence' (*Zugleichsein*) of what can only be given successively, does 'violence' not only to the *a priori* condition of the intuition of any given or succession, but to the eminent and unique condition that such a grasp imposes on the 'intuition of ourselves and our state'. If the imagination were able to satisfy reason, time as the form of inner sense would be altered, at least for the duration of the *Zugleich* (but then how would this be determined?). This would mean that there would no longer be an inner sense to organize our representations in a time series. The 'subject' would be deprived of the means of constituting its subjectivity … the 'regression' of the imagination in sublime feeling strikes a blow at the very foundation of the 'subject'. (Lyotard 2004: 143–4)

Broken down, the problem is with the demands reason makes of the imagination in the sublime sentiment. The demand for simultaneous presentation of what can only be 'given' as successive flies in the face of one of the transcendental conditions of the subject's experience of the world and itself; it also implies that the subject is internally, necessarily and violently divided.[23] This would render Kant's facultary notion of the subject a kind of illusion, or at the very least a tenuous truce between warring faculties; the ground of Kant's subject would on this reading be at best a necessarily and perpetually shifting one.

Lyotard's post-*Differend* writings (and here Badiou will trace a similar trajectory after the mathematical turn) concern themselves above all with the subject. He multiplies testimonies to the effect that thought is an incessant and unprincipled wandering between faculties, ever in search of a rule. He does not however always invoke Kant in the ways just described. Lyotard also draws for example upon Freud, Augustine, Malraux, Paul and a number of artists to drive home essentially the same message: that human thought is vulnerable and radically finite, but also intrinsically resistant to totalization. As I argue elsewhere (McLennan 2013a), the late writings mark a shift to an additive strategy of witnessing, resembling Adorno's 'determinate negation' (2007). The strategy is political in a very broad sense, since Lyotard maintains that the defence of human finitude and the irremediable remainder of thought against the inhuman logic of technoscientific development is likely all that remains of politics (Lyotard 1988c). The strategy is also however melancholic and flirts with nihilism because the witness's work in the name of human finitude may be recuperated in the name of the latter's 'mutation or its defeat for the benefit of a better performing system' (Lyotard 2003: 99). The fact that Lyotard does not succumb to nihilism in spite of the melancholy of his strategy and the

glaring limitations of his tactics (inaccessible texts and curation of art exhibits) earns him the respect of Sfez and Badiou among others; Badiou avows that in *The Differend* 'philosophy has not stopped being militant' and the later works suggest that Lyotard's militancy endured until the very end (Badiou 2012b: 29). But the preceding also explains my claim in the introduction that Lyotard's later writings, though rigorous and original, break no new ground at the deepest level. Though rooted in the intimacy of the body in a way markedly at odds with the dry, abstract plateaus of *The Differend*, the late writings may be inscribed under the latter's basic ontological picture. The problem remains how to effect passages between heterogeneous genres of linkage in such a way that does justice to both parties. And this, in turn, presupposes an ontology of the event as phrase.

Boiling all of this down, we have the following description of Lyotard's thinking of being:

- Being is event; it is pure presentation, hence it is one event, one time.
- Being is also however linkage and *polémos*; it calls forth another event necessarily, but how that event will be situated is not necessary. Only at the level of genres can we decide what counts as a pertinent linkage, but genres are defined by different rules and stakes and so are in irremediable conflict. Being as one being, one time therefore already implies or calls forth the multiple, but in the last instance this is a multiplicity without cohesion; it is pure or inconsistent multiplicity, paratax, not syntax.
- Since being is pure or inconsistent multiplicity, it is unthinkable as such. Indeed, thought – the 'faculty' of reflective judgement – only strives for the novel, if not impossible linkage, to effect just passages between genres without a meta-rule to guide it. So thought is pain; it always falls short not only of its own inner or Kantian-facultary unity, but also of the Heideggerian/pre-Socratic/Romantic 'fullness of being' (both of which are, in any case, impossible as such). Thought leaves a remainder.
- Modes of linkage will henceforth be thought, in the last analysis, under this rule of the inconsistent multiple. Thought of being is now inextricably bound up with the rule. And thought worthy of the name – 'honourable' thinking – bears witness precisely to the impossibility of a transcendent rule of rules. As such it bears witness to the unthinkable, the unpresentable, the ineffable, the impossible passage. This has wide-reaching implications for politics, ethics, love, art and writing. But also, as we will see, for philosophy.

Badiou's thinking of being

The idea that Lyotard is connected to Badiou in some important way is gaining traction. The recent spate of translations of Badiou's works into English has helped in this regard, since it is not uncommon to encounter Lyotard's name therein. Of special note are the chapters in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* and the *Pocket Pantheon*, which are devoted to Lyotard, not to mention Badiou's intervention and Lyotard's response as recorded in the still untranslated Lyotard text *Témoigner du différend: Quand phraser ne se peut*. I will discuss these texts in subsequent chapters. But granting as I have that *The Differend* is of a fundamental importance in the interpretation of Lyotard's corpus, we must note that Badiou's *Being and Event* is similarly central to his own. It would therefore be of obvious interest for our purposes to read these texts together in order to investigate how deeply the link between the two thinkers goes. Can *Being and Event*, a text whose meta-ontological deduction has produced volumes of commentary generally skirting the question of Lyotard's influence,[24] be further illuminated by reading it against *The Differend*? My wager is that it can.

First, note that Badiou explicitly acknowledges the connection to Lyotard in *Being and Event*. The admission is buried in an endnote, so it is easy to miss (Badiou 2007a: 483). The note was inserted to address the question of how the ideas and themes expressed in Badiou's text stand with respect to those of certain of his French contemporaries. This is helpful, since the connection is not made explicit in the body of the text; readers of *Being and Event* will note that when Badiou names names, he is reckoning with historical figures. In the endnote however he only includes those contemporaries who make 'some sense' to him (ibid.: 482). And he underscores that it is not simply a question of 'proximities alone, or of influence', but also, perhaps, 'the most extreme distancing, but within a dialectic that maintains thought' (ibid.).

The specific claim that Badiou makes about Lyotard positions him as one of his most important interlocutors. He claims that, along with Deleuze, Lyotard is one of two 'principal names in France' of 'a major theme of the epoch': the theme of presentation as pure multiple (ibid.: 483). This is precisely Badiou's own theme, or rather the one from which builds his system. But he notes that whereas the 'latent paradigm' of his work is mathematical, Deleuze's is 'natural' (in a Spinozistic sense) and Lyotard's is 'juridical (in the sense of the [Kantian] Critique)' (ibid.). From this comment alone, which begs elaboration, we might reasonably expect that Badiou will engage in pitched exchanges with the two thinkers; after all, they diverge from him while occupying the same fundamental

ground. But while indeed Badiou has devoted a book-length critical study to Deleuze,[25] and the connection has been widely explored by commentators, there is no comparable work on Lyotard by Badiou and in fact the Lyotard question has barely been posed in the secondary literature.

Granting however that Badiou and Lyotard meet up over the theme of presentation as pure multiple, it is quite clear that it would be a mistake to read *Being and Event* as derivative of Lyotard, or as commentary. The trick is to build a case for Lyotard's evidently considerable importance to Badiou without overstating the extent to which he can serve as an interpretative key.

For one thing, as Badiou is careful to state in the same endnote, the theses of his contemporaries were to some extent ambient in the French intellectual context of *Being and Event*, and in any case already expressive of an ongoing, plurivocal dialogue (Badiou 2007a: 482). It is therefore often less a question of direct influence than of exposure to multiple, sometimes indirect tributaries. Witness, on this count, how Badiou places Deleuze alongside Lyotard, while stating that the pure multiplicity of presentation is a major theme *of the epoch* – thus in one stroke posing the fascinating question of how the Deleuze–Lyotard relation might triangulate our picture of Badiou's standing, and suggesting a *fil rouge* by which the French intellectual *fin-de-siècle* may be more broadly interpreted.

Further, note that *Being and Event* cannot be read as pure criticism or commentary without failing to grasp its deductive structure and grand rationalist style. Badiou is above all engaged in a constructive or systematic exercise – even if, as we will see, 'subtractive' figures loom large in his later work. Though his language appears Lyotardian at the outset, his methods and his trajectory are not.

Finally, even granting that Lyotard was the senior thinker of the two, it is still much more reasonable to posit a dialogical interplay rather than a unidirectional influence. The Lyotard of *The Differend* was evidently already conversant with Badiou's own thoughts, arguments and concerns. As Badiou reports in *Logics of Worlds*, 'In 1983 … Lyotard told me that he was publishing "his" (only) book of philosophy, *The Differend*, and that it was my commentary he was waiting for' (Badiou 2009b: 553).

Three points can be made here: first, Badiou's scare quotes around 'his' can be plausibly interpreted in light of Lyotard's longstanding and, in the 'Reading Dossier' of *The Differend*, ironical authorial self-effacement. This points to a notion of philosophy as pure process, possessed by no one, with which Badiou will have to contend. Second, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Lyotard wrote

and published a staggering number of books and articles, but only considered *The Differend* to be properly philosophical or, rather, his book *of* philosophy, where philosophy is understood as a sustained activity. Badiou's comments on the significance Lyotard attributed to *The Differend* are in fact corroborated by Lyotard himself and are plainly reflected on the back cover of the 1983 edition of the text. Third and finally, notwithstanding Lyotard's explicit address of *The Differend* to any and all 'philosophical' readers (Lyotard 1988b: xiv), Badiou's comments suggest that *The Differend* was written with him in mind as a possible interlocutor.

The context of Badiou's anecdote is also important. Lyotard was speaking to Badiou following a session of the seminar 'The Retreat of the Political', 'organized at the École Normale Supérieure by Sarah Kofman, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Lyotard and others' (ibid.). Badiou, who was invited to participate in this seminar, gave two talks that would later comprise his short 1985 text *Peut-on penser la politique?* As Nina Power and Alberto Toscano suggest, the latter is an 'essential' book in Badiou's corpus, wherein key concepts such as 'event' are introduced (Power and Toscano 2010).[26] The Lyotard of *The Differend* was thus conversant with Badiou at the time that he was composing *Peut-on penser la politique?* This fact alone is suggestive of a nuanced reading of the link between *The Differend* and *Being and Event*.

Striving then for a deft touch, let us return to Badiou's comment concerning 'Lyotard' as one of two principal names for the contemporary theme of the pure multiplicity of presentation. The two texts turn out to be intimately connected, not just historically, but at the deepest ontological level. Badiou and Lyotard effectively set out from the same premise: 'First of all – and on this point my agreement with Lyotard is profound, essential – there is the multiple … Being is essentially plural' (Badiou 2009c: 96). And just as Lyotard's project in *The Differend* was to think being with and against Heidegger, Badiou's masterpiece is also conceived as a post-Heideggerian thinking of being. More accurately, like Lyotard, Badiou broadly accepts the Heideggerian thesis of ontological difference – that is, the difference between beings and being-as-such – but attempts to rethink it in such a way as to escape Heidegger's poetical ontology of presence and his romantic nostalgia. He does so by resurrecting mathematical-ontological thinking in the tradition of Plato, rejecting the criticism that Heidegger levels at the latter in texts like 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth', (Heidegger 1998b).

Badiou claims that the pre-Platonic poem and the Platonic matheme indicate two orientations commanding 'the entire destiny of thought in the west'

(Badiou 2007a: 125). The later Heidegger, under sway of the poem, thinks 'appearing as the coming-to-presence of being' (ibid.), specifically in the horizon of language which he variously describes as 'the house of being', 'the house of the truth of being' and 'at once the house of being and the home of human essence' (Heidegger 1998a: 248–9, 272–3). Badiou, following Plato, will deploy mathematics to escape the horizon of poetic language – and in the first place, from the all-too-human horizon of language in general – disjoining 'being from appearing, essence from existence' (Badiou op. cit.). According to Badiou, Heidegger, in whose name contemporary philosophical 'ontology' is 'entirely dominated' (ibid.: 9), remains in spite of everything a prisoner to metaphysics and an exemplar of romantic modernity.[27] This is precisely because he thinks being as 'endowment and gift, as presence and opening' and therefore his ontology is 'the offering of a trajectory of proximity' (Badiou 2007a: 9). His ontology is indeed poetic in its inspiration (e.g. Hölderlin, Trakl), and he sutures philosophy to the poem, to the detriment of both.[28] Heidegger is through and through 'haunted by the dissipation of Presence and the loss of the origin' (Badiou 2007a: 9–10).

Lyotard, as we saw, though broadly Heideggerian in his own categories and concepts of the thinking of being, mounted a similar criticism. He attempted to get beyond the poetic pull of Heidegger's ontology, the seduction of pure presence and subsumption to the One, with a rigorous thinking of the rule, the irremediable clash of the faculties, and the intractable remainder. According to Lyotard the true mark of the event is the thought that pure presence is not, that there is no origin, and that all is strife. The trajectory traced in *The Differend* reveals or rather enacts being to be pure, inherently unstructured, infinitely sequential multiplicity – what Lyotard calls 'paratax' – and the acceptance of Heidegger's thesis of ontological difference amounts only to tracing a line between presented being and being-as-presentation. Since the presentation itself cannot by definition be presented, there is no lost unity to speak of and Lyotard appears on first blush to have escaped Heidegger's romanticism. His thought hearkens back to no originary fullness, but faces up to something like a pure chaos of situations that is devoid of intrinsic meaning yet, for that very reason, is radically open by way of the question of the next linkage.

For Badiou however, the way in which Lyotard reckons with Heidegger comes at a heavy cost. Philosophy's 'two adversaries of origin', recall, are poetry and sophistry (Badiou 2008a: 130). Though philosophy borrows from both (ibid.), it must distinguish its operations from theirs. The trouble, from Badiou's perspective, is that Lyotard's thinking of being shows itself to be insufficiently

autonomous from either. In the first place, one could argue that Lyotard remains in Heidegger's poetical orbit despite his best efforts inasmuch as he continues to privilege the category of appearance, and against the horizon of language no less. His ontological claim that being is only one being, one time is a mediated one, since it implies a situation in which the count 'one' already operates; it also implies that from the point of view of the language that speaks it there *is* therefore never anything but what appears, i.e. that which belongs to the situation. Couple this with his insistence on the syntactic nature of situations and the impression is produced that being is nothing but the void between situations.[29] For Lyotard, precisely because the linkage of phrases traverses this void, this translates into anxiety and hope; being in the substantive sense disappears into the question 'is it happening?' (Lyotard 1988b: para. 131). This suggests a subjectivity trained upon and invested in appearance; if not 'nostalgic', properly speaking, then characterized by a certain desire for the ineffable.[30] As his writings on aesthetics especially bear out, Lyotard maintains in his thinking a paradoxical nostalgia for the unpresentable presentation, or the unpresentable *in* presentation, and an orientation of thought that awaits the dispensation of a being that is no longer thought in terms pure presence, but rather pure contingency.[31]

But there is a second problem. Thinking being not mathematically but within the purview of the rule, the road Lyotard takes leads not to philosophy but to sophistry – or better yet, sophistry is of its essence, granting of course that sophistry, as a strategic deployment of rhetoric, is a thought of the rule. The sophistical tools deployed by Lyotard are by no means worthless, since they might be said to ward off the extremism of Heidegger's thought – what Badiou will call its 'disastrous' qualities (see Chapter 4). In fact, Badiou accepts this as a laudable contribution that thinkers like Lyotard can make. And – as we will see in the next chapter – they might even allow Lyotard to claim that he is doing real philosophy, as opposed to Heidegger, who succumbs to the terrorism and dogmatism of the One. But to accept this claim is to uncouple philosophy from truth and, if Badiou's analysis is correct, to allow sophistry to speak in the name of true philosophy.

It is therefore neither through the rule nor the poem but through the matheme – which for Heidegger, precisely represents the great fall from Parmenides to Plato via the challenge of sophistry, the foreclosure of thought by scientific knowledge – that Badiou will attempt to think being without succumbing to the seduction of poetic ontology. His project, around the time of *Being and Event*, the first *Manifesto for Philosophy* and *Conditions*, might be conceived as a way out of what he perceived to be the end of the century's

impasse, the apparent choice between Heideggerian (or Gadamerian) hermeneutics and modern sophistry (in both its 'postmodern' and 'analytic' varieties), by way of an affirmative appropriation of mathematical thinking.[32] That the chain of historical-philosophical meditations running through *Being and Event* begins not with Parmenides but with the *Parmenides* of Plato alone drives home the forceful and fundamental way in which Badiou distinguishes his project from Heidegger's.

Indeed, the break from Heidegger's hegemony in contemporary philosophical ontology takes the form of a remarkable settling of accounts with the Pre-Socratics in Meditation One of *Being and Event*. Setting out the *a priori* conditions for any possible ontology, Badiou makes 'a decision to break with the arcana of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried, phoenix of its own sophistic consumption' (Badiou 2007a: 23). This decision takes shape for Badiou in the surprising thesis – surprising since it is evocative of sophistry – that *the one is not*.

This section will spin out the implications of this thesis for Badiou's larger project by examining the two fundamental doctrines that flow from it – the doctrine on inconsistent multiplicity and the doctrine on the void – and the account of the event that results. In discussing all of this I will briefly describe Badiou's use of Zermelo–Fraenkel (ZF) set theory to reconceive of the language of being-as-such, and to construct his account of the event. This will bear later, in Chapter 3, on his account of truths, the empty category of Truth and of the concept of 'the generic' according to which he grounds his definitions of philosophy and, by extension, sophistry. It is to be understood that this section does not attempt a complete overview of Badiou's ontological thinking. Francois Wahl is correct to claim that Badiou's decision on being is 'a site of anchorage to which all the terms are tied, one after the other in a continuous chain' and that, as such, 'With Badiou, we never leave the discourse of being' even while moving on to discuss concepts like truth, event and subject (Wahl 2008: xxiii). This said, I will have to risk moving over some steps rather quickly in order, while attempting to preserve the coherence and veracity of the account, to illuminate only those parts which are of greatest relevance to the dispute with Lyotard.

Being as multiple

The surprise occasioned by Badiou's apparently sophistical declaration, that the one is not, is quickly dispelled. As I will explain in Chapter 4, it is not unusual for Badiou's philosopher to glean important insights from the sophist, and on

his view one of the highest philosophical virtues is to retain the latter as an essential dialogue partner.

For Badiou we must accept the thesis that the one is not because the one is only ever the 'count-as-one', i.e. it is quite literally a number (Badiou 2007a: 24). It is not a presentation, nor is it what presents (being, rather, 'is what presents (itself)', as Lyotard might also be inclined to put it) (ibid.). The one is rather an 'operational result' of counting, for which an anterior multiple (only legible as such after the counting) is assumed and required (ibid.). The multiple is in this way also 'the regime of presentation'; being is 'only multiple inasmuch as it occurs in presentation' (ibid.). Badiou's term for a presented multiplicity (further on: 'a structured presentation') is 'situation' (ibid.: 25). Every situation has a 'structure', which is to say 'its own particular operator of the count-as-one' (ibid.: 24). So the one is counted according to the structure of the situation, which is itself multiple and (already) presented.

So being is not one, since the one is not – or rather, the one is not primordial, cannot be a name for being itself, since it is only a number, a count, the result of an operation. But based on the preceding explanation, neither, without qualification, can we say that being is multiple. Badiou is not effecting here a simple inversion of Parmenides's monism, but is rather cutting through the issue of the one and the multiple at a diagonal. The one is not, but being is neither one *nor* multiple strictly speaking (ibid.), since a multiplicity is by definition a multiplicity of ones, and ones are only operational results of the count-as-one. Badiou's thinking of being takes rather, in the first instance, the form of a 'doctrine on inconsistent multiplicity' (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou 2014a: 11). This is the doctrine that being is *multiple multiplicities*, which themselves contain only multiplicities which contain only multiplicities, and so on ad infinitum. As such being is wholly *inconsistent* multiplicity – uncounted, unstructured multiplicity – as distinct from *consistent* multiplicity (Badiou 2007a: 25). The latter is, we have already noted, what Badiou calls a structured presentation or a situation, and is a multiplicity of ones. But we should also note here that being *qua* being is not *a* multiplicity of multiplicities either, in the sense that it would constitute *one* overarching multiplicity, a 'universe' or the like. Affirming as much would 'smuggle back the One at a global level' (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou 2014a: 11).

It would be useful to illustrate the difference between the two types of multiplicity – though bear in mind that in itself, inconsistent multiplicity is by definition not a *type* of multiplicity because to be among types is to be counted. Consider a given multiplicity: a playgroup of four or five toddlers. We'll call them

'*Les copins*'.[33] From the point of view of the situation in which they are counted, the children belong in a readily recognizable way, despite their disparate characteristics and often chaotic behaviours, to the playgroup '*Les copins*'. The children are not randomly, arbitrarily grouped together; all are placed under the same adult supervision at the same time of day each weekday by their parents, they all participate in the same learning and recreational activities and so on. But from the indifferent point of view of being, the group of children is also a multiplicity of human bodies, which are multiplicities of bones, nerves and the like, which are multiplicities of tissues, proteins and so on down to what Feltham and Clemens characterize as 'the bare level of their brute existence' – the level from which it is impossible to tell if anything about the individual children inherently makes them distinct elements of the playgroup '*Les copins*' in particular (ibid.: 10). To avoid giving the impression that Badiou's 'bare level' of being boils down to a pluralistic metaphysics of substance, a kind of monadism, the example could also move in the other direction. From the indifferent point of view of being, the belonging of the children to the group is *also* undecidable because the group belongs to a multiplicity of neighbourhood playgroups, a multiplicity of playgroups in the city, province or territory of a given nation state, a multiplicity of playgroups on the planet Earth, a multiplicity of past, present and future playgroups, a multiplicity of groups of children, a multiplicity of children, of humans, or of mammals, or of members of the order *Animalia*… The example illustrates how fundamentally – that is, at the level of being-as-such, which is not an 'atomic'[34] level – no element can be designated as *inherently* an element of anything, but is rather lost in an indistinct multiplicity of multiplicities. To be an element is already to be counted-as-one, but the count is situational. So being *qua* being, anterior to the count, is wholly inconsistent, indistinct and undecidable.

But how then does Badiou reach this fundamental level of being, given its apparent opacity? And on what basis and to what extent can he say anything constructive in an ontological register?

The short answer is that Badiou's doctrine on inconsistent multiplicity is a pure, 'axiomatic decision' (Badiou 2007a: 31). It must be since, as Alex Ling puts it, 'any consideration of what precedes the situation is itself hopelessly compromised by its very situatedness' (Ling 2010: 50). Recall Lyotard, for whom pure presentation may be situated but not presented, and for whom the thought that thinks presentation cannot escape the risk entailed by judgement over the next linkage. Badiou's statements are similarly situated, and he grants this. But in openly declaring the axiomatic nature of his ontological

commitments, he underscores how far he is both from Kantian 'juridical' philosophy such as Lyotard's, and from any mysticism that would name being as the transcendent unsayable. Nor as we have seen does he follow Heidegger down the path to the unveiling of being through poetical donation. Ontology, he wagers, is '*a* situation', if it exists (Badiou 2007a: 25: 27). And as such, Badiou claims nothing about being and claims no access to it other than that which is entailed by his axiomatics. He does not in other words succumb to the 'Great Temptation' of historical ontologies that would deny that ontology is a situation, expressed conceptually as negative theology, subjectively as mystical annihilation, and linguistically as the poetical advent of being's unveiling (ibid.: 26–7). Whereas Lyotard appears to simultaneously make but then enact the perpetual deferral of the ontological decision through the very form of the wandering of thought, Badiou claims a ground from which to deductively build an edifice of thinking. To underscore the Cartesian nature of the enterprise, note here the simple but striking fact that *Being and Event* is divided into 'Meditations'.

The longer and more illuminating answer to the question of how Badiou gets at the fundamental level of being is: through adherence to mathematics, which thinks the one, the multiple and the count-as-one in a rigorously formal way. Its ability to carve up being in a rational manner is precisely the pay-off of cleaving to it by way of the axiomatic decision that the one is not. It is crucial here however to dispel the impression that Badiou is a latter-day Pythagorean who maintains that being is mathematics. Rather, he maintains that being is *thinkable by* mathematics, and it is here that his novelty in post-war continental philosophy is most apparent. Against the grain of the better part of his generation Badiou is a rationalist, maintaining that 'mathematics captures whatever is sayable about being *qua* being' (Brassier 2010: 61) and that 'mathematics is simply the fact that the complexity of pure being is a complexity that lets itself be rationally mastered' (Badiou and Tarby 2013: 102). This explains why he has often styled his philosophical programme a 'Platonism of the multiple'. Roughly this means that he derives from Plato the injunction 'Let no one enter who is not a geometer' – i.e. the maxim that mathematics is integral to philosophy – but his notion of the infinite, as distinct from Plato's, refers precisely to the pure, indifferent multiple of post-Cantorian mathematics which he expresses in his doctrine of inconsistent multiplicity. Mathematics for Badiou thinks the multiple as such, which is to say that it *is* ontology, whether the mathematician knows it or not. Mathematics is in other words the thought of being *qua* being, which entails that Badiou's thinking of being is a meta-ontological

transposition of mathematics into (admittedly neological and often daunting) natural language. *Being and Event* may be certainly interpreted in this way, but it is also a demonstration of the ability of mathematics to carve up being and render it to thought. Accepting the gesture and the chain of derivations of *Being and Event* leads us to conclude that if Badiou's ontology is ultimately based on a decision, it is a decision that pays off in yielding up a rational account of being *qua* being.

But set theory in particular – and more particularly still, 'the formal axiom-system' of orthodox (ZF) set theory (Badiou 2007a: 43)[35] – is fundamental for Badiou, especially inasmuch as any mathematical proposition can be rewritten in its language (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou 2014a) or, as he puts it, 'it can still be used today to set out every branch of mathematics' (Badiou 2007a: 43). While a detailed engagement with the ZF system is beyond the scope of this book, a quick overview of set theory is essential to grasp Badiou's approach to ontology and, as we will see further on, his definition of philosophy. The basic concepts of set theory,[36] briskly interpreted in light of Badiou's meta-ontological transcriptions, are as follows.

First, there is the *set*. The set is by necessity only implicitly defined by set theory; there is in other words no property 'to be a set' that is posited in set theory (Badiou 2007a: 43), which rather proceeds from the simple assumption that something belongs to something (Badiou and Tarby 2013). The set could be minimally characterized as that-to-which-it-belongs, or what Badiou calls the situation, a structured presentation or multiplicity – i.e. a consistent multiplicity (Badiou 2007a).

Second, there is the *element* of the set. It is that which is counted-as-one, or that which belongs to the set. It is strictly speaking not an object (ibid.: 38), but rather that-which-belongs. Note that inasmuch as set theory is the 'formal theory of non-unified multiplicities', there is 'no fundamental difference between elements and sets' (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou 2014a: 11). Because being *qua* being is a multiplicity of multiplicities, what belong to a set are sets.

Third, there is the *subset*. It is a set which, in the situation, forms a *part* of a set, or is a part-multiple (Badiou 2007a). It is included in the set, which is not necessarily to say that it is counted in the set's presentation or that it belongs to it. But this indicates that in addition to the three basic concepts we must address the two relations which have already been deployed in their description (ibid.).

First, there is the relation of *belonging* which was already used to characterize both the set and the element. Belonging is the fact of being-counted as an

element of the set, i.e. being counted-as-one in the situation. But there is also the relation of *inclusion*. This refers to the counting of subsets, or parts of sets. This counting, as counting, is based upon belonging. But it refers not to the counting which occurs in presentation but rather in *representation* as I will explain in the next subsection. Note for now that the set and the element are entirely defined by the relation of belonging, and that as such, sets and elements are handled by set theory as qualitatively neutral. Put differently, the elements can be expressed as variables inasmuch as they are defined entirely by the count, i.e. by their being-counted according to the structure of the situation. Any relation of belonging save the paradoxical (ibid.) can in principle be expressed using set theory's concepts and axioms. As for the notion of inclusion, this will figure later in allowing Badiou to build towards his notion of the event, as I will explain.

For now however, note the following: if Badiou is right, then as opposed to Lyotard's pragmatics, set theory is capable of properly and constructively *thinking*, rather than negatively gesturing towards and guarding over, the infinite. This is because on the basis of its core concepts and its axioms it can construct i.e. rationally carve up the pure multiple into *any number of sets*, which is to say any number of consistent multiplicities which, defined solely by belonging, do not have to be comprised of discrete objects. Think back to the example of '*Les copins*': the 'multiplicities' at issue are simply sets. Set theory is able to construct these multiplicities, and in principle any number of the multiplicities in which the children seemed hopelessly lost at the bare ontological level. It does not need to get hung up on the juridical problem of a relativism of criteria for belonging – roughly, Lyotard's genre-specific notion of pertinence – since it can account in principle for any and all of the ways of belonging *compossibly* and by means of a small number of axioms.

