

**Writing for Two: A Critique of Literature, Love, and the Event in
the Philosophy of Alain Badiou**

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I would like to begin with a poem by Samuel Beckett entitled "Something There," which was translated from the French into English by the author in 1974:

something there
where
out there
out where
outside
what
the head what else
something there somewhere outside
the head

at the faint sound so brief
it is gone and the whole globe
not yet bare
the eye
opens wide
wide
till in the end

nothing more
 shutters it again

 so the odd time
 out there
 somewhere out there
 like as if
 as if
 something
 not life
 necessarily¹

In this poem Beckett condenses the problematic knot of an aleatory encounter (“something there”), the elision of its appearance (“at the faint sound so brief / it is gone”) and the poetic aftermath of deciding on its presence (“like as if / as if”). The synaesthesia underlying the repetition of the “as if,” its echo-effect, creates the impression that the trace of the “something there” introduces into the situation of “life” an element whose origins are somewhere that is “not life,” and this “necessarily.” The necessity of the outside-of-life that Beckett attributes to the indeterminacy of the “something there” stands in contrast to the dominant imagery of an uncertain presence running throughout the poem, a presence whose status as an existent element of its textual situation would seem to be anything but necessary. Of course, once a sound has been heard we can easily say that its existence is beyond doubt, and thus necessary. Yet this is not what the speaker of Beckett’s poem intends by concluding with the necessity of the sound’s “not life,” as though the idea of necessity pertained directly to the sound’s immediate presence within the sensorial horizon of the speaker. In the tension between the poem’s expression of uncertainty and its concluding assurance of the necessity of the “not life” of the “something there,” we can discern a subtle ambiguity surrounding precisely in what sense the “not life” is inexistent and why it is *necessarily* inexistent. Beckett presents us with the artistic necessity of negotiating the indeterminate presence of an encounter with a “something” that inexists in the poetic field.

However, it is the assurance that the sound is “not life,” that it is “not life / necessarily,” that poses the interesting philosophical and aesthetic problem of articulating the real existence of a thing that does not, ontologically speaking, exist. Before proceeding further, though, it is worth noting that Beckett’s poem here is not without ambiguity with respect to the ontological status of the “sound.”² Whereas the English version of this poem concludes with reference to an object—the sound—that is necessarily not life, its French variation opens the possibility for a less emphatic reading of

the degree to which what is “not life” is “not life” *necessarily*: “comme quelque chose / de la vie pas forcément.”³ The difference between inflecting these lines as “not life / necessarily” and “not necessarily life” is significant insofar as it is precisely the *necessity* of what is not life that determines whether or not Beckett is making an ontological point through the language of poetry. The decision taken here to emphasise the *necessity* of “not life” can be traced to what in “Three Dialogues” Beckett’s speaker, “B,” refers to as “the certitude that expression is an impossible act.”⁴ That Beckett’s narrators and protagonists do little else except continue down the avowedly impossible road of expression is what gives them their distinctly Beckettian signature. The content of expression, however, is more difficult to articulate than the mere fact of continuing to express. As this poem suggests, what accedes to expression, or rather what it is the responsibility of poetry to force into expression, is what did not possess the capacity *to be* expressed in the first place. What is worthy of poetic expression, in other words, is what resists poetic expression, and in the context of the poem cited above it is what falls outside the context of “life” that is the object of expression. The narrator-protagonist of Beckett’s *How It Is* makes an analogous statement when he or she claims that “the essential would seem to be lacking.”⁵ If the essential is lacking, if the belief in the impossibility of expression is held with certitude, then it is not on account of the object of expression—the essential sound of the poem “Something There”—being located elsewhere, as though the essential were a real object that had been misplaced or hidden beneath appearances. The essential, that ingredient that would render the “ill-said” of poetic expression a “well-said” of discursive knowledge, is lacking in the precise sense that that very lack conditions the possibility of ontological appearance, so long as we understand this lack not in terms of a strong nihilism (nothing *is* what there is), nor as a weak nihilism (try as we may, there is no deeper meaning to things), but rather, to put it in Alain Badiou’s terms, as the aleatory prerequisite of any and all structures of ontology : being as inconsistent multiplicity. Lack, in this case, can be understood as the “minimal difference” that makes the difference between the infinity of being (inexistence) and the finitude of existence,⁶ Beckett’s poetic gaze is fascinated with the former. Accordingly, placing the stress of interpretation on the necessity of what the poem calls “not life” serves to reflect on Beckett’s repeated interest in the essential lack that poetic expression continually encounters and reproduces.

Lack, in other words, is a productively ambivalent category for Beckett. Taking the condition of lack, of (a non-nihilist concept of) nothingness or “not life,” as a foundational category of being is no small task. Already in his famous letter of 1937 to Axel Kaun, Beckett remarks that “more and more

my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it.”⁷ Indeed, by the time Beckett publishes his “Three Dialogues” in 1949, the accent of his writing has unmistakably shifted to the “Nothingness” that both language and existence conceal. The experience of the “minimal difference,” it could be argued, is the effect of the repetition of the “as if” in Beckett’s poem, where the speaker’s chance encounter with a mysterious sound is confirmed as the object of the poetic encounter—the first “as if”—and then (and this is where the poetic act commences) re-confirmed as the stand-in for the universal encounter as such, the pure and unsolicited “as if” of the encounter with an object of inexistence. The encounter is doubled in that slight space opened between the two *as ifs*, and it is in this tenuous space that the poetic sequence takes place. How are we to interpret the “sound” of Beckett’s poem? On a Badiouian reading, and it is just such a reading that the present article is interested in challenging, the philosophical intervention into the poem would consist in extracting the poetic sequence from this indeterminate space, the space separating “as if” from “as if,” and redirecting the significance of such indeterminacy away from mere indecision and towards the construction of a truth-event. But does Beckett’s writing allow for such a Badiouian extraction of the sound without such extraction amounting to a philosophical violation of the poem? It is contended here that it does not. To inhabit this gap indefinitely is surely Beckett’s singular achievement, but it is one that points to a subtle discrepancy within our ability to conceptualise an artistic experience that tarries with the in-finitude of this peculiar site of poetic expression. Taking Beckett’s poem as a point of departure, this article intends to look at how the concept of inexistence functions in both the philosophy of Alain Badiou and the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, arguing that it is in the distance Badiou takes from both Beckett and Lacan *vis-à-vis* the concept of inexistence that not only are we privy to the more technical aspects of his philosophy of the event, but that this distance provides a glimpse of where Badiou’s philosophy is in need of restraint from the very theoretical and artistic positions he claims to have exceeded (though not without a profound debt of gratitude).

