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## What's Love Got to Do With It? Badiou's Scene of Two Through the Lens of Lacan's Formulas of Sexuation<sup>1</sup>

### Keywords

love, politics, sexuation, Lacan, Badiou, emancipation

### Abstract

Badiou's philosophy deals with the question of radical change, most prominently in relation to love and emancipatory politics. Yet, he notes that love and politics are not interwoven and must be dealt with separately. In recent literature, Lacan's theory of sexuation and love has been extensively drawn upon and put into relation with politics (notably by Žižek and Zupančič). It is striking that Badiou, being both a highly political thinker and strongly influenced by Lacan, only discusses sexuation in relation to love, but disconnects the concept from politics. In this paper, I probe Badiou's concept of love in light of Lacan's formulas of sexuation. I first examine Badiou's concepts of love and politics in relation to sexuation, then set this against Lacan's formulas, to eventually illustrate the political relevance of love.

## Kaj ima ljubezen s tem? Badioujeva scena Dvojega z vidi-ka Lacanovih formul seksuacije

### Ključne besede

ljubezen, politika, seksuacija, Lacan, Badiou, emancipacija

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### Povzetek

Badioujeva filozofija se ukvarja z vprašanjem radikalne spremembe, predvsem v povezavi z ljubeznijo in emancipatorno politiko. Vseeno pa Badiou opozarja,

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da se ljubezen in politika ne prepletata in ju je treba obravnavati ločeno. V nasprotju s tem so se novejši komentariji v veliki meri opirali na Lacanovo teorijo seksuacije in ljubezni in jo postavljali v razmerje s politiko (zlasti Žižek in Zupančič). Presenetljivo je, da Badiou, ki je izrazito politični mislec in je obenem pod močnim vplivom Lacana, razpravlja o spolnosti le v povezavi z ljubeznijo, sam koncept spolnosti pa ločuje od politike. V pričujočem prispevku proučujem Badioujev koncept ljubezni v luči Lacanovih formul seksuacije. Najprej preučim Badioujeva koncepta ljubezni in politike v razmerju do seksuacije, nato ju primerjam z Lacanovimi formulami, da bi na koncu ponazorila politični pomen ljubezni.



## Introduction

When I say I love you, and I do, I don't know what I am saying. And when you say you love me, and I believe you do, you don't know either. What I do know is that we are affirming each other, that we firmly agree upon this very incomprehensible statement that *we love each other*. And in doing so, I become even more convinced of it. I act upon it, and even more so, I was already acting upon it before I dared to say it to you. But the moment I said it, I could act upon it with more confidence. Yet due to the fact that I don't really know what I am saying, my confidence also makes me feel somewhat insecure. What exactly am I acting upon so confidently? Well . . . I try to gasp your difference and make it my own. I imagine how to look through your gaze and see the world from your perspective. I look through a window of how I think you would see the world. And in that window, I see you, standing there, looking through another window, and I wonder what you are looking at.

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In his celebrated essay, *In praise of love* Alain Badiou stated that love is a "truth of difference." It creates a new world in which one no longer departs from the perspective of the "One," but from the perspective of the "Two."<sup>2</sup> Less famous are his elaborations on love in *Conditions*, where he introduces a notion of sex-

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 39.

ual difference.<sup>3</sup> For Badiou, sexual difference *only* exists in the field of love. The two sexes do not pre-exist. Rather, love establishes sexuation from the moment two lovers encounter each other. Two disjunctive positions arise: the masculine and the feminine position, “as gay as it may be.”<sup>4</sup> For Badiou states that the two positions are to be understood as “strictly nominalist: no empirical, biological or social distribution is acceptable here.”<sup>5</sup>

This conception of sexual difference resonates Jacques Lacan’s famous formulas of sexuation. Lacan developed a formalisation of two logical positions, the “phallic” or “masculine” and the “Other” or “feminine” logic, to grasp speaking beings’ relation to the world. The masculine and the feminine logic illustrate the way in which we relate ourselves to the world, respectively, through language, and through the shortcomings of language. In Seminar XX, Lacan uses these logics to formalise love. Yet, contrary to Badiou, Lacan does not *restrict* sexuation to love. Lacan’s concept of sexuation is much broader in use and application than that of Badiou.