Caution is in order here. In thus describing the power of set theory, Badiou does not suggest that it constitutes, or that there can otherwise exist any ultimate 'set of sets'. This is explicitly denied by set theory, which prohibits 'paradoxical multiples' (ibid.: 43). Such multiples would render set theory inconsistent – posing the question of the ultimate set's belonging or not belonging to itself, for example – so the infinity it traces is inchoate, i.e. it is infinity, not *an* infinity. Set theory is a protocol for thinking being, not a Hegelian-speculative system, which is to say a totalizing totality. It does not, in other words, seek to reintroduce the global One by explicitly defining or giving meaning to pure multiplicity as such (ibid.).

In the end, Badiou frames his adoption of set theory beautifully: 'There is not any more order in mathematics than there is in the concept of pure

multiplicity as set out on the basis of this sole idea: something belongs to something' (Badiou and Tarby 2013: 102). As for ZF in particular, it is 'the strongest kind of set theory' inasmuch as it 'goes as far as it's able to without encountering any formal contradictions that would annihilate its conceptual framework' (ibid.: 103). Here Badiou is characteristically modern in the vanguardist if not radically decisionist style of his formalism; as opposed to Lyotard's cautious pragmatic eclecticism, he pursues a rational framework to the point where it strains thought and language entirely while wagering that it nonetheless – on the strength of its deductive structure – commands rational assent.

Being as void

In addition to his doctrine on pure multiplicity, Badiou posits a 'doctrine on the void' (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou 2014a: 12). It amounts to maintaining that 'in every situation there is a being of the "nothing"' (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou). As Feltham and Clemens describe, the doctrine is crucial to his enterprise because it bridges the infinity of sets thought by set theory on one hand and 'particular non-ontological situations' on the other (ibid.).

The bridging operation in question is absolutely essential. Set theory may claim to think being *qua* being granting the ontological decision on pure multiplicity, but it is not as yet clear *how* it is capable of constructing or accounting for the being of *actual sets* from out of the pure multiple. The one is not, after all, so any initial existential commitment on the part of set theory must proceed from something other than the one. It also remains the case that being is opaque from the non-ontological point of view. Badiou maintains like Lyotard that although being presents (itself) in every situation, it goes uncounted as such (short of adopting the set-theoretical axiomatics that allows us to begin to carve it up). From the point of view of being then, it is not immediately clear how any situation could be constructed without violating the axiom that the one is not, and from the point of view of the situation, ontology is a non-starter since being *qua* being is not.

This problematic of a schism between being and situation can be put more simply. On one hand, there is the problem of determining whether or not set theory is capable of making any ontic as opposed to strictly ontological commitments. On the other hand, there is the problem of demonstrating how, from the point of view of the non-ontological situation, being underpins and gives consistency to the latter without being anything at all.

We have to be careful here however, since 'being-nothing is not the same thing as non-being' (Badiou 2007a: 53). To be nothing is simply to go uncounted, and we know at this stage *why* being-as-such is uncounted: precisely because it is inconsistent multiplicity. But under certain conditions the uncounted may 'be nothing' while 'having being' in the situation nonetheless. If we can explain this, then both of the problems posed above might have a solution.

Here Badiou follows set theory once more, in its positing of the existence of a null or empty set. The positing is in fact the first existential declaration of set theory, inasmuch as it enables the construction of an infinite number of actual sets, i.e. concrete 'non-ontological situations'. According to ZF's axiom of the void set, 'There exists a set which has no element' (ibid.: 67). Already this axiom troubles the neat equivalence that was drawn above between set and element. So why make this declaration? For one thing, consider the danger attendant to positing being *qua* being as the 'first' set – using scare quotes as Badiou does (ibid.: 57), to indicate ontological if not strictly ontic/existential priority. Though this might seem a reasonable point of departure, we cannot interpret being as a 'set' if we mean by this a set *of elements*. This as we saw is prohibited, because being is pure multiplicity, and a set is an element or a one that contains other elements or ones. Though we might be tempted to say that being 'contains' multiplicities of multiplicities, it is not a container – and the notion that being is *a* multiplicity, even one multiplicity ranging over other multiplicities, has already been ruled out for reasons of consistency. But second, if we abandon the hypothesis of being *qua* being as the 'first' set, then we cannot posit the latter in the form of a given set of ones either – even if these ones are, as set theory maintains, counted multiples. If it were, then it would be a question of constructing infinite ones out of the one – in other words, of finding the one ready-made. But this would beg the question, since the one is only the count-as-one, i.e. it is the element of a set. The 'first' set must therefore be posited as that which is neither multiple, nor one. What remains is the operational possibility of being *qua* being posited as a multiplicity of zeroes or, put more intuitively, as a set that has no elements (ibid.).

The idea of a null or empty set butts up against the limits of thought and language, and it might intuitively appear that nothing could be constructed therefrom. After all, in strictly arithmetical terms, no amount of zeroes multiplied will add up to one. But surprisingly, it is precisely its axiomatic positing of the null set that allows set theory to do its constructive work. The explanation is given in the use of the constructive ZF power-set axiom, according to which the subsets of any set also compose a set (ibid.). In other words, granting the

existence of the void set Ø, we can gather together and to it its own subsets or parts, i.e. the existential naming of the void itself, to express the power-set {Ø}. The operation can be repeated infinitely many times, since the power-set does not count its own count; the power-set of {Ø} would therefore be {Ø, {Ø}}, and the power-set of {Ø, {Ø}} would be {Ø, {Ø}, {Ø, {Ø}}} and so on, to infinity (Feltham and Clemens in Badiou 2014a). It is precisely at this point that we can begin to speak of multiples, i.e. sets of elements. This is because even on the basis of no pre-existing elements at all, set theory can construct multiples through – and I am simplifying considerably here – a *count of the count*, proceeding on the basis of an axiomatic existential decision. On this basis it can therefore be demonstrated, from the ontological side, that the counting is what gives being to the situation. We can say, more precisely, that being *qua* being lends itself to the construction of actual situations without: (a) foundering in its own inconsistency; or (b) begging the question of the one. Put differently, Ø is a 'proper name of being', minimally legible but mysterious from the non-ontological side (Badiou 2007a: 59). But crucially, the constructability of sets from the null set also entails that all situations, inasmuch as they are unfolded from being, present the void (ibid.).

To see what this means, let's follow Badiou in moving from the 'point of view', if I may be once more permitted to put it that way, of being *qua* being – encapsulated in the proposition that 'the one is not' – to the point of view of the situation. Since the situation, as we have seen, is defined by the structure of its count-as-one, the situation as such, short of a pure ontological decision, cannot maintain that the one is not (ibid.). It conceives of existence solely in terms of being-one. Therefore, any and all *knowledge* of a situation, which is also by definition knowledge *in* a situation – and which Badiou will distinguish from *truths*, as I will explain later – is always a matter of 'exact nomination': discerning and classifying, carving out consistent multiples according to their properties (ibid.: 328). In a word, knowledge of the situation concerns what is counted. Badiou thereby distinguishes the radical, ontological deployment of mathematics from uses of number that are entirely situational, 'encyclopaedic' (ibid.) and therefore conservative.[37]

But if knowledge of the situation is only a matter of what is counted, then it already implies a remainder and therefore it wavers 'towards the phantom of inconsistency' (Badiou 2007a: 53). Badiou likens this wavering to Heidegger's 'care of being' (ibid.: 93), to a kind of anxiety. Arguably, Lyotard's '*Is it happening?*' would not be out of place here either. What is counted implies both the count as well as the uncounted 'must-be-counted' out of which the count

occurs (ibid.). But it is precisely these which are unpresentable, uncountable according to the structure of the situation; they are therefore the 'poles of the danger of the void' (ibid.: 98). What Badiou calls the 'void' of any situation is thus its localized suture to its being through the dual problem of the count and the must-be-counted; it is the fact that the situation is defined by the unpresentable count through which is woven out of the inconsistent multiple (ibid.). There is, put differently, an 'errancy' of the void (ibid.: 55) in every situation: a lack that haunts and destabilizes it and that, at the level of affect, creates an anxiety demanding relief, a properly encyclopaedic desire. This is why it is not simply a matter of what-is-nothing, i.e. what is uncounted and what would therefore simply not register; it is a matter of what the situation grasps as *nothingness*, of nonbeing gnawing at the situation from within. But strictly speaking this 'nothingness' is a misnomer since it is actually a naming of being. 'Void' is thus – from the perspective of the situation, to repeat once more – a proper name of being.

The situation must, to retain its consistency, expunge what it perceives as the kernel of nothingness causing it to it waver. Every situation as we saw is defined by a structure. The structure structures the count of what is presented. But inasmuch as the count itself is the void of the situation, its haunting effect necessitates a recount in which it is counted. Presentation, in other words, necessitates representation. Every situation is therefore immediately doubled, or rather subsumed by a second counting. This is what Badiou calls the 'metastructure' or 'state of the situation' (ibid.: 94–5). It is what represents both what is presented in the situation – its *elements* or its ones, i.e. that which belongs to it – as well as its *parts* or subsets, what can only be *included* in it because they are, from the point of view of the situation, not-ones. The metastructure or state thereby accounts for the count, which is included but does not belong to the situation. The state of the situation thus exorcizes the void by creating a 'fictional being' or illusory consistency of the situation (ibid.: 98). Note that the metastructure or state of the situation is a meta-ontological transcription of the ZF power-set, which was already seen in connection with the unfolding of sets on the basis of the existence of the null set.

The state's function is inherently conservative; it is not based on consistency so much as the prohibition of inconsistency (ibid.). This is why Badiou will frequently illustrate the concept by analogy with the political state – especially the latter's forced consensus and universal opposition to authentic politics, its troubled if not impossible relation to undocumented workers, 'illegal immigrants' and so on. But inasmuch as the state is a structure – a metastructure, after all – it is

characterized by a particular count-as-one and therefore does not count-all. There are *gaps* between the situation's 'native structure' and its metastructure (ibid.: 99). For example, since the power-set axiom suggests that the metastructure is always 'larger' than the structure, hence countable in its own right, Badiou's account entails that the idea of a hermetically sealed, total metastructure is an impossibility. In this connection, he devotes an entire meditation in the text to a criticism of Spinoza, the thinker of the total metastructure *par excellence* (ibid.).

Badiou gives us a typology of gaps. Terms of a situation can be *normal*, *excrescent* or *singular* with respect to their state (ibid.). The normal is what is both presented and represented, i.e. belongs and is included. Think here of the citizen registered to vote. The excrescent is not presented, but is represented, i.e. is included without belonging. It can be clarified according to the notion of the power-set. Think here of the bureaucracy in a 'representative' democracy. Finally the singular is presented but not represented, i.e. belongs but is not included. Think here of the undocumented worker. As is clear, this division is helpfully clarified through its political manifestations. But it has far-reaching implications for Badiou's system more broadly considered, since it points the way to a 'typology of the donations of being' (ibid.: 99).

In fact, through his account of the gap between the situation and the state, Badiou lays the ground for a discussion of one of his most important concepts: the *event*. First, he lays out three types of situation: *natural*, *neutral* and *historical*. These are distinguished by the multiples from which they are composed. Note that all three types contain excrescent multiples since these are implied by the recount, i.e. the power-set. Otherwise, the three types are characterized by unique arrangements of multiples. Note for example that the neutral situation contains a mixture of all three types. For Badiou however, it is the nature/history distinction that is of particular concern.

Natural situations are composed entirely of normal and excrescent multiples. All of a natural situation's elements are interconnected. As such, nothing genuinely new emerges in a natural situation since anything that happens can be accounted for given its elements. Moreover, the natural situation excretes its power-set as the overall knowledge of itself. Natural situations therefore contain no singular multiples, i.e. nothing that is presented but not represented – no miracles, if you like, since even evolution, *qua* natural process, only produces variations on the same – and it is possible in principle to possess encyclopaedic natural knowledge. Historical situations on the other hand are characterized by at least one 'evental site' (ibid.: 173–7), which is an extreme subtype of singular multiple. The evental site is 'an entirely abnormal multiple', which means that

'none of its elements are presented in the situation'; as such it is 'on the edge of the void' but also, as such, and for reasons we have seen, 'foundational' with respect to the situation (ibid.: 175).

It is crucial to note however that 'history' in the sense of 'a history' or a Hegelian 'History' is not intended here – for reasons that should be clear given the foregoing explanation of Badiou's ontology. There is rather only a local and entirely contingent 'historicity' of the historical situation (ibid.: 176). What I mean is that the existence of the evental site is necessary but not sufficient for the emergence of the genuinely new in the situation. An astounding problem emerges here: being *qua* being *prohibits* the event, or rather cannot think the emergence of what is radically new, impossible or unthinkable even according to the state of the situation, since set theory's ontology is, if infinitely constructible, also totally static (ibid.). Set theory delivers us to an impasse, since the event is therefore supernumerary (ibid.), i.e. it simply cannot be counted since it is an unpresented multiple. As such, it is purely *supplemental* to the situation, but also thereby entirely *subtractive* with respect to it. This entails the necessity of what Badiou calls an *intervention* (ibid.) – the risking of the naming of the event and the working-out of its implications in the situation it has apparently destabilized.

There is a fragility to the event, if I can put it that way, that necessitates the rigorous thinking of subjectivity with which, incidentally, Badiou is still engaged. Not only the intervention, but also its duration, are what is at stake. Note on this count that whereas for Badiou, 'History can be naturalized', 'nature cannot be historicized' (ibid.: 176). As such, 'nature' is not simply a matter of ecosystems and the like, but rather of the normal in all of its manifestations. This sheds light on the pervasive tendency of the encyclopaedic desire to normalize or naturalize historicity; witness in this connection the revisionism around May 1968 in France, the event that was decisive in Badiou's own life. For Badiou, such an operation is inherently politically conservative, since it amounts to an attempted recount according to which no immanent possibilities remain to be experimented with in the event's wake. In essence, the state is everywhere engaged in the demonstration that the event was not an event. The ontological starting point, as we now see, brings us to the brink of a decision to declare and to capitalize upon the event's occurrence.

Schematically then, we have the following description of Badiou's thinking of being:

- Having read and responded to *The Differend*, the Badiou of *Being and Event* and after conceives of being as inconsistent multiplicity. His doctrine

on inconsistent multiplicity holds that being *qua* being is a multiplicity of multiplicities of multiplicities and so on ad infinitum.

- Being however can be thought. If we decide axiomatically that the one is not – that being is pure multiplicity – then being can be thought by set theory, which in its ZF variety in particular, provides the tools to account for the composition of situations, i.e. sets of elements. Set theory admits to translation into meta-ontological discourse, which Badiou attempts in *Being and Event*. For example, set theory posits the existence of the null or empty set, from which an infinite number of other sets may be constructed. Similarly, in Badiou's meta-ontological discourse, every situation is founded on the void, which is the proper name of its being.
- From the point of view of the situation however, this foundation in the void is an errancy capable of making knowledge of the situation waver. It is an anxiety that necessitates the doubling of every situation by a metastructure or state. The latter includes what does not belong. It represents what is presented. But no metastructural counting is a complete recount.
- Accordingly we can define three types of situation according to the gap between presentation and representation which obtains in any recount: natural (containing normal and excrescent multiples, where elements are both presented and represented, save the encyclopaedia of the recount); neutral (containing normal, excrescent and singular multiples); and finally historical (where there is at least one evental site, a completely abnormal singular multiple, which is not represented and whose elements are not presented according to the situation).
- Badiou however is beset by the problem of the emergence of the new, or rather the difference between natural and properly *historical* situations (granting local 'historicity' but not 'History' in a Hegelian mode). To deal with this, in light of the static nature of set-theoretical ontology, he maintains that the category of the evental site is necessary but not sufficient for the event, which is completely unpredictable and, properly speaking, undecidable. Set theory leaves off and the intervention begins.
- The 'event' therefore names the point at which the thinking of being effectively breaks down, but it must be thought inasmuch as it appears to have been encountered, and it demands the absolute decision of a fidelity. The way is now open to discuss philosophy in the next chapter. As we will see, from the supplementary nature of the event Badiou recasts the notion of truths and the category of Truth which, traditionally, have been associated with the philosopher's labours. Badiou's understanding of truths

> and of Truth is by no means traditional. It is radically subtractive, and this as we will see has far-ranging effects for philosophy's self-understanding, as well as its relation to sophistry.

Lyotard and Badiou may now be more easily compared and contrasted on their approaches to the thinking of being. Both posit being as the pure multiple, and both must settle accounts with a broadly Heideggerian intellectual heritage. Badiou posits philosophy, sophistry and poetry as the three primordial rivals of the Greek era, and notes that Heidegger's dominance in our era amounts to the hegemony of poetry (philosophy being sutured to poetry in the figure of Heidegger and his disciples). Whereas Badiou thinks being mathematically against poetic ontology, Lyotard – though not without retaining something of Heidegger's influence – thinks being pragmatically, which is to say under the aegis of the rule.

In Badiou's estimation, as we will see in the next chapter, this means that Lyotard has chosen sophistry over philosophy in his already ambivalent resistance to poetic ontology. It all boils down to how he 'handles' the event. Lyotard concedes too much; one does not recover the empty category of Truth from poetry by choosing the thought of the rule which comprises the path of sophistry. He does not escape Heidegger's destructive gesture with respect to philosophy and therefore remains, in a certain respect, within the orbit of French variants of Heideggerianism (Badiou 2011a). However, if it is true that Lyotard seems at times to fall under the sway of Heideggerian poetic ontology because he gives the impression of a certain *attentisme*, a hopeful and fearful expectation of the genuinely new, Badiou faces precisely the problem of deciding upon its emergence, and philosophy's role in this decision.

Thus far then, we have two broadly different trajectories from a common starting point in the thinking of being *qua* being. But both retain this much in common: they open onto the question of the proper measure of the event. 'Being' and 'event' thus broadly structure both *The Differend* and Badiou's text which bears their names. And the specific ways in which Lyotard and Badiou treat the event bears upon their definitions of philosophy.

2

Philosophy in its Relation to Being

We have seen that both Lyotard's and Badiou's interventions cut deeply into the Heideggerianism of late twentieth-century French thought. Badiou, it is plausible to conclude, cuts deeper by taking up an explicitly Platonic, mathematical standard against Heidegger's poetical-ontological mysteries. But by staking out positions with respect to the thinking of being in this way, the two authors call into question the nature and destiny of philosophy. The standard or vulgar definition of philosophy as deep or higher-order thinking, though drastically over-simple, is not altogether out of place here. Indeed if, as Lyotard suggests, thinking being devolves to a thinking of the rule, then what if anything may be said of the thinking that thinks the thought of the rule? And if, as Badiou suggests, ontology is mathematics, then what exactly is the thinking that thinks ontology? Both authors are called to give an account of what has traditionally been considered philosophical thinking, since neither does Lyotard appear to want to reduce philosophy to pure rhetoric, nor does Badiou want to reduce it to pure mathematics.

Giving such an account cannot however happen in a vacuum. The question of philosophy's definition is perhaps perennial, but not for all that without a punctual importance. Badiou suggests that the late twentieth century in France was a profoundly creative philosophical 'moment' which 'everything else being equal, bears comparison to the examples of classical Greece and enlightenment Germany' (Badiou 2012b: li). Indeed, via the discussion on Heidegger in Chapter 1, the connection has already been made between Badiou's and Lyotard's French context on one hand, and Greece and Germany on the other. Badiou in fact situates the moment of 'contemporary French philosophy' between Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Deleuze's (*sic*) *What is Philosophy?* (ibid.: lii)[1] and, notably, underscores the importance of the German intellectual tradition for French philosophy ('All contemporary French philosophy is also, in reality, a discussion of the German heritage'

(ibid.: liv)); 'the French philosophical moment encompassed a new appropriation of German thought, a vision of science as creativity, a radical political engagement and a search for new forms of in art and life' (ibid.: lvi). Taking into account: (a) the Heideggerian sign under which Sartre laboured in *Being and Nothingness*, as well as; (b) the text's foundational importance for Badiou's account of contemporary French philosophy; and finally (c) the claim to the French philosophical moment's profound significance, grappling with Heidegger's influence takes on a world-historical importance. But Heidegger, as is well known, put himself at odds with the Platonic tradition and in any case favoured the term 'thinking' to 'philosophy' in his later period. If this 'thinking' collapses into poetic ontology, and if poetic ontology may be challenged by ontologies of the rule and of the matheme respectively, then the last word on philosophy has not been uttered.

Notably however, Badiou hesitates to pronounce on his own place in the French philosophical moment, suggesting that he might be 'its last representative' (ibid.: lii). Indicating that it culminates in Deleuze's (and Guattari's) final work on philosophy however suggests that Badiou – who is attacked in Deleuze and Guattari's text, and who was engaged in a long and at times fiercely polemical exchange with Deleuze – may be more properly considered to herald a new philosophical sequence. Time will tell. But for our purposes, Badiou situates Lyotard's labours as well in the French philosophical moment which he is – perhaps – implying he is surpassing.[2]

Thus understood, the stakes of the discussion are high. The following chapter however is merely expository, breaking down for the reader Lyotard's metaphilosophy and outlining Badiou's criticism. The one that follows traces the battle lines drawn by Lyotard and Badiou over the definitions of their respective enterprises. It will, among other things, more properly situate Lyotard in Badiou's account of the French philosophical moment. Subsequently, the final chapter will draw out the ethical and political dimensions of this dispute over philosophy. For now, suffice it to begin by explaining Lyotard's metaphilosophy and demonstrating how it is ineluctably tied to his thinking of being.

Lyotard's metaphilosophy

Recall Badiou's comment that Lyotard considered *The Differend* to be his only book of philosophy (Lyotard corroborates this, going so far as to print '*mon livre de philosophie*' on the back cover of Gallimard's 1983 edition of the text). What

could it mean for a professional philosopher with a vast written output to make this claim?

First, a note of caution: Lyotard's assessment should not be taken strictly or at face value, and for two reasons: (a) Performatively speaking, his repeated authorial self-effacement undermines (i) itself, but also, if we take it seriously, (ii) the authority of his other specific authorial comments, even if corroborated by Badiou. And (b) Lyotard strategically employs philosophy or rather a philosophical *dispositif* (device, or set-up) throughout the vast number of his writings, spanning his entire career – arguably even in his most anti-theoretical if not anti-intellectual ('acephalous') text, *Libidinal Economy*. The emphasis on strategy will become important in what follows, since Lyotard appears to be blending genres of discourse, using philosophy not strictly for truth but to create effects – much as, arguably, Gorgias is doing in the fragment 'On Not-Being, or On Nature', aping Parmenides's style for satirical or critical rather than strictly philosophical ends. For now, I simply wish to note my reservations about the claim that, strictly speaking, Lyotard's corpus is broadly unphilosophical, save *The Differend*.

This is not to deny however that *The Differend* is special in the particular *way* it relates to philosophy. As noted, I follow Badiou in his assessment that the text represents Lyotard's arrival at maturity, his 'point of equilibrium' so to speak. But how then is 'philosophy' understood in the text? And what about *The Differend*, if anything, is purported to make it philosophical, whereas the other texts are not? A plausible answer is that the Lyotard of *The Differend* is not merely writing in a 'philosophical' style but *doing philosophy* – as he understands it – in a rigorous, continuous and self-conscious way. It is a book *of* philosophy rather than a book *about* philosophy, though we may certainly grant that the philosophical form is, in some respect, what it is about.[3] On this reading the text is a virtuoso performance of properly philosophical thought, adopting in the bargain a 'zero degree style' intended to put 'the thought in hand' (Lyotard 1988b: xiv) and to distance itself from the rhetorical flourish – the sophistical machinations, perhaps – of the vast number of Lyotard's other texts. As such, the text is organized much like Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in arid, loosely related numbered sections, punctuated by 'reading notices' for deeper reflection on philosophical and literary source material. The overall effect is that of a record of philosophical activity, in the precise sense that Lyotard will provide, and he denigrates the work as a 'pile of phrases' (ibid.: xv). He – or more accurately a nameless, Wittgensteinian voice in the text – will tell his reader that 'You really are reading a book of philosophy, the phrases in it are concatenated in such a way as to show that that concatenation is not just a

matter of course and that the rule for their concatenation remains to be found' (ibid.: 129). This passage not only helps us to settle the question of what a 'book of philosophy' could be in Lyotard's estimation, but also speaks to the definition of philosophy he deploys in the text.

In the 'Reading Dossier' prefacing *The Differend* – provided ironically to 'save time', to allow 'the reader, if the fancy grabs him or her, to "talk about the book" without having read it' (ibid.: xiv) – Lyotard sets out his mode of operation: 'The book's mode is philosophic, reflective' (ibid.: xiv). This in essence captures Lyotard's definition, though it requires extensive comment. Recall the brief discussion in Chapter 1 on Lyotard's use of Kant's notion of reflective judgement. Reflective judgement moves from the particular to the universal, without knowledge of the rule or rules which will have been used. When Lyotard says 'philosophic, reflective', this is exactly what he has in mind (moreover, in later texts such as *The Inhuman*, *Misère de la philosophie* and *The Confession of Augustine* he quite explicitly allows that there can be artistic, literary, devotional and psychoanalytical practices which are similarly reflective and thus broadly 'philosophical'). He goes on to distinguish this mode from the theoretical: 'Unlike the theoretician, [Lyotard] does not presuppose the rules of his own discourse, but only that this discourse too must obey rules. The mode of the book is philosophical, and not theoretical (or anything else) to the extent that its stakes are in discovering its rules rather than in supposing their knowledge as a principle' (ibid.: xiv).

This definition of philosophy is thus rather different from the standard model, so it pays to break it down carefully. Recall the previous chapter's discussion on Lyotard's thinking of being. For the Lyotard of *The Differend* being is the event, which is to say it is one being, one time. But each event – each phrase – calls forth another. *That* a phrase must follow is necessary, but *which* phrase must follow is not. A decision must be made as to the subsequent phrase, and this requires an apparatus for judging a phrase's pertinence. Genres of discourse or 'faculties' fix the pertinence of a given phrase linkage according to specific rules and stakes. Only in this way does thought get a handle on being, which is otherwise or in itself radically paratactic. But as such, thought also loses something of being – most of being, even – precisely when it thinks. This goes for philosophical thinking as well. Philosophy might be pre-eminently reflective but, to import Badiou's terminology, like other genres of discourse it counts what is, as such, uncountable.

Philosophy, as a particular genre of discourse, therefore fixes the pertinence of linkages according to its rules (which it does not know) and its stakes (which

are to find its rules). This definition makes of philosophy, in the most general terms, a genre of discourse like any other. But it also indicates that philosophy (like other reflective, broadly 'philosophical' artistic, literary, psychoanalytical and devotional practices) falls into a rather special category of genre to the extent that its very stakes are to find its own rules. Philosophy is thus extremely difficult and in principle interminable, falling victim to Meno's paradox ('how will you search for something, Socrates, if you don't know at all what it is?') (Plato 2010: 80d). In fact, Lyotard suggests that as distinct from strictly logical discourse, 'time cannot be excluded from [philosophy] without it ceasing to be philosophical' (Lyotard op. cit.: 60–1). This is because philosophy's '*a priori* is what it has at stake. It is a matter of formulating this rule, which can only be done at the end, if there is an end' (ibid.: 60). And as we saw in Chapter 1, even granting temporality to philosophy, the question of an 'end' to phrasing is meaningless.

Such reflective casting has the striking effect of radically undermining philosophy's long-held, perhaps essentially Platonic pretension to be a 'master discourse' or 'metalanguage' in the logician's sense ('constituting the grammar of an object-language') (ibid.: xiv).[4] In other words, among genres of discourse philosophy may be formally distinguished but takes no pride of place; it is in any case not a theory, but rather a wandering, interminable temporal *activity* of thought as Lyotard tirelessly repeats. Philosophy only ever proceeds as metalanguage in the linguist's rather more humble sense of the term, which is to say that it is about language, or more precisely that 'phrases are its object' (ibid.: xiv). This explains why, despite the fact that Lyotard takes great interest in related reflective genres that also submit the next linkage to radical questioning, philosophy stands apart: as distinct from avant-garde painting, for example, the material of philosophy proper is phrases in their specifically pragmatic-ontological dimension (i.e. phrases, but also the whole apparatus of presentation, situation, regimen, genre, linkage, passage – in sum, philosophy is 'about', or perhaps more accurately works with, being in its pragmatic dimensions). Incidentally, confusion over the two senses of 'metalanguage' also explains why Lyotard's 'pagan' writings preceding *The Differend* are often unfairly read in terms of simple relativism or performative contradiction. When he states in *Just Gaming*, for instance, that 'There is no metalanguage', only genres of language, Lyotard has in mind 'metalanguage' in the sense of a master discourse capable of grounding, organizing or sanctioning other statements (Lyotard and Thébaud 1999: 28). The notion that his statement about metalanguage is itself metalinguistic is unproblematic if we keep in mind that

it is merely so in the linguist's sense of being about language (it could be false, but that is another matter). The oft-repeated critique of Lyotard's 'relativism' treats his writings precisely as if they constituted a theoretical system when he advances them rather as 'essays' in the French sense of 'attempts'. They are, above all, records of philosophical activity.

