

Love - The Scene of the Two

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RESUMO

Este artigo examina a filosofia do amor de Alain Badiou como uma disciplina distinta que gera verdades compartilhadas, contrastando-a com a teoria da sexuação de Lacan. Enquanto Lacan situa o desejo e a sexualidade dentro de impasses estruturais, Badiou reconfigura o amor como um procedimento acontecimental que emerge da experiência da diferença. Ao criar um mundo compartilhado entre dois sujeitos, o amor resiste tanto ao individualismo quanto ao reducionismo biológico, afirmando-se como um lugar de compossibilidade. Esta estrutura redefine a relacionalidade, apresentando o amor como um processo imanente que integra dimensões subjetivas e universais. O artigo se conclui considerando como a filosofia do amor de Badiou oferece uma alternativa convincente às concepções contemporâneas de experiência relacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: amor; verdade; sexuação; acontecimento.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Alain Badiou's philosophy of love as a distinct discipline that generates shared truths, contrasting it with Lacan's theory of sexuation. While Lacan situates desire and sexuality within structural impasses, Badiou reconfigures love as an evental procedure that emerges from the experience of difference. By creating a shared world between two subjects, love resists both individualism and biological reductionism, asserting itself as a site of compossibility. This framework redefines relationality, presenting love as an immanent process that integrates subjective and universal dimensions. The paper concludes by considering how Badiou's philosophy of love offers a compelling alternative to contemporary conceptions of relational experience.

KEYWORDS: love; truth; sexuation; event.

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Introduction

Few philosophical systems position a theory of love as one of their foundational principles. Alain Badiou himself acknowledges this in his discussion on Auguste Comte¹, noting that love is often relegated to the domains of life philosophy or practical action rather than serving as a central philosophical category. Typically, robust theories of love are found outside of traditional philosophy, particularly in psychoanalysis or mysticism. Given this context, it seems particularly surprising that Badiou, whose philosophical system is deeply rooted in the ontology of truths and structured by the rigorous logic of the axiomatic set theory, provides a 'hospitable environment' for a theory of love and sexual difference. Yet, in Badiou's work, love emerges as a crucial site where truth is encountered and affirmed, challenging conventional philosophical boundaries.²

Badiou's theory of love is bold and innovative, yet it bears the hallmark of all his theoretical endeavours: a deep engagement with and transformation of its predecessors. In this case, Badiou draws on Platonic, romantic, and psychoanalytical theories, not to discard them but to reframe them as components within his own broader conception. What, then, are the key elements of Badiou's theory of love? First, Badiou affirms that love does not deny or erase sexual differences, nor does it reject the desire for the body. The body, sexual fantasy, and the difference between sexes remain integral to the love relationship. However, Badiou argues that love transcends mere bodily desire and sexual fantasy. Similarly, while Badiou acknowledges the validity of Platonic love—love that exists without sex—

¹ See Badiou 2023: "August Comte and Love".

² "Stretches of parched prose filled with mathematical symbols and irrigated by a militant passion that does not balk at identifying its enemies, the work of Alain Badiou—which also comprises a project antipathetic to the most recognizable forms of feminism—seems an inhospitable environment for a theory of love and sexual difference." (Copjec 2005)

he positions it as another aspect of the love relationship rather than its entirety. In Badiou's view, love is not simply the sum of physical desire and Platonic love; it is something more, something that emerges from their interaction—a unique scene that he terms “the scene of the Two,” characterized by a shared yet distinct movement, what he describes as “limping gaiting.”³

Perhaps it becomes clearer if we first understand what love is not, according to Badiou. The “Two” is not simply a numerical value like 1, 2, or 3. Firstly, love is not the value of 1, which would signify the fusion of two individuals into a single entity—this represents the desire to erase their differences, akin to the romantic ideal of becoming “one” with the beloved. This notion of 'one' reflects a desire to possess the other, reducing love to the fantasy of ownership. Secondly, love is not $1 + 1 = 2$, implying that love is merely the sum of two separate desires, a concept often seen in postmodern interpretations of love, where individuality is preserved in a 'live and let live' arrangement. This arithmetic also fails to capture love's essence when it is reduced to the sum of a sexual and a non-sexual desire. Thirdly, love is not $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, where the relationship is mediated by an external entity—such as the State, law, family, custom and culture—to harmonize the two individuals. In Badiou's theory, love resists these simple numerical reductions. So, if love is not 1, 2, or 3, what, then, is the 'Two' in Badiou's conception of love?