In recent literature, many Lacanian philosophers draw from the formulas of sexuation to (*re-*)think politics, notably Alenka Zupančič and Slavoj Žižek.<sup>6</sup> Alenka Zupančič departs in her book *What is Sex* from the claim that “the sexual is political [. . .] in the sense that a true emancipatory politics can be thought only on the ground of an ‘object-disoriented ontology’ [. . .]—that is, an ontology that pursues not simply being qua being, but the crack (the Real, the antagonism) that haunts being from within, informs it.”<sup>7</sup> Politics, for Zupančič, is not about what is, but about what is not, “the crack,” which is “the sexual.” It is exactly this “crack” that is, following Zupančič, grasped by Lacan in his formulas. It is striking that Badiou, being a highly political philosopher, does not make this connection.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Badiou, 196.

<sup>5</sup> Badiou, 183.

<sup>6</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017); Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 24.

Following Badiou, sexuation is linked to love, and love should be strictly separated from politics. But if love creates a new world, how could this not be political?

When I say I love you, and I do, I get to see the world differently. My gaze gets differentiated. It gets sexuated. It is on this level of sexuation, I claim, that politics comes into play. In this paper, I question the relation between love and politics through the notion of sexuation. I do so by first examining what Badiou means by love and how this relates to his own concept of sexuation. Secondly, I bring in Lacan's formulas of sexuation, consider their relation to love and think through their political implications. Thirdly, I confront the Lacanian formulas of sexuation to Badiou's frame, to illustrate how Badiou's concept of love is also politically meaningful.

### The One That I Want

The philosophy of Alain Badiou is all about the “radical change” caused by the confrontation with “truth.” He formalises this confrontation as an “event,” i.e. an occurrence of love, politics, science, or art which drills a hole in the current state of affairs and makes possible something radically new. “An event is something that takes place in the world, but which cannot be calculated from the elements of that very world itself. It happens.”<sup>8</sup>

The concept of the event should be understood from within Badiou's ontology. According to Badiou, we can discern two notions of being. On the one hand, there is the ontological notion of being, which considers being in terms of a set of beings counted as one. Here, the following Leibnizian principle applies: “What is not *a* being, is not a *being*.”<sup>9</sup> Everything that *is*, is counted as one. Yet, each one is thereby always a set referring to multiple members, which are in turn multiples themselves. “Every multiple is a multiple of a multiple.”<sup>10</sup> By counting the multiple of everything we experience as one, we create a consis-

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Badiou, *Alain Badiou par Alain Badiou* (Paris: PUF, 2021), n.p.; all translations of references in French are my own.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 31.

<sup>10</sup> Badiou, 37.

cy in which we can think and move. So, there are sets such as “the Frenchman,” “the artwork,” “the migrant,” and “the witch,” and so forth.

However, despite the appearances of “ones,” Badiou’s central premise is that one is not—“*l’un n’est pas*.”<sup>11</sup> The apparent consistency of the one is always an effect of a procedure of counting something inconsistent, namely “inconsistent multiplicity.” This is where the second notion of being comes in, i.e. *being qua being*, which lies at the origin of counted being, and is in itself exactly this true inconsistent multiplicity. The true inconsistent being cannot be grasped by the one, yet we constantly attempt to by counting multiples and setting up a consistent ontology. Every consistent multiple is always a flawed attempt to grasp the inconsistent multiplicity. Consequently, *one* does not exist in itself. It only exists as an operation, the count-as-one.

It should be noted that this metaphysical structure of being is clearly inspired by Lacanian theory, more precisely, the Lacanian notion of castration. That is the idea that all human beings as speaking beings are castrated, i.e. they fall short in language. Badiou’s pure inconsistent multiplicity is in terms of Lacan “non-castrated”: nothing more can be said about it. Yet, once it gets “counted as one”—and therefore recognised within ontology—it becomes castrated. And, just as castration, according to Lacan, is doomed by its shortcomings, so is ontology always lacking according to Badiou.

For Badiou, the counted being is always haunted by “a multiple-without-one” that cannot be addressed. “Its non-arrival makes it comparable to the flight of scenes from a dream.”<sup>12</sup> It is the surplus of our structuring procedure of the count-as-one. Since it is not one, it is not—or rather, it is “no-thing.” Badiou refers to this nothing as the “void,” which functions as the proper name of the negativity of all multiples, i.e. the proper name of the unrepresentable.<sup>13</sup> It is exactly this void which forms the condition of possibility for the event.

