ALAIN BADIOU, *BEING AND EVENT*: A NON-CONFORMIST MODEL OF COUNTING AS BASIS FOR A NON-CONFORMIST MODEL OF ONTOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT: This is not a review of Alain Badiou's *Being and Event,* but only a focus on the problem of the emergence of ontological theory.
KEYWORDS: Alain Badiou, ontology, *Being and Event*, counting, situation.

I consider Badiou's book an illustration of the constructivist and epistemological approach of ontology: approach that puts consciously that the ontological interest of man as well as the ontological concepts realise through historical processes which counter man, as both an individual and a collective, to the world. Badiou's persistent interest to mathematics is related just to this view whose aim is not exterior at all to man's struggle for a human environment.

This is the reason Badiou does not separate the *quantitative* from the *qualitative*: the first is the abstracting from the second and, since it is explained as resulting au fond from our experience of life – of nature and society –, it is no longer the reduction of phenomena to mathematical expressions familiar only to a specialist elite, but in fact a qualitative form of natural things understandable by the lay persons. The mathematical imagination is different and more than metaphysics: it is and leads to a form of rationality and in this respect – and related to emancipator standpoints in science and social experience – is it a part of the philosophical questioning. Numbers[2] are

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seen as ontological constructs only at the end of the analysis: in fact they are "evental nominations"[3], "fragments sectioned from a natural multiplicity" and, since the multiplicity is "thought" and it is thought as ordinal, the numbers are "forms of Being", in fact "*our* way of traversing or investigating their being"[4].

The book[5] from which I removed here only the logic of ontological construction precedes this philosophical research of numbers. It refuses the "nostalgia about the thought of the origin"[6], by showing only why a mathematical operation can explain man's searching for and arriving at a unitary and coherent view concerning "the last principles".

Badiou's theory is a *meta-ontological* one, he insists, but, as we know, every ontology is a *meta* /over the concepts related to the understanding "of beings" in Heidegger's formula: namely, to the understanding of the essence or composition of things given by sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, cosmology). Thus, Badiou analyses the ontological discourse by proposing another one more receptive to the necessity to explicitly state that ontology cannot be understood without expressing the logic of the emergence of concepts (thus the logic of the process of knowing). Badiou's attempt enters, thus, in Heidegger's approach of being: that of the epistemological – i.e. human – mediation of the significances of the deep constitution of the world.

The Nothing, not the nothingness (Sartre), is an essential point of departure in Badiou as well: because when we ask what is a *thing* we cut it out from the indistinct, indiscernible whole – thus we put it as *presenting* itself (let us also remember phenomenology's *intentionality of conscience*) –, so first of all we *count* it; in fact, our count, naming the object as an *one* we want, is our first reaction when we abstract the object from the indistinct whole[7]. But, probably also because our abstraction was the result of something interesting for us

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3   *Ibidem*, p. 101.
4   *Ibidem*, p.211.
5   Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (1988), Translated by Oliver Feltham, London, New York, Continuum 2007.
6   Maël Renouard, « Les mondes crépusculaires : Alain Badiou et la mélancolie », *Critique*, n° 719, avril 2007, http://www.ciepfc.fr/spip.php?article156.
7   But, victory, even for the theoretical ontologist, "the nothing names that undecidable of presentation which is its unpresentable", Badiou, p. 54.
    I don't know if this entire description in this chapter reflects the real standpoint of Badiou; anyway, it is my reading.

– i.e. the result of a *situation*[8] the thing lies within, or the interesting is always the situation we observe – "the only thing we can affirm is this: every situation implies the nothing of its all. But the nothing is neither a place nor a term of the situation. For if the nothing were a term that could only mean one thing; that it had been counted as one. Yet everything which has been counted is within the consistency of presentation"[9].

