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THE NEW MAN'S FETISH

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the recourse to mathematics as a "language of the real" in the literature of perversion and in the philosophical project of Alain Badiou.

> "If number (polls, accounts, audience ratings, budgets, credits, stock market trends, print runs, salaries, stock-options. . .) is today's fetish, it's because at the place where the real comes to falter, there stands blind number."
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> —Alain Badiou, *The Century*

In a 2004 essay entitled "Mathematics and Philosophy: The Grand Style and the Little Style," Alain Badiou offers a polemical critique of the "linguistic turn" and its underlying assumptions that seeks to return philosophy to the robust mode of ontological enquiry pioneered by Plato. Denouncing what he calls the "little style" in philosophy—which describes any philosophical discourse that makes language the horizon of philosophical investigation (notably Wittgenstein), Badiou calls for a return to the "grand style" of philosophy that gives pride of place to mathematical reasoning and formalization as that which enables the pursuit and construction of truth. In the "little style," mathematics is merely an "object for philosophical scrutiny": a "ready-made philosophical question, rather than something capable

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of challenging or undermining that question" (MP, 4).[1] Even worse, this ready-made question invariably turns out to be "a question concerning logic, or the capacities of language; mathematical problems are therefore reduced to logical and linguistic problems" (ibid., 4). In contrast, mathematics in the "grand style" is understood as providing "a direct illumination of philosophy, rather than the opposite" (ibid., 7).

After discussing passages from Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, and Hegel as representatives of the "grand style," Badiou turns to a final example: the great libertine poet Isidore Ducasse (better known by his pen name, the Conte de Lautréamont), whose ruminations on mathematics are elaborated in his epic poem *Les Chants de Maldoror*. For those unfamiliar with this masterpiece of black humor and surreal imagery, the poem centers on the exploits of its sociopathic antihero, Maldoror, whose name evokes something like "gilded with evil" or "evil gleam." Haughty and blasphemous, Maldoror is a figure of unrelenting evil who has forsaken God and mankind, and who spends most of the poem locked in an epic war with God in which he seeks to defame, castrate, and ultimately kill him. In the passage Badiou cites, Maldoror offers an extended apostrophe to Mathematics—figured as a cold and implacable woman—whom he thanks for enriching his intellect with the "alien qualities" that sustain him in his "struggle against man." I cite the passage here in its near entirety:

> O rigorous mathematics, I have not forgotten you since your wise lessons, sweeter than honey, filtered into my heart like a refreshing wave. Instinctively, from the cradle, I had longed to drink from your source, older than the sun, and I continue to tread the sacred sanctuary of your solemn temple, I, the most faithful of your devotees. There was a vagueness in my mind, something thick as smoke; but I managed to mount the steps which lead to your altar, and you drove away this dark veil, as the wind blows the draught-board. You replaced it with excessive coldness, consummate prudence and implacable logic. . . . Arithmetic! Algebra! Geometry! Awe inspiring trinity! Luminous triangle! He who has not known you *is* a fool! He would deserve the ordeals of the greatest tortures; for there is blind disdain in his ignorant indifference. . . . But you, concise mathematics, by the rigorous sequence of your unshakeable propositions and the constancy of your iron rules, give to the dazzled eyes a powerful reflection of that supreme truth whose imprint can be seen in the order of the universe . . . Your modest pyramids will last longer than the pyramids of Egypt, those anthills raised by stupidity and slavery. And at the end of all the centuries you will stand on the ruins of time, with your cabbalistic ciphers, your laconic equations and your sculpted lines, on the avenging right of the Almighty, whereas the stars will plunge despairingly, like whirlwinds in the eternity of horrible and universal night, and grimacing mankind will think of settling its

[1] 'MP' will denote: Alain Badiou, "Mathematics and Philosophy: The Grand Style and the Little Style," in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004).

> accounts at the Last Judgment. Thank you for the countless services you have done me. Thank you for the alien qualities with which you enriched my intellect. Without you in my struggle against man I would perhaps have been defeated.[2]

To submit to the rigor of mathematics, Maldoror suggests, is to submit to the iron law of a stern and unforgiving mistress. In Badiou's gloss, mathematics is "the necessary exercise through which is forged a subject adequate to the transformations he will be forced to undergo" (MP, 14). It signals the advent of a "glacial anti-humanism" that will "bring about a denaturing of man," a "positive becoming-monster," so as to effect an "ontological deregulation of all the categories of the human" (ibid., 11).

This is why, Badiou concludes, he himself may be Lautréamont's only true disciple. When the latter teaches that "mathematics is the discipline and the severity, the immutability and the image of 'supreme truth'," he is, Badiou writes:

> only a short step away from saying that mathematics inscribes being as such; a step which, as you know, I have taken. . . . On all these points, from glacial anti-humanism to the trans-human advent of truths, I think I may well be Isidore Ducasse's one and only genuine disciple. Why then do I call myself a Platonist rather than a Ducassean or a son of Maldoror? *Because Plato says exactly the same thing.* (MP, 12)

The question I would like to consider here is: what does it mean to be a Platonist "in the same way" as—or by way of—Maldoror?

This paper is a preliminary sketch of a project I am just beginning to research. Tentatively entitled *Libertine Mathematics*, it seeks to juxtapose masterpieces of the libertine tradition by the Marquis de Sade, Giacomo Casanova, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, and the Count of Lautréamont with contemporary philosophical works that have embraced the language of mathematical formalization—or of other nonsignifying languages—as a means of contesting the so-called "linguistic turn" in twentieth century thought.

These two series of works are more closely related than they might at first appear, since the devotion to Mathematics is a major preoccupation both of libertine literature and of some of its most important authors. Sade and Casanova both authored mathematical treatises of some significance, and Casanova even earned a living as a professor of mathematics when he was not traveling the world seducing the hundreds of virgins he claimed to have deflowered. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose nineteenth century reference volume *Psychopathia Sexualis* was the first major work to attempt a taxonomy of

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[2] Conte de Lautréamont, "Les Chants de Maldoror," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Guy Lévis Mano (1938), Canto II.

the perversions, even identified the predilection for "mathematical patterns" as an essential trait of sadism.[3] (Gilles Deleuze observes that Sade in particular has a surprising affinity with Spinoza, who arguably belongs to the same genealogy—both rely upon "a naturalistic and mechanistic approach imbued with the mathematical spirit" [*CC*, 20].[4]) But what links these libertine and philosophical works, beyond their shared investment in mathematics, is a shared affirmation that an unmediated confrontation with the real is the only way to effect a specific "forcing" of truth.

