

Theory from Structure to Subject: An Interview with Alain Badiou

Paris, France, 6 May 2007

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Peter Hallward (PH): I'd like to begin with some anecdotal details. The *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were launched in 1966. What was happening at the Ecole Normale Supérieure at that time, that is, around 1964-65? What is the Cercle d'Épistémologie, and how did the journal come to be launched?

Alain Badiou (AB): First I should admit that I don't know all that much about it. I was no longer at the Ecole Normale. I arrived there in 1956 and left in 1961. I'm older than this project. I first left for the provinces and then did my military service. So, in the years 1962-63, the preliminary years of all this, I was actually pretty far from the intellectual scene of the ENS. All the farther, in fact, since I was mainly caught up in writing fiction at the time; I was busy with my novels *Almagestes* and *Portulans*.¹ I thus only joined up again with this process after a distinct gap; I will tell you about that later. I only made a connection with the *Cahiers* project in 1966-67.

PH: In other words, once the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were launched.

AB: Yes, I wasn't really incorporated into the editing of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* until 1967. So in addition it was to be a very brief experience, since, as you know, it was interrupted in 1968. That is the first point I want to make. I am a belated element, belonging to another generation. For even if there are only a few years of difference, ideologically and philosophically these few years are very important. In particular, I had a Sartrean background and training, for example.

PH: And was Sartre a reference for the other members of the Circle? His name doesn't appear much in the *Cahiers*, if at all.

AB: No, no, the others had no Sartrean background. They were far removed from and very critical of Sartre. The situation began to change as of 1963-64: the two decisive events of those years were the moving of Lacan's seminar to the Ecole Normale Supérieure, and Althusser's cycle of seminars leading up to *Reading Capital*. None of that existed when I was at the ENS (1956-1961). Instead, there was a dispersed, hesitant progression – investigations that were tentatively oriented in the direction of what was starting to happen, structuralism, whose foundations were in fact laid down in the readings we were doing at the time, in the discussions we were having, in particular the rather delayed, retrospective discovery of Lévi-Strauss. The reading of his *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* was very important for me.

PH: From 1948-49.

¹ Alain Badiou, *Almagestes* (Paris: Seuil, 1964); *Portulans* (Paris: Seuil, 1967).

AB: That's right, though for at least ten years the book actually remained unread by anyone other than specialists. Then, it became a public reference. Linguistics, an engagement with structural linguistics, phonology, the discovery of both Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, the epistemological significance of mathematics, of formal logic (itself very seldom taught at the time) – these were all things we discovered on our own, as best we could. At the time there was only a single teacher who dealt with any of these things, Roger Martin. So, this involved a certain effort, a certain engagement with mathematics and logic.

PH: Were you already engaged on that path at the time?

AB: Yes, I had a training in mathematics, but even those who didn't nevertheless became interested in it – or at least, those of us who belonged to the small group who were bound up in this philosophical movement. We began to read the analytic tradition, Carnap and then Wittgenstein. And so through all of that we began to cobble together a few things, into which the discovery of Lacan would soon be inserted. In fact I was quite involved with the (philosophical) discovery of Lacan, since already in 1959 I started to become familiar with the *Revue sur la psychanalyse*, that is, with Lacan's first public texts. Althusser also started to take note of them, around the same time, and I once went with Althusser to Lacan's seminar at Sainte-Anne – it must have been in 1960. Hyppolite also participated in Lacan's seminars, as is well known: in other words, the guarantor of the Hegelian and phenomenological tradition, Hyppolite himself, also moved – if I may say so – toward these innovative elements. And then, encouraged by Hyppolite and Althusser, I gave the first systematic account of Lacan at the ENS in 1960, or perhaps in 61.

So, that was the general atmosphere of the period: an interest for structuralism, an interest in formalization, an interest in linguistics, and an interest in Marxism. There was also the idea that the teaching inherited from traditional philosophy, in its most recent phenomenological modality, should be replaced by a new set of theoretical tools. The human sciences became a very important reference point, and this helped instill a scientific aspect to our work: a reference to scientificity, to science, which Althusser would subsequently systematize.

So what you have to understand is that we were really constituted in a mixed environment. On the one hand, we had a Sartrean training and background, and we continued to maintain considerable interest in Sartre. The year 1960 was also the year of publication of *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Along with Emmanuel Terray and a few others, we read it passionately, we debated it. Moreover at the same time as us, Sartre was also discussing the structural current and the human sciences, and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* bears the mark of these discussions. So we recognized each other in these discussions, even if some of us were in tension with this latest effort of Sartre's. For, on the other hand, we were perhaps already more committed to the alternative theoretical approach. In this, there was an element of conviction which went far beyond pure philosophy, because it also involved discussions about the *Nouveau Roman* of Robbe-Grillet and the cinematic *New Wave*. There was a general feeling that there had been a kind of fundamental transformation in the intellectual climate.