The Two represents a new, dynamic life emerging from the relationship between two individuals in love, a life distinct from the numerical values 1, 2, or 3. As we shall see later, this new existence is born

³ “Whether one be slow or speedy, he that is a seeker will be a finder. Always apply yourself with both hands to seeking, for search is an excellent guide on the way. Lame and limping and bent in figure and unmannerly, ever creep towards it and be in quest of it.” (Rumi 2001)

through two crucial operations that Badiou terms “excision” and “expansion.” In this context, a new body is formed from the individuals in love. This body has (what I call) two key ‘organs’: the humanity organ (u), shared between the partners and serving as the locus for sexual desire and fantasy, and the organ (t), which represents what remains of each individual after their desire has been excised. The organ t includes both individuals, minus their desire, creating a new entity from this excision. The scene of the Two is characterized by the interplay between these two organs— u and t —entangled within the new body of the Two. Love, in this view, is the life that unfolds as these organs interact within this shared existence. This life is neither smooth nor harmonious but reflects a dynamic and sometimes turbulent rhythm akin to the asymmetric movement of the heart’s systole and diastole. Badiou suggests that when we focus solely on the operation of excision, we encounter love according to sexual desire (organ u), whereas Platonic love emerges when we consider only the operation of expansion (organ t).

Before proceeding, I would like to reference my previous work on Badiou and the ‘theory of discipline.’⁴ In that context, Badiou’s account of love as a truth procedure never fully resonated with me. It seemed counterintuitive to conceptualize love as a discipline, a framework through which I have theorized and generalized truth procedures. Formalizing mathematics and science as disciplines was relatively straightforward. It took longer to grasp how to formalize politics, and I wasn’t confident in my approach until later when I had an opportunity to work on Sylvan Lazarus’ concepts and Badiou’s theory of models as a guiding paradigm.⁵ Although I never attempted to formalize art, I’ve always believed that art,

⁴ See Naderi 2024, especially the last chapter “Thinking Discipline”. For a much more condensed version see Naderi 2021.

⁵ See Naderi 2020.

like science, is object-based, making its formalization comparatively straightforward. However, love poses a unique challenge. Unlike object-based disciplines like science or art, love is akin to politics in that both are grounded in becoming rather than being.⁶ This explains my initial struggle with formalizing politics, yet politics, despite its emphasis on becoming, still engages with numerous objects—organizations, classes, the State, to name a few. Love, by contrast, is devoid of objects and exists purely as a process. Moreover, I always found a more direct path from Badiou’s ontology to disciplines like mathematics, science, art, and politics. But love? I struggled to see how ontology could bridge to love. It wasn’t clear what the generic of love might be—what constitutes the generic extension in the situation of an amorous relationship?

Part of the challenge lies with Badiou himself. His shorter works on love often obscure his actual account, painting a picture of someone who glorifies love in the way a romantic novel or poem might. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Badiou is critical of how art—whether poetry, fiction, or film—handles the subject of love. He believes that art fails to fully grasp love, focusing only on its eventual aspect, from the initial spark to the moment of union, and then glossing over everything that follows as a “happily ever after.” However, for Badiou, the real saga begins after this point. It is in this aftermath that the life of the Two truly commences.⁷

Becoming a subject to the truth in science, politics, or art is a rare occurrence—it doesn’t seem accessible to the average person. But love is different. Anyone can fall in love. Subjectivation under science, politics,

⁶ For Badiou’s theorization of object versus becoming based procedure see Badiou 2022, sections 8 and 9.

⁷ For Badiou’s criticism of the treatment of love in cinema and poem see Badiou 2024, “The Work of Love: The Scene of the Two.” We will see some of his criticisms later in this paper.

and art procedures is uncommon, but in love, it is far more widespread. Yet paradoxically, Badiou's theory of love is the most complex of all four procedures. Unlike in science and politics, where he refrains from offering a full theory, Badiou has developed a comprehensive theory of love.⁸

There is a fundamental discontinuity between the event of a love encounter and events in science, politics, or art. In all other truth procedures, a situation already contains an exception that the event brings to light. The event alters the transcendental of the situation so that what was previously non-existent or barely existent now becomes maximally present. But this existence was already there, latent, waiting to be revealed. This phenomenological interpretation aligns with Badiou's ontology of the multiple, where unnamable subsets are always potentially discoverable within a situation. That's how I understand the generic process. The event doesn't create the generic subset in the other truth procedures; rather, it reveals what was already possible, embedded in the situation's being. With the event of love, however, things are different. Before the encounter, the generic did not exist and could not have existed. The two lovers meet for the first time, and this encounter creates a new world that did not previously exist. Each lover inhabited their own separate world, and the meeting of the two transforms these worlds, merging them into a shared reality. The transcendental shift occurs within this new world, not within the separate worlds the lovers once occupied. Only now can we speak of a generic subset in this new world as the lovers enter this shared reality where the procedure of truth suddenly becomes relevant.