The occurrence of the event passes through different phases. First, there is a “situation,” a multiple of everything there is. This is, for example, the situation of

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<sup>11</sup> Badiou, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Badiou, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Badiou, 105.

the Belgian state, which consists of everything that is counted as being part of the Belgian state. The situation is always stuck in place. “It is like it is,” they say. Here comes the need for radical change. How can the migrant free him- or herself from “being a migrant”? How is it possible that the witch is suddenly no longer a witch, but a falsely accused woman? A situation is always temporary since it is but an imperfect representation of what there is. Radical change within a situation is possible when an event occurs. The event in turn is never independent of the situation. It is initiated by the creation of something exceptional—a love encounter, an artwork, a scientific outcome, a political trigger—*within* a situation.

Although the event is thus always intrinsic to a situation, it is always fundamentally extrinsic to it as well. The event arises from an exceptional creation *within* the situation, bringing forth an ineffable truth that is grounded *outside* the situation, i.e. in the void. But this ineffable truth, even once discovered within the situation, does not necessarily lead to radical change. An event can only be realised if there is a subject willing to hold on to the truth. It is a matter of “fidelity” to embody the truth of an event and bring forth its effects in the situation. The subject here should not be thought of as a given, nor as a constituting human being. A subject only arises in relation to a truth. The subject therefore necessarily takes up a revolutionary position within the situation. It could be, for example, a series of artworks moving away from the prevailing art norms, or a political party that breaks with the status quo. The “procedure of fidelity” that is followed by the subject, is, just as the count-as-one, a structuring procedure. It *regroups* the multiplicities that are counted-as-one. “One can think of a fidelity as a counter-state: it organises in fact in the situation another legitimacy of the inclusions.”<sup>14</sup> Because of this procedure of recounting, some things are brought to life and others disappear, for example the unjustly burned woman and the witch.

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## It Takes Two

Love, for Badiou, is one of the four realms, next to art, science, and politics, in which an event can take place. Thus, love is posited as “a construction of truth,” that is, not only an encounter, but a new life or even a new world that is made, departing no longer from the perspective of the “One,” but from the perspective

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<sup>14</sup> Badiou, 263.

of the “Two.” The truth at stake here is a “truth of difference,” refuting the laws of identity. This new world is what Badiou calls “the scene of Two.”<sup>15</sup>

How is the scene of Two realised? It follows the structure of the event as set out above. First there occurs, hazardously and unexpectedly, an amorous encounter between two differences. It founds the sexual difference. For this encounter to turn into an event, the subject, in this case the two lovers, should faithfully hold on to this truth by reinventing the world from the point of the Two. This “long-lasting laborious desire,” “*le dur désir de durer*,”<sup>16</sup> is sealed by the declaration of love: “I love you.”<sup>17</sup> Badiou describes this moment, referring to Mallarmé, as the fixation of the hazard (See Mallarmé: “Le hasard doit être fixé”).<sup>18</sup> This moment of fixation is an eternal task, one impossible to ever fulfil. “The hazard of the encounter is conquered day after day in the invention of a duration, in the birth of a world.”<sup>19</sup>

As I mentioned before, Badiou holds it is only in respect to love that the sexual difference shows itself, as a radical disjunction between the two lovers. In the scene of Two, the two lovers have nothing in common and there is no “third position” as a neutral perspective that could count the Two. Therefore, the amorous Two is at the same time uncountable, from the perspective of the one, and immanent, because it is only counted from itself. Love articulates itself around this paradox of the uncountable immanent Two. “Love does not relieve the paradox; it treats it. More precisely, it makes the truth of the paradox itself.”<sup>20</sup>

The masculine and the feminine, as two positions of difference in the scene of Two, each develop a different relation towards the truth. The feminine position “sustains the articulation of the Two and the infinite,” and at the same time “inscribes when and as needed the becoming-truth [of this articulation].”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the feminine position is about the long-lasting challenge to make love true, and to prove the ontological existence and symbolic value of the Two. The

<sup>15</sup> Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Badiou, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Badiou, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Badiou, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Badiou, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Badiou, *Conditions*, 186.

<sup>21</sup> Badiou, 192–93.



masculine position, on the other hand, “guards [. . .] the premier naming, which ensures that the naming of the event is not engulfed by the event itself” and “[takes] absence itself as a modality of continuation.”<sup>22</sup> With this, Badiou means that the masculine position recognises much more the split of the Two, and the void in which it situates itself. Rather than affirming its ontological existence, the masculine position sees love as a metaphor for truth.