The close connection between them is a recurring motif in Badiou's work. In *The Century*, Badiou suggests that the twentieth century was animated by a "passion for the real,"[5] attested by a range of different phenomena: the frequency of wars and revolutionary upheavals, the development of nuclear fission, and even the embrace of "purifying" violence in practices of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The "passion for the real" is defined not merely by the celebration of violence, however, but by a contestation of the order of the signifier and of the representations and grand narratives it supported. One of its most important expressions, he argues, is the confrontation with the real in modern mathematics, which entails the risk of foregoing language and linguistic representation in favor of a logical "construction" of the real that has no imaginary or representational dimension. But it also appears in the premium that psychoanalysis places on the confrontation with the death drive as the formative event in the subject's life—a theory for which perverse practices serve as an indispensable precursor and guide by exposing the signifier's inability to limit the real of the drive.

Badiou's intentionally provocative invocation of the great libertine aligns the pursuit of the real in mathematics with the embrace of the real (of the drives) as "truth" in the literature of perversion, and even plays knowingly with the problematic of castration (and above all its disavowal) that this allusion brings into play. While the object of the little style is a "neutered mathematics" (MP, 3) whose "aristocratic self-sufficiency" and "unrivaled mastery" are diluted, even castrated, in being inscribed within a linguistic mode of reasoning, the "grand style" stipulates that the "direct illumination of philosophy" that mathematics provides is "carried out through a forced or even violent intervention at the core of these issues" (ibid., 7).

Badiou's citation of Lautréamont points to a tension in his work between two ways of thinking about mathematics. On the one hand he affirms—via

[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 20. Deleuze cites Krafft-Ebbing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* 208–9 here, but provides no publication information.

[4] '*CC*' will denote: Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, in *Masochism*, 20.

[5] Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). From here, will be cited as '*TC*'.

Cantor—an understanding of mathematics as nonimaginary or nonintuitive, a constrained practice or "truth procedure" that foregoes any recourse to imagination, representation, or figuration. But on the other—as in this laudatory citation of Lautréamont—he seems to elevate mathematics to a distinctly imaginary or even allegorical persona. Mathematics is a *figure*, but a figure of the *end of figurality* (and thus a figure of a kind of "absolute zero," a radical new beginning). Its ambiguous status is apparent in Badiou's relation to Plato, whom he affirms as saying "exactly the same thing" as Lautréamont—and Badiou himself—in denouncing the failure of language to construct truth.[6]

I want to take Badiou seriously when he claims to be Lautréamont's "only true disciple" in this singular undertaking, and especially when he sees in the work of the libertine poet a fundamental contribution to mathematics. It stresses something that is by no means obvious, that mathematics has a subjective dimension or supports a specific subjective experience. Lautréamont represents the *masochist's* relation to mathematics, which is not only elevated to the same importance as the others, but even assigned a certain priority.

I would suggest that Badiou's work represents a "return" to Plato whose stakes are truly legible only by way of the libertine tradition that mediates this return. While math is appealed to as a supersensual language, which gives access to a real that cannot be represented or intuited, its juxtaposition with the problematic of perversion suggests that its effect is not merely to transcend the sensible, but to "force" the manifestation of what cannot be named, to call forth a supersensible reality that must be embodied or given form. Moreover, the "real" at stake here is not a purely intelligible truth, but a real that is violent, destructive, inadmissible in human civilization, and incompatible with speech—the real of the death drive, in other words. The death drive arguably animates each example of what Badiou describes as the "passion for the real," including mathematics. Even in Plato, he suggests, mathematics is invariably assimilated to *war*. What Plato admires in mathematics is

[6] While we do find in Plato the same antinomy between language and truth, it is also ironically staged. Even as Socrates famously indicts the "infection" of the mind by figurative language and dramatic representation in Book X of *The Republic* (where it is charged with contaminating reason, promoting ill-health and delusional thinking, and effeminating speaker and listener alike), one cannot help but notice that the dialogue is itself structured as a theatrical staging and elaborated in a language that makes constant recourse to the very figures and rhetorical devices it indicts in its critique of representation. The upshot of Plato's dialogue is thus to ironize—if not completely undermine—the very autonomy of philosophical reflection from representational language that Socrates seems to espouse by implying that there is no communication between language and the truth, and that the philosopher falls prey to the same impasse as the poet.

not simply that "it sets its sights on pure essences, on the idea as such, but also that its utility can be explicated in terms of the only pragmatics of any worth for a man who has risen beyond man, which is to say, in terms of war" (MP, 12). Arithmetic itself is shown to be "an instance of stellar and warlike inhumanity" (ibid., 13), where the "terrible reckoning of weapons and corpses" serves as an introduction to "number in its eternal essence" (ibid., 12). At stake is not just an ideal mathematics of pure monstration, therefore, but a *violent* mathematics of pure force, described alternately as a "weapon," a "catapult," and as a "fearsome machine of thought" (ibid., 17).

Here it is important to recall that like the real at stake in mathematics, Freud reminds us that "the death drive cannot be 'given' in psychic life, even in the unconscious, but is essentially silent—which is why we can speak of it only in speculative or mythical terms" (*CC*, 30). This is why Gilles Deleuze understands Freud's account of the death drive not merely as a description of what he observes in the clinic, but as a foray into "speculative philosophy": an attempt to locate a "real" that is not given empirically, and that therefore demands to be constructed. Prominent among these constructions is the myth of total war, whose proximity to the promise of mathematical formalization is a constant in Badiou's work (and a subject to which I will return shortly).

1. PERVERSION AND THE QUEST FOR A "LANGUAGE OF THE REAL"

The ungivenness of the death drive, and the corresponding need to substantiate or construct it, is arguably the central preoccupation of perversion and its most important contribution to the field of psychoanalysis. In seeking to render visible or give voice to the drive, perverse practices can thus be understood as staging a *demonstration* of what cannot be represented. In so doing, they might also be understood as advancing another understanding of language, which is not opposed to the drive or founded upon the negation of the real (Hegel's "the word is the death of the thing"), but a language *of* the drive—a "language of the real" that is not conditioned by lack or finitude. In Sade's work, the libertine who declares his freedom from the laws that seek to limit the drive also appeals to a new ground of authority in the real, frequently figured as a "voice of nature" that "commands" the libertine to execute its will: an unspoken voice whose authority is not limited by speech, but expressed in the drives and impulses that take hold of the libertine and compel him to act. This "voice" not only speaks in and through the subject whose actions it dictates, but provokes the manifestation of a language that has nothing to do with the finitude and de-completion of human speech. In practices of torture—as in the violent marking or testing of the body in

masochistic ritual punishment—the body itself is made to "speak," to give expression to a real that cannot pass through language.