Note however that Lyotard's definition of philosophy as a reflective mode of discourse does not simply unseat it from its pretended position of mastery. It also renders it right down to the zero degree of thought (incidentally, perhaps giving further credence to Lyotard's decision to deploy a 'zero degree style' in the text). The title of Marx's (2002) polemic *Misère de la philosophie* also names Lyotard's posthumous collection of late writings, with a subtle inflection to the term '*misère*' (poverty): in Lyotard's hands philosophy figures as radically and constitutively 'impoverished'. It is in a perpetual state of homelessness, peregrination and new beginning.[5] Philosophy is moreover linked in an intrinsic way to infancy and childhood, which become frequent points of reference in Lyotard's later writings.[6] Anyone who has cared for an infant is intimately familiar with the poverty of the child's cognition, and the precariousness of her capacity to interact with the world – but also with the necessity and the ability of the child to dive into the thick of experience and to begin somewhere. Philosophy is in this sense the childhood of thinking, and the philosopher before the philosophical problem is as the child trembling before the world – but as Lyotard reminds us time and again in his later writings, she is also like the painter, hesitating over the first brushstroke, or the musician over the first note, or the psychoanalyst or religious supplicant over the interlocutor's silence. Reflective judgement is radically underdetermined so it is pain, but it is for the very same reason promise; hence the figure of the infant in Lyotard's writings as at once monstrous and 'inhuman', but also emblematic of human promise and, perhaps, courage (Lyotard 1988c).[7] It is in the name of this figure of infancy that the later Lyotard militates, and resistance to its transformation or its defeat by purely instrumental rationality is, for him, all that remains of politics (ibid.: 7).

It is important to stress that while *The Differend* offers new terms for understanding philosophy, Lyotard's basic understanding of its nature was consistent throughout his career. In fact, if the idea of philosophy as an interminable process rather than a body of doctrine is rigorously worked out (and enacted) in connection with the ontology of *The Differend*, it is also implicit in the early *Phenomenology* and becomes quite clear in the Lacanian-Marxist phase. A publication available in French and English editions, *Pourquoi philosopher?* (*Why Philosophize?*) (Lyotard 2013) collects Lyotard's introductory 1964 lecture

series for students at the Sorbonne and has done the extraordinary service of demonstrating a basic continuity between Lyotard's earlier and his later metaphilosophy. The secondary literature on Lyotard has until comparatively recently been restricted to a misleading selection of English translations and has tended to emphasize the ruptures and left turns in the trajectory of his thinking. New translations and greater attention to the full span of his career indicates deep resonances between the early, middle and late periods of his thought. It appears, taking into account the recently published lectures, that Lyotard's vision of philosophy was relatively stable from at least 1964 until his death in 1998. The themes of the remainder, of the interminable nature of philosophy and of the figure of the child are all there, playing essentially the same role but within a more strictly Lacanian-Marxist frame of reference.

Badiou's critique of *The Differend*

Badiou's 1983 review of *The Differend*, '*Custos, Quid Noctis*?'[8] ('Watchman, what of the night?') will form the guiding thread of this section. The reason for this is simple: it is his most direct and sustained engagement with the book and with the question of its status as philosophy. It also serves as a prolegomena to his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, wherein he names Lyotard in demarcating philosophy from sophistry. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Badiou's critique and appraisal of sophistry can be more broadly applied to Lyotard as the *Manifesto* and other texts envision, but it is worth devoting some sustained attention to his most pointed intervention since it unpacks and troubles the terms of Lyotard's major and possibly only philosophical text.

It should be noted straight away that Badiou's review of *The Differend* is largely expository and is exemplary in its nuance, its grasp of the whole text and its charity. It is clearly the product of a philosopher who has taken seriously the special request of its author, as per Badiou's anecdote in *Logics of Worlds*, to be among the book's readers and commentators. It is also precisely for these reasons that Badiou's critical remarks or 'punctuations' late in the review are vastly more instructive than those critiques of the type that would simply charge Lyotard with sophistry or with performative contradiction and move on. Badiou in fact explicitly denies that Lyotard's view of philosophy is self-contradictory. For philosophy to be in search of its rule does not itself constitute a rule in any logically troubling sense of the term, inasmuch as the very 'search' implies that 'the type of linkage between phrases is neither prescribed in advance nor

governed by a result' (Badiou 2012b: 225). Badiou also notes how the text smartly enacts its own uncertainty as to the rule of philosophy, deploying a 'properly de-regulated multiplicity of the procedures of linkage' (ibid.). Being 'made up entirely of passages, following a trajectory from which no totality whatsoever results' (ibid.) *The Differend* is actually all too logical inasmuch as it is acutely aware of its limitations. Badiou's critique is therefore put forth not so much with a view to demonstrating what Lyotard cannot do according to his own stated constraints, but rather to gesturing towards what he *should have done* to escape them. The proximity between the two thinkers is keenly felt here, and Badiou should be read as engaging with Lyotard precisely because their similar starting points entail that Lyotard is a major competitor with whom he should reckon. When, later, Badiou charges Lyotard with sophistry, he does so having seriously and charitably engaged with Lyotard's major philosophical statement.

A few points in Badiou's exegesis stand out. In reconstructing the overall structure and trajectory of *The Differend*, he tracks Lyotard's derivation of the phrase through a rediscovery, critique and diversion of Descartes's procedure of evidence (see Chapter 1) (ibid.: 226). He characterizes the phrase which is derived thereby as 'the One of the multiple, the atom of sense qua event' (ibid.: 227) and this should already give us pause. We saw that Lyotard's phrase ontology is not so much an 'atomism' (ibid.: 226) as a paratax – or, that if it is indeed an atomism, it is immediately paratactical and therefore the atomic 'One' calls forth and is already midstream in the multiple. Badiou, who is a subtle enough reader to understand this, is perhaps setting up a later critique – to be revisited in Chapter 4 in connection with the text *Témoigner du différend: Quand phraser ne se peut* – according to which Lyotard's thought of the multiple succumbs to a desire for the One. But as we will also see, under Punctuation Five, if Badiou can establish that Lyotard thinks the occurrence as a One rather than a Two, then he might demonstrate Lyotard to be incapable of gaining any traction by which to judge the relative force of phrases – something which, for Badiou, is precisely at issue in the irruption of truths.

For now however, we should shift our attention to Badiou's claim that 'Lyotard's ontology is not autonomous' (ibid.: 229). There is in *The Differend* not a discourse on being properly speaking – since 'What is said of being will not present the presentation, but rather name the unpresentable' – but rather, and rightly so, a 'displaced aphoristics', the substance of which I have expanded upon in Chapter 1, and which Badiou encapsulates in four aphorisms of being and four aphorisms of nonbeing respectively (ibid.). From the aphorisms of nonbeing he derives the claim that for Lyotard, the philosopher bears witness

to the nonbeing which 'encircles' (ibid.: 231) the event. But crucially – and this accounts for the military metaphors that emerge in Badiou's assessment – the philosopher also guards steadfastly against its covering or its forgetting (ibid.). Badiou will also note, with some satisfaction, how the 'politics' which emerge in the text, its strange militancy, chafes against 'the politico-economic order of the West' (ibid.: 234). 'Philosophy has not stopped being militant' in *The Differend* precisely because it is 'still and always against capital, in the name of the differend – of which Marxism connotes the feeling – that the point is to save the Idea of a humanity engaged along the paths of the multiple' (ibid.: 235). Moreover there are 'grounds for hope, since the differend sprouts up relentlessly' and everywhere frustrates the economic imperative to gain time (ibid.; Lyotard 1988b).[9]

The impression is thus that Badiou is well acquainted with and overall favourably disposed to the text. As he notes in the opening paragraphs, *The Differend* has nothing to do with the execrable reaction of the 'new philosophers', and his exegesis as we have seen ends with the declaration that Lyotard's is after all a militant philosophy. Nonetheless, Badiou closes with seven 'punctuations' that trouble the text and indicate the path he will strike out in opposition to Lyotard over the course of his later writings. I will presently examine each of Badiou's punctuations in turn, indicating where pertinent how they link up to Badiou's later declarations on philosophy and sophistry.

Punctuation one

Badiou first takes issue with the juridical metaphors that dominate the text. Leaving aside the speculative genre, he poses a stark choice between two modes of having to look for one's rule without knowing it: the juridical and the mathematical (Badiou 2012b). Evidently his own search will be mathematical, as he will plot out later in *Being and Event*. Lyotard however takes the juridical road – the Kantian one of limitation, contraction and the careful watch over passages between phrases – and thus exposes himself to the 'great return of right' if not of human rights specifically (ibid.: 235). Explicitly substituting the 'authority of the infinite' for the resurgent 'rights of man' – and Badiou claims that one 'could not have said it better' – Lyotard is nonetheless in trouble here, and on two counts (ibid.: 235–6).

First, any non-mathematical deployment of the signifier 'infinite' is 'erratic' (ibid.: 236). What Badiou has in mind here is not immediately clear, but it is plausible to interpret him to mean that a notion of infinity cashed out in linguistic

terms, as Lyotard presents in *The Differend*, risks entanglement in hermeneutical and logical problems that could be avoided or at least mitigated with a properly neutral apparatus of operators and variables. 'Infinite', for example, can serve as a mystical signifier if not properly handled by mathematics.

Second, Badiou holds that right is 'literally dominated by its hatred of infinitude' (ibid.). What he has in mind here is the fact that right and rights consist of boundaries. A juridical conception of philosophy – to repeat, a basically Kantian one such as Lyotard employs – is a thinking of finitude and limitation. It is not equipped to think the infinite. The very language with which Lyotard approaches the infinite is therefore antithetical to it, and this explains the self-consciously paralogical nature of his enterprise.

To anticipate the exploration of sophistry in the next chapter, Lyotard perhaps figures here as a postmodern Protagoras. If man is not exactly the measure, the measure nonetheless traverses the clash of linguistic faculties and is therefore as constraining as it is decisive.

Punctuation two

Badiou claims further that the juridical paradigm affects Lyotard's epistemology, such that the latter 'does not possess the radicality of his ontology' (ibid.: 236). Lyotard defines knowledge in terms of a 'cognitive genre' whose stakes are to establish whether or not real referents correspond to a given sign or combinatory of signs (Lyotard 1988b: para. 85). The cognitive genre, put more simply, establishes the reality of referents in discourse. Therefore, regarding truth and knowledge 'everything for him depends on the question of the referent' and this, moreover, allows him to distinguish the cognitive from the purely logical genre, which is presupposed by the cognitive but separate inasmuch as it is formal, axiomatic and strictly hypothetical (Badiou op. cit.: 236). Badiou counters that mathematical phrases – but also 'all phrases of which the effective stakes concern the truth' (ibid.) – are not so governed by cognitive procedures for establishing a real referent and yet, do not fall either under the umbrella of the logical genre.

Thus we hit upon an important bone of contention in the dispute, which will be unpacked in the next punctuation: Lyotard's logicism, his apparent belief that mathematical statements are grounded in logic or, put differently, that the 'mathematical paradigm' is reducible to the 'logical genre' (ibid.).

Punctuation three

The problem may be posed as follows: isn't mathematics an exemplary case of thought proceeding according to rules? Couldn't Lyotard simply chalk mathematics up to a genre of phrasing and therefore equalize it, relativize it, subsuming it under the set of other genres among which philosophy must interminably seek passage? And inasmuch as mathematics is an empty discourse of operators and variables, purely axiomatic and formalistic, could it not be viewed as a case of the logical genre more specifically?

Here is where Badiou insists upon the special status of mathematics – or rather, insists that Lyotard fails to grasp it. Turning Lyotard's own juridical framework against him, he claims that 'A wrong is committed in this book towards the mathematical paradigm, by reducing it to the logical genre' (ibid.). Badiou thereby places Lyotard – and evidently Lyotard places himself – in the lineage of logicism along with Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein, according to which 'If a proposition is necessary it has no sense' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 85). Against this Badiou insists, as we have seen, that mathematics is the science of being *qua* being and as such, its propositions are far from being empty, hypothetical declarations. They are, rather, what is most fundamental. In a promissory note, to which translator Bruno Bosteels draws attention as foreshadowing nothing less than the wager of *Being and Event*, Badiou claims that 'One day I will prove it' (Badiou op. cit.: 237).

This is, perhaps, the crux of the matter. Each thinker considers himself to be doing philosophy but, if Badiou is correct in his characterization of mathematics as the thought of being *qua* being, then Lyotard does ontology at an insufficient level of profundity, which is to say, he speaks about it or gestures towards it but doesn't really do it at all.[10] As we have seen, Lyotard's ontology is not autonomous, but rather suggestive of a genre among others – and genres, being genres of linkage upon events, are genres of appearing, not being. The architecture of Badiou's system suggests that one must deal with the question of being *qua* being through mathematics (*Being and Event*) prior to that of appearing and the situational structures or 'logics' of its governance (*Logics of Worlds*). Lyotard arguably confuses the two levels, or rather, cannot avoid subsuming the former to the latter, because his thought as Badiou charges is beholden to the rule (and perhaps, inasmuch as appearance takes precedence, the poem). As such he ultimately entwines the posing of the question of being *qua* being with the horizon of appearance and therefore genre – a notion that is arguably coextensive with what Badiou calls 'logic'.

It is worth pausing here to unpack this further. According to Badiou, a logic describes

> that which, of being, appears in given worlds and forms relations between objects of these worlds … It's a logic insofar as it doesn't bear on the composition of that which is, but on the relations that are established between all the things that appear locally in worlds. (Badiou and Tarby 2013: 106–7)

As such, a logic concerns not being but 'being-there' (ibid.: 106). Replace 'relations' with 'linkages' and we have a case for 'logic' as a generic name for genre. What is more, if a logic concerns being-there and if for Lyotard being-there – i.e. presented being, not being as presentation – is all that a genre can grasp, then it would appear again that his thought is mired in the 'logical', granting Badiou's usage of the term. Recalling Badiou's claim that Lyotard's ontology is not autonomous, for Lyotard, the thought of being-as-such is already a genre, or proceeds according to one; it is more akin to a logic than a genuine ontology or, perhaps, the notion of a 'genuine ontology', a grasp of the thing in itself, is an illusion.[11]

The logicist lineage in which Badiou places Lyotard is of course beset by failures and empirically if not inherently ends in sophistry – witness Russell's demolition of Frege's *Grundgesetze*, Russell's own drift from the logicist programme, and Wittgenstein's shift to full-blown sophistry in the later writings. The question of the relation between mathematics and logic turns out to be a major flashpoint in the dispute, and it falls to Badiou to attempt to extricate mathematics from logicism in his expressly mathematical works.

Punctuation four

Lyotard's logicism entails for Badiou that 'the book does not completely ground the fact that the phrase would be the One of the occurrence – or that it would be its appropriate name' (Badiou 2012b: 237). As we have seen, lacking a properly mathematical ontology the analysis of *The Differend* spins interminably among logics and thus, from Badiou's viewpoint, even its Cartesian meditation – which to my mind is the book's centrepiece – does not yield up the phrase without begging the question.

The problem is framed in terms of its relation to the dialectic, and Badiou points out here that Lyotard's critique of the speculative genre is symptomatic. The critique is concerned with – in fact is 'excessively centred on the theme of' – the result, or subsumption under the One of History or of Absolute Knowing.

To this effect, Lyotard attempts to establish that the proper name 'Auschwitz' indicates a black hole or caesura from which no result may issue (as such). But his procedure here suggests that he lumps the dialectic in with a conservative gloss on Hegel (ibid.: 229), upholds an identitarian logic in its place and thereby 'misses the essence of the dialectical message, which is the non-arithmetical primacy of the Two over the One, the logic of scission as form of the occurrence itself' (ibid.: 237). What Badiou gleans from mathematics is precisely what he insists is its ability to establish the primacy of the Two over the One, inasmuch 'its necessity lies in naming and giving consistency to pure being as existential scission of the nothing and the name' (ibid.). In this connection we should take note of Badiou's comment to the effect that 'You could almost say that my entire enterprise is one giant confrontation [*démêlé*] with the dialectic' (Badiou in Bosteels 2011a: 331). Transposing this confrontation into an expressly political and characteristically Maoist register, he will tell us that 'Not to be a conservative, to be a revolutionary activist nowadays, means obligatorily to desire division' (Badiou 2007b: 11). But how might a militant such as Lyotard ever desire division, let alone conceive of it, from within a Kantian and logicist horizon?

Punctuation five

Here it is possible to grasp, however much appearances may be to the contrary, the static or rather purely serial character of Lyotard's endeavour. His arc describes a spurious infinity, to borrow Hegel's language. And thus also we hit upon 'a serious differend with *The Differend*' (Badiou 2012b: 238).

Asking the question 'Are some phrases and genres strong, and others weak?' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 227), Lyotard must answer in the negative, or at least is incapable of providing a definitive answer because he holds language to be fundamentally heterogeneous. The relative 'force' of a phrase is 'judged by the standard of a genre's rules' (ibid.: para. 231), and thus relativized; moreover there is no genre of genres (e.g. the speculative) that does not beg the question of its own force as compared to all of the others. Badiou holds however that the mathematical notion 'that the Occurrence may be Two' allows him to uphold, against Lyotard's apparently indifferent linguistic atomism, that some phrases are stronger than others. Both philosophy and politics, which for Badiou are 'not exactly genres', qualify the occurrence, captured as Two, in terms of 'its force in proportion to whether it breaks down the rule of the hegemonic genre that endeavours to count it as One' (Badiou op. cit.: 238). In other words the

phrase, properly understood, may destroy or disable the genre in which it is phrased. Or, to use Badiou's language, truth punctures a hole in knowledge, and the event proposes itself as the supplement to the situation in which it has occurred, from which positive implications may be patiently worked out. Lyotard is unable to account for any of this, and precisely for this reason his philosophical vigilance is, if militant as per Badiou's characterization, then also inherently piecemeal and conservative.

Punctuation six

This also accounts for what Badiou diagnoses as the incompleteness of Lyotard's 'polemic against the (Hegelian) subject' (ibid.). Though Lyotard is indeed generally counted among the demolishers of the latter, Badiou's parenthetical insertion indicates that it is only a certain figure of the subject, the subject as 'totalizing interiority' which we have inherited from Hegel, which is affected by his critique (ibid.). As we will further explore in Chapter 4, Badiou's account of the subject 'designates something else completely' (ibid.). His brief description in Punctuation Six holds that the subject is a subject-*process* – thus already at odds with the apparently substantive notion targeted in *The Differend*. It is moreover, and this is further reflective of its anti-Hegelianism, no process of totalization. In fact it is quite the opposite, inasmuch as it is 'what keeps open the gap of the Two of the occurrence, what insists on the interval between events' (ibid.). The subject is thus *deduced* (later, Badiou will often say 'induced') 'from a dysfunction in the count-as-One of the event' (ibid.). Its logic is scissional, or it is of the scission. As such, the subject is precisely what Lyotard cannot think, lacking a mathematical apparatus with which to break the opacity of the logical.

To be fair to Lyotard however, in the later writings he will sketch an *anima minima* or 'minimal soul' that underpins the biographical subject, all the while undermining it in acting as a pure passage apparatus.[12] He articulates this minimal soul in drawing upon resources like André Malraux's concepts of 'stridence', 'throat' and '*je-sans-moi*' (I-without-me).[13] Its articulation however compromises the architecture of the subject at the expense of a naming of the site of passages, and thereby introduces an ambiguity as to whether it is a question of a self-identical apparatus or the bare fact of passages occurring which is really at issue. The minimal soul is, in a manner of speaking, a dysfunctional Kantian if not Hegelian subject – if it is not nothing at all (which is to say, the vanishing act of linking). But this inversion or perversion of the subject, following Badiou, would therefore redouble and reflect nothing more than

Lyotard's imprisonment in the universe of logic, since its very existence would be circumscribed by the question of passage, i.e. linkage.

Thus in Lyotard's hands the critique of the subject falls short because it takes a certain figure of subjectivity to stand for subjectivity in general. He critiques a subject which is modern, no doubt, but whose modernity is perhaps nostalgic – a romantic modernity – and is already or is well on its way to being surpassed.

Punctuation seven

Finally, Lyotard's critique Hegelianizes and therefore plays itself out as a premature demolition of some of the subject's most important and promising political names. Considering these only as they appear in 'philosophies of history' (Lyotard 1988b: para. 257)[14] would, following Badiou, fail to grasp that the name of a subject may designate a mathematico-political concept covering the putting-into-play of 'effective procedures' of fidelity to an event, through which counted individuals may overcome situational repetition (Badiou op. cit.: 239). Thus 'subject' or '*subjectivation*', in the wake of the event which disrupts the situation through the force of its Twoness, names the process of incorporation in which individuals engage in the supra- or trans-individual task of forcing the situation according to its evental supplement. It has nothing to do with the One of a historical collectivity or a collective destiny, and everything to do with the decision to insist upon and hold open the Two, thinking the situation through the possibilities opened up by the violence of a scission. We are emphatically not dealing here with a 'subject of history' in the sense of a bearer of history, a substantive 'we' for whom and through whom the totalizing logic of history is fulfilled.

To this extent, Badiou can retain notions like 'proletariat' and 'communist' in his system by insisting upon their link to the generic set which forces the situation and everywhere harasses the State. Take 'proletariat' for example: great revolutionaries like Lenin and Mao were 'always careful to block any identitarian drift in the word', and ran aground not on account of sustaining a Hegelian 'subject of history' but rather attempting the impossible task of doing genuinely proletarian i.e. generic, communist politics in the Party-State framework (Badiou 2012c: 79–80). Responding to the empirical 'death of communism' in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Badiou is therefore able to declare against the grain that the death in question is not a historical *event*, in the technical sense of the term, in the first place since every death is simply a return to the indifferent, inconsistent multiple. Rather, 'every historical event

is communist' inasmuch as 'communism' or 'democracy' in their philosophical usage, denote the generic when its procedure is political (Badiou 2014a: 107–8). Treating the terms in this way – and noting how, for Badiou, only communism is genuinely democratic and vice versa – he is able at the precise moment when the triumphant neoliberal end of history is declared to maintain that what has died was merely a form of State, not communism. In fact, to the extent that there is ever genuine politics at all, there is communism. This allows him to cast a retrospective glance on the history of communist i.e. genuinely and self-consciously political sequences, wherein the 'communist hypothesis' was tested out (albeit unsuccessfully) under the Communard, Bolshevik and Maoist frameworks.[15] For Badiou the failed sequences indicate the way forward, which is politics at a distance from the State (and in this regard, consider his activism in the now defunct group *L'Organisation politique*).[16] The failures, being procedural, do not as such invalidate the hypothesis, so for Badiou the way forward is also communist.

By contrast, consider some uses of the terms 'proletarian', 'communist' and 'workers' in *The Differend* and *The Postmodern Explained*. Drawing upon an analysis of Kant's notion of a 'sign of history' – which he will treat at length in the study *Enthusiasm*, product of the same conference from which is derived Badiou's *Peut-on penser la politique?* – Lyotard will propose a by no means exhaustive list of proper names of the failure of modernity, including specifically 'communist' names such as 'Berlin 1953', 'Budapest 1956', 'Czechoslovakia 1968' and 'Poland 1980'. Inasmuch as they denote moments when the workers rose up against the party, the names 'refute the doctrine of historical materialism' according to which 'Everything proletarian is communist, and everything communist is proletarian' (Lyotard 1988b: para. 257; 1993c: 28–9). This pessimism about the communist proletariat – but more accurately, about the Party-State which declares itself to compose the latter's historical body – is of a piece with Lyotard's general drift to the lonely position from which truly inter-subjective moments occur only as inhuman resonances from which nothing, or at any rate no substantive 'we', can be constructed.[17] But from Badiou's perspective, the abandonment of communist or proletarian names of the subject only follows if we insist upon a Hegelian definition of the subject unhinged by the Kantian sign of history. Lacking a properly mathematical notion of the political generic, Lyotard takes 'proletarian' and 'communist' as genre-specific, historical artefacts, illegitimately granting that the invading Soviet army in Czechoslovakia, for example, was communist in any meaningful sense of the term.

In the end, Badiou's review clarifies the extent of his proximity to Lyotard, while indicating why he cannot grant him, without serious reservation, his account of philosophy. This allows him to set the stage for the later critique following *Being and Event*, according to which the essence of Lyotard's thought is sophistical.

3

Demarcations: Philosophy, Sophistry, Antiphilosophy

The question of philosophy's definition, like any definitional question, implies a demarcation. But the pitch and longevity of the struggle for philosophy's definition has been remarkable. While it is impossible to give anything near to an overview of this struggle here, it is instructive to once more set the encounter between Badiou and Lyotard against the backdrop of ancient Greece. Heidegger again serves as an important point of reference, in particular his reading of sophistry's role in provoking 'the fall of thought into philosophy'.[1] The idea of a shift – if not a fall – from early Greek thought to sophistry and philosophy finds echoes in both Badiou and Lyotard, though each interprets and transforms it in his own remarkable way.

Heidegger is well known to have favoured the 'pre-Socratics' or, to use a less loaded term, the earliest Greek thinkers. But the 'Being that opened itself to Greek antiquity' (Heidegger 1977: 144), precisely to these earliest thinkers, remains closed off to us moderns because 'from long habituation we see Greek thinking through a modern humanistic interpretation' (ibid.: 143). What accounts then for our modern humanistic interpretation of the Greeks? Precisely, the rise of philosophy in response to the sophistical challenge, exemplified by Protagoras's thesis that 'Man is the measure of all things, of those that are … that they are, of those that are not, that they are not' (ibid.).

Heidegger tells us that

> through Plato's thinking and Aristotle's questioning a decisive change takes place in the interpretation of what is and of men, but it is a change that always remains on the foundation of the Greek fundamental experience of what is. Precisely as a struggle against sophism and therefore in dependency upon it, this changed interpretation is so decisive that it proves to be the end of Greek thought, an end that at the same time indirectly prepares the possibility of the modern age. (Ibid.)

As Crome puts it, Heidegger here recognizes the sophists as 'historically singular thinkers who provoked the fall of thought into philosophy, and who thus precipitated the end of the brief, originary experience of being found at the dawn of Western thought' (Crome 2004: 83).

But what was this originary experience of being, and how did sophistry provoke its fall into philosophy? The case of Parmenides of Elea is instructive.[2] Parmenides cleft the world in two, designating two sole possible paths of inquiry – the Way of Truth, and the Way of Opinion. The Way of Truth accepts 'that it is': effectively, that truth is being, and that thought and being are the same. By contrast the Way of Opinion, which deals in phenomena – change, differentiation and multiplicity – necessarily accepts 'that it is not'. Designating the latter path to be wholly unthinkable – because nothingness, and hence the negations implied by differentiation and multiplicity, are inconceivable as such – Parmenides thereby drew a sharp line between the thinkable One, or being, and the nothingness of the unthinkable multiple. But in doing so he also gave shape to any possible *sophos*, wisdom, as a discourse on being – thus pitting wisdom against the discourses of mere opinion (Parmenides 2001).