The paradoxical (non-?) relationship between the masculine and feminine positions becomes even more interesting in light of what Badiou calls “humanity.” While love is founded on a totally disjunctive, uncountable Two, i.e. the sexual difference, its immanent truth appeals, following Badiou, to *one* humanity. By humanity, Badiou refers to “that which provides support to the generic or truth procedures.”<sup>23</sup> When becoming a subject relating to truth, man elevates himself above the bestial and identitarian and lays claim to one universal humanity. While this “humanity function” applies to all four realms of truth (science, politics, art, and love), Badiou points out that the feminine position in love takes on a unique role:

The existence of love makes it retroactively appear that, in the disjunction, the position woman is singularly conveying of the relation between love and humanity. [. . .] Woman is that term  $x$  that, as the noumenal virtuality of the human and irrespective of its empirical sex, only activates the humanity function on the condition of [the experience of love]. Thus, woman is she (or he) for whom the particular subtraction of love devalorises  $H(x)$  in its other types, namely, science, politics and art.<sup>24</sup>

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In other words, woman states that love is the truth of all truths. “It knots the four [truths] together.”<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Youngjin Park notes that “this implies that anyone who participates in a truth procedure, regardless of the type, is a lover in the Badiouian sense. Love and truth are coextensive,”<sup>26</sup> at least from the feminine point of view.

<sup>22</sup> Badiou, 192–93.

<sup>23</sup> Badiou, 184.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou, 195–96.

<sup>25</sup> Badiou, 196.

<sup>26</sup> Youngjin Park, *On Love: Between Lacan and Badiou* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2018), 45.



In light of this, it is remarkable that Badiou also claims that “love, as a singular adventure of a truth of difference, must be rigorously separated from politics.”<sup>27</sup> What love and emancipatory politics have in common is that both “always fracture a point of impossibility,”<sup>28</sup> with regard to, on the one hand, “the power of the state and the gesture of normalisation,” and on the other hand, “the family as the basic unit of property and egoism.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, for Badiou, love and politics only share a *structural* similarity. But that is it. Their subject should not be confused. But what about the feminine position claiming that love is the truth of all truths, knotting all truths together? Has Badiou now created a feminine position only to reject it completely? And how can Badiou hold that the effect of love, namely seeing the world from the perspective of difference instead of identity, does not have any political significance? To better understand why Badiou makes a theory of sexuation, and to what exactly the “feminine position” is a response, we must turn to the original formulas of sexuation formalised by Jacques Lacan.

### One Way or Another

—*Tu as remarqué que dans le mot masculin il y a masque? Et il y a cul?*  
 —*Et dans féminin?*  
 —*Il n’y a rien.*<sup>30</sup>

For Jacques Lacan, speaking beings’ relation to the world is determined by a “masculine” or “phallic” and a “feminine” or “Other” logic. Although these names refer to the sexes, Lacan is not putting forward any essentialist or stereotypical theory of sex, i.e. male versus female in a biological or institutional sense. As Marie-Hélène Brousse emphasises: “It is not a question of distributing the men on one side and the women on the other as is done in religions, locker rooms or toilets, and more generally in any institutionalised social order.”<sup>31</sup> We are not doomed to one or another logic, nor could we ever exclusively choose the one above the other. Both logics are applicable to all human beings. They

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<sup>27</sup> Badiou, *Éloge de l’amour*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Badiou, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Badiou, 62.

<sup>30</sup> *Masculin Féminin*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard (Anouchka Films-Argos Films, Sandrews-Svenskfilmindustri, 1966).

<sup>31</sup> Marie-Hélène Brousse, *Mode de jouir au féminin* (Paris: Navarin, 2020), 67.

aim to illustrate the way in which we relate ourselves to the world, on the one hand through language, and on the other hand through the shortcomings of language.

The first question that arises now is where the need to formalise this as sexual difference comes from. Badiou, just like Lacan, emphasises that his masculine and feminine positions should not be equalised with a human's biological, or institutional gender. But why then do we talk about the sexes anyway?