While the pursuit of an intense and often violent confrontation with the real through these transgressive or even life-threatening practices certainly entails a great deal of risk, it could also be understood precisely as an attempt to *eliminate risk*—not only the threat of castration (whose "disavowal" defines perversion in Freud's lexicon), but more fundamentally the risk that presides over every instance of speech, inasmuch as it involves a mediation (of experience, of the "energy" of the drives, of truth) by a language that prevents the real from being transmitted in its integrity. Unlike the logics of communication that define instinctual animal languages, and that involve the integral transmission of information from an emitter to a receiver, human speech is always marked by the failure of communication or transmission; it is this risk of failure that the perverse hero of libertine literature seeks to control or even eradicate.

Serge André suggests that Sade's project is defined by an aspiration for "a language without supplement, a lexicon without subject" (*IP*, 29).[7] It is characterized by a "will to totalization" (ibid., 28), a mission to demonstrate that, in Sade's words, "*la philosophie doit tout dire*": that philosophy can and must *say everything*.[8] What drives Sade is not the imperative to obtain *jouissance* through crime, therefore, but the imperative to *say it all*, and more precisely to commit everything to writing: "as long as the object of *jouissance* has not been named, inventoried, poured into letters, it must survive so as to offer itself up to the blows of the torturer who pursues its symbolic distribution" (ibid., 28). Sade's

[7] Serge André, *L'imposture perverse* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 29. From here, will be cited as '*IP*'. In fact there is a double exclusion of the subject: the subject is made to feel the division, but is reduced to having nothing more than the cry; the pervert also effaces his subjectivity to make way for the Other. Following Lacan, André notes that Sade's own fantasy is clearly masochistic rather than sadistic in nature. It substitutes a morality of strict obedience for a false moral freedom: "we must enjoy, it's an obligation," and "since Nature wants to enjoy without any limit, our duty is to annihilate ourselves to clear the way for her, so that the Law can be accomplished (the Law that it is necessary first to destroy in order to create). The Sadean hero sacrifices his own subjectivity to this sanguine and constraining Other. He becomes nothing more than a voice that enunciates the natural commandment of *jouissance*, and an instrument that executes it like a zealous functionary. It is the victim who doubts and who asks questions about what is expected of her (because she's ignorant of the Law, she must be educated), who finds herself divided between body and speech, who sustains the full weight of anxiety" (*IP*, 23–24). The best expression of this sacrifice is the effacement or extinction of the pervert as subject; in his own life, Sade consecrates himself to the fantasy by becoming a voluntary prisoner, a "subject on the point of disappearing" (ibid., 25).

[8] At the end of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* the victim who has fallen unconscious under the repeated assaults of her torturers, Madame de Mistival, is revived by a vigorous whipping. When she asks the libertine Dolmancé why she has been called back from the grave, he replies: "Because all has not yet been said" (*Eh! vraiment, ma petite mère, c'est que tout n'est pas dit*) (*IP*, 28).

writing could thus be construed as attempting to fill the void in language, "to reintegrate into language what cannot ordinarily be said (and not only out of respect for convention)" (ibid., 28). For André, the Sadean endeavor is sustained by the fundamental affirmation that "nothing is impossible to say"; the desire to accede to a "language that would leave no remainder," that would engulf what by definition is posited as an excess of speech: namely the real or *jouissance* at stake in the fantasy (ibid., 29).[9]

Pauline Réage, in her erotic masterpiece *Story of O*, identifies the perverse enterprise with the quest for a writing that would not equivocate or dissemble. The masters tell O they will judge the effectiveness of their lashes not from her screams, but from the marks the whip raises on her skin—which are "more reliable" than words. They give expression to the fantasy of a "writing of the real" that would respond directly to the master's inquiry, bypassing the subject as someone who could refuse to answer, and who might therefore present an obstacle to the sadist's attempt to extract language from the body. In these examples, one could speak of a "writing on the body" that is not a writing of the *impasse* at stake in the fantasy (such as we find in the hysterical symptom, for example), but a writing that promises an *integral communication* of its object in which nothing is lost.

Willy Apollon identifies something similar in the scientific and linguistic reduction of the problematic of *speech* to the phenomenon of *communication*, where communication would entail the integral transmission of a piece of information from emitter to receiver, such as we find in the instinctual communication that is a feature of all animal groups. He notes that in English there is no equivalent for the French distinction between *le langage* and *la langue*, or between the structures of language we find everywhere in the natural world and that repository of the signifiers of the Other identified with the mother tongue: idiomatic expressions, jokes, figures of speech, and, most

[9] The paradox is that as Sade advances in the direction of this exigency, he finds that a new excess is always possible, an amplification of *jouissance* always imaginable. He is therefore condemned to write, enumerate, and inventory all the more. Marcel Hénaff suggests that this paradox is distributed spatially in the opposing functions of the *boudoir* and the *cabinet secret* as the two privileged locales of the Sadean master's demonstration (cited by André, *IP*, 29). The *boudoir* is the scene of philosophy and its "totalizing will," where everything that can be *said* must immediately be *done*. The *cabinet secret* is its supplement and symptom. The site of an excess whose details are never recorded in the narrative, this "secret room" is the scene of the unspeakable—it inscribes the place of an "impossible to say," the place of a remainder disavowed by the narrative's exhaustive inventory of acts and of different expressions of the drive. We know nothing about what goes on there, and the only thing that escapes is the victim's scream, which resonates in the text as the irreducible excess of the sayable. The void in the fantasy—what fails to be inscribed or written—is positivized and contained in a room, a room that is then imagined as the scene of an ultimate *jouissance*. The fantasy as a relation to lack is disavowed in favor of the fantasy as wholly speakable, as fully capable of integration into language.

importantly, the myths that give credibility to the subject's experience of the Other of language. Speech implies a structure of address, which is overdetermined by the empty place of the Other of this address. In the examples I have just mentioned, the perverse enterprise could be understood as a refusal of this lack as the origin of speech (and therefore of a language that is incomplete, inasmuch as it lacks a signifier for *jouissance*) in favor of a "speech that would be without remainder." In cataloguing all the possible manifestations of *jouissance*, in trying to "say it all," it is as if Sade aspires to bring *la langue* up to the level of *le langage*, to formalize, classify, and totalize *la langue* such that it is no longer defined by its empty center, by what it cannot say.

