

# Love in Badiou: ontology of void, non-sexual relationship and truth \*

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## ABSTRACT

### KEYWORDS

Badiou; amor; multiplicidad inconsistente; diferencia sexual; acontecimiento; verdad

The aim of the current reflection article is to offer a reading of the concept of love in Alain Badiou's thought that mediates and harmonizes the abstract and formal background of his metaontology with his well-known interventions on this concept aimed at the general public. This fills a gap in the literature that analyzes this region of his thinking. The article undertakes this task in three moments: First the connection, which is assumed to exist, between the theory of being as multiplicity and the Lacanian theory of sexualization is explained in order to indicate the continuity and limit between them. After that, we place love in the coordinates of the theory of the event, the subject and the truth. Finally, we interpret Badiou's proposal in the light of some elements that come from Plato's theory of love and what we call a communism of difference or minimum.

## El amor en Badiou: ontología del vacío, la no relación sexual y la verdad

## RESUMEN

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Badiou; love; inconsistent multiplicity; sexual difference; event; truth

El objetivo del siguiente artículo de reflexión es ofrecer una lectura del concepto de amor en el pensamiento de Alain Badiou que medie y armonice el trasfondo abstracto y formal de su metaontología con sus conocidas intervenciones sobre este concepto dirigidas al gran público. Se llena con ello un vacío en la literatura que analiza esta región de su pensamiento. El artículo acomete esta tarea en tres momentos: primero se explica la conexión, que se asume que hay, entre la teoría del ser como multiplicidad y la teoría lacaniana de la sexualización a fin de señalar la continuidad y límite entre las mismas. Tras ello, situamos el amor en las coordenadas de la teoría del acontecimiento, el sujeto y la verdad. Finalmente, interpretamos la propuesta de Badiou a la luz de algunos elementos que proceden de la teoría del amor de Platón y de lo que llamamos un comunismo de la diferencia o mínimo.

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# O amor em Badiou: ontologia do vazio, da não-sexualidade e da verdade

## R E S U M O

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Badiou; amor; multiplicidade inconsistente; diferença sexual; evento; verdade.

O objetivo do artigo de reflexão a seguir é oferecer uma leitura do conceito de amor no pensamento de Alain Badiou que medeia e harmoniza o fundo abstrato e formal de sua metaontologia com suas conhecidas intervenções sobre este conceito dirigidas ao público em geral. Isto preenche uma lacuna na literatura que analisa esta região de seu pensamento. O artigo empreende esta tarefa em três etapas: primeiro, a suposta conexão entre a teoria do eu como multiplicidade e a teoria lacaniana da sexualização é explicada a fim de apontar a continuidade e os limites entre elas. Em seguida, situamos o amor nas coordenadas da teoria do evento, do assunto e da verdade. Finalmente, interpretamos a proposta de Badiou à luz de alguns elementos que provêm da teoria do amor de Platão e do que chamamos um comunismo de diferença ou minimalismo.

## I. Introduction

There is a long and rich tradition of philosophical reflection on love in the West ([Singer, 1992](#); [Ackerman, 2000](#); [May, 2011](#)), in particular, in the context of contemporary French philosophy, from [Barthes \(1982\)](#) to [Nancy \(2003\)](#) or [Marion \(2005\)](#), a sustained reflection on love is recorded. Alain Badiou is no stranger to it, and partly because of this, in his system of thought, love constitutes a condition of philosophy itself ([Badiou, 1990](#)). The literature on this particular aspect of his theoretical production approaches his conception of love from two different flanks: either he analyzes love in the light of the notions of event, subject, or truth ([De Chavez, 2017](#); [Gómez Camarena, 2012](#); [Lozano, 2014](#)), or he traces affinities or tensions with the Lacanian thesis of sexual difference ([Chiesa, 2006](#); [Barlett and Clemens, 2012](#); [Copjec, 2005](#)). In this theoretical context, the present article integrates both perspectives into the formal framework, called meta ontology, deployed by Badiou in his 1988 work *Being and the Event* ([Badiou, 2015](#)). This approach, which seeks to integrate ontological theory with the philosophy of love, allows us to account for the central problem of Badiou's work with love, a problem posed in these terms: how can a love relationship give rise to an authentic difference or duality and thus overcome the imaginary idea of romantic fusion, the pursuit of enjoyment by narcissistic subjectivities, and the utilitarian conjugal union characteristic of traditional models?