According to the logic of what Badiou calls the “truth procedure,”⁸ the subject of the event does not have access to the event as such, but rather to the indeterminate trace of an event that will have taken place. As this brief definition already suggests, it is difficult to discuss Badiou’s work without having a basic understanding of his terminology. When Badiou refers to the “event” he has something very specific in mind: Badiou’s concept of event, he writes in an essay on Deleuze, is

the risky passage from one state of things to another. ... The event

would not be the inseparable encroachment of the past on the future, or the eternally past being of the future. It is, to the contrary, a vanishing mediator, an intemporal instant, which renders disjunct the previous state of an object (site) and the state that follows. We could equally say that the event extracts from a time the possibility of an other time. This other time, whose materiality envelops the consequences of the event, deserves the name of a new present. The event is neither past nor future. It makes us present to the present.⁹

Where the event refers to the entire, yet intemporal sequence of the passage, or radical break, from one state of things to another, it is on the basis of mobilising the ontological indeterminacy of a trace (i.e. what remains of the vanishing mediator of the event) that an evental sequence is possible. It is precisely because an evental sequence proceeds on the basis of a trace that it is risky: without the risk inherent in predicating the construction of a sequence of subtraction on the invisibility of a trace of excess, there is no chance that an event will entail a separation from the consistency of the visible world and, in the language of Beckett borrowed by Badiou, “bore a hole in knowledge.”¹⁰ The trace, then, is that element on the basis of which an event institutes the conversion from inexistence to a new existence. The sequence whereby “what formerly inexistence becomes intense existence” names the pre-evental presentation of a trace that had not yet been represented by the process of a truth procedure.¹¹

One of the many examples of an event that Badiou cites is the atonal revolution initiated by Arnold Schönberg: “The event is the Schönberg-event, namely that which breaks the history of music in two by affirming the possibility of a sonic world no longer ruled by the tonal system.”¹² In Badiou's characterisation of this particular event, the trace can be identified with anything from the specific techniques of atonal harmony, the performances and compositions, or the statement that “rules unrelated to the permissible harmonies of tonality or the academic progressions of modulation” are indeed possible and imperative at a specific moment in the history of aesthetics.¹³ The Schönberg-event, then, is the collection of finite instances that, retroactively inserted into the history of music, signal a radical shift in musical possibility and in the determination of what is aesthetically anachronistic. The void, in this case, is responsible for the fact that, in order for a new form of audibility to materialise, it is necessary that the sequence leading to its materialisation pass through the non-sense of atonal harmony. To be sure, “how can one make the truth of the audible heard without passing through the in-audible? It is like wanting truth to be 'human,' when it is its in-humanity which assures its existence.”¹⁴ Beckett, however, unlike Mallarmé, does not figure for Badiou as a participant in any kind of event of

literature. Beckett's works are rather literary analogues to the logic that leads from trace to event, via what Badiou calls the truth procedure that emanates from a certain disposition towards the void of being. Because it is at the meta-evental level, then, at the level of pure thought, that Badiou inscribes Beckett within his concept of the event, it is here, too, that this article will situate Beckett's writing (as well as Lacan's theory of feminine *jouissance*) as a critical riposte to Badiou's philosophy.

What guarantees, at the very minimum, the possibility of an evental excess becoming the truth of a situation is what Badiou refers to as the axiom of the void,¹⁵ which simply refers to the idea that given any presentation of a set (say, the set of permanent citizens in a given state), there is included within this set a pure multiple that can be counted as being both included and not included within the set (say, the set of illegal immigrants, who reside within the borders of the state but are not officially counted as belonging to its citizenry). The pure multiple is responsible for the fact that a count is possible in the first place, and so it has a transcendental function without a subject: "to put it more clearly, once the entirety of a situation is subject to the law of the one and consistency, it is necessary, from the standpoint of immanence to the situation, that the pure multiple, absolutely unrepresentable according to the count, be *nothing*. But being-nothing is as distinct from non-being as the 'there is' is distinct from being."¹⁶ The emphasis Badiou places on the "nothing" of the void resonates strongly with the textual situation in which Beckett's figure of the unnamable finds itself in *The Unnamable*. The predicament concerns whether or not it is possible to think what one speaks and to speak what one thinks simultaneously, and if not, then to experiment with the limits of trying to navigate the landscape of what separates these procedures. If this is not possible, if it is not possible to count oneself as part of a counted set in the act of the counted set being counted, then what sustains the count as such must be what Badiou calls the void, and Beckett the nothing: "But how can you think and speak at the same time, without a special gift, your thoughts wander, your words too, ... between them would be the place to be, where you suffer, rejoice, at being bereft of speech, bereft of thought, and feel nothing, hear nothing, know nothing, say nothing, are nothing, that would be a blessed place to be, where you are."¹⁷ Where Beckett and Badiou agree is on the presence of an ineliminable void, or nothing, that localises one's ontological essence even as it is understood to be inaccessible to what appears as ontologically given. The void is the unnamable proper name that marks the excess of being and that, because the void is inaccessible to being, is responsible for the fact that being is always (mis)represented as a consistency of appearance.

Beckett's writing circulates incessantly around this point of the void, though it is highly questionable whether there is anything like Badiou's concept of the event present in his work, namely something that is capable of remaining literature at the same time as it escapes from the tyranny of uncertainty, indecision, and disintegration. Badiou, too, is hesitant to locate the invocation of an eventual separation in Beckett's literature, and so he turns to Stéphane Mallarmé, who seems to provide a more hospitable variation on his schematisation of the truth procedure.¹⁸ The question I am interested in asking is whether or not Badiou must turn away from Beckett precisely because Beckett presents a type of literature that is irreducible to philosophy. This would then raise the question of whether or not literature as such is capable of laying claim to Badiou's axiom of decision, on which the possibility of an event depends. Does literature produce truths in the way Badiou thinks that it does? Literature—and this is as true for Beckett as it is for Maurice Blanchot—is perhaps the exhaustive and insomnia-driven work of infinite subtraction without event. If so, then the event of literature would be precisely the non-event of literature. Badiou does not want to think this, namely the possibility that literature is incompatible with his philosophy of the event and, more disruptively, invalidates the gesture of trying to compossibilise the truths specific to each of what he calls the four generic registers (art, love, science, and politics).

If we follow Badiou's insistence that an event (i.e. the instance of a radical break from the complacency of a situation) proclaims the inexistence, and not the *non*-existence, of the void, then we are in a position to identify what Beckett means when he ascribes inexistence to the "something there" that occasioned the response of the poem, namely that the immediate presence of an indeterminate trace, points towards an "outside-of-place"—Badiou's void—from which events can occur to disrupt the complacency of existence. It is out of the poetic responsibility to respond to the indeterminate trace, to decide on the undecidable, that sets Beckett, like his narrator in *III Seen III Said*, "on the way to inexistence. As to zero the infinite."¹⁹ Without affirming the necessity of a space that is "not life," that which appears in the guise of the "something there" would otherwise be reducible to what already is, finite existence thereby encompassing the limit of the possible. On the other hand, what Badiou would like to say about the necessity of the "not life" of "Something There" is that it points to Beckett's conviction of the infinite-made-present in the field of finite existence, not as a sublime event of incalculable magnitude (a miracle), but as the trace of an indeterminate sound that confronts the Beckettian subject with the uncertain task of poetic nomination. The problem with such a reading is that it ignores the possibility that the repetition of the "as if" is a spatial, rather

than temporal, demarcation. If Beckett's purpose in repeating the "as if" of the sound's indeterminate existence is to enclose the poem's boundaries within, precisely and exclusively, the space of indeterminacy, then what we are dealing with is an indirect refusal to allow for a conceptual retrieval of what the sound might signify and what its positive effects might be. This does indeed seem to apply to the project announced in "Something There," and it is a project that maintains fidelity to poetic indecision; otherwise the poem risks shattering the tenuous and fragile existence of an indeterminate presence of sound.