Parmenides divided while negating one term of the division. This was in essence an act of war. It was not yet however, if we accept Heidegger's, Badiou's or Lyotard's characterizations, a strictly philosophical act inasmuch as Parmenides's wisdom rested on *phusis*, nature, coming-to-presence in and through the grace of the goddess. The proem of *On Nature* (Parmenides 2001) sets up Parmenides's poem as a recounting of what the goddess has revealed. The recounting is immediately being, and is what Lyotard calls the poem's 'demonic phrase' (Lyotard 1988b: 15). What is essential here is that Parmenides's discourse is presented as veridical but it is not ultimately grounded in and through the dialectic he inaugurates. Rather, Parmenides sets what Badiou calls poetic ontology into motion against the discourses of mere opinion. Like philosophy, his discourse has to do with truth; unlike philosophy, its ultimate ground is the presencing of truth in an immediate way through revelation, an ontology of 'donation' or 'sending' where 'the thinker of Being is an addressee, a witness' (ibid.: 20). Since thought and being are coextensive, this witnessing is immediate and the truth of the revelation is fully present to the revelation's addressee (indeed, the addressee only thinks at all because she participates in the being of the address). Parmenides's discourse is not as such *philo-sophos*, love of wisdom, because, being divine and thus wisdom itself, it does not take the distance and desiring attention from its object that is implied by the notion of love.[3]

The combative Parmenidean discourse on being naturally came under fire from the sophists, counted among partisans of the way of opinion. Gorgias of Leontini is of particular importance in this connection. His work *On Not-Being, or On Nature* is read closely by Cassin and Lyotard as a 'ruination' of the ontological thesis of Parmenides's poem by way of a characteristically sophistical move: pretending to defend it (Lyotard op. cit.: 15).[4] 'He tries to make an argument for [Parmenides's thesis] instead of sticking to its divine revelation by the goddess, and he thereby ruins the thesis' (ibid.: 15). In other words Gorgias treats the demonic phrase as if it was susceptible of proof, rational articulation and defence, and spins out the destructive consequences. If, as Parmenides writes, 'Not-Being is Not-Being', then it *is* Not-Being in precisely the same way Being *is* Being; hence, Not-Being is, which means that Being is not. But if Being is not then we cannot say either that Not-Being is. Therefore 'It is possible neither to be nor not to be' (ibid.), and revelation submitted to logical proof ends in paralogy.[5]

As noted, on Heidegger's reading this sophistical challenge to the early Greeks, exemplified by Gorgias and Protagoras, provokes the rise of philosophy. Simplifying considerably, philosophy attempts to stay rooted in the thinking of being while fighting the sophists on the terrain to which they have shifted the discussion, the terrain of language, argument, and of course 'Man's' role in the measure of all things. As Lyotard puts it, 'The word *logos* changes meaning. It is no longer speak-welcome, it is speak-argue' (Lyotard op. cit.: 20). *Onto-logos* gives way to a philosophical *logologos*, an argumentative discourse on the discourse of being or, read differently, a thinking of the thought of being. As suggested in the previous chapter, the orbit of logology is precisely where Lyotard is happy to stay; he accepts the ruination of the demonic phrase and views philosophy as one permutation of the *logologos* among others, having no special claim to mastery. But as Crome explains, philosophy in the form of Platonic and Aristotelian thinking emerges precisely as a seizing of logology in order to 'signify something for oneself and for another', not for the pure sophistical sake of speaking and arguing.[6] Philosophy retains its link to 'father Parmenides' (Plato 1993: 241d) through an understanding of being as what is signified in and through *logos*. But this means that thought and being are no longer strictly coextensive. The thinking of being thus becomes, in the hands of the first philosophers proper, tangled up in signification and representation. As per Heidegger's critique, this is a mediated, degraded thinking of being as representation and it is so significant a turn as to amount to 'the end of Greek thought' (Heidegger 1977: 143). Indeed, since representation also entails a

thinking of subjectivity, Platonic and Aristotelian thought pave the way to modernity. Modern humanism is, after all, already incipient in the Protagorean thesis that provokes them, that Man is the measure of all things. Heidegger asks: 'Does this statement of Protagoras not sound as though Descartes were speaking?' (ibid.).

Badiou, for his part, can accept the outcome of the sophistical ruination of the demonic phrase but not Heidegger's characterization of the emergence of Platonism as a fall of thinking. Rather, Platonism is for Badiou a stunning advancement in Greek thought. The matheme remains underexplored in both Heidegger (who cleaves to poetic ontology) and Lyotard (who remains in the realm of sophistical logology, the thought of the rule). This accounts for their respective devaluations of Plato. But for Badiou it is precisely by way of the matheme that we should think being and, thus, properly understand philosophy. His Platonism repeats Plato's nomination of the philosopher and her double, the sophist – and this repetition is itself an appropriation of Parmenides's gesture of drawing a line between those who militate for truth, and those who militate for opinion. In this chapter I will begin by explaining Lyotard's own complex relation to philosophy's main rival, sophistry, before exploring Badiou's critique of Lyotard. Before concluding I will also consider whether Badiou's further nomination of the category of antiphilosopher sheds any light on the debate with Lyotard.

Lyotard, *sophiste*?

In Chapter 2 I defended the claim that Lyotard understood *The Differend* as his philosophical testament. I emphasized how the philosophical practice plotted out in the text is an extremely minimal, humble form of intellectual militancy with little guarantee and which, frequently, is characterized by considerable melancholy. It stands purposefully in stark contrast to the historically dominant notion of philosophy as a master discourse, a theory or 'metalanguage' in the logician's sense. It flirts with the nihilism of despair against what is perhaps the greater and more terrible nihilism of the will to efficiency and theoretical completeness. It does not, for all that, succumb to nihilism, and it is not rare to find references in the secondary literature to the later Lyotard's rigour and courage.

In offering his alternative to the idea of philosophy as a master discourse, Lyotard was thus demarcating, redrawing the boundary not between philosophy

and sophistry but between philosophy proper and, adapting a concept of Althusser's, what might be called its theoreticist deviation. Emerging from an ambient French Nietzschean current, Lyotard fought on the side of the living and the singular, against its nihilistic *relève* into an element of an ossified theoretical system. But militating philosophically for the living – for the finitude and contingency of human thought, as he conceives it in later writings – entails for Lyotard an operation of theoretical destruction or, more accurately, of disabling.[7] Lyotard's anti-theoretical stance broadly characterizes his intellectual trajectory, emerging even in his earliest writings. At the beginning of the 1970s, however, he inaugurates a 'pagan' phase of his thinking wherein he begins in earnest to draw lessons from the Greek sophists and the Aristotle of the *Rhetoric*. Over the course of the pagan phase, Lyotard deploys these resources in a sustained anti-theoretical direction. Widely considered a 'strategic plunderer' of intellectual history (Williams 1998: 24–5), in drawing the boundary between philosophy on one hand and theory or master discourse on the other, the Lyotard of the 1970s increasingly sets the fragmentary canon of sophistical fellow travellers to work. As Crome notes, it is first a matter of setting out the sophistry–philosophy distinction without taking sides and then, increasingly, taking-up of sophistical tools explicitly to batter the fortress of philosophy-as-theory (Crome op. cit.). This is starkly at odds with the picture of philosophy as a close cousin to (or a degradation of) poetic, Parmenidean revelation fighting for truth against sophistry. Rather, in *The Differend* and, arguably, the preparatory works leading up to it, Lyotard the philosopher fights alongside the sophists, using sophistical tools, against philosophy's reification into Platonic, Hegelian and other such systems. In addition, until his death Lyotard employed his sophistical tools to exploit cues or lapses from thinkers as diverse as Kant, Freud, Augustine and Malraux to further undermine philosophy's theoretical pretensions.

What has happened here to philosophy's longstanding antagonism to sophistry? To anticipate Badiou's criticism, Lyotard has perhaps gone all the way over to sophistry in abandoning truth to the rule. But before going further, a note of caution: the problem, if problem there be, is that Lyotard militates under the sign of the rule, not that he wishes to make the rule into a first principle. It cannot be emphasized enough that Lyotard's operations against philosophy-as-theory only fall prey to performative contradiction if the question of his relation to metalanguage is begged. He is not offering a theoretical alternative to philosophy-as-theory – i.e. he is not presenting us with a master discourse intended to critique, counter or replace the theoretical-Platonic

master discourse. Nor do his propositions conceal or ultimately rest upon any such discourse. Picking up a phrase of Crome's in connection with Lyotard's discussion of sophistry in *Discourse, Figure*, 'It is not a matter of siding *with* sophistry *against* philosophy … Rather it is a matter of displacing the opposition itself' (ibid.: 87–8). And, when Lyotard runs his 1975 seminar on Nietzsche and the sophists, it is a matter of 'seeking among the interstices of the philosophical order the possibility of displacing the claims of philosophical reason, not according to another truth, but by way of its own limits and what it seeks to exclude' (ibid.: 90).

Put differently: rather than construct an oppositional master discourse, Lyotard approaches philosophy as practice. He mines sophistical resources in the course of thinking philosophically against a theoreticist conception of philosophy. As to the nature of these sophistical resources, Crome briefly examines the vague notion of *mētis* or sophistical ruse, covering 'various practices that concern the contingent and unforeseeable'; essentially, forms of craftiness tailored to the moment (ibid.: 104). The definition is sufficiently broad to include ruses that are not rational or argumentative, properly speaking. For example Crates the Cynic teaches a pupil of Aristotle to fart at will, rending Aristotelian erudition not by rational refutation but by meaningless punctuations of flatulence and laughter.[8] Similarly, Diogenes the Cynic eats in the *agora* and masturbates in public, arguably to demonstrate by shock the core Cynical value of natural simplicity over societal convention (Crome op. cit.: 104). When I suggest that the sophist aims above all to create effects, these should thus be understood to include effects by way of affects. Incidentally, this understanding of *mētis* sheds light on earlier and less-studied Lyotardian texts such as *Libidinal Economy,* which seek above all to persuade at an affective level; witness the latter text's violence, sex, fuming hatred and beautiful rhetorical flourishes, all of which are intended to 'conduct intensities' (set off and accelerate energies in the reader, get the reader to conduct intensities as part of a general libidinal acceleration) rather than make rational arguments per se. Accepting that ruses of affect are a component of sophistical practice, 'Lyotard is able to recover sophistry itself as an instance or element of a way of life that secures its victories by way of the body as much as by way of reason' (ibid.: 105).

Lyotard however will privilege one ruse in particular, which bears directly on rational argumentation: the way in which the master discourse's rules and axioms, its exigencies against 'lesser' discourses, can be turned back against the master discourse itself with far-reaching, disabling results. In fact, in one of his foundational sophistical interventions '*Sur la force des faibles*' in *L'Arc* 64,

Lyotard gives an overview of several sophistical figures and tells us that he really speaks of 'only one force' throughout: specifically, the force of submitting the greater force to its own exigencies and spinning out the consequences (Lyotard 1976: 8). Lyotard will call this force 'retorsion', and it broadly characterizes his sophistical interventions. Crome claims in fact that 'The originality of Lyotard's analysis is to have identified at the heart of the *habitus* of the sophist the technique – if one can call it that – of *retorsion*' (Crome op. cit.: 100).

Crome identifies three distinct but interconnected senses of retorsion operant in Lyotard's discussion of the sophists: (a) the sophist teaches the principle of 'double argument', *dissoi logoi*, the art of arguing both sides 'in order that, no matter what the particular argument, the one possessed of this skill is always able to *retort*' (ibid.: 96); (b) the sophist shows that another *turn* in the argument is always possible, ultimately such that 'The sophistical act is not merely a matter of making a retort, but in retorting, of also producing an act of retorsion – turning the adversary's argument back against herself' (ibid.); and finally (c) 'the sophist can always manage a retort against the final word', such that retorsion even 'turns the absolute in upon itself' (ibid.: 100).

In passing, note that it is with the use of this tripartite retortive *technē* that Socrates is charged in his trial, conceived simply as 'making the weaker argument the stronger' and 'making the stronger argument the weaker' (ibid.: 97).[9] The third inflection of Lyotard's use of retorsion in fact hits upon the idea that Socrates's practice, confused by his accusers for sophistry, troubled the absolute in some way and thereby committed an impiety, i.e. denigrated the gods and introduced new ones. But abstracting the question of the absolute away from the figure of the gods, we see that the third inflection also troubles the very idea of a master discourse and thus requires further comment.

Take the master discourse's demand for proof, for example – is it subject to itself, i.e. to its own demands? How can the demand for proof be grounded or 'proven', and at any rate how can the same be done for a given proof protocol? Or take the idea that 'truth' describes an isomorphism, a strict correspondence to facts; is that statement itself isomorphic with the facts, and if so, how could it possibly be established? Speaking more generally, and to take a page from Hans Albert and his Münchhausen *trilemma*, how may the demand for any first principles at all not run afoul of either: (a) infinite regress (on what other principles do your principles rest?); (b) circularity (on what ground other than your principles can you defend the claim that your principles are self-evident?); or (c) arbitrariness (on what grounds have you broken off the search for first principles here?)?[10]

To illustrate concretely the force of this 'weak power' with respect to first principles, consider how Lyotard handles two connected cases: the story of Protagoras demanding a fee from his student Euathlus, and Russell's attempt to dissolve the liar's paradox.

In both '*Sur la force des faibles*' and the Protagoras Notice of *The Differend*, Lyotard relates a widely-reported story: the sophist Protagoras demands a fee from his student Euathlus, but Euathlus refuses on the grounds that he has yet to win an argument under Protagoras's tutelage. Protagoras insists that 'if I win this dispute …, I must be paid because I've won …, and if you win it I must be paid because you've won' (Lyotard 1988b: 6). Euathlus is caught in a double bind, because Protagoras includes the argument over the payment of the fee in the set of arguments under discussion. Thus even if Euathlus successfully argues that he must not pay the fee, the victory of his own argument defeats him and he must pay the fee to his teacher.

The story of Protagoras and Euathlus is instructive in that for Lyotard, it sheds light on retorsion. But this kind of sophistical play with sets of elements extends to the deeper question of first principles, evidenced by Russell's attempt to dissolve the liar's paradox. To say 'I lie' is to create a paradox such that: (a) if what I say is true then it is false (if 'I lie' is true, then I am lying, so it is false that I lie); and (b) if what I say is false then it is true (if 'I lie' is false then I am telling the truth). Since 'I lie' is a single proposition it cannot be, strictly speaking, both true and false at the same time according to the principle of non-contradiction. It appears in fact to be neither true nor false, inasmuch as is not saying anything intelligible at all. But admitting as much is troubling for any vision of a logically perfect language, since it suggests the existence of pseudo-propositions which are incoherent. Hence Russell's attempt to dissolve the paradox by introducing his theory of types: stipulate that there are propositions of type 1, which refer to any object whatsoever, and propositions of type 2, which are metalinguistic and refer to propositions of type 1 (Lyotard 1976). 'I lie' may be rendered differently as '[It is true that] I lie', and the paradox dissolved inasmuch as the bracketed type 2 proposition 'It is true that' is metalinguistic and therefore does not itself belong in the class of instances covered by the un-bracketed type 1 proposition 'I lie'. The coherence of discourse is saved by stipulating that a proposition cannot refer to itself; 'I lie' does not cover itself as an instance of lying, but rather implies a metalinguistic statement that purports to be true. In this fashion, Euathlus might have defended himself by stipulating that the argument with Protagoras was an argument about a distinct set of arguments, and was not to be included in the set under discussion.

This however raises an important question upon which Lyotard insists: what of Russell's axiom, his decree that discourse should respect the theory of types – to which type does it belong? Lyotard argues that it is a type 2 statement, inasmuch as it takes other statements for its referents, pronouncing in particular on the totality of relations between statements belonging to types 1 and 2 (more specifically, fixing a truth-value for the totality of propositional variables in a given statement) (ibid.). But this means that Russell's axiom runs afoul of itself, since it belongs to the set of its own referents and this is precisely what Russell wished to avoid (ibid.). Russell might try to surmount this difficulty by stipulating the existence of a type 3 class of statements capable of fixing relations between types 1 and 2, but this opens up the problem of an infinite regression (how do we ground the axiom to distinguish between types 1, 2 and 3 without counting type 3 as a member of itself? Type 4! Ad infinitum …) (ibid.). Since an infinite regression is no ground at all, the question is whether or not Russell can ground the axiom without appeal to self-evidence (thus falling on the circularity horn of the Münchhausen trilemma) or to its expediency (thus falling on the arbitrariness horn).

Lyotard at this point sets out a remarkable alternative: on one hand, there is 'nothing serious' in Russell's failure to ground the axiom of the theory of types absolutely (ibid.: 9). We can in good conscience choose the arbitrariness horn, simply break off the regression at a given axiomatic level and be content with the decisional nature of our operation. Indeed, Russell's axiom makes sense hypothetically, inasmuch as *if* we want coherent discourse at a certain level of depth then it is prudent to abide by it. This is to highlight the pragmatic nature of Russell's operation rather than to insist upon the question of its ground. But on the other hand, Lyotard goes on, the failure of Russell's theory of types is grave indeed in what it suggests about philosophy-as-theory: the discourse of philosophical mastery cannot live up to its own standards. Indeed Plato himself, arch nemesis of the sophist, arguably falls victim to a Lyotardian retorsion (note in passing that it is the early Russell's Platonism, not the arbitrary or pragmatic nature of his axiomatic, that Lyotard finds objectionable) (Crome op. cit.).

The Plato Notice in *The Differend* uses much the same tactic to get at the heart of the philosopher–sophist problematic. Recall that Lyotard accepts the Heideggerian thesis, echoed by Cassin, of a shift in early Greek thought from immediate presencing to representation, via the provocation of the sophists. This shift indicates a cleavage between thought and being, the acceptance of the ruination of the demonic phrase, and immediately raises the question of impiety – not just on the sophist's count, but the philosopher's as well. As Lyotard puts

it regarding Socrates and Plato, 'One can still be impious, no longer by speaking to the gods, but by speaking about them. They are then in the situation of a referent in phrases exchanged between men' (Lyotard 1988b: 21). Recall that it is with impiety and corrupting the youth that Socrates is charged, and his interlocutors often mistake him for a sophist; therefore to address these charges (in the bargain rehabilitating Socrates), Plato must account for a 'pious' way of taking the gods (or being, or the Ideas) as referents in discourse, formulating protocols for establishing and defending the veracity of referents in general. Like the sophist, the Platonic philosopher thinks on the terrain of language and representation; unlike the sophist, the Platonic philosopher is animated by the ideal of getting beyond language and representation to what is most real.

This necessitates however an enormous undertaking. Because he thinks in the context of the shift from the demonic phrase to representation, Plato must establish *through dialogue* (or, frequently in his corpus, through the telling of a verisimilitudinous mythic narrative that is not coextensive with being) the proper protocol of dialogue by which to establish the reality of the referent – which explains why the Platonic dialogues contain frequent interruptions of the type of a '*that's not fair*' (ibid.), the ruses and the ultimate silence of Thrasymachus, etc. Even if Plato succeeds in establishing such a protocol, the spectre of impiety remains. For example, it is well known that for Plato 'In principle, mimesis must be rejected' (ibid.: 22) on account of the distance it takes from being, since it amounts to copying copies (i.e. creating linguistic or artistic images of phenomena, which themselves only participate in the Ideas). But mimesis is also unavoidable:

> one ought to forbid mimesis but one cannot. In fact, things themselves are not grasped, only their images. If things were grasped, there would be no need to phrase. Or else, if we didn't phrase, there would be no need to mime. Phrasing takes place in the lack of being of that about which there is a phrase. Language is the sign that one does not know the being of the existent. When one knows it one is the existent, and that's silence. (Ibid.)

But this means that 'You can merely improve the imprint' of representation and that 'The canonical phrase of Platonic poetics would be in sum: I deceive you the least possible' (ibid.).

To get at what is most real, even assuming such a remainder of doubt, the Platonic dialogues perform at the same time as they defend a particular standard of dialogue. It is one in which the third party, either the judge or the witness, is impugned: 'the only acceptable testimony about the referent is that

of those who, in disputing over the referent, pass all of the testimony about it through the sieve of refutation' (ibid.: 23). The parties to the dialogue come together with the aim of reaching consensus, submitting claims in good faith to the test of refutation in a dialogical time that is, on account of the remainder of doubt implied by the shift from presence to representation, in principle infinite (ibid.: 24). In the bargain this helps explain Plato's phonocentrism – his privileging of speech over writing – since the letter is dead and cannot defend itself (ibid.: 23).

But the standard of proper dialogue, automatically excluding the third-party judge, poses the question of the right dialogue partner: 'What is required … by the institution of the dialogue is at least an agreement between the partners concerning the stakes, that is concerning the quest for an agreement' (ibid.: 24). The question is thus posed, at the heart of Plato's undertaking, of the sophist's inclusion in the dialogue. Operating under the agonistic principle rather than that of consensus, the sophist must be variously coaxed into accepting the rule of Platonic dialogue by means of refutation or mythic seduction (Gorgias), reduced to silence (Thrasymachus) or simply banished from the city (one thinks here of the *Laws*). But all of this raises the spectre of the differend, 'the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim' (ibid.: para. 12). Claiming the protocol's self-evidence or expediency does not appear sufficient to dispel this charge; perhaps Plato's success here hinges on whether or not refutation or seduction, in defence of his protocol of agreement, can hold muster over the sophist, or even simply the non-philosopher. But this poses the problem of a ground other than that of consensus. If the sophist or the non-philosopher is swayed to the side of philosophy, this is not due to the protocol of philosophy, but to other, arguably poetical and sophistical reasons. Indeed, as Lyotard claims 'it is not just a question of eliminating a few, infirm brutes who claim to dialogue, but also of attracting and of taming those recalcitrant ones who don't want to dialogue. The simulated dialogue serves to lure them in' (ibid.: 24). Through metalepsis – 'a change in the level of one's take on the referent' (ibid.: 25) – Plato stages the dialogues of Socrates as epic events which are at once a record of philosophical protocol and a seduction into said protocol.

Platonic dialogue, much like Russell's theory of types, is therefore caught between recourse to non-philosophical tools (infinite regress), self-evidence (circularity), and breaking off pragmatically (arbitrariness). There is no question here of refuting Plato's dialogical protocol; attempting as much would commit Lyotard to precisely the kind of appeal to ground that he

disables in Russell and Plato. Rather, Lyotard's operation appears to be a simple unpacking of the rules delimiting a particular kind of discourse. But this operation is not as simple as it appears; it is in fact deeply sceptical, since it demonstrates how the protocols of Platonic philosophy comprise a set of dialogical rules in a larger set of sets of dialogical rules. Inasmuch as the Platonic philosopher forecloses the possibility of making certain moves in the dialogical encounter the question is posed as to the veracity of the protocols by which she operates. But these are established either through: (a) Socrates's deployment of mixed protocols in reducing the sophist to silence or winning him over (infinite regress); (b) question-begging acquiescence on the part of Socrates's interlocutors (circularity); or (c) starting out from the Platonic protocol for pragmatic reasons (arbitrariness).

Summing up: raising questions and deploying ruses with no view to the truth but, rather, solely to create effects, the sophist seeks to drive a wedge of 'weak power' into the master discourse, disabling it but not refuting it. The overall strategy is itself ethical or perhaps political rather than philosophical, as I will explain in the following chapter, and it is not unlike Derridean deconstruction, in that the architecture is undermined, though not destroyed, using the very tools available in the house. Sophists work with language, within language. They keep it from trying to jump its own shadow. As such, the sophist not only troubles the systematic pretensions of a Plato or a Hegel, but keeps the Lyotardian philosopher honest, vigilant and resistant to the temptation to succumb to the impulse to totalize. The sophist is no enemy of the Lyotardian philosopher, but rather a fellow traveller. And in any case, there is no need to draw any rigid distinction between them, since both operate within *logologos* and the sophist does not have a monopoly on the uses of *mētis*.

Badiou's response to Lyotard's appropriation of sophistry, as I will explain in the next section, tries to evade the ruse of retorsion with the help of the matheme, more particularly set theory. If Badiou's estimation is correct, Lyotard's thought is insufficiently mathematical and as a result spins endlessly in a topography staked out by sophistry. It is by recourse to the matheme that Badiou – like Plato – seeks to evade the sophist's traps. Moreover, Badiou will insist that there lurks in Lyotard's philosophy of phrases precisely the kind of totalizing, terroristic impulse that it claims to avoid.

Badiou, *philosophe*?

Badiou's eulogy to Lyotard demonstrates the great extent of their *rapprochement* following years of 'extremely irritated' relations (Badiou 2009c: 108). I prefaced Chapter 1 with a quote therefrom, expressing Badiou's view that their dispute concerned infinity and its correlation with the finite. While the meaning of this claim should now be clearer on account of the exegesis performed in Chapter 1, it is important to note that Badiou makes a further important claim in the eulogy regarding the infinite: that their dispute is 'over the essence of the infinite, but not really about its use' (ibid.: 111). What this means is that on the basis of their ontologies – which as we have seen diverge crucially after the initial decision on the nature of being *qua* being – each of them stakes out a vision of philosophy as an essentially obstinate enterprise. To 'use' the infinite as they do is in other words to mark a trajectory for thought which, setting out from a decision on being *qua* being as pure multiplicity, runs counter to the economic and bureaucratic rationality that produces and thrives upon finitude, and everywhere strives to anticipate, exploit and thus neutralize the radically new. Badiou will even go so far as to suggest that, in submitting philosophy to the search for its own rule, and denying the possibility of systematicity as such, Lyotard *necessarily* sutures philosophy or, put differently, 'hands thought over to only one of its conditions' (Badiou 1999b: 60).

Since both thinkers accept the thesis of being as inconsistent multiplicity, the idea that they differ as to the 'essence' of the infinite is perhaps better expressed in terms of how they conceive of and deploy their ontologies, i.e. the methodological choices they make in thinking the infinite. In this connection, perhaps the real difference between the two thinkers inheres in the question of logicism which was underscored in Chapter 2. On the basis of his subsumption of thought to the rule, we have seen how Lyotard disables philosophy-as-theory. But his takedown of Hegel and of the totalizing pretences of the speculative genre is, for Badiou, symptomatic. It indicates a failure to think being in a properly mathematical fashion, thereby falling short of an account of truths and of Truth, which could escape not only the force of the speculative genre, but also the sophistical cul-de-sac of bad infinity, which is merely its inversion. As Lyotard claims in *The Differend*, 'The phrase formulating the general rule for operating the passage from one phrase to the next is itself subject to this form of operating the passage'; put differently, in more Kantian terms, 'the synthesis of the series is also an element belonging to the series' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 97). But this is precisely what Badiou rejects, giving the most 'banal example' from

mathematics to show why Lyotard is mistaken: 'the series that makes a finite whole number is not a finite whole number; indeed, it is an entity that is truly inaccessible. The immanent principle of that which is repeated or succeeded is neither repeated nor succeeded' (Badiou 2009c: 110). Thus, while Badiou recognizes the resistant, militant drive and potential of Lyotard's account of philosophy, his own metaphilosophy seeks to go beyond it. On account of his logicism Lyotard fixates on 'the reversible' (ibid.: 108) – i.e. retorsion – and is therefore limited to particular sophistical interventions, caught as he is in the 'serial logic of the drift' (ibid.: 110–11). Badiou for his part seeks 'orientation' (ibid.: 108), an intractable point from which to philosophize systematically, and finds it in 'the localization of the point of excess' (ibid.: 111). Granting Badiou's claim that the matheme overcomes Lyotard's logicism and escapes retorsion in a rather banal fashion, it remains for us to explore the nature of the alternative he lays out.

The *Manifesto for Philosophy* – in combination with the collection *Conditions*, which expounds upon its theses – delivers a clear and forceful statement of the metaphilosophy which follows from *Being and Event*. In these texts Badiou develops the latter's ontological schema for philosophy through the account of truths and the category of Truth, expressing a singular vision of the discipline. The very title and literary form of the *Manifesto* indicate an urgently required and quite explicitly partisan intervention around the signifier 'philosophy'. This of course evokes Badiou's teacher Louis Althusser, who held dear Lenin's dictum that 'non-partisans in philosophy are just as hopelessly thick-headed as they are in politics' (Lenin 1970: 274). But in drawing attention to the partisan element of philosophy, it also raises in a particularly forceful way the question of philosophy's unique temporality – or better put, its unique timeliness. Granted, philosophy is perennially *un*timely in that, because it intervenes in a partisan fashion, it finds itself out of step with the prevailing consensus of opinion. Precisely for this reason however, philosophy is uniquely capable of constructing a space in which the untimely truths of the properly historical moment may be thought together. As such, there is nothing more timely than philosophy.

Everything therefore depends upon how philosophy, traditionally considered to be the guardian or searcher after Truth, figures with respect to the theory of truths and of Truth derived from *Being and Event*. It is necessary to declare, first, that philosophy is still *possible* in the context of its general retreat and *fin-de-siècle* malaise. Philosophy at the time of the *Manifesto*'s composition is everywhere in decline and what passes for it constitutes nothing more than a

variety of ruminations on the theme of its own end. 'Philosophy' thus practised has apparently extracted from its own core a perennial totalitarian and terroristic impulse to reduce the Other to the Same and as such, pleads guilty to the crimes of the twentieth century – but also 'all of the centuries since Plato' (Badiou 1999b: 28) who figures here – as he does for Heidegger, take note, in whose shadow philosophy labours – as the avatar of a fall in thinking. It is essential then to get beyond the theme of philosophy's end, to escape the Heideggerian air that French thought at any rate still breathes – but also to reckon with the inherently sophistical character of much post-Heideggerian thinking. Ultimately, what is needed is to reinvigorate philosophy in an explicitly Platonic mode: 'Stating the end of the End, of *this* end, inevitably comes down to reopening the Plato question' (Badiou 2008a: 10). But this is precisely, following Badiou, a matter of properly defining philosophy in respect to truths and Truth – such that it neither overreaches, as Plato himself did in Book X of *The Laws* (ibid.), nor misses its destiny and succumbs to poetical or sophistical temptations. Like Lyotard, explicitly named in the *Manifesto* as a thinker of philosophy's guilt-ridden decline, Badiou is a thinker of the century's excesses as well as of its grandest experiments.[11] It is crucial however that the philosopher absorbs something of the insights of the theme of the end, *without* reducing her endeavour to it. Philosophy, after Plato's and certainly Heidegger's political follies, but also its accretion into the monstrosity of official Stalinist 'diamat', has lost whatever innocence it might have once claimed and relaxes its vigilance at its own peril.

What then is philosophy? And how does it preserve the category of Truth from: (a) the pervasive theme of its own demise, but also; (b) subsumption under a terroristic desire for the One?