The proposal consists in arguing, firstly, that the meta-ontological background proposed by Badiou, centered on the idea of inconsistent multiplicity, is coherent with Lacanian ideas on sexuality. Secondly, the articulation between sexuality and ontology ([Zupančič, 2017](#)), must be affirmed as a necessary condition for introducing the non-ontological character of love, that is, its status as a post-event truth. The main result arrived at is that, with the conjunction of these two theses, the way is opened for a novel conception of love, which represents an alternative to the fusional, pessimistic, or institutional view and, in general, to the views on love registered in the Western world ([May, 2019](#)).

For this article, qualitative methodology based on a hermeneutic approach is employed. The Lacanian theses concerning sexuality as a phenomenon of the structure have been taken and a reading of them has been made from the point of view of the ontological formalism of *Being and Event*. This reading aims to highlight, first, the mediating character of psychoanalysis between the ontological dimension of sexuality and the eventual dimension of love; second, to point out the knotting required between mathematics and psychoanalysis to account for a complete reading of Badiou's theory of love.

One may suspect the possibility of articulating mathematics and love even in its psychoanalytic way, due, in short, to the abstract character of the former and the kind of affect that the latter entails ([Cooke, 2018](#)). While acknowledging the unusualness of this perspective, at least in the philosophical tradition, this is due to the initial preconception of these two fields. On the one hand, mathematics is fully assumed as a demonstrative exercise, based on logical discipline and rigor, applied to the study of abstract objects, as a rule using an axiomatic language. For its part, there exists in our time ([Bologne, 2017](#)) the conventional view of love as romantic passion. Even under other ways of conceiving it - as desire, virtue, or sentiment (Halwani, 2018), in terms of an irrational rapture or madness ([Curi, 2010](#)) or a longing for completeness, neighborly love, fraternal friendship, idealization of the desired object or agape ([May, 2019](#)) - it remains a universal human

experience in no way linkable to the proof of theorems. Why is mathematics such a passionate matter as love? This judgment can be deconstructed in two moments: first, Badiou does not adopt a positivist or formalist view of mathematics, since he understands that mathematics is the science of being as being and, as such, offers a general description of the being of any situation or phenomenon, including the phenomenon of love. Second, contrary to the usual judgment, for Badiou love is not identified with an emotion or passion, but with an indiscernible construction that he renames the procedure of truth; the question to be asked about love is: what if it were not a feeling but a real (in the Lacanian sense of the term) that manages to be reflected by the formal means of a mathematical ontology?

On the other hand, taken not as the object of his reflection, but as the very form of his metaphysical thought, love in Badiou stands out among the other procedures of truth. Unlike science, politics, or art, love constitutes the very essence of what this thinker understands by philosophy. Against the grain of most philosophers of his time, he places, like Plato, truth as the central category of all possible philosophy (Badiou, 1990; 2008a)<sup>1</sup>. This is the result of the central thesis of his philosophical system, a thesis that affirms the identity between mathematics and ontology. Although mathematics also plays an essential role in Plato, for Badiou this thesis forces us to redefine philosophy in terms of a meta-ontological thought, elaborated based on the reunion (or composability) of the four types of truth.

