

Badiou *Contra Badiou*: Review of Alain Badiou. 2010. *Five Lessons on Wagner*, translated by Susan Spitzer. London: Verso.

Naomi Waltham-Smith

The business of philosophizing in France can sometimes resemble that of another French passion: couture. As I write, renowned designer and photographer Hedi Slimane, known for his distinctive skinny menswear silhouette at Dior Homme and Yves Saint Laurent, has just presented his first ever womenswear collection for the latter fashion house. Unlike designers such as Miuccia Prada and Marc Jacobs who have enjoyed the luxury of pursuing their own creative vision under the auspices of their relatively youthful and eponymous brands, every new artistic director at the big French couture houses finds that their heritage inevitably looms large. In a sector ever hungry for innovation, not every designer has enjoyed Karl Lagerfeld's reputation for every season brilliantly reconfiguring Coco Chanel's signature tweeds, camellias, and sportswear aesthetic to provide a sometimes trenchant commentary on contemporary issues, while demonstrating a playful, if slightly irreverent, curiosity towards the archive.

French philosophers too find themselves in the shadow of a substantial tradition of thought, not just of post-Heideggerian philosophy in France, but of a long-standing Continental lineage that can be traced back to Kant and Hegel. Like Slimane, Badiou has asserted his break with that tradition in the first instance through a process of rebranding. If Slimane sparked controversy when, upon taking the helm earlier this year, he renamed the ready-to-wear line Saint Laurent Paris and dispensed with the familiar interlocking-letter logo, Badiou has set himself against his philosophical predecessors by reclaiming philosophy for his own work and dismissing the better part of the Continental tradition as "anti-philosophy." Instead of the Tribute pump, Slimane presented super skinny rock-chic trousers; instead of "aesthetics," Badiou argues for "inaesthetics." In both cases, what looks at first blush like a rebellious rejection of the tradition by a self-confessed rebel more accurately represents a return to an earlier master. Slimane has sought to sweep aside the work of his immediate predecessor so as to recuperate something of the aesthetic and brand identity of the *maison's* creator and Badiou, working with entirely different material, is attempting a Heideggerian destruction of almost the entire history of Continental philosophy to restore a fundamental Platonism at the heart of his thought.

The reaction to Slimane's first collection was mixed: even if his familiar signatures were there, had he failed in his too literalistic homage to Saint Laurent's seventies rock aesthetic to put his own stamp on the designs? There was an undercurrent of anxiety in the reviews: did this imaginative and notoriously independent menswear designer, suddenly so in thrall to the master, have nothing to say about the relation between his high-minded design concept and the female body? It is a similar anxiety that seems to haunt almost every philosophical enterprise where (from a certain perspective at least) the stakes are much higher and the margin by which one thinker can distance himself from his heritage has become increasingly tight with every new critical maneuver. It is an anxiety that persists after a first reading of Badiou's Wagner book: a few of Badiou's terminological signatures are there, but a mixture of his evident fascination with Wagner and the heady critical tradition that has surrounded the composer seems to stifle any possibility of a rigorous working out of Badiou's own conceptual framework. He is not the first philosopher to be charged with this accusation: "Kant *the philosopher*," Jean-Luc Nancy tells us in *Logodaedalus*, "has nothing to say" about the relation between body and thought, "nothing to say" about sensation (Nancy 2008:145). On the contrary, the author of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* has a lot of say about the senses, so, as Derrida notes, Nancy appears to be saying that Kant only has something to say when he is no longer a philosopher, but an anthropologist. So long as he speaks philosophically, he has nothing to say. Rather provocatively, then, I shall propose that Badiou "*the philosopher*" has nothing to say about Wagner.

I might even go further to suggest that this is not a book about Wagner, not even a book about the philosophical reception of Wagner, nor a book about music. The book rightly raises the question of what interest it holds for music scholars: the discussion of the music seems hampered by a lack of technical musical expertise, and the contextual frame, largely limited to philosopher-Wagnerites on the one hand and producers on the other, would have been enriched by more sustained engagement with scholarship in musicology. Why, for that matter, would we be interested in anything that any philosopher has had to say about Wagner? Derrida astutely observes that, just because "Kant the philosopher has nothing to say," this does not exclude another, more radical, hypothesis: in this case, that "no philosopher, as such, has ever had anything to say, philosophically," about Wagner (Derrida 2005:39). The relation between music and philosophy is a major theme in Badiou's book and one that currently presents itself with some urgency to scholars in our own field, but it is questionable whether, at face value, Badiou's contribution makes a sufficiently persuasive case for the value of interdisciplinary dialogue. Some readers may come away

thinking that Badiou has contributed little new to Wagner studies beyond a clearly-articulated and perspicacious analysis of the philosophically-minded tradition that surrounds Wagner, or they might conclude that his musical understanding ultimately limits his contribution to the superficial observations of a dilettante and that his attempted rebranding of the composer ultimately fails.

That, however, is not why I argue that Badiou “the philosopher” has nothing to say about Wagner. Rather, it is the sidelining in this text of Badiou’s own philosophical enterprise, together with its distinctive terminology, that leads to a disconnection between what Badiou has to say as a subject responding in fidelity to the “Wagner Event” and the faint traces of a philosophical argument that is always approaching Wagner, but never quite finds its aim. Only by reading Badiou “the philosopher” alongside—better against—Badiou “the Wagnerite,” with all the contradiction that this implies, is it possible to begin to discern the contribution that his ingenious philosophy may be able to make to music studies.