First, consider Badiou's account of a truth. Any truth is distinct, as I mentioned already in Chapter 1, from *knowledge* or the merely veridical. The veridical concerns only that which is represented according to the state of the situation; thus the knowledge of any normal situation would be its excrescent, encyclopaedic power-set. But if truth is not knowledge, then neither by implication is Badiou's account a correspondence theory, according to which propositions are true (and not trivially so) if and only if they are isomorphic with that which is the case – i.e. that which is counted in the situation. Far from it; Badiou will state that truth remains 'unthinkable' if we tie it to the proposition, and that modern philosophy as a whole is 'a criticism of truth as adequation' (Badiou 2014a: 49). This is because truth is submitted to thought 'not as a judgment, but as a process in the real' (ibid.). Truth in other words has an ontological basis and it is essential to resist its absorption into epistemology.

Properly construed, any truth presupposes an 'eventful origin' (Badiou 1999b: 36). If no event supplements the situation, there is literally no truth to speak of (ibid.). Therefore truth always concerns *historicity*, rather than normality or nature; if, as we saw, there is no natural event, then there is properly speaking no natural truth. Moreover, if we understand truths on this basis then it is possible to say that a truth punches a 'hole' in knowledge (Badiou 2001: 70). Or, to express the same idea mathematically, truths are purely 'subtractive' with respect to the situation in which they occur.[12]

It is important however to underscore that if a truth is subtractive, which is to say completely heterogeneous to the knowledge characteristic of the situation, it is also 'the sole known source of new knowledges' (Badiou 2001: 70). A truth 'groups together all of the terms of the situation which are positively connected to the event' (Badiou 2007a: 335) and thereby 'forces' knowledges (Badiou 2001: 70). Differently put, based on the possibilities indicated by the rupture of the event, a truth puts into play a modification of the situation such that, for example, the Mozart-event organizes a new body of musical knowledge (ibid.). There is, from the perspective of this new knowledge, no going back to the pre-evental situation. But this post-evental process of organization results in much more than a new encyclopaedia of the situation.

The concepts of *forcing* and of the *generic* – central to Badiou's enterprise[13] – are crucial here. Badiou adapts these notions from the mathematician Paul Cohen (Badiou 2007a). The *generic set* is the ontological schema of truth or, put differently, it 'founds the being' of any truth (ibid.: 327). It must be infinite, or it will remain indiscernible *qua* truth, precisely through its re-incorporation into the situation (ibid.). Moreover its link to the event is immediately clear, inasmuch as it is defined as a set that can neither be totalized, nor named, nor constructed according to a given situational, encyclopaedic language (Badiou 2014a). As opposed to a garden-variety or 'constructible' set, whose elements are determined by the conditions of belonging that they satisfy, a generic set is a collection of elements satisfying no such condition; as such, the generic set is 'determined merely by its members' (Reinhard 2013: xxxiii). It is therefore 'an only partly known infinite set' (ibid.). Starting from the fiction or hypothesis of a completed truth, based upon the indiscernible existence of a generic set, it is possible to 'weakly force' (as opposed to 'strongly' forcing, through direct logical implication) (ibid.: xxxiv) new 'bits of knowledge' upon the situation without having to verify them (Badiou op. cit.: 53). Put differently, 'A faithful generic procedure renders the indiscernible immanent', and as such it 'forces the situation to accommodate it' (Badiou 2007a: 342).

To better see what Badiou has in mind by forcing, think here of the declaration 'I will always love you' (Badiou 2014a: 53). The declaration is strictly unverifiable, but it forces the situation, however weakly, according to a retroactive nomination of the amorous event and the hypothesis of a life lived not just together, but truly in common or according to the perspective of a Two.[14] In common parlance, the declaration is a game changer; even if it goes unreciprocated, it forces the beloved to know and treat the lover differently (Badiou 2014a). Though Cohen was concerned with the specifically set-theoretical implications of forcing based upon the hypothesis of the generic set, Kenneth Reinhard is correct to state that it is 'precisely [Badiou's] project' to 'extend Cohen's concepts of forcing and the generic to other realms, including politics and art' (Reinhard op. cit.). But regardless of the particular realm in which forcing is deployed, inasmuch as the ontological schema of a truth is the truly *generic* subset, it is important to recall that what results is not a new encyclopaedia of the situation but rather an infinite procedure of experimentation and verification based upon the forcing. Thus, to give one more example, following the Galileo-event we do not have a 'closed and unified subset of knowledge that we could call "physics"'; rather, we have 'an infinite and open set of laws and experiments' (Badiou op. cit.: 52). Similarly, the lovers in the wake of the declaration remain faithful to their love only by pursuing the properly infinite possibilities opened up by the hypothesis of a life that is truly lived in common. The moment their love becomes routine, or a coexistence of solitudes, it effectively ceases to be.

The account thus far may cut a strange figure of truth. Indeed, it indicates that the categories by which we can think truths are on Badiou's view strictly negative (ibid.). First, the event which heralds truth evokes the *undecidable* since, *qua* event, we cannot name truth according to the knowledge of the situation; as Badiou puts it, nothing in the situation permits us to say 'here begins a truth' (ibid.: 47). Since a given enquiry 'cannot discern the true from the veridical' (Badiou 2007a: 332) truth by definition begins with the 'groundless decision … to *say* that an event has taken place' (Badiou 2014a: 50). One retroactively decides upon the event and hence, upon the existence of the generic subset.

Second, at the level of *subjectivation* – becoming subject-to-a-truth – the choice to adhere to the generic procedure is by definition a choice among *indiscernibles* (ibid.). If there is no situational language according to which the given truth takes place, then it is not even possible to identify the terms that one chooses. Here again, it is a question of an absolutely free and pure decision, premised on risk.

Third, we have already seen how truth implies the *generic* – but it pays to emphasize that the generic is precisely the 'generic not-all (*pas-tout*)' of the situation (ibid.: 47). This subtractive characteristic is precisely what accounts for its potential force.

Finally, the fiction or hypothesis of a complete truth in no way entails the possibility of a truth's completion. Indeed, there is always the *unnameable* or the *real* of the situation, i.e. that which is *unforceable* (ibid.). For example, a mathematical truth cannot force the non-contradictoriness of mathematics, since non-contradiction is the very *sine-qua-non* of any mathematical theory (ibid.). But this suggests an ethic of truths, according to which the generic procedure must be cognizant of the limits of its own powers. According to this view, the root of all evil lies precisely in the will to force the unforceable (ibid.). In Chapter 4 I will explain this in detail, with particular attention paid to Badiou's understanding of philosophy and sophistry in light of an ethic of truths.

In sum, Badiou's account of truths is purely negative. But this is only a function of the unavoidable situatedness of his discourse. Far from offering a nihilistic account of truth, he is insisting upon the fact that the radically new is unthinkable *according to existing parameters*. That truth is subtractive does not entail that it has no effects, or that it lacks purchase in the situation – far from it. Rather, the retroactive nomination of the event and the infinite verification of a truth based upon the forcing of the situation according to the hypothesis of the generic subset are the very heart and soul of a militancy that strives to change the world.

It is important at this step however to properly conceive of philosophy's relation to truths and to its generic category of Truth. Contrary to what might be expected, philosophy does not produce any truths of its own (Badiou 1999b). Rather, Badiou defines its role thus: 'to propose a unified conceptual space in which naming *takes place* of events that serve as the point of departure of truth procedures' (ibid.: 37). Put differently, the event supplements the situation, and is named on the basis of the autonomous generic procedures it engenders. *Only then* can we speak of philosophy's role. Philosophy is a servant to truth procedures; it is *conditioned* by them (Badiou 2007a). Badiou names four such conditions, each with its own specific features requiring investigation. These are the matheme (science), the poem (art), political intervention and love (Badiou 1999b). Scientific, amorous and artistic examples have already figured above. For a broad idea of how politics conditions philosophy, take the event most central to Badiou's life: May 1968 in France and the generic i.e. properly democratic and communist truth procedure it inaugurated.

Thus understood, philosophy, in the first instance, merely thinks or carves out a space in thought for the 'there is' of truths (Badiou 2008a). *It is therefore the thinking of the generic as such* (Badiou 1999b). But to this extent we may also describe philosophy as constructing an empty category of Truth, or in other words, thinking the compossibility of truths according to the heterogeneous generic procedures through which it is conditioned (ibid.).[15] This explains philosophy's untimely timeliness, referenced above: philosophy is always dependent upon the conditions which are operant in a given historical situation, but its vocation is to think them *together* and thus create a cartography of possibilities inherent in the historical conjuncture. Note how Badiou differs from Lyotard on this count; the concept of the generic allows him to unite the four truth procedures under the category of Truth while upholding their heterogeneity. It is not a question of the tentative and vigilant drift between islands of difference, but rather of transforming the situation on the basis on a shared genericity.

Badiou does not claim however that philosophy is always possible (Badiou 1999b). To the contrary, it is entirely contingent upon the event, which is by definition incalculable. But more than that: lacking even *a single one* of its conditions, philosophy dissipates (ibid.). So the question arises: have there been any genuinely philosophical sequences in history? In other words, has thought ever measured up to the truth procedures of its historical conjuncture? The answer is yes, and philosophy's very inauguration in the Platonic corpus remains perhaps the ultimate example. The seizing of artistic, amorous, scientific and political truths in a single space of compossibility which names moreover the category of Truth (though admittedly under the name of the Good)[16] broadly characterizes the dialogues (ibid.). It is for this reason that Badiou, though quite far from Plato on a number of doctrines, can without irony style himself a contemporary Platonist.

The account of philosophy according to its conditions also serves a critical function. Badiou can attack his interlocutors precisely on account of their failure to think the generic procedures compossibly, or in a rigorous fashion. What is more – and I will explain this in Chapter 4 – he can claim that they have 'sutured' philosophy to one procedure at the expense of the others, thus running afoul of philosophy's ethics by giving it content, i.e. filling in the void of its central category. In connection with Lyotard, Badiou appears – and not without giving the impression of a certain lack of consistency – to level each of these criticisms at one point or another.

Speaking quite generally, throughout his writings Badiou makes frequent suggestions to the effect that Lyotard does not make good on philosophy's

promise. For one thing, Lyotard's eclecticism is not to be taken as the equivalent of Badiou's thinking of the compossible. It is as we have seen an interminable passage between faculties, not the construction of a space for thinking the properly historical present. Another way of putting this is that Lyotard's handle on the conditions emphasizes their heterogeneity at the expense of their shared genericity. Another way of putting this is that his handle on the conditions is out of balance.

Regarding science in particular: the discussion of logicism already suggests that Lyotard is insufficiently tuned in to modern science, via a failure to grasp the cutting-edge, vanguardist adventures of the matheme. In this spirit Badiou cites Plato's *Cratylus* in connection with Lyotard, driving home the idea that through mathematics, philosophy engages not with linguistic signs but rather with things themselves (Badiou 2008b).

Regarding love: in the eulogy Badiou will describe how Lyotard always granted an exceptional status to love (Badiou 2009c). But does this not indicate the risk of a suture? Badiou claims in the *Manifesto* at any rate that Lévinas – who as we will see in Chapter 4 is a decisive figure in Lyotard's development – gives ground on philosophy's ethics by suturing it to love (Badiou 1999b).

Regarding politics: it is striking that in his rewriting of the *Republic*, Badiou has the vicious sophist Thrasymachus name Lyotard as his friend (Badiou 2012a). Lyotard's reputation as an exceptionally attentive, gentle person[17] does not square with this. But put into context, we see the critical function of the remark: Badiou is simply suggesting that like Thrasymachus, Lyotard interprets philosophy through the lens of pragmatic force and thereby sutures thought to politics.

Finally, regarding art: we have already seen how Lyotard's privileging of literature, painting and the like is for Badiou suggestive of philosophy's suture to the poem. It is a latent romanticism, or a Heideggerianism that is insufficiently purged.

Though it is hard to interpret Badiou as literally suggesting that Lyotard fails both in general and on account of each condition individually – sometimes for flatly incompatible reasons – the foregoing does demonstrate the critical way in which Badiou can bring his metaphilosophy to bear in interpreting his opponents.

Before closing, it is important to note that Badiou's metaphilosophy is still under construction. What remains to be thought in Badiou's enterprise, and which he intends to address in the future, is whether philosophy entails a 'figure of life' that would integrate the four truth procedures: a specifically

philosophical subjectivity and its affects (Badiou and Tarby 2013: 111). But in sum, we can say that philosophy distinguishes itself as the construction of the empty category of Truth – a space in which to seize the 'there is' of a truth, and to think its compossibility with other truths in order to measure up to its time.

Lyotard, *antiphilosophe*?

We have established that Lyotard and Badiou both consider themselves to be doing philosophy. Or at least Lyotard considers *The Differend* to be a philosophical book, though Badiou, for reasons we have seen, characterizes it as sophistical. Because Lyotard defines philosophy therein as an open and interminable search for its own rules – a search for itself, in a word – he shows less concern than Badiou regarding strict demarcation and the use of sophistical resources. But for Badiou this eclecticism is symptomatic of sophistry's having infiltrated the academy and for decades having spoken in philosophy's name.

Though I have framed the Badiou–Lyotard dispute as a struggle to define philosophy, and perhaps an enactment of the philosopher–sophist drama following in the wake of the first Greek thinkers, we would be remiss not to consider a further category traced by Badiou in his metaphilosophical demarcations: that of *antiphilosophy*. Noting that Lacan called himself an antiphilosopher (Badiou and Roudinesco 2014: 45), Badiou has adapted the term to characterize a number of thinkers who appear, at first blush, to be widely divergent. Four of his seminars have been devoted to key antiphilosophical figures, among which he counts Paul, Nietzsche, Lacan and Wittgenstein. He also makes frequent passing comments naming Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Pascal and, perhaps, Heraclitus[18] and Diogenes the Cynic as antiphilosophers. To complicate matters, he allows that a given thinker may become or cease to be an antiphilosopher in the course of his development. Thus he characterizes the early Wittgenstein as one of the two great twentieth-century antiphilosophers (the other being Lacan) (Badiou 2009b), whereas the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* he commonly classifies as a great modern sophist, 'our Gorgias' whom we respect as such (Badiou 1999b: 117–88).

What then can these disparate figures of antiphilosophy have in common? Badiou defines antiphilosophy thus:

> Antiphilosophy … can be recognized by three joint operations: 1. A linguistic, logical, genealogical critique of the statements of philosophy; a deposing of the category of truth; an unraveling of the pretensions of philosophy to constitute

> itself as a theory … 2. The recognition of the fact that philosophy, in the final instance, cannot be reduced to its discursive appearance, its propositions, its fallacious theoretical exterior. Philosophy is an act, of which the fabulations about 'truth' are the clothing, the propaganda, the lies … 3. The appeal made, against the philosophical act, to another, radically new act, which will either be called philosophical as well … or else more honestly, supraphilosophical or even aphilosophical. This act without precedence destroys the philosophical act, all the while clarifying its noxious character. It overcomes it affirmatively. (Badiou 2011b: 75–6)

Points 1 and 2 appear to place the antiphilosopher in the orbit of sophistry. Badiou concurs that there is a connection, noting that 'every anti-philosopher is a virtual accomplice of sophistry' (Badiou 2009b: 542). For both, it is a question of deposing the category of truth and the pretension to theoretical completeness. The tools used in the deposing may even appear to be philosophy's own, such as the logical critique deployed in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* and this suggests that the concept of retorsion examined previously in this chapter would not be out of place in interpreting some if not all cases of antiphilosophy. The kinship is so close that every antiphilosophy ultimately risks a slide into sophistry – witness Wittgenstein's transition to the 'surprising inventions' but also 'trite acrobatics' of the later writings (ibid.: 541) – since 'in order to uphold the exorbitant privilege which it accords to pure enunciation' it 'often demands a rhetorical forcing which renders it indiscernible from the sophists of the time' (ibid.: 540–1). What is more, antiphilosophers and at least some of the sophists (arguably Thrasymachus, Callicles) concur in turning a jaundiced eye on philosophy, regarding it as a kind of authoritarian discursive realpolitik clothed in lofty rhetoric.

But though there is such a kinship, to the extent that 'in every modern antiphilosophy there are always numerous sophistic elements' (Bosteels 2011b: 25), Badiou warns that these elements 'are not the most important ones and they mainly concern the preliminary, negative, or diagnostic side of antiphilosophy' (ibid.). The crucial element in defining antiphilosophy appears rather in points 2 and 3 above. It is the notion of an *act*, which is both destructive and affirmative at the same time, consisting at once in the destruction of the properly philosophical act and the positing of something radically new to overcome it. The specific content of this act changes according to the antiphilosopher in question; thus Paul declares and works out the consequences of the Damascan conversion, whereas Nietzsche declares the advent of the overman and works out the consequences of the last man's overcoming. But with each founding

antiphilosophical declaration, so changes the exemplar of the philosophical act which is its target. Thus Pascal scourges Descartes, Paul the Athenian philosophers, Kierkegaard Hegel and Nietzsche Plato, to list only a few examples. Antiphilosophers are rivals to the philosopher – to specific philosophers of their time – but they have 'more punch' than sophists alone, since the latter limit themselves to 'holding up a mirror in which philosophers see their language reflected and emptied out of all truth value' (ibid.). Antiphilosophers go much further by their active denigration of philosophy, and their claim to overcome it affirmatively. They are creative destroyers – unlike the sophist, who is a mere troubler, or disabler.

It is *the form of the positing of the act* that is decisive in the assessment of antiphilosophy however. Antiphilosophers are rivals of the philosopher but also teachers, harsh pedagogues of the act. 'That the event (or pure act) evoked by antiphilosophers is fictitious does not present a problem' (Badiou 2003: 108), inasmuch as the antiphilosopher teaches, demonstratively and in the warp and weave of his very life, the formal rigour of *subjectivation* – and this element is integral to philosophy as Badiou conceives it. Paul, for example, founds universalism while teaching the philosopher that the conditions for the universal cannot be conceptual (ibid.), that 'all true universality is devoid of a center' (ibid.: 19) and 'Truth is either militant or it is not' (ibid.: 88). The fact that he roots his universalism in the resurrection of Christ, which Badiou calls 'a fable' (ibid.: 4), is inessential; what matters is his discovery of the formal properties of militant subjectivity, which is precisely why Badiou incorporates the Pauline letters into his ongoing project of thinking the subject philosophically.

The philosopher must therefore grapple with the antiphilosopher to shed light on, articulate and defend the act comprising her own vocation, which consists of constructing an empty space for truths and seizing them. Badiou goes so far as to claim that 'no contemporary philosophy can be considered important' if it has not measured itself at some point against the great antiphilosopher Lacan (Badiou and Roudinesco 2014: 45–6). Antiphilosophers like Lacan are formidable foes but are also 'awakeners who force the other philosophers not to forget two points': first, that philosophy's conditions are always contemporary to it – i.e. that the philosopher cannot be content with the status quo of received opinion and must commit to the affirmative act of the seizure of truth – and that she also 'assumes the voice of the master' – i.e. that her word is 'authoritarian', 'seductive', 'violent', 'committing others to follow suit, disturbing and converting them' (Badiou 2011b: 68). Through his antagonism the antiphilosopher reminds

us that the philosopher – to her credit – is no postmodern democrat, but rather a visionary, partisan militant and a corruptor of youth.

The demonstrative power of antiphilosophy consists in how antiphilosophers position themselves with respect to these two points in an 'absolutely singular way' (ibid.): 'They claim to be the contemporaries not only of the truths that proceed in their time but they also make their own life the theatre of their ideas, and their body the place of the Absolute' (ibid.: 68). In other words, the antiphilosopher lives a life where the body is permeated and wracked by the concept, or by the infinite which outstrips every concept, and the en-actment of his very existence *shows* what philosophy only vainly attempts to say.[19] As Badiou puts it in his discussion of Paul,

> it is of the essence of antiphilosophy that the subjective position figure as a decisive factor in discourse. Existential fragments, sometimes anecdotal in appearance, are elevated to the rank of guarantor of truth … For an antiphilosopher, the enunciative position is obviously part of the statement's protocol. No discourse can lay claim to truth if it does not contain an explicit answer to the question: Who Speaks? (Badiou 2003: 17)

Hence, the canonical antiphilosopher Paul's repeated insistence that he is entitled to speak *precisely as a subject* – moreover who is entitled through his *becoming* a subject, being 'conscripted' into subjectivity by the event on the road to Damascus (ibid.).

The inclusion of Pascal, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Paul, Rousseau, Lacan and others in the list of antiphilosophers in this regard is illuminating.

First, each of them expounded their thought through forms of autobiographical and characteristically micrological writing. As Badiou claims, the antiphilosopher 'writes neither system nor treatise, nor even really a book. He propounds a speech of rupture, and writing ensues when necessary' (ibid.: 31). Hence Paul's letters, which are militant missives, context-bound interventions; Pascal's *Pensées*, a pile of interconnected fragments, some of which were found sewn into his clothing when he died, and which defy the editor to defend any particular collation; Lacan's seminar, sphinx-like, oracular and ending, perhaps fittingly, in aphasia – the 'speech of rupture' becoming quite literally a rupture of speech.

Second, each of the antiphilosophers struggled with the finitude of the flesh in thinking the absolute. Or rather they *lived* their absolute in an intimately corporeal way, inhabiting the flesh as a site of questioning or of receiving the absolute, as impossible point of contact with the real. Pascal's chronic illness,

for example, permeates the fragments of the *Pensées* and gives way to tears of joy; the sexuality of a Paul or a Rousseau are sites of pitched subjective struggle; and it is by reneging on his engagement to Régine that Kierkegaard overcomes the sucking pressure of inauthentic *sittlichkeit*. We might pause here over what Badiou calls 'the striking misogyny that characterizes all antiphilosophy' (Badiou 2011b: 95), inasmuch as woman figures perennially for the antiphilosopher as the-flesh-as-such, the gravity of the site of subjective struggle and the eternal unspeakable. As Badiou puts it, 'the more flagrant the misogyny, the more we are in the vicinity of antiphilosophy' (ibid.: 96), and this is one reason why discourses on the 'mystery' of the feminine should raise alarm bells for the philosopher.

This dual characterization also goes some way to explaining why for Badiou, the 'remainder' is also essential to every antiphilosophy, and why it often courts mysticism; in fact, antiphilosophy's deposition of philosophy consists in '*showing* what its theoretical pretension has missed and which in the end is nothing less than the real' (ibid.: 94). Antiphilosophy pits the real, posited through the radical gesture of a form of life, against the philosopher's pretentious and ultimately empty chatter. Simplifying considerably, we could say that the antiphilosopher reduces the philosopher to a mere logologist, a sad case of a sophist who insists – whether in good faith or in bad – that she is something more.

Naturally, Badiou devotes considerable efforts to defeating the antiphilosophers while absorbing and properly framing their lessons for philosophy as he understands it. Where then does Lyotard fit into this picture? Does the category of antiphilosopher describe him in any way, or shed any light on his dispute with Badiou above and beyond the ancient Greek poet-philosopher–sophist distinction whose inception Badiou maintains 'destines and traverses us' (Badiou 2009b: 541–2)?

To start, note that Badiou's characterization of the antiphilosopher also partially characterizes philosophy. When antiphilosophy attempts to depose philosophy, it is not philosophy as enacted by *The Differend* that appears to be at issue. Because the philosopher of *The Differend* has relativized the category of truth by subsuming any and all truths to the protocols of genres, it is extremely likely that the antiphilosopher would not even recognize Lyotard as a philosophical rival. In fact, Lyotard comes quite close to the description of the antiphilosopher in certain key respects, and we will need to examine whether or not this proximity recommends that he be so described.

For one thing, taking the act as a necessary condition for antiphilosophy, we can identify at least one point in Lyotard's corpus where he appears to

be engaged in an affirmative overcoming of philosophy. I have in mind here the gesture of *Libidinal Economy*, a book which is quite obviously inspired by the great antiphilosopher Nietzsche. The text enacts a resolute break with the nihilism that Lyotard ascribes to any and all semiotics and to Western thought in general. To overcome philosophy as system or as criticism, Lyotard abolishes the logical operator of exclusive disjunction, or rather relativizes and castrates it by subsuming it under a monistic metaphysics of primary psychic process inspired by Freud's metapsychology. The law of non-contradiction thus abolished, Lyotard effaces the impression that he is doing (bad) critical philosophy by proclaiming in no uncertain terms that his gesture is purely voluntaristic, admitting of no theoretical support or alibi. In place of a critical argument to depose philosophy we are presented with the empty affirmation of a fourfold 'yes' at the end of the text (Lyotard 1993a: 262), and a wild deployment of eclectic discursive ruses throughout. The act of *Libidinal Economy* is therefore resolutely non-philosophical and antiphilosophical at the same time as it is absolutely affirmative. And there are indications in the text, plausible but by no means certain, that the overcoming enacted by *Libidinal Economy* reflects an upheaval or several upheavals in Lyotard's life. The end of the story is of course familiar to readers of Lyotard, who will know that *Libidinal Economy* ended in aporia, exhaustion and the need to recommence in order to 'say the same things but without unloading problems so important as justice' (ibid.: xxiv–xxv).[20] The act of *Libidinal Economy* is to my mind the closest thing we have to a Lyotardian antiphilosophical act, but its own author would almost immediately play it down as an acting out.

Second, Lyotard is for most of his career a thinker of the remainder *par excellence*, and maintains as the antiphilosopher does that philosophy – whether we are talking about Lyotardian philosophy as enacted in *The Differend* or its totalizing, theoreticist deviation – fails to get at the real. He does not, for all that, offer his post-libidinal thought as an alternative to philosophy on the grounds that his own act would somehow get at the real. He does not, for example, claim mystical or otherwise supra-philosophical access to the remainder – even when it is a question of showing how Augustine's account of grace squares quite well with his own later thinking of the event.[21] Rather, his definition of philosophy frames it as an intrinsically incomplete but necessary task.

Third, Lyotard's corpus of writings on the whole is fragmentary, both in terms of its style and its contents – to the point that it is hard to believe at times that the same author produced the various texts when they are compared. He also engages in micrological writing in the style of Pascal and Adorno, especially

in later years. Here things get tricky though, because as we have noted Lyotard rhetorically effaces his subjective imprint and above all his authorial privilege time and time again. While his intellectual autobiography *Peregrinations* may be approached in a relatively straightforward if cautious manner, and a number of 'Pauline' missives from the trenches in and around May 1968 seem fairly easy to incorporate into the orbit of antiphilosophy,[22] it is often hard to get a sense of the extent to which Lyotard is enacting his life as writing, and the extent to which he is engaging in fiction. For instance there is an underexplored current of eroticism in Lyotard's writings, in which his subjectivity is to varying degrees sheltered or dissimulated through literary form and convention. To take only two examples, there are: (a) the meditations on the skin of young white American women, racism, jealousy and empire culled from his time at UC San Diego and collected disingenuously as a 'found text' in *Le mur du pacifique* (Lyotard 1979); and (b) the striking description of – what appears to be, given the uncertain register of his language – his burning desire for a dark-skinned young woman in the opening pages of *Libidinal Economy* (Lyotard 1993a: 4). Interpreters of Lyotard may draw their own conclusions, but it is at any rate difficult to identify unambiguous declarations pertaining to a subjectivity of the lived remainder, as one would expect to find them in antiphilosophical writings given Badiou's description.

Finally, as for antiphilosophy's misogyny, here Lyotard doesn't fit the bill in any obvious way. In fact, he characterizes the thrust of his own pagan and postmodern thought as essentially feminine.[23] Granted, his notion of the feminine is conversant with and obviously draws upon the paradoxically essentialist understanding of femininity-as-non-identity identified and ennobled by the early Luce Irigaray.[24] To this extent, one could charge Lyotard with reproducing the discourse of the mystery and intractability of Woman that takes place, usually in a virulent register, in antiphilosophical misogyny. He does, however, identify with and militate in the name of this picture of femininity, so it is by no means clear that he may be lumped in with the antiphilosophers in this respect.

The jury is out then on the extent to which the category of antiphilosopher sheds light on Lyotard, or his dispute with Badiou. At a minimum, it appears that Lyotard had at least one antiphilosophical moment, and that for the remainder of his development he played the part of a sophistical fellow traveller to the antiphilosopher. But a final, tantalizing comment of Badiou's should give us pause. He claims that it fell to Kant 'to give philosophical form to antiphilosophy itself, to show philosophically that the philosophical pretension

can only stir up air' (Badiou 2011b: 96). Lyotard's considerable debt to Kant, explored in Chapter 1, should be interpreted in light of Badiou's comment that the 'return to Kant' is an 'infallible sign, in philosophy, of morbid and regressive times' (Badiou 2012b: 308). If Kant, by means of a philosophically rigorous limitation of the prerogatives of thought, succeeded in giving antiphilosophy a philosophical form, then he represents a crucial case that Badiou would do well to further explore. But this also means that Lyotard – the thinker who arguably did the most to transpose Kantian categories into a rigorous postmodernism – may be more antiphilosophical still.

4

Ethics and Politics

Thus far, my account of the Badiou–Lyotard dispute concerning philosophy has reconstructed how the two thinkers' respective ontologies shaped their accounts of philosophy, and how each negotiated the distinction between philosophy and sophistry (with a brief excursus on antiphilosophy). By this point the outlines of the dispute should be clear, and I hope to have successfully used it as an occasion to question and clarify some of the thinkers' most important concepts and arguments.

