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THIS PHILOSOPHY WHICH IS NOT ONE:

*Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian Antiphilosophy*

Jacques Lacan says very little about what, in his later life and teachings, he calls “antiphilosophy.” The negation of the oldest of the academic professions, he proposes this field in 1975 as an area of study for those who have been exposed to psychoanalysis in the context of a university education.<sup>1</sup> Five years later, just as he is dissolving his *École freudienne* and winding down *le Séminaire*, Lacan, speaking again of antiphilosophy, declares, “*I rebel*, if I can say, against philosophy.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite (or, maybe, because of) the fact that Lacan leaves behind merely two brief mentions of antiphilosophy, a fair amount of ink has been spilled on this topic since Lacan’s death by some of his most able readers—in particular, Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, François Regnault, and Colette Soler. Perhaps they were provoked by understandable perplexity, for Lacan’s entire intellectual trajectory of course involves a sustained, recurrent reliance upon philosophy.<sup>3</sup> As Regnault correctly observes, citations of Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, among others, in Lacan’s work are nearly as ubiquitous as references to Freud.<sup>4</sup> In Regnault’s reading, the philosophy at stake in Lacanian antiphilosophy isn’t so much philosophy in general as the then-current antipsychoanalytic philosophy of the anti-Oedipal duo, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.<sup>5</sup> Slavoj Žižek endorses this reading, asking, “which (singular) philosophy did Lacan have in mind; which philosophy was, for him, a stand-in for philosophy ‘as such?’”<sup>6</sup> Žižek claims that Lacan has

1. Jacques Lacan, “Peut-être à Vincennes...” *Autres écrits*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001) 314-35.

2. Jacques Lacan, “Monsieur A.,” *Ornicar?* 21-22 (Summer 1980): 17.

3. Jean-Claude Milner, *L’Œuvre claire: Lacan, la science, la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995) 146.

4. François Regnault, “L’antiphilosophie selon Lacan,” *Conférences d’esthétique lacanienne* (Paris: Agalma, 1997) 61.

5. Regnault, 61-2, 73.

6. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999) 250.

Deleuze's thought in view as a philosophical stance epitomizing a "false subversive radicalization that fits the existing power constellation perfectly" in the climate of post-May '68 Paris.<sup>7</sup> Apropos of a generalized concept of antiphilosophy, Badiou advances a claim dovetailing with Regnault's and Žižek's observations—"Each antiphilosopher chooses the philosophers that he intends to make into canonical examples of emptied and vain speech"<sup>8</sup> (that is, the "anti-" of antiphilosophy is always relative to particular philosophers and/or philosophies, rather than to Philosophy per se, if such a thing even exists at all).

But, as with his technical formalized graphs and "mathemes" (the latter discussed below), Lacan's precious few sentences regarding his rebellion against the philosophical—offering no specifications for what, precisely, Lacan takes "philosophy" to be—function somewhat like Rorschach ink blots, supporting the projections of multiple divergent interpretations. Whereas both Regnault and Žižek detect a disparagement of philosophical tendencies prevailing within France's restless student bodies of the late 1960s and 1970s, Soler construes the later Lacanian denigration of philosophy as going with, rather than against, the flow of its contemporaneous socio-cultural *Zeitgeist* in the wake of May '68; Soler depicts this Lacan as participating in the widespread (quasi/pseudo-)Marxist devaluation of theoretical thought as being hopelessly embedded in ideologically compromised superstructural strata of *status quo* society.<sup>9</sup>

Although antiphilosophy à la Lacan has given rise to such exegetical discrepancies, those who have addressed this topic nonetheless converge on a specific shared hypothesis regarding its significance: Milner, Badiou, Regnault, and Soler are united in their agreement that it is neither by accident nor coincidence that Lacan's announced insurgency against philosophy comes at a time when his institutional circumstances involve issues to do with the teaching and transmission of psychoanalysis in academic settings.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Lacan's initial use of the term, in "*Peut-être à Vincennes...*" defines antiphilosophy as an "investigation of what university discourse owes to its supposed 'educational' function."<sup>11</sup> As is well known, the phrase "university discourse" is part of Lacan's theory of the four discourses (the other three being those of the master, hysteric, and analyst), a theory first elaborated at length in the seventeenth seminar of 1969-1970 (*L'envers de la psychanalyse*).

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7. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 250-51.

8. Alain Badiou, *L'antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein* (Caen: Nous, 2009) 9.

9. Colette Soler, "Lacan en antiphilosophie," *Filozofski vestnik: Philosophie, psychanalyse: alliance ou mésalliance?* ed. Jelica Šumič-Riha, 27. 2 (2006) 121-44, 121.

10. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 146-48; Alain Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan: Séminaire 1994-1995* (unpublished), first course, <http://www.entretiens.asso.fr/Badiou/94-95.htm> [accessed July 18, 2010]; Alain Badiou, "The Formulas of L'Étourdit," trans. Scott Savaiano, *Lacanian Ink* 27 (Spring 2006): 81; Regnault, "L'antiphilosophie selon Lacan," 62-63; Soler, "Lacan en antiphilosophie," 122.

11. Lacan, "Peut-être à Vincennes..." , 314.

This essay will focus on Milner's and Badiou's readings of Lacanian antiphilosophy with an eye to establishing that Lacan is not so much an antiphilosopher (his isolated 1980 proclamation and associated utterances notwithstanding), as a paraphilosopher, so to speak, whose interweavings of the psychoanalytic and the philosophical pave the way for cutting-edge developments in European/European-inspired philosophy—developments concerning which Badiou is himself one of the most prominent figures today. But before turning to this critical examination, I will quickly explore those of Lacan's pronouncements pertaining to university discourse and philosophy that are roughly contemporaneous with his truncated discussion of antiphilosophy.

Lacan tends to closely associate philosophy with university discourse. Since Kant, philosophers have usually been professors. In his fifteenth seminar (*Lacte psychanalytique*, 1967-1968), Lacan contrasts his analytic discourse with the discourse of these appointed academic "subjects supposed to know," maintaining that the latter will likely resist and be hostile to what he has to say as an analyst.<sup>12</sup> The following year, in a seminar conducted during the immediate aftermath of May '68 (*D'un Autre à l'autre*, 1968-1969), Lacan characterizes the reign of (neo-)liberal capitalism as ushering in the dominance of "science" qua the authority of university discourse, in which "knowledge" (*savoir* as S2) is in the "agent" position of this matheme-schema.<sup>13</sup> This claim is subsequently reiterated in the seventeenth seminar (*L'envers de la psychanalyse*, 1969-1970<sup>14</sup>) with Lacan pointing out that, according to his formalized theory of the four discourses, the discourse of the university is proximate to that of the master insofar as the former is generated through a mere "quarter turn" of the latter.<sup>15</sup> (As Lacan puts it in the eighteenth seminar, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 1971, "the university discourse can only be articulated if it starts from the discourse of the master."<sup>16</sup>) Similarly, the (apparent) locus of agency in each of the four discourses, knowledge as S2 in the case of university discourse, is a "semblance" beneath which lies its "truth" (*vérité*), the "master signifier" qua S1 underpinning and governing the *savoir* of academic agents (put crudely, the knowledge of university discourse ultimately rests upon and serves the arbitrary anchors [S1s] of power).<sup>17</sup> In the academic year of 1971-1972, Lacan continues to stress the following points: the knowledge produced by the discourse of the university, with

12. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XV: Lacte psychanalytique, 1967-1968* (unpublished), session of February 28th, 1968.

13. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre, 1968-1969* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006) 239-40.

14. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007) 31.

15. Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, 168.

16. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1971*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006) 43.

17. Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, 169; Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008) 251-52.

which analytic discourse should not be confused, ultimately buttresses the power of capitalism and makes it more effective;<sup>18</sup> University discourse, epitomized by the history of philosophy, generates a knowledge that is a dissimulating ideology, bolstering whoever happens to be the given *status quo* master.<sup>19</sup> In the twentieth seminar (*Encore*, 1972-1973), Lacan flatly identifies “philosophical discourse in its true light” as “a variation on the master’s discourse.”<sup>20</sup> Soler’s reading of Lacanian antiphilosophy, as being very much of its time, is by no means unjustified. Furthermore Badiou, with his interest in defending the philosophical tradition from its detractors and eulogizers, insists that philosophy as such is “diagonal” to Lacan’s four discourses (that is, it cannot be reduced to any of these structural schemas).<sup>21</sup>

Curiously, while citing 1975’s “*Peut-être à Vincennes...*” and 1980’s “*Monsieur A.*,” previous discussions of Lacanian antiphilosophy have neglected Lacan’s 1974 interview with journalists in Rome, “*Le triomphe de la religion*.” The section of this interview, entitled by Jacques-Alain Miller, “*Ne pas philosophe*,” begins with the interviewer prefacing a question with the phrase, “In your philosophy...” Lacan interrupts, snapping back, “I am not at all a philosopher.”<sup>22</sup> When the questioner specifies that by “philosophy” he/she means an “ontological concept” (*nozione ontologica*) such as Lacan’s “metaphysics of the real,” he/she is met by another, similarly blunt negation—“It is not at all ontological”<sup>23</sup> (the evidence from this period of Lacan’s theorizing strongly suggests he entirely equates philosophy with ontology, unsympathetically viewing the latter as a systematic *Weltanschauung*, an intellectually bankrupt and laughable “theory of everything” grounded on the supposition that being is an ultimately coherent and unified substantial whole, a seamless One.<sup>24</sup> Regnault reasonably proposes that the undermining of the ontological worldviews of academic/university philosophy is a key mission of Lacanian antiphilosophy, which does not attempt to pose as an alternate worldview<sup>25</sup>). When the interviewer then describes

18. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971-1972* (unpublished), session of December 2nd, 1971.

19. Lacan, Seminar XIX: *Le savoir du psychanalyste*, session of May 4th, 1972; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: ...ou pire, 1971-1972* (unpublished), session of June 21st, 1972.

20. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Bruce Fink, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998) 39.

21. Alain Badiou, “Lacan et Platon: Le mathème est-il une idée?,” *Lacan avec les philosophes*, ed. Collège international de philosophie, (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1991) 148.

22. Lacan, “Le triomphe de la religion,” *Le triomphe de la religion, précède de Discours aux catholiques*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 96.

23. Lacan, “Le triomphe de la religion,” 96.

24. Lacan, Seminar XIX: *...ou pire*, session of June 21st, 1972); Lacan, Seminar XX: *Encore*, 30-1; Adrian Johnston, “Conflicted Matter: Jacques Lacan and the Challenge of Secularizing Materialism,” *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* (Spring 2008): 184-85; Adrian Johnston, “Life Terminable and Interminable: The Undead and the Afterlife of the Afterlife—A Friendly Disagreement with Martin Hägglund,” *New Centennial Review* 9.1 (Spring 2009): 168-69.

25. Regnault, “L’antiphilosophie selon Lacan,” 64, 66, 73.

the Lacanian Real as Kantian, Lacan, evidently assuming (like Hegel) that for Kant the noumenal realm of thing-in-itself beyond the limits of possible experience forms a consistent totality, retorts:

But this is not at all Kantian. It is even on this that I insist. If there is a notion of the real, it is extremely complex, and on this account it is not perceivable in a manner that would make a totality. It would be an unbelievably presumptuous notion to think that there would be an all of the real.<sup>26</sup>

A short while later in the conversation, Lacan exclaims, “I do not make any philosophy; on the contrary, I am wary of it like the plague.”<sup>27</sup> He immediately goes on to mention his topological Borromean knotting of the registers of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary as central to a non-philosophical, non-Kantian handling of the Real in analysis<sup>28</sup> (similarly, Soler and Badiou both note Lacan’s opposition to a Kantian-style critical cordoning off of the Real as an absolutely inaccessible noumenal ‘x’<sup>29</sup>). At this juncture, things become especially puzzling.

Clearly, the Lacan of “*Le triomphe de la religion*” thrusts to the fore his topologized, analytic register theory as antithetical to the all-encompassing fictions of philosophical ontology (with even Kant’s critical-transcendental framework implicitly accused of harboring unanalysed vestiges of traditional substance metaphysics). By contrast, the temporally proximate Lacan of the twenty-third and twenty-fifth seminars (*Le sinthome*, 1975-1976 and *Le moment de conclure*, 1977-1978) appears to sing a quite different tune. The Lacan of *Le sinthome* wants to forge a “*foliesophie*”<sup>30</sup> (that is, a neologism involving an acoustic resonance between “philo-” and “*folie*,” madness); he speaks of “supplementing” a “certain lack” in philosophy with his Borromean knot, thereby creating “the first philosophy that it appears to me supports itself.”<sup>31</sup> Stranger still, in 1977, addressing his lifelong engagement with the theory and practice of analysis, Lacan confesses:

That which I do there...” is of philosophy...” My Borromean knots are philosophy too. It is philosophy that I have handled as I have been able to in following the current, if I can say, the current that results from the philosophy of Freud.<sup>32</sup>

All of these vacillations on Lacan’s part are sandwiched in time between his two explicit uses of the word “antiphilosophy.” Two reactions to the above are to be

26. Lacan, “Le triomphe de la religion,” 96-7.

27. Lacan, “Le triomphe de la religion,” 101.

28. Lacan, “Le triomphe de la religion,” 101.

29. Soler, “Lacan en antiphilosophie,” 123-4; Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, seventh course; Badiou, “The Formulas of L’Étourdit,” 91-2.

30. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975-1976*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 128.

31. Lacan, Seminar XXIII: *Le sinthome*, 144-45.

32. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXV: Le moment de conclure, 1977-1978* (unpublished), session of December 20th, 1977.

avoided, at least at the present stage: the first is to leap to the conclusion that Lacan is merely inconsistent, carelessly contradicting himself in rapid succession as regards his fraught *rapport* with philosophy; the second is to rush to smooth over these inconsistencies with various interpretations of a (perhaps overly) charitable nature. Instead, my approach here will be to pass through an exploration of Milner's and Badiou's overlapping treatments of Lacanian antiphilosophy (with additional references to Regnault, Soler, and Žižek) so as to arrive at a better perspective on Lacan's final positioning of himself and psychoanalysis *vis-à-vis* philosophy.