Event and Fidelity

Outside a small, if growing, circle of close-readers, Badiou is known chiefly for his theory of the Event (“*l'événement*”), that is, a moment of completely unpredictable change, a chance happening that ruptures the fabric of history. While undoubtedly the cornerstone of his philosophical project, the concept of the Event alone does not allow us to assess Badiou’s re-evaluation of Wagner’s ethico-political significance or the political potency of his thought more widely. Only by understanding the overall trajectory of Badiou’s entire project is it possible to illuminate the break that he claims for himself with the philosophical tradition. Similarly, the disjunction that he attributes to Wagner only reveals itself against the background of an admittedly daunting body of thought. To determine the status of Wagner’s musical works from a Badiouan perspective demands a rigorous understanding of his theory of the Event—an understanding that can only come by responding to Badiou’s very thought as if it itself were an Event. Badiou’s theory isolates three stages: a pre-existent situation, an unpredictable Event that ruptures the fabric of this status quo, and finally an aftermath in which the Event is affirmed, denied, or perhaps simply ignored. The only proper response to an Event—the only response that affirms that a particular happening is indeed an Event—is a faithfulness that labors to work out all the consequences of the Event and to convert gradually the situation to this new orientation. Despite the fact that Badiou restricts Events and truth processes to the domains of art, politics, science and love, and consigns philosophy to the task of affirming

and making known their existence, Alexander García Düttmann observes philosophical thought too demands a kind of post-Evental fidelity:

One manner and, in a sense, perhaps the only manner of relating to a philosopher's thought is to consider it an event, and to do so not just in the realm of ideas, but in one's own comportment, worthy not just of serious thought, but of an active and militant fidelity . . . For how could I grasp what is at stake in a thought, how could I seize what a thought does or does not to provide me with a hitherto unknown sense of the world, raising or lowering the stakes, if I were not faced with a choice or a decision which affects me as much as it affects the thought itself, and which leaves no space for the equanimity of an impartial evaluation? (2004:202)

The relation between Event and post-Evental fidelity, however, is, upon more thorough reflection, not quite the straightforward opposition upon which Badiou insists. Fidelity, he maintains, is not an Event, but the conditions of fidelity that he describes might suggest otherwise. The decision to be faithful is as singular and as axiomatic, as detached from the law of logical prediction and causality as the Event itself; it equally admits of no regulation or institutionalized patterns of behavior. Thus a thought that presents itself as an Event only reveals its potential significance when confronted with a faithfulness that itself has an Evental character. One might even go as far to say that Event and fidelity are mutually constitutive: fidelity makes something into an Event as much as an Event precipitates fidelity in its wake. To that end, I propose, before hastily writing off Badiou's rescue of Wagner, to proceed, initially at least, through an active fidelity to Badiou's thought.

At no point in *Five Lessons* does Badiou explain fully in what sense Wagner constitutes an Event. He tells us that Wagner "invented a new model of the relationship between continuity and discontinuity" by creating an "undecidability between narrative drama and music" (70); he also claims that Wagner inaugurated a new relation between music and philosophy on account of the debate he continues to spark between thinkers (Badiou 2010:56). It is to other texts, though, that we must turn to supply a more systematic understanding of the Event. Outside his core theoretical writings, there is a short article, reprinted as part of *Logics of Worlds*, which is devoted to another Event in music history and provides a helpful schematic of his core concept (Badiou 2007). In summary, the Event is essentially a transient happening, the potential for which is immanent to the situation in which the Event takes place, but the occurrence of which is completely unexpected from within that situation. The Event is thus not an external intrusion upon a situation, but it is equally unpredictable from the perspective of the status quo. The examples he gives are typically famous ones of abrupt historical change. For example, since Badiou's version of music history is admittedly

rather conservative and unimaginative, it is unsurprising that his decision to give Evental status to Schoenberg's innovations in musical composition conforms to a well-worn narrative. The Event reveals what Badiou, following the set-theoretical framework that he adopted to structure his thinking, calls the void of the situation. The void is the foundational term that the situation at once disavows: that which belongs to the situation but which is not perceptible according to its modes of structuring knowledge. In the case of the Schoenberg Event, the void revealed is nothing other than the possibility of "an acoustic world not ruled by the tonal system" (2007:29).

What gives the Event its revolutionary significance is that it provides the impetus for transforming the status quo, although the Event itself vanishes so quickly that it does not accomplish this work itself. Instead, the Event recruits members of the situation who, in fidelity to the Event, labor through various investigations in order to convert various elements in the situation to their cause. In what Badiou terms a "truth procedure," the truth revealed in the Event is gradually reinscribed into a new situation. In our music-historical example, the last effects of Wagner and the maximalism of Mahler, Strauss, early Schoenberg, and the young Korngold, are the situation into which the Schoenberg Event intervenes, and Berg and Webern's works are composed in fidelity, albeit of two rather different kinds, to this Event. One of the more radical departures that Badiou takes from his Sartrean inheritance, but via means different from that of the linguistic turn endorsed by many of his compatriots, is to reject the primacy of the subject. An Event is not inaugurated by a Subject, such as Schoenberg or Wagner. The term subject is instead reserved for those whom the Event induces, meaning that subjectivation does not pre-exist the Event, but is its effect. Schoenberg or Wagner do not then produce the Event. An artistic Event is the demonstration of a possibility that had hitherto seemed impossible, the demonstration of a formalization of a material that was hitherto considered formless. As such, the Event is not usually a single work, but more likely a cluster of works or even multiple oeuvres. "Wagner" or "Schoenberg" is simply a retrospective name for the Event, given by those in militant fidelity to describe a particular musical configuration that breaks with the status quo.

Out of the Event emerges a statement in the form of a prescription, which then orients the investigations that follow. In this case, Badiou speculates that the statement might read: "There can be an organization of sounds able to define a musical universe on a basis entirely subtracted from classical tonality" (2007:30). The truth process consists of musical pieces that attempt to construct a universe conforming to this imperative until the possibility revealed by the Event is exhausted. Badiou argues that there are two species of consequences: one (exemplified by Berg) works through

local appropriations of the subject to objects and relations of the old world and is an infinite negotiation with the current situation, whereas the other (represented by Webern) is a point which must force the impossible in what can only appear as a decision that breaks radically with the past. Just as there is more than one way in which to respond to an Event (reject it, seize it), there is also more than one way of being faithful.