And this was also the moment when we started to contest and criticise the legacy of the communist party. For, it must not be forgotten that this period is situated right in the middle of the Algerian war—that is fundamental. A difference with those who came later is that the Algerian war was finished. For us the Algerian war was still a key point, after all – the struggles around the war, the

demonstrations against it, relations with the FLN support network set up by Francis Jeanson, and the permanent threat, which weighed on everybody, of being sent to fight in the colonial war! Everyone had to do his military service. In this context we experienced the political conflict as very violent, since the old apparatuses no longer functioned, were unable to deal with the situation. The stance of the French Communist Party was indecisive. There was an element of transformation after de Gaulle's arrival in power, but the war in Algeria continued.

So overall, the Sartrean heritage formed a fundamental reference point for a whole group of us, but there was also this sort of transformation, still somewhat obscure, which brought about a new way of comprehending things, a new relation to the question of the scientific paradigm. And there were also very important mutations in the artistic order, and so on.

PH: How should we situate the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* of the ENS in this milieu?

AB: The *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* began around 1964-65, since they were tied to the Sino-Soviet split and even to the development, to the first stirrings, of the Cultural Revolution. The creation of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* was linked to a split with the union of communist students. There always was a considerable number of communists at the Ecole. The group of communist students was significant and, moreover, it was linked to the communist party cell of the Ecole, which contained a considerable number of communist teachers, including Althusser. This communist apparatus at the Ecole entered into crisis – rather fundamentally, it seems to me – concerning, on one hand, some new ideas, the reformulation of Marxism, but above all the Vietnam war and, more generally, the communist party's position on the colonial question and the question of the national liberation struggles. The young people, strongly marked by the anti-imperialist struggles, considered the Party's official position to be timorous and uncertain. Other criticisms were to follow later. But the vector was the conflict between Third-Worldism and the French Communist Party [PCF] as such, that is, between the idea that the fundamental stage of contemporary history was the wars of national liberation, and the trade-unionist and nationalist orientation conserved by the PCF apparatus.

There would be two successive splits in the Union of Communist Students (UEC), splits which defined a configuration that persist for a long while to come. Grosso modo, there would be a Trotskyist split and a Maoist split.

The Trotskyite split gave rise to the creation of the apparatus which has best withstood the test of time, that is, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, led by Alain Krivine, Daniel Bensaïd, etc. They also called themselves the 'Italian' split. They claimed the Italian community party as a model, more dynamic and open compared to the French party, toleration to a certain extent of factions and internal divergences, less attached to the USSR, etc.

And then there was the 'Chinese' split, that is to say, the one that gave rise to the UJC-ML, the Union des Jeunes Communistes – Marxist-Léninistes.² These two splits each had their representatives at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. It can be said that with the UJC-ML there was actually a merging of something of the Chinese experience, of the Sino-Soviet split after the Cultural Revolution and of a significant, active fraction of the French intelligentsia. They are the ones who created the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*.

² See Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération 1. Les années de rêve* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 'Points', 2008), 128-135.

PH: And during this time you were appointed to a teaching post in Reims and busy writing novels...

AB: Yes, when French Maoism was created (I call French Maoism not all the pro-Chinese organizations, but basically that novelty comprising the crystallization around Maoism of a concentrated, intense and creative part of the French intelligentsia), I was living in the province, general secretary of the PSU of la Marne, a novelist... And so really somewhat out of the loop.

Two things would bring me back within the centre of gravity emanating from the Ecole Normale in Paris. The first was the arrival of my friend, François Regnault, in Reims in 1965-1966. Regnault was part of the *inner circle* of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, a friend of Miller and of Milner, and a Lacanian. Meanwhile I had continued to read Lacan; I did not go to his seminars but I continued to read his books, the journals, etc. Regnault arrived in Reims at the start of the academic year of 1965. We became great and deep friends. It was he who told me of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, Althusser's seminar and the tensions between the two. Because watch out! The Lacanians and the Althusserians were not entirely the same people. There were overlaps and exchanges, but these were nevertheless two distinct groups.

PH: How were the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* themselves launched? Were there divisions among the editorship of the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes*? And there was that dispute between Miller and Rancière, in 1965.

