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Alain Badiou and the Feminine: In Conversation with Julia Kristeva

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to bring into conversation two contemporary and prominent theorists of psychoanalysis: Julia Kristeva and Alain Badiou. As of yet, there has been very little engagement between these two theorists. However, I contend that there is a rich theoretical discussion to be had where their theories overlap. The interest of this project is political; I engage in a preliminary interrogation of Badiou's work from a feminist perspective. Specifically, I bring Kristeva's construction of the semiotic, and the correlating discussion of the maternal body, into conversation with Badiou's concept of the feminine as generic. Through this investigation, I demonstrate the similar ways in which the feminine and the maternal body both operate and are situated. Their conceptions of the feminine and the maternal body, I argue, push at the limits of identity and implement innovative articulations of difference which resemble each other. I briefly draw out the manner in which these conceptions of difference overlap but, in particular, I address the conceptions of subjectivity that become possible as a result.

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Introduction

The central focus of this paper is the intersection between the works of Julia Kristeva and Alain Badiou. In particular, I compare Kristeva's concept of maternity with Badiou's concept of the feminine and his use of the feminine signifier. For Badiou, the feminine signifier is the instantiation of what he calls the generic set, the set that operates at the ontological level. In addition, the feminine is also integral to his discussion on love, one of the four truth procedures.¹

In Badiou's account of love, the categories of feminine and masculine are maintained, wherein the feminine (written ♀) signifies infinity, and the masculine (written ♂) signifies finitude.² Integral to this paper is the role played by the feminine signifier, as the generic set, for the purpose of the creation of something new and the emergence of the

¹ Peter Hallward states that for Badiou, 'the production of truth operates in four fields or dimensions (2003: 181).' In *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1992), Badiou states that 'Philosophy is prescribed by conditions that are the types of truth procedures or generic procedures. These types are science (more precisely the matheme), art (more precisely the poem), the political (more precisely the political in its interiority, or politics of emancipation) and love (more precisely the procedure which makes truth out of the disjunction of sexuated positions (141)).' These four fields provide the necessary conditions for attaining truth, something which cannot be ascertained independent of these kinds of fields (although Badiou also makes note that there might be other truth procedures that are not included in this list). In other words, truth cannot be thought of in abstraction, and thus cannot be done in philosophy alone. Instead, these fields condition philosophy, and provide the conditions from which philosophy can work. Subsequently, Badiou will also call these procedures 'generic procedures', a concept which makes reference to their ability to produce truth insofar as a truth is, according to Badiou, 'at once something new, hence something rare and exceptional, yet, touching the very being of that which it is a truth, it is also the most stable, the closest, ontologically speaking, to the initial state of things' (1992:36). In other words, for Badiou a truth is both universal and unchanging but is also produced through these procedures.

² In *On Beckett* (2003) on pages 32-33, as well as in *Conditions* (2008), Badiou develops an account of the feminine in relation to love. Here he states that, 'Love (but also all the other generic procedures, despite being in different orders), weaves in its singular duration [...] four functions: wandering, motionlessness, imperative and narrative [...] The masculine polarity combines the function of motionlessness and the function of imperative. To be a man is to remain motionless in love guarding the founding name, and prescribing a law of continuation [...] The feminine polarity combines wandering and the tale. It does not accord with the fixity of the name, but with the infinity of its unfolding in the world, with the tale of its interminable glory (Badiou 2008: 281).'

(new) subject.³ For Kristeva, on the other hand, the maternal body is the foremost example of what she calls the subject-in-process. This subject, as bound to the semiotic, both disrupts the symbolic, or law of the father, and allows for new meaning. In this paper, the points of intersection between Kristeva and Badiou are twofold. First, I discuss and compare the roles of the feminine signifier and the maternal body for the creation of something new through the concepts of ‘event’ for Badiou and ‘poetic revolution’ for Kristeva. Second, I discuss the concepts of subjectivity these theories make possible. For Badiou, ‘the subject is thus convoked as a border-effect or a delimiting fragment of such a hole-piercing’ (Badiou 1988: 94). Similarly, Kristeva states that ‘the genesis of the functions organizing the semiotic process can be accurately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions’ (Kristeva 1984: 27). These two points of intersection will be discussed in relation to the overall structures in which are manifest the feminine signifier and the maternal body.