While it may be possible to construct a version of the Wagner Event by reference to this template, the argument that emerges is not as compelling as the one that can be discerned after a closer engagement with the major texts in Badiou's oeuvre. Badiou first sets out his theory of the Event step-by-increasingly-complicated-step in his 500-page *L'être et l'événement* dating from 1988 and translated in 2005 into English as *Being and Event*. His philosophical project in this text rests upon a "wager" that pits him against (almost) the entire Continental philosophical tradition (2011:23). Ever since Plato's *Parmenides*, ontology has wrestled with the fact that beings present themselves as multiple while being is itself thought of as singular. In contrast to the typical gesture of grounding the diversity of presented existence in an unrepresentable unity, Badiou meets this impasse head on by asserting that "the one *is not*" (2011:23). Instead, being must be purely and infinitely multiple. He is nonetheless careful to argue that, while the one is not, there is an operation which makes one: "there is no one, only the count-as-one" (2011:24). In presentation (in what "there is"), the pure inconsistent multiple is structured by this counting-as-one to form what Badiou terms a situation. But this oneness is merely the effect of a count that composes the multiples into a series of ones to produce a consistent multiplicity. Because all presentation is under the law of the count, the inconsistent multiple is not presented as such. Badiou takes the admittedly axiomatic decision to assert that nothing is presentable in a situation that is not already counted. In this way, the situation inverts Badiou's schema, identifying being with presentation and sustaining the illusion that the one is and the pure inconsistent multiple is not. Only by virtue of the fact that the count-as-one is a result can pure inconsistent multiplicity be deduced as the raw inertia upon which the structure must have operated. While unrepresentable inconsistency does not come to light as such within a situation, because the "there is" of presentation is an operation, it gestures towards "something" that precedes the count and does not quite coincide with its structured result. All that is presented in a situation is already structured, such that, from within that situation, the pure inconsistency of being counts as literally nothing. This nothing that links the situation to pure being is the void. Normally remaining inaccessible from within the situation, the void is exposed only by an Event.

Badiou turns to post–Cantorian set theory to flesh out this ontology of the pure multiple because this branch of mathematics uniquely enacts the thought that the one is not and guarantees that multiplicity is without limit. Unlike deconstruction or Deleuze’s materialist vitalism, set theory admits of no difference between multiples. Every multiple is a multiple of multiples. For set theory, the only predicate of existence is that of belonging to a set; there is no other way to distinguish between multiples. There is no partial or qualified belonging; an element either belongs or does not belong to a set. To be is simply to belong.

Set theory does, however, distinguish between two different types of relation between multiples: belonging and inclusion. These constitute two different operations or ways of counting rather than ways of thinking the being of a multiple. First, the ordinary relation of belonging indicates that a multiple is counted as an element of a set. The elements that belong to a set can, of course, be variously grouped into distinct subsets, or parts, of that set. A part is said to be included in its set. More strictly, a part is defined as having no elements that do not also belong to the set. Badiou equates belonging with presentation such that what is presented of being is what is counted as an element in a set. Inclusion corresponds to a second–order count that is representation. Further, it is easy to grasp without recourse to Badiou’s complex mathematical proof that there will always be an excess of inclusion over belonging: there will always be more ways to group the elements of a set than the number of elements themselves. Representation thus exceeds presentation.

Where does the void figure in this schema? Within an ontological—that is, purely mathematical—situation, the void functions as its foundational term. According to set theory’s axiom of foundation, a set must always contain one element that has no members in common with the set: in other words, it must contain one element that, from the perspective of the situation, cannot be decomposed further into multiples. A second axiom, known as the null–set axiom (or axiom of the empty set), declares that there exists a set to which no elements belong. Insofar as it has no elements of its own that are presented in the situation (because it has no elements whatsoever), the empty set constitutes the foundational term of a purely set–theoretical situation. It is the void of the situation, the mark within the situation of the unrepresentable multiple. The void, though, does not belong to any set because it is not presented. The void is, on the other hand, still included in the situation. This is because a part is said to be included if it contains no elements which do not also belong to the set. Because the empty set contains no elements, it is included in every set. While the void may not *belong* to a situation, it is universally *included* everywhere in every set within the situation.

It is for this reason that Badiou sees the excess of inclusion over belonging as anarchic. There is nothing in the structure of the count to organize the parts of a situation and therefore the count of belonging is insufficient to ward off an encounter with the void. This is because it is formally impossible for everything that is included in a situation to be presented; the unpresented parts of a situation might therefore lend a latent figure of existence to the void. In other words, any unstructured point within a situation poses a threat. There is always one such point in the situation since the structure is unable to count itself as an element of the situation that it structures. There is a risk that the void could emerge with something that escapes the count and this something is the count itself. Put differently, what escapes belonging is the very fact of belonging itself.

Badiou therefore infers a second-level count or metastructure which guarantees that the one holds for inclusion just as it does for belonging. It does so by structuring the structure, by counting as one every possible way of arranging the situation's elements. As such, representation conceals the operational moment of presentation, the fact that being is made to belong. The metastructure or state of the situation thus suppresses the specter of the void and dispels the phantom of pure inconsistent being by making it appear as if there were nothing before belonging, as if belonging were not the effect of an operation, as if there were no being outside belonging.

An Event shatters this illusion by revealing the void. The ontological peculiarity of the Event within this framework lies in the fact that it is strictly unpresentable within the situation. In fact, it is strictly impossible from an ontological perspective because it breaks with the axiom of foundation. While a founded set contains one element whose own elements do not also belong to the set, the Event belongs only to itself and is thus absolutely self-founded which is also to say unfounded. From within the situation, it is therefore impossible to say whether the Event belongs to that situation. Only an intervention can decide. But, in order for it even to be possible that it might belong, Badiou maintains that, in addition to the Event itself, the inhabitants of what he calls an Evental site also belong to the Event. This Evental site is what connects the Event to the situation. The Evental site itself belongs to the situation, but Badiou says that it is located at the edge of the void. This is because the Evental site forms the situation's foundational term. As a group, its inhabitants are a recognized term of the situation, but as individuals they are not presented. The Evental site thus belongs to the situation only as something indiscernible.