This is where mathematics comes in, as a language that appears to defy the failure or uncertainty that defines every attempt to represent the real in speech. Sade's libertine philosopher, when he does not explicitly identify himself as an amateur logician or mathematician, at the very least appeals to mathematical reasoning in his diatribes against the "divine chimera," the illusory God of Judeo-Christian theology and his unfounded law. André notes that the libertine's quest for a totalizing language also finds expression in the two great passions of Sade the man: for geography—in his words, "the system that names and inventories every point on the Earth's great body"—and for mathematics. In this reading, Sade would appeal to mathematics in an attempt to make visible the Mother's body, to constitute it as a whole. Despite their obvious heterogeneity, therefore, mathematics could be said to share with the bodily inscription of the drive in acts of violence or torture the promise of allowing for an integral transmission, the possibility of "speaking all of the real."[10]

These examples show how mathematics might be understood as having a "fetish" function, that of plugging up a lack on the part of the real. The claim that there is a specifically fetishistic attitude toward language is not in and of itself particularly novel, of course; Jacques Derrida, in his hugely influential discussion of the logic of the "supplement," even implies that such an attitude is what defines the use of language as such. He deconstructs the classical devaluation of writing (and of linguistic representation more broadly) as a distorting or merely "secondary" representation of the signified, and thus the absenting or negation of an originary presence, by showing how the signifier as "supplement" invariably substitutes or compensates for a lack on the part

[10] Mathematics would thus be closely related to the violent act that attempts to unify the mother's body "in the real," without passing through the signifier of the father's desire (for example the stitching up of the mother's vagina at the end of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* in *L'imposture perverse*).

of the real. What appears as a supernumerary "addition" is thus logically inseparable from the lack that is its condition of possibility.

Jacques-Alain Miller, in his 1965 essay "Suture," makes an important contribution to these debates by attempting to prove that the field of mathematical logic is marked by the same equivocal relation to lack that defines every discourse where a subject is at stake. His argument proceeds through a demonstration borrowed from Frege, in which the position of a zero defined as lacking its own identity is shown to condition the serial constitution of numbers. The position of this zero-as-lack is "sutured" by the zero number, which stands in for its absence in the series of numbers. The zero number can therefore be understood as having a "fetishistic" function, inasmuch as it fills in for an absence and so allows the serial constitution of numbers to hold together as a field.

Derrida and Miller understand "fetish" in the sense of "supplement," where the addition of the signifier is called upon to compensate or fill in for an originary lack (recalling Freud's famous dictum concerning the fetish, that a "multiplication of penis symbols always signifies castration"[11]). But Gilles Deleuze offers a novel approach to this familiar problematic, which allows us to grasp the more profound relation of libertine mathematics to Platonism. At stake is not merely the substitution of *something* for *nothing*, a supplement for a lack, but of the priority of the "ideal" over reality.

In *Coldness and Cruelty*, his tour-de-force reading of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, Deleuze even argues that masochism is defined by the pursuit of "supersensualism," and not, as one might suppose, of a quest for unbounded sensuality, or the eroticization of pain or suffering. Severin, the hero of *Venus*, takes as a motto for his doctrine the words of Mephistopheles to Faust: "Thou sensual, supersensual libertine, a little girl can lead thee by the nose" (*Venus*, 151/*CC*, 21).[12] Deleuze notes that *übersinnlich* in Goethe's text does not mean "supersensitive"—in the sense of "exceedingly sensual"—but rather "'supersensual', 'supercarnal', in accordance with theological tradition, where *Sinnlichkeit* denotes the flesh, *sensualitas*" (*CC*, 21). On the face of it, this claim is counterintuitive. In the examples we have just considered, the perverse demonstration seems to aim at an *intensification* of sensuality, notably through the sensations of pleasure and pain. Even in Sacher-Masoch's novel, Severin appears to swing from masochism to sadism, or between the pleasure taken in receiving pain to the pleasure taken in delivering it.

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[11] Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, et al. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), 18: 273.

[12] Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, in *Masochism*, 143–272.

But while Deleuze admits that the masochistic adventure of *Venus* is structured by a series of dialectical reversals, he contends that it is not the Hegelian dialectic that holds sway here, but a Platonic "dialectic of the imagination" (*CC*, 22) that aims at the "supersensualism" of the Ideal. At stake is not the reversibility or equivalence of sadism and masochism, therefore, but the extraction of masochism from the sensuality of which sadism would merely be one manifestation. For Deleuze, masochism aims at a specific "freezing" or suspension of the "pendulum swing" between two poles, identified with two different modes of sensuality: the hedonistic ideal of the Greek woman or Aphrodite who dedicates herself solely to the pursuit of pleasure, and the tortures of the sadist;[13] it seeks to identify a specific *supersensualism* that is pursued in—and also beyond—sensual experience. Thematically it is expressed by the ideal of "coldness," which in freezing the warmth of sensuality allows a specific severity to emerge.[14] (Here, I think we can hear an echo of Maldoror's appeal to mathematics in his struggle against man, implicitly, against the sensualism that is the ultimate trap of humanism.) The Greek Ideal is transformed into the masochistic ideal through "the catastrophe of the *glacial epoch*, which accounts for both the repression of sensuality and the triumphant rise of severity" (ibid., 52–53). The ideal is thus "the specific freezing point, the point at which idealism is realized" (ibid., 55). Only at this "freezing point" can the masochistic ideal of the "*cold* mother" exist; only here does the maternal phallus, which has no sensual existence, reveal itself in its timeless eternity, in the form of frozen images, impersonal traits, and inanimate objects.

It is this specific supersensualism that the fetish secures. Deleuze follows Freud in affirming that the fetish is the "image or substitute of the female phallus," and thus "the means by which we deny that a woman lacks a penis" (*CC*, 31). More importantly, however, it functions as what he calls a "protective and idealizing neutralization" (ibid., 32). That is, "the belief in a female phallus is itself experienced as a *protest of the ideal against the real*; it remains suspended or neutralized in the ideal, the better to shield itself against the painful awareness of reality" (ibid.). It follows, Deleuze writes,

[13] Masochism is not only distinguished from sadism, therefore, but almost antinomial to it. As an excess of sensuality, sadism always threatens to compromise the masochistic ideal, to swing right past the "freezing point" and suspended scenes that are its ideal toward a "vulgarity" in delivering abuse (Severin's complaint concerning Wanda) that has nothing in common with the icy discipline the masochist seeks.

[14] "The function of the masochistic ideal is to ensure the triumph of ice-cold sentimentality by dint of coldness. The coldness is used here, as it were, to suppress pagan sensuality and keep sadistic sensuality at bay. Sensuality is disavowed, and no longer exists in its own right; thus Masoch can announce the birth of the new man 'devoid of sensual love'" (*CC*, 52).

that "disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists . . . in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it" (ibid., 31). In other words, the fetish substitutes not for a "real" penis, but for the maternal phallus that does not exist in reality, and for that very reason lays claim to being the ideal or "true" phallus, the one that never fails. As Serge André's perverse patient Violette puts it, a woman is superior to a man because she never loses her erection; only a woman who does not actually "have" a penis can never lose it.[15] In Platonic terms, we might say that the maternal phallus is the "ideal form," the male penis its "copy." The fetish therefore opposes the ideal, the maternal phallus that does not "exist," to the real—the male penis that, by virtue of "existing," is necessarily secondary with respect to the ideal.