In 1990, Milner and Badiou each presented a paper at the conference, *Lacan avec les philosophes*, organized by the Collège international de philosophie. Both made references to Lacan's antiphilosophy on this occasion.<sup>33</sup> As will become evident, Milner's and Badiou's interpretations of Lacan's ambivalent relationship with philosophy overlap considerably. Beginning with Milner, the final section of the penultimate fourth chapter ("*Le second classicisme lacanien*") of his magnificent book *L'Œuvre claire: Lacan, la science, la philosophie* (1995) is devoted to "*L'antiphilosophie*." One of Milner's arguments there is that Lacan's late turn against the philosophical tradition, a tradition to which he refers constantly, must be understood as intimately bound up with what Milner characterizes as the "hyperstructuralism" of Lacan's "second classicism,"<sup>34</sup> namely, the paradigm centered on the doctrine of the *mathème* holding sway in the later period of his teachings (especially during the 1970s).<sup>35</sup> Milner equates Lacanian antiphilosophy with this doctrine, thus positing an antinomy between, on the one side, a transmissible, mathematical-style formalization of psychoanalysis, and, on the other side, what Lacan understands by "philosophy" in the final phase of his theorizing.<sup>36</sup>

Consisting of a plethora of letters, numbers, formulas, and diagrams, Lacan's *mathèmes* constitute his attempts to formalize his analytic insights. Why does he engage in this struggle to distill his reflections on psychoanalysis into the skeletal configurations of scientific-style symbolizations? Arguably, Lacan reaches for such representations motivated by his suspicion that part of what delivers Freud into the hands of his bastardizers and betrayers (that is, non-Lacanian post-Freudians) is the latter's speciously accessible and deceptively clear prose, a writing style that lulls readers into complacent misreadings because its apparently ordinary language seems too easily to "make sense" (an illustration of Lacan's dictum accord-

33. Badiou, "Lacan et Platon," pg. 135; Jean-Claude Milner, "Lacan et la science moderne," *Lacan avec les philosophes*, 348.

34. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, pg. 117-158; Jean-Claude Milner, *Le périple structural: Figures et paradigme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002) 153-18; Jean-Claude Milner, "Interview with Jean-Claude Milner (with Knox Peden)," *Concept and Form: The Cahiers pour l'Analyse and Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Peter Hallward, Christian Kerlake, and Knox Peden, (London: Verso Books, forthcoming).

35. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 147-48.

36. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 148, 150-51, 154.

ing to which understanding entails misunderstanding<sup>37</sup>). Of course, this goes some way toward explaining Lacan's notoriously cryptic fashions of expressing himself in light of his "return to Freud." But, what is more, it also clarifies the link between the doctrine of the *matheme* and the recurring theme of transmission. Contemporaneous with his declaration of insurgency against philosophy during a period when the place of psychoanalysis in the university is at stake, Lacan, speaking of the *matheme* in the ancient Greek sense of *ta mathemata* (that is, that which can be taught and passed on without loss),<sup>38</sup> repeatedly emphasizes that his formalizations function in the service of rendering his analytic concepts integrally transmissible.<sup>39</sup> The implicit contrasting case is Freud, whose concepts, couched in non-formalized writing, proved themselves vulnerable to corrupting, perverted mistransmissions. And yet, in an irony not to be missed, Lacan's *mathemes* can be seen as pillars of a new Tower of Babel inasmuch as, not self-evident in their own interpretations, they have given rise to thriving pluralities of incommensurable readings (although, admittedly, Lacan shows an awareness of this danger—for instance, with respect to these *mathemes*, he remarks, "they are not transmitted without the help of language, and that's what makes the whole thing shaky"<sup>40</sup>).

However, the significance of Lacan's increasing mobilization of *mathemes* in the '60s and '70s also has to do with issues of communication and understanding (as miscommunication and misunderstanding) apropos not only of the practice of analytic pedagogy (that is, the educational teaching and transmission of analysis), but also the very objects of metapsychological theory (that is, the *parlêtre* as subject of the unconscious). In his discussion of Lacanian antiphilosophy, Milner asserts that philosophy (at least in this context) remains completely wedded to its archaic roots in a pre-modern ethos concerned with the enrichment of the soul (*psuchê*, *âme*) through the acquisition of meaningful wisdom. Milner's contention is that the advent of modern science—following Alexandre Koyré, as does Lacan, he privileges Galileo's mathematization of the study of nature as the founding gesture of scientific modernity<sup>41</sup>—shatters the pre-modern fantasized wholeness of the closed cos-

37. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Russell Grigg, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) 163-64.

38. Martin Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," trans. W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) 273-78.

39. Lacan, Seminar XIX: *...ou pire*, sessions of December 15th, 1971, April 19th, 1972; Lacan, Seminar XIX: *Le savoir du psychanalyste*, session of May 4th, 1972; Lacan, Seminar XX: *Encore*, 110, 119; Jacques Lacan, "L'étourdit," *Autres écrits*, 472, 482-83; Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 122-23.

40. Lacan, Seminar XX: *Encore*, 110.

41. Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958) 99, 278; Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006) 235-39; Jacques Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," *Écrits*, pg. 299-300; Jacques Lacan, "On an Ex Post Facto Syllabary," *Écrits*, 608; Jacques Lacan, "Science and Truth," *Écrits*, 726-27; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques*

mos with which the wisdom-loving soul of the philosopher is entangled.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, unlike the philosophical tradition which (still) allegedly lags behind the early seventeenth-century revolutionary rupture signified by the proper name “Galileo,” psychoanalysis, according to Milner, is entirely in synch with modern science<sup>43</sup> (as is common knowledge, Lacan considers this new scientificity an historical condition of possibility for the subsequent emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis nearly three centuries later<sup>44</sup>). Hence, among other of its agendas, Lacan’s antiphilosophy perhaps aims to draw attention to the fact that the philosophical (and quotidian) conception of psychoanalysis, as a depth hermeneutics in search of the profound meaning of psychical suffering, is a hopelessly wrong-headed misreading of Freud and his place in the history of ideas.

Soler rightly reminds readers that Freud’s discovery of the unconscious poses a series of fundamental challenges to traditional philosophy.<sup>45</sup> Buttressing Milner’s position, she maintains that the later Lacan comes to place his faith in mathemes modeled on scientific formulas because anti-ancient, mathematized modern science does not “think”<sup>46</sup>—with thinking associated here with modes of cognition that are prone to endow things with sense and significance (indeed, traditional philosophy certainly thinks in this manner). In the post-Galilean universe, the Real of mathematically-parsed material being, although anything but ineffable and unknowable, is meaningless, decoupled from the ordered, organizing plans of final causes as guarantees of rhyme and reason.

A couple of months prior to his second and final self-identification as an antiphilosopher, Lacan, in his “Letter of Dissolution” announcing the end of his *École freudienne*, presents his “obstinacy on the path of mathemes” as a struggle against “meaning” qua “always religious.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, atheistic psychoanalysis is op-

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*Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988) 298-99; Lacan, Seminar III: Psychoses, 238; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIII: L’objet de la psychanalyse, 1965-1966* (unpublished), session of December 8th, 1965; Lacan, Seminar XX: Encore, 81-2; Milner, *L’Œuvre claire*, 9, 37-53; Jean-Claude Milner, “De la linguistique à la linguisterie,” *Lacan, l’écrit, l’image*, ed. l’École de la Cause freudienne (Paris: Flammarion, 2000) 8; Adrian Johnston, “Turning the Sciences Inside Out: Revisiting Lacan’s ‘Science and Truth,’” *Concept and Form* (forthcoming).

42. Milner, *L’Œuvre claire*, 148-49.

43. Milner, *L’Œuvre claire*, 149.

44. Lacan, “Position of the Unconscious,” *Écrits*, 712; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977) 47, 231; Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005) 61-71; Johnston, “Turning the Sciences Inside Out.”

45. Soler, “Lacan en antiphilosophie,” 124-25.

46. Soler, “Lacan en antiphilosophie,” 142-43.

47. Lacan, “Letter of Dissolution,” trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990) 130.



posed to the essence of religiosity, the latter rendered as the infusion of purposiveness, sense, or significance into being, existence, reality, the world, etc. (in his seminar on Lacan's antiphilosophy, Badiou indisputably has this statement from 1980 in mind when he describes the doctrine of the *matheme* as a countermeasure to the fact that psychoanalysis is "constantly threatened with being a hermeneutic of sense," with "Lacan imputing to philosophy a religious recovery of sense"<sup>48</sup>). Combining this with Milner's and Soler's previously mentioned observations, a stark opposition between two chains of equivalences becomes apparent in the final stretch of Lacan's teachings: religion-philosophy-meaning (grounded and totalized in the ancient finite cosmos) versus psychoanalysis-antiphilosophy-meaninglessness ([un-]grounded and detotalized in the modern infinite universe).