AB: Yes, there was Miller's famous trial of intellectual plagiarism against Rancière over the concept of 'metonymic causality'. Miller thought that Rancière had stolen this concept from him. It was a painful story, since all the participants were in the same Althusserian circle... But despite everything, even prior to this episode, the Lacanians were already somewhat in their own separate world. They assigned more importance to Lacan than to Marxism, Althusser, etc. This difference became more heated with the plagiarism affair. Ultimately, [in 1965] the whole group (Miller, Milner, Regnault...) withdrew from Althusser's *Reading Capital* project. They decided to create their own organization, the Cercle d'Épistémologie, and their own journal, the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* (while still maintaining links with Althusser: after all Althusser published his text on Rousseau in their journal [CpA 8.1]). Furthermore, there was already a germ of the tension that would soon turn into the tension between the Maoists (including Miller and Milner) and Althusser and the Althusserians. Althusser and the Althusserians (Macherey, Balibar, etc.) did not join the Maoist organizations. They remained in the Communist Party. Only Rancière would play an intermediary game, as always.

PH: Okay. So when Miller and his friends created the Cercle d'Épistémologie, was the main issue at stake political, or more '*epistemological*' in a broad large sense, that is, a mix of a certain scientific-philosophical inheritance and a new psychoanalytic orientation?

AB: I think that what they understood as structuralism was what I'd call a certain Lacanian interpretation of scientism. They sought to find in scientism itself, in the extreme forms of formal thought, something to support the Lacanian theory of the subject. In my view that is why Miller's text 'Suture' (CpA 1.3) is programmatic. It is a fundamental text in this regard, because this is the text that manifests the

synthetic genius for which Miller must undeniably be recognized: he shows that for Frege the logicist reconstruction of the theory of numbers conceals an operation which can only be interpreted as the operation of a subject. I would say that this was the general orientation.

Their alliances, in addition, were very broad. In the review, one finds Bouveresse, for example, who would become the mainstay of analytic philosophy in France. So as always with the young, there was much confusion.

But in the end, the primitive operation – which also seduced me, as I've often admitted – is this idea that it's not because one engages in the most extreme formal rigour and takes up the intellectual power of mathematics, of logic, etc., that one must necessarily erase or abolish the category of the subject. I think that was Lacan's major philosophical influence. That is, the ability to bring together, in thoroughly unusual way, a theory of formal structures, which he developed as the logical theory of the signifier, and a theory of the subjective adventure.

I think that from this viewpoint Lacan, succeeded where Sartre, in his furthest effort, didn't really succeed. For if you think about it, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is also an attempt of this kind. Note that the subtitle of the *Critique* is the *Theory of Practical Ensembles*. It's an emblematic title: 'theory of ensembles', or *sets*, is the formal structures side of things; 'practices' is the aspect of constituting praxis, the aspect of the subject. The great difference is that for Lacan and for us, including myself today, formal dispositions are in a position of condition *for* the possible development of the subjective figure. Sartre, however, unfortunately remained within a genetic theory. He wanted to engender structures on the basis of praxis. He took praxis as elementary. What interested him [in the *Critique*] was the genesis of monumental history, understood as having ultimately only a single operator, the interaction of different individual freedoms or liberties. Sartre's goal was somewhat the same as ours: to maintain at all costs a theory of the subject, while also doing justice to the human sciences, doing justice to Braudel, to history, etc. Simply he conserved a Hegelian element, which was a genetic element. For Sartre, everything was to be engendered; he wanted to show how all these figures were engendered on the basis of an absolutely simple and initial determination, which is practice. And with a sole contingent element, scarcity, and the operator of nihilation [*néantisation*] that is praxis, we are supposed to be able to generate formally all the practical ensembles, seriality, the group in fusion, the organized, statutory group, the party, the state...

I think the reason why this project of Sartre didn't seem to work in the eyes of young people at the time – even for that fraction of the young who in a sense shared his objective – was because he tried to maintain this genetic operation. We were no longer in a position to believe in it. That is to say, we were no longer able to believe in the engendering of the general system of formal structures on the basis of the simple intentionalities of consciousness.

And so we worked the other way around. We began by assuming the formal construction as such, the general system of structures, but we then tried to see in what breach, in what crack, in what disruption of this system, the subject and freedom might possibly spring up. This is what I have done until this very day, it must be said.

In addition, Sartre continued to cling to a process of legitimizing the Soviet Union. In 1960 he still sought to legitimize the communist party of the Soviet Union, that is, to legitimize an alienated form of the process of emancipation. What was the reason for Stalin's terror? If you read the second volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the one which is unfinished, you start to realise that it's always a question of Stalin. I think that Sartre's problem was Stalin. Moreover, I think that

this was also Althusser's problem. Now, the stance of young people at the time was instead: 'Stalin is finished'. With Mao and with the Cultural Revolution, something else had begun right on the inside of the socialist countries, so Stalin was no longer our problem. We were learning from the Chinese who said 'Stalin, well, he had some merits, there were pros and cons; in any case we'll figure all this out in a thousand years'. This was very characteristic of the Chinese: they said that Stalin must not be constituted as a problem. If Stalin is constituted as a problem, we are doomed. For the true problem is instead to constitute *our* political scene, which lays claim to the socialist heritage, which takes on this heritage absolutely (Stalin included, for that matter), but which also goes beyond it.