⁸ Part of the reason that I have attempted to provide a "theory of discipline" is the underspecification of what a procedure of truth is, especially in the case of science and politics. Love, in the other hand, is a category for which Badiou has attempted to provide a stand-alone theory.

With these considerations in mind, I'd like to offer a brief recap of Badiou's theory of love as a procedure of truth.

Love, Truth, and Sex

In Badiou's philosophy, love is a condition of truth. However, even as a truth procedure, love is not merely, or even primarily, a transference of the Master. For Badiou, love is predominantly understood as erotic love. Since Plato, love has been deeply intertwined with philosophy, and this relationship extends beyond the mere love of truths. For Plato, the love of the body serves as the gateway to the love of truth. It is the love for "beautiful bodies," where the insistence of desire lingers, that marks the starting point of the dialectical journey toward the Idea.⁹

However, it is essential to recognize that love cannot remain confined to the level of desire alone; it must progress to something more while never fully alienating desire. The journey of love cannot be reduced to the mere eruption of desire or the fleeting pleasures of sex.

So, what is love? Badiou's thesis is that love yields the truth of difference as such and the truth of the other within the element of the same.¹⁰ In the "experience" of love, disjointed "positions" emerge. Badiou defines experience broadly as "the presentation as such of the situation,"

⁹ "A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies." (Plato 1997, 492). In *Symposium* (210a–212a), Diotima, through a conversation with Socrates, outlines a philosophical journey that one can take through love, which is often referred to as the "Ladder of Love." Diotima explains that the love of a single beautiful body is the first step on the ladder. Initially, one is attracted to the physical beauty of an individual person. From this initial attraction, the lover should eventually come to appreciate the beauty in all bodies, recognizing that the beauty of one body is similar to that of another. This is the stage where love for all beautiful bodies becomes evident.

¹⁰ See Badiou 2022, 529.

and these positions as two “presentative positions.”¹¹ The fact that these disjoint positions are sexuated—labelled as one man and the other woman—is irrelevant to the axiomatic definition of love.¹² Furthermore, the understanding that these positions are disjointed is something we recognize only after the event of love. Before the encounter, the experience of the relationship does not present disjointedness or even the existence of two distinct positions.¹³ This is because the disjunction is total. The totality of disjunction is affirmed by another axiom of love, which states that there is no third position in a love situation. Since the positions of ‘one’ and ‘one’ are entirely disjoint, with no shared experience between them, neither can recognize the other’s position as distinct from their own. After the event of an encounter, it is only retroactively that this recognition becomes possible.

As a natural desire, the aim of sex is not directed at the opposite sex. Its aim lies beyond the individuals engaged in the sexual act; it is in the perpetuation of the species—something external to both human animals involved. This externality is where the desire for sex plays out. The sexual act itself lacks interiority; it is a structure whose contingent and fleeting interiority briefly aligns with Nature’s strategic, external plan.

Love emerges precisely at the point of this vanishing non-relationship between the sexes and creates a relationship, a bond, a connection—in short, an interiority that nevertheless preserves difference. What love creates is a structure that Badiou refers to as the Two—a symbol of difference, to which this interiority bears witness and which is

¹¹ See Badiou 2008, 183.

¹² “The approach thus far is strictly nominalist: no empirical, biological or social distribution is acceptable here.” (*Ibid*)

¹³ “There is ‘one’ and ‘one’, which do not make two, as the one of each one is indiscernible, although totally disjunct, from the other. In particular, neither position includes the experience of the other, as this would amount to internalizing the two.” (Badiou 2008, 187)

overdetermined by language, symbolism, and signification. This is why love reveals the truth of the sexual non-relationship by introducing what it lacks: the symbolic power of the Two. It does so even within the domain of sex and eroticism, which are reshaped and redefined through their integration into the new symbolic framework that love provides.¹⁴

Love as an event

If a sexual act belongs to the order of being, love belongs to the order of the event. Unlike the sexual relationship, which is ontological, love can only occur by chance. A love encounter interrupts the continuous and ever-present stream of sexual desire, rupturing it to create something entirely new—its own truth.

In psychoanalysis, sexual desire is incited by the object of desire, which is the cause of the desire—the unconscious drive to have sex with a particular individual. However, Badiou argues that love transcends the unconscious object of desire. He acknowledges that the love encounter is always somewhat guided by the "dark star" of the original object of desire, yet he emphasizes that love exceeds this, thanks to the reversal expressed in the declaration "I love you." This declaration signifies more than just an attraction to the object of desire; it affirms, "I love you, not merely the object of my desire within you, but you as a whole, beyond what initially captivated me, beyond what I know nothing about."¹⁵

Love begins with an event—an encounter between two individuals that disrupts their previous state of being and opens the

¹⁴ Badiou 2022, 530. In a Hegelian context, love appears to render itself as the dialectical sublation of sexes – and as a sublation, it reveals the truth of the difference between the same Two. We will return to this Hegelian register later on in this paper and will examine whether this is a proper interpretation of the operation of love.