In her exegesis of Lacan's revolt *contra* philosophy, Soler refers to the Lacanian "anticognitivist thesis" according to which "thought is *jouissance*,"<sup>49</sup> a thesis she dwells on at some length.<sup>50</sup> Both Badiou and François Balmès similarly identify *jouissance* as that which is granted no proper place in classical philosophy/ontology.<sup>51</sup> As with so many things that initially appear enigmatic and mysterious in Lacan's musings, returning to Freud is both helpful and crucial for illuminating the reasoning behind these assertions. At root, what connects all of the above is Freud's conception of primary-process-style mentation as characteristic of unconscious thinking.<sup>52</sup> Devoid of innate ideas, Jungian archetypes and the like—as a hard-wired foundational basis of necessary deep meanings—the Freudian psyche acquires its contingent contents over the course of temporally elongated ontogenetic subject formation. These contents, furnished thus and registered in the form of ideational representations (Freud's *Vorstellungen* and Lacan's signifiers), come under the driving influence of primary processes as libidinally charged (that is, *jouissance*-saturated) psychological dynamics chaining together concatenations of mental materials with no regard for considerations of sense, significance, communicability, or comprehensibility whatsoever. These latter are the concerns of secondary-process-style mentation, as usually governing conscious cognition (and here we circumnavigate back to one of Soler's earlier remarks: philosophy "thinks" in a secondary process mode, a mode circumvented by Lacan's analytic *mathemes*. The thinking she equates with *jouissance*, on the other hand, is quite distinct and is associated with the primary process).

The ensemble of Lacan's later concepts emerging cotemporaneously with his announced move onto the terrain of antiphilosophy (for example, the letter, *lalangue*,

48. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, third, fourth, sixth, and seventh courses.

49. Soler, "Lacan en antiphilosophie," 127.

50. Soler, "Lacan en antiphilosophie," 128-29, 131-32, 134.

51. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, sixth course; François Balmès, *Ce que Lacan dit de l'être (1953-1960)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999) 206.

52. Adrian Johnston, "Sigmund Freud," *The History of Continental Philosophy, Volume III: The New Century*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson, *The History of Continental Philosophy, Eight Volumes*, ed. Alan Schrift, Chesham: Acumen Press (forthcoming).

and *jouis-sens*, enjoy-meant) can be seen as extensions of Freud's insight into the primary processes. According to this insight from the origins of psychoanalysis, networks and webs of associations that are meaningless from the standpoint of self-consciousness' awareness (associations hinging on the acoustic and graphic resemblances between *Vorstellungen*/signifiers as material rather than meaningful) comprise the unconscious grounds of psychical life itself. If philosophy peers introspectively into the presumed depths of the soul (*âme*) in order to discover profound *a priori* meanings anchoring the unified self in its relations with the world as a coherent global whole, Freudian psychoanalysis, as developed by Lacan, is antiphilosophical insofar as it scans the surfaces of the *S*-qua-*parlêtre* to detect traces of the Real, of a strange thoughtless thinking out-of-joint with sensible worldly reality—a thinking in which currents of *jouissance* (as *jouis-sens*) concatenate *a posteriori* fragments of phonemes, words, images, and memories in movements whose susceptibility to formal delineation and analytic interpretation makes them no less senseless relative to common, conscious sense. The sub-title of Milner's *L'Œuvre claire*, in which Lacan's name is linked to science as well as philosophy ("*Lacan, la science, la philosophie*") might be recalled here: just as scientific equations such as " $E = mc^2$ " ultimately do nothing more than descriptively encircle facets of a universe with no transcendent, metaphysical Other or Elsewhere—the sheer, brute givenness of immanent materiality in its inexplicable contingency is science's one-and-only Ground Zero, that which it represents without adding any supplementary meaning or guarantee of necessary significance—so, too, do Lacan's mathemes, equally as meaningless as the mathematical formulas of physics, reflect the baseless base of subjectivity's structures as beneath or beyond the spheres of sense.

Milner concludes his remarks on antiphilosophy in Lacanian psychoanalysis by placing psychoanalysis and philosophy in relation to the dialectic of contingency and necessity foreshadowed above. Focusing on the subject, the notion constituting the core hub of intersection between Lacanian theory and the philosophical tradition, he states:

The point of intervention of psychoanalysis is very nicely summarized thus: the passage from the anterior instant where the speaking being would have been able to be infinitely other than it is—in its body and thought—to the ulterior instant where the speaking being, due to its very contingency, has become entirely the same as an eternal necessity. For in the end psychoanalysis speaks of only one thing: the conversion of each subjective singularity into a law as necessary as the laws of nature, also as contingent as them and as absolute.<sup>53</sup>

Milner continues:

Yet, it is true that philosophy has not ceased to treat this instant. In a sense, one would be able to maintain that it has properly invented it. But, to describe it, it has generally taken the paths of the outside-the-universe (*hors-*

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53. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 153.

*univers*). Yet, psychoanalysis is nothing if it does not maintain, as the pivot of its doctrine, that there is no outside-the-universe. There and only there resides that which is structural and non-chronological in its relation to modern science.<sup>54</sup>

In a sense, the claims in these passages tap into a line of thought present in Lacan's theorizations at least as early as his mid-1950s discussions of Poe's "The Purloined Letter"<sup>55</sup> (that is, well before the dominance of the antiphilosophical mathemes in the 1970s and start of the 1980s). Simply put, Lacan consistently remains committed to models of subject formation in which a scaffolding of firm, law-like structural constraints shaping subjectivity (that is, apparent necessities regulating the vicissitudes of psychical life) emerges via a bottom-up genesis in the interplay between primary-process-level dynamics (including the libidinal economy, *jouissance*, drives, and desires) and arbitrary sets of signifiers *qua* *Vorstellungen* (that is, imposed contingencies stamped upon the psyche by chance experiences, encounters, relationships, etc.). In Milner's reading, philosophy errs in that it seeks to stabilize this groundless ground of contingency by slipping under it the imagined depth of a supposedly solid bedrock of final, irreducible meaning/sense (that is, an "outside-the-universe," with "universe" designating the post-Galilean plane of mathematized materialities, as a metaphysical and/or theological "other scene" giving reason to existence by rationally orchestrating the order of things). As Badiou puts it, "Philosophy operates, in Lacan's eyes, by affirming that there is such a thing as a meaning or sense of truth (*sens de la vérité*)."<sup>56</sup>

Milner, Regnault, and Badiou all agree that, for Lacan, philosophy and antiphilosophy are not simply and diametrically opposed to one another as mutually exclusive entities. For Milner, "psychoanalysis has not only the right, but the obligation to speak of that which philosophy speaks, because it has exactly the same objects."<sup>57</sup> For Regnault, the "anti-" of "antiphilosophy" "is to be understood, no longer in the sense of contradiction."<sup>58</sup> For Badiou, the issue is particularly complicated. On the one hand, just as Regnault describes psychoanalysis as on "the opposite shore,"<sup>59</sup> bordering the same river as philosophy—this is another way of articulating Milner's assertion that philosophy and psychoanalysis share common points of reference—Badiou, too, grants that Lacanian theory is quite proximate to philosophy in that it applies itself to an identical ensemble of topics<sup>60</sup> (in a related vein, he recognizes Plato's Socrates as the first analyst<sup>61</sup>). Nonetheless, he repeatedly and

54. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 153.

55. Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" *Écrits*, 30-48; Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego*, 181-86, 192-94.

56. Badiou, "The Formulas of L'Étourdit," 82.

57. Milner, *L'Œuvre claire*, 153.

58. Regnault, "L'antiphilosophie selon Lacan," 73.

59. Regnault, "L'antiphilosophie selon Lacan," 73.

60. Badiou, "Lacan et Platon," 153-54.

61. Badiou, "Lacan et Platon," 147.

emphatically insists that Lacan is unambiguously the partisan of an antiphilosophy to be rigorously and sharply distinguished from philosophy proper.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, Badiou devotes his seminar of the academic year 1994-1995 to “The Antiphilosophy of Lacan,” which was itself preceded by year-long seminars on the two other figures he singles out, along with Lacan, as the great antiphilosophers of the current age: Nietzsche (“The Antiphilosophy of Nietzsche,” 1992-1993) and Wittgenstein (“The Antiphilosophy of Wittgenstein,” 1993-1994). In addition to the seminar on Lacanian antiphilosophy, three other of Badiou’s texts focus on Lacan’s tricky placement of himself with respect to philosophy (not including the numerous references to and lines of influence stemming from Lacan that are scattered throughout Badiou’s corpus from its earliest years up through the present): “*La psychanalyse a-t-elle des fondements philosophiques?*” (1989), “*Lacan et Platon: Le mathème est-il une idée?*” (1990/1991), and “The Formulas of *l’Étourdit*” (2006). In this context, exhaustively surveying and unpacking Badiou’s relationship to Lacan, or even his multifaceted glosses on Lacanian antiphilosophy, (let alone encompassing Badiou’s extremely wide-ranging elaborations regarding antiphilosophy as a broad, fundamental category<sup>63</sup>) is out of the question. Instead, my engagement with Badiou’s meditations on Lacanian antiphilosophy will be guided primarily by Milner’s remarks as spelled out above and restricted to those pieces by Badiou just mentioned.

As he openly acknowledges, Badiou not only borrows the very word “antiphilosophy” from Lacan for his own philosophical purposes, his philosophy relies heavily upon a distinction between “knowledge” (*savoir*) and “truth” (*vérité*), thereby echoing Lacan’s fashion of distinguishing between these two terms.<sup>64</sup> In the first session of his 1994-1995 seminar, Badiou notes that, unlike Nietzsche-the-antiphilosopher, Lacan retains a notion of truth<sup>65</sup> (although, in his lecture on the question of the philosophical foundations [or lack thereof] of psychoanalysis, Badiou contrasts the analytic concept of truth-as-cause, situated as the originary catalyst of the subject’s trajectory in analysis, with the philosophical idea of truth-as-end, situated as the ultimate *telos* of the inquirer’s quest<sup>66</sup>). However, whereas one might be tempted to think of unconscious truths exceeding the scope of (conscious, thematized, self-reflexive) knowledge, as elusive and imponderable eternal mysteries (that is, as belonging to a Kantian-style noumenal Real), Badiou correctly draws attention to the fact that Lacan wants, as it were, to eff the ineffable, to produce

62. Badiou, “Lacan et Platon,” 135; Alain Badiou, “Lacan and the Pre-Socratics,” *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2006) 7.

63. Bruno Bosteels’ article “Radical Antiphilosophy,” which will serve as his translator’s introduction to a forthcoming collection of Badiou’s texts on Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan entitled *What Is Antiphilosophy?*, provides a superlative overview of the antiphilosophical as it functions in the philosophy of Badiou. See Bruno Bosteels, “Radical Antiphilosophy,” *Filozofski vestnik: Radical Philosophy?*, ed. Peter Klepec, 29.2 (2008): 155-87.

64. Badiou, *L’antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein*, 7.

65. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, first course.

66. Badiou, “La psychanalyse a-t-elle des fondements philosophiques?,” <http://www.entretiens.asso.fr/Badiou/Chexbres.htm>

analytic knowledge (*savoir*) regarding those truths (*vérités*) anchoring the being(s) of speaking subjects. He explains later, in the penultimate session of this seminar, that Lacan seeks “to subtract the real from knowing (*connaître*) without falling into a doctrine of the ineffable or the unknowable.”<sup>67</sup> It is crucial to appreciate here the difference between knowing/knowledge, as involving conscious acquaintance or familiarity (*connaître/connaissance*), versus knowing/knowledge (*savoir*) as entailing conceptual, intellectual comprehension. As Badiou is well aware, according to Lacan, the Real truths constituting the arbitrary, senseless kernels of the unconscious of the *parlêtre* are not known *qua* consciously recognized as customary or familiar knowledge, although they can be known *qua* theoretically grasped or symbolically interpreted knowing (through the discourse of psychoanalysis). Along these same lines, in “The Formulas of *L’Étourdit*,” he stipulates that Lacan’s “twist is not at all to put forward that the Real is unknowable, nor that it is knowable either. Lacan’s thesis is that the Real has an exteriority to the antinomy between knowing and being unaware.”<sup>68</sup> The truths of the unconscious, situated in the register of the Real, defy *connaissance* but not (analytic) *savoir*. This *savoir* is what Lacan situates “between knowing” (*connaître*)-*connaître* inevitably brings with it the quotidian and philosophical temptations to render things recognizable through infusions of communicable meaning and significance, thus guaranteeing misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of the meaningless contingencies (that is, Real truths) brought to light by analysis—“and being unaware.”

Like Milner, Badiou assigns the doctrine of the *mathème* a great deal of importance in the later period of Lacan’s teachings. From Badiou’s perspective, registering Real *vérité* by tracing its edges within the Symbolic field of transmissible *savoir* is the crucial task assigned to the *mathèmes* by Lacan.<sup>69</sup> More specifically, the act (in the precise Lacanian sense of “act”<sup>70</sup>) of each unique, un-repeatable analysis can and should be captured as replicable, iterable knowledge, as *ta math?mata*; Lacanian analysis thus attempts to be a paradoxical “science of the singular”<sup>71</sup> (that is, a Symbolic *savoir* of Real *vérité*, the latter being idiosyncratic and peculiar to the experience or event of an analysis). Several times, Badiou connects this *mathème*-mediated knowledge, a knowledge of those truths causally influencing the subjects at stake in analytic acts which target the unconscious, to a Lacanian neologism featuring prominently in Lacan’s 1972/1973 paper “*L’Étourdit*”: *ab-sens* (ab-sense).<sup>72</sup> In Badiou’s reconstruction of the Lacan of this period, the *savoir* that is neither con-

67. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, sixth course.

68. Badiou, “The Formulas of *L’Étourdit*,” 92.

69. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, first course; Badiou, “The Formulas of *L’Étourdit*,” 92-3.

70. Adrian Johnston, Badiou, Žižek, and *Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009) 144-56.

71. Johnston, “Turning the Sciences Inside Out.”

72. Badiou, “The Formulas of *L’Étourdit*,” 91-2.

naissance nor directly *vérité* (although it sustains a relationship to the latter) is that which “touches ab-sense.”<sup>73</sup>

A succinct definition of *ab-sens* is needed before we move on to the manner in which Badiou reads “*L’étourdit*.” Briefly, *ab-sens* refers to the absence of a “sexual relationship” (à la Lacan’s infamous contemporaneous dictum that “*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*”) as a Real around which form the Imaginary-Symbolic realities of the sexuated subjects with sexual and gender identities, the *parlêtres* spoken about in psychoanalysis from Freud onward. Additionally, Lacan makes clear that *ab-sens* involves the formal delineation-without-meaningful-signification (via mathemes, topology, and the like) of the consequences of this lacking rapport<sup>74</sup> (as Badiou observes along these lines, “the lone form of transmissibility for *ab-sex* sense that is possible is found in the figure of the *matheme*. There is no language of the Real, there are only its formulas”<sup>75</sup>).

