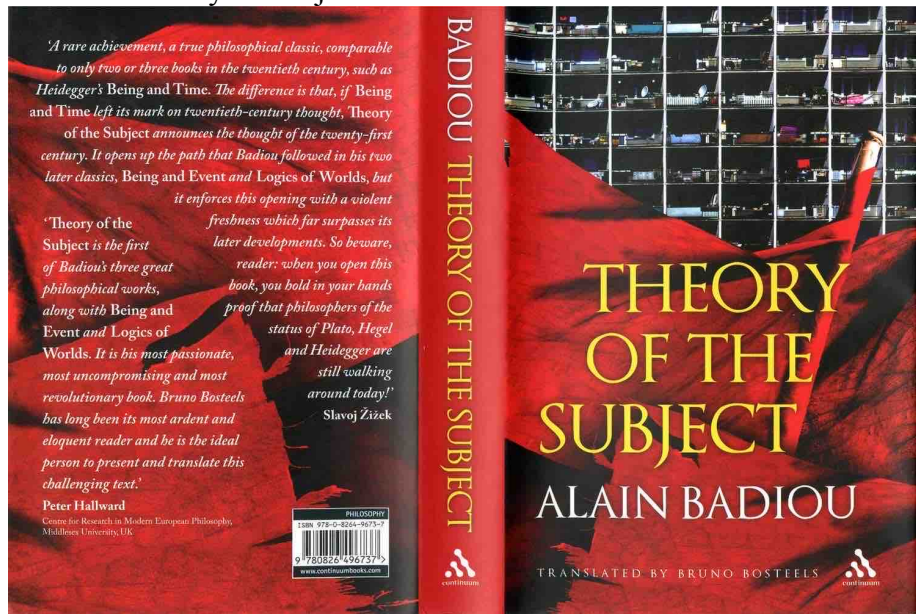


## Badiou's Theory of Subject



Although Badiou has revised his position on a number of key points in later works, reading 'Theory of the Subject' is indispensable for understanding his work as a whole. If Badiou is right when he claims (in 'Logics of Worlds') that the philosophy we need today is nothing other than a materialist dialectic to oppose the insipid complacency of prevailing democratic materialisms, then 'Theory of the Subject' is nothing less than the manifesto of the materialist dialectic.

*A = (AaP)... [T:]he true but camouflaged contrary of A is the space of placement P: it is that which delegates the index. The givenness of A as being itself split into:*

- its pure being, A
- its being placed, Ap

*...Everything that exists is thus at the same time itself and itself-according-to-its-place.*

Objections. 1) I think I want to maintain that this thesis, which Badiou distills effectively from Hegel, is thought more radically, and without the Aristotelian detour of the "thing", by Plato, under the heading of the relation of eidos to khora. 2) Following from this, I think I want to name A opposed to the space of placement P, as "norm" (in the double sense, mathematical and ethical norm), rather than as either "thing" or "force". 3) How does the place dominate? Only through a postulation (false) of a general synthesis of place and term, characteristic of ideological closure. So the dialectical algorithms are perhaps not yet located quite at the right (metalogical) level.

Badiou also accomplishes a rather novel feat in working Marxism and Psychoanalysis into a theoretical overture of the subject. In thinking through the subject-effects of anxiety, superego, courage and justice, Badiou comes up with a magnificent space to operate in wherein one can elucidate different forms in which the subject will take (his distinction is subjectivation and subjective-process).

However, Badiou's attempts to create an alternative symbolic plane – a historical plane – do not seem reassuring; therefore, one must look at the event-producing-history from the psychoanalytical perspective.

The theory of drives opens the possibility to relate Badiou's subject to the repressed real, to show him as immune to the desire, which may be derived from a symbolical plane, and able to ground his struggles with revolutionary jouissance while not allowing history to end too early.

*Theory of the Subject*, predates his equation of ontology with mathematics, but it is almost certainly Badiou's most successful marriage of rigorous philosophical rationalism and political polemic.

Badiou's aim is to delineate the theoretical basis of a subject of radical post-Marxist politics, through an inventive appropriation and critique of Lacan's 'logic of the signifier'. If the Badiou of *Being and Event* and the recent *Logics of Worlds* signals a firm distance from a focus on signification as the locus of critical philosophical practice, the model of signifiatory analysis in this text cleaves to the expanded and singular linguistic materialism that dominated Lacan's late seminars.

In so far as the mass movement is said to effectively destroy the space of placement by forcing the eventual presentation of the real, *Theory of the Subject* pre-emptively contradicts Badiou's subsequent attempts to deny political status to the group-in-fusion. The present article thus concludes that the Sartrean group functions as a veritable cause that commences the subject-process constitutive of politics itself.

Continental philosophy is, by contrast, far more top heavy, with more influence concentrated in a few figures, and nearly everyone else organized in relations of "following." This is why, after Derrida, people have been so obsessed with who will inherit the mantle of "master theorist." Badiou certainly had his day as a contender, as did Žižek and Agamben... But there is also a strong feeling that the days of the "master theorist" are over...

Those analytic philosophers who actually care to think about disciplinary structure — who are not completely resistant to these sorts of reflections — do recognize this difference, but they attribute it, wrongly I think, to the sophistic character, the general charlatanry, of continental philosophy. In fact, however, it has to do with the fact that, in continental philosophy, perspectives are more important than positions.

The difference between a perspective and a position may be understood, in part, in terms of far greater investment of effort that is needed to defend the former than the latter. To defend the "position" of materialism, say, all I need to do is 1) be able to provide a cogent account of the position and 2) provide a plausible counter-argument to critiques. To defend the "perspective" of materialism, by contrast, one must enter so deeply into it that one can see the entire world in materialistic terms... While perspectival thinkers need not abandon argumentation, it does not have the decisive significance that it has in more polemical, "agonistic" modes of philosophy.

It is important to note, though, that while mediocre continental philosophers often descend into positions (which are often taken vis-à-vis the interpretation of a "master thinker"), the very greatest analytic philosophers rise to perspectives, and thus, in turn, can be read fruitfully by outside an analytic context.

This is certainly the case with Wittgenstein, Frege, Quine (to a lesser degree) — and also for perhaps for Kripke. But in the same way, Badiou's originality consists in synthesizing a "Continental" mode of discourse with a perspective that also transcends many of its prevailing tendencies.

(While I believe that positions are inferior to perspectives, I also would maintain that a positional mode of discourse, as discourse, has many advantages over a perspectival discourse. Analytic philosophy approximates what Kuhn calls a "normal science," while Continental philosophy remains a never-ending sequence of paradigm shifts, philosophical revolutions...)

(And it is in this light that one must acknowledge the greatness of Husserl — perhaps the last philosopher that achieved a real synthesis between a normal method and a deep perspective)

Badiouan subject can be considered an exceptional product of the formalist project of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* as instigated by psychoanalytical discourse (Lacan) and a certain Marxist discourse (Althusser) insofar as both were centered upon a theory of the subject.