The impetus behind my general approach is an investigation into the degree to which the feminine is integral to understanding Badiou’s theory as a whole, and whether Badiou’s theory is problematic from a feminist perspective. Reading Badiou in conversation with Kristeva allows us to examine the limits of the feminine signifier in Badiou’s system.

³ In *Being and Event* (2005) Badiou states: ‘A generic set is written φ ’ (510), a point which is elaborated upon on pages 370-371 (ibid.). Similarly, Badiou demonstrates ‘both the genericity of φ ’ [and] its indeterminate nature (ibid., 422).’

I. Jacques Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality

I begin by giving a brief overview of Jacques Lacan's account of sexual difference, followed by developing his account of 'woman' as is pertinent for a conversation between Badiou and Kristeva. I draw primarily from Lacan's *Encore (Book XX) On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, a seminar that took place in 1972-1973.

In this text, Lacan delineates a strict differentiation between man and woman. In fact, he says that the differentiation is such that we cannot conceive of a sexual relationship between them (Lacan 1999: 7, 12). The impetus behind this statement is his system's dependence upon desire. For there to be desire, there has to be a gap between that which desires, and that which is being desired. For Lacan, man is the subject who desires, and woman is that which he desires. Furthermore, as in Zeno's paradox, where Achilles can never overtake the tortoise, man can never fill the gap between him and what he desires. It is imperative that the gap is maintained because it is through this gap that the subject, specifically the speaking subject, is constructed. As noted by Elizabeth Grosz, 'the subject demands a wholeness, unity, and completion which it imagines the other can bestow on it' (1990: 137). In other words, the other (which is in this case 'woman', who is also the object of desire) is necessary for subjectivity, and the other must be maintained as other in order for the subject to achieve this wholeness or unity.

The structure of desire, and thus what constitutes the subject (or subjectivity), comes from the phallic signifier. Lacan does state that 'man and a woman [...] are nothing but

signifiers’, but he is quick to point out that there is only one signifier at work in his account of sexual identity, the phallic signifier, i.e., the phallus (1999: 39). The phallus is the third term between the two lovers and it operates in the gap between them. However, we must note that man and woman have different relations to the phallic signifier. For Lacan, man is situated such that he has the status of *being* the phallus. As a result, man is constituted only insofar as his ‘possession of or identity with the phallus can be confirmed’ by the other (Grosz 1990: 133). Woman, however, has a different relation to the phallic signifier. Woman is constituted only insofar as it *has* the phallic signifier. However, once again, because there is no sexual relation, woman only *has* the phallic signifier intersubjectively, or through man. What it means to *have* the phallus is problematic, given a feminist critique of Lacan. While man attempts to achieve a kind of wholeness through the phallic signifier, and can thus achieve a kind of unified subjectivity from which it can speak, such is not the case for women.⁴ According to Lacan, ‘there’s no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There’s no such thing as Woman because in her essence [...] she is not whole (1999: 72-73).’ In other words, woman is only included in relation to the signifier to the extent that she is not-whole; she is absent, excluded, or present only as a lack. The implication is that we cannot constitute a category of woman, or state what woman is. In fact, Lacan is very careful to even suggest that there is an essence of woman, unlike man

⁴ In addition, Lacan states that ‘everyone knows there are phallic women, and that the phallic function doesn’t stop men from being homosexuals. It is, nevertheless, the phallic function that helps them situate themselves as men [plural] and approach woman [singular] (1999: 71).’ It is important to note here that the phallic signifier situates the speaking subject, the speaking subject who has a certain kind of essence, that of being men.

whose essence is determined through his desires. Rather, as noted by Peter Hallward, ‘the “feminine” universe is the universe of boundless dispersion and divisibility which, for that very reason, can never be rounded off into a universal’ (2003: 188). As a result, woman cannot be a subject and has no position from which to speak. This is, of course, the criticism that was brought against Lacan by Luce Irigaray, the focus whose project was to create a place from which women could speak.