The Nothing is the primal – from the standpoint of knowledge[10] – reality for, for example, the child who discovers the world: something lacking of any form, lacking of any significance. Therefore, a thing – something already discovered, chosen, counted, named – cannot exist without the presupposition of the „previous" nothing.

In fact, Badiou uses for the word "nothing" that of "*void*": "The name I have chosen, the void, indicates precisely that nothing is presented, no term, and also that the designation of that nothing occurs 'emptily', it does not locate it structurally"[11]. Therefore, the void is only a general term ("indicating nothing other than the unpresentable as such"[12]), not related to a situation, since "no term within a situation designates the void"[13]. The conceptual level reflects that „in a situation there is no conceivable encounter with the void"[14]. But ontology is more than a counting of the *one*: it is "theory of the pure multiple without-one, theory of the multiple of multiples"[15].

Knowledge of things takes place through the *structuring* of the counts, names, events: "The apparent solidity of the world of presentation is merely a result of the action of structure, even if nothing is outside such a result"[16]. But all is more complicated: neither the structure nor the count itself – "the fundamental reason behind this insufficiency is that something, within presentation, escapes the

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[8] We have to remember both the Latin origin of this word (*situs*, ūs)– that of being situated, of having a place, a lieu, a position, an order, a making, a structure, somehow a history since that place/the something lain in that place is forgotten, left, neglected, discovered – and the modern existentialist origin, from Sartre to the situationists.

[9] Badiou, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 57: "The only solution is for all of the terms to be 'void' such that they are composed from the void alone".

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 56.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 59.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 56.

[14] *Ibidem*.

[15] *Ibidem*.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 93.

count: this something is nothing other than the count itself"[17] – can provide the consistency of a presentation. It is only the doubling of the structure with a *meta-structure* which can do this: a "count of the count" which puts order into the inconsistent multiplicities presented as "the world". Simply: any situation – which is a structured presentation – supposes a second count through the form of a *re-presentation*. This is which avoids the danger of chaos in the knowledge of things[18]. "Everything presented is represented and reciprocally, because presentation and representation are the same thing"[19].

Where is here ontology, the search for Being (since we have talked till now only about the manner to know, to come nearer to things perceived as situations and events)? In the fact that: the re-presentation "brings the one into being within the un-encounterable danger of the void"[20].

If every *one* is fixed within a structure, and every structure is fixed with the *one*, the veracity of this transparent operation is guaranteed by the second count, the "fictionalizing of the count via the imaginary being conferred upon it by it undergoing, in turn, the operation of a count"[21]. And for there are many "count-as-one" presenting themselves altogether, thus presenting a multiplicity, the re-presentation imposes "the reciprocity of 'being' and 'one' therein, by means of the consistency of the multiple"[22].

Ontology again; more, the revealing of the *quality* – which is *sine qua non* to a deeper "science of Being" than the translation of the epistemological relations into quantities; could be the meta-structure only a counting of the terms of a situation (i.e. the aspects highlighted by these terms)? Certainly not, since the *one* which is counted is so with the help of a structure/ the counting itself leading to the structure: namely, the structure fulfils in its *effect*, and not only that

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[17] *Ibidem*.

[18] A rich theme of philosophy of language, logics, psychology, philosophy of mind.

[19] Alain Badiou, p. 148.

[20] Alain Badiou, p. 94.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 95.
      Pay attention to the word "fictionalisation". The process of fictionalising means both naming the ones – with and through concepts and categories – and realising a second range imagination (the first was related to the constitution of concepts and categories), through the figure of God. Indeed, God assures the existence, including our counting within it. Spinoza's *Deus sive natura* expresses a long history, before and after him, of this fictionalisation.

[22] Alain Badiou, *ibidem*.

the structure as such can no longer be counted after the first clash between the subject and the indiscernible void, but also that the effect is that "there is oneness"[23]. The direct role of meta-structuring is thus to emphasise the effect of the one as its *state of the situation.* As a conclusion: "- *presentation, count – as – one, structure, belonging and element* are on the side of the *situation; – representation, count of the count, metastructure, inclusion, subset* and *part* are on the side of the *state of the situation*"[24]. Therefore, the counting is the premise of the effect – the effect being always *quality* – emphasising a situation. What does *situation* mean here?