Philosophy is, as [Farrán](#) describes it, a great “fiction composed of heteroclite discursive fragments that supplement each other” (2021, p. 53)<sup>2</sup>. Such a definition invites us to think of philosophy as a discipline of the encounter, a device of thought that knots or strings together very diverse truths. Badiou himself has employed a Deleuzian image to describe his work as an exercise in capturing truths (2012a). This metaphor can be interpreted in a second sense: the capture of truths involves equally a passive action of awe (*saisissement*) or amazement (*étonnement*), an element that undoubtedly evokes the classic definition of philosophy as a love of truth, although, Badiou warns, such love, must be understood as lacking its own or unique object (2012a). From this point of view, one can claim, with [Zupančič](#) (2004), that love is not only one of the four procedures of truth, but a fifth global condition, for it fixes the very way in which philosophical discourse approaches truth<sup>3</sup>. By deploying a thought conditioned by the love of truth, it can be argued that, as [Badiou](#) enunciates in his work *Plato's Republic*, “whoever does not begin with love will never know what philosophy is” (2013c, p. 221).

This article is organized in three moments, delimited as follows: the first is an exposition of the meta-ontological edifice presented by Badiou in the first part of *Being and the Event*, to then trace the general lines of articulation between the theory of being and the conception of sexuality that Lacan's psychoanalysis put into circulation with his formulas of sexualization in the *Seminar Aun* ([Lacan, 1992](#)). This section aims to evidence the continuity or coherence between Badiou's ontology and Lacan's conception of the non-existence of sexual relations while pointing out the limit of this continuity. In the second moment, Badiou's theory of love is presented as derived from the general notions of event, subject, and truth, found in the second part of *Being and Event*. Finally, an interpretation of Badiou's theory of love is proposed in light of Diotima's speech at the Banquet and the idea of minimal communism.

## 2. From ontology to the absence of the sexual relation

The foundational thesis or axiom of Badiou's entire philosophical project consists in identifying modern mathematics with classical ontology, that is, with the science of being as being. Badiou understands that the question of being is the most urgent question of our time<sup>4</sup>, although only mathematics possesses the necessary tools to solve it (or to think about it). For this reason, he calls his philosophical project a “meta ontology”, since ontology, by identifying itself with mathematics, ceases to be a branch of philosophy ([Baki, 2015](#)). In the place left by the absence of the ontological category of being, Badiou will instead situate the philosophical category of truth as the expression of a renewed Platonism of the multiple that affirms the existence of truths in four recognizably Platonic domains: science, politics, art, and love. But, although ontology is not a branch of philosophy, it is instead the source of inexhaustible materials for the unfolding of his discourse on truths, including love. Badiou bets on a reinvention of love ([Badiou, 2012b](#)) that harmonizes with what mathematics says about being. Hence his characteristic proposal to develop an axiomatic of love, for he is convinced that “no subject requires pure logic like that of love” ([Badiou, 2012a, p. 244](#)).

In this scenario, post-Cantorian set theory - specifically the Zermelo-Fraenkel formulation - stands as the theoretical framework from which any statement about making sense. However, what mathematics speaks about does not imply that being itself is mathematical; the equation “mathematics = ontology” expresses that the former delimits a realm within which it is possible to resolve by strictly formal and technical means the classical aporias or antinomies about whether

being is one or multiple ([Bowden, 2012](#)). The equating of mathematics and ontology derives in a second meta-ontological thesis that Badiou makes explicit in most of his works, namely the non-being of the One (*l'un n'est pas*). This thesis implies the rejection, as merely imaginary, of an original and unconditioned unity that splits off from itself at some historical, logical, or dialectical moment to give rise to all that there is. For set theory, the existence of a non-relational and ineffable One-infinite ([Badiou, 2015](#)) proper to the onto-theological order is axiomatically excluded ([Badiou, 2002](#)).

Thus, the being that mathematics deals with and that Badiou speaks of lacks any form of the One, which is why being is a mere pure multiplicity or inconsistent multiplicity. This means that mathematics has as its object a type of multiplicity that is subtracted from any effective presentation or any attempt at symbolization. The only means they have to refer to such a manifold turns out to be the mere signifier that designates it, which for Badiou is none other than the empty set ( $\emptyset$ ), “the proper name of being” ([Badiou, 2015, p. 67](#))<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, whatever can be asserted as “veridical” ([Badiou, 2015, p. 368](#)) of the void depends on the axioms of set theory<sup>6</sup>. As the mathematician Terence Tao states, in pure set theory, everything is set and there are only sets constructed from the empty set (2016)<sup>7</sup>. Badiou generalizes this thesis in his meta-ontology by saying:

With joy, one must accept that the destiny of every situation is the infinite multiplicity of sets, that no depth can ever be established in such a multiplicity, and that the homogeneity of the multiple ontologically defeats the play of intensities ([Badiou, 2002, p. 21](#)).