What is logically interesting about the sexual difference is that the two positions are not, following Lacan, like two equal sides of a coin. They are not “1+1.” The two positions can only be understood in relation to one another. Zupančič expresses this in the following formula: “What splits into two is the very nonexistence of the one (that is, of the one which, if it existed, would be the Other).”<sup>32</sup> The difference between the Two already departs from referring to both as “the One” and “the Other.” “If there are two sexes, and they attract each other, which is [O]ne and which is the [O]ther?”<sup>33</sup> One (or the Other) could say it is equal who is the One and who is the Other. However, this ignores the fact that the second one will always be the “Other” of the first, “One” being the man, and “the Other” being the woman. This unequal relationship can be traced back in various examples in culture and history. To illustrate this, Guy Le Gaufey brings in the biblical origin story. First, there is Genesis 1:27, where God creates human beings, men and women, in his own image. Next, there is in Genesis 2:18–24, the better-known story of God creating man, and subsequently man creating women from one of his ribs. Here the image is created of “men” being created as one genus, and subsequently this genus being split into men and women.<sup>34</sup> One can recognise the same hierarchy in language. There is man—in French *Homme*—as the general term for our species, and then there is man—*homme*—and woman—*femme*—as the two genders of the species.

Here, man determines the principle of distinction. At first, he is all (*tout*). Next, he gives away something of himself, creates a part of all, but still thinks of him-

<sup>32</sup> Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Guy Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan: Consistance logique, conséquences cliniques* (Paris: Epel, 2006), 11.

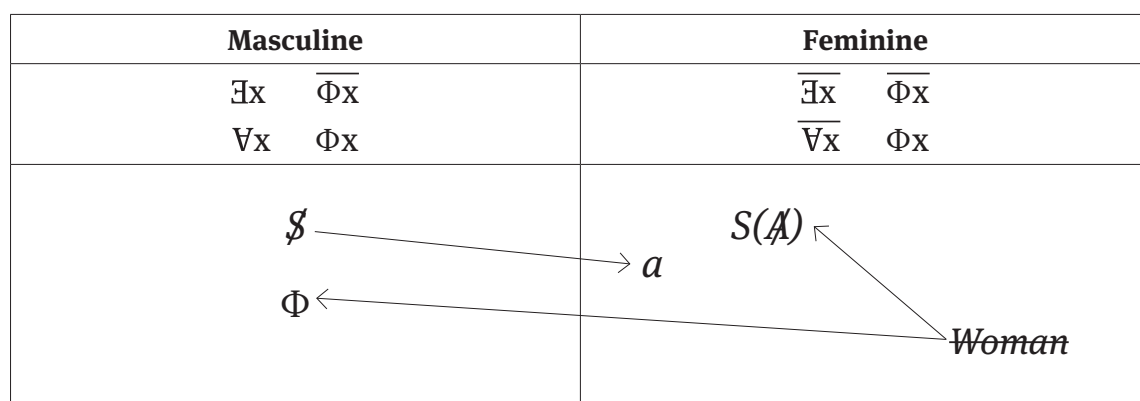
<sup>34</sup> Le Gaufey, 17.

self as all, or as the One in relation to the Other. Women however, being the “Other,” have no other to relate to, since there is no other of the Other. Therefore, women follow another logic, of being not–all (*pastout*).

Lacan takes this structural relation between man and woman, the One and the Other, as being exemplary of speaking beings’ relation to language. Being constantly in relation to one another, man represents our linguistic inclination to grasp *all* and define what *is* there. In this way, the masculine logic illustrates how we positively relate to the world through language. Yet, each attempt is disappointing. There is always something which escapes our grasp, for which our words do not satisfy. This is where the feminine logic comes into play. It represents our negative relation to the world through language: language falls short. This is nicely illustrated in the citation with which I started this paragraph. At some point in *Masculin Féminin*, a movie by Jean-luc Godard, Robert notices that in the word masculine (*masculin*), there is the word “mask” (*mask.*) and “ass” (*cul.*). “And in femininity (*féminin*)?” Paul asks. “Nothing,” says Robert. Femininity as such, is nothing, and to be masculine is to put a mask over this nothingness, in order to be something.

### She's Not There

Departing from the difference between the One and the Other, Lacan develops the following schema:



**Image 1:** Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore*, 1972–1973, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 78.

On the left side there is the masculine logic that is thought of as “One.” The formula  $\forall x \Phi x$  states that all  $x$  fall under the function  $\Phi x$ , the phallic function. This means that all men are counted or nominated as “One.” In other words, there is the conviction that all can be brought together under one predicate. “All  $x$  are subject to the function of castration.”<sup>35</sup> However, as I have already pointed out above, just like Pandora’s box, castration comes at a price, i.e. one has to deal with the ever-present shortcomings of language. Yet, the creation of all is only possible if there is something that does not fall under this predicate and thereby, as an exception, confirms the rule. For this, Lacan writes  $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$ , meaning there is an  $x$  ( $\exists x$ ) that does not fall under the function  $\Phi x$ . It is only because there is one that is not castrated that the universal of castration (the phallic function), as the predicate for all, is founded.