An Event, though, disappears as quickly as it appears. What Badiou calls a truth process is the means by which the consequences of an Event are inscribed into the new situation. At the risk of simplification, this involves an

initial declaration or naming of the Event that makes it recognizable within the situation and then a sustained fidelity which proceeds through a series of investigations. These work by exploring with militant fidelity the relation of every element within a situation to the Event and seeking to connect them positively to the Event wherever possible in an attempt to transform the situation. A truth is that part of a situation that collects to infinity all those elements which investigations have positively connected to the situation. It is composed as what is known as a *generic* subset, for it has no criterion of belonging other than pure inconsistent being. Initially, it may be possible for the state to represent those elements positively connected to the Event in terms of existing, sanctioned categories, but a generic set is capable of evading all classification because, for every distinct principle in the state's encyclopedia, it contains some elements which fit the principle and some which do not. The generic set is thus an inclusion whose only property is belonging itself. It is the paradoxical inclusion, the representation, of belonging not to one category or another, but of pure belonging as such.

I emphasize the role of belonging in Badiou's ontology more than his own account does partly because it will allow later for a passage to be navigated between Wagner's status as an Event—that is, as an instance of absolute self-belonging—and the ethical condemnation of the nationalist impulse from which Badiou attempts to extricate his construction of Wagner. Moreover, the theme of belonging permits one to discern a secret affinity between fidelity and Event that Badiou's own opposition obviates. Badiou's set-theoretical ontology defines the Event as an element that belongs only to itself, even if, paradoxically, this self-belonging is itself then inscribed through inclusion. The Event subtracts itself from the situation insofar as its turning inwards constitutes a withdrawal of belonging from an externality, from any reference to any outside itself to which it could belong. In exposing the void, this Event-as-self-belonging reveals the fact of belonging that evades the count of presentation. A belonging without externality that refers only to itself reveals the pure that-it-belongs that constitutes existence. Fidelity, on the other hand, labors towards the generic set that admits of no criteria of belonging. Fidelity moves in the opposite direction to the absolutely singular belonging of the Event towards an absolutely generic belonging. This belonging too, however, knows no outside. Both are figures of the Absolute All or nothing, each pole in this bipolar machine tends at its limit towards articulating the pure that-it-belongs without predicate or condition.

Hence it makes sense for Düttmann to claim provocatively that “event is *also* a name for fidelity,” even if it would seem to do some violence to Badiou's thought. Badiou himself speaks of two limits to which fidelity tends, but

at which fidelity would extinguish. The first is a kind of bad fidelity, which evaporates in succumbing to regulation and institutionalization: abandoning its risk of betrayal, its commitment transforms into an empty confirmation. Second, there is the kind of fidelity, faithful to its innovative impulse, that would bring about so complete a hiatus between Event and intervention as to become a second Event. *Contra* Badiou, Düttmann seeks to infer a positive consequence from this indistinction of fidelity and Event, namely that fidelity is constitutive of an Event. Just as:

fidelity depends on the unexpected appearance of a singularity that cannot be accounted for in a given situation . . . an event that would not be constituted by the very fidelity it calls for, an event that could be identified as the object to which fidelity attaches itself and that for this reason would not be brought about by a faithful intervention, an event that would be added to a situation as a further element, could not interrupt the way of the world. (2004:202–3)

Düttmann reflects on the fact that fidelity necessitates a commitment to being faithful before one can actually grasp oneself as a faithful subject. Before one is actually faithful, the question arises as to whether one will commit to being faithful. In what he describes as a “fidelity to fidelity” Düttmann thus invokes another figure of self–relation. Just as the Event is a pure relating of itself to itself—an absolute sovereignty one might say—it is when fidelity is no longer faithful first and foremost to an Event outside itself, but turns back on itself to be faithful only to itself that a figure of absolute self–reference appears. From this perspective, fidelity and Event become indistinguishable. Düttmann’s approach addresses head on a fundamental anxiety about Badiou’s work: by insisting on the Event as a chance happening without any way of theorizing how its coming might be precipitated, Badiou risks leaving his theory with an impoverished account of historical change and consigning his philosophy to a political impotence in spite of his revolutionary aspirations. This notion of an anticipatory fidelity that could bring about an Event also authorizes a certain reading of Badiou’s Wagner book: as an act of militant fidelity so faithful that it triggers a rupture between Event and intervention, between Badiou “the Wagnerite” and Badiou “the philosopher.”

Heir to the Wagner Tradition

If *Five Lessons on Wagner* is an act of fidelity, then to whom does Badiou grant this unwavering fidelity? Who is the Master to whom he remains in thrall? Despite Badiou’s obvious enthusiasm for the music dramas, the

Wagner Event receives surprisingly little detailed attention in the book. Instead, the focus is on its aftermath and on the consequences within philosophical discourse that emerge in response to this purported Event. What preoccupies Badiou most is not so much the occurrence of the Event or the situation that it ruptured, but rather the possibility of fidelity to the Wagner Event. He seeks here to correct what he perceives as a radical betrayal of the alleged Wagner Event and to overturn the diagnoses of his philosophical predecessors who have declared Wagner to be a false Event. Badiou frequently recruits innovative productions to aid his rebuttal, but less often or successfully the workings of the music. What instead emerges most forcefully in the text is the question of Badiou's own fidelity to or betrayal of the discourse on Wagner that he has inherited. It is the question that also haunts the reception of Slimane's first womenswear show for Yves Saint Laurent: whether he remains in thrall to that tradition or whether he succeeds in making a radical break with it. Or does Badiou effectively dissolve the opposition that he sets up between Event and fidelity such that there might be a fidelity which, in reaching its limit, also risks betrayal and thereby become an Event? Does the book embody a fidelity that can only remain true to that fidelity through a radical break?