Empirically: by cutting out a *one* from the impersonal void, we present it/it appears as presenting to us/it is the Presence itself which appears and differentiates from the grey, un-presented and un-presentable void. If a *one* is both presented and represented, it is an "object" with a *normal* situational integrity (a real *object*). If a *one* is presented, but not represented, it is, firstly, an object only *in statu cognoscendi*, thus a *singularity*. If a *one* is only represented, but not presented, it is an ideal object and a non-existent object, an *excrescence* from an ontological point of view. But in all cases the object is clear for us, as a situation (existence itself is thus situation) sutured with its state, or as a state (existence itself is thus the state related to or calling the situation), just because *void is un-presentable* (it does not present itself to us, it is not a situation nor a state) and certainly *un-representable.* The cutting out of the object from the void is thus not only an epistemological action, but also ontological: a founding of the *ontos* which has meaning for us. We give names only to this *ontos*: this *ontos* is the only one that exists for us.

This is not the place to detail the epistemological operations through which, for example, by reasoning about the presented situations, we link them and thus include a re-presentation within another *one*. In this case an excess of inclusion could happen and things should be solved only by further research. This implies a control over our reasoning, premises and conclusions: since in deduction the presentation of a one is not guaranteed by the re-presentation from the premises, since in induction the truth of our conclusions is not guaranteed by the truth of our premises, these *ones* being many times insufficient as basis for a conclusion, and since we rely a re-presentation to a hypothesis – and being many hypotheses, we only choose

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[23]   *Ibidem*.
[24]   *Ibidem*, p. 103.

one[25] –, existence appears once more as a process of discovering it from, as Badiou insists, the "unpresentable errancy of the void"[26].

I have to add that in this process, "external" aspects of manipulation and instrumentalisation of knowledge could appear in order to re-present reality detached from its presentation: one could name a state of a situation as being just the opposite of its presentation. Orwell's example from *1984*'s concerning the inversion of words 'peace' and 'war', thus the first re-presenting a real state of warfare while the latter – a peaceful state of actions and situations, helps us to understand also that the creation of the world through our understanding, i.e. the re-presentation of *ontos*, is not at all a neutral one, as issuing only from our endeavour to know, namely to have the world as-it-presents-to-us, but a multiply transfigured re-presentation, a translation of the relationship between presentation and re-presentation through and from the point of view of the viewer. This is the *ideological* veil which interposes between the two aspects.

Well, leaving this aside, why is this ontology so interesting for our problem of information? Obviously because, as we already saw, the counting (as the focusing on the *one*) is not only *the first epistemological operation* of man in front of reality which, first of all, appears as a void, but also because *the first result of the counting* is the first simplest acquisition of the world, the first appearance of the real existent as *a one*, while *ontos* – as something having within it *a one*. (And ontology, as a discourse concerning *ontos*, – an "accumulative infinity of subtractions"[27]).

But, once more, for the inquiring man, the world is not at all a *one*, it is an un-countable void. Only by focusing on a certain situation, we subtract it from the void and thus it has significance for us, it is – first of all – a *one*. Consequently, *the second epistemological result of the counting* is the whole known as *multiple of ones*. Step by step, man doffs snatches from his primal epistemological "reality", the void: coloured parts of *ones*. Namely, although the void remains as infinite as it was at both the ontogenetic and phylo-genetic birth of man[28], the whole which is known appears as a multiple.

Existence is now accredited. It is what lasts and "stability necessarily derives from the count-as-one, because all consistency proceeds

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[25] See Lorenzo Magnani, *Abductive Cognition. The Epistemological and Eco-Cognitive Dimensions of Hypothetical Reasoning*, Springer, 2009.