The attainment of this "specific freezing point" thus serves two aims. The first is defensive, where the suspension of movement has the effect of making time stand still and so freezing the threat of castration in its tracks. Because "the fetishist's choice of a fetish is determined by the last object he saw as a child before becoming aware of the missing penis," the "constant return to this . . . point of departure enables him to validate the existence of the organ that is in dispute" (*CC*, 31). The fetish "is therefore not a symbol at all," Deleuze writes, "but as it were a frozen, arrested, two-dimensional image, a photograph to which one returns repeatedly to exorcise the dangerous consequences of movement, the harmful discoveries that result from exploration; it represents the last point at which it is still possible to believe" (ibid.). (Recall as well Freud's reading of the Medusa's head, where being frozen in place or turned to stone is at once the effect of castration and its defiance, since it turns the body into the erect penis.)

But the second and more important function of this frozen arrest is to elucidate another reality: that of the maternal phallus, certainly, but in and beyond it, the reality of the death drive itself. Recall that for Freud, *inanimacy* is the form in which the death drive is most often expressed in its ungivenness. Deleuze makes a remarkable contribution to this thesis when he writes—this time in *Difference and Repetition*—that "time empty and out of joint, with its rigorous formal and static order, its crushing unity and its irreversible series,

[15] In André's words, "her true identification is with a phallic mother with respect to whom all men, beginning with the father, are castrated" (*IP*, 126); for this fetishist, therefore, castration "is located on the side of man and the father, rather than on the side of woman and the mother" (ibid., 129).

is precisely the death instinct."[16] The formalism of the masochist's surrender to the mother's icy discipline sustains not only a certain maternal ideal, therefore, but the suspension, timelessness, and inanimacy of the death drive itself. The relationship between them is already implied in Sacher-Masoch's three feminine types, in which Deleuze sees three fundamental mother images: the primitive, uterine mother; the Oedipal mother, figure of the beloved, who becomes linked with the sadistic father as victim or as accomplice; and the oral mother, the mother of the steppe, who nurtures and brings death (*CC*, 55). (Freud, he reminds us, found the same trinity in the figure of the Three Fates: "The mother herself, the beloved who is chosen after her pattern, and finally the Mother Earth who receives him again . . . the third of the Fates alone, the silent goddess of Death, will take him into her arms."[17])

This is why for Deleuze fetishism belongs to masochism, and thus to a transcendental structure. Indeed, the "supersensualism in and beyond sensual experience" that Deleuze reads as the object of Severin's quest might even be a definition of the death drive as Deleuze understands it. As a drive to the inorganic, the death drive is fundamentally opposed to sensuality, and specifically to pleasure and pain. This is why Deleuze understands Freud's account of the death drive as the "beyond of the pleasure principle" not in terms of the transgression of a boundary or limit (going "beyond pleasure" into something painful or traumatic, for example), but rather as a foray into speculative philosophy, an attempt to identify the transcendent principle or "higher law" of the pleasure principle, the supersensual law of its sensual manifestations.

The "glacial anti-humanism" Badiou ascribes to Lautréamont's evocation of math resonates powerfully with this frozen ideal, as if Lautréamont had found in mathematics the "cold mother" who proves so elusive to the masochist in reality. But Deleuze's argument also sheds light on the nature of the "Platonic supersensualism" implied in both examples, which does not merely oppose the ideal to the given, but attempts to *real-ize the ideal*, to "force" it. In Deleuze's words, the masochist "does not believe in negating or destroying the world nor in idealizing it: what he does is to disavow and thus suspend it, in order to secure an ideal which is itself suspended in fantasy. He questions the validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality" (*CC*, 33).

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[16] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 111.

[17] Sigmund Freud, "Theme of the Three Caskets," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, et al. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1957), 2: 291–301.

2. THE NEW MAN

In the final section of this paper, I would like to consider what these affinities with perverse and libertine experience might reveal about the place of mathematics in Badiou's own thought. To pursue truth through mathematics is to refuse the "neutering" involved in inscribing every proof in language; but it is also, Badiou implies, to affirm the much more radical risk involved in foregoing the representations, intuitions, and other imaginary supports that function as crutches to reason, and so diminish its true capacities and freedom. To submit to the iron laws of mathematics is to abandon all stable reference points, to renounce the world as we know it, and thus to access a specific experience, one that will profoundly test the subject and call into question his very coherence as a *cogito*. In the "glacial anti-humanism" math inaugurates, Badiou asserts that man himself must disappear in favor of truth. (Whence the affinity between his account of mathematics and his more politically-inflected theory of the "event": a violent break with the status quo that makes way for a new state of affairs—and a New Man—that cannot be imagined in advance.)

The affinities between Badiou's core concerns and perverse thought are numerous and sometimes explicit, and on another occasion it would be interesting to think about their implications for the theory of the event in particular. The event "suspends" an existing state of affairs—an existing "situation," in Badiou's terms—which is thereby revealed to be a mere "description of what is." And yet the event never simply inaugurates a new epoch. Instead it is a *momentary* encounter with a real to which the subject declares his fidelity, which is rare, fleeting, and ephemeral—an object of construction rather than a manifest state of affairs.

In Badiou's work, the topos of the "new man" is identified not only with the evental forms of Christian eschatology (the "resurrection event" he ascribes to Saint Paul as his singular insight) but with the political-emancipatory importance of the same figure in Soviet communism and constructivist art. This topos arguably achieves its fullest elaboration, however, in the literature of perversion, and in the works of Sade and Sacher-Masoch in particular. Deleuze even suggests that the birth of a "new man" may be the fundamental aim of perverse disavowal, in which the disavowal of the mother's castration is only a necessary first stage. Commenting upon the dream of an agrarian communism that recurs throughout Sacher-Masoch's work (*CC*, 96), and that is closely related both to his nationalistic pan-Slavism and to his masochistic fantasy of a "cold mother of the Steppe," Deleuze suggests that the aim of each is to announce the birth of a "new man" devoid of sensual love (ibid., 52). "What is the significance," he

writes, "of this constantly recurring theme: 'You are not a man, I am making a man of you?' What does 'becoming a man' signify? Clearly it does not mean to be like the father, or to take his place. On the contrary, it consists in obliterating his role and his likeness in order to generate the new man" (ibid., 99). This is the meaning of the three different kinds of rites that recur again and again in Sacher-Masoch's fiction: hunting rites, agricultural rites, and rites of regeneration and rebirth; "the ideal woman hunts the bear or the wolf; she organizes or presides over an agricultural community; she makes man undergo a process of rebirth" (ibid., 95). The last would appear to be the essential rite, since it stages a parthenogenetic second birth independent of the father.