The story is not quite over however. Badiou's and Lyotard's metaphilosophies each carry ethical and political implications of considerable importance to their overall projects, once more testifying to the seeming closeness but ultimate divergence of their trajectories. It is worthwhile to pause over these implications as variations on the theme of '*subjectivation*' or becoming-subject. Inasmuch as Lyotard and Badiou are both militants, each poses the question '*que faire?*' at the same time as he poses the question of a philosophical vocation and a philosophical ethics. It would therefore be incorrect to leave my readers with the impression that their debate is purely esoteric, 'high church' or the like. Rather, the debate over the proper definition of philosophy, and the demarcation between philosophy and its rival discourses, is fired by a practical urgency and an ethical and political immediacy that must be addressed. The debate over philosophy is, in sum, very much a debate with political and ethical stakes, as the following chapter will make clear.

Why 'Ethics and Politics' in particular though? Why not art, science and love – these being three of Badiou's conditions, and each (especially art) enjoying considerable attention in Lyotard's own writings? No doubt a much longer study contrasting the thinkers' art philosophies, for example, would be desirable. But restricting ourselves to ethics and politics is of particular interest here, granting the balance sheet I sketched in the book's introduction. It allows us, in the context of an apparent instrumentalization of philosophy and the risk of

philosophy's slide into sophistry, to pose the following questions: Is there such thing as an 'ethics of philosophy'? Is there moreover a 'philosophical politics', and if so is the latter beholden, in the last instance, to philosophy's ethics? Finally, in dabbling with sophistry, does the philosopher commit an ethical error by going over too far to the side of pure politics?

The dispute between Badiou and Lyotard over who is doing philosophy in fact takes place in the context of a wide-ranging dispute over the relation between ethics and politics. The pagan, postmodern and later Lyotard participates in an 'ethical turn' in French philosophy that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, and which Badiou vigorously rejects.[1] It is a turn which, in broad sociological brushstrokes, was prompted by the failures of actually existing socialism and, in particular, the sequence of communist militancy inaugurated by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, widely discussed and internationally celebrated, was a text both symptomatic of and contributing to the overall shift from revolutionary to ethical discourse in France.[2] On the philosophical plane, the shift occurred largely under the influence of Heidegger via Emmanuel Lévinas and a renewed interest in Kant. In this connection, Lyotard's unique contribution to the ethical turn was to have thought Kant with Lévinas (and of course Wittgenstein) in order to articulate an ethics of obligation by means of juridical concepts and a transposition of Kantian faculties into phrase regimens and genres. Viewed critically, however, Lyotard's effort was part and parcel of an overall 'retreat of the political'[3] which, more accurately, might be construed as an absorption of politics into ethics. Indeed, while he speculates that ethics may be an autonomous genre 'akin to the philosophical genre' (Lyotard 1988b: para. 175), Lyotard denies that politics is a genre at all; it is, rather, 'the threat of the differend', 'the question of linkage' and 'tantamount to Being which is not' (ibid.: para. 190). Politics is in fact one of the names of being, considered as paratax (ibid.). As such, politics is the condition of ethics and philosophy, but it is really only a name for that which is already thought by ontology. One is prima facie at pains, in this picture, to imagine what 'doing politics' would amount to.

Lyotard would however, with some degree of success, struggle to articulate and enact a practical politics in his post-*Differend* writings. And, to his credit, he remained something of an outlier in the ethical turn by resisting as far as possible the human rights language and overt liberalism of the *nouveaux philosophes* and tried until the end to articulate his part in the ethical turn in a manner consistent with his earlier antihumanism (McLennan 2011). For this reason, and following my reconstruction of Lyotard's complicated relationship

with Heidegger in Chapter 1, we can very plausibly place him in the camp of 'Left-Heideggerians' that Badiou identifies as one tendency in the ethical turn (Badiou in Bosteels 2011a: 291).

For Badiou's part, wishing to cleave to the militancy of the red years, the ethical turn in French philosophy heralded a period of profound philosophical and political isolation during which he dug in his heels and produced his first major philosophical work, the magisterial *Theory of the Subject*.[4] He would later characterize his philosophy in the latter as sutured to the version of Maoist politics that inspired it, and this necessitated the self-critique according to which 'what [Badiou's teacher] Althusser was missing, what *we* were missing between 1968 and, let's say, the beginning of the 1980s … was full recognition of the immanence of thought to *all* the conditions for philosophy [politics, but also art, science and love]' (Badiou 2008a: 161). Badiou would not however take Lyotard's route, apparently conflating politics with being and suturing philosophy's vocation to ethics. He claims rather that there is 'no ethics in general' but only ever 'ethics of processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation' (Badiou 2001: 16). For Badiou we might plausibly say that there are particular ethics *of* truth procedures, including politics, and of course philosophy as the discourse thinking the compossibility of its four conditions. These localized ethics however boil down to fidelity to truth procedures – encapsulated in the slogan 'keep going!' – i.e. the giving-consistency or working-out of the implications of truths. This is a far cry from Lyotard's position, which not only grants ethics a certain autonomy but also seems to suggest that philosophy *is* a case of ethics, or is intrinsically ethical in a certain sense. In spite of his self-critique, Badiou retains politics but not ethics as a condition of philosophy and to this extent presents a rare case of a thinker from the 1968 generation who was relatively uninfluenced by the ethical turn.

For Badiou then, Lyotard's ethical turn actually courts ethical failure since it appears to be a relinquishing of the fidelity to what was genuinely new in May 1968 and is, ultimately, a concession to the state of the situation (being an interminable peregrination between genres, open to the new phrase but encapsulated by the rule – in other words 'conservatism with a good conscience' (ibid.: 3)). But for Lyotard, Badiou's ethics, because they resemble no more than militant virtue ethics, would be an abnegation of ethical vigilance and moreover flirt with terror. As Badiou recalls, 'I often dubbed him a modern sophist, and he regarded me as a Stalinist' (Badiou 2009b: 553). I will presently show how this complex knot of arguments plays out and bears on the dispute over philosophy, noting – but he is well enough aware of this – how Badiou's above characterization is simplistic to the extreme.

Philosophy as ethical and political vocation: Lyotard

The central ethical category of Lyotard's postmodern philosophy of phrases is the differend. In *Lyotard: la partie civile*, Gérald Sfez offers a contemporary reading of this key concept. He notes that Lyotard's appropriation of legalistic terminology ('le dommage, le tort, le litige, le différend, le plaignant, le tribunal, le témoin, la preuve' (Sfez 2007: 6)), is a rigorous if creative one: he redefines them with a view to giving them a new accent and elaborating the conditions of their proper use (ibid.). As regards the notion of the differend in particular, Lyotard strips the term of its existing meanings and synonyms, isolating/creating a very particular meaning that is philosophical or meta-juridical rather than properly juridical (ibid.). I will presently explain what this means.

Broadly construed, a differend in Lyotard's special sense occurs when two or more parties

> do not speak the same language at all and do not share even a minimum of common ground which a third party would be able to exploit in order to ensure that each party makes the effort to put herself in the place of the other. (Ibid.: 12)[5]

Where there is a differend, the problem is that the parties in question do not share 'a common reason or rationale'; it is as though there were no 'language in general' upon which or with which they could meet in order to resolve their conflict (ibid.). Rather, the parties speak radically heterogeneous languages (ibid.).[6] As such, any instance of translation from one language to the other would amount to staying within one's own language at the expense of the other's singularity; therefore translation would immediately be a form of betrayal (Sfez 2007). Where there is a differend, Sfez summarizes, 'there will be no means of going to meet the other without bringing her to oneself' (ibid.: 12).

Sfez notes that Lyotard appears to offer important variations on this general definition. The first, he claims, can be seen when Lyotard states the following:

> As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. (Lyotard 1988b: xi)

Since the parties in question do not share the same idiom, both of them might conceivably be in the right, despite being in conflict (Sfez op. cit.).[7] Lyotard goes on to say that 'applying a single rule of judgment to both in order to settle

their differend as though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them (and both of them if neither side admits this rule)' (Lyotard op. cit.). It is a question here of incompatible, or rather incompossible standards of truth, beauty or justice, and how to adjudicate their conflict without wronging one or both of them by doing so from a perspective which translates them (i.e. treats or puts them in terms of an alien idiom) (Sfez op. cit.).

The second variation of Lyotard's general definition of the differend, Sfez claims, emphasizes the notion of victimhood (ibid.): 'I would like to call a *differend* … the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim' (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 12). Here, as Sfez points out, the notion that there are two heterogeneous legitimacies in conflict is downplayed; victimhood and differend seem interchangeable, as the latter implies that a radical wrong has been done. Injustice *par excellence* would be a case of a wrong that cannot be presented. But Sfez notes that while the first definition seems to imply the latter, the latter does not imply the former. This puts Lyotard's thinking of the differend in a dynamic tension which Sfez judges to be fruitful (Sfez op. cit.). In any case, if the differend implies the victim, then it is not simply a formal-legalistic notion, but one that by definition raises ethical questions.

A third variation (ibid.) on the definition of the differend is as follows:

> The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible. This state is signaled by what one ordinarily calls a feeling: 'One cannot find the words', etc. (Lyotard op. cit.: para. 22)

Sfez emphasizes that 'The feeling announces and prescribes' (Sfez op. cit.: 31). What is meant here is that the feeling attendant to the differend, aside from its enunciatory power as phrase-event, calls upon the addressee of the phrase to respond in a particular way: to find an idiom capable of phrasing that which the feeling signals, or at the very least, capable of phrasing that there is something which cannot (yet) be phrased (ibid.).[8]

Note that the third definition, besides putting ethics firmly on the agenda, also posits its basis as tied in some way to Lyotard's phrase-based ontology. I agree with Sfez when he emphasizes that Lyotard's meditations on the differend are at the heart of a 'general ontology' (ibid.). Reading as I do the differend as an eminently ethical concept, the question is: how, then, does Lyotard's postmodern ontology, his philosophy of phrases, link up to the demands of the ethical? It is here that we must examine his relationship to Emmanuel Lévinas.

Lyotard's debt to Lévinas is best summed up as follows: he finds in Lévinas a philosopher who links the question of ethics to the *il y a*, i.e. the event. In fact, Lévinas attempts to make ethics a function or category of the event. More generally, Lyotard finds in him a kindred spirit, a philosopher of the event who is radically critical of the pretensions to, and nostalgia for, totality that is characteristic of much of Western thought (Lévinas 1997). Lévinas's *Totality and Infinity* bears this out by setting totality against 'infinity': that with which we are never and should never be finished (think here of the Kantian Idea, interminable Freudian analysis, and other resources to which Lyotard will turn time and again to articulate and illustrate his philosophical ethos).

It is often objected – and this was Lévinas's main objection to Heidegger – that ontology as first philosophy leaves in suspense or, worse, actively covers over the questions of ethics and politics.[9] Like Lyotard, Lévinas sees a link between totality, as a philosophical idea or operation, and totalitarianism in the political sense of the term (ibid.). This informs his defence of the infinite: there are, according to Lévinas, certain things that are 'non-synthesizable' into any transcendent structure, exemplary among them the 'relationship between men' (ibid.: 78–9). It is important to note that when he speaks of the 'relationship between men', it is not in the normative or 'applied' ethical terms familiar to contemporary North American students of philosophy. Rather, for Lévinas, ethics is a matter of the event, cast specifically in terms of the encounter. He conceives of an ethics of the event, then, as first philosophy, in response to Heidegger; what is primary is not the question of Being, but the asymmetrical (ibid.) relation of I/you that is the encounter with the face of the other (asymmetrical because the eruption of the other makes the subject a 'you', renders her subject-to-another, decentres her with respect to her own world, so that she must respond).

The affinity of Lyotard for Lévinas can be demonstrated more specifically. For instance, Lyotard's reading of Heidegger is essentially, but with its own inflections, that of Lévinas. As the latter states,

> With Heidegger, 'verbality' was awakened in the word being, *what is event in it*, the 'happening' of being … Philosophy would thus have been – even when it was not aware of it – an attempt to answer the question of the signification of being, as verb. (Ibid.: 38, italics mine)

Lévinas likewise privileges the phrase-event in essentially Lyotardian terms: 'for me, the *said* [*le dit*] does not count as much as the *saying* [*le dire*] itself. The latter is important to me less through its informational contents than by

the fact that it is addressed to an interlocutor' (ibid.: 42). This is put in more general terms by Lévinas as the *il y a* (the 'there is'). As we saw in Chapter 1, Lyotard peels back the layers of Kant's *Darestellung*, matter given to and synthesized by a subject, to reveal a brute presentation which 'gives itself' to no one. Similarly, Lévinas insists 'on the impersonality of the "there is" ' (ibid.: 48). But he also holds on to the idea that there is a 'solution' to the *il y a* (ibid.: 51), that is, it issues in an ethical relation between human subjects. On this count, note that for him the face is constitutive of the ethical encounter and its being-as-language: 'Face and discourse are tied' (ibid.: 87). For Lévinas, then, there is if not a humanism in ethics,[10] a privileging of the human as two poles of the ethical relation.

Lyotard stands in an interesting relationship to Lévinas because he derives his ethics from a 'general ontology', but one which casts the universe as, properly speaking, a multiplicity of universes, which are functions of events. Ethics and ontology are not conflated for Lyotard. As noted above, he rather conflates ontology with the political, defines the political as the permanent possibility of the differend, and thereby renders being/politics the condition of ethics. But this means that Lyotard does link ontology to ethics by claiming that the multiplicity of pragmatic universes that constitutes the world admits (in cases where the addressee is situated) of a variably distributed 'you', an addressee that is called upon to hear. Hearing, by its structure, is intrinsically asymmetrical: one is seized, taken hostage, to the extent that in hearing one becomes a 'you' (Lyotard 1988b: 111). But for Lyotard, it is not that some *prior* you becomes a 'you'; he retains what Lévinas identifies as the asymmetry constitutive of the event of the encounter with the face of the other, but he denies that the event comes to you (or that it must come from the face). Rather, since you are, as such, only when situated in a phrase universe, 'You come when it arrives' (ibid. para. 173), and since every phrase necessarily entails 'and a phrase', you must always respond.

The 'you' who comes, comes into being with the phrase-event, but this is not enough to say that the you is obligated. Lyotard is careful to note that '*It is necessary to link* is not *You ought to link*'; that is, 'one is not held by an occurrence the same way one is held by an obligation' (ibid. para. 174). One is obligated only at the level of genres of discourse, which is to say that obligation pertains to rules of linkage and is hypothetical in its structure: 'you ought to link on like this in order to get to that' (ibid.). He speculates, however, as to whether there is an ethical genre: if there is one, he questions whether or not it would be 'the one whose rule is to admit no rule but that of obligation without conditions' (ibid.: para. 175).[11] This would make ethics 'akin to the philosophical

genre', i.e. the genre, as we saw in Chapter 2, whose stakes are to find the rules by which it is to proceed (ibid.). It would be a matter of responding without rule to the irruption of the I/you relation (in Lyotard's terms, the addressor/addressee relation). In this special sense, ontology/politics is intimately tied to ethics: while the event does not exactly imply the ethical genre, the ethical genre implies the event. To speak of the ethical is to speak of a bearing-witness and an obligation to the event.

There are, it seems, two parts to the ethical dimension of Lyotard's philosophy in *The Differend*. On the one hand, he develops the normative claims of the pagan period promoting respect of singularity, experimentation, dispersion and dissensus by formulating the notion of the differend. On the other hand, he suggests that the ethical, to the extent that it is a genre of discourse, implies and is intimately linked to his ontology. Phrasing entails not only the differend, but the necessity, to the extent that one is constituted as an addressee in the umbrella of the ethical genre, to respond to it.

The question may be fairly posed, however: in what sense, if any, is the ethical genre determinant in the last instance? The philosophy of the differend circles the problem of the rupture, victimhood and silence attendant to discourse. Does it, however, convincingly show that we must respond ethically, or with ethics in mind, to the differend? Perhaps ethics as genre shows this itself, as Lyotard seems to suggest. But then does not the ethical genre itself stand in a relation of differend to any and all other genres which would claim that the stakes of discourse are to conquer, to colonize and so forth? By speculating as to the genre status of ethics, Lyotard opens the door to the claim that ethics is one genre among others holding no pre-eminent place; or, by contrast, that ethics is a kind of meta-genre and therefore one which, paradoxically, commits wrongs. Lyotard's ethical turn is, it would appear, vulnerable to a retorsion.

It may be further asked what all of this entails, if anything, in terms of a positive ethics or politics. We are called by (and into being by) differends where they occur, and, in light of the ethical genre, this implies an obligation with respect to finding an idiom that does not do violence to one or both parties – perhaps an impossible task, or at least a task with no guarantees, and certainly admitting of little or nothing to guide us. As Lyotard says of the event, 'you can't make a political "program" with it, but you can bear witness to it' (Lyotard 1988b: para. 264). At best we bear witness to the differend, to the fact that victimhood has occurred and that something which cannot be put into language is trying to speak. An extreme respect for and vigilance with respect to the heterogeneous is entailed by all this, but beyond that it is difficult to see

what has become of politics. Whereas the libidinal phase admitted at least of 'conspirators' (Lyotard 1993a: 42), the philosophy of the differend seems much more cautious. To the extent that he increasingly emphasizes vigilance and respect for difference, Lyotard ultimately abandons the revolutionary and even the insurrectionary-anarchistic aims of his earlier phases.[12]

Beyond seeming formally negative, '*attentiste*', Lyotard's philosophy of the differend seems to imply other difficulties. The rigour characteristic of the ethics laid out in *The Differend* seems to extend in a pernicious way to applied problems broached in the text. For one thing, with respect to the silences of Holocaust survivors, Lyotard's position flirts with the negationism it ostensibly opposes – that is, it risks a position that is unduly strict about what constitutes or determines the reality of a given referent. It may be questioned whether removing the four 'situated' silences that can occur is not too high a standard, notwithstanding the possibility of logical retreat or concession discussed in the Gorgias notice.

In sum, the notion of philosophy expounded in *The Differend* apparently generates a rigorous exploration of language pragmatics as following from ontology; it is less clear, however, that it dissolves the problem of the grounding of ethics. In any case, as I have already stated it is my belief that Lyotard's strategy, if not the stakes of his project, change after *The Differend*. While still operating within the purview of the philosophy of the differend, he appears to shift from a formal, language-pragmatic description of the material at hand and the claims of ethics towards something resembling an antihumanist, philosophical anthropology – what I have elsewhere called a 'paralogy of the human', an 'anthro-paralogy' (McLennan 2013a). More specifically, it appears that, having arrived at the impasse of a radical linguistic/ontological dispersion and the difficulty of articulating without paradox how one can be said to have ethical duties within and because of such a dispersion, Lyotard begins to multiply testimonies to the effect that the individual human being and perhaps the human as such, if there is such, is constitutively resistant to totalizing genres.

Lyotard's later understanding of ethics and politics, to anticipate Badiou's criticism, will in sum amount to a stance of rigorous vigilance, essentially rearguard and constrained by a Kantian juridical framework. It remains to be seen what Badiou offers in terms of a positive articulation of ethics and politics, and whether he can overcome the near nihilism of the final Lyotard. What is clear at this point, however, is that Lyotard's understanding of philosophy, and the proper appropriation of sophistical tools, is bound up precisely with his understanding of ethics and politics.

Philosophy as ethical and political vocation: Badiou

Badiou's first major philosophical publication was *Theory of the Subject* (1982). It collects a seminar which ran from January 1975 to June 1979, the context of which was the end of the 'red years' (1966–76), the rise of the reactionary 'new philosophers' and the political 'common programme' leading to Mitterrand's 1981 electoral victory (Bosteels in Badiou 2009d: vii). Badiou's political isolation during this period was profound. Bosteels recounts how the text was 'written in the midst of what can only be called an active campaign of ostracism against its author because of his undying Maoism' (ibid.). But despite Badiou's tenacity and iconoclasm during this period, his thought was undergoing a major shift in which the concepts for which he later became known began to take shape. Respecting ethics and politics in particular, the transition from *Theory of the Subject* to *Being and Event* (via *Peut-on penser la politique?*) is one in which Badiou cements his account of ethics while modifying his relation to politics by way of a rethinking of philosophy. While Bosteels persuasively counsels the reader not to reduce *Theory of the Subject* to a purely preparatory and surpassed text – even going so far as to suggest that a reading of the text may shed critical light on *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* (ibid.) – it does prove instructive as an enactment of 'suture', a process that Badiou will later caution against in articulating the metaphilosophy which emerges around *Being and Event*.

Philosophy, as mentioned earlier, is a procedure guarding the empty category of Truth, suspended between its four conditions – science, politics, art and love – thinking their compossibility in general and in a given historical context. It produces no truths of its own, but rather 'constructs a device to seize truths, which means: to state that there are some, and to let itself be seized by this "there are" ' (Badiou 1999b: 127). As such it is entirely dependent upon the truth procedures that condition it, and certain peaks in the history of thought bear witness to a truly philosophical attempt to think all of the procedures compossibly. Think here of Plato.[13] Badiou's recent engagement with *The Republic*, which culminated in a creative and in many places 'corrective' translation, demonstrates both Plato's historical importance and his contemporaneity. By casting him as a thinker of all four conditions – in general and in his own historical context of Athens in the fourth century BCE – but by also modifying his text to express Badiou's own ideas in light of later history, Badiou presents Plato as a model, precursor and teacher.[14]

Philosophy however – even Plato's, for example in the *Laws* – runs the permanent risk of *suture*, which Badiou defines as a 'rupture of symmetry

and determinant privileging of one of philosophy's conditions'; 'philosophy is sutured whenever one of its conditions is called upon to determine the philosophical act of seizing and declaration' (Badiou 2008a: 160). In other words suture occurs when

> instead of constructing a space of compossibility through which the thinking of time is practiced, philosophy *delegates* its functions to one or other of its conditions, handing over the whole of thought to *one* generic procedure. Philosophy is then carried out in the element of its own suppression to the great benefit of that procedure. (Badiou 1999b: 61)

The suture of *Theory of the Subject* is political, since it subordinates philosophy to the expressly political goal of thinking a subjectivity basically faithful to Maoism and capable of overcoming the period of reaction which followed the red years. It may be plausibly interpreted as emerging in the wake of Louis Althusser's own political suture, since Althusser exerted a profound influence on the younger Badiou, and since it is through a critique of Althusser that Badiou will later illustrate the extreme form of the political suture.[15] As Badiou, tells us, 'the trouble with sutures is that they make their two edges, that is, both philosophy and the privileged condition, difficult to discern' (Badiou 2008a: 160). With respect to the political suture in particular, 'On the side of philosophy, the suture, which invests the philosophical act with a singular determination concerning its truth, destroys the categorical void necessary to the philosophical site as a site of thought by filling it in' (ibid.). Philosophy in other words – under condition of political suture – defines itself according to specific objects, which according to Althusser's own criteria is impossible since philosophy by definition has no object; moreover, since Althusser cleaved to a 'purely immanent conception of the effects of philosophy' any possible external e.g. political effect of philosophy 'can only be completely opaque to philosophy itself' (ibid.: 160–1). But on the side of politics, 'the suture de-singularizes the process of truth. To be able to declare that philosophy is a political intervention', as Althusser explicitly held and as the Badiou of *Theory of the Subject* apparently maintained, 'one must have an overly general and indeterminate concept of politics' (ibid.: 161). In other words, rather than politics as a localized truth procedure, i.e. bound up with a specific event and situation, philosophy through the suture to politics thinks the latter as transhistorical and therefore subsuming localized cases, as evidenced by how Althusser treats the classical Marxist notion of 'class struggle' (ibid.).

Thinking politics, without suturing philosophy to the latter, will henceforth take the form of a rigorous working-out of the implications of localized political

truths, understood in light of specific events and situations. It leaves open the possibility that thought, *qua* philosophy, may think specific instances of politics *in conjuncture* with specific instances of the other three conditions,[16] *respecting their heterogeneity* but precisely in order to think the conjuncture as such – in other words, to construct 'a space of thoughts of the time', 'compounding' specific problems by 'setting generic procedures in the dimension not of their own thinking, but of their joint historicity' (Badiou 1999b: 38–9). Philosophy in other words declares and holds open the empty space in which thought may think truths according to the four truth procedures in their localized manifestations compossibly, and it does so for the present, to articulate the specific conjuncture in which we find ourselves.

Note however that Badiou has not, in self-criticizing and rethinking philosophy's relation to politics, given primacy to the ethical, as so many of his generation had done during the same period. This is a crucial element to understanding his distance from Lyotard. Though he already raises and explores 'topics of ethics' in the last lecture series collected in *Theory of the Subject*, ethics there and from then on will consistently maintain a subordinate if integral position in his work. As he puts it in *Theory of the Subject*, 'Without arguing for a superiority, our interest will be in ethics' (Badiou 2009d: 310). To be clear, there is indeed a kind of ethical shift from *Theory of the Subject* to *Being and Event* and related works. But it is a shift of scope and emphasis rather than a substantive one, as I will presently explain.

In *Theory of the Subject* Badiou will tell us that 'Lacan is certainly right in reducing ethics to the question: "Has the subject given in?"', where, invoking Mallarmé, 'to give in means to disappear. Nothing will then have taken place but the place' (ibid.: 311). In terms taken from the later Badiou, we can translate this to mean that ethics is a matter of the subject's fidelity to an event, which is to say the subject's endurance, its persistent cleavage to a localized truth procedure, in the face of the law of the state – the regime of the count-as-one that declares the event and the sequence it inaugurates to be impossible. 'Fidelity' or rather 'a fidelity', for the later Badiou, is 'the decision to relate henceforth to the situation *from the perspective of its evental* [*événementiel*] *supplement* … [i.e.] *thinking* … the situation "according to" the event' (Badiou 2001: 41, italics in original). According to this definition the 'subject' is 'the bearer [*le support*] of a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth' (ibid.: 43). But it is important to emphasize that for Badiou, the subject is not coextensive with the empirical, individual human animal, or with the psychological, reflexive or transcendental subject (ibid.). In an amorous truth procedure, for example, two lovers 'enter into the

composition of *one* living subject, who *exceeds* them both' and who is entirely immanent – and the same goes, in the essentials, for incorporations respecting the other three truth procedures (ibid.: 43–4, italics in original). Nor for that matter does the subject pre-exist incorporation into a truth procedure, but rather 'we might say that the process of truth *induces* a subject' (ibid.: 43). This much is already articulated in *Theory of the Subject*, where Badiou emphasizes the need to 'find' the subject (which is never already given).[17]

What is essential is that ethics, from *Theory of the Subject* onward, is thought in terms of the struggle for the endurance of the subject. For the Badiou of the *Ethics*, starting from fidelity to the localized truth procedure and the sequence which an event inaugurates, an individual human animal remains incorporated into the subject through her 'being faithful to a fidelity' (Badiou 2001: 47), by not giving up on the procedure – in a word, by persisting in her thinking of the situation according to the event. Her relation *qua* 'some-one' (ibid.: 44–6) i.e. as individual, to ethics, therefore consists entirely of the struggle to remain faithful to the fidelity in question. The ethical struggle arises from the fact that she is only a finite human animal participating in an eternal Idea, and in this sense – though in a strictly immanent fashion – Badiou is repeating Plato's problematic of how to train one's soul on the Good, or rather the empty category of the True.[18] Indeed the bifurcation of the individual between her belonging to the situation – 'the principle of interest' – and her subjective consistency – 'the subjective principle' – describes 'the place of ethics' (Badiou 2001: 48). Ethical failure, in the sense of succumbing to the permanent temptation 'of giving up, of returning to the mere belonging to the "ordinary" situation' (ibid.), is the rule rather than the exception and is a crucible through which all militants of truths must pass. As Badiou has already stated in *Theory of the Subject*, 'The proper opposite of ethics is betrayal, the essence of which consists in betraying oneself, in inexisting in the service of goods' (Badiou 2009d: 311). But put inversely, this amounts to 'defining courage as the core of the question' of ethics (ibid.). Badiou's ethics is – risking Aristotelian connotations – therefore a militant virtue ethics, or to put it more clearly an ethics of militant virtues.

Cast in terms of virtues or not, ethics is further complicated by a double temporality. On one hand it is backward-looking, inasmuch as it is cast in terms of fidelity to an event. But it also raises the problem of subjective preparedness for the future. The event that has occurred in the past retains a minimal existence for as long as the sequence it inaugurates holds: 'The possibilities opened up by an event are still present within a situation throughout an entire sequential period. Little by little they peter out, but they are still present' (Badiou

and Tarby 2013: 12). A veteran of the event of May 1968 like Badiou is therefore concerned not simply with remembrance, but with working out the implications of the event, which still reverberate, even in the period of reaction where politicians and official historians of the situation are doing their nullifying work. The cultivation of this openness to immanent possibilities may also be understood as preparedness for events in general – the reader of Badiou learns that the possible is always possible – which is not to say that Badiou advocates a stance of Millenarian expectance. To the contrary, throughout Badiou's writings hope is jettisoned in favour of subjective rigour. But this makes of ethics an extremely difficult undertaking, to the extent even that one must affirm without hope (properly speaking) that something impossible according to the situation is possible. As regards politics in particular, Badiou will tell us that 'the difficulty today is to extricate oneself from consensus', which requires one to 'have the conviction that something needs to be done that escapes the law of the world' (ibid.: 2–3). 'Consensus' describing the state of the situation, the process of extricating oneself from it is nothing less than incorporation into a subject. But to have the conviction that this needs to be done in the first place is already to be sensitive in some minimal way to what the situation deems impossible or inconceivable. The classical question 'What is to be done?' when considered in the fullness of its militancy is evocative here.