As a result of Lacan’s account of sexual difference, woman is subsumed under the phallic signifier, rendered subservient to man, and thus also excluded from sexual identity. Furthermore, the phallic signifier, by constituting not only the speaking subject as man, thus making man the sovereign subject, also constitutes language itself as resulting in a language that is by and for men.⁵

II. Julia Kristeva, The Maternal and the Semiotic

For the purpose of this paper I read Kristeva alongside Kelly Oliver who provides what I take to be one of the more generous readings of Kristeva’s project.⁶ Kristeva’s project of incorporating the maternal and the semiotic into psychoanalytic theory was an attempt to address the absence of a certain kind of maternal body from the

⁵ ‘Man is defined as wholly determined by symbolic castration – that is, by total alienation in language – and is thus “bounded” by the symbolic system, forming a “free”, exceptional, but delimited Whole within it. He is whole, yet forever cut off from the substantial Thing of his primordial (incestuous) desire. Woman, on the other hand, is defined as being only partially enveloped in the symbolic or phallic function; she is not bonded, not whole, and not limited in her enjoyment. Woman is open to an un-re-presentable jouissance, a jouissance for which there is no signifier (Hallward 2003: 187-188).’

⁶ The many debates surrounding readings of Kristeva’s work are listed in the introduction of Kelly Oliver’s *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (1993b).

psychoanalytic system of representation, an absence that was due to the phallogocentric structure of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In particular, Kristeva resists the reduction of the mother and the maternal body into an object for the infant in Lacan's mirror stage. As noted by Oliver, 'Before the mother or the maternal body becomes an object for the infant, it is an abject. It is neither object nor nonobject, but something in between [...]' Subjectivity is a process that is set in motion long before Lacan's mirror stage (Oliver 2002: 226).⁷ By introducing the maternal body and the semiotic into psychoanalytic discourse, one could argue that Kristeva is attempting to provide a feminist analysis of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The semiotic and the symbolic are two modalities that run throughout Kristeva's works. The symbolic, for Kristeva and Lacan alike, is a realm of shared cultural meanings. The symbolic operates to ensure a coherent system of signification insofar as it appears to be univocal and homogenous. At the same time, however, we can think of the symbolic as linguistic representation (i.e., language) and the rules that make it possible for a speaker to express something to someone else. As noted by Grosz, for Kristeva, 'the symbolic is the stability which ensures a cohesive, unified speaking subject and a coherent, meaningful text' (1990: 152). Similarly, Kristeva states that 'language is always *one* system, perhaps even one "structure", always *one meaning*, and, therefore, it necessarily implies a subject (collective or individual) to bear witness to its history' (2002: 95). The extent to which the symbolic order ensures a unified speaking subject is predicated on the subject

⁷ Further information on this topic can be located in Julia Kristeva's 'From Filth to Defilement' in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982).

here understood through the subject/object divide that is performed in Lacan's mirror stage. In short, and as mentioned above, the phallic subject is whole or unified, and comes into existence, by taking up an object. There is a dual imposition at play with this conception of the subject. The speaking, phallic subject is established through the taking up of an object, i.e. the woman. Simultaneously, language is an object for the speaking subject, a subject who is also subsequently reinscribed in the subject position through its taking up of language as an object.