Though it might seem strange, this is what I see as the source of what has always stupefied foreign and hostile observers, namely that strange fusion of Lacanianism and Maoism which characterized the most intense and creative fraction of the young French intelligentsia between 1965 and 1980, and indeed well beyond (since I belong to this genealogy). Now the fusion of Lacanianism and Maoism is entirely pertinent here because, as regards the relation of structures and subjective freedom, Lacan is the one who developed the alternative apparatus to Sartre's. That is why, from the viewpoint of politics, it was the Lacanians who were ready to receive Maoism, precisely as a hypothesis which did not claim to legitimate alienation and terror via the inertia of the economic and the socialist state. It was a hypothesis that stated: it is necessary to make use of internal contradictions, of the subjective novelties, the revolts, in order to develop a radical critique of the socialist state itself. It's clear that this is how things were heading. Indeed, I have always found it absolutely rational and by no means contingent and absurd, the fact that it was the Lacanians who became Maoists.

PH: A moment ago you said that the essential operation of the *Cahiers* was that of thinking together the primacy of mathematical, scientific formalism *with* the category of the subject. I recognize in this the priorities of Miller, of Milner, of Regnault, of Duroux also, and others... But not so much of the Badiou of 1967! Your article 'Mark and Lack' (CpA 10.8) is presented as a critique of Miller's 'Suture' and his logic of the signifier. You refuse the idea of a 'logic' that could think the subject (the non-identical). You insist on the 'psychotic' aspect of science, the expulsion from its domain of any trace of a subject. Through and after 68, of course, the subject becomes the central category of your thought. (You reaffirm, perhaps, an aspect of your earlier Sartrean inspiration?). But how did you understand this question, at the time of your participation in the *Cahiers* (1967-68)?

AB: In 1967, I was indeed at the extreme point of a strict formalism. I pushed much further than my friends the detailed study of the recent developments of mathematical logic, notably the sectors in full effervescence comprising set theory (Cohen's theorem) or the new non-standard theory of numbers (and wrote a paper on this in the *Cahiers*, of course [CpA 9.8]). The fact that my thought is rooted in Platonism, which I've never denied, even when I was a convinced Sartrean, sometimes leads me to oscillate between a radical priority of the question of the Subject, on the one hand, and on the other a pre-eminence of the Idea, or of the truth, whose intelligible substructure, whose purest model, is to be found in the historical development or life [*vie*] of mathematics. Subjectively, for me this means that politics and mathematics constitute the two major 'appeals' [*appels*] on the side of what I call the 'conditions of philosophy', and that these two appeals are always in tension.

I only came to find the conceptual form of that tension once I understood that the most significant mathematical events might also provide the key to the subjective process of truths. That was the entire aim of *Being and Event*, in the crossing, through the concept of genericity, of the mathematics of the pure multiple and the post-evental subjective trajectory that constructs a truth. In 1967, just before the political storm, my meditations were on the side of formal structures. For the ten years following it, I was rather on the side of political subjectivity. Philosophy really began for me after these oscillations, at the start of the 1980s.

PH: I'd like to return for a moment to the status of science, of structuralism, etc. From the very first volume of the *Cahiers*, the insistence on science is very emphatic. And science, roughly speaking, is Galileo, Descartes and mathematical formalization, that 'literalization' of mathematics which was to become, as you know much better than me, more and more intense in Lacan. I wonder if there was not in that formalizing ambition, that singular search for the clear and distinct, something like the equivalent of that primordial clarity of consciousness to be found in Sartre, precisely. In Sartre, consciousness illuminates itself from the start; here, there is scientific work, 'Science' with a capital 'S', which clarifies itself in primordial and literal formalization. There is precisely no plurality of sciences, no historical and technical plurality, as we find in Bachelard or Canguilhem (who are nevertheless among the figures who inspired the *Cahiers* authors). The link between Canguilhem and the *Cahiers* is not entirely obvious.

AB: No, it is not obvious at all, I absolutely agree with you. I think that what was retained from Canguilhem and Bachelard is limited to two things. For me it was first the idea of a fundamental constitutive relation between philosophy and science. In itself that is ultimately anti-Sartrean. I remember that Sartre liked to say, in terms that lose their poetry in literal translation: 'morality's an asshole, but science is nothing at all.'³ For us, inheritors of the French epistemological tradition, there was no way that philosophy could escape its confrontation with scientific discipline. So there is this first point, which is simultaneously prospective and reactive. It is prospective because it creates a new situation, roughly termed 'structuralism'. But it is also reactive since people such as Sartre, and in a certain sense Bergson too, had already tried to escape from that tyranny of science. We are dealing with a cyclical phenomenon here, which can be observed very clearly in the history of French philosophy, between the vitalist and existential tendencies on one side and the formalist and conceptual ones on the other.⁴ At the start of the twentieth century, this is very clearly seen in the couple Bergson-Brunschvicg. It is obvious that people such as Bachelard, and Canguilhem, but also Cavaillès and Lautman, and then Desanti, and also me, are in a certain way all among the descendents of the Brunschvicgian current of French philosophy. Yet Sartre, who detested Bergson, is actually much more part of the Bergsonian filiation. So this is the first point: to restore an inextricable link between philosophy and science.