If the poem is to inhabit the uncertain field of poetic nomination, then it does so because it implicitly and presciently anticipates the catastrophe looming in such a project that would seek to cross the threshold from indeterminate trace to the being of the event. Beckett is hesitant to make this leap. Badiou, on the other hand, is sometimes too quick to valorise the poetic sequence in which the naming of an eventual supplementation to being is carried out. As critics like Andrew Gibson and Shane Weller have argued, Beckett is not so easily reducible to a poet/writer of eventual nomination; his poetic constructions are far too nuanced and ambivalent, too ironic and knotted, particularly when it comes to the problem of writing in/on the category of the void. According to Gibson, "what Badiou himself lacks, what he everywhere refuses, and what distinguishes him from Beckett, ... is the thought, not only of anything resembling what [Walter] Benjamin calls catastrophe, but of the logic that, *according to his own scheme of things*, must bind event and catastrophe together."²⁰ The point is that Badiou's conception of the artistic truth procedure is much too committed to the axiomatic unfolding of the consequences of the eventual trace. By "axiomatic unfolding" Badiou has in mind the conversion that the poet confronts of a residue of the void into an instance of truth. This means that in order for the poetic sequence to participate in what Badiou calls "the writing of the generic" truth of being, it must adhere to a program of subtraction that passes from indeterminacy to truth.²¹

For Badiou, there is always a narrative of the truth-event, and it is logically delineated in his detailed and complex construction of the truth procedure. As he explains in *Conditions*, "a truth circulates within this exhaustive quadripartite structure [immanence, genericity, the infinite, and the unnamable] of the givenness of being, at the same time as its trajectory is pinned together by the entire logic of subtraction."²² The Benjaminian catastrophe to which Gibson refers above seems to be the event's ever-present proclivity for the disaster of forcing the sequence beyond subtraction, of exhibiting a "passion for the real" that is evocative of destruction rather than subtraction, and that would tip the balance of the truth sequence into the domain of

violent closure.²³ Granted, Badiou conscientiously intends to avoid this. Nevertheless, catastrophe, Gibson contends, is an inherent possibility to the unfolding of a truth. Badiou seeks to counter this consequence by affirming the irreducible unnameability of any event, which distinguishes his project quite explicitly from all those failed projects of emancipation that characterised the twentieth century. Gibson is aware of this (as is Badiou), but he nevertheless suggests that with respect to the truth procedure of art, the programmatisation of the trajectory of truth cannot but infringe on literature's constitutive responsibility to indeterminacy, which is, furthermore, linked to a resistance to Badiou's mathematical paradigm of construction²⁴.

One of the implications here is that Badiou cannot easily claim that all four truth procedures—science, politics, love, and art—are linked through the compossibilisation of their sequences of subtraction. The responsibility of philosophy *vis-à-vis* events of subtraction is pedagogical insofar as it establishes the compossibility of subtraction across all four truth procedures. If Badiou is not able to fully subject art (or love), for instance, to the sequence of the truth procedure, then we are once again faced with the possibility championed by deconstructive approaches to literature whereby writing is at once self-legislative and self-disintegrative of the truths it demonstrates, and therefore in no need of philosophical re-affirmation through the mathemes of set theory. Moreover, it is precisely the disagreement between Beckett and Badiou over their respectively enacted discursive responsibilities to formations of inexistence that problematises the smooth passage from the indeterminacy of place, of an encounter, to the composition of a poetic truth procedure. Beckett's poem is stubbornly lodged at the threshold that Badiou intends to surpass via the concept of the event.

While Gibson goes a long way towards showing how Beckett supplements for this lack of patience in Badiou's project, I would now like to turn my attention to the psychoanalytic thought of Jacques Lacan as another possible site of supplementation to Badiou's philosophical mathematisation of the truth procedure. In his critique of Badiou's reading of both Beckett and Mallarmé, Gibson does not fully address Badiou's insistence that it is the concept of the axiom that grounds that particular poetic space of creation in which art is tied to a philosophical concept of truth. The aim of the present discussion is to pursue some of the broader consequences of Badiou's insistence on art's relation to truth into the core of his thought, where the sequence of the truth procedure as such is believed to rely on an axiomatic point of (retroactive) departure.

For Beckett, however (and, as will be seen, for Lacan also), the maintenance of what Badiou calls an axiomatic decision is problematic, to

say the least, as shown by the saturation of his work with the hesitation, despair, and impending collapse that follows from the near-paralysing recognition of “the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.”²⁵ If there is to be anything resembling an axiomatic point of departure in Beckett's writing, it will proceed from what Beckett himself identifies as the point of departure for the interpretation of his work: “*Nothing is more real than nothing*,”²⁶ which is one of “those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. ... They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark.”²⁷ Indeed, what sort of decision (other than a radical form of indecision) might follow from so aporetic a statement as this, one that embraces the destruction of logic (without being illogical) and that intends the ruination of language? Beckett does not submit his artistic freedom to the creative licence vouchsafed by an axiomatic point of departure. When it comes to art, there are no axioms that do not, in turn, collapse under the weight of the process of their requisite articulation. It is Lacan who, against the horizon of Badiou's philosophy of the event, most conspicuously shares this position with Beckett²⁸ (even though in his late seminars he turns to the prolific literature of James Joyce). It is in this context that we can understand Lacan's turn, in Seminar XX, to the difficult concept of “the written” in his formulation of the possibility of love as a type of enjoyment (what he names feminine *jouissance*) that supplements the universality of symbolic castration. The Lacanian concept of “the written,” as the expression of feminine *jouissance*, is directed towards trying to negotiate the inexistent dimensions of love *qua* the actual infinite. Lacan's version of an actual infinite mode of existence is, then, what he terms feminine *jouissance*, which functions in Lacan's later work as a “necessary” supplement to the symbolic foreclosure promised by the sexual non-rapport. Feminine *jouissance*, Lacan writes cryptically, is “that which doesn't stop what?—being written. ... Can you imagine? The necessary is linked (*conjugué*) to the impossible, and this 'doesn't stop not being written' is the articulation thereof. What is produced is the *jouissance* that shouldn't be/could never fail. That is the correlate of the fact that there's no such thing as a sexual relationship, and it is the substantial aspect of the phallic function.”²⁹ The impossibility of feminine *jouissance*, paradoxically, is what supports its necessity as the supplement to masculine *jouissance*. Love, the written effect of feminine *jouissance*, participates in a modality of inexistence that eludes conceptual articulation, or “seizure,” as Badiou would say, while remaining conceptually viable. What we have in Lacan is yet another site of critique from which to challenge Badiou's mathematical

narrativisation of a truth procedure, this time in the domain of love.

In bringing “the written” into our thinking of the poetics of both the artistic and the amorous encounter, moreover, we will have occasion to resist Badiou’s charge that Lacan simply lacks the courage of an axiomatic decision on the (in)existence of the actual infinite. Rather, Lacan had good reason for not leaping wholeheartedly into the luxury of axiomatic affirmation promised by Cantorian set theory. If Lacan turns to writing instead of mathematics, we can reasonably inquire into his reasons for doing so, set as they are in the conviction that language and the signifier are irrevocable predicates of existence. The primary implication of Lacan’s reversion to “the written” is that, according to Badiou, he is forced to assume an impotent notion of inexistence, one that is incapable of passing from indeterminacy to the actuality of truth. The Lacanian version of inexistence, then, can be described more readily in Badiou’s critique as a notion of *non*-existence, and thus forever castrated by the logic of the signifier. Again, the distinction between non-existence and inexistence is crucial, and concerns nothing less than the possibility of crossing the threshold from indeterminacy to truth, particularly in the fields of art and love.

Before proceeding into a more detailed discussion of precisely where, and how, Badiou parts ways with Lacan and Beckett on determining how a concept of inexistence can be mobilised theoretically and poetically for developing his philosophy of the event, let us take a moment to address some of the broader implications of what is at stake here. The immediate concern in the discussion that follows, to reiterate, is to suggest that Badiou mistakenly imputes the category of *non*-existence to what, in Lacan, can more accurately be filed under the category of *in*existence, though without being synonymous with the type of inexistence formulated by Badiou in his set-theoretical mathemes. For Badiou, the event of love, in the rare chance that it occurs, is an event that inexists in the habitual everydayness of our experience. Love cannot be anticipated or planned, in other words, it simply happens, always in a time, as Hamlet might say, that will have been out of joint. Badiou indicts Lacan for failing to see that the only way to affirm love as the experience of a non-experience, an experience that is subtracted from the field of what we habitually perceive, is to do so axiomatically, i.e. as an affirmation that is capable of being made without having to pass through the abyssal labyrinth of language and textuality. An axiomatic decision is, after all, a decision that is made on the basis of itself alone. Belief in God, for example, can only be held axiomatically as an affirmation that God’s existence is self-grounding: the statement “God exists” initiates a sequence of thought and belief that retroactively confirms itself. Accordingly, when it comes to accounting for love, Badiou charges that Lacan is too lin-

guistically minded to think outside of language and desire, which is precisely where the event of love must be affirmed and developed.