It is extremely important however to extend this analysis of militancy to the other four truth procedures. The political suture of *Theory of the Subject* can ultimately be read in how Badiou articulates the problem of ethics. He claims for instance that 'Ethics is the remainder of politics' (Badiou 2009d: 309), that is, that it has solely to do with a political decision, and he speaks of confidence, courage and the like in terms of their connection to Marxism. But since politics is only one of four truth procedures, this is unduly limiting from the perspective of Badiou's later account of truths. Ethics emerges in his recasting of philosophy around the time of *Being and Event* as an ethics of truths or more accurately of localized truth procedures, there being no specifically ethical truth procedure. The shift with respect to ethics from *Theory of the Subject* to *Being and Event* and related works might therefore be said to consist in the expansion of the themes of confidence, courage, fidelity and the like to encompass the other three truth procedures. In other words ethics persists in Badiou's work after *Theory of the Subject* in essentially the terms laid out in the latter, though it is no longer cast in solely political terms. It amounts to an ethics of militant virtue more broadly conceived, where the militant is understood as a defender of truths, or the one who faithfully works out their implications. This opens the door to notions of

amorous, scientific and artistic militancy in addition to specifically political militancy, and in later works Badiou will have occasion to illustrate his ethics of truths with a vast array of examples culled from the history of lovers, painters, mathematicians and so on.

But considering that philosophy itself is not a truth procedure, the question arises of whether or not it also has an ethics. Badiou will answer in the affirmative, and his characterization sheds considerable light on his dispute with Lyotard.

To understand Badiou's ethics of philosophy we need to grasp his notion of *disaster*. Disaster is in the making 'whenever philosophy presents itself as being not a seizing of truths but a *situation of truth*' (Badiou 2008a: 15). In other words, philosophy risks disaster when its void is filled in or comes to presence (ibid.). Disaster is an effect of philosophy's annexing the truth to itself, or 'presenting itself as the fullness of Truth' (ibid.) rather than cleaving to the considerably humbler vocation of constructing and holding open the empty category of Truth and thinking the compossibility of the four truth procedures. Disaster amounts to ceding ground on three points, such that it is also defined as a 'knotted, three-fold effect – of ecstasy of sacredness and of terror' (ibid.: 17).

Ecstasy is connected to a failure to uphold the multiplicity of truths and the heterogeneity of their procedures (ibid.). Put simply, there is a shift from truths to Truth. The ecstatic component of a disaster names the sense in which philosophy's procedure is no longer conceived as constructing and thinking within an empty space where truths are considered possible and compossible, but rather as 'a spacing of being in which the Truth *is*' (ibid.: 15). The problem is that 'since only *one* place of Truth exists, the required metaphor is one about accessing this place' (ibid.). Philosophy becomes 'an invitation, a path, a point of access' (ibid.), an initiation to the Truth, and this accounts for Badiou's use of the word 'ecstasy' with all of its mystic connotations. To evoke Bonaventure, philosophy would be something like the journey of the mind to God, where God is understood as a substantive category of Truth. As the etymology suggests, in ecstasy the one who philosophizes is outside of herself, beside herself and in any case obliterated by the transcendent Truth that now comes to presence in the space constituted by philosophy. For Badiou, the militant atheist, any ecstatic concession on the part of philosophy is to be regarded with extreme suspicion.

The *sacred* however is a distinct matter for Badiou. Whereas ecstasy has to do with place, the sacred has to do with the name. In giving substance to the category of Truth, philosophy 'cedes on the multiplicity of *names* of truth, on the temporal and variable dimension of these names' (ibid.: 16). For Badiou, the

category of Truth is eternal, but it is also as we have seen empty since it is only an operation – and there is in any case no Truth of Truth, no transcendent notion of Truth subsuming truths in a substantive sense (ibid.). Conceiving of Truth not as an empty category but as pure presence, philosophy's concession to the sacred consists in sacralizing Truth's name. Even in Plato's work Badiou finds sacralization, specifically inasmuch as the idea of the Good 'operates as the unique and sacred name from which all truth [in Badiou's sense] would be suspended' (ibid.).

Finally *terror* arises when philosophy, thinking it produces truth, gives way on its moderation and critical virtue (ibid.). In declaring that Truth has come to presence, philosophy affirms that *the* Truth has come. But this Truth in general, conceived as full presence, therefore infinitely outstrips the some-thing, the any-thing that is presented. The thing that is presented is not fully present; put differently, the presented thing implies a void, a nothingness inasmuch as it is determinate and as such falls outside of the fullness and eternity of Truth. Therefore from the perspective of Truth as presence, 'something of being presents itself *as that which ought not be*' (ibid.: 17). But this means that any time Truth is conceived as presence it implies a 'law of death' (ibid.), a terroristic imperative not-to-be. Badiou tells us that 'The essence of terror is to pronounce the ought-not-to-be of "this" which is' (ibid.).

'Disaster' then names the knotting of ecstasy, the sacred and terror in thought, when philosophy cedes ground with respect to multiplicity, heterogeneity and moderation. Badiou points out however that 'every empirical disaster originates in a disaster of thought', and as such every empirical disaster contains a 'philosopheme' knotting together ecstasy, the sacred and terror (ibid.). Two clear-cut historical examples he gives are the Stalinist 'new proletarian man' (*ecstasy*: the socialist fatherland; *the sacred*: the name of the father of peoples; *terror*: the traitor to the cause, the kulak, must not be), and the 'historically destined German people of National Socialism' (*ecstasy*: German soil; *the sacred*: the name of the Führer; *terror*: the Jew, the gypsy, the communist, the homosexual, the disabled must not be). But he also points to 'feeble and insidious forms' of disastrous philosophemes such as 'the civilized man of imperial parliamentary democracies' (*ecstasy*: the West; *the sacred*: the Market, Democracy; *terror*: the immigrant, the slum-dweller, the distant rebel must not be) (ibid). The power of this designation lies in its diagnosis of the contemporary conjuncture in liberal democracies as essentially disastrous – a far cry from contemporary liberalism's triumphalist self-understanding.

The importance of understanding disaster, for our purposes, is that it is tied up ineluctably with the sophist. Badiou boils down the ethics of philosophy

by declaring that it 'essentially inheres in retaining the sophist as adversary, in conserving the *polémos*, or dialectical conflict' (ibid.: 19). The sophist is sufficiently important that 'The disastrous moment occurs when philosophy declares that the sophist *ought not be*' (ibid.). Philosophy's ethics therefore essentially consist of staving off disaster by never giving in to the desire to eliminate the sophist. But why is the sophist so important to philosophy? Why would Badiou, who styles himself a Platonist, claim that 'Nothing is more philosophically useful to us than contemporary sophistry'? (ibid.: 18).

The answer is that the sophist is the one who reminds us that the category of truth is empty (ibid.). As distinct from the philosopher, he does this in order to deny truths, and as such he must be opposed (ibid.). But in doing so he is essentially the one who keeps philosophy honest, and as such he cannot be eliminated without risk to philosophy itself. The sophist challenges the philosopher in three ways, which line up with the temptations to ecstasy, the sacred and terror. First, the sophist insists that there are no truths; the philosopher can legitimately counter that there is a multiplicity of local truths, without giving way to the ecstasy of place against which the sophist warns (ibid.). Second, the sophist says that there exists, along with the multiplicity of language games, a multiplicity of heterogeneous names; the philosopher can legitimately counter that by constructing the empty category of Truth it is possible to seize these names, these truths, as compossible and as constituting the unity of their time (ibid.). In doing so the philosopher evades the temptation to sacralize the name of Truth. Finally, the sophist claims that being-as-such is inaccessible to thought and the concept; the philosopher can legitimately counter by constructing the place of the real of truths, the empty place of their seizure, without succumbing to the terroristic impulse to designate this real to be being-as-such (ibid.). In all three ways the sophist challenges the philosopher to articulate a thought that escapes disaster. Philosophy's ethics therefore consist in affirming that philosophy must travel both *with and against* the sophist.

In giving way to the temptation to annihilate the sophist, philosophy actually 'participates in his triumph', since it reduces its operation to dogmatic terror and the sophist 'will always have an easy time of exposing the deal philosophical desire makes with tyranny' (ibid.: 19–20). Much contemporary 'philosophy' is essentially a sophistry which poses as philosophy, and it is not hard to see why considering the traumas of the last century. Any philosophy which retains the category of Truth is perceived as tarnished by a long history of deals with the devil. In recent memory there was the 'Heidegger affair' as well as Marxism's loss of credibility through its reduction to Stalinist 'diamat'. By allying itself

with state terror in the twentieth century, philosophy gave ground on its ethics, exposed itself to disaster and opened itself to the sophist's righteous criticism. In this context truth smacks of terror. It is illustrative and highly instructive that Lyotard and those of his ilk peregrinate interminably around the proper name 'Auschwitz' and the latter's connection to the desire for complete presence, theoretical completeness and transcendence which has accompanied philosophy's development from the very beginning.

Though Badiou considers himself a Platonist, he reckons with the extent to which Plato exposed his own thought to disaster. 'In the genuinely philosophical dialogues Plato *refuted* the sophists', whereas in Book X of the *Laws* he *banned* them – thus giving ground on philosophy's ethics, and exposing his thought to disaster (ibid.: 19). Badiou's repetition of the Platonic division between philosopher and sophist must be understood in the precise sense of a return to the Plato of – for example – the *Protagoras*, where the ethics of philosophy are upheld and the sophist is given his due as a friend and an indispensable partner. The rigour with which the philosopher combats the sophist must never, for Badiou, give way to the desire to be done with him. But this entails that Badiou, the Platonist, must travel both with and against the sophist. Lyotard must be refuted, but nothing is more philosophically useful than his challenge to philosophy.

A desire for the One

We have seen how both Badiou's and Lyotard's projects can be considered in light of the larger ethical turn taking place in French philosophy during the 1970s and 1980s. Lyotard's own turn to ethics is the culmination of his long drift away from Marxism and is a repudiation of the libidinal philosophy which reaches its aporetic expression in *Libidinal Economy*. In fact he foreshadows the linguistic framework of *The Differend* when, during his pagan period, he minimizes the libidinal metaphysics, calling it 'a way of speaking'.[19] And as for Marxism, all that remains of it by the time he writes *The Differend* is a sensitivity to the wrong that is perpetuated against labour by the economic genre. Lyotard's part in the wider French ethical turn shares not only the repudiation of Marxism but also several crucial references and resources, namely Kant and Lévinas, with a host of other philosophers. But Lyotard sets himself apart from the 'new philosophers', for whom the turn to ethics meant moralism, liberalism, human rights and in some cases a defence of religion and of really existing

capitalo-parliamentarian regimes. His thought remains antihumanistic and his final struggle is to defend the finitude and contingency of human thought – a kind of Kantian Idea of human dispersion – against the terroristic streamlining imperative of technoscientific development. He is, broadly speaking, a Left-Heideggerian for whom ethics amounts to a permanent vigilance guided by the radical hope that thought might be able to measure up to the event.

Badiou's ethical trajectory is radically different despite sharing, as we have seen, many of Lyotard's concepts and key interests. Put bluntly, he rejects the French ethical turn as by and large reactionary – or perhaps, in the case of Left-Heideggerians such as Lyotard, as well-meaning but objectively speaking all but defeatist. He responds to the ethical turn and the near total isolation it entailed however by examining ethics as a component of militancy. Ethics boils down to an ethics of fidelity – the capacity to give duration to a truth, to work out its implications in the situation of which it is the supplement, in a word, to keep going. His thinking of ethics becomes more nuanced as he desutures his philosophy from politics, but he persists in claiming that there is no ethics in general. Rather, as regards truths there are only localized ethics that are invariably thought in terms of fidelity. And regarding philosophy in particular, Badiou insists that its ethics consist in the retention of the sophist as an essential dialogue partner who reminds the philosopher of the emptiness of the category of Truth, and the imperative to recognize the unnameable of a situation as a limit to truth's forcing (Badiou 2014a). Giving ground here risks a disaster of thought, which produces empirical disasters through philosophemes knotting together ecstasy, the sacred and terror.

It might seem simple at this point, and intuitively appealing given the ascension in the West of a climate of risk reduction, care and sensitivity to difference, to grant Lyotard's ethics an advantage in the dispute. One may simply point out that whereas Lyotard's ethics consistently display the virtue of cautious vigilance, Badiou's appear overall risky if not irresponsible. As we have seen, Badiou's account of ethics is centred on truth rather than the Other. This automatically puts it at odds with most contemporary understandings of ethics. What is more, in the period of *Being and Event*, Badiou holds that the inducement of the subject by truth is coextensive with an axiomatic, strictly speaking unverifiable declaration that an event has occurred (ibid.). As such, his ethics openly court risk and gives the impression – though Badiou certainly contests this and will revise his language to dispel it – of an absolute and dangerous decisionism, to the extent that Lyotard will liken him to 'a sort of new Carl Schmitt' (ibid.: 144), no doubt intending to let the association with

totalitarianism resonate. A telling moment in this regard is reproduced in the collection *Polemics* (Badiou and Winter 2006), when Badiou must explain in a formal way why there was no National Socialist event, and distinguish Nazi militancy from his own model of authentic militancy. There is moreover an element of the inhuman in Badiou's account of ethics, which he readily admits and, in fact, cheerfully upholds. After all, the risk run by rooting ethics in humanity is that we define the latter in terms of our finite, animal nature rather than our innate capacity to access something of the infinite. Badiou's concern is that ethics has become a limiting, domesticating discourse based on human weakness and finitude rather than a practice of sustaining participation in the eternal Idea capable of elevating humanity to the virtual immortality of which it is capable (Badiou and Tarby 2013).

The impression that Lyotard has the advantage does not hold up to scrutiny however. For one thing, it concedes a good deal to the state of ethics as we find it, and this for Badiou is simply question-begging. But as we have seen a deeper critique, based on a retorsion of Lyotard's own arguments, is also possible. In *The Differend* and after, Lyotard retains his earlier immanentism and antihumanism, and begins from the same ontological premise as Badiou. But he also wishes to articulate an Other-centred ethics of obligation in the style of Lévinas, and as such he faces a difficult if not impossible task. He must articulate an ethics that is rooted in the event rather than in a determinate concept of human nature or any other figure of the transcendent One. His ethics must in other words be an ethics of the other that is grounded in an immanent account of being as unstructured multiplicity. But there is a problem here since the identity of the other according to his ontological commitments is ephemeral and can be parsed to infinity, and this produces the impression of an ethics that is literally impossible to uphold.[20] A second problem is that we cannot move without argument from facts to values, as Lyotard is well aware, and he is therefore unable to root the ethical as such in the immanent obligation that occurs at the level of phrases, with the coming of the 'you'. And finally, at the level of genres, he must explain why the normative force of the ethical genre trumps the colonizing and cannibalizing force of, say, the economic genre, since it is precisely the ethical genre's duty to identify and watch judiciously over cases of genres in dispute.

In the end, Lyotard is put in a dilemma by the demands of rational discourse. Either ethics is undecidable or relative, or it is not. If it is, then in *The Differend* and after he has not fundamentally advanced beyond the normative aporia of *Libidinal Economy*; and if it is not, then according to his own arguments he suffers a logical defeat or succumbs to a negative theology. So it appears

that his ethics and later practical politics are suspended in thin air, resting on nothing more than a decision to be faithful to the affect signalling the differend. Though judgement remains a key concept, it functions in his later work as a fundamentally creative force, i.e. as an expression of a romantic will, however much Lyotard attempts to decentre the notion of a willing subject. This sheds light on the curious mixture of Nietzsche and Kant with which he experiments in *Just Gaming* but, by the time of *The Differend*, drops in favour of Kant alone. Lyotard remains, after all, something of a decisionist and therefore closer to his own characterization of Badiou than he might like to admit.

It is possible, however, to go even further in troubling Lyotard's ethics. If we follow Badiou here, the problem of logical defeat in Lyotard's case is actually haunted by the spectre of ethical failure according to both Badiou's and Lyotard's own terms. Certainly, as we have just seen, Lyotard's account of ethics is vulnerable to a retorsion by means of his own thinking of the inconsistent multiple. In other words it is possible to demonstrate that his ethical commitments do not follow from his understanding of being. But this entails that the ethics of *The Differend* are smuggled into an otherwise promising thinking of being, and this carries an ethical relevance for both thinkers. It is here I think that Badiou's critique of Lyotard cuts deepest, since he suggests that the smuggling is indicative, not simply of bad philosophy or a logical problem – the famous 'performative contradiction' of Lyotard's Frankfurt School critics – but a desire for the One. Put plainly, if such a desire can be read out of his ethics and politics then Lyotard's thought commits a wrong (by his own lights) or is exposed to disaster (by Badiou's) – and the latter notwithstanding his usefulness as a sophistical partner to Badiou's philosopher.

Badiou makes this argument in a conference devoted to Lyotard's thinking of the differend (Lyotard 1989). His intervention is brief, dense and powerful – yet Lyotard holds his own, as we will see. Badiou starts by identifying the axiomatic of inconsistent multiplicity which he identifies at the bottom of both his and Lyotard's philosophy, the '*Multiple sans-Un*' (Badiou in ibid.: 109). He then poses the following question: 'Are you, in your enterprise and, in the totality of *The Differend*, faithful to this axiomatic of multiplicity?' (Badiou in ibid.: 110).[21] In reply to his own question Badiou lists 'three instances, or moments, of a desire for the One' in *The Differend* (Badiou in ibid.). Lyotard, he will maintain, is not faithful to his own ontological commitments.

First, Badiou questions how Lyotard can move from his axiomatic of inconsistent multiplicity to the juridical categories of damage, wrong, litigation, arbitration and the like. The concept of the differend operates in the text as a

value, and this bespeaks an 'authority of the infinite' – a 'magnificent expression' to which Badiou will elsewhere 'bow' (Badiou 2009c: 111), provided, one imagines, it is understood in properly mathematical terms. For Badiou this authority, expressed as the valuation of the differend and the apparently special status granted to ethics and philosophy with respect to it, is illegitimately normative; 'it doesn't go without saying that what is should be' (Badiou in Lyotard 1989: 110), and it is not clear how Lyotard can move from a fact about being to a criterion of judgement without violating his own ethic of discursive caution (let alone the fact, as noted above, that his ethic of discursive caution also violates itself). If the juridical categories Lyotard employs in the text do not follow from his ontology, then their appearance is also troubling on account of the effect they produce: 'Law imposes a regime of the One' (Badiou in ibid.: 111) on thinking.

Second, Badiou questions how Lyotard can, apart from the weak move of invoking in *The Differend's* Reading Dossier the broader philosophical context of a 'linguistic turn', subsume his thinking of the unstructured multiple under the category of the phrase (Badiou in Lyotard 1989). For Badiou, any operation other than the seizure of being by set theory – a 'pure and simple' thinking of dispersion whose only concept is belonging – illegitimately *unifies* being (ibid.). In Lyotard's text this illegitimate unification takes place as a subsumption of being under the metaphorics of *language* (ibid.) with its baggage of syntax, semantics and time. We have already noted that for Lyotard, the destruction of Descartes's second meditation yields only 'time and the phrase'. The crucial question is whether 'time' functions here as a kind of space in which phrases occur. Granted, Lyotard deduces transcendentally (in the manner of Kant) that there is infinite time. But since he does not *pluralize* infinity in *The Differend*, Badiou wonders whether he conceives of the multiple as the space of a One in which events occur, and its indistinction as the unification of infinity (ibid.).

Third and finally, Lyotard presents the proper name 'Auschwitz' in *The Differend* as naming the contemporary caesura of thinking, i.e. as that which names the unthinkable or which serves as the absolute negative horizon of all philosophy. Here Badiou identifies what is 'perhaps the one universal prescription' in the text: any thought that does not face up to the caesura of 'Auschwitz' – for example, the speculative dialectic, the Hegelian genre which would try to lift 'Auschwitz' up into a station on the Calvary of History – cannot measure up to our time (ibid.). Badiou questions why this name in particular prescribes the thought of our time, and whether its positing doesn't betray a desire for the One conceived as historical limit.

There are, to sum up, three occurrences of a desire for the One in *The Differend* according to Badiou: The One as Law of the multiple, the One as a unity of the plane of occurrences or a unified infinity, and the One of a name that names the caesura of our time (ibid.).

Lyotard's response to Badiou is also recorded in the text. He suggests that Badiou is 'psychoanalysing' *The Differend* – note the implication that he is not approaching it philosophically – and jokes that it is evidently his 'voluntarism' rather than the thesis of being as multiplicity with which Badiou takes issue (Lyotard in ibid.: 118). Having intriguingly hit upon the heart of the matter in a burst of humour, he responds to the first two charges and sketches a response to the third.

First, against the charge of a juridical desire for the One, Lyotard characteristically pleads 'the inconsistency that is not only the risk, but the honour (the honesty, the probity) of thinking and writing' (Lyotard in ibid.: 119). His aim, he maintains, is not conciliation, but rather the inscription of the interval, of 'that which doesn't lend itself to inscription' (Lyotard in ibid.). Everything depends here on whether or not this aim cannot, precisely, be cast as a desire that the unpresentable come to presence, as an affirmation of that which evades inscription. If it is, then Lyotard has not evaded Badiou's criticism, and still must explain why the pure multiple entails anything normative whatsoever – in terms of honour, honesty or probity – about thinking. At any rate, the first reply should be noted as a singular moment where one philosopher attempts to convince the other of his own inconsistency!

Second, Lyotard denies that in his account 'time' functions as a space of presentation, and in fact denies that he presupposes space at all (Lyotard in ibid.: 120). It is rather the phrase which is a 'temporal atom', and time only occurs in the occurrence. He scolds Badiou, 'mathematician enough to understand this', for missing the distinction (Lyotard in ibid.) – though to be fair, it is altogether possible that Badiou's understanding of 'space' in the question is rather less literal than Lyotard seems to allow. In any case Lyotard admits that he does uphold the one, but not the one that Badiou suggests; it is the one of the occurrence, 'this one' that comprises rather than appears within time. Lyotard might be pressed however on his claim in *The Differend* that 'to link is necessary' (taking 'necessary' in a non-normative sense), noting that to link is temporal and that therefore time is necessary. The question is whether the temporality implied by linkage transcends any and all presentations, constituting a virtual 'space' of time in which phrasing occurs. Lyotard does admit 'I presuppose infinite time' (Lyotard in ibid.) and it is this kind of wording that

might be considered problematic, since it could be read as suggesting either an infinite series of phrases to which time reduces, or that time functions as an infinite 'space' in which the temporal atoms may occur. Ultimately, the meaning of Lyotard's formula 'time and the phrase' is unclear, though he expressly denies Badiou's claiming that he is unifying infinity.

Finally, as regards 'Auschwitz', Lyotard identifies here Badiou's 'gravest' objection and defers the debate (Lyotard in ibid.). He accounts however for the special function reserved for the name by invoking the way in which it covers an event or series of events that defy inscription. He explains the notion of caesura by modeling it on the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* or '*après-coup*' (Lyotard in ibid.), the double blow of an event that is not at first recorded as such, but which nonetheless exerts an unconscious causal effect on the psychic machinery, emerging only later as an affect that appears to have no cause. The caesura, if there is one, is only declared tentatively *après-coup*, and this is incidentally why 'Auschwitz', as a breakdown of historical/temporal thinking, is put in quotes. As such, it is therefore not one, strictly speaking, but already two inasmuch as it is a traversal of an uncertain duration of time by two events. 'Auschwitz', if it names anything then, names not a submission of contemporary history to the One but rather an insistence that history is inherently – 'after Auschwitz'[22] in any case – divided.

It is remarkable how much the two thinkers cover in a few short pages, but the outcome of the exchange seems uncertain. Are there any other indications then that Lyotard's ethical claims and political interventions bespeak a desire for the One as Badiou charges? Everything depends on how his trajectory from *The Differend* onward is interpreted, and here it will pay to repeat some key facts.

Elsewhere I have made the case that in the writings following *The Differend*, Lyotard produces little that is new philosophically speaking but, following in broad outlines the terms set down in the latter text, multiplies testimonies to what is intractable as a means of pursuing an additive political strategy of resistance to instrumental rationality (McLennan 2013a). Tracing two senses of the inhuman in his 1988 collection of the same name, Lyotard pits the inhuman figure of infancy – the radical contingency and finitude of human thought, but also its promise – against the inhumanity of 'technoscience' or, as he variously calls it, 'development', 'complexification' or 'System' (Lyotard 1988c).[23] Since the instrumental rationality of the System demands frictionless exchange and the maximization of the input-to-output ratio, Lyotard simply bears witness to that about the human which is intractable to the system's performance. More precisely, he deploys commentary on artistic experiments, psychoanalytical

testimony, gender and sexual difference, biography and confession to testify to what resists in the human. But this, he also realizes, is playing into the hands of the System, since it provides diagnostic grist; 'The witness is a traitor', as he stunningly puts it at the close of *The Inhuman* (Lyotard 1988c: 204). Lyotard's last writings are therefore melancholic and come to the brink of nihilism, but without succumbing to it. He remains a militant in that, although his definition of politics has drastically changed to encompass artistic and literary testimony in defence of human contingency and finitude, he nonetheless deploys the entirety of his energy to the struggle. His posthumous text on Augustine bears this out; already in the process of dying of leukaemia, Lyotard extracted from Augustine's confessions an exemplary witness to human intractability and a radical hope that thought may measure up to the event.

The question, as mentioned earlier, is whether or not this singular, final trajectory is entirely faithful to the pure multiple. If Badiou is to be believed, and as I am inclined to agree, it is not. Rather, the melancholy politics of the later Lyotard is anchored only in the affectivity of a lack, and what it lacks is the One that he has expressly repudiated.

By way of conclusion I will reflect upon how this problematic of affectivity bears on philosophy's future. Before taking leave of the dispute, and in evident contrast with Lyotard's melancholy and his minimal hope, we need to come to grips with the seductive power of Badiou's inexhaustible enthusiasm, which is evidently a function of a thoroughgoing repudiation of the One, a modernity that has left behind all nostalgia and rooted its desire in the immanent possible.

Conclusion

The goal of this book was to give an overview of the Badiou–Lyotard dispute by approaching it as a dispute over philosophy's definition. Though admittedly this approach simplifies a much larger conversation between the two broad-ranging thinkers, the desired dividends are to have traced the outlines of a highly instructive philosophical encounter regrettably seldom explored in the Anglophone world and, since philosophy is so fundamental to their respective trajectories, to have shed light on the itineraries of both thinkers. If I have made good on my desire, then it remains for me to make a final brief commentary. Desire will in fact be the animating concept in these closing words.

The picture I sketched in the introduction described a world where philosophy has been subjected to the regime of economic calculation. Whatever else it is, philosophy in the Socratic tradition is by nature untimely: it takes too long, it is not clear what, if anything, it produces and it is often if not constitutively out of step with the prevailing winds of opinion. Where it is tolerated, philosophy is usually touted as a use-value. If it survives, it therefore increasingly does so at its own expense – assuming that is, its intrinsic value or its ethos is what is essential to it, and that its use-value is only secondary. As such, conditions are favourable for philosophy to give way to sophistry, if we define sophistry as the politically astute craft of creating effects with language for a fee. It is not hard to see why: flattery and pragmatism produce careers, whereas Socratic obstinacy has a tendency to produce martyrs.

Despite their differences, both Lyotard and Badiou, as we have seen, uphold an obstinate vision of philosophy. They explicitly oppose philosophy to the levelling and domesticating pressures of economic reason. But neither of them sees the sophist as an absolute enemy. Rather, each turns to sophistry at a crucial juncture in order to keep philosophy in check. Lyotard draws upon the sophists to keep philosophy nimble, open, procedural rather than theoretical, and honest about the extent of its powers; Badiou retains the sophist as a dialogue partner to remind the philosopher of the emptiness of the category of truth, and to maintain her ethics against disastrous temptations.

It is not a question then of tracing a simple demarcation between philosophy and sophistry by which to finally interpret the dispute, since, on one hand,

Lyotard is not obviously a full-blown sophist – nor is he obviously an antiphilosopher – and if he is, then he is still by Badiou's lights integral to the global process of philosophy. But on the other hand, even if Badiou is wrong about philosophy, his dispute with Lyotard is a particularly snarled and therefore instructive station in the endless search for the rules by which the genre proceeds. Hence, *the very dispute over who is doing philosophy is philosophical – is a taking-place of philosophy – according to both thinkers.* Even if we bracket the question of who is *truly* doing philosophy, the dispute delivers two powerful attempts to articulate and enact an obstinate philosophical ethos. As such, regardless of whom we side with, the dispute is a point at which the philosopher might get her bearings and drink deeply if her aim is to resist the regime of economic rationality and efficiency.