This system of signification is not limited to language as an abstract theory; rather there is a social element to it as well. For Kristeva, the symbolic governs the rules through which we engage with others, which becomes especially problematic given the phallogocentricity of the subject of discourse. Here, we see the manner in which the symbolic operation is not restricted to language alone but also turns itself into a political question.⁸

Kristeva has attempted to resolve the limitations of the symbolic order to the extent that it constitutes the (whole and unified) subject through the creation of what she calls the semiotic. Kristeva describes the semiotic, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), as that 'which is concerned with specifying the functioning of signifying practices such as art, poetry, and myth that are irreducible to the "language" object' (21-22). In other words, the primary difference between the semiotic and the symbolic lies in their respective relations to language. Whereby the symbolic is manifest in and through language,

⁸ Kristeva points towards this extension of her theory into the social in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) and in the essay 'The System and the Speaking Subject' (1986).

instantiations of the semiotic cannot be taken up as an *object* in language to the extent that the semiotic cannot be understood through the symbolic order. What this means is that the semiotic cannot be thought in such a way that it fits with the categories in operation in the symbolic order.

Unlike the symbolic, which operates through the process of signification, as ‘the element of meaning within signification that does signify’, the semiotic does not signify and yet it is meaningful (Oliver 1993a: 96). Kristeva describes the semiotic as a ‘distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration’ and there is, perhaps, no end to the ways in which the semiotic can appear (Kristeva 1984: 29). Kristeva turns to rhythm in music, and light in art, as possible instantiations of the semiotic, but perhaps the most important examples she draws from are poetic. Not all poetry is an operation of the semiotic for Kristeva, nor could we say that a poem could only be an instantiation of the semiotic, for reasons that will become clear later in this paper. However, we can still come to understand the ways in which the semiotic operates generally. The semiotic is elusive, it exists as a trace that is barely visible or a murmur that you can’t quite make out; and yet even though its meaning cannot be discerned through the symbolic order, even though it does not signify some object for our understanding, i.e., cannot be named, this does not imply that the semiotic is deficient. Rather, what becomes evident is the manner in which it operates. The semiotic disrupts order, halts it, and imposes upon it. As Kristeva tells us, of ‘signifying practice such as “poetic language”, the semiotic disposition will be the various deviations from

the grammatical rules of the language' (Kristeva 1986: 28). In addition, according to Kristeva, 'its *raison d'être*, if it is to have one, must consist in its identifying the systematic constraint within each signifying practice' (Kristeva 1986: 26). The semiotic thus functions to the extent that it shows that something can be meaningful without already being instantiated in the symbolic order. By so doing it makes evident the limit of the symbolic order. The symbolic cannot account for all significations or, put another way, there are significations that fall outside of the symbolic. In so doing, the semiotic introduces heterogeneity into the production of meaning; it introduces heterogeneity into a homogenous symbolic order.

A further implication of the semiotic operation is that because the semiotic cannot be taken up as an object of language, it also serves to displace the speaking subject. The speaking subject of the symbolic, whose position is dependent upon this subject/object divide, becomes unsettled. The semiotic is thus not only an operation that occurs, but, I argue, the semiotic is essential to the production of meaning and the production of the speaking subject as well. First, in terms of the speaking subject, Kristeva states that 'the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him' (Kristeva 1984: 28). According to the Lacanian system, the subject and object are co-constitutive; the subject is constitutive on the basis of its being a speaking subject, a position which requires that the subject take up language as an object, and yet language is only an object because the subject is a speaking subject. Along similar lines,

the semiotic is foundational for the symbolic not only in a genealogical sense of what came first, but, more interestingly, for the continued production of new meaning (Kristeva 1984: 68). As Kristeva tells us, ‘the semiotic [...] constantly tears [the symbolic] open, and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice that are called “creation”. Whether in the realm of metalanguage (mathematics, for example) or literature, what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic (Kristeva 1984: 62).’ The semiotic provides the conditions through which something new can come about, but the semiotic must also be named; the subject must enunciate or name that which does not already exist within the expression of the law, social practices, or already established language. This locates the paradox at the heart of the semiotic operation. While we might understand the manner in which the semiotic is operative in art, poetry, and music, we cannot name it and stay within the operation of the semiotic. To name these modalities of the semiotic is to reinscribe them into the symbolic structure.