One of the implications of the present discussion, then, concerns precisely the discrepancy between philosophy and psychoanalysis (and also literature) regarding the process by which the category of inexistence leads to a universal experience of love. The increasing popularity of Badiou, especially in the Anglo-American context, can be attributed, at least in part, to his claim to having revived philosophy's capacity for universal conceptualization, and thus to having redressed the castration of philosophy perpetrated by what in *Logics of Worlds* Badiou terms the postmodern horizon of "democratic materialism,"³⁰ in their privileging of the logic of the signifier and the materiality of the body. Badiou takes issue where philosophy is reduced, as it has been in the post-war French context of vitalism and post-structuralism,³¹ to combining "a deconstruction of its past with an empty wait for its future," and so his "basic intention is to break with this diagnostic."³² Moreover, Badiou insists, "what is presented as being most contemporary in philosophy is a powerful sophistry. Sophistry ratifies the final statement of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*—'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'; philosophy [i.e. Badiou's], however, only exists in maintaining, precisely, that it endeavours to say what cannot be said."³³ Badiou follows several trajectories in maintaining philosophy's responsibility for what cannot be said, yet it is the trajectory that derives from Lacan and Beckett, psychoanalysis and literature respectively, that is particularly instructive for assessing just how successful Badiou has been in surpassing modern sophistry. By returning to where Badiou breaks from Lacan, namely in how the determination of the concept of infinity and inexistence fares in the psychoanalytic experience of love, it is possible to bring into focus whether or not Badiou's reinvention of philosophy is as inventive as it claims to be. To what extent is Badiou justified in claiming that his own philosophy of the event, and its reliance on an axiomatic logic of departure from the idea that being *is* not, is indeed a break from the linguistic turn that has characterised French philosophy into the twenty-first century? Is there a legitimate place for philosophy and thought outside the realm of "*bodies and languages*"?³⁴ Perhaps; but not necessarily in all the places that Badiou believes there is. These are some of the broader questions that the present discussion intends to address, however indirectly at times, relying as it does on some of the more technical points in the philosophy of Badiou and the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan.

We will have the occasion to return to Beckett further on, but what I want to propose at this point is that the condition of necessity that Beckett confers upon the "not life" of the "something there" can assist in illuminating

the discrepancy between how Badiou and Lacan respond to the infinite-made-present of the event of love. In his essay “The Subject and Infinity,” Badiou asserts that Lacan is unable to count to Two. Needless to say, the disagreement is not as facile as it at first appears (that Lacan can’t count!), as Badiou goes on to stage the problem with more heightened philosophical urgency:

2 is infinite. Indeed, the only true concept of the infinite is the inaccessible, so the number 2 is, according to Lacan, inaccessible. ... All of this would yield a memorable consequence, which I state at my own risk, *because Lacan does not chance it*, even though it follows from the inaccessibility of 2: secondary enjoyment, feminine enjoyment, merely in being inferred as inaccessible, would be enjoyment of the pure subject, of the split subject as such, since it is in the point of the crack between its primordial signifiers that the inaccessible is established.³⁵

What, exactly, is the charge? Badiou’s dispute with Lacan hinges on the subject of feminine enjoyment, which he claims is attainable for Lacan “merely in being inferred.” The consequence of feminine enjoyment being relegated to a dependency on a fictional inference, of a hypothetical supposition of the subject who is capable of directly enjoying its “being-split,” is that the Lacanian infinite is trapped at a pre-Cantorian stage of the concept of infinity, trapped that is in Zeno’s paradox of the existential impossibility of counting *to Two* by traversing the gap separating one and one. Because feminine *jouissance* remains fictional, Lacan is reduced to entrapment in a Derridean notion of truth as only ever *to come*, but never arriving in the here and now. Truth, for Badiou, is predicated on precisely the count *from Two qua* infinite, which logically presupposes that the count *to Two* is an existential possibility (and not *merely* a fiction); truth, therefore, exists. However, things are not so simple, as both Lacan and Badiou reject the possibility of *actually* counting to Two.³⁶ Badiou is interested in heeding the lessons of deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis without forfeiting the philosophical (Platono-materialistic) concept of truth.

In “The Subject and Infinity,” Badiou is responding to a passage from Lacan’s Seminar XX, in which it is claimed that the existence of the not-Whole of feminine *jouissance* is predicated upon the formula that there is an element of the set of phallic *jouissance* that is not inscribed therein, which leads, if one follows Aristotelian logic, to the conclusion that the dominant set is contradicted by the particular that escapes its totalising grasp—in other words, the universal is negated by the existence of the particular. For instance, we could consider how Aristotelian logic applies to the claim

of the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, that there are no homosexuals in Iran. Affirming the existence of the particular in this case would amount to finding just one Iranian who was not heterosexual, thereby negating the universal set of Iranian heterosexuality. Accordingly, affirming not-p, where p is the universal set of Iranian heterosexuals, permits the statement that “there exists x such that not-p,” as Aristotelian logic dictates that the negation of the universal is equivalent to affirming the existence of the particular—of the existence of just one Iranian who is not heterosexual. For Lacan, then, the feminine not-Whole is structurally equivalent to the particular of Aristotelian logic. This is the case, however, only when we are dealing with the finite. What happens if we posit that the particular is not a part of a finite totality, that the particular is not simply an extension, within the finite domain of the merely potential infinite, of the Aristotelian universal set? What if the particular, to borrow from Beckett, is from somewhere “not life”? What happens, in short, if we posit a conjunction of excess between the particular and the infinite, where the particular does not have an easily identifiable existential property (such as an Iranian who identifies as homosexual)? The paradox would thus be that even if Ahmadinejad is right, that the Iranian citizenry is composed of nothing but heterosexuals, the claim to universality is still subject to negation without the affirmation of an existent particular.

This is precisely what Lacan posits with his conception of the relation to the not-Whole of feminine *jouissance*, arguing that if we are interested in envisioning a mode of experience—love—that is not restricted by the logic of the sexual non-rapport, then we are no longer dealing with something that can be said to exist on the basis of a finite negation (of the universal Whole). Otherwise (that is, if we were to refer to the Aristotelian logic of affirming the particular via its negation of the universal), we would find ourselves back in the metonymic loop of deferred desire and the production line of surplus *jouissance*. Lacan calls love the supplement to the fact that there is no sexual relationship, though of course it is a non-extensional supplement that does not affirm any positive existential features of the kind of enjoyment—feminine *jouissance*—that love produces. As Badiou explains, “It signifies that it is not from the vantage point of the whole that a woman supports its effect. The formula [of love] therefore only indicates a subtraction-from, or a making-a-hole-in, this effect.”³⁷ To produce a mode of experience that somehow transcends the phallic economy of desire, we would be required—and this is no small difficulty—to convert the surplus-effect of phallic *jouissance*, which is a specifically finite phenomenon, into a mock stand-in for the actual infinite of feminine *jouissance*. Here, Lacan concedes that “you can, at a pinch, posit it as an indeterminate existence,”

and thus as a form of inexistence.³⁸ But because the existence of the not-Whole can only be conceived indeterminately, we must say that according to the logic of extension that pertains to the finite world of appearance, the not-Whole simply does not exist since, in order to exist in any meaningful way, “one must also be able to construct it, that is, know how to find where that existence is.”³⁹ So, while it is the case that the logic of the finite extension of the “there is” would have to be enlisted in the process of forming the particular substance of the actual infinite, there is nevertheless a strict and seemingly insurmountable ontological barrier separating the finite from the infinite, on the basis of which the infinite is an inconstructible set, and thus merely a necessary fiction that we tell ourselves in order to believe that experience can be something other than the impossibility of a sexual relationship. As Badiou argues, the existence of the feminine function in Lacan’s thought must be indeterminate, as “Lacan does not at all want to accept that there might exist an x [Woman], and hence a speaking being that is radically subtracted from the [phallic] function. Castration is universal in that it affects access to enjoyment for every speaking being, regardless of position, woman or man.”⁴⁰ As has already been suggested, it is the “mere fiction” of the Lacanian actual infinite of feminine *jouissance* that is a problem for Badiou, since it cannot serve as the foundation of an event of subtraction in the finite world of existence.