We can conclude then that Badiou, by identifying mathematics with ontology, and the latter with a science of inconsistent multiplicities, continues, albeit in his terms, Lacan's original idea in his last seminars of elevating mathematics (along with logic) to a science of the real<sup>8</sup>. It is this approach to Lacan that allows him to knot ontology with the theory of the subject - and thus with the theory of the event and truth - for the real, he reminds us, “remains a category of the subject” ([Badiou, 2015, p. 13](#))<sup>9</sup>. But such knotting cannot be completed without an additional Lacanian resource that Badiou incorporates as a mediating element between the pure dimension of being and the subject: the idea of sexual difference expressed in the formula “there is no sexual relation” ([Lacan, 1992, p. 17](#)); such mediation is the starting point for the deployment of a renewed philosophical theory of love.

Although Lacan's influence on Badiou is difficult to measure ([Barlett and Clemens, 2010; 2012](#)), especially since he is, for Badiou himself, a contemporary antiphilosopher ([Badiou, 2012a; 2013a](#)), in the specific case of the reception of the formulas of sexuation (see Figure 1) it is possible to distinguish with relative precision between what Badiou incorporates from his master concerning what he leaves aside. Indeed, although he takes from Lacan the thesis of the non-sexual relation, read in an ontological key, he refrains from adopting, as unphilosophical, a consequence that for Lacan is necessary if one accepts this thesis, namely: that love is the semblance that makes up for the absence of the sexual relation ([Lacan, 1992](#))<sup>10</sup>. Such a pessimistic consequence ([Zupančič, 2017](#)) is answered with the thesis that love is a procedure of truth that exceeds the gap between the sexes.

Alenka Zupančič ([2013](#)) argues that the point where psychoanalysis becomes relevant for philosophy is precisely at the convergence between ontology and sexuality. For the author, psychoanalysis recognizes that human sexuality, at the level of object drives or partial drives, is constitutively polymorphous, and deviant concerning a norm that simply does not exist. Zupančič adds that the Freudian discovery consists in pointing out that our sexuality:

It has no “natural” or pre-established place but is constitutively dislocated, fragmented, and dispersed, in that it exists only in its deviations from “itself” or from its supposed natural object, and that sexuality is nothing but this very constitutive, “out-of-place” dislocation of its satisfaction ([Zupančič, 2013, p. 26](#)).

This polymorphism can be interpreted ontologically as an equivalent of the multiplicity without One postulated by [Badiou \(1990; 2011\)](#); a real or realm of “the indistinct and the dispersed” ([Milner, 1999, p. 11](#)), the nothingness or void that coincides with undifferentiated being ([Watkin, 2017](#)). Proof of this is the status that Badiou grants to desire when he states: Sexually, what exists is disorder. Take it in the strict sense: there is no order, or if you prefer, desire is disorder. This is what I think is meant, very simplistically, by the phrase there is no sexual relation: desire is disorder (2000b, p. 109)

Thus, the symbolic order imposes itself on the pulsational disorder and divides it, although always partially, and only to pose sexual identification more as an interrogation than as a place of arrival. Through this appeal to the psychoanalytic

conception of sexuality, Badiou opposes, like Plato, the myth of the androgynous spheres narrated by Aristophanes in the *Banquet* (189c-193d), since, in principle, such a conception implies that desire is not a longing for reintegration into the lost One, but multiplicity without a given object.