It would be interesting to consider how the different domains in which Badiou himself has elaborated the problematic of the new man might themselves be understood as a perverse horizon. Here, however, I am going to focus on Badiou's book *The Century*, which represents his fullest exploration not only of the problematic of the "new man," but also of the "passion for the real" that he sees as the animating force of the twentieth century (and that is thus implicitly the horizon of his own thought as well). Although the word "perversion" never appears in it, *The Century* could be read as a very original intervention into the problematic of perversion and its relation to the "new." It presents itself as a kind of psychoanalysis of the twentieth century, an attempt to apprehend it as a subject and to identify, in and beyond its more symptomatic manifestations, the novelty of its object. As Badiou puts it, his "aim is not to judge the century as an objective datum, but rather to ask how it has come to be subjectivated" (*TC*, 5). He thus positions himself as a kind of "passeur" for the century, who undertakes to transmit the essence of its relation to the real.

Badiou offers a ringing indictment of certain iterations both of the "new man" and of the "passion for the real": the possibility of a genetically engineered new man that would be created by science, in the absence of any political project,[18] and the confusion of the real with a suffering body that could be tortured or destroyed. Both might be understood as the manifestations of a certain perversion, the one generally identified with Sade. The

[18] "We are living through the revenge of what is most blind and objective in the economic appropriation of technics over what is most subjective and voluntary in politics. And even, in a certain sense, the revenge of the scientific problem over the political project. . . . 'To change what is deepest in man' [the reference is to the Chinese revolution] was a revolutionary project, doubtless a bad one; it has now become a scientific problem, or perhaps merely a technical problem, in any case a problem that allows for solutions. We know how, or at least we will know. Of course, we could ask: what is to be done about the fact that we know how? But to reply to this question we require a project. A political project: grandiose, epic and violent. Believe me, inane ethical committees will never provide us with an answer to the following question: 'What

genetic engineering of a new man might even be understood as a kind of Sadean ideal, a desexualized production of a new man who would not be tainted by the odious "engendering" of the family. In *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, the sixteen-year-old girl who becomes the libertine's precocious student, Eugénie, is even named for the emerging science of eugenics (from the Greek roots meaning "felicitous birth"). Her torture of her own mother and bloody suturing of the maternal womb heralds the brave new world of a truly revolutionary France, liberated from the familial order and its sanctimonious morality. But Sade also represents what Badiou calls the "terrifying but ancient" idea that "the only real body is the tortured body, the body dismembered by the real" (*TC*, 116). The libertine's demonstration attempts to substantialize the real through a violent "act" (for example, the suturing of the mother's womb) that would unify the body, forcing it to "exist" or to show itself.

What Badiou is really critical of is not perversion as such, however, but rather the way in which a certain avatar of the century's "passion for the real" has come to exemplify it, and therefore cause it to be dismissed, repudiated, or feared. This is the one implied in its diagnosis as the "century of crime," the genocidal, violent, and totalitarian century of the extermination camps, massacres, and organized state crime (*TC*, 2). Its particular "passion for the real" is one we are already accustomed to calling perverse: the apathetic, sadistic violence of instrumental reason (a diagnosis for which Horkheimer and Adorno's and Lacan's respective readings of perverse fascism clearly loom large, even if they are never mentioned).

Badiou refuses to engage in the judgment that surrounds these examples and their characterization as devoid of thought or as unthinkable. But he is especially interested in elucidating other, less obvious dimensions of the century's "passion for the real." He identifies within it two distinct "orientations" toward the real: the *destructive orientation* that conceives the real as a substance (for example, in genocide, torture, or genetic engineering), and the *subtractive orientation* that conceives of the real as a minimal difference (for example, the difference between white and white in Malevich's "suprematist composition" of the same name) (ibid., 54). In the second case, the task of "purification" is replaced by the attempt to "measure" (or *construct*) an ineluctable negativity (ibid.). The subtractive orientation differs from destruction in that "instead of treating the real as identity, it is treated right away as a gap. The question of the real/semblance relation will not be resolved by a

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is to be done about this fact: that science knows how to make a new man?' And since there is no project, or as long as there is no project, everyone knows there is only one answer: profit will tell us what to do" (*TC*, 9).

purification that would isolate the real, but by understanding that the gap is itself real. The white square is the moment when the minimal gap is fabricated" (ibid., 56). The "destructive" passion for the real is "a passion for the authentic," which "can only be fulfilled as destruction"; but this is also its limitation, since "purification is a process doomed to incompletion, a figure of the bad infinite" (ibid.). In its "subtractive" orientation, on the other hand, the passion for the real is "a differential and differentiating passion devoted to the construction of a minimal difference, to the delineation of its axiomatic. *White on White* is a proposition in thought that opposes minimal difference to maximal destruction" (ibid.).[19]

Sadism would represent the destructive orientation—the sadist wants to short-circuit the subject and get right to the extraction of the real. Badiou's criticism of torture or genocide as attempts to isolate the real might be read as an exemplary instance of his "supersensualism": to confuse the real with the sensuality of the body (and especially the mortality or destructibility of the body), he suggests, is to miss the real by substantializing it, and so making it "exist" as a substance. As this observation suggests, however, Badiou's distinction between the "destructive" and "subtractive" should not be read as opposing perverse and nonperverse "passions for the real," or, for that matter, violent and nonviolent. *Both* are perverse, and *both* are also violent, but the violence is not the same. Drawing upon Deleuze, we might say that while Badiou's century is undeniably perverse, its perversion manifests itself both sadistically and masochistically; it is this second, less familiar and less well-appreciated perversion that he brings to the fore with his emphasis on the specific violence of mathematics.

To the substantialization of the real, as something to be manipulated or destroyed in the form of a living body, Badiou opposes what he calls the "definitive destruction" at stake in mathematical formalization. He gives as an example "the mathematical endeavor that goes by the name of *Bourbaki*, which seeks to build a mathematical monument that will be integrally formalized, complete and definitive" (*TC*, 36). It is "definitive" because it is complete. Yet it is also *destructive*, since "this longing for the definitive is realized as the beyond of a destruction. . . . By means of an integral formalization, the monument of completed science destroys the old scientific intuitions" (ibid.).