The second point that was retained was that science, far from consolidating empiricism, is *anti-empiricist*. That is the absolute break made by French epistemology from Anglo-Saxon epistemology. We see very clearly with Bachelard, but also with Canguilhem, that not only is science not empiricist, but that it is the principle school of non-empiricism, that it forms the principle critique

³ TN: The French reads, '*la science, c'est peau de balle, la morale, c'est trou de balle*'.

⁴ Cf. Michel Foucault, 'Life: Experience and Science', trans. Robert Hurley, in Foucault, *The Essential Works*, vol. 1: *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 1998), 466-469.

of empiricism itself. Whether it's a matter of Galileo, Descartes, etc., or even the Canguilhemian conception of the life sciences, it is axiomatic decisions and conceptual constructions that prescribe empirical experimentation and not the reverse. That is Bachelard's theory in a nutshell: scientific apparatuses are theory embodied, experimentation is always an artifice, the theoretical and formal hypotheses come first. The historians and philosophers of the sciences, such as Koyré, come to the aid of this view. They prove that in reality Galileo never made a single experiment and, moreover, that if he had carried any out, they would have contradicted his conceptual decisions, etc. That is the second point: philosophy is all the closer to science for science's being theoretical and not empirical. French epistemology, in which Meyerson must be included, is conceptualist and anti-empiricist. This is why it is entirely ignored and contested in the Anglo-Saxon milieu, of course, which has always considered it dogmatic, typically French, that is to say *a priorist*, or even idealist.

We structuralists certainly shared this conceptualist view. But the differences that you point out are evident. For Bachelard and Canguilhem the centre of gravity of what is called science remains physics. Even in Canguilhem, who was above all concerned with the life sciences, we sense clearly that his scientific paradigm is physics, since he was squarely a companion of Bachelard. The most important discussions concern issues like general relativity, the origins of physics, the relations between conceptualization and experimentation, etc. Yet for Lacan and for the Lacanians that we were and are, in reality the centre of gravity of science is mathematics. As Lacan said: 'our aim, our ideal, is formalization'.

PH: What you describe fits Lacan more generally, and his refusal of imaginary forms of identification, of the adaptation of the subject to his 'natural' and social environment, etc.

AB: We mustn't forget the motif, so important at the time, of the 'human sciences'. We thought that formalization could be extended to the human sciences. Didn't Lévi-Strauss call upon group theory to come to the aid of the theory of kinship relations? Well, the paradigmatic human science became linguistics. And as the paradigmatic science was linguistics, there turned out to be a much greater and more immediate proximity with mathematical logic. It's exactly here that the Lacanian figure of the logic of the signifier will establish itself. This logic will operate in a sense between natural language and formalization.

PH: Indeed, because as Miller explains, 'epistemology in our view is defined as history and the theory of the discourse of science' (CpA *) – which is also to say, it's a matter of science on one hand, and discourse on the other.

AB: Yes, absolutely. Discursivity will be the fundamental category.

PH: This remains the case even in your ontology, in *Being and Event*.

AB: Indeed. In it I maintain that mathematics is the only admissible discourse on being qua being.

PH: What I find most striking about the *Cahiers* project is the attempt to extend such a notion of science, i.e. one dominated by mathematics (such that in the end there is only one science, or Science as such) to the domain of the subject, and in

particular of unconscious subjectivity, which is to say, classically, to all that seems to escape measure and quantification.

AB: That is the core of the question. If we assume that there is one science and that this science is ultimately what touches the real; if as Lacan said, the real is the 'deadlock of formalization', meaning that it is only attained in the element of formalization, then how can we have any access whatsoever to that which subtracts itself from the evidence of this scientificity? To that which is an exception to formalization? To the point which is 'out of structure' (i.e. that which I call, in *Theory of the Subject*, the 'outplace' ['*horlieu*'])? This exception is the unconscious, the pure subject, the rupture, the revolution...

PH: ... lack ...

AB: Yes, lack, grace, the event... French philosophy, or at least what's been creative in it over the last forty or more years, is virtually structured by the system of names it gives to the figure that is placed in exception, that is produced *as an exception* to an apparatus [*dispositif*], moreover to an apparatus that is conceived as pertaining to science. Even if this is a metaphor, then when all is said and done the real is conceived in the regime of science and no longer in the region of spontaneous perception, as the phenomenologists proposed to think it, as a correlate of consciousness. The world, for us, pertains to scientific objectivity; it is indifferent to humanity, etc. Nevertheless, it is in the regime of the exception to this objectivity, precisely, that something can be grasped which maintains the figure of the subject, the figure of universality.