In the closing pages of the second chapter of *L’Œuvre claire*, Milner, although not explicitly referring to “*L’étourdit*,” helps to illustrate what Lacan has in mind when resorting to *ab-sens* as a neologism. Considering the central grounding role Freudian-Lacanian analysis assigns sexuality in psychical-subjective life, he declares:

I will advance that sexuality, inasmuch as psychoanalysis speaks of it, is nothing other than this: the place of infinite contingency in the body. That there is sexuation, rather than not, is contingent. That there are two sexes rather than one or many is contingent. That one is on one side or the other is contingent. That such somatic characteristics are attached to a sexuation is contingent. That such cultural characteristics are attached to it is contingent. Because it is contingent, it touches infinity.<sup>76</sup>

This “touches infinity” can be interpreted as synonymous with Badiou’s above-quoted “touches ab-sense.” Milner goes on to state, “The Freudian unconscious, inasmuch as it’s sexual, is the unconscious inasmuch as it would be able to be other than it is [...]. In its place, as it admits, the infinite and the contingent therefore pass into each other.”<sup>77</sup> Of course, human beings, as organisms produced through sexual reproduction, each owe their very existences to sexuality. But, humans as speaking beings, unlike other animals, somehow have to subjectify, whether consciously and/or unconsciously, overwhelming knowledge of the infinite contingencies this condition brings with it (one need only consider the sheer improbability of the existence of any given person—if this one sperm of this one man had not inseminated this one egg of this one woman...) extrapolating chains of circumstances and happenings outward from this incredibly chancy point, one eventually arrives at a confrontation with the inexplicable facticities of the very existences of humanity

73. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, third course.

74. Lacan, “*L’étourdit*,” 452, 458-59, 477, 490.

75. Badiou, “The Formulas of *L’Étourdit*,” 92.

76. Milner, *L’Œuvre claire*, 68-9.

77. Milner, *L’Œuvre claire*, 69.

and even the universe, right up to the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”<sup>78</sup> With ample justification, Milner suggests that the formations of the unconscious (in particular, various sorts of fantasies) orbit around and reflect the impressions made on subjectivity by the limitless versions of “it could have been otherwise,” which come to be inseparably bound up with sexuality as theorized analytically. *Ab-sens* is this Real of infinite contingency, an absence of meaning that subsists within the heart of those beings condemned to make meaning out of it nonetheless. *Ab-sens* entails being condemned to making sense out of senselessness.

Badiou devotes a lot of attention to *ab-sens* in “The Formulas of *L'Étourdit*,” introducing the Lacanian concept-term as follows:

...the Real may be defined as a sense which is ab-sense. The Real is ab-sense, and therefore an absence of sense, but which absence of course implies that sense does exist.<sup>79</sup>

He immediately adds:

The point that needs to be understood, as concerns the complex decision Lacan is formulating here, is that ab-sense must be held absolutely distinct from nonsense. Lacan’s argument is not absurdist or in a general sense existentialist. He is not asserting that the Real is nonsense. He is asserting that an opening onto the Real cannot be breached save through the presupposition that it is an absence in sense, an ab-sense, or a subtracting of something from, or out of, sense. Everything depends on this distinction between ab-sense and non-sense.<sup>80</sup>

Rejoining the theme of antiphilosophy, Badiou subsequently emphasizes in this same essay that philosophy is both unwilling and unable to acknowledge and incorporate ab-sense.<sup>81</sup> Badiou’s accurate remarks touch upon two crucial details. First, the Real *qua* ab-sense (which is bound up with *jouis-sens*, *lalangue*, and related concept-terms) is posited and parsed from within the fields of socio-symbolic realities, remaining inaccessible to any sort of (non-existent) intellectual intuition of or mystical union with *le réel du ab-sens*. Put differently, the ‘ab-meant’ Real, so to speak, is not a sublime and utterly withdrawn transcendence, but instead that which subsists immanently with respect to the accessible planes of articulable knowledge (specifically, the *savoir* of formulas consisting of mathemes<sup>82</sup>). Second, ab-sense is, as it were, the method in the madness, namely, the primary process

78. Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, 35-6.

79. Badiou, “The Formulas of *L'Étourdit*,” 82-3.

80. (Badiou, “The Formulas of *L'Étourdit*,” 83.

81. Badiou, “The Formulas of *L'Étourdit*,” 85, 88.

82. Badiou, “The Formulas of *L'Étourdit*,” pg. 93. In his seminar on Lacanian antiphilosophy, Badiou emphasizes that “le savoir qui touche à l’ab-sens” can be testified to and conveyed, which leads him to concede that Lacan, unlike most of those he identifies as antiphilosophers, refuses to succumb to the allure of a transcendent *je ne sais quoi* beyond

dynamics and non-classical logics of a thinking other than the secondary process mentation familiar to everyday and philosophical consciousness alike, a thinking unfolding itself as the free-associative *lalangue* of *jouis-sens* constructing the rudiments of the formations of the unconscious. Such *ab-sens* is an integral part of Lacan's psychoanalytic antiphilosophy insofar as classical/traditional philosophy tends to deploy a black-and-white, either/or distinction between sense (associated with secondary process conscious thinking as reasoning in obedience with the constraints of bivalent logic and the syntaxes and semantics of recognized natural languages as systems for the production of communicable meanings) and nonsense (that which is not sense as per the preceding definition, envisioned as totally random and anarchic).<sup>83</sup> Clearly, as Badiou aptly discerns, Freudian-Lacanian analysis is centered on, among other things, the hypothesis that something in between strictly structured sense and completely unstructured nonsense not only exists, but even underpins sense itself (hence, Badiou's reflections on *ab-sens* intersect with Soler's above-cited insistence on equating unconscious thinking and *jouissance*).

In this vein, Badiou highlights Lacan's theory of the material signifier. Lacking the space to explain this theory, which runs uninterrupted as a red thread throughout the full span of *le Séminaire*, it suffices to say that *ab-sens* is a neologism that refers to the sonorous and/or visual materialities of ideational-psychical *Vorstellungen*. Without meaning themselves, they are nonetheless not sheer nonsense, as transcendent and chaotic meaninglessness lurking silently beyond the confines, circumscribed by accepted logic and grammar, of consciously recognized and reassuring significance.<sup>84</sup> Badiou speaks of a Lacanian "meta-physics" of material signifiers as incorporeal bodies.<sup>85</sup> For Badiou, the "meta-" indicates that the intra-signifying motions of psychical causality, bound up with material signifiers, are irreducible to physical causality. As such, any sort of psychoanalytic scientism, in which a reduction of the psychical to the physical would be at stake, is out of the question.

Badiou praises Lacan as opening up vectors of speculation promising to help us maneuver the twin dangers emanating from theology- and science-inspired ideologies. In *Logics of Worlds*, he comments, "traversing Lacan's anti-philosophy remains an obligatory exercise today for those who wish to wrest themselves away from the reactive convergences of religion and scientism."<sup>86</sup> This comment should be read in connection with some remarks Badiou makes in a eulogy for Louis Althusser regarding "all hermeneutic conceptions of philosophy":

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all possible as well as actual knowledge, an unspeakable and ineffable "x." Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, fourth course.

83. Badiou, "The Formulas of L'Étourdit," 85.

84. Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, 85-90; Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations*, 118-124; Adrian Johnston, "Slavoj Žižek's Hegelian Reformation: Giving a Hearing to *The Parallax View*," *Diacritics* 37.1 (Spring 2007): 9.

85. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, second course.

86. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009) 523.



The idea of philosophy as questioning and openness always paves the way, as we know, for the return of the religious. I use “religion” here to describe the axiom according to which a truth is always a prisoner of the arcana of meaning and a matter for interpretation and exegesis. There is an Althusserian brutality to the concept of philosophy that recalls, in that respect, Nietzsche. Philosophy is affirmative and combative, and it is not a captive of the somewhat vicious delights of deferred interpretation. In terms of philosophy, Althusser maintains the presupposition of atheism, just as others, such as Lacan, maintain it in anti-philosophy. That presupposition can be expressed in just one sentence: truths have no meaning.<sup>87</sup>

Insofar as Lacanian psychoanalysis concerns itself with a distinctive meta-physics of the incorporeal-yet-material signifier, it avoids a scientism that submits to and imitates the physical sciences. But it does so without lapsing into religiosity, as happens all too often to those who pit themselves against scientific reductionism. The Symbolic of an analytic savoir outlining and capturing, through the formal “literalization” (as Milner has it<sup>88</sup>) of mathemes, the play of Real *vérité*, itself without meaning or sense, bypasses the Imaginary lures of a *connaissance* fixated upon visions of a corporeal wholeness (biologistic scientism) and/or enveloping world of significance (onto-theological religion and, as observed previously, the majority of traditional philosophies as Lacan and Badiou see them). For anyone acquainted with both Lacan and Badiou, it is impossible not to hear profound cross-resonances between the antiphilosophy of the former and the philosophy of the latter.

In response to these cross-resonances, one could go so far as to maintain that Badiou’s opposition of philosophy and antiphilosophy comes undone in the confrontation with Lacan-the-supposed-antiphilosopher (Milner’s endorsement of Lacan’s few self-identifications as an antiphilosopher likewise becomes problematic at this juncture too). Arguably, some of Badiou’s own statements indicate this. His 1990 Collège international de philosophie presentation contains an admission that Lacan’s thought is uncannily proximate to his own philosophy.<sup>89</sup> Near the end of this same presentation, Badiou, avowing that both Plato and Lacan, side-by-side, are crucial inspirations for his own thinking, describes a “cross-fertilization in torsion, without unity of plan, between antiphilosophy and philosophy.”<sup>90</sup> Quite recently, he invoked “Lacan the philosopher, as much as antiphilosopher. Or, philosopher of that which in psychoanalysis is antiphilosophical,” going on to propose that Lacan

87. Badiou, “Louis Althusser (1918-1990),” *Pocket Pantheon: Figures in Postwar Philosophy*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 2009) 67.

88. Milner, *L’Œuvre claire*, 141-146; Milner, *Le périple structural*, 149-150; Milner, “De la linguistique à la linguistique,” 8; Milner, “Interview with Jean-Claude Milner.”

89. Badiou, “Lacan et Platon,” 138. In his discussion of Lacanian antiphilosophy, Regnault also highlights the relevance of Badiou’s thought to analysts interested in Lacan’s later teachings. See Regnault, “L’antiphilosophie selon Lacan,” 76.

90. Badiou, “Lacan et Platon,” 154.

offers “no reason to conclude as to the triumph of antiphilosophy.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, in “*La psychanalyse a-t-elle des fondements philosophiques?*” he states that, “inasmuch as there is a philosophy of Lacanianism, it’s the philosophy of antiphilosophy.”<sup>92</sup> The precise formulation of this statement signals that for Badiou, Lacan’s thought represents a paradoxical node of convergence at which the apparent opposites of philosophy and antiphilosophy pass into each other, a short-circuit in which these seemingly antinomic poles are rendered fluid, unstable, and, perhaps, even indiscernible at times. Such an interpretation is further supported by reference to the 1994-1995 seminar on Lacan’s antiphilosophy, in which Badiou posits that, “Lacan elaborates the first immanent antiphilosophy and, as such, it’s the last antiphilosophy.”<sup>93</sup> By “immanent,” he means here that, by treating ab-meant Real truths as attested to in and through transmissible knowledge, Lacan eschews the standard antiphilosophical gesture of pointing at unsayable mysteries transcending any and every possible *savoir* (that is, truths absolutely refractory to all efforts at knowing). According to this characterization, Lacan’s name designates a historical switch-point at which, to resort to Hegelian language, antiphilosophy becomes self-sundering, surpassing itself at the very moment it reaches an apex of culmination. As noted earlier, Lacan himself, in the years 1975 to 1980, oscillates back-and-forth between embracing and repudiating philosophy as his key intellectual partner in thinking through everything at stake in Freudian psychoanalysis. Hence Badiou’s ambivalences, hesitations, and qualifications surrounding the identification of Lacan as an antiphilosopher echo Lacan’s own vacillations apropos this issue. Can anything more satisfactory be said about this matter?

Interestingly, Žižek’s very first reference to Badiou in print, in the introduction to his 1993 book, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*—a text essential for an understanding of the philosophical foundations of Žižekian theory in its various guises and manifestations—hinges on the question of whether Lacan is an antiphilosopher in the Badiouian sense. Žižek argues at length:

According to Alain Badiou, we live today in the age of the “new sophists.” The two crucial breaks in the history of philosophy, Plato’s and Kant’s, occurred as a reaction to new relativistic attitudes which threatened to demolish the traditional corpus of knowledge: in Plato’s case, the logical argumentation of the sophists undermined the mythical foundations of the traditional mores; in Kant’s case, empiricists (such as Hume) undermined the foundations of the Leibnizean-Wolfian rationalist metaphysics. In both cases, the solution offered is not a return to the traditional attitude but a new founding gesture which “beats the sophists at their own game,” i.e., which surmounts the relativism of the sophists by way of its own radicaliza-

91. Badiou, “Formules de «l’Étourdit»,” in Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel: Deux leçons sur «l’Étourdit» de Lacan* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2010) 107-8.

92. Badiou, “La psychanalyse a-t-elle des fondements philosophiques?”

93. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, fourth course.

tion (Plato *accepts* the argumentative procedure of the sophists; Kant *accepts* Hume's burial of the traditional metaphysics). And it is our hypothesis that Lacan opens up the possibility of another repetition of the same gesture. That is to say, the "postmodern theory" which predominates today is a mixture of neopragmatism and deconstruction best epitomized by names such as Rorty or Lyotard; their works emphasize the "anti-essentialist" refusal of universal Foundation, the dissolving of "truth" into an effect of plural language-games, the relativization of its scope to historically specified intersubjective community, etc., etc. Isolated desperate endeavors of a "postmodern" return to the Sacred are quickly reduced to just another language game, to another way we "tell stories about ourselves."<sup>94</sup>

He continues:

Lacan, however, is not part of this "postmodern theory": in this respect, his position is homologous to that of Plato or Kant. The perception of Lacan as an "anti-essentialist" or "deconstructionist" falls prey to the same illusion as that of perceiving Plato as just one among the sophists. Plato accepts from the sophists their logic of discursive argumentation, but uses it to affirm his commitment to Truth; Kant accepts the breakdown of the traditional metaphysics, but uses it to perform his transcendental turn; along the same lines, Lacan accepts the "deconstructionist" motif of radical contingency, but turns this motif against itself, using it to assert his commitment to Truth *as contingent*. For that very reason, deconstructionists and neopragmatists, in dealing with Lacan, are always bothered by what they perceive as some remainder of "essentialism" (in the guise of "phallogocentrism," etc.)—as if Lacan were uncannily close to them, but somehow not "one of them."<sup>95</sup>

Of course, this inaugural invocation of Badiou, one that initiates a subsequent sustained engagement with Badiou's ideas, implicitly contests the Badiouian depiction of Lacan as an antiphilosopher. As mentioned at the outset, Žižek (like Regnault) insists that Lacan's antiphilosophy is not an antagonistic dismissal of Philosophy *tout court*, but rather a rejection of particular philosophies (such as Deleuze and Guattari's anti-Oedipal philosophy of nomadic desiring machines in vogue during the period when Lacan declares himself to be an antiphilosopher—or many metaphysical and/or ontological systems of the philosophical past). Furthermore, as the above quotations reveal, Žižek goes so far as to situate Lacan in a classical Western philosophical lineage tracing all the way back to Badiou's dear Plato, contending that the Lacanian "anti-" signifies hostility specifically to the new postmodern sophists, namely, many of his intellectual contemporaries in post-war France. Given that Badiou subsumes what Žižek refers to as "postmodernism" under the heading of antiphilosophy, if Žižek's assertions in these quoted passages regarding

94. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) 4.

95. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 4.

Lacan were to secure Badiou's agreement (which it isn't evident they wouldn't), it would mean that Lacan's antiphilosophy is actually an anti-antiphilosophy (interpreted here according to a dialectical, rather than a classical, construal of double negation, meaning that the Lacanian "philosophy" resulting from the negation of the negation is different from the [traditional] philosophy initially/originally negated by the first "anti-"). Moreover, as regards the Žižekian rendition of Lacanian *vérité* "as contingent," Badiou's (conception of) philosophy, based as it is on truths generated by aleatory events in the four "generic procedures" of truth-production (that is, art, love, politics, and science) as "conditions" for philosophy, now appears to be itself an heir of Lacan, inheriting some of his defining features (the title of the thirty-seventh and final meditation of *Being and Event*, his 1988 *magnum opus*, "Descartes/Lacan," is telling in this regard as well).

Lacan's influence on Badiou is no secret. The latter is quite forthright about his profound indebtedness to the former ("my master Jacques Lacan"<sup>96</sup>). For instance, in his *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1989), Badiou speaks of Lacan-the-antiphilosopher as "the greatest of our dead."<sup>97</sup> He goes on to identify Freud and (especially) Lacan as marking a proper event at the level of thinking the generic procedure of love, itself one of philosophy's four conditions.<sup>98</sup> This leads Badiou to declare that "the antiphilosopher Lacan is a condition of the renaissance of philosophy. A philosophy is possible today, only if it is compossible with Lacan."<sup>99</sup> In the immediate wake of *Being and Event*, Badiou's confining of Lacan's importance to a radical transformation of the amorous may strike the eye as an exercise in shoehorning Lacan into a pre-arranged picture, in which love is the final category of truth-production left, once Badiou has identified the artistic, political, and scientific events conditioning his philosophy; anyone with even a passing acquaintance with Lacan's texts is aware that he has a great deal to say about art, politics, science, truth, subjectivity, and so on (that is to say, love is hardly the sole thing with respect to which Lacan makes crucial theoretical contributions pertinent to Badiouian philosophy). Additionally, those familiar with Badiou's texts is aware that Lacan is deeply significant for Badiou beyond the topic of amorous matters alone. In several texts prior to *Being and Event*, this is frankly admitted. For the relatively younger Badiou, faithful to a Maoist version of Marxism and a certain materialist deployment of dialectics, "Lacan..." is our Hegel."<sup>100</sup> "Like Hegel for Marx, Lacan for us is essential,"<sup>101</sup> and "For today's French Marxists, the function of Lacan is the function that Hegel served for the German revolutionaries of the 1840s."<sup>102</sup> In hybrid Hegelian-Žižekian parlance,

96. Badiou, "What is a Philosophical Institution? Or Address, Transmission, Inscription," *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008) 27.

97. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 28.

98. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 81-4.

99. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 84

100. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, (London: Continuum, 2009) 132.

101. Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 133.

102. Badiou, "Jacques Lacan (1901-1981)," *Pocket Pantheon*, 4.

Lacan could be construed, in this light, as a “vanishing mediator” between philosophy and antiphilosophy, with his determinate negations of given philosophies rendering possible the birth of novel philosophical trajectories.

In the opening session of his seminar on Lacanian antiphilosophy, Badiou proposes that Lacan’s specific brand of antiphilosophy requires passing through philosophy, hence the frequent, extended forays into the philosophical canon by Lacan.<sup>103</sup> Combined with the portions of the *Manifesto for Philosophy* cited in the preceding paragraph, Badiou’s position mandates two inverse yet complementary movements: a philosophical traversal of antiphilosophy (as Lacanian psychoanalysis) and an antiphilosophical traversal of philosophy. Badiouian thought arises, in part, out of what forms at the center of these crosscurrents. With the benefit of hindsight informed by the advent of Badiou’s work, Lacan can retroactively be viewed as already in 1972, in a session of his nineteenth seminar (“... ou pire, 1971-1972), heralding the eventual arrival of a new mode of philosophy, a post-Lacanian philosophical orientation. After speaking of Plato’s *Parmenides* and the theme of “the One” (key references precious to Badiou), Lacan predicts that, “one surely will be found one day to make an ontology with what I am telling you.”<sup>104</sup> The temptation to crown Badiou an at-least-one-philosopher who fulfills this prophecy is well nigh irresistible. What is more, doing so demonstrates that Lacanian theory is neither opposed to Philosophy as such, nor incapable of serving as a foundation for the construction of new philosophical edifices freed from the burdens imposed by a range of intellectual-historical constraints. The contemporary flourishing of philosophies without Ones or necessities, such as those articulated by Badiou, Žižek, Quentin Meillassoux, and others, bears witness to the philosophical fecundity of Lacan’s reflections.

A prolific neologizer, Lacan employs the prefix “para-” for a number of his neologisms. Of particular relevance in this context are his utterances concerning the “*paraître*” of “*parêtre*” (roughly translated, the appearing-being of parabeing).<sup>105</sup> Although he portrays himself as scrupulously skirting around philosophical ontology<sup>106</sup>—nobody who bars symbolic orders as big Others and the Real itself could buy into what presents as a consistent discursive system mirroring a consistent field of Being—he nonetheless is “not without” (*pas sans*)<sup>107</sup> many things to say about mat-

103. Badiou, *Le antiphilosophie de Lacan*, first course.

104. Lacan, *Seminar XIX: ...ou pire*, session of May 17th, 1972.

105. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre V: Les formations de l’inconscient, 1957-1958*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998) 350, 453-454; Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” *Écrits*, 582; Lacan, *Seminar XX: Encore*, 44-5; Lacan, “L’étourdit,” 488; Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV: L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre, 1976-1977* (unpublished), sessions of February 15th, 1977, March 8th, 1977.

106. Lacan, *Seminar XI: Four Fundamental Concepts*, 29.

107. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation, 1958-1959* (unpublished), session of February 11th, 1959; Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IX: L’identification, 1961-1962* (unpublished), session of April 4th, 1962; Lacan, *Le Séminaire*

ters ontological,<sup>108</sup> things that may better be said (or half-said, *mi-dire*) through an indirect, circumspect style, unfamiliar by comparison with accepted philosophical conventions of speech and writing. In the end, with respect to the topological placement of the philosophical vis-à-vis the antiphilosophical, Lacan is perhaps best thought of as a kind of ‘slant’ philosopher developing a paraphilosophy, twisting and subverting the surfaces supposedly dividing philosophy from its others.

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de Jacques Lacan, *Livre X: L'angoisse, 1962-1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004) 105.

108. Johnston, “Life Terminable and Interminable,” 168-69.