On the right side, there are the feminine formulas, the “Other,” which can only be understood in relation to the masculine. Here, not the predicates but the quantifiers themselves are negated: “there is *not one* . . .” and “there is *not all* . . .” It is not about *what* there is but *that* there is. The first formula states  $\overline{\exists x \Phi x}$ , there is *not* one  $x$  that does not fall under the phallic function. There is no exception to the rule, and as a consequence there is no rule to be confirmed. In other words, there is no *all* since *all* is not grouped together by the same exception. Following this logic, there is no such thing as *the* woman. Therefore, the second formula states:  $\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$ , “not all  $x$  fall under the phallic function.”<sup>36</sup>

“Not-all,” *pastout*, does *not* function here as a simple negation of the masculine side (for all  $x$  . . .), because this would lead us again to a function of grouping together. “For no  $x$  . . .” is in fact “for nothing,” which equally operates as a predicate that applies to *all*. Instead, Lacan puts forward “*pastout*” as a maximal particular, something that only applies to *some*. Not all, not nothing, as “existence without essence.”<sup>37</sup> It is “characterised by undecidability.”<sup>38</sup> For this reason, I would opt not to use the term “feminine” in reference to *pastout*, but only use the other term Lacan proposes, namely the “Other” logic. This is because the notion

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<sup>35</sup> Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> Zupančič, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Gertrudis Van de Vijver, “De durf van onbeslistheid,” in *Dates with Gender and Diversity: Huldeboek voor Marysa Demoor*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Gent: Skribis, 2021), 282.

of femininity in contrast to masculinity gives all too much the impression that it is about a binary opposition: masculinity and femininity, each having their own essence. The Other logic, however, does not have any categorical trait that correctly classifies it in a set of all things falling under the predicate “femininity.” As Le Gaufey formulates mysteriously: “If there were an Other, it must not be *that one*.”<sup>39</sup>

The phallic and Other logics each relate to the way we experience “*jouissance*.” Enjoyment or “*jouissance*” refers, within Lacanian theory, to an ever-present attraction that is neither desire nor enjoyment. It cannot ever be satisfied and comes forth out of our human capacity to talk and our incapacity to talk sufficiently. It is an effect of castration. Phallic *jouissance* relates to language and the prospect that there is a possibility to talk sufficiently. In other words, it fosters the dream that one moment we will no longer be castrated. In trying to capture something as “all,” under one predicate, we derive a short-term pleasure. Yet, “phallic” refers to the fallible/fallibility (*faillible/faillibilité*). It fails us, it always disappoints, because no predicate ever suffices. It is never able to grasp the Other. Rather, the Other is reduced to and loved as an object of desire, what Lacan calls “object a.”<sup>40</sup>

Other *jouissance* is then, just like the Other logic, supplementary to phallic *jouissance*. It functions as “a shadow of the phallic *jouissance*.”<sup>41</sup> Its existence is undefined and its longing much more radical. It no longer relates itself to language and does not hold on to any prospect. It is a constant strife, never temporarily satisfied, and therefore also infallible. Following the formula of “*pastout*” (not-all), Fink states that “not all of her [sic] *jouissance* is phallic *jouissance*,” and “there is not any that is not phallic *jouissance*.”<sup>42</sup> Here, the emphasis is laid on the first “is.” While there *exists* only phallic *jouissance*, Other *jouissance* “exists.” It is not there as One, but this does not mean that one cannot experience it. Rather, it is not countable. It escapes our grasp. Contrary to the phallic *jouissance*, Other *jouissance* “belongs to that part of the Other that is not covered by

<sup>39</sup> Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan*, 43; italics added.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance,” in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>41</sup> Le Gaufey, *Le Pastout de Lacan*, 45.