¹⁵ Badiou 2022, 531.

possibility of a new, shared existence. This event is transformative, creating something new that wasn't there before. After the event, the individuals involved in love start to navigate their new relationship. It is through this process that two distinct positions—often characterized as "masculine" and "feminine"—emerge and become clear. These positions are not predetermined or fully formed before the event; rather, they are a product of the love process itself. The retroactive nature of this process means that individuals only become aware of the distinct positions they occupy in relation to each other after they have entered into the love relationship. In other words, the event of love creates a new reality in which these positions become meaningful and recognizable. Before the event, these positions were not consciously understood or perhaps even nonexistent. The experience of love retroactively brings them into focus as the individuals reflect on their relationship and how it has transformed them. The awareness of these disjunct positions—the understanding that each person occupies a distinct but interrelated position within the relationship—is a consequence of the love process. This awareness was neither fully understood nor articulated before the love event. The event changes how individuals perceive themselves and each other, creating a new understanding of their respective positions.

To make this more concrete, consider the initial encounter between two people who fall in love. Before this encounter, they were just two individuals, each with their own life and perspective. Once they enter into a love relationship, they realize that they are no longer isolated; they have entered a new mode of existence—the "Two." As they navigate this new relationship, they may notice differences in how they each approach love, desire, and the relationship itself. These differences, or disjunct positions, are not immediately apparent but become clearer as the relationship develops. The key point is that these positions are understood

only in the aftermath of the event of love—they are a result of the love process, not a precondition for it.

Badiou asserts that love goes beyond mere attraction to the object of desire, and this excess is constituted by subsuming the object within the whole of the beloved. As Badiou suggests, the field of the presentation of love transcends the mere object. Compared to sexual difference, which is essentially disjunctive, love, by subsuming the object under the subject's being of the beloved, constructs a scene of presentation where the non-relationship occurs as a count—a count-as-two.¹⁶

The count is the outcome of the encounter, its sign and effect. But the Two is neither a fusion (a unification of two ones into another one, now called Two) nor an addition (one plus one). It is not even three: “The Two is in excess over what composes it, yet without our having to count to three.”¹⁷

Badiou encapsulates these ideas in two theorems:¹⁸

- **Theorem 1:** Where there is an absence or a lack, only an excess can act as compensation.
- **Theorem 2:** It is the event that constructs, for a situation of being, the truth of that situation.

This means that it is love that reveals the truth of which sex is capable, not the other way around.

In this regard, Badiou has been critical of art's representation of love as an event. He points out that various works of art typically represent love in the following ways:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

1. As the coming together of two lovers: one + one. This interpretation misses the miraculous experience of love, which is the creation of the Two—not simply as the result of one + one. Love directly attains the Two.
2. As a fusion of the two lovers into one entity. This view overlooks the (sexual) difference. Love preserves the difference between the two lovers in the figure of the Two.
3. As the renunciation of sexuality in a form of unity. This interpretation loses sight of the sexual non-relationship. Love sublates sexual non-relationship but remains inclusive of it.
4. As primarily an event—the event of the encounter. Art often neglects the procedural aspect of the truth of love, which is why love stories usually end with a “happily ever after.” They do not explore what happens after the two lovers finally come together after a long and arduous journey. But this coming together is not the end of the truth procedure. Although love originates in evental excess, it is still coextensive with its duration. Only time can judge the event in terms of the truth it makes possible. Therefore, the focus should be on the construction of the scene of the Two, as this is the work of love, whose paradox lies in sexual disjunction being both its content and its obstacle.¹⁹

We can surmise that the sexual is the terrain of fantasy. The sexual is driven by the object of desire, whose existence is within the subject’s fantasy. This is why sex is non-relational. The subject projects its fantasy onto its partner and remains faithful to this fantasy. As a result, the sexual is the domain of difference. Love is the sublation of this difference—it preserves the difference while, at its peak, creating a relationship that

¹⁹ Badiou 2022, 533.

establishes a new experience of the Two. This new experience, the Two, is inaugurated and announced by an eventual encounter and functions as a procedure that, like any other truth procedure, requires renewal. This is where we encounter the index of love to the absolute.