Badiou manipulates what he perceives to be a structural inconsistency in Lacan’s conviction that there does not exist an element of the set of speaking beings that is not subject to the phallic function of castration, but that the constitutive incompleteness of the totality of signifiers is nevertheless vouchsafed by the not-Whole of a purely negative function introduced into the field of signifiers as feminine *jouissance*. In other words, Lacan would appear to hold the paradoxical position that love is possible only in the framework of its impossibility. For Lacan, it is of utmost importance, though, that this negative function of feminine *jouissance* not be used to affirm the actual existence of a feminine particular. On the contrary, the particular that Lacan has in mind, Badiou tells us, is of the order of angels, who cannot be *said* to exist: “For the angel, this being subtracted from the whole operation of castration, the cogito is expressed as ‘if I think, I am not.’”⁴¹ The problem implied by Lacan’s reversion to the not-Whole of feminine *jouissance* as the ontological guarantee that the set of available signifiers have always already been not-Whole is that the feminine must simultaneously exist and not exist, that Her existence be predicated on the basis of absolute indetermination. To do this Lacan has to assume what Badiou identifies as two incompatible logical assertions: 1) that Aristotelian logic does not apply to the particularity of the feminine not-Whole; and 2) that there is an un-

bridgeable void of sense separating the finite from the infinite. Both of these propositions adhere to the intuitionist suspicion of the affirmative powers of negation, from which we are precluded from claiming, or more precisely from constructing, the existence of an actually infinite set that is not subject to the restrictions imposed on language by the universal function of castration—universal in the sense that to speak (or think) is always already to have been castrated. The intuitionist can allow neither the construction of an actual infinite nor the act of affirmation from negation, on the basis that to do either we would have to permit what Badiou describes as “an uncontrolled negation of the finite” and “reasoning by the absurd.”⁴²

Now, if this is the position of the intuitionist, it is curious that Lacan allows both an uncontrolled negation of the infinite—the not-Whole of the set of signifiers—and reasoning by the absurd. If we are to charge Lacan with intuitionism, it will have to be with respect to the consequence that the actual infinite cannot be constructed without being degraded to a merely potential infinite by the phallic function of finite desire. The difference between a potential infinite and an actual infinite is that, under the logic of the former, the infinite is always deferred. The actual infinite, in Badiou's philosophy of the event, occurs *here and now*, in the future anterior point of its affirmation. In a political context, we might illustrate the difference between these two forms of the infinite as the difference between liberal democratic and revolutionary politics. Liberal democratic change is always gradual, and never results in a complete overhaul of the political system; it is indeed the name of the situation towards which the political destiny of the globe would like to tend. Revolutionary politics, on the other hand, and recent movements such as the Arab Spring, suggest at least the real possibility that the actual infinite might take place in the historical present and upset the “business as usual” of liberal democratic politics. Lacan, of course, is not an adherent to the revisionist politics of liberal democracy, as is made clear in Seminar XVII, but the problem that follows from Badiou's criticism is that, in the same breath that the Lacanian theory of feminine *jouissance* seeks to transcend what is otherwise the inescapability of castration, it stubbornly adheres to the position that such a break is possible only in language, where castration does, indeed, enjoy absolute rule.

What Lacan's supposed reduction of the actual infinite to a potential infinite means, paradoxically, is that we can believe in angels only on the condition that we do not believe that they exist; that we can affirm the event of the Arab Spring only on condition that we do not believe that it actually occurred. The problem, to return to the site of love, would thus seem to revolve around what it means to posit a non-dialectical existence of the infinite that resists the temptation of either simply reconciling the finite with the

infinite (love as the experience of the Two fusing into a One), or with prostrating the finite before the absolute alterity of the infinitely other (in Levinasian terms, love as a heteronymous submission to the absolute alterity of the Other⁴³). Rather, in the Lacanian program of love it is necessary, Badiou believes, to uphold the idea that it is the structural effect of the *fiction* of the infinite that prevents the “relation between the two enjoyments [phallic and feminine] from being dialectical, from being the unity of contraries, and ultimately from being a relation. The infinite is here a power of dissymmetry. The impossible relation of the for-all of man and the feminine not-all is inscribed in the division of enjoyment: neither can be actualized as the negation of the other, because actually the infinite is by no means the negation of the finite. It is its *inaccessible* determination.”⁴⁴ The Lacanian infinite—in short, the site of Lacanian inexistence—functions to ascribe the quality of the not-all to the universe of castration without having recourse to any existential determination. It is enough that we are able to posit the mathematical possibility of the actual infinite set to jettison the rules of Aristotelian logic without falling into the trap of intuitionism, which rejects wholesale the actual infinite set and any real consequences that would follow from its supposed inexistence. For Lacan, on the contrary, it is logically permissible, and indeed necessary, to posit feminine *jouissance* as the not-all of the phallic economy of desire without concluding that the not-all can be extended into an actually existing element of the finite totality of being. The site of feminine *jouissance* is thus pure void, the lack in being that motivates and forever limits the phallic circulation of desire, and as such is incapable of confidently serving as the axiomatic foundation for the production of a truth. The Lacanian infinite is fictional, and not axiomatic. “Ultimately,” Badiou would like to claim, “Lacan remained pre-Cantorian. He did not really accept ... that the infinite can sustain a judgement of existence, or a real effect of separation.”⁴⁵

Without getting tangled up in the set-theoretical details that Badiou relies on to accuse Lacan of remaining pre-Cantorian, of denying the existence of the minimum cardinal ordinal—Two (in the sense that the square root of two is irrational)—it is enough to relate this accusation to the idea that Lacan remains thoroughly enthralled to the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. According to this parable told by Zeno, Achilles can never catch up with the tortoise, because each step that Achilles takes, the tortoise also takes a step, however much slower it is. Achilles cannot reach the tortoise at position A, because the moment Achilles reaches position A, the tortoise has already moved to position B, *ad infinitum*. What makes this a true paradox is that it cannot be surpassed from within the terms that structure its impossibility—the succession from part to whole, from one to two. What is

required—and this is what Badiou believes Lacan is unwilling to do—is to decide axiomatically, i.e. without any recognisable existential foundation,⁴⁶ that the successful count to Two from Achilles to the tortoise is real without being constructible. The implication of insisting on the axiomatic decision of the existence of the infinite-Two is that we are no longer dealing with a *merely* fictional presupposition grounding the not-all of feminine *jouissance*, but with the existence of a not-all that is mathematically localisable within the finite territory of castration. This is made possible by the fact that the existence of an actually infinite set that is affirmed on the basis of a purely axiomatic decision does not have to adhere to the logic of construction, but is instead subject to the subtractive presence of an existence that, precisely because it resists the logic of construction, attests to the inexistent being of the not-all. This non-constructible being of the not-all Badiou refers to as the event, and it is because the event *is-not* that the infinite is not merely a fiction, but an effect of the decision to insist on its axiomatic foundation and to persist in the subtraction of the *is-not* from the finite set of what merely *is*. As it turns out, the discrepancy between Badiou and Lacan, at least according to the former, is a difference between the status of the infinite as either fictional or axiomatic, with Badiou insisting that, insofar as the infinite is axiomatic, it does not have to be relegated to the inaccessible dumbness of a being forever castrated by language. For Badiou, the infinite speaks *exceptionally*, and it is on the authority of the axiom that it is permitted to do so.