To begin to formulate an answer to this question, one first needs to explore Badiou's relationship to the philosophical context from which he takes his orientation towards Wagner. In his review article of this book, John Deathridge positions *Five Lessons* firmly within the context of post-1968 French philosophical debates, suggesting that Badiou here accuses Lacoue-Labarthe of levelling the same charge against Wagner that Badiou himself has repeatedly made against Deleuze and Guattari: namely, that they have liquefied the possibility of real revolutionary change (Deathridge 2011). Deathridge, however, while rightly pointing out that Badiou's Wagner book should be read in the context of *Being and Event*, also underestimates the extent to which Badiou's conception of political intervention had already shifted by the mid 1980s. Moreover, Badiou's concerns in *Five Lessons on Wagner* come more sharply into focus when they are considered alongside the more contemporaneous sequel to *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds*. Seen from this perspective, the terrain contested in *Five Lessons* may suddenly seem less colorful and less Oedipal than Deathridge's reading suggests, and rather more arcane and abstract. Unfortunately, the connection between music and philosophical thinking arguably becomes even harder to substantiate from this perspective.

It is neither May '68 nor Badiou's French rivals, however, but Adorno who dictates the agenda in *Five Lessons* and not just in the opening chapters that rehearse the music's philosophical reception since Nietzsche. He haunts

the book's opening confrontation with Lacoue-Labarthe and his famed negative dialectic then becomes the explicit focus of attention in the second lesson and the pivotal conceptual nexus in the next chapter's attempt to construct a broader archaeology of Wagner as a philosophical question. Even when Badiou "reopens" the case in his fourth lesson, his defense proceeds as a step-by-step rebuttal of Adorno's familiar charges on totality, identity, the instrumentalization of suffering and the subordination of waiting to an ultimately assured resolution. The exegesis in Lesson 2 of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* paves the way for this defense, with Badiou preferring to tackle Adorno's philosophy of music via the text that engages most directly with the philosophical tradition rather than one of books addressed to music, of which *In Search of Wagner* would surely have seemed most relevant here. The merit of Badiou's approach is that it confronts with uncompromising directness the conceptual structure that determines Adorno's judgments about music and gives what is arguably the most lucid account of his philosophical commitments in print to date. The book is worth reading for this chapter alone to the extent that it corrects a number of misunderstandings within musicology that surround Adorno's thinking and thereby opens up the possibility of further productive engagement with his work. Badiou's engagement with Adorno's most philosophical text yields a number of insights relevant to the Frenchman's project. First, he discerns an attempt to forge a melding of Kantian and Hegelian thought that preserves the critical and negative aspects from their respective philosophies while dispensing with the identitarian assertion emerging from this tradition that nonetheless exceeds rationality and thereby paves the way for the horrors of Auschwitz. From Hegel, he preserves the work of the negative without accepting its ultimate and inexorable elimination in the absolute. From Kant, he adopts the irreducibility of the sensible to the conceptual in order to retrieve a fundamental receptivity or "pathetics" that would not allow experience to succumb to the violence of conceptual thinking. This ethical imperative to attend to the somatic—or drastic—moment in musical experience continues to resonate within musicological discourse today; Adorno and Badiou's projects retain an urgent relevance insofar as music studies continues to wrestle with the possibility of building a discipline upon this moment. "Difference," both tell us, "has not even begun as yet" (Badiou 2010:33). This leads to Badiou's second observation about Adorno: that he seeks to think what is different from thought. In Adorno's philosophy, music enjoys this privileged status both as the other of thought, of philosophy.

Combining these two strands, Badiou makes common purpose with Adorno insofar as he asks "What, in music itself, can partake in rescuing appearance?" (2010:45). In his diagnosis of Wagner, however, he seeks

to overturn Adorno's analysis point by point. According to an illustrious philosophical tradition embraced by Lacoue-Labarthe that also includes Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, Wagner epitomizes the identity-principle against which Adorno wages his entire conceptual and ethical effort. Yet Badiou reverses each condemnation of Wagner. Each of his rebuttals is an elaboration of a central point: that Wagner's music dramas are not, *pace* Adorno, dialectical in the bad, Hegelian sense because they do not subordinate all difference to a higher-order identity or continuity. This leads Badiou to argue that Wagner does not reduce the melodic line to continuity (the "endless melody" hypothesis), nor the music to the narrative. Rather than provide a continuous subjective horizon through which to unify the external world, Wagner repeatedly invokes the figure of the split subject, chiefly in the guise of the Dutchman-type character, much cherished in Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian readings, who "cannot stay put" (2010:93). Sach's monologue in Act III of *Meistersinger*, he suggests, entails a genuine subjective transformation, refuting the possibility of a unified and unifying subject, while allows attesting to the music's capacity to unyoke itself from the narrative and to create new dramatic possibilities (2010:87-90). Badiou extrapolates from the emergence of a "generic humanity" (2010:101) at the end of *Götterdämmerung* the notion of a "transformation without finality" (2010:131) and, in an act of explicit betrayal of the master on his own turf, hears in *Tristan* a Beckettian waiting in vain (2010:122).

The Real Master

Deathridge's family feud thus has Adorno giving paternal guidance amidst a fierce sibling rivalry between Badiou and Lacoue-Labarthe only for both sons to reject him by ignoring his sage advice or turning it against him. Besides the question of who the French "mother" in this dysfunctional family might be, I suggest that a paternity test might not go amiss. While philosopher and Badiou translator Bruno Bosteels discerns an affinity between Adorno's critique of identity-thinking and Badiou's insistence that Being is not One (2004), at the ontological level there are no common bloodlines between these two philosophers. They sit on opposite sides of the divide between classical Platonism and Aristotelian pluralism. The incommensurability Adorno sees between concept and object differs fundamentally from Badiou's axiomatic inconsistency: Adorno tears thought and being apart, while Badiou maintains their identity. Badiou's project, in the 1980s at least, was to theorize the formal sufficiency of "a finally objectless Subject" (Badiou 1991). In short, there can be no shortfall between object and concept because his set-theoretical orientation excludes any notion of relation from being altogether.