[26] Alain Badiou, *ibidem*, p. 125.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 126.

[28] The void, empty of knowledge, was called by the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga *mystery* or the *Great Anonymous*.

from the count. What could be more stable than what is, as multiple, counted twice in its place, by the situation and by its state?"[29].

A third both epistemological and ontological moment is that of the construction of concepts and their allocation in the process of counting of new *ones* and to new *ones* which are chosen from the void. *Ordo et connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo et connexio rerum*, said Spinoza by asserting the conclusion of this then not yet known logic of the process. In fact, after man has imagined a non-present and non-presented *one* in order to compare the new *one* chosen from the void, thus after he has labelled this new *one* and together with his fellows has conceived of notions containing all the *ones* of the same sort, thus after – and, again, through the endeavour of imagination, memory and induction – he has made multiple connections between states, between situations, between events, he could throw the historical order of consequences: he could not only wonder about the similitude between the ideal order of things and their real order, but also consider that *ordo et connexio rerum* would genetically follow from *ordo et connexio idearum*.

Situations and their counting show once again: things – thus *ones* on which man focuses on – are not independent from man, though obviously they *exist* objectively. The *ones*, things which arrive to be called as *those* "things", are chosen (and obviously defined) by man from the un-presentable void. This means that an axiom of ontology – a rule without which there is neither the certain *ones* nor the reflective discourse on existence – is that of the *choice*, as founding condition of knowledge and, thus, of *ontos* as such *which has meanings for the human being*. The choice is at the same time an *intervention* within being, thus the being itself is "created" by man, because Being is always that which has a meaning for man. Consequently, counting is not at all a cold play[30], based on impersonal rules and generating an objective world of symbols, but an interaction and, thus, a world impregnated by uncertainty.

If so, namely, if to know is to intervene and create, this process has another axiom: that of *foundation*. Through foundation, the human construction of being can lead to the level when the *ones* chosen/created on the basis of an artificial foundation no longer could be related to concrete situations.

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[29] Alain Badiou, *ibidem*, p. 127.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 228: "The conflict between mathematicians at the beginning of the century was dearly-in the wider sense-a political conflict, because its stakes were those of admitting a being of intervention... Mathematicians... had to intervene for intervention to be added to the Ideas of being".

But all of these mean that to know implies *decision*: to choose the *one* etc. not only that the "ethic of knowledge has as its maxim: act and speak such that everything be clearly decidable"[31], but the meaningful world itself presents us the result of the decisions concerning the moments of knowing. Thus, decision reveals itself not only as a founding factor of knowledge, but also as acknowledgement of the meaningful objective existence.

In short, the meaningful *ontos* is the result of a human constructive process. The counting, as ontological condition of this *ontos*, involves the functioning of human logic, which is/cannot be reduced to the randomness of individual wills. Long ago, Leibniz has mentioned two principles that emphasise the constructive process of the meaningful existence, without transforming this process into an arbitrary creation: 1) the principle of *non-contradiction* – which supposes the mode of possibility to exist of the contradictory existentials, i. e. possibility manifested even in the historical tendency of things to perfection themselves (see the idea of *conatus* of Spinoza) – and 2) the principle of *sufficient reason*, repudiating the "blind chance" because, in Badiou's words, "that what is presented must be able to be thought according to a suitable reason for its presentation"[32].

These principles, or conditions of being, are very important: because if the world as it presents itself cannot be communicated – and there is no efficient communication or communication at all, without common languages/symbols/logical principles[33] –, this world as such is precarious.

References

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31   *Ibidem*, p. 314.

32   *Ibidem*, p. 315.

33   *Ibidem*, p.392: "I term subjectivization the emergence of an operator, consecutive to an interventional nomination. Subjectivization takes place in the form of a Two"... "What subjectivization counts is whatever is faithfully connected to the name of the event".