If it were simply the case that Lacan failed to recognise that what he was actually describing *vis-à-vis* the infinite was closer to the logic of the axiom than to the logic of a fiction, then we could simply go straight to Badiou and his meticulous construction of the axiomatic foundation of the event. As Badiou acknowledges, Lacan had access to Cantorian set theory and its mathematic proofs of the actually existent infinite set. Why, then, refer the infinite to fiction? Badiou's response to this question cannot but appear reductive, to say the least: Lacan's "strict definition of the infinite by way of the inaccessible ... is necessary to block the inference whereby secondary enjoyment leads to an existence entirely subtracted from castration. ... Lacan only summons the infinite to dismiss it. The infinite must remain an operational fiction, one that points to the abyss or crack in which the subject is constituted, but that is only a secondary clarification."⁴⁷ What if Lacan does not dismiss the infinite, but locates it in a different register of construction? More precisely, is it not the case that the function of the infinite in Lacan's formulation of feminine *jouissance* that supplements the ontological field of being is to insist on the non-being of the point of the Two—the Real—without affirming a strict logical correlation between this point

and the axiomatic foundation of an actually existing infinite set? Badiou is right to claim that Lacan denies the authority of the axiom, though this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the infinite is not fully present in the conjunction between the Two and the experience of love outlined by Lacan, so long as we are comfortable ascribing to the form of presence of the Lacanian infinite a fundamental absence of being. This is paradoxical, to be sure, particularly as the concept of the actual infinite only makes sense—i.e. exists—within the logic of the axiom, the logic of a sovereign decision, namely, that “the one *is not*.”⁴⁸ In other words, in order to develop a truth procedure, for instance the procedure of love, what is required would seem to be an axiomatic point of departure, something like the phrase “I love you!,” which is then used as the basis of the novel experiential set that will follow. The determination that a loving encounter has occurred can only be made from the future anterior position of the set derived from the axiom of love. Of interest here, however, is the move to attribute to the Lacanian infinite of feminine *jouissance* certain ontological effects, but with the crucial caveat that in the count *from* Two the recourse to an axiom of decision is denied. We are thus dealing with two ontological effects predicated on the void, one set that is axiomatically determined (I love you!), and another that is without axiomatic determination (Love is this: ...). If we are to trace the consequences of an experience of love that is without axiomatic foundation, we must consider what it means to claim, as Lacan does, that love is (and here we are not without the affirmation of love) an artistic construction, and not a mathematically constructed infinite set. Indeed, we do not count (on) love, as Badiou does; rather, we write (about) it.

Interestingly, Lacan hints at precisely this early on in Seminar XX with reference to Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the hare, where he explains that while Achilles can never actually occupy the same position as the tortoise, it is nevertheless “quite clear that Achilles can only ever pass the tortoise—he cannot catch up with it. He only catches up with it at infinity.”⁴⁹ Alenka Zupančič picks up brilliantly on this passage in Lacan, suggesting that it presents not just one Achilles, but two. On the one hand we have the Achilles who cannot catch the tortoise, and so is locked into the metonymy of desire that characterises existence under the phallic function of castration—the sexual non-rapport. In terms of the sexuated positions, Zupančič explains, this first Achilles would correspond to man. “‘Woman,’ on the other hand, is the (Lacanian) Achilles, who can do nothing but pass the tortoise, and who, so to speak, passes it already with the first step, relating to it from the initially double or split standpoint of the Other.”⁵⁰ Where does this leave the tortoise? Zupančič’s response is that the tortoise signifies *objet a* as double-object: the lost object of desire (*vis-à-vis* masculine Achil-

les); loss as itself the object of *jouissance* (*vis-à-vis* feminine Achilles). In other words, the tortoise stands for what she calls the minimal difference separating the external lack conferred onto the economy of speech by paternal castration from the lack internal to being where the signifier of feminine *jouissance* is called forth by an originary ontological gap. This point of separation is the objectless site of “ex-sistence,”⁵¹ where the Real is situated on the edge of being and the void. This means that loss, or the elusive point of the Two that Badiou affirms axiomatically as the catalyst of the truth procedure, is doubled for Lacan without invoking a determined break from the discourse of lack implicit in the logic of the signifier. Reading Beckett’s poem in the context of feminine *jouissance* and its fictional construction (Lacan refers this construction to what he calls “the written”), we do not pass from the “something there” to the truth of the situation, but instead compose the paradoxical contours of the inconsistent being of the site of the Real. The not-all, accordingly, is nothingness neither affirmed nor denied, but negotiated in the fictional guise of the inexistent indeterminacy of feminine *jouissance*. Moreover, it is the tenuousness of this negotiation that distinguishes Lacan and Badiou at a crucial point of intersection with the concerns staged by Beckett’s poetry and prose: the effects and limitations placed on the horizon of sense by the void inherent to being. This is a subject that Badiou is not always willing to accommodate, militantly committed as he is to affirming the existence and the progressive composition of truths. Lacan, however, with his peculiar doubling of *objet a*, provides an alternate formulation of the experience of love and art, one that accommodates more explicitly the paradoxes and impasses of the dimension of the infinite. In short, both Lacan and Beckett supplement Badiou at the point in his thought where, as for instance in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Mallarmé is preferred to Beckett, since it is here that the writing of the infinite in the field of love is to be apprehended fictionally rather than axiomatically.

For Lacan, feminine *jouissance* leads us to believe that the logic of the non-all that determines, simultaneously, the incompleteness of being and the subject’s incessant attempts at achieving its completion (desire is the condition of responding to the non-all of being), appears as a structurally necessary gap that can only be intuited by its dynamic effects *within* language: “It’s not because she is not-wholly in the phallic function that she is not there at all. She is *not* not at all there. She is there in full. But there is something more.”⁵² We would be right to read the italicised “not” in the passage above as a double entendre with the logic of the knot that Lacan develops in the later chapters of Seminar XX (fortuitously, the English translation permits this), particularly the section “Rings of String,” where the

Borromean knot can only be said to ex-sist insofar as the configuration of its loops are held together symptomatically by a carefully constructed absence. Properly speaking, there is no identifiable knot in their configuration, yet they are paradoxically knotted together as an inseparable and incomplete One. This is how Lacan's formulation that "There's such a thing as One" should be read: "The One incarnated in language is something that remains indeterminate between the phoneme, the word, the sentence, and even the whole of thought. ... It is the signifier One, and it was no accident that, in order to illustrate the One, I brought to our last meeting that bit of string, insofar as it constitutes a ring, whose possible knot with another ring I began to investigate."⁵³ The knot, in this case, is retroactively instated as the absent principle that acts as the binding-cause of the structure.