To secure his alignment of Adorno and Badiou, Bosteels must venture an argument for finding a new dialectics within Badiou's thought (Bosteels 2004). Badiou's more recent turn towards the realm of appearance in *Logics of Worlds*, under the banner of a "materialist dialectic," raises precisely such expectations. Even, or rather especially, in this text, however, when Badiou strives to show how pure being–qua–being, how the pure inconsistent multiple, might *be there*, how it might appear locally as an object in a world, the gulf between his subtractive philosophy and the dialectic, however negative, remains clearly insurmountable. True to the rigorous set–theoretical ontology that Badiou presented in *Being and Event*, the appearing of every object in a world is directly determined by the actual ontological composition of which it is a manifestation. The result is that Badiou's new relational theory—what, in reference to Hegel, he calls a "greater logic"—still does not allow for the relation between objects to affect in any significant way the objects caught in that relation. The capacity for historical change is still restricted to an Event: as in the earlier book, an Event is something that belongs to the situation but is not presented and therefore appears to come out of nothing. To this definition, *Logics* adds the idea that an Event is that which "inappears" in a world. This means that, while being remains a matter of belonging alone (something either belongs and it *is*, or it does not belong and it *is not*), existence is, by contrast, a *quality* of being such that something can exist more or less depending on the intensity with which it appears in a world.

Drawing upon category theory, Badiou proposes that the degree of apparent intensity of an object is determined by the extent of its self-coincidence. What Badiou calls the "transcendental" of a world—the framework that structures the way in which being appears in that world—is an ordered series of identity functions that specify the degree to which an object is identical with itself, as well as the maximum and minimum intensity thresholds for appearing in that world. In this schema, an Event is the reassessment of the intensity of a singular object where an object that appeared as minimally intense now appears as maximally intense. If being is still belonging and existence is now the relation of being to itself, what becomes of the new and much–vaunted idea of relationality in this schema? Disappointingly for diehard dialecticians, the relation between two objects turns out to be nothing more than the measurement of their relative intensities. Despite Badiou's attempt to think how the connection between objects and their appearance might retroactively affect their being, it is hard to see how this kind of relationality could bring about a sufficiently significant reconfiguration of the situation so as to usher in an Event.

Five Lessons on Wagner is, I contend, best understood in dialogue with this effort in *Logics* to describe the connection between being and appearing and crucially to explain how the latter might exert a retroactive effect on the former. There are a few subtle clues scattered throughout the text that suggest such a reading. First, Badiou frames his defense using language reminiscent of how he has described his philosophical program after *Being and Event*. There are the two key passages that point in this direction. Uncoupling Wagner from totality, Badiou explains,

does not necessarily imply that totality will have to be ignored but rather that its trail can be picked up in fragmentation or in localization: at the point where continuity and dissonance, the local and the global, confront each other. If Wagner is made to appear here . . . where this clash between continuity and dissonance, between the local and the global, plays out, then I believe he can be defended against the . . . charges (Badiou 2010:83–84).

And later, upon resting his case, Badiou concludes that: “Ultimately, I would say that the most important thing we can learn from Wagner is, in this way, *topological*: it resides in the relationship of the local to the global, concerning which I believe he really contributed some significant, innovative ideas” (2010:32). The use of the word “topological” immediately connects Badiou’s claim about Wagner to his project of developing a logic of *being–there*, of appearing power of localization, in *Logics*. His repeated reference to the “clash between the local and the global” echoes a fiendishly difficult passage in *Logics* in which he tries to demonstrate through category theory the correlation between the orders of being and appearing (Badiou 2009:221–230 and 252–265). To connect the elements of a set to a given range of apparent intensities, Badiou needs to show how it is possible to proceed from a global to a local register.

The best way to understand what Badiou is getting at with the terms “local” and “global” and the significance of their coming together is to turn to the meditation on Hegel in *Being and Event* (2011:61–171). Here Badiou associates the local and the global with two contrasted types of difference: quantitative and qualitative difference respectively that will later come to characterize the two orders of being and appearing that Badiou attempts to connect in *Logics*. So, Badiou wants to make Wagner appear at the meeting point between two philosophical domains: between, on the one hand, the domain of a logic (of the global, the consistent world of appearing, qualitative difference, category theory) and, on the other hand, the domain of an ontology (of the local, the pure inconsistency of multiple–being, quantitative difference, set theory). Wagner, in other words, only “appears” at the confrontation between Badiou “the philosopher” and Badiou “the

Wagnerite,” between the philosopher of inconsistent being and the thinker of appearance. And it is Hegel who occupies this bewitched spot. Hegel is the real Master from whom Badiou must establish his break.

Badiou’s recuperation of Wagner thus hinges on his *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel, which proceeds along these lines: Hegel has a differential or qualitative (intensive) conception of difference that begins with the idea that something is other than the other. This external difference is then inscribed internally such that a qualitative something is discernible insofar as it has the other within itself. For the dialectical tradition, the other defines itself through an apportionment of difference and identity: something is what it is to the extent that it is not something else. Existence is held in relation to an other. By contrast, Badiou’s quantitative something has no other; his mathematical ontology thinks the difference of same to same, the pure difference in position, for example, between two letters in an alphabetical count. A multiple cannot differ more or less from another; it is only identical to itself. In other words, Badiou’s ontological commitments lead him to conceive of an extensive difference according to a logic of pure spacing.

This is all in keeping with the second, more explicit clue. The most significant philosophical proposition that Badiou makes apropos of Wagner is that he is non-dialectical (Badiou 2010:131). In the passage leading up to the conclusion cited above, Badiou claims that Wagner’s approach to the creation of possibility is “hardly a Hegelian or dialectical one,” (2010:130) implying not only, against Adorno, that Wagner resists a positive dialectic, but, more than that, that he resists any form of dialectical thinking, even that of the negative dialectic. Accordingly, Wagner also exposes the “possibility that a resolution may not necessarily be the reprise, the sublation, the condensation of or the solution to, differences set up in the artistic process.” With this “accept[ance] that resolutions may be non-dialectical without necessarily being . . . instances of arbitrary stopping,” he furthermore dispenses with the Adornian demand for interruption or failure that would undercut any appearance of dialectical resolution.