What, then, is the relation between the semiotic and the symbolic? The semiotic is not strictly opposed to the symbolic order. Rather, the semiotic is internal to the symbolic order. According to Kristeva, the destruction of the symbolic (by the semiotic) leads to fantasy or psychosis. In addition, Kristeva tells us that a repression of the semiotic, focusing solely on the symbolic, ‘is what sets up a metalanguage and the “pure signifier”’ (Kristeva 1984: 51).⁹ This is not to say that the semiotic is confined within the

⁹ Kristeva’s rejection of metalanguage here (as invoking a pure signifier, and being unable to account for

symbolic—although we cannot speak about the semiotic except through the symbolic. The semiotic thus moves both inside and beyond the symbolic order. As a result, on the one hand, the semiotic is both the condition for the possibility of the symbolic, and lays the foundation for identity itself. On the other hand, the semiotic is in excess to the symbolic, and threatens to overwhelm it. For Kristeva, the correlation between the semiotic and the symbolic is important because creativity or poetic revolution is only possible from within the symbolic order. Kristeva states that this must lead to the ‘resumption of the functioning characteristic of the semiotic *chora* within the signifying device of language within the signifying device of language. This is precisely what artistic practices, and notably poetic language, demonstrate (Kristeva 1984: 50).’ As such, the semiotic makes possible the creation of a new subject, and a new kind of identity.

Of the symbolic and the semiotic, Kristeva states that ‘these two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse involved’ (Kristeva 1984: 24). In a certain sense, it is the intersection of the semiotic and the symbolic that concerns Kristeva the most. She states, ‘at the intersection of sign and rhythm, or representation and light, or the symbolic and the semiotic, the artist speaks from a place where she is not, where she knows not’ (Kristeva 1980: 242). This is the space in which the subject is

the semiotic), and her inclusion of it in the previous quote, is of particular interest to this discussion between Kristeva and Badiou. A possible site of investigation might be the extent to which Badiou’s use of set theory as a meta-theoretical tool through which he provides his account of the feminine signifier is either problematic for Kristeva, or could be consistent with her project. An answer to this question requires considerable investigation into Kristeva’s articulation of poetic revolution in relation to Badiou’s use of poetry in the following texts: *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005); *On Beckett* (2003); *The Age of the Poets* (2014); and *First Love* (2010). This is an important question, but one which exceeds the limits of the current paper.

constituted, this is the space in which new language is formed, and this is the space of the maternal body.

Kristeva's discussion of the maternal is predicated on her discussion of the semiotic. In *Desire in Language* (1980), she describes the maternal body in the following manner: 'within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there." "I cannot realize it, but it goes on (237)."' Of the maternal experience, we should think of the way in which the maternal body encompasses an other, an other that is not altogether other, but is not altogether her own either. The concept of the maternal thus breaks down any clear boundaries between subject and other, and calls on us to put into question what our notion of difference is, or ought to be. As noted by Ewa Ziarek, 'the alterity is neither inaccessible to me nor similar to me, but radically interrupts "my relation" to myself, to "my" body [...] The maternal body requires the thought of alterity in terms of infolding, as the imprint of the other within the same. As a site of infolding of the "other" and the "same", the maternal body renders the fundamental notions of identity and difference strikingly insufficient (1992: 102).' The experience of the mother, or the maternal body, is that this body both contains what is other than itself, folded into itself, and yet it is also the mother's same body, i.e., the body is not totally other to itself. The implication is that there is no coherent or uniform identity possible in this instance, i.e., there is no clear delineation between the self and other. This example serves as a counter example to the

homogenous speaking subject mentioned above, one whose identity is predicated on its relation to an object that exists outside of itself and for itself. The maternal body cannot distinguish itself from the other that is folded within with the same simplicity. Rather, difference is here internal to the subject and its identity. Accordingly, for Kristeva, ‘the maternal body is the place of a splitting’ (Kristeva 1980: 238), but it is a splitting which is internal to the self, where the self knows itself to be alien to itself, in other words, ‘the mother occupies the place of alterity’ (Kristeva 1984: 47).