Additionally, Lacan's formulas of sexuation break with the metaphysics of the sexes or the masculine and feminine genders (Le Gaufey, 2007; Santos, 2009). Although there are various interpretations of such formulas (Rovira, 2018), Badiou's reading, as also that of Zupančič (2017), stands out for its ontological perspective (Badiou, 1990; 2011), something that is not strange if one keeps in mind that such formulas are an attempt at logical-mathematical formalization (Lacan, 1992). (See Figure 1).

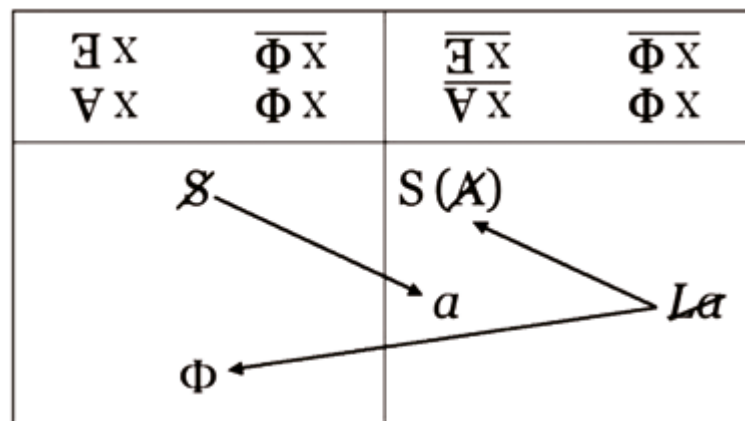


Figure 1. Formulations of sexuation

Source: Lacan, 1992, p. 95.

Both in the chronological reading of Rovira (2018) and the more synchronic and analytical reading of Le Gaufey (2007), the core of the formulas is the object  $a$ , the object cause of desire (Badiou, 1990; 2009a)<sup>11</sup>, a “partial object that emerges as resistant to fall under unity, under unification” (Rovira, 2018, p. 48). Around this object, sexual difference is organized as a difference in the modes of enjoyment to which individuals located in one of the signifying positions “man” and “woman” have access (Santos, 2009, Gonzáles Taboas, 2020)<sup>12</sup>. These signifiers, instead of representing biological or cultural categories, express the fact that, in the sexual relation, the enjoyment of each subject is related to the forever lost object of his desire, which is why no signifier can write the relation of one subject with another; in other words, between “man” and “woman” there is a hiatus or gap that prevents them from becoming one: it is impossible to establish, Lacan notes, “nowhere in the enunciable, that unique One that interests us, the One of the sexual relation-ratio” (Lacan, 1992, p. 14). In sex, the other is the object of my desire, one more in the series of those with whom one tries to fill a lack. In the class of January 16, 1973, Lacan states: “Love, if it is true that it is related to the One, never takes anyone out of himself” (1992, p. 61). Moreover, for Lacan, the impossibility of the sexual relation is not only due to the different ways of enjoyment, to the asymmetry between the feminine and the masculine position but to the very meaning of the expression “there is no relation”, a formal meaning, that is, absence of relation in a logical-mathematical sense (Le Gaufey, 2007; 2014).

But, while Lacan extracts a deflationary reading of love from the hiatus implied by sexual difference, for Badiou it is only love, as an event, “that authorizes us to enunciate the existence of two positions” or sexed places (Badiou, 2012a, p. 245). If love for Lacan does not make Two in the sense that it does not take anyone out of himself, out of the autarchic enjoyment of the other; and if the sexual relation does not make One with the other either as in the romantic myth of fusion, Badiou bets on a love that expresses a genuine difference, a difference that, without falling back on the being of the One, takes the individual out of himself and directs him to the Other.