Here there is a general movement of thought [common to our generation of creative French philosophers], wherein we all agree on the fact that the world (or that which is) is arranged as a matter of formal objectivity, one that is foreign to consciousness and valid on its own terms. One might then think it's only a question of pure scientism. This is perhaps how Ray Brassier, for example, interprets the movement of French philosophy. But for me and many others, it is precisely because this formal objectivity exists that one can search for and define the point that exceeds it. And in this point the subject, or its possibility, takes place.

PH: Okay. But you're familiar with the 'Anglo-Saxon' (and moreover Hegelian) objection. This applies perfectly well to the domain of mathematics, we might say, and up to a point it's easy to see what Duroux and Miller have in mind when, (following Frege), they talk about 0 and 1. But how can we go from this mathematical domain to the conditioned freedom of a *subject*, that is to say, of a being endowed with a will, a living and sexed being, a being that has a body, that exists in the natural and historical world, that is socialized in specific conditions, etc.? Don't we need operators of mediation that might enable the passage between mathematical and natural, 'human' or historical situations? What are those operators? As conceived by the Lacanians of the *Cahiers*, is psychoanalysis able, on the sole basis of a formalizing theory of the signifier, to do justice to this whole empirical aspect of things?

AB: I don't at all think that psychoanalysis is capable of this, and besides it is not interested in this problem, since that is not its objective. It is a discipline of the clinic, and not a protocol of knowledge of the empirical subject. I think that it simply needs the conditions which enable it to construct the particular and limited stage or scene in which the cure is deployed. Psychoanalysis is not a theory of the

world. It is quite the opposite of a theory of the world. Even Lacan's complicated operators, which have an air of generality, ultimately have as their filter the construction of a particular experimental apparatus for a particular procedure.

PH: The subject faced with his discourse, etc.

AB: Yes. If, by contrast, we are to ask about philosophy, I would say that, yes, mediation is needed. We need to assume that between the pure multiplicity thought by mathematical formalism and everything that has a body (including the Subject, which also has a body), there operates a singular localization. Such a localization authorizes us to speak not only of being but of a world. You know that I call this mediation a transcendental [*un transcendental*].⁵ From this viewpoint, and, this is what I said in the very interesting discussion on *Logics of Worlds* with Andrew Gibson (at the British Library, in 2007), it's true that *Logics of Worlds*, in which the concept of a transcendental appears, and then that of body, is partially a response to long-standing Anglo-Saxon objections.

PH: Let's come back a little to the question of scientism, of structuralism, that peculiar mixture between mathematical formalization and Lacanian inspiration. For Regnault, Miller and Milner, was psychoanalysis their primary point of reference?

AB: At the time they were not psychoanalysts, and only one has become one: Miller. But they were all deeply stamped by Lacan's teaching. The attempt of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* was essentially to constitute an independent Lacanianism which would not be immediately linked to psychoanalysis as such.

PH: Miller insisted on this from the very beginning; he begins his discourse on 'Suture' (CpA 1.3:37) by presenting himself as a non-analyst.

AB: Exactly (and he engaged in self-criticism about this later on). He often told me that 'we tried to declare that we were stronger than Lacan, for being able to create a Lacanianism without having to pass through all the trouble of psychoanalysis. But in reality we were presumptuous, and destined to return everything to psychoanalysis, after all.' Miller dedicated himself to organising this return after the Maoist parenthesis, from 1972. It's true that Lacan saw us as a sort of dissidence at the time, around 1966. Miller told me several times that Lacan was a bit vexed by the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. He saw them as a presumptuous attempt to escape from the rigours of psychoanalytic training.

PH: Ok. Let's go back now to your own trajectory for a moment. In the mid-1960s, then, you were together with Regnault for a time, and Regnault was already active in the *Cahiers*. When did you decide to become part of the Circle?

AB: The decisive years were 1966-67. Moreover, they can be considered the peak years of what was called structuralism, in all aspects.

PH: There was Foucault's *The Order of Things*...

AB:... and Derrida's three fundamental books; there was Althusser's seminar, and *Reading Capital* [by Althusser and his students]; there was Lacan's teaching at the

⁵ See Peter Hallward, 'Order and Event: On Badiou's *Logics of Worlds*', *New Left Review* 53 (October 2008), 97-122.

Ecole Normale Supérieure, there was the creation of Maoist dissident groups in politics, there was the creation of the *Comités Vietnam de Base*, very important, because these were the first cells to practice a new type of militantism. All that was in 1966-67. They were major formative years! Extraordinary years! There was a fabulous intensity to those two years. As Patrice Maniglier says, the miraculous year of what is called structuralism is 1967.