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[19] Badiou notes that the conflict between these two orientations has played a decisive role in his own philosophical trajectory. If *Theory of the Subject* took as its motto the famous words of Mallarmé, "destruction was my Beatrice," *Being and Event* offered an explicit self-critique of that position by attempting to show "that a subtractive thinking of negativity can overcome the blind imperative of destruction and purification" (*TC*, 55).

3. THE VIOLENCE OF NUMBER

Yet what is fascinating about this argument is that mathematics is not simply aligned with the "subtractive" orientation. Instead, the distinction between destructive and subtractive, sensual and supersensual, actually allows for the identification of an oscillation *within mathematics itself* between two different orientations toward the real. Central to this argument is a discussion of the twentieth century's fascination with number, which is not a unified problematic for Badiou but has two different and opposing faces.

The first concerns the substantialization of number as *count*, and therefore as the enumeration, listing, or calculation of what is, whether in the form of body counts, opinion polls, budgets, salaries, or stock-market trends (*TC*, 26). This is what Badiou calls the "Restoration's number"—"indefinitely numerable," "arbitrary" in its variability, it is the "floating number" that indexes the "fluctuations of the stock market" (ibid., 27). He even describes it as the *fetish* function of number, which has a "bad" relation to the real that consists in substantializing it as numerable: "If number . . . is today's fetish," Badiou writes, "it's because at the place where the real comes to falter, there stands blind number" (ibid., 26). Its relation to destruction partakes of this existential slant, elucidating one connection between number and war: the numbers of the dead, the numbers of towns and cities destroyed, the industrialization of death, the number of dollars spent to fuel the war machine. The violence of the twentieth century may be, and often is, calculated numerically.

Against this account of number "as a stopgap for the failure of the real" (*TC*, 26–27), Badiou elucidates another genealogy (to which his own work would belong) in which number is a form of being. To the dimension of number as mere count or tally, it opposes what he calls the "unique" or "necessary" number. If the "Restoration's number" consists in taking the measure or count of the existing situation to the exclusion of being, the "unique" or unsubstitutable number is closely identified with the being that Badiou's own thought ascribes to the event, which interrupts "what is" (the degraded being—or mere existence—of "the situation") by breaking with the logic of the "count." Here he evokes it in relation to Mallarmé (who, in "Mathematics and Philosophy," is also discussed alongside Lautréamont as a poet of "glacial anti-humanism"):

> Mallarmé is a thinker of number in the guise of the dice-throw. But for Mallarmé number is anything but the material of opinion. It is "the unique number that cannot be another," the moment in which chance is fixed—by the intermediation of the dice-throw—as necessity. There is an indissoluble link between chance, which is

> not abolished by the dice-throw, and numerical necessity. Number is the cipher of the concept. That is why, as Mallarmé concludes, "Every thought emits a dice-throw." (*TC*, 27)

This "unique" or unsubstitutable number shows that the destruction, purging, or purification associated with the quest for the "definitive" can also take another form: the "call to purify—through axiomatics and formalism—the mathematical real, to purge it of the entire spatial or numerical imaginary of institutions" (*TC*, 52).

Here too there is "purging": not of real bodies, however, but of the *imaginary itself*. This is a project of *supersensual* purging, which is certainly still destructive, but not in the same way. These two kinds of "purging" can be read as eludicating the difference between two modalities of perversion, which correspond to the distinction between the numerable and the "unique" number.

The first avatar of number (the "fetish number" of count and accumulation) is closely related to what we find in Sade, where number is made to serve the project of exhaustive *enumeration* that Sade calls "saying it all" (*tout dire*), and that consists in giving a full reckoning, count, or tally of everything that can be done (as in the endless lists of possible perversions that fill the pages of *The 120 Days of Sodom*). From this perspective, Sade's insistence that "nothing is impossible to say" could also be read with a different emphasis: nothing *is* impossible to say, since he is unable to give expression to the "nothing" except in the form of a symptom. His ideal of *integral* transmission necessarily tends toward an *interminable* transmission—interminable not only in the sense of going on and on *ad infinitum*, but in the sense of refusing termination or closure. It can never be truly complete, inasmuch as there is always more to be catalogued, more to be said and done, which attests to the impossibility of "saying it all."

The "fetish number," for Badiou, is thus *number reduced to the function of the signifier*, with all that implies about the displacement of lack within the structure and the corresponding impossibility of "writing the real." This relates to one way of linking fetishism and mathematics, the one elaborated by Derrida and Miller: in terms of addition and substitution, or the numerical logic of the supplement.[20] More broadly, number as count reduces mathematics to the *representational function* of language that consists in accounting for what is already there. Whence the close connection between the "numerable" and the discursive logic of enumeration: although the first relates to math and the

[20] Badiou's characterization of the "Restoration's number" as a "floating number" even seems to be an allusion to the well-known problematic of the "floating" or "zero" signifier in structuralism.

second to language, both involve a count in which the signifier (or number as signifier) is reduced to the function of pure deixis, labeling, or list-making, the tallying up of "what is" (and thus to the enumeration of existence, rather than pure ontology). But it is also consigned to the *sensual*, in the specifically Platonic sense in which poetic language, understood as merely representational or imitative, belongs to the sensual and not to the supersensual sphere.

The "unique number," on the other hand, is supersensual, eternal, definitive, and "necessary," the same number Plato has in mind when he aligns mathematics with the intelligible sphere of the idea. Just as Deleuze opposes masochistic supersensualism to the sensuality of the sadist, Badiou can be read as opposing the masochist's relation to number (as formalization,[21] eternity, and truth) to the sadist's (the piling up of bodies, names, and acts, the bad infinity of an interminable transmission).

Yet this second avatar of number, while it constitutes a critique of the "fetish" function of number that comes to plug in for a "faltering" on the part of the real (and therefore of a certain perverse investment in mathematics that I have explored here in relation to Sade), may also be much more intimately related to fetishism in the sense in which Freud and Deleuze understand it. It relates to the "supersensualism" of the masochist's fetish, which is not calculable or numerable—the one, unique, unsubstitutable number "beyond" substitution. Recall that in Freud's argument, the fetish is understood as a substitute for the penis; not "any *chance* penis," he specifies, but "a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost":[22] the (unique) penis attributed to the mother. When Serge André's patient, Violette, maintains that all other women (and for that matter all men) are castrated, while she and her mother are not (*IP,* 126), she makes clear that castration cannot be verified at the level of the body's sensual reality, as the presence or absence of an organ. This actually suggests a specific disavowal of castration (the one glimpsed by Deleuze) in which castration is situated in the sensual sphere (as an inadequation of the sensual representation to an intelligible truth) while the uncastrated Real (the woman who is not castrated) is situated in a nonsensual register, that of the maternal phallus as an object of fantasy, where "fantasy"

[21] Deleuze, too, stresses the *formalism* of masochism: "masochism can be defined neither as erotogenic and sensuous (pleasure-pain), nor as moral and sentimental (guilt-punishment)," since "each of these definitions implies the possibility of any manner of transformation." Instead, he maintains that "Masochism is above all formal and dramatic," since "its particular pleasure-pain complex is determined by a particular kind of formalism, and its experience of guilt by a specific story" (*CC*, 109).