### 3. Love: event, Subject, and theory of truth

Badiou often refers to his conception of love through the theatrical image or metaphor of the “scene of the Two”. But, beyond this image, the term “Two” refers to a concept elaborated in response to a problem facing any theory of love in

the age of capitalism<sup>13</sup>, what guarantee is there that it can be anything more than the sum of two solitudes incapable of breaking the other's narcissistic enjoyment, that is, anything more than the mere veil of Isis that masks the search for sexual satisfaction? The conceptual challenge in the face of love is to produce in consequence a Two that is neither a division of the original One nor a disjunct sum of two solitudes. Love implies, for Badiou, a problem that can only be solved by an axiomatic:

Formally, it is a matter of determining what can be a function of supplanting, at the very point at which a relation cannot be written. Ontologically, it will be agreed that if not ceasing to be written, the sexual relation does not exist by the effect of structure, love, as a substitution, can only come about randomly. Which imposes, in my language, that the sexual, being of the order of being, is if love must be registered (2008b, p. 26).

It is not a question of affirming, in the form of analytical reasoning, that sexuality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the advent of love; on the contrary, Badiou affirms, contrary to Lacan, that sexual difference is not before the emergence of love, and therefore an a priori condition, but rather a retroactive result (Badiou, 2007; 2012a).

The strategy applied by Badiou to escape the above alternatives consists of decentering love concerning the field of emotions and passions. It can even be affirmed that he aims to split love and subjectivity since the former "is not at all given in the immediate consciousness of the loving subject" (Badiou, 2012a, p. 243). This thesis can be considered a direct critique for example of the phenomenological approach to love (Marion, 2005), although its genuine theoretical value lies in not reducing love to a theory of emotions (Wollheim, 2006) or, even, to a theory of dispositional states (Díez and Iacona, 2016). If love is not an immediate object of consciousness, neither does it mean on the other hand a dialectical process of reconciliation within the difference of the sexes. The nature of love events means at least two things: first, says Badiou, it consists of:

This original disappearing, which has supplemented the situation in the time of a flash of lightning, which has not situated itself there but insofar as nothing subsists of it, and which insists in the truth precisely in the absence of repeating itself as presence, I call it an event. (2012a, p. 189).

This passage illustrates a sense of the term "event," according to which an event is that sudden, radical change subject to absolute chance; the encounter is a change or occurrence that the subjects involved cannot anticipate and cannot determine whether or not it took place at the very moment it occurs. Love, then, has its origin in a random, ontologically unpredictable encounter with the other, an encounter that, unlike the image of Cupid's crush, does not have immediate effects and goes rather unnoticed by the individuals. Secondly, although the love encounter emerges in the form of an unnoticed anomaly as such, its distinctiveness lies in the disruptive effect capable of upsetting and transforming a human reality, in the ability to exert at a future point in time a transformative effect that was previously ignored (Norris, 2015). Even if it takes place in a fleeting and indifferent encounter between two bodies each crossed by its desire, such an encounter harbors, or better yet, will have to harbor, in its banality, a power to affect the lives of those subjects from the moment the declaration of encounter occurs. It is only subsequently and therefore retroactively that the amorous encounter is named and interpreted as the event that concealed a disruptive effect on existence. This logic seems to lead to an understanding of love beyond the romantic narrative that sees it being born in the spontaneous manifestation of feelings, affections, and emotions after a fortuitous encounter.

The declaration (or subjective intervention) of the encounter consequently has the function of introducing the Subject as distinct from the mere individual<sup>14</sup>. The category of Subject is used by Badiou to indicate that, in the face of the ontological impossibility of deciding whether an event has occurred, a decision is required without any basis whatsoever that declares the amorous encounter. To decide that an encounter has happened means to decide that what went unnoticed will contain the potency of a series of effects yet to be determined. A Subject is someone who proclaims or postulates the advent of a community of Two individuals traversed by an irreducible difference (the failure of the sexual relation). This Two is for Badiou what makes love cut, a diagonal or "disjunctive synthesis" (Badiou, 2008a, p. 50) at the very heart of this structural difference.