A Sketch of Formalization

Badiou has a deep affinity for formalization, and love is no exception. His formalizations carry intriguing pedagogical value, often illuminating the concepts more effectively than his philosophical explanations or examples. In the following, I will attempt to reconstruct Badiou's formalization of love.

The first thing to understand is that love is about non-relationship. The presence of non-relationships implies that the elements involved are singularities. What does this mean? It means that their entanglement—their relationship, in other words—is antisymmetric. This means that their positions cannot be swapped; their roles are qualitatively different. Consequently, the Christian motto “love thy neighbour as thyself” is not appropriate for love, as it assumes that self and non-self are interchangeable, negating their singularity.

Singularity means that the two elements within the relationship are not interchangeable. If we formalize the relationship with the symbol \approx , then $a \approx b \neq b \approx a$. In other words, the difference between a and b enters into the relationship. A relationship that respects the singularity of terms cannot tolerate the indifferent symmetry of interchangeable roles. In other words, $[(a \approx b) \rightarrow (b \approx a)] \leftrightarrow (a = b)$. This is the axiom of antisymmetry, which states that a relationship between different singularities is always antisymmetric. Following one of Nietzsche's intuitions, this also implies that such relationships are always power relationships. In other words, if

the term a occupies a particular position relative to the term b , which is assumed to be different, it cannot relinquish that position to b . Indeed, love is such that it never involves giving up one's position.²⁰

This tells us, as we already know, that equivalence ($=$) is not the appropriate model for relationships in love. What about a non-equivalence relation, such as the order relation (\leq), which, like equivalence, is reflexive and transitive?

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|--|---------------|
| 1. $a \leq a$ | reflexivity, |
| 2. $[(a \leq b) \wedge (b \leq c)] \rightarrow (a \leq c)$ | transitivity, |
| 3. $[(a \leq b) \rightarrow (b \leq a)] \leftrightarrow (a = b)$ | anti-symmetry |

The order relation is an excellent way to model the relationships that frequently occur among human beings. Badiou observes that such relationships are ubiquitous in the general context of human interactions. There is no need to interpret them as relationships of subjection or hierarchy; they simply indicate that any living singularity is related to itself (reflexivity), that any relationship is mediated by phenomena of seriality (transitivity), and that a singularity is never indifferent to its position within a relationship (antisymmetry).²¹

Badiou borrows the concept of seriality from Sartre. In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1985, first published in 1960), Jean-Paul Sartre introduced the concept of seriality in discussing alienation in modern capitalist societies. Sartre distinguishes between "group" and "series." A "group" is a collection of people actively and purposefully engaging with each other, recognizing one another, and sharing objectives and strategies to achieve common goals. A "series" is a collection of people passively brought together by orienting themselves toward an object or behaviour, establishing specific relations with each other and the

²⁰ Badiou 2022, 534.

²¹ *Ibid*

surrounding material conditions. His best-known example is the bus queue: people line up, orient themselves toward the bus, and are defined by their position in the line. For Sartre, seriality is negative because it negates mutual dependence on the Other by not realizing it; individuals do not interact beyond the superficial, becoming a “plurality of isolations.” Sartre argues that seriality is a mode of everyday life commonly experienced by individuals, a passive and anonymous relation governed by circumstances, habits, and routines that regulate the objects or behaviours people orient themselves toward.²²

Although the order relation is an excellent model for relationships among human beings, the “sex distribution” among them does not follow an order relation. If M and W stand for man and woman, writing $M \leq W$ or vice-versa is nonsensical. In other words, there is no order relation between man and woman. In this regard, Badiou notes that “man” and “woman,” in terms of their relationship with sexuality, have no relationship or are incompatible.²³

Badiou formalizes this non-relationship of sexes as $M \perp W$, equivalent to $W \perp M$ —the \perp operation is commutative. Badiou refers to this as the first axiom of disjunction. If someone asks what this formula means, it can be expressed as follows:

$$M \perp W \leftrightarrow \neg(M \leq W) \wedge \neg(W \leq M) \quad (1) \text{ axiom of disjunctions}$$

The second thesis posits that, despite M and W being completely disjunctive in their sexed positions, they are both members of humanity as a whole. Therefore, there is something common between them that, while analytically indefinable due to the non-relation, nonetheless exists because

²² See Ronström 2008, 2.

²³ Badiou 2022, 534-535.

both are human. Let's call this common term that makes them both human "u." We can formulate it as follows:

$$(\exists u)[(u \leq M) \wedge (u \leq W)] \quad (2) \text{ axiom of humanity}$$

The third important concept is that u is unanalyzable. There is nothing that can be said about u . In other words, u does not have any terms itself. We can express this as follows:

$$(t \leq u) \rightarrow (t = \emptyset) \quad (3) \text{ axiom of atomicity}$$

The fourth axiom is that M and W do not compose a whole, which can be formulated as follows:

$$M \cup W \neq \text{Whole} \quad (4) \text{ axiom of not-whole}$$

This latter axiom may be a corollary to the axiom of atomicity. If the union of M and W constituted a whole, one could claim that M and W have terms that make up the whole of humanity, which contradicts the axiom of atomicity.