A Program for Musical Difference

Even if Badiou “the Wagnerite” appears to slip into an unthinking homage and Adorno’s verdict ultimately obtains, thereby consigning Badiou’s intervention to a fidelity to a false Event, that does not mean that our discipline ought to dismiss the project that Badiou “the philosopher” attempts apropos of Wagner. In other words, even if, as a dilettante Badiou is seduced into supporting the wrong candidate, it does not follow that there is no music that could match the aspirations of Badiou’s philosophical enterprise. An early rhetorical peroration in the book addresses this prescription: “Can music be

a programme for difference? . . . Can music contribute, or even play a critical role in, bringing about the beginning of difference? . . . Must we maintain that Wagner is the enemy of a programme for difference?” (2010:34)

Although Badiou is embroiled in Adorno’s concerns at this point, it is reasonable to suppose that this program for difference would have to exceed the privileging of difference over identity in the negative dialectic and approach the purely quantitative difference that Badiou attributes to being. The valorization of difference promoted in the majority of Adorno’s writings and in some parts of French deconstructionism seeks to rectify the injustice of social marginalization by recognizing and protecting the other. Badiou’s point is that any qualitative conception of difference would unavoidably entail in a minimal marginalization insofar as the other is always–already defined by the distance it takes from what it is not, by the margin by which is always–already separates itself.

A similar point is made in Jean–Luc Nancy’s notion of the ban, or the abandonment of being, taken up by Giorgio Agamben in his analysis of the logic of exception. This logic is distinguished by a limit–relation between inside and outside: that the outside (the exception) is included precisely to the extent that it is excluded from the community. Insofar as the ban marks the minimum structure of relation and hence of qualitative difference, Agamben asks whether sweeping away the violence that comes with exclusion, might therefore “put the very form of relation into question” (Agamben 1998:29). Such an approach might be facilitated by reading Badiou alongside other contemporary trajectories in Continental philosophy. Against the demolition of the subject in favor of structure in post–structuralist thinking, there has been an effort in some quarters to combine a notion of the impersonal with a critique of the logic of iteration that discloses the affinity between deconstruction and the dialectic. Most relevant to Badiou is the distinct turn in recent French and Italian thought, manifested most obviously in the work of Nancy and Agamben, away from the relation between subject and object towards the *between* of the relation. The task here is to think not the mediation of two poles, but the relating itself. For Nancy, this guides a renewed understanding of community founded not in the sharing of a common substance, but in recognizing the primacy of a being–with that precedes the individual and of a primordial opening or spacing at the heart of being. By inserting Nancy’s project of an inoperative community into Badiou’s ontology at the point where he thinks the pure fact of belonging without condition, it would be possible to tease out the means by which Badiou could counterpoise an image of community to the mythological vision of Germania’s founding so commonly associated with Wagner. Furthermore, if the Wagner Event is said to reconfigure the relationship

between music and philosophy, it would do so by rejecting both the claim that philosophy is music and its Adornian inversion that music is the other of philosophy. Instead, fidelity to the Wagner Event would work towards an indistinguishable music-with-philosophy and philosophy-with-music. Music and philosophy would be this “with.” There would be no more effort to identify an overlap between the two or to claim that they share a common substance, but simply this pure “with,” in which each would open itself out in spacing itself.

That assumes, of course, that Wagner’s music can be heard to promote such a conception of difference, and, even before one addresses that particular instance, that any music could set out such a program for difference. An objection must be raised to this supposition. To demonstrate the difficulty here I quote at some length a passage from *Logics* in which Badiou distinguishes between ontology and logic, between being and appearing, by analyzing the relation between local and global difference in each domain. He begins by noting the correspondence between the two registers at the level of pure inconsistent being:

The slightest local difference . . . entails an absolute global difference. The axiom of extension declares that two multiple-beings are equal if and only if they have exactly the same multiple composition, and therefore the same elements. *A contrario*, the existence of a single element that belongs to the one but not the other entails that the two beings are absolutely distinct . . . If two beings are globally different, there certainly exists at least one element of the one that is not an element of the other . . . Therefore there exists a *local* difference, or a difference “in a point,” which can serve to test the global or absolute difference between the two beings. (2009:155)

From this fact that “the ontological theory of difference circulates *univocally* between the local and the global,” (2009:155, my emphasis) Badiou is able to deduce that “there can be no purely global difference, . . . meaning that in being there is no purely intensive or qualitative differentiation” (2010:155–6). This means that, as far as being is concerned, there is only extensive difference all the way from the local to global.

Badiou, however, then goes on to contrast this with the logic of appearing:

But the same cannot be said in terms of appearing. It is clear that multiples in situation can differ more or less. It is thus necessary to admit that what governs appearing is not the ontological composition of a particular being . . . but rather relational evaluations which are determined by the situation and which localize that being within it. Unlike the legislation of the pure multiple, these evaluations do not always identify local difference with global difference. (2010:156)

To the extent that Badiou aligns his reading of Wagner with his theory of appearing (and because only an Event itself in the brief moment before it expires can give a glimpse of pure inconsistent multiplicity), the possibility of Wagner precipitating the emergence of the difference of same to same within music would seem to be foreclosed.

Let us recall, however, that Wagner's contribution is supposedly "*topological*: it resides in the relationship of the local to the global" (2010:132). The departure from the dialectic that Wagner provokes manifests itself not so much at the higher level of the opposition between being and appearing or at the lower level of local or global difference, but instead *in the relation* between global and local, in "localization" (2010:84). Badiou sets out the formal theory of appearing's power of localization in one of the most daunting sections of *Logics* on the theory of points. The theme of the relation between local and global has already arisen throughout earlier portions of the text, but it is here that Badiou turns the focus onto the topological character of the passage between them. For Badiou, appearing is the taking place of being, but a world only reveals itself as a set of topological spaces under certain conditions in what Badiou calls "points." It is helpful to recall that a world is organized by its transcendental, by a thoroughly immanent set of operations "that allows sense to be made of the "more or less" of identities and differences in a determinate world" (2009:118). The transcendental orders the objects in a world by assigning to each a degree of intensity. It also specifies a minimum degree of intensity required to appear in a world, as well as a maximum. The transcendental, however, is not limited to this function, but splits in two registers:

When we say "logic of appearing," we privilege the coherence of the multiples that compose a world . . . rule for the correlation of intensities of appearance. When we say "form of being–there," we privilege instead the localization of a multiple, that which wrests it away from its simple mathematical absoluteness, inscribing it in the singularity of a worldly place. (2009:410)

Localization describes the passage between logic and being–there and hence forges a link between being and its taking–place. The two registers of global logic and local being–there coexist in the figure of the point. Occurring at a degree of intensity ranked immediately above the minimum degree, the point is a moment within a world that scarcely appears, that borders on the inexistent; it thus occupies a similar position to the notion of Evental site in *Being and Event*.