It would seem that Lacan's use of knot theory would situate his thought closer to Badiou's on the subject of the infinite, as Lacan famously declares that "mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal."⁵⁴ However, Lacan's use of mathematical formalisation differs from Badiou's at the point of the written, where the sustainability of a mathematical structure depends on an active, or written, reassertion of the "ties that bind," so to speak, rather than on an axiom of foundation. Lacan is not interested in constructing sets, but rather with tying strings. His assertion that mathematical formalisation is the goal of psychoanalysis will have to be qualified to accommodate for the act, which is always a written act, of tying strings. Lacan does just this, offering the immediate clarification that "no formalization of language is transmissible without the use of language itself. It is in the very act of speaking that I make this formalization, this ideal metalanguage, exist."⁵⁵ As commentators such as Andrew Cutrofello have pointed out, Lacan's epistemology must be read in terms of a Möbius strip configuration, with the ideal of mathematical formalisation and the indecipherability of a *Finnegans Wake* composing the two indistinguishable sides of the Lacanian surface of thought. The benefit of this approach is that the mathematical ideal of psychoanalysis circulates around an inescapable point of formal composition and its translation into a communicable discourse, with the result that "we should not expect to be able to say whether the results will more closely resemble mathematics or poetry."⁵⁶ If this is the case, then Lacan cannot be charged with advocating an ideal metalanguage in the traditional sense of the term, as a totalising system of signification that hermetically captures the migratory presence of *jouissance*. What Lacan's Möbius strip-like formalisation reveals is the irreconcilable gap in being that maintains the enigmatic formulation that "I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking"; that my thinking of where I am is the very gesture that pushes my being elsewhere.⁵⁷ As Cutrofello remarks,

this is the gesture of modern science *par excellence*, and it serves to distinguish between the Heideggerian project of being-revealed with the Lacanian project of being-foreclosed: “[I]t is the difference between an attempt to re-establish reality [Heidegger] and an attempt to confront that loss of reality [Lacan], which is the true consequence of modern science.”⁵⁸

Lacan’s use of the Borromean structure is, accordingly, directly related to his non-axiomatic theory of the infinite and its affinity to a certain type of modernist writing—Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*—that comes to occupy the place of *objet a*. This place can be intuited through mathematical formalisation, but as soon as it desires to have real effects in the symbolic order, as a *para*-sense of truth, mathematics must be left behind and the signifier re-assumed. However, this will be a signifier forever struggling against its relentless attachment to the signified. *Objet a* is the site of this struggle, and so is founded on the void, but this does not lead into a formulaic mathematisation of how the literary truth of love, for instance, comes to be written. Here, Badiou refuses to accommodate the Beckettian aesthetic of aporia, which bears a stronger resemblance to the Lacanian notion of the written. Beckett, like Lacan, is unwilling to leave the void-point of sense in the formal security of an axiom of foundation, but rather integrates it and struggles with its indeterminacy at each point of the writing process. The Real/void, in other words, is not subject to a retroactive nomination in the future anterior of the truth procedure; the Real is the point of the nothing that, as Beckett suggests above, accompanies the artistic venture at each and every stage of its unfolding. Accordingly, turning to the non-axiomatic Lacanian infinite affords a greater conceptual accommodation not only of the modernist projects of both Beckett and Joyce, but of the modern experience of love as well.

We must be careful to distinguish between the logic of the signifier as it dominated Lacan’s earlier work, particularly in its implication in the dialectic of desire, and the function of the signifier as it is re-located in Lacan’s thought through the virtually indecipherable use of language in *Finnegans Wake*. Arriving at a revised theory of the signifier, one that is no longer restricted to the context of the sexual non-rapport, Lacan explains that the introduction of the signifier into the field of discourse produces a language-effect—“the signifier stuffs the signified”—that dissolves the coherence of a representational linguistic system. Instead, we end up with what he calls “linguistricks,” a form of writing that radically re-configures the coordinates of sense to the edge of semantic collapse.⁵⁹ Lacan’s notion of the written, then, is definitively not what passes as communicable language. Rather,

it is at the very point at which paradoxes spring up regarding everything that manages to be formulated as the effect of writing that be-

ing presents itself, always presents itself, by para-being. We should learn to conjugate that appropriately: I par-am, you par-are, he par-is, we par-are, and so on and so forth. It is in relation to the para-being that we must articulate what makes up for the sexual relationship qua non-existent. It is clear that, in everything that approaches it, language merely manifests its inadequacy. What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love.⁶⁰

Love does not complete the lack of sexual union, but *supplements* it as an effect of the written that “is never reached except by twisted pathways.”⁶¹ This point is key, as the function of the written in Lacanian discourse is not merely to nominate the position of lack around which the sexual relationship could be fused, nor is it to provide an avenue of mystical escapism into the densely interlaced society of signifiers in Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*; the supplementation inscribed in being through love is the aleatory inherence in the paradox of the infinite made present. In more direct Lacanian terms, the supplementary experience of love occurs in the disjunctive presence of the Other of the sexual relationship, the Other of feminine *jouissance* that is immediately inaccessible to the everyday encounter with other beings (via masculine desire). It is only through the encounter-*in* with the Other (the Other as the not-all of Woman) that the Lacanian written is found as the internal threat to the economy of sense. “All love,” Lacan writes, “subsisting only on the basis of the ‘stops not being written,’ tends to make the negation shift to the ‘doesn’t stop being written,’ doesn’t stop, won’t stop.”⁶² In a sense, Lacan’s psychoanalytic concept of love, and by extension the infinite-Two, can only take place in the relentlessness of the written. Lacan’s willingness to provide a non-axiomatic theory of the infinite, one that permits an *indefinite* experience with the impossibility of the Real, places his thought closer than Badiou’s to the artistic practice of Beckett.

“Finally,” Zupančič writes, “the miracle of love consists in ‘falling’ (and in continuing to stumble) because of the Real which emerges from the gap introduced by [a] ‘parallel montage’ of two semblances or appearances, that is to say, because of the real that emerges from the non-coincidence of the same.”⁶³ Zupančič’s description of love allows us to return to the doubling of the “as if” in Beckett’s poem, where the poetic effect is not so much to nominate the eventual presence of the “something there” that would initiate the beginning of a truth procedure, but to carve out an image-space predicated on the non-axiomatic site of the infinite-Two. It is this site that accommodates the spontaneous and dynamic immobility that occurs in the “the non-coincidence of the same.” To say that the Lacanian infinite is non-axiomatic is to affirm that it takes place not in the generic presentation of an infinite set that is predicated on the existence of an element—the sound—

caught on the “edge-of-the-void,” but in the moment that the limit-point of representation, the point of the Two, is assumed as the zone of the “not life,” of inexistence, that is wedged between the appearance of the “something there” and the secondary representation of its poetic effect.

Badiou's indebtedness to Beckett and Lacan is as difficult to underestimate as it is to articulate. Badiou's insistence on having surpassed both Beckett and Lacan by discovering the ontological actuality of a truth-event requires their modes of thinking throughout the construction of his (truly remarkable) philosophical system. What I have attempted to do in this article is to show where Badiou is indebted to Beckett and Lacan on the subjects of art and love, respectively, but also to show that both Beckett and Lacan refuse to follow Badiou across the threshold from subtraction to event, given their fidelity to writing's interminable indissociation from the void-point of the Real. Just as it is highly questionable whether Beckett ever escapes from the aporetic condition that punctuates *The Unnamable*—“you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on”⁶⁴—so too does Lacan appear to be unable to transcend the written complexity of feminine *jouissance* that *doesn't stop, won't stop*. In closing, let us turn once again to Badiou, who explicitly imputes a Beckettian vocabulary to the paradox of feminine *jouissance* in Lacan, and wonders whether what is missing in Lacan are the mathematical insights of set theory:

Perhaps one source of Lacan's difficulties lay in the paradox of the unnameable, a paradox that I will formulate as follows: if the unnameable [of feminine *jouissance*] is unique to the field of truth, is it not precisely named by this property? For if what is not named is unique, the 'not being named' functions as *its proper name*. Would not the unnameable ultimately be the proper name of the real of a situation traversed by its truth? Would not unsayable enjoyment be the name of the real of the subject, as soon as it has to come to terms in the cure-situation with his truth, or with a truth? But then the unnameable is named in truth, it is forced, and a truth's reserve of power is effectively boundless. Here again mathematics steps up to aid us.⁶⁵

To be sure, I am willing to concede to Badiou that mathematics *might* enable us to escape the paradox of the unnameable insofar as it is capable of naming the unnameable outside of language. This might very well be the case, yet I remain unconvinced that recourse to the matheme is an acceptable manoeuvre when trying to understand the discourses of art and love. Perhaps where philosophy endeavours to “seize” truths from the four generic sites where they reside, it nevertheless runs the risk of violating the

singularity of what makes these sites so unique and important, particularly, I claim, at the sites of art and love. “Philosophy, as discourse,” Badiou argues, “is thus an activity that constructs a fiction of knowledge and a fiction of art in superposition to one another. Philosophy *seizes* truths in the void that is opened in the gap or interval of the two functionings. This seizing is its act.”⁶⁶ “Discourse” and “act” are thus two different procedures, and it is the philosophical recourse to the matheme that allows Badiou, or so he would like to claim, to pass from discourse to act. The decision taken throughout this article has instead been to tarry with the torturous and interminable experience of inexistence that Beckett and Lacan inspire.