It should be noted that Lacan previously attempted a formalization of sexual non-relation based on the global function he termed the phallic function. Lacan's formalization includes two axioms: The first states that all speaking beings are subject to the phallic function; the second states that while the phallic function fully determines all men, it only partially determines women. There is a part of a woman that is not subjected to the effects of the phallic function, a part that makes women undefinable, underdetermined, and indefinite—the so-called "feminine mystery."

In contrast, Badiou's axioms concerning the "feminine mystery" are as follows:

1. There is nothing common between man and woman: a woman contains nothing undetermined that destines her for the public sphere. In other words, a woman is essentially a private being.

2. Unlike man, there is no determination for woman. This renders the woman's position undetermined and indefinite, leading to an effect similar to an infinite domain. "Hence the assumption of a potentially infinite expansion of the feminine, which, since it has no atoms, might well be equivalent to the whole."²⁴

Badiou refers to the first as the operation of excision—the common term between man and woman—and the second as the operation of expansion, which renders a woman both a deprived being (in relation to what has public value) and an overvalued being (in relation to the infinity of the situation).

In contrast, Badiou seeks to develop a theory of love based on the four axioms presented earlier.²⁵

The Theory of Love

The core of these axioms is that while M and W exist in a non-relationship (there is neither equivalence nor order between the sexes), they share a common atomic element, which Badiou refers to as the term u . The existence of u is intuitive: there must be something that men and women share, enabling us to categorize them both as humans. However, this shared element, u , is atomic—meaning it cannot be described or

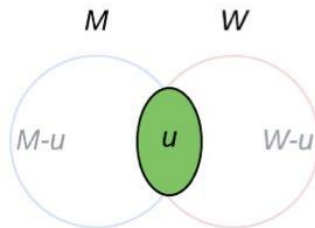
²⁴ Badiou 2022, 537

²⁵ It is interesting to compare Badiou's humanity function with Lacan's phallic function. As speaking beings, regardless of the positions man or woman, humans are subject to the phallic function. As Colette Soler explains, the sex of a man or a woman is not derived from biology or anatomy but from language."The natural difference between the sexes has subjective consequences only by being signified and only has repercussions at the level of the speaking being [*parlêtre*] by passing through the twists and turns of discourse." (Soler 2000, 40). Similar to u , the phallic function has a universality that is prior to the sexual positions.

defined. The axiom of atomicity captures this lack of descriptiveness: $(t \leq u) \rightarrow (t = \emptyset)$.

Badiou offers two readings of the axiom of humanity— $(\exists u)[(u \leq M) \wedge (u \leq W)]$ — one involving excision and the other expansion. In the excision operation, u is included in both M and W , making them incompatible. Here, what is common between them results in a non-relation. Conversely, in the expansion operation, u is excluded, leading to what Badiou calls the scene of the Two. Thus, excluding what is common creates a pairing between the sexes.

In the first reading, u represents what makes M and W incompatible. Badiou describes u as the object of desire. As an unanalyzable term, u causes M and W to engage in a misunderstanding centred on the atom u —the cause of their shared desire. This misunderstanding is irresolvable because u cannot be articulated.²⁶



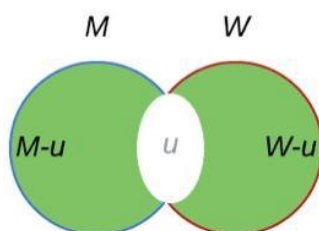
Badiou elucidates the second reading as follows:

“Or else it can be read the other way: on the basis of u is constructed, by joint internal excision or by pairing of the two external “halves” joined by u — which

²⁶ Badiou 2022, 538. It remains unclear how Badiou conceptualizes u as the object of sexual desire.

can be written as $(W - u)$ and $(M - u)$ —the Two of the positions as what the atom u serves as a basis for while being subtracted from it.”²⁷

In this second reading, it seems that by excluding u , we focus on the two halves, $(W - u)$ and $(M - u)$, which somehow give rise to the enigmatic Two.



A bond exists between the two positions that u maintains. This bond arises because u is the object of desire for the opposite sex, yet it simultaneously forecloses the possibility of a relationship between them (as per the first reading). What binds them also prevents a direct relationship. At the same time, this bond creates two interconnected regions of being. Thus, if we subtract the joined region from M and W , the idea is that we arrive at a different topological figure, which Badiou names the scene of the Two.