PH: And May '68, it did not spring up like that, from the void.

AB: Not at all. The highest pitch of the action was articulated around the highest effort of thought. [Going back to 1966-67:] from in my retreat in Reims, Althusser first asked me to run a course at the ENS, which I did on the question of literature (which yielded the article in the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* on the relations between literature and ideology⁶). A little later, Althusser asked me to participate in his course of philosophy for scientists, organized in 1967.

PH: That became *The Concept of Model*?

AB: The story of that lecture course on the concept of the model is a veritable allegory of the moment. There were supposed to be two sessions: the first took place and the second didn't, because it was supposed to take place right at the beginning of May 68! That was the Althusser side of things. And then symmetrically, as it were, Regnault introduced me to Jacques-Alain Miller, and eventually I joined the editorial group of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. At the time the group comprised Grosrichard, Milner, Miller, Regnault and me. There were five of us. So this was the time that I began to write articles for *Les Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, namely 'Mark and Lack' (CpA 10.8) and the one on non-standard analysis (CpA 9.8).

PH: It seems to me, all the same, that these last two issues (9 and 10) of the *Cahiers* are different to the others. It's as if you put these two issues together yourself.

AB: I think I had some influence at the time, due to the fact that during these two years I was closely tied, in friendship, not only with François Regnault, but also with Jacques-Alain Miller. I certainly had some influence over the composition of these issues on account of the technical knowledge I had of the most recent formalisms. But they were also influenced by Jacques-Alain Miller's own evolution, and by the general context. In addition, these two issues were published in a more official way, because they were produced by Le Seuil, whereas before this the production was rather artisanal; and lastly they were distributed too late, in any case one of them was distributed after 68.

PH: In 1969. But all the work had been done before May 68?

AB: All the work had already been done. The final adventure of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* consisted, sometime after [May] 68, I think at the end of 1968 or the start of 1969, in a last meeting of the editorial committee. Grosrichard was absent, but Miller, Milner, Regnault and I were all there. We met at a time when Miller and Milner were heavily involved in the *Gauche Prolétarienne*. I was not in the *Gauche*

⁶ Badiou, 'L'Autonomie du processus esthétique', *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* 12/13 (1966): 77-89.

Prolétarienne myself, but we had not yet created the UCF-ML (Union des Communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste), so I appeared as an independent Maoist (I was still in the PSU, where I led a Maoist tendency which later caused a split and then rallied to form the UCF-ML). The question at issue in this meeting was whether we would continue the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* in the new political context, regardless, or if we would give up. Jacques-Alain adopted a hesitant position, as he often does; Regnault and I were rather for continuing. I put forward suggestions for continuing, arguing that, overall, there were aspects of some of the theoretical questions we were working on that could be considered separately from the immediate political questions. And Milner was violently against continuing. He thought that none of it made sense any longer, etc. The meeting was very difficult. The situation was tense and did not lead to anything. This meeting marked the end of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* project.

PH: At the time, did you have any ideas in mind for further issues?

AB: there was a project for an issue, I think, on the idea of hierarchy, to which Miller was very attached, because he had a solid grasp of the theory of types, the hierarchy of languages in Russell. There were one or two projects like that, which we had already discussed. But after May 68 we scarcely met. This is because when 68 erupted Jacques-Alain was in Besançon, I was in Reims, and the political demands were so intense that we no longer saw each other. So we called a meeting, an *ad hoc* meeting, to deal with this issue. It was held at Regnault's place; it was at once violent and confused, and we inevitably proceeded toward a negative conclusion.

PH: Before that, in 1966-67 there were regular editorial meetings?

AB: Yes, yes, there were regular meetings, on the whole every month, a little less, a little more, that depended on the moments, and besides, meetings that were terribly tiring, because Jacques-Alain was an extraordinary stickler for details, meetings involving infinitely long discussions (which Regnault narrates brilliantly) bearing simply on the form and colour of the cover, which dragged on for hours; he was obsessive about these sorts of questions!

PH: And ordinarily, how were the topics for each of the issues decided?

AB: The issues were decided on the basis of a sort of central theme, but it also depended a little on what we had available, on things that we'd asked for or which occurred at the time, things that 'would be interesting to talk about'...

PH: ... for example, Derrida's text was longer than expected...

AB: Exactly, that's right.

PH: Was there much of a difference between the editorial committee and the Cercle d'Épistémologie as such?

AB: In my opinion, during the period of my participation the Cercle d'Épistémologie was dead, an empty shell. In the period I was there, I actually had no contact with Bouveresse, and I only met with Duroux only once or twice; Grosrichard was no longer there, and I never saw any of the others. The group

made up of Jacques-Alain Miller, François Regnault, Milner and me decided everything. In my view, the Cercle d'Épistémologie only existed when all these people were together at the ENS. But in 1967-68, none of them were still there.