<sup>42</sup> Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance,” 39.

the fantasy of the ‘One’—that is, the fantasy sustained by the positioning of the phallic exception.”<sup>43</sup>

So, we experience Other *jouissance* as negativity, but it cannot be nominated, as otherwise it would fall prey to phallic fallibility. Other *jouissance* is ineffable, but “One’s experience of it simply ex-sists.”<sup>44</sup> It exists without being counted as one. Nothing can be said about the Other, non-phallic enjoyment “because it is a placeholder for the knowledge which does not exist.”<sup>45</sup> Other *jouissance* is that which has always fascinated us. It is like the Zombies sang: “Nobody told us about her, she is not there.”<sup>46</sup> This does not mean that Other *jouissance* is not at all there. It is rather excessively there, or, in Lacan’s words, “She is *not* not at all there. She is there in full (*à plein*).”<sup>47</sup>

### **All That She Wants**

Now we can understand how Badiou’s theory of sexuation is a response to and a revision of Lacan’s formulas of sexuation. Badiou takes over the idea of sexuation as two totally disjunctive positions, the masculine and the feminine, that cannot be counted as 1+1. Yet different from Lacan, he absolutises this uncountable Two as the universal truth of love. In doing so, he narrows down the concept of sexuation from two positions expressing humans’ relation to language and its shortcomings, to two positions expressing humans’ relation to love. Instead of the function of castration—that all humans fall prey to the shortcomings of language—he posits the “humanity function,” i.e. that all human beings are capable of elevating themselves to *one* universal humanity, which is embodied in the truth of the Two.

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In this regard, Park notes that “the transition from the phallic function to the humanity function results in the transition of the feminine position from not-all

<sup>43</sup> Suzanne Barnard, “Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance,” in Barnard and Fink, *Reading Seminar XX*, 172.

<sup>44</sup> Fink, “Knowledge and Jouissance,” 40.

<sup>45</sup> Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> The Zombies, “She’s Not There,” by Rod Argent, released July 24, 1964, as the first single from the album *The Zombies*, Parrot PA 61001.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 74.



to universality.”<sup>48</sup> This transition is due to Badiou’s critiques of Lacan’s formulas. Next to his overall critique of Lacan’s use of logic—which, according to Badiou, is inconsistent and overly intuitionistic<sup>49</sup>—he rejects Lacan’s conception of the feminine position and feminine *jouissance* because of its lack of universalisation. Lacan’s introduction of the logic of “*pastout*” makes any overarching idea of universalisation impossible. Badiou criticises Lacan for upholding such a “segregative thesis of sexual difference”<sup>50</sup> in which the infinity of the *pastout* can only be grasped from the masculine point of view, and the two positions cannot be united as one universal humanity. As Burchill points out:

Indeed for Badiou, as we know, Lacan’s very claims for such a *jouissance* reveal his formulae of sexuation to be flawed from the start: they underline that the phallic function—which does effectively hold universally, or “wholly” in respect of the masculine position alone, according to Lacan—is always already situated within the disjunction of the sexes and is, as such, unsuitable as a support for the universal.<sup>51</sup>

Badiou instead proposes that the feminine position be the universalising position *par excellence*. For Badiou, *she* is the one hammering on the ontological existence of the Two. By upholding love as the guarantee of a universality, woman “treats”<sup>52</sup> the paradox of the two, and shows what both sexes relate to. For Badiou, there is a sexual relationship after all, realised in the event of love.

It is remarkable then that in response to Lacan, Badiou shifts the focus from sexuality to love. He does not elaborate on the concept of *jouissance*. As Zupančič points out: “It is indeed striking how Badiou, who is otherwise a most incisive reader of Freud and Lacan, mostly uses the notion of enjoyment in an entirely non- or pre-analytic sense—as an individual hedonistic idiosyncrasy, devoid of any possible bearing at the level of truth. That is to say: he takes it to be some-

<sup>48</sup> Park, *On Love*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> For a logical discussion of this critique, I refer to Russell Grigg, “Lacan and Badiou: Logic of the Pas-Tout,” *Filozofski Vestnik* 26, no. 2 (2005): 53–65.

<sup>50</sup> Alain Badiou, “The Scene of Two,” trans. Barbara Fulks, *Lacanian Ink* 21 (Spring 2003): 47.

<sup>51</sup> Louise Burchill, “Of a Universal No Longer Indifferent to Difference: Badiou (and Irigaray) on Woman, Truths, and Philosophy,” *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 1179, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday201937250>.

<sup>52</sup> Badiou, *Conditions*, 186.



thing titillating, but at the same time completely irrelevant.”<sup>53</sup> But while dismissing the concept of *jouissance* as irrelevant, could one not understand Badiou’s reaction to Lacan as being a clearcut example of only phallic *jouissance*? By wanting to “treat” all paradoxes, group them together under one truth, and delimit them to the realm of love, he fosters the dream that “all” can be grasped under one predicate, namely “one universal humanity.” The feminine position becomes for Badiou the one that recognises the ontological existence of “all.” Woman becomes just another name of the phallus.