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NOTES

1 Samuel Beckett, “Something There,” *Collected Poems in English and French* (London: John Calder Ltd., 1977), 63.

2 I would like to thank Conall Cash, co-editor of *Colloquy*, for drawing my attention to the emphasis in these final lines in the French version of the poem.

3 Beckett, “Hors crane seul dedans,” in *Collected Poems in English and French* (London: John Calder Ltd., 1977), 62.

4 Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1984), 143.

5 Beckett, *How It Is* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1964), 129.

6 Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 136.

7 Beckett, *Disjecta*, 171.

8 Badiou insists that there are four truth procedures: “Philosophy is prescribed by conditions that constitute types of truth-or generic-procedure. These types are science (more precisely, the matheme), art (more precisely, the poem), politics, (more precisely, politics in interiority, or a politics of emancipation) and love (more precisely, the procedure that makes truth of the disjunction of sexuated positions)” (*Conditions*. Trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 23). For a more detailed account of what is “generic” about the logic of the truth procedure, refer to chapter 8, “On Subtraction”, of *Conditions*. Here Badiou explains how and why “these operations [of the truth procedure] are four in number: the undecidable, the indiscernible, the generic and the unnameable” (114). See also Peter Hallward’s excellent analysis of the truth procedure in *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 2003), 185–243.

9 Alain Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” trans. Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia* 2 (2007): 39.

10 Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 525.

11 Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” 39.

12 Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 80.

13 *Ibid.*, 81.

14 *Ibid.*, 85.

15 In the technical language deployed in *Being and Event*, Badiou defines the void thus: “the void of a situation is the suture to its being. Non-one of any count-as-one (except within the ontological situation), the void is that unplaceable point which shows that the that-which-presents wanders throughout the presentation in the form of a subtraction from the count” (526).

16 Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 53.

17 Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958), 374.

18 Badiou makes several significant statements throughout his work about the importance to his philosophy of the relation between Beckett and Mallarmé. In *Handbook of Inaesthetics* he writes that “perhaps the entire difference between Beckett and Mallarme lies here. The first forbids sleep, as he forbids death. One must remain awake. For the second, after the work of poetry, one can return to the shade—through the suspension of the question, through the saving interruption.... In this regard, I approve of his [Mallarmé] being a French faun, rather than an Irish insomniac” (trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 121). Beckett’s prose, in other words, belongs to a pre-evental situation, whereas it is Mallarmé’s poetry that provides Badiou with an instance of how the event enters into the field of appearance, decision, and subjective fidelity.

19 Beckett, *Nohow On: Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1996), 82.

20 Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 269.

21 Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 251.

22 *Ibid.*, 122.

23 Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 48.

24 Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou*, 279–90.

25 Beckett, *Disjecta*, 139.

26 *Ibid.*, 113.

27 Beckett, *Three Novels*, 192.

28 It is worth pointing out that nowhere in his writings does Beckett seem to consider the concept of the axiom, though there is evidence that his work does intend to resist the philosophical and aesthetic import of *something like* an axiom of deci-

sion.

29 Jacques Lacan. *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 59.

30 Part of Badiou's polemical project in *Logics of Worlds* is to break with the philosophy and culture of the "postmodern": "Postmodern is one of the possible names for contemporary democratic materialism. Negri is right about what the postmoderns 'know': the body is the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment.... Moreover, it is essentially a *democratic* materialism. That is because the contemporary consensus, in recognizing the plurality of languages, presupposes their juridical equality" (2; italics in original). For Badiou, then, what he calls "democratic materialism" aims at the entwined philosophical legacy of vitalism and poststructuralism

29 In his essay "The Adventure of French Philosophy", published in the *New Left Review*, Badiou gives a more nuanced and detailed reading of the intellectual context and history of French philosophy. Badiou delineates the "moment" of French thought between "Sartre's foundational work, *Being and Nothingness*, [which] appeared in 1943 and the last writings of Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, [which] date from the early 1990s. The moment of French philosophy develops between the two of them, and includes Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan as well as Sartre and Deleuze—and myself, maybe" (September-October 2005, 67–8). In addition to the importance that Badiou also gives to pre-War vitalist philosophy, principally Bergson's 1911 lectures at Oxford, he also attributes the origins of the post-War French moment to the mathematically inclined philosophy of Leon Brunschvicq.

32 Badiou, *Conditions*, 4.

33 *Ibid.*, 6.

34 Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 1.

35 Badiou, *Conditions*, 223; italics mine.

36 In *Being and Event*, Badiou will by-pass the constructivist claim that "if it is quite possible to demonstrate that some sets are constructible, *it is impossible to demonstrate that some sets are not*.... How indeed can one explicitly define such a multiple without, at the same time, showing it to be constructible? Certainly, we shall see that this aporia of the indeterminate, of the indiscernible, can be circumvented; that much is guaranteed—such is the entire point of the thought of the generic" (299–300). Lacan, by implication, would deny the existence of a generic infinite.

37 Badiou, *Conditions*, 214.

38 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 103.

39 *Ibid.*, 103.

40 Badiou, *Conditions*, 213

41 *Ibid.*, 213.

42 *Ibid.*, 215.

43 "The relationship with the Other," writes Emmanuel Levinas, "the face-to-face

with the Other, the encounter with a face that at once gives and conceals the Other, is the situation in which an event happens to a subject who does not assume it, who is utterly unable in this regard, but where none the less in a certain way it is in front of the subject" ("Time and the Other," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand and trans. Richard A. Cohen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 45).

44 Ibid., 218.

45 Ibid., 219.

46 It is important to note that the foundation of the axiom is not *recognisable* as such, and not that it does not exist. Otherwise, the truth procedure would have as its origin a miracle: "Set theory ontology thereby affirms, through the mediation of the Other, that even though the presentation can be infinite it is always marked by finitude *when it comes to its origin*. Here, this finitude is the existence of a site, on the edge of the void; historicity" (Badiou, *Being and Event*, 187).

47 Badiou, *Conditions*, 224–5.

48 Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23.

49 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 8.

50 Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, 148.

51 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 121.

52 Ibid., 74.

53 Ibid., 143–4.

54 Ibid., 119.

55 Ibid., 119.

56 Andrew Cutrofello, "The Ontological Status of Lacan's Mathematical Paradigms," in *Reading Seminar XX*, eds. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 143.

57 Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 430.

58 Cutrofello, "The Ontological Status of Lacan's Mathematical Paradigms," 157.

59 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 37.

60 Ibid., 45.

61 Ibid., 95.

62 Ibid., 145.

63 Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, 175.

64 Beckett, *Three Novels*, 414.

65 Badiou, *Conditions*, 142.

66 Ibid., 23.