As noted by Oliver, ‘Kristeva uses maternity as an example of an experience that calls into question any notion of a unified subject. Maternity becomes a prime example of what Kristeva calls a “subject-in-process” (Oliver 1993a: 100).’ I would like to stress that it does not seem to be the case that Kristeva’s subject-in-process is simply a kind of becoming, held in tension with a concept of being; rather, it is a site of rupture, of abjection, of swelling, or of overflowing. Kristeva’s system does not presuppose a dialectical process of becoming; instead the inclusion of difference in identity is in addition to the symbolic and logical system of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Furthermore, ‘Kristeva analyzes maternity in order to suggest that all distinctions between subjects and objects, all identifications of unified subjects, are arbitrary (Oliver 1993a: 100).’ In other words, because maternity calls into question the border between subject and other, it becomes more difficult to distinguish between subject and object without engaging in an arbitrary categorization. As a result, the concept of the maternal allows for a new concept of subjectivity. Also what the maternal makes possible is a mode of

disentangling women's self-definition from the phallus through 'experiences of heterogeneity, not between one body and another, but between oneself and one's body or oneself and one's language (Grosz 1989: 66).'

III. Alain Badiou: The Feminine Signifier and the Generic

Now that we have attended to the role of the maternal body and the manner in which the semiotic functions in relation to the symbolic in the work of Kristeva, we can turn our attention to the feminine signifier as it appears in Badiou's work. The correlation that I am drawing between Kristeva's maternal and Badiou's feminine signifier is based on their respective operations. At same time, however, it should be kept in mind that the maternal and the feminine signifier do not exactly map on to one another given Badiou's emphasis on set-theory. However, both Badiou and Kristeva deal with a problem that is central to Lacanian psychoanalysis, i.e., they both attend to Lacan's phallogocentric construction of the subject in quite distinct ways. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that there are constructive ways bring the works of Kristeva and Badiou into conversation.

In *Conditions* (2008), specifically the chapter entitled 'The Subject and Infinity', we find Badiou's disagreement with Lacan's concept of the infinite. According to Badiou, Lacan's concept of the infinite must be such that it does not negate the phallic position. The reason for this is that the phallic subject must retain his universal position. The

phallus lies at the heart of constructions of sexual difference and is central to the instantiation of the speaking subject. Badiou addresses the various ways that Lacan maintains this position of the infinite by turning to intuitionist logic. However, the structure remains the same throughout: the infinite must be such that it not negate the universal phallic system. In other words, for Lacan there cannot be a dialectical relation between the masculine (phallic) and the feminine, such that the feminine cannot negate the masculine or can be constituted as external or independent of the masculine signifier. As a result, the infinite can only ever be imaginary; it cannot be real in any sense. This is a famous problem which has been discussed by many feminist theorists, notably Irigaray. Irigaray understood the dilemma in Lacan's system to be one whereby women could not hold a position from which to speak and were said not to exist because, as infinite, she would negate the phallic position. As noted above, Irigaray's solution to this dilemma was to suggest the creation of a language which was dependent upon a wholly other signifier, a signifier which (again) did not negate the phallic signifier. While it is not altogether clear whether Badiou has the same motives as these feminist theorists, his critique does run along parallel lines. Badiou takes issue with the presumption that a) the infinite must necessarily negate the finite and furthermore that b) the infinite must not exist, or can only exist in the imaginary order. Badiou's conclusion in 'The Subject and Infinite' is that the infinite does not negate the finite and that the infinite can have actual existence – although an existence that is posited axiomatically.