The shape formed through the expansion operation is distinct, representing a new being altogether—neither man nor woman, but a love relationship. Badiou expresses this idea as follows:

“What is meant by “an external expansion of the Two”? Empirically, it of course means those countless common practices, or shared investigations of

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the world, without which love has no scene of its own, except just to be a sexual adventure.”²⁸

The topological shape created by the expansion operation resembles a new "vessel" through which new experiences, common practices, and shared explorations can unfold.

Badiou compares the relationship between the two topological shapes, each resulting from excision and expansion, to the two phases of the heart's movement: systole (contraction) and diastole (expansion). He also uses the metaphor of a limping gait to illustrate the peculiar binding of these two functions. There is no dialectical resolution, no third term, and no synthesis between them. This assertion contradicts the thought that love sublates the non-relationship between the sexes. There is no sublation or resolution—love's progress is not a smooth movement but akin to limping.²⁹

Badiou further explains:

“Logically, it means the following: since, in line with its aspect of joint internal excision, the Two comes to exist on the basis of the indeterminacy that co-belonged to it, it is possible to define what comprises this Two as such, with the specific exception of the object that was a component of both of them. In other words, the terms of the situation that comprise the subtraction of u on both the “man” and “woman” sides. Let t be such a term. We will then have:

$$(W - u) \leq t \text{ and } (M - u) \leq t \wedge \neg(u \leq t)$$

In other words, t has predicative value for M with u excised as well as for W with u excised.”³⁰

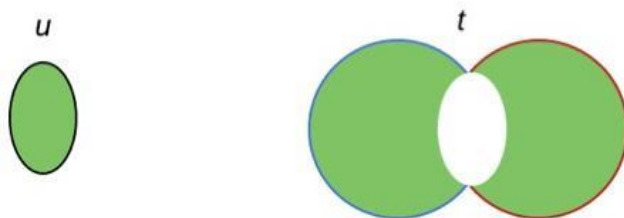
The use of the verb "excised" here is intriguing. Earlier, it appeared that the above operation pertains to expansion, yet it occurs

²⁸ Badiou 2022, 539.

²⁹ See footnote 14.

³⁰ Badiou 2022, 539-540.

through the specific exclusion of u . However, it seems more appropriate to say that t is the name of this second shape.



And the limping, or systole and diastole, occurs between these figures.

The shape marked by u forms through an ordinary sexual encounter. However, the shape marked by t emerges through an evental encounter. Maintaining both shapes simultaneously, enabling the "amorous limping," is a truth procedure.

“As a result, the sexual non-relationship is topologically situated in a different configuration from that in which it originally unfolds. Or, if you will, it is saturated by the construction of the scene of the Two. We will by no means claim that this saturation is in itself a facilitation of sexuality or an adequate staging of desire. It may be just the opposite. But there is no need for it to be that way either. This is precisely where love as truth is played out, in the radical unknowing of those captured by its effect.”³¹

If my interpretation is accurate, following the model presented above, the two distinct shapes, u and t , afford a certain independence between the sexual non-relationship (u) and the scene of the Two (t).

We established earlier that u marks the indeterminacy at the heart of the sexual non-relationship. But what about t ? Does the shape t , formed

³¹ Badiou 2022, 540

by the excision of u , serve as the locus of determinacy in the binding of M and W ? Badiou's answer is no. While u represents internal indeterminacy, t represents external indeterminacy. But why is t also indeterminate? Here is what Badiou says:

“So the amorous limping, caught, so to speak, in bed, or in the snares of sexuality, can also be defined as the wedging of the sexed positions that form a couple in it between two indeterminacies: the included indeterminacy of the object and the external indeterminacy of this or that non-predicable fragment of the scene of the Two. Between u and what, from a term t subsuming $W - u$ and $M - u$, returns to u , yawns the gap of two indeterminacies.

It is therefore easy to say that *a love is the eventual establishment of a difference between the indeterminacy that underlies the lack of its relationship and the indeterminacy that underlies the excess over its nonrelationship*. Ultimately, this is the Two that it establishes. And this is the formal principal of a compensation.”³²

Term t designates an excess over the two individuals, and because of that, the relationship of the scene of the Two with the specific fragments of t ($W - u$ or $M - u$) is unpredictable, indeterminate, or non-conclusive. Hence, love is caught between the indeterminacy of the sexual encounter (u) and the indeterminacy of excess over the difference of sexes (t), as Badiou explains in the following:

“The understanding that love provides is that the Two as such, conceived of as a process, is neither stuck to the One that obfuscates its gap nor detached from it to such an extent that we can count the space between its components as a third term. It is neither the Two that counts the Two as one nor is it the Two counted as one by the Three. It is the immanent construction of an indeterminate disjunction, which does not pre-exist it.”³³

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Badiou 2022, 540-541

This confirms that the scene of Two is not just the term t in isolation. The scene of Two encompasses the entire procedure, the amorous limping.