Declaring an encounter implies being faithful to it. The notion of fidelity, however, should not lend itself to misunderstanding, for it does not mean in this context subscribing to the thesis of sexual fidelity as a necessary condition for the existence of love or as one of its forms of commitment (Brogaard, 2019). An event supposes an open possibility (Badiou, 1999), it



harbors a potency derived from its possible effects, in such a way that the second function of the Subject is to be the bridge or connection<sup>15</sup> between the chance event (the encounter) and those effects<sup>16</sup>. This allows us to understand the more formal definition of the Subject offered by Badiou in *Being and the Event*, as that “process of binding between the event” and “the procedure of fidelity” ([Badiou, 2015, p. 266](#)). In other words, the Subject is nothing other than a pure praxis, an action that exhausts itself in fidelity to the event, in the inquiry of the consequences of this event<sup>17</sup>.

A second meta-ontological axiom on which *Being and the Event* relies states that truth is post-event (Gillespie, 2008)<sup>18</sup>. In fact, “truth” is the term Badiou uses to refer to the indeterminate, indiscernible, or generic effects of an event (Badiou, 2015). Truth has this distinctive form that can be summarized, on the one hand, in the “here is A, from now, never from before” ([Camargo, 2010, p. 104](#)), that is, an axiomatic statement that founds without itself having any foundation and, on the other hand, the very unfolding of the effects of that axiom, “what can be” or deduced from its introduction, deduction that always implies a transit “from the known to the unknown” ([Badiou, 2009b, p. 33](#)). Truth, therefore, turns out to be a sort of hole in knowledge, in what is already known ([Badiou, 1990](#)). More precisely, truth is a random and therefore unpredictable process ([Fraser, 2015](#)) of inquiry to infinity of that which is positively connected to an event (Gillespie, 2008). This vision of truth applied to love brings Badiou closer to the same critique that Bauman makes of love relationships under capitalism ([Bauman, 2005](#)). Indeed, what Badiou calls “love against all risk” (2012b, p. 16) coincides with what, according to [Bauman](#), is a characteristic of today’s love relationships: the conviction that love is a skill that can be learned as a number of its experiences increases (2005).

As a procedure of truth, love is projected onto the couple as an indiscernible novelty; with this thesis, Badiou opposes resolutely to a conception of a skeptical nature that figures the amorous experience according to the script of a tragic or comic series, but in any case, a canned, prefabricated and immediately consumable product destined to be discarded and passed on to the next one ([Bauman, 2005](#)). We thus arrive at one of the most successful characterizations of love that Badiou has formulated; we find it at the very heart of his theory of truth in *Being and the Event*:

I consider that in the situational sphere of the individual, as presented and thought, for example, by psychoanalysis, love (if it exists, although various empirical indices seem to indicate that it does) is a generic faithful procedure, whose event is an encounter; its operator is variable, its infinite production is indiscernible, and its inquiries are the existential episodes that the loving couple expressly links to love. Love is therefore a truth of this situation. I call it “individual” because it is of no interest to anyone other than the individuals involved. Let us observe - and this is a capital point - that it is then for them that the one truth that produces their love is an indiscernible part of their existence since the others do not share that situation. A-loving-truth is un-knowable [in-sue] for those who love each other: They do nothing but produce it ([Badiou, 2015, p. 377](#)).

#### 4. Between Platonism and the communism of difference: final views on love

Badiou asserts that love implies an impossibility of knowledge for the one who produces it, for the subject and its situated existence. Although this is an aspect that even other contemporary thinkers ascribe to love ([Han, 2014](#); [Bauman, 2005](#); [Marion, 2005](#)), Badiou adds to this characterization an additional element that can be formulated as follows: love is not an experience of the world in the first person, but an experience of the world from the point of view of the Two, based on the subjective community, that is, from the perspective of difference. The question to which love must always respond is “How is the world, examined, put into practice, and lived from difference and not from identity?” ([Badiou, 2012b, p. 29](#)). In Han’s terms, the challenge or utopia that love must materialize in today’s world is to achieve the negativity of the atopy of the other, to tear the individual out of his autoerotic narcissism, and bring him to the atopic outside (2014). Badiou agrees with this position, although he adds that the ultimate goal of love lies in an atopic experience of reality that overcomes the enclosure of individualism.

Love, in the contemporary world, must then start from an ontological presupposition: the existence of the homogeneous equality and narcissistic sameness that secludes the individual in the