PH: Do you regret the fact that the journal came to an end as it did, in this rather sudden way? In many respects, it could be said you subsequently returned to it; you came back to the questions of formalization, of logic, of structure, and so on, already in *Theory of the Subject* (2009 [1982]) and even more so thereafter. How do you conceive the *Cahiers* project today? Do you still maintain a certain fidelity to the journal's original ambition?

AB: I think that, on the philosophical level, there can be no shadow of a doubt about that. It was politics that liquidated the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. Now, it was by no means a political journal. The *Cahiers* were not in a position to endure the open political tension that began after '68 – that's obvious. Don't forget that what followed was a period of ten years in which we all did nothing but politics.

PH: And were you, too, more or less completely involved in political practice during those years? Did you leave to one side the questions of formalization, etc., for a while?

AB: To a certain extent, yes; I only returned to them around 1974-75, with the seminars that would lead to *Theory of the Subject* (published in 1982). In the period from 1968 to 1972, in those four years, whether it was Jacques-Alain Miller or myself, we were caught up in political decisions in the most activist sense of the term. I think it was very difficult to continue a common project. But from another perspective, the problem from which we set out and which ultimately gave the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* their general legitimacy, namely a more Lacanian than Sartrean version of the correlation between the theory of the subject and the formal theory of structures (to give it a very simple name), this project has continued to drive my philosophical research, absolutely.

I think that little by little I was left as the only one from the old team who remained faithful to the initial project. Because those who have remained in the Lacanian orbit properly speaking brought things back down to psychoanalysis. They became or returned to being disciples of Lacan, and abandoned philosophy. They even became antiphilosophers. Jacques-Alain Miller was the first to do so, of course, but Regnault also in a certain sense. As for Milner, he was a linguist by training. He hasn't succeeded in imposing, on a grand scale, his theoretical vision in this domain, but it nevertheless seems to me that this vision was original and profound. In addition, in relation to Regnault or Miller, Milner was without doubt the most 'political'. He had a potential ambition in that direction. Little by little he has helped to organize (in a manner that's remained faithful to Benny Lévy) a distinctive ideological current, whose recent avatars, linked to a singular interpretation of the name 'Jew' and its historical pertinence, are nevertheless thoroughly reactionary. When all is said and done, this reactionary normativity now dominates his work [*emporte tout*].

Clearly the Althusserians (Balibar, Macherey, my friend Emmanuel Terray, in certain respects Rancière, who is an anti-Althusserian Althusserian), that is to say the non-Lacanian, have followed an entirely different trajectory. They are working in a far more historicist problematic, more in debate with Foucault than with Lacan. They are closer to a debate with classical Marxism, less tied to hypotheses of formalization. Overall, it is a different trajectory, even if on isolated

political questions I have often been very close to them. And we should give credit where it is due: unlike Benny Lévy, Miller, Milner, and even Regnault, they are not renegades.

In the intellectual world, May 68 ultimately produced three distinct orientations. A first orientation is dominated by fidelity to the initial kernel of the event, which tries to develop a theory of the compatibility between subjective exception and the formal theory of structures, such that, furthermore, this compatibility not only doesn't block but demands political radicalism.

PH: ... and which continues on the antihumanist path.

AB: Absolutely. Let's call this orientation, Lacano-Maoism. Clearly we are no longer Lacanians nor Maoists. But Lacano-Maoism endures, as a possible figure of thought, one deployed in philosophical-conceptual space but also in practice and in politics. Today, I embody this tendency.

Then, second, there are those who have returned the project back within the psychoanalytic institutional space, who have cut it off from philosophy or from more general ambitions, and who have also cut it off from radical politics. That is to say, they have become either members of the socialist party, nothing at all, or even Sarkozy supporters, it doesn't much matter. I would say that this is the re-institutionalization of this project within the restricted disciplinary space that first gave rise to it. Here we find Miller and his followers.

And then, third, there are those who got caught up in an explicitly reactionary drift, and who think it is necessary to return back to before the 1960s, who say that we must have done with the 1960s. These are the renegades, generally sectarian supporters of 'democracy' against 'totalitarianism', who ultimately drape themselves in the American flag.

The post-68 sequence gave rise to this little galaxy of positions, one that stretches from a reconstituted extreme right to a continued extreme left, crossing an institutional centre. This is the trajectory of the small world of this period, and at bottom it has its own logic. You have to see that it was in the ordeal of May 68 and its consequences that these things were structured and deployed. In this sense, it is also legitimate to say that May 68 marked the end of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, in the twofold sense of its cessation and its realization.

Translated by Steven Corcoran.