Another important point is that love, which binds the two terms u and t , can also be u without t (as discussed earlier) or t without u . Badiou calls the latter Platonic love, and either of these poles can operate without the amorous limp.

“This can work/walk very well, or without limping particularly, but it constructs no scene of the Two and is ultimately only an activation of the structure. And, at the other end, there is the pole that, in assuming only the Two, with no sharing of the object, can be called sublime, or Platonic, love, which has, so to speak, no marching orders but instead proposes in imaginary fashion that the segregation itself, or the sexual mystery, be singularized as the encounter. Moreover, with this theme, the artistic scheme of sublime renunciation flirts.”³⁴

Conclusion

In exploring Alain Badiou's theory of love, this paper has delved into the intricate interplay between love, truth, and sexual difference. Badiou's conception of love challenges traditional and modern philosophical perspectives by refusing to reduce love to mere physical desire, romantic fusion, or even simple companionship. Instead, Badiou presents love as a truth procedure that transcends individual desires and engenders a new existential reality, the "scene of the Two."

Central to Badiou's philosophy is the idea that love is not about the erasure of differences but about the affirmation of those differences within a shared framework. The encounter of love, which disrupts and reconfigures the lives of the two individuals involved, gives rise to a new

³⁴ Badiou 2022, 539.

world that did not exist before the event of love. This event, characterized by its randomness and capacity to bring forth something new, underscores love's unpredictability and transformative power.

The paper has also addressed the complexities inherent in Badiou's notion of the "Two," where love does not merely equate to the sum of its parts ($1 + 1 = 2$) but represents a dynamic, ongoing process of becoming. The "Two" signifies a new form of life that emerges from the interaction between the individuals, a life marked by the rhythm of both unity and disjunction, intimacy, and distance.

Moreover, Badiou's framing of love as a truth procedure reveals the philosophical depth of his approach, which moves beyond philosophy's traditional boundaries. Love, for Badiou, is not merely an emotional or physical experience but a fundamental site where truth is produced and encountered. This truth is not pre-existing but is created through the process of love, where the lovers continuously negotiate their differences and shared experiences.

Badiou's formalization of love diverges significantly from Lacan's theory of sexualization. While Lacan's framework is deeply rooted in the phallic function, which serves as the organizing principle for both male and female positions, Badiou's approach emphasizes the fundamental non-relationship between the sexes. Lacan posits that all speaking beings are subject to the phallic function, with men being fully determined by it and women only partially so, leaving a portion of the feminine experience shrouded in mystery.

Badiou, on the other hand, introduces the concept of the term *u*, a common but indeterminate element shared by both sexes, which he uses to illustrate the absence of a direct relationship between men and women. This term *u* is atomic, devoid of any descriptive properties, and highlights the disjunction that defines the relationship—or non-relationship—between the sexes. In contrast to Lacan's notion of the feminine mystery,

which suggests an intrinsic and unknowable aspect of femininity, Badiou's formalization does away with any essentialist or mystifying elements. Instead, he focuses on the structural and logical dimensions of love, characterized by the interplay of inclusion and expansion, resulting in the formation of the *Two*.

While Lacan's theory is marked by a fundamental asymmetry rooted in the phallic function, Badiou's formalism insists on the non-equivalence and non-ordering of the sexes, which, through the operations of excision and expansion, lead to the creation of new, shared experiences—what he calls the "scene of the Two." This scene is not a dialectical synthesis but rather a limping, uneven movement that embodies the truth of love as a process that navigates the indeterminacies at the core of sexual difference.

Thus, Badiou's theory of love presents a radical departure from Lacanian psychoanalysis, shifting the focus from the mysteries of sexual difference to the creative, evental potential that arises from the non-relationship between the sexes. Love, for Badiou, is not a resolution of sexual non-relation but a new configuration that emerges from it—a scene where the *Two* can exist in a dynamic and indeterminate state, constantly in motion and constantly redefined.

Badiou's theory of love offers a radical rethinking of love's place within philosophical discourse. By positioning love as a scene of the Two, Badiou opens up new possibilities for understanding the relationship between individuals, the nature of truth, and the role of love in creating new existential realities. This reimagining of love challenges us to rethink our experiences and consider how love can be a powerful force for

transformation and truth. As Nietzsche has said: "There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness."³⁵

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³⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library, 1995, 89.

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