### The Power of Love

I argue that Badiou is wrong in dismissing “*pastout*” and “*jouissance*.” Rather, these Lacanian concepts of sexuation and its contemporary reception are of great value for Badiou’s concept of love. Not only do they deliver a fruitful interpretation of his theory, they also pave the way for a more political take on love, revealing its emancipatory potential.

First, Van de Vijver reformulates the logic of *pastout* as being about “the impossibility of universalising. It is about dropping nobody, that is, nobody is left behind, regardless of what someone’s predicates are. It is the universal identification with the unconditional.”<sup>54</sup> Isn’t this exactly what Badiou’s truth of love is about when he defines it as “a truth of difference,” “refuting the laws of identity”?<sup>55</sup> Badiou opposes the *pastout* because it does not universalise and thereby seems to contradict his so-called “humanity function,” which appeals to one universal humanity. What Badiou is missing here, however, is that a *pastout*-interpretation would make the humanity function much more radical. It is no longer about inclusion: Who falls under the humanity function, i.e. who is able to belong to that one universal humanity? Rather, it is about “dropping nobody”:<sup>56</sup> nobody does *not* fall under the humanity function.

Second, recalling what I have explained above, phallic *jouissance* follows the phallic logic, relating to language and the prospect that there is a possibility to

<sup>53</sup> Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 133.

<sup>54</sup> Gertrudis Van de Vijver, “Het gaat er niet om gelijk te hebben, het gaat erom niemand te laten vallen,” *VSTN*, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 42.

<sup>55</sup> Badiou, *Éloge de l’amour*, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Van de Vijver, “Het gaat er niet om gelijk te hebben,” 42.

grasp “all.” In the words “I love you,” we think that we have captured it “all,” and we derive a short-term pleasure. However, it soon becomes clear that this is not it. It does not cut the mustard. So, Badiou points to the importance of “fidelity” as a “long-lasting laborious desire” (*dur désir de durer*).<sup>57</sup> Is this laborious desire not exactly what Other *jouissance* is about? As not all seems to be grasped in the words “I love you,” it follows the logic of *pastout* (not-all). We negatively experience this Other *jouissance* as an ever-present challenge, a “long-lasting laborious desire” that is impossible to ever fully complete. Thinking of fidelity as Other *jouissance* grasps our struggle to love “beyond the veil of phallic presence.”<sup>58</sup>

With this interpretation of love, through the lens of *pastout* and *jouissance*, it seems strange to rigidly separate love and politics. For Badiou, “emancipatory politics presupposes an unconditioned prescription. [It] does not set out from an examination of the world that aims to demonstrate its possibility. [. . .] A politics of emancipation draws itself from the void that an event brings forth (*fait advenir*) as the latent inconsistency of the given world.”<sup>59</sup> It is this very inconsistency that contemporary Lacanian philosophers, notably Zupančič and Žižek, recognise in sexuality. For Zupančič, “what relates sexuality to politics is that they are not simple ontological categories but essentially imply, depend on, and deploy something which is not of the order of being, and which Lacan refers to as the Real.”<sup>60</sup> Žižek, in the same vein, states that “politics is structured around a ‘missing link,’ it presupposes a kind of ontological openness, gap, antagonism, and this same gap or ontological openness is at work also in sexuality: in both cases, a relationship is never guaranteed by an encompassing universal Signifier.”<sup>61</sup>

Both politics and sexuality deal with the same difficulty, namely a “crack” or an “ontological openness.” One can try to ignore this gap by excluding it, according to a phallic logic. Love, however, forces us to be confronted with the gap. One loves the other unconditionally, without knowing or being able to name exactly what it is that one loves. In other words, love refutes the laws of identity and makes counting impossible. Instead, there is a logic of difference, that

<sup>57</sup> Badiou, *Éloge de l'amour*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> Barnard, “Tongues of Angels,” 178.

<sup>59</sup> Badiou, *Conditions*, 152.

<sup>60</sup> Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 22.

<sup>61</sup> Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 129.

is, a logic of *pastout*, at play. The lovers are haunted by a long-lasting desire, or Other *jouissance*, to try to grasp the other, without ever succeeding. In boldly confronting this negativity, love forces us to do politics. It makes us rearticulate the borders of what is possible and compels us to reinvent the world. That is the power of love.

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