What I am suggesting here is simple: in order to shed light on: (a) philosophy in general; (b) philosophy as resistance; and (c) Badiou and Lyotard in particular, Badiou should be read alongside Lyotard, and Lyotard alongside Badiou. But since both thinkers link philosophy to politics, as we have seen, the final question that I will pose then – by way of provocation, certainly – is not strictly speaking philosophical but rather pragmatic, if not realist in the political sense of the term. In a world where philosophy is apparently threatened, *which of the two accounts of philosophy better sustains the desire that is particular to philosophy?*

Badiou and Lyotard are both very clear from their early writings that philosophy is bound up with desire. When the younger Lyotard asks his students the rhetorical question 'why philosophize?' in the text of the same name, his answer is blunt: how *not* philosophize? Philosophy is a special case of desire for the younger Lyotard influenced by Freud and Lacan: 'to philosophize is not to desire wisdom, it is to desire desire' (Lyotard 2013: 38). Put differently, to philosophize is to move towards the movement from the same to the other that proceeds without confounding the two (ibid.). The question 'why philosophize?' is therefore as absurd as the question 'why desire?' Desire simply desires, and likewise, to be in the pain of the flux of human experience, the gulf between same and other, between presence and absence, is already to be exposed to the interminable desire that is philosophy. We philosophize, in short, because 'it desires' (ibid.: 43).

Without great violence this view of philosophy as desire desiring itself may be transposed to the postmodern Lyotard's definition of philosophy as a genre in search of its rule. And in the late Lyotard's terms, one resists because *it* resists; the remainder and the pain of thinking are, after all: (a) inscribed in ontology

as we have already seen; (b) constitutive of philosophy; and (c) inherently resistant to totalization. To philosophize – to resist – is human, bearing in mind the specific antihumanist use he makes of term.[1] But this thought of resistance – this minimal militancy, or this militancy of the minimal – flirts with nihilism as we have also seen. Wouldn't it sap the resoluteness, the dose of voluntarism necessary to authentically challenge rather than simply endure the situation to which thought is exposed? If resistance is ubiquitous – if it is inscribed in the very constitution of human thought – then it is by no means a special case of action or of orientation. One more effort, philosophers, if you are to change the state of the situation … but if we read out of the later Lyotard that resistance as such takes no effort because it is inherent, that it is recuperated in any case by the system of technoscientific development that it opposes, and that even the desire for change harbours totalitarian impulses, then this is hardly a sustaining vision.

Badiou diagnoses the problem in a characteristically schematic way. He lists four dimensions constitutive of philosophical desire: *revolt* ('there is no philosophy without the discontent of thinking in its confrontation with the world as it is'), *logic* ('a belief in the power of argument and reason'), *universality* ('philosophy addresses all humans as thinking beings since it supposes all humans think') and *risk* ('thinking is always a decision which supports independent points of view') (Badiou 2014a: 31–2). Badiou describes how our world is averse to all four dimensions of philosophical desire and 'exerts an intense pressure' on them (ibid.: 32–3). Briefly, ours is – or is in the process of becoming, and is trying to become – a world particularly inhospitable to philosophy, since it is a world of pacific conformity, the undecidable flux of opinions, the cultivation of finely parsed particularity and safe calculation. The problem is how to sustain philosophical desire in the face of this fourfold pressure. Badiou makes room for his own view of philosophy by delineating the three principal orientations in contemporary philosophy and how they have failed in this connection.

The three orientations are the hermeneutic, the analytic and the postmodern (ibid.). The distinction is not absolute, since there is considerable borrowing and overlap that occurs between them. Roughly, the hermeneutic designates Heideggerian *sophos* whereas the analytic and the postmodern are two variants of modern *sophistēs*. The hermeneutic trains itself on the meaning of Being and Being-in-the-world through interpretation; the analytic demarcates sense from nonsense by thinking the rules of scientific utterance; and finally the postmodern deconstructs 'accepted facts of our modernity' and in particular the

idea of totality by thinking the fragmentation and plurality of language games (ibid.: 35). It will come as no surprise that Badiou names Lyotard as an exemplar of the postmodern orientation.

What the three orientations have in common are the themes of the end of metaphysics, and the centrality of language (ibid.). First, all three orientations declare an end if not to philosophy itself, then to a certain understanding of it as the bearer or search for eternal truth. This is why thinkers as diverse as Heidegger, Carnap and Lyotard are all for Badiou exemplary of philosophy in our time. But second, all three orientations train their attention on language as their primary material or the horizon in which thought must occur; as Badiou puts it, 'Language has thus become the great historical transcendental of our times' (ibid.: 37). Considered together, the two themes common to the three orientations entail that 'the question of meaning replaces the classical question of truth' (ibid.).

Badiou's question, as mentioned earlier, was whether or not the three orientations can sustain the fourfold desire that is particular to philosophy. Inasmuch as they rest on the axiom of the end of metaphysics and the axiom of the centrality of language, Badiou claims that they cannot.

First, the category of truth is essential to the element of revolt, i.e. it is essential to interrupting the interminable economic circulation of codes. Without 'at least one unconditional requirement', philosophy itself can be subsumed as just another value in the general circulation (ibid.: 39). If it understands itself as part and parcel of the world as it finds it, it is difficult to see how it can find its bearings or even its reason to resist. It is precisely here that Lyotard, exemplar of the postmodern tendency and plunderer of the hermeneutic and analytic tendencies, struggles in the later pages of *The Differend*, since he must simultaneously maintain both: (a) the general equivalence of all genres; and (b) the rightness of resisting the injustice perpetrated by the economic genre. Lyotard self-criticizes in the earlier *Just Gaming*, to the effect that the libidinal philosophy which culminated in *Libidinal Economy* was 'quite broadly a politics of capital', working within the latter to 'make it appear in its affirmative force' (Lyotard and Thébaud 1999: 90). *The Differend* was a sustained attempt to remedy the shortcomings of the libidinal philosophy by putting the question of justice back on the agenda. But the earlier descriptive monism of desire is replaced by a descriptive monism of language, and the result is an account of justice that is framed in terms of the relativity of rules, and which therefore remains wary of the category of truth. It therefore lacks any absolute fulcrum from which to demonstrate capital's injustice or its inessential being, and to

this extent Lyotard's later work remains very much 'within capital', not to speak of the larger regime of instrumental reason of which capital is a particularly volatile case.

Note however that in addition to revolt, the dimensions of logic, universality and risk proper to philosophical desire are also sapped by the theme of the end of metaphysics and the deposing of the category of truth. Lyotard as we have seen is tangled in logical problems, which he can only dismiss by shifting the register of his later writings to the order of idiosyncratic political intervention. The problem of logic is thus evaded at the expense of universality, and the later Lyotard's interventions resonate at the level of individual affect rather than cogent universal address. As such, Lyotard cannot account for risk: *why* risk resistance? *Why* stake one's life, one's career, one's happiness on anything, let alone on an obscure struggle the necessity of which is difficult to articulate and is primarily *felt* in one's divided subjectivity? Lyotard's ethics is of vigilance rather than decision and even the question of risk itself is only genre-specific. As we have seen, Lyotard's reply that 'it resists' answers the question without answering it.

To the extent, second, that contemporary philosophy accepts the primacy of language, it is also incapable of sustaining the desire proper to itself. Language presents itself to philosophy in the present as the dispersion of languages and language games, and this is no help in overcoming the fragmented regime of communication. One could, of course, designate *particular* languages as philosophically privileged – witness Heidegger's privileging of ancient Greek and modern German, and analytic philosophy's privileging of scientific language (Badiou op. cit.). We know that Heidegger's move is particularly troubling, linked as it is to nationalism, Nazism and fascism, and the scientism of analytic philosophy forecloses other loci of truth and cedes hegemony to instrumental reason. To the extent that the postmodern orientation has tried to put forth something like a 'language of ethics' which is at the same time an 'ethics of language' by way of Kant and Lévinas, it has similarly compromised the desire of philosophy by inscribing it in an Other-centred vigilance resembling quietism.

In sum, according to Badiou contemporary philosophy appears in three main variants: the hermeneutic, the analytic and the postmodern. All three are dominated by the themes of the end of metaphysics and the centrality of language. As such, contemporary philosophy cannot sustain the desire proper to philosophy, and in fact it actively endangers that desire. Inasmuch as the world exerts a constant pressure on philosophical desire, philosophy cedes too much in reflecting back the world as it finds it: 'There is something in [the

principal orientations] that goes too far in reflecting the physiognomy of the world itself' (ibid.: 39). Hermeneutics, analytic philosophy and postmodern philosophy are altogether too worldly – whereas the aim of philosophy should be – to borrow from John the Evangelist – to be in the world, but not of it. Lyotard in particular, being an exemplar of the postmodern orientation, is too worldly according to Badiou's analysis.

But this is precisely the essence of the Platonic complaint levelled against the sophist. We don't need to stay mired in *doxa*. Through mathematics – and recall that this is precisely Badiou's gesture – we can get at the unconditional and preserve the category of truth, thereby: (a) grounding the revolt in something that cannot be denied or conceded; (b) giving substance to the desire for logic and reason; (c) addressing ourselves in principle to all; and (d) shoring up our risks by breathing life into the notion of the possible. To be sure, it is not a question of escaping the world and accessing some transcendent realm, but rather of proceeding immanently on the basis of the void that is at the bottom of every situation. But if Badiou is correct, then his account of philosophy allows us to sustain the latter's desire against the weight of the world precisely because it is a rigorous thought of revolt, logic, universality and risk.

In my view Badiou has a slight edge over Lyotard, even bracketing the question of whose metaphilosophy is correct, because his analysis articulates precisely what is so troubling about the melancholy of Lyotard's later peregrinations. The only way Lyotard can anchor his militancy is in finitude, a kind of antihumanistic anthropology – what I have called an anthro-paralogy – that is ostensive, additive, interminable and therefore incomplete, since it proceeds as a case of reflective judgement under a Kantian Idea of maximum human dispersion. The challenge presented by Badiou by contrast is to provide the tools to ground philosophical militancy in the unconditional, and thereby to enable the human animal to participate in the infinite. The challenge is exhilarating since it opens onto the possibility that we are not in the era of philosophy's end, or of its transformation into an interminable rear-guard struggle, but rather that we find ourselves in a period of reaction in which militants of truths are called upon to get organized and begin the long, slow, patient work of transforming the world according to the faintest glimmers of its immanent possibilities.

The reader might object here that even this slight edge may be disabled by Lyotard's thinking of genres. Posing the question in terms of philosophy's capacity to sustain itself as desire smuggles pragmatic and affective, ultimately non-philosophical criteria into the picture and risks a decision – a hasty linkage, a forced passage perhaps – where greater philosophical patience is required.[2]

The philosopher cannot be carried away by enthusiasm without risking disaster, and must have a grasp of affect that will guard against error and temptation. But Badiou grants this and, having already outlived Lyotard by seventeen years, continues to hammer out the implications of his metaphilosophy for a theory of the subject.[3] This note of caution is precisely the kind of contribution Lyotard – playing the sophist, perhaps – can make to Badiou's project.

Neither Badiou then, nor Lyotard, but Badiou–Lyotard? Perhaps the Platonic dialogues that form the template for their dispute serve as an eternal model of philosophy in action. And perhaps carving out the time and sustaining the patient attention it takes to read them counts as a minimal first step on the path of a specifically philosophical resistance.

Notes

The Thinking of Being

1 As Badiou notes in the conclusion to the *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*,

> the philosophical position I combatted [in the first *Manifesto for Philosophy*] was principally the Heideggerian position in its French variants (Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, but also Lyotard), which consisted in announcing the irremediable end of philosophy in its metaphysical form and considering the arts, poetry, painting and theatre as proffering the supreme recourse for thought. (Badiou 2011a: 117)

Note the tension and the ambiguity of the 'but also Lyotard' ('*mais aussi Lyotard*' – Badiou 2010a: 109) here: does Badiou mean that in spite of appearances, or in spite of himself, Lyotard remained at bottom a Heideggerian?

2 In criticising Plato's mathematical rupture with the poem, Heidegger, 'like so many Germans' (Badiou 2007a: 126) takes up a nostalgic, reactionary defence of the idea of nature as auto-revelation.

3 Cf. Lyotard, *Why Philosophize?* (2013), Chapter 2, 'Philosophy and Origin'.

4 McLennan, 'Anthro-paralogy: Antihumanism in Lyotard's Late Works' (2013a).

5 The event is not a special category for Heidegger, but, one could say, being insofar as it reveals itself ('clears' itself). Time, which the notion of an event seems to presuppose, occurs in any case 'essentially in the dimensionality that being itself is' (Heidegger 1998a: 254).

6 In critiquing Descartes, Lyotard is also polemicizing against Karl-Otto Apel, who tries to put Descartes to use for the ultimate grounding of reason in 'La question d'une fondation ultime de la raisonne' (Apel 1981).

7 Whether 'and this is language, including the current phrase' is similarly problematic is an interesting question.

8 Lyotard is here quoting Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.01 (2002).

9 This is to say that the purported 'absence of a linkage' is not really the absence of a linkage; if it is a phrase, then it already implies a linkage (i.e. it implies a prior phrase and a next phrase).

10 Lyotard points out that since the silence of Holocaust survivors may signal any of these four negations, in any concatenation, the conclusion of Holocaust deniers

and revisionist historians such as Faurisson that their silence signals the absence of gas chambers *tout court* is fallacious (Lyotard 1988b).

11 Notice again the performative contradiction: Lyotard is making a claim which presumably holds good for all events, i.e. a universal claim.

12 Though now and then 'certain overlappings are possible', 'Phrase regimens coincide neither with "faculties of the soul" nor with "cognitive faculties". Genres of discourse don't coincide with them either' (ibid.: para. 187).

13 Gérald Sfez, *Jean-François Lyotard, la faculté d'une phrase* (2000), p. 69: 'La faculté des phrases ne présuppose pas de sujet, car la *force d'une phrase* est celle qu'elle apporte avec elle. Chaque phrase vient avec sa faculté, ses facultés.' ('The faculty of phrases does not presuppose a subject, since the *power of a phrase* is that which it brings with itself. Each phrase arrives with its faculty, with its faculties.') In a similar antihumanist register, Robert Harvey interprets Lyotard as

> positioning [the] 'I' as passage. 'I' am to become and remain passages everywhere I can, as plural as possible, taking care, all the while, that this 'I-as-passages' never favors the facile tendency to tidily fill the abyss over which passage is suspended. Not *creation* so much, then, as service at the passage by means of some yet unknown extensibility that should impel me to suspend the temptation to pass over. (Harvey 2001: 102–16)

14 In Lyotard's later terminology the 'anima minima' or 'minimal soul' (see 'Anima Minima' in *Postmodern Fables* (Lyotard 2003)). Note the tension between the view of minimal subject as 'apparatus' on the one hand, and fact of passage (see footnote 362 in *Fables*) on the other.

15 Lyotard might say: a spasm in what is called 'subject' occurs.

16 Lyotard might say: a pleasure in what is called 'subject' occurs.

17 Note the talk of Absolutes; Rudolphe Gasché unpacks the ontological dimensions of the analytic of the sublime in 'The Sublime, Ontologically Speaking' (Gasché 2001).

18 Kant, in *The Critique of Judgment*:

> … in general we express ourselves incorrectly if we call any *object of nature* sublime … All that we can say is that the object is fit for the presentation of a sublimity which can be found in the mind; for no sensible form contains the sublime properly so-called. (Kant 2000: 103)

19 Kant has in mind e.g. German enthusiasm for the French Revolution; a contemporary example would be Saudi enthusiasm for the Tunisian/Egyptian events of early 2011.

20 See Lyotard's *Enthusiasm* (2009) for a close analysis of Kant's philosophy of history.

21 Kant, of course, did not travel outside of his home town and had no first-hand experience of the monuments of which he speaks.

22 Lyotard's most sustained engagement in 'reading Kant against Kant' is his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's 'Critique of Judgment'*, (Lyotard 2004). The articles on Kant in *The Inhuman* are also crucial (Lyotard 1988c).

23 The sublime is the child of an unhappy encounter, that of the Idea with form. Unhappy because this Idea is unable to make concessions. The law (the father) is so authoritarian, so unconditional … He desperately needs an imagination that is violated, exceeded, exhausted. She will die in giving birth to the sublime. She will think she is dying' (Lyotard 2004: 180).

24 Notable exceptions that raise the Lyotard question are Terence Blake, 'Badiou's Reduction' (2013) and Tzuchien Tho, 'The Consistency of Inconsistency: Alain Badiou and the Limits of Mathematical Ontology' (2008).

25 Cf. Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (1999a).

26 Note that Bruno Bosteels, in *Badiou and Politics* (2011a), takes pains to emphasize that the book does not mark an absolute break.

27 Regarding Heidegger and romanticism, see 'Philosophy and Mathematics' in Badiou, *Conditions* (2008a).

28 The notion of 'suture' will be explored in Chapter 4. See also Badiou, 'The Philosophical Status of the Poem after Heidegger', in *The Age of the Poets and Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose* (2014b).

29 Michael Haneke's film *Code Unknown* (2000) is in my estimation one of the best available filmic illustrations of the ideas in *The Differend*. One of its most striking features is that it gestures towards the void between situations, if a little too literally; the cuts between the scenes are presented as blanks.

30 In Chapter 4 I will explore an intervention by Badiou to the effect that Lyotard's thought harbours a desire for the One.

31 See especially the aesthetic essays in *The Inhuman* (Lyotard 1988c).

32 In the *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* Badiou identifies a shift that has occurred; it is no longer a 'Left-Heideggerianism' of the poem and sophistry that constitute the main challenge to philosophy, but a 'poor dogmatism by way of analytic philosophy, cognitive science and the ideology of democracy and human rights' (Badiou 2011a: 118). There is now rather too much 'philosophy' about. To this extent, Badiou and Lyotard (just as he describes concerning his rapprochement with Derrida) would now have the same enemies.

33 I am adapting here and expanding upon the example given by Feltham and Clemens of a football team called 'The Cats' in Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (2014a), 9–10.

34 Cf. Badiou, *Being and Event* (2007a), 130–49 for a discussion of 'natural atomism', whose ontological schema is not being *qua* being.

35 The axioms of ZF are: extensionality, power set, union, empty (void) set, replacement, infinity, foundation, separation and choice. A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this book's argument, but Badiou demonstrates in *Being and Event* how each of these axioms figures in his ontological deduction.
36 An excellent overview is given by Feltham and Clemens in Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (2014a), 11–13.
37 Cf. Badiou, *Number and Numbers* (2008b).

Philosophy in its Relation to Being

1 Note the interesting lapsus: where is Guattari in connection with the authorship of *What is Philosophy?*
2 Badiou includes his review of *Differend*, 'Custos, Quid Noctis?', in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (2012b).
3 Strictly speaking, Lyotard's 'only rule' in the text is to 'examine cases of differend and to find the rules for the heterogeneous genres of discourse that bring about these cases', but the way in which he goes about this is broadly reflective and he resists the temptation to settle the differends according to the rules of the reflective discourse he employs (Lyotard 1988b: xiv).
4 One thinks not only of Plato but, naturally, Hegel and other architects of grand systems. Lyotard submits the notion of philosophy as queen of the university to sociological scrutiny in *The Postmodern Condition* (2002).
5 Here we can see an echo of Merleau-Ponty's influence on the young Lyotard; cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie* (1953).
6 See for example *Lectures d'enfance* (Lyotard 1991) and *The Postmodern Explained* (Lyotard 1993c).
7 See 'Introduction: About the Human', in *The Inhuman* (Lyotard 1988c).
8 This can be found in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (Badiou 2012b).
9 Lyotard, in *The Differend*: 'The *Is it happening?* is invincible to every will to gain time' (Lyotard 1988b: para. 263).
10 In this connection, think of descriptions of 'postmodernism', with which Lyotard is associated, as a thought of the surface. See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (2005).
11 The resonances with Kant are intentional and should be noted.
12 Cf. Lyotard, 'Anima Minima', in *Postmodern Fables* (2003).
13 Cf. Lyotard, *Soundproof Room* (2001) and *Signed, Malraux* (1999).
14 Lyotard puts the term in scare quotes.
15 Cf. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (2010b).
16 A web-archived copy of the missive "Qu'est-ce que l'Organisation politique?" may

be accessed at http://web.archive.org/web/20071028083920/http://www.orgapoli.net/

17 See especially the analyses of love and solidarity in *Soundproof Room* (Lyotard 2001).

Demarcations: Philosophy, Sophistry, Antiphilosophy

1 Nicely summarized in Crome, *Lyotard and Greek Thought: Sophistry* (2004), pp. 79–84.

2 Note however that Heidegger also counted Anaximander and Heraclitus among the first Greek thinkers.

3 On the link between love, desire and attention see Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (2007).

4 It is possible that partisans of the Way of Truth emerging in Parmenides's wake betrayed him in precisely the same way, but without the sophistical irony. Melissus of Samos elegantly expounded upon, clarified and defended the master's thought. Zeno of Elea's paradoxes also stand as combative declarations of faith in the master's division, expressing the Way of Truth in the purely negative form of an attack on opinion and multiplicity. Arguably, both thereby exposed the demonic phrase to the criteria of proof and argumentation which, according to Cassin and Lyotard's interpretation, ruin it. In a limited sense, the case could be made that Melissus and Zeno belong in the camp of the philosophers with Plato and Aristotle, since they may have been provoked by the sophists to attempt to think being on the terrain of language and argumentation.

5 Note further how the title of Gorgias's treatise betrays his sophistical intentions. It situates itself in the Parmenidean tradition, while at the same time suggesting that the tradition collapses under its own weight. 'On Nature' was a commonly used title among the early ontological thinkers; Gorgias thereby inserts himself in the emerging tradition while suggesting, in the bargain, that to speak of nature is to speak of non-being. (Crome op. cit.: 130)

6 These are the words of Aristotle (1999), in his *Metaphysics*, IV, iv, 1006a, 22f, which is cited in Crome 2004: 143.

7 I have gleaned this term from James Williams who, in his excellent *Lyotard and the Political*, suggests that Lyotard creates a 'disabling feeling' around Ideas such as Humanity, History and the like (Williams 2000: 122).

8 Similarly, see Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', in *Writing and Difference* (1978) for a meditation on Bataille and the force of laughter against the Hegelian dialectic.

9 Plato, however, viewed sophistry as in some sense unnatural precisely because, in making the weak triumph over the strong, it subverted the natural order of things.
10 See Albert, *Treatise on Critical Reason* (1985), Chapter 1, Section 2.
11 Cf. Badiou, *The Century* (2008c).
12 Cf. the chapter 'On Subtraction', in Badiou, *Conditions* (2008a), 113–28.
13 Badiou, *Being and Event* (2007a), p. 15: 'If one category had to be designated as an emblem of my thought … It would be the *generic*.'
14 For a concise overview of the question of love, cf. Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love* (2012).
15 Note here that *contra* Parmenides, for Badiou being and truth – and more precisely, the category of Truth constructed by philosophy – are not coextensive. While both are strictly speaking voids, Truth is 'not a presented but an operational void' (Badiou 2008a: 12). Once more we see the profound influence of Althusser on Badiou. Althusser claims in 'Lenin and Philosophy' that 'philosophy strictly speaking has no object' – being at all times a partisan (read pro-materialist) intervention into the spontaneous i.e. ideological declarations of the sciences (Althusser 2001: 34). But as I will explain in Chapter 4, on Badiou's judgement both he and Althusser ran afoul of this categorical emptiness by suturing philosophy to politics.
16 In *Plato's Republic* (2012a), Badiou has Socrates speak of the True rather than the Good.
17 Godzich, 'Afterword: Reading Against Literacy' (1993), 110: Lyotard is described as 'the wild man, albeit of the gentlest kind, of French philosophy'. Cf. also Michel Butor, 'Recollections on Jean-François Lyotard' (2001).
18 Badiou at times speaks of Heraclitus as an antiphilosopher, but at other times his terms are less certain; for example in *Logics of Worlds* he declares Heraclitus to be 'undoubtedly the proto-founder of anti-philosophy, just as Parmenides is the proto-founder of philosophy' (Badiou 2009b: 542).
19 Note here the saying–showing distinction which is explicitly at issue in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, considered by Badiou to be a monument of antiphilosophy.
20 See also Lyotard's self-criticism in Lyotard and Thébaud, *Just Gaming* (1999).
21 Cf. Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine* (2000b).
22 See especially Lyotard, *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (1994) and the section entitled 'Students', in Lyotard, *Political Writings* (1993b).
23 Cf. Lyotard, 'One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles' (1992).
24 Cf. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a)*; This Sex Which is not One* (1985b).

Ethics and Politics

1 Julian Bourg has written an excellent overview of the ethical turn which, while not paying sustained attention to Lyotard, captures the essentials (Bourg 2007).
2 Lyotard devotes a section of *Instructions païennes* (1977a) to Solzhenitsyn's text.
3 This being the title of the 1983 École Normale Supérieure seminar which produced, among other works, Lyotard's *Enthusiasm: The Kantian Critique of History* (2009) and Badiou's *Peut-on penser la politique?* (1985).
4 Badiou's isolation and perseverance are wonderfully described in the introduction to the *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* (Badiou 2011a).
5 My citations of Sfez are my own translations into English.
6 In his *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (1991), Bill Readings gives an excellent example of a differend: in the film *Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984) by Werner Herzog, a legal dispute erupts between a mining company and a group of Australian aborigines. The aborigines claim that the miners are digging in sacred ground and should cease immediately. The court asks the aborigines to produce evidence that the ground in question is sacred; but this would mean violating the taboo on the ground e.g. by digging up sacred artefacts. Basically the aborigines are asked to dig in the ground to substantiate their claim that digging there is out of the question.
7 Consider the case where the poet and the physicist describe the red of a rose in terms proper to their respective disciplines. Is it meaningful to ask who among them is right?
8 Recall the sublime sentiment, discussed earlier.
9 Note that recent Spinozistic attempts to *ground* politics in ontology, such as that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, seem to have also produced their share of negative assessments, including by Badiou.
10 See Lévinas, 'Humanism and An-Archy' (2006).
11 Think here of Lyotard's contortions with respect to prescription, reflective judgement, and Idea in *Just Gaming* (Lyotard and Thébaud 1999).
12 Georges Van Den Abbeele claims that it is Lyotard's book on Kant's historico-political writings, *Enthusiasm*, in which the political implications of *The Differend* are brought to fruition. For Van Den Abbeele, the book 'marks the full transition from Lyotard's earlier Freudo–Marxist preoccupation with libidinal politics and cultural revolution to his latter [*sic*] work on more discursive models of social justice and ethics' (Van Den Abbeele 2009: ix–xiv).
13 'Plato' is the name that represents 'the first philosophical configuration that proposes to dispose [the truth procedures] in a unique conceptual space, thus showing that *in thought* they are compossible' (Badiou 1999b: 34).
14 Badiou, *Plato's Republic* (2012a); 'For Today Plato: The Republic' (2009a).

15 'What Althusser was missing – what *we* were missing between 1968 and, let's say, the beginning of the 1980s, and that we see today, was full recognition of the immanence to thought of *all* the conditions for philosophy' (Badiou 2008a: 161).
16 'Philosophy does not pronounce truth but its *conjuncture*, that is, the thinkable conjunction of truths' (Badiou 1999b: 38).
17 'A subject is nowhere given (to knowledge). It must be found … [and this thesis] concentrates the post-Cartesian nature of our endeavour' (Badiou 2009d: 278).
18 In Badiou's rewriting of *The Republic* (Badiou 2012a) Socrates refers not to the Good but to the True. For an explanation of what Badiou considers legitimate and illegitimate philosophical functions of the idea of the Good, see *Conditions*, p. 16 (Badiou 2008a).
19 Lyotard, *Rudiments païens* (1977b), 130: '… il y a des énergies (façon de parler)'.
20 The concrete manifestation of this problem is playing out in contemporary activism, where an identity politics rooted in infinitesimally parsed intersectionality wreaks havoc.
21 Here, and in what follows, the translations from this text are mine.
22 Here again note Lyotard's debt to Adorno.
23 See 'Introduction: About the Human', in (Lyotard 1988c). The distinction is also worked out in several chapters of Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables* (2003).

Conclusion

1 Cf. McLennan, 'Anthro-paralogy: Antihumanism in Lyotard's Late Works' (2013a).
2 Badiou complains that Lyotard 'completely misreads' him as 'an absolute decisionist, a sort of new Carl Schmitt' (Badiou 2014a: 144).
3 See Badiou with Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event* (2013), 105–18 for a recent discussion of the proposed third volume of *Being and Event* tentatively titled *The Immanence of Truths*.

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