[22] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 204–09.

is understood not merely as "illusion" or "wish-fulfillment," but as the construction of a *definitive* object.

Deleuze's argument allows us to understand that both are examples of fetishism, even if it is not the *same* fetishism in each case. One is an attempt to "real-ize" as sensual, to make exist, what is experienced as lacking; the other is an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of the real (of truth) over the given, outside of any appeal to the imaginary of sensuality. Here, fetishism is apprehended not primarily in terms of its symptomatic features (the disavowal of castration), but in terms of its contribution to the problem of construction. As a singular mental object that does not properly speaking "exist," and that must therefore be constructed, the fetish makes an important contribution to psychoanalysis by demonstrating that the object at stake in the fantasy is a purely mental object that has no correlate in reality. In other words, just as it is the perversions that first attest to the reality of the drive for Freud, so it is fetishism that arguably "proves" for the first time that the object of the fantasy is not an object in the world. As a construction of this object, what Badiou calls the "unique number" may also reveal something about the object as such, or what Lacan calls the *objet a*: the mental object that does not belong to the "world" or to "what is," but intervenes in it, interrupts it, at moments that have an "evental" status.

So, why call this the masochist's number and not simply the Platonic number? Because it is the very avatar of number that invites Badiou to say that Lautréamont and Plato are "saying the same thing" when they laud the capacity of mathematics to construct the real: the number that inaugurates a "glacial anti-humanism," makes the ice age reign, and effects the destruction of man. It allows for the construction of a very specific real, that of the death drive.

Badiou's specific contribution to this problem is to show that there is a "subtractive" as well as a "destructive" orientation to the death drive. The first differs from the second not in negating or repudiating the death drive or its violence, but in conceiving the real otherwise than as a substance to be destroyed. It purges us of an imaginary understanding of the drive, including its representation as "energy"—for example, the thermodynamic representation of the drive we find in Sade, as a constant energy not subject to entropy or loss, "coursing through the world it destroys."[23] This substantialization of the death drive obscures a more profound understanding of the drive as immaterial, not given, and therefore presentable or knowable only as a formal construction.

[23] I thank Daniel Wilson for this formulation.

Steven Miller speaks of the "constitutive illegibility" of the death drive due precisely to the fact that it finds no limit in death.[24] At stake is thus a figure of infinity, which may be destructive or subtractive, indefinitely numerable or unique, the "bad infinity" of repetition compulsion and the unlimited return of trauma, or the "good infinity" of formal construction. The upshot of Badiou's argument is to show that the death drive cannot simply be reduced to the "destructive," since it is the source of all creativity, of all novelty or innovation, as well as of destruction. The death drive is no more intimately related to Nazism or the Final Solution than it is to poetry or mathematics. Plato, Mallarmé, and Cantor all wage war on a certain idea of the imaginary, but this does not imply bloodletting or merely destructive violence. Instead, each of these examples is concerned with what might be called (following Benjamin) a "divine violence" of number, which annihilates absolutely without shedding blood.

To the extent that Badiou is talking about the death drive in these pieces (and my thesis is clearly that he is, whether intentionally or not), he apprehends it primarily as something creative, linked to the production of the new, even as he acknowledges its violence and destruction. What it creates or produces is closely connected with the question of *style*, which is understood not as something external to subjectivity (its ornamentation or embellishment) but its very essence, as in Buffon's "the style is the man himself." Lucie Cantin defines the ethics of masculinity as a quest to "give a style to the death drive."[25] This observation suggests that the death drive might reveal itself not merely as deadly force or destructive energy, but *as style*. For the masochist, the signatures of this style are formality and formalization. In Badiou's thought, the question of style is closely related to the distinction between the "destructive" and "subtractive" orientations to the "passion of the real." But it also frames his discussion of mathematics, in the form of his distinction between the "grand style" and the "little style" of philosophical enquiry. My inference is that the "grand style," the one he identifies with mathematical formalization, consists precisely in *giving a style* to the death drive, rather than attempting to substantialize it through material destruction.

Because it is so closely concerned with the problematic of the "new," and in particular the production of a "new man," the logic of perversion provides a specific insight into what Lacan describes in his *Seminar* 17 as a "new style

[24] Steven Miller, *War After Death: Reflections on Violence and its Limits* (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

[25] Lucie Cantin, "La masculinité au-delà du phallus, un style et une éthique pour la pulsion de mort," *Savoir* 5 (2000), 128.

of master signifier,"[26] the S_1 that is the byproduct not only of the analyst's discourse, but of the discourse of perversion that shares with it the same *matheme*:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\not{S}}{S_1}$$

Formally the two discourses are identical, since both are associated with the forcing of the subject's division:[27] and thus the uncovering of the "style" of its relation to the fantasy and the drive. The argument I am making here might suggest that this "style" has a fundamental relationship not only to math and mathematical logic, but to perversion and the fetish. In other words, Badiou's work helps us to understand why the analyst's discourse and the discourse of perversion share the same *matheme*, what this means, and how it can be read.

However, I would also stress that Badiou's own "passion for the real" is ultimately not as "subtractive" as it pretends to be, since in the place of a "construction of the gap"—or even a "definitive destruction"—he consistently gives us the *figuration* of definitive destruction, in the form of a figurative appeal to mathematics itself (for example, as an "instrument of war"): a figuration that always retains something of the more "substantial" relation to the real. This is what ultimately gives to Badiou's treatment of mathematics a perverse inflection, even if he is not necessarily himself a pervert.

To say that Badiou's treatment of mathematics falls under the sway of the masochist's is not to deny its importance, however. To the contrary, his discussion has the virtue of transmitting (whether intentionally or not) what might be the fundamental insight of the masochist's relation to mathematics: that it provides a construction of the death drive. In this, he may not only confirm Deleuze's fundamental insight into masochism, but take it one step further.

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[26] Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, book 17, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 176.

[27] Serge André: "it is only possible to make the other's subjective division appear from a certain position that Lacan designates in the same way for the analyst and the Sadian master: $a \rightarrow \not{S}$, or the inverse of the formula of the fantasy $\not{S} \rightarrow a$" (*IP*, 21).