The point is also where all the infinite complexity and nuance of a world (its global dimension) condenses onto the local in the passage from the

norms that govern how and what appears within that world towards the necessarily local taking–place of appearance. The point marks the moment when a global question—one that affects the world as a whole—is condensed into a decision about a highly localized, but scarcely discernible, issue. All of the complexity of a world is suddenly reducible to a simple “yes or no.” Each of these decisions has the potential to reconfigure the conditions by which the transcendental determines the degree to which an object appears or inappears in a world. Badiou identifies a spectrum between “atonic worlds” that have no points and “tensed worlds” in which there as many points as there are degrees of intensity. Most sit somewhere in between, although Badiou fears that the current state of “democratic materialism” (2009:1) is so homogenous as to tend towards complete atony. A major theme in the critical reception of *Being and Event* has been the inability of Badiou’s ontology to explain how the inhabitants might work to bring about an Event. The theory of points, though, provides something of a corrective in that it recognizes a certain state of affairs that might precipitate an otherwise chance happening: the more points in a world, the more likely an Event.

An Objective Phenomenology of Sound

It is in this context that Badiou “the philosopher” might have made a case for reconsidering the significance of Wagner. Insofar as Wagner inaugurates a debate over totality and identity, over the conceptual and ethical limits of the dialectic, he brings these questions to a point. The very possibility of a non–dialectical music, as a question to be pondered and a binary choice to be decided, suddenly shifts from minimally intense to maximally existent within musico–philosophical discourse. The Wagner Event, Badiou proposes to us, forces the question: Can there be music that would not ultimately be dialectical? Can there be music that would not just reinstate qualitative difference for identity and thereby perpetuate a totalitarian violence, but genuinely effect a displacement in the direction of an extensive difference? Can music sound as pure spacing?

In focusing the entire edifice of *Logics* on the local decision of music’s relation with philosophy, as if capturing the sunlight with a magnifying glass, Badiou forces an altogether much bolder question: Can music sound at all? Each point in a world forces a reconsideration of the norms that determine whether objects appear or inappear and how intensely. In the musical world, a point prompts a redetermination of what sounds and how intensely it sounds—and what unsounds in a world. By localizing the phenomenology of *Logics* through the lens of Wagner, Badiou, I argue, authorizes a new phenomenology of sound—of which I can only provide a brief sketch here.

First, in accordance with Badiou's goal of rescuing appearance "from the totalizing stranglehold of meaning," (2010:45) this would be a radically objective phenomenology. Rather than an account of musical experience rooted in the continuity and identity of an Husserlian consciousness, this new phenomenology would comprise a grappling with the conditions and operations that structure what sounds in a world. This would entail dispensing entirely with the horizon of a listening subject. Just as music studies warms up to the idea of placing hearing at the center of its investigations, it must at once resist this idealist impulse in favor of a materialist insistence on the priority of sound before subject—a step more radical than the plea to put the experience of raw sound before sense (or drastic before gnostic).

Beyond an investigation into the operations that determine what sounds, it would be the responsibility of this new phenomenology to take decisions that would potentially reconfigure these structures in the logic of appearing. In seeking to understand the minimal threshold of sounding in a world, one would encounter the moments which only just sound in that world and that thereby invite a decision between consigning the object to the oblivion of unsounding or amplifying it to an intensity impossible to ignore. The ethical injunction here—bearing in mind the need to elaborate a taking-place of difference that would not succumb to the logic of totalization and exclusion associated with Wagner—would be to seek out all those moments in the present world that occupy the margins of sound and the objects that scarcely sound so as to flesh out a new soundscape. This new phenomenology would thereby accomplish the revised relation between music and philosophy to which Badiou's reading of Wagner gestures: in allowing more and more new objects to sound in a constantly-changing world, the discipline would allow "music" to open itself up, spacing itself outwards and thereby dissolving the dialectical relation between it and its other.

Just as it is arguably Badiou who brings the Wagner question to a point through his fidelity, it is only through a faithful commitment—in working through point-by-scarcely-audible-point—that scholars of music might bring about a new world that sounds entirely different from the one in which we now live.

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others. Vurkaç taught the group's beginners' samba class 2000–2009. He also served as an adjunct instructor at Whitman College in the Music Department (Sound Synthesis, 1994) and taught in the general-education program, the World Dance Office, and the Electrical and Computer Engineering department at Portland State University (2003–2009).

Naomi Waltham-Smith is Assistant Professor of Music Theory at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research sits at the intersection of music theory and Continental philosophy. She is interested in how the critical resources of recent French and Italian thought might be deployed to interrogate the ethical significance of the processes and structures of music and listening. In particular her work analyses encounters with music's sounding materiality. Attempting to address both the experience of listening and the ways in which music might stage its own encounter with its aurality, she has published and presented on subversive constructions of space in listening to recorded sound, on the musical moment as an exposure of sonic materiality, on Voice as an instance of impotentiality that destabilizes the distinction between sound and sense, and on the inscription of the temporality of listening within music's unfolding. She has also written on the structural negativity of the Classical style, on the problem of repetition and on the sound of potentiality in the new *Formenlehre*. In approaching these questions, she has engaged with the thought of Aristotle, Heidegger, Agamben, Badiou, Deleuze, Derrida, and Nancy among others. She has nurtured these interests in England, Germany and, more recently, in the US. A graduate of Selwyn College, Cambridge, she spent a year as a DAAD Research Scholar at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität in Heidelberg before embarking upon a Master's and PhD at King's College London. After completing her thesis on "Adorno's *Augenblick* and the Ethics of Late Beethoven," she held post-doctoral positions at City University in London and Indiana University in Bloomington.