In *Being and Event* (2005), Badiou describes the feminine signifier both as the generic set

and as indiscernible (510). As noted by Peter Hallward in *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003) ‘subsets qualify as generic or “indiscernible” if they evade all of the criteria of discernment operative in the situation in which they are included’ (130). In other words, the generic set cannot be counted (or represented) within the given situation, because it is always that which exceeds the count of that situation, whatever the transcendental order. One of the primary concerns in Badiou’s work is the manner in which knowledge is produced, and the way in which something new can come about. In any given situation, the situation is ordered in a way such that knowledge is produced. For Badiou, this ordering is ultimately contingent. There is nothing necessary about the way in which a situation is ordered, even though there is homogeneity to this ordering. This is akin to the symbolic as it appears in the work of Lacan and Kristeva. For Badiou, it is the transcendental order that provides us with knowledge, but this knowledge is only founded in the order itself, and cannot account for the multitude of being that provides the condition for the transcendental order. Consequently, the feminine functions—as indiscernible and generic—by making a hole in knowledge, by disrupting knowledge (Badiou 2005a: 327). Or, as Badiou tells us, ‘truth is realized as multiplicity and not as punctuality’ (Badiou 1988: 94). It is not, therefore, a simple disruption. Instead, it would seem that what the infinite makes possible is the introduction of heterogeneity (through the realization of truth as multiplicity) into what might otherwise be considered to be a homogenous and finite system. And yet, the heterogeneity that is produced cannot be meaningful in the sense of what is produced by the symbolic and by knowledge.

Already we can sense similarities between the symbolic and semiotic for Kristeva and the finite and the infinite for Badiou. In the most general sense, both the semiotic and the feminine serve to disrupt the order that is currently operating in a given situation. But they also constitute a disruption that can subsequently be taken up through the order thus changing this order. In addition, according to Ziarek, ‘Kristeva demands that we read the semiotic *chora* neither as an alternative, more authentic origin (such an origin is indeed only a fantasy) nor as an alternative independent position within the symbolic, but as traces of alterity and heterogeneity operating within the linguistic and psychic economy (1992: 98).’ Ziarek’s reading of trace in Kristeva’s work locates the manner in which the semiotic has a kind of presence as absence in the symbolic. In a similar vein, for Badiou, the generic set belongs to the situation, but is not represented in it (Badiou 1988: 94). The manner in which the generic set is present can never be in the terms of the transcendental order. Similarly, for Kristeva, ‘one must still posit an “outside” that is in fact internal to each closed set, since otherwise the set would remain enclosed, even if internal differentiation could be extended indefinitely. One must, then, decenter the closed set and elaborate the dialectic of a process within plural and heterogeneous universes (1984: 14).’ The implication of this theory is that, for both Kristeva and Badiou, there is some difference *internal* to the system of identity and naming. In Badiou’s use of set theory, it is a set that is generic to the terms of the given situation, and for Kristeva it is the semiotic that maintains not only heterogeneity but also openness.

As we saw above, for Kristeva difference is maintained through the relation that is developed between the semiotic and the symbolic, and to the extent that the semiotic exists with the symbolic realm but is not subsumed under it. For Badiou, I argue, the feminine is similarly not subsumed within the finite realm, sometimes referred to as knowledge. The reason for this is twofold. First, while the generic set does exist in the situation, or the domain of the finite, its function is to disrupt this domain. As noted by Hallward, “‘woman’ [for Badiou] is what punctures totality’ rather than the ‘infinitely unbounded excess’ that it was for Lacan (2003: 188). Or again, we can recall the point above that the generic set is present in the situation but is not represented within it. The generic set thus exists in the situation, yet it exceeds the organization of knowledge of this situation, it is what makes possible new forms of knowledge. The feminine, i.e., the generic set, is what founds the very being of truth and truth is what allows for change in the production of knowledge for Badiou.

Perhaps the most significant point of intersection between Badiou and Kristeva for my argument is the theories of the subject they each put forward. Badiou, through his reconfiguration of the infinite, does not construct his account of sexual difference on desire. His conception of the subject attempts to dispel with a dependence upon the subject/object divide, upon which an account of desire is founded, as integral for the subject’s constitution. Thus, unlike Lacan for whom the subject is constituted intersubjectively through the phallic signifier, for Badiou, the subject necessarily breaks with the ego, and thus the desiring subject. For Badiou, the subject emanates from the

evental encounter, the encounter which inherently involves this break from knowledge and from the domain of the finite. The subject is born out of the intersection of the feminine and the masculine, out of what is on the one hand indiscernible in a given situation, but which will be named.¹⁰ Similarly, according to Kristeva, the ‘subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either “exclusively” semiotic or “exclusively” symbolic, and is instead marked by an indebtedness to both (1984: 24).’ It is integral to both Kristeva and Badiou that the subject is produced not only out of the finite and ordered realm, but that it also sit on the edge of what exceeds organization. The further implication, which we already saw in the section on Kristeva above, is that the subject can no longer be thought to be a unified subject. For Badiou, this means that the subject can no longer be the conscious subject or the source of organization or language as we saw in the case of Lacan. According to Badiou, ‘the “subject” thus ceases to be the inaugural or conditioning point of legitimate statement. He is no longer – and here we see the cancellation of the object, as objective this time – that *for which* there is truth, nor even the desirous eclipse of its surrection. A truth always precedes him (Badiou 1988: 93).’ Put simply, for Badiou ‘the

¹⁰ The concept of the subject that I am discussing here is a generic or general subject. Given that the topic of this discussion pertains to conceptions of the feminine and the masculine, there is a tendency to assume that the subject produced therein must be the amorous subject alone, or the subject of love, as it pertains to Badiou’s system. However, this is a problematic assumption for two reasons. First, the four truth procedures, or conditions, Badiou sets out in his system (namely, science, art, politics, and love) ought not be considered as totally independent of each other. Second, part of the impetus behind my writing this paper is to make evident how Badiou utilizes the feminine signifier throughout his project, i.e., as an underlying feature for his entire system. Just as in the case of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the account of the subject (whether speaking or desiring) is always sexed and sexual difference was the underlying feature for his account of language, similarly, for Badiou, a conception of sexual difference, made evident in his use of the feminine and the masculine and specifically how the feminine becomes the generic-set, pertains to his system at large.

subject is in no sense the organizing of a meaning of experience' (Badiou 1988: 94).

Not only does the subject emanate at the intersection of the feminine and the masculine for Badiou, but it is also this subject that makes possible a change in what is counted as knowledge. For both Kristeva and Badiou, naming is still integral to the philosophical system. For Badiou, 'subjectivization is [...] that which makes a truth possible', because it is the subject who not only names when an event has taken place, but it is also the subject's fidelity to an event that will bring about the change in the transcendental ordering (Badiou 1988: 95). Badiou makes note of this process in the following manner: 'The names with which a subject surrounds himself are not indiscernible. But the outside observer, noticing the names are mostly lacking in referents in the situation as it is, considers that they make up an arbitrary and contentless language [...] [for example, why] lovers' babble is cast aside as infantile madness by prudent people. Now these observers are, in a certain sense, right. The names generated – or rather composed – by a subject are suspended, as concerns their meaning, upon the yet-to-come of a truth (Badiou 1988: 97).' And yet, 'naming is only empty insofar as it is pregnant with what sketches out its own possibility' (Badiou 1988: 98).

Conclusion

Regardless of the kinds of functional similarities that exist between the maternal body and the feminine signifier for Kristeva and Badiou respectively, there is a pertinent

difference which ought to be explored further. Badiou attempts to retain the structure of the masculine/feminine divide and yet critiques Lacan on the basis of the inconsistencies at play in his construction of the infinite, offering an alternative conception of the infinite through Cantorian set theory. Kristeva, on the other hand, chooses not to address the feminine and instead develops the maternal body, which is a wholly new concept to integrate into Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Now, there are numerous criticisms of Kristeva for her move away from the feminine and of her choice to develop the maternal body. Similarly there are numerous critiques raised against Badiou's feminine as generic and the implications that follow from his use of set theory for a politics of embodiment, neither of which can be addressed in this paper. It might be the case that Kristeva has succeeded in surpassing Badiou from a feminist perspective in her move out of the dichotomous relation of the masculine and the feminine. But, speculation and presumption aside, it is certainly the case that there is space for conversation between Kristeva and Badiou, and there is definitely more work to be done in considering the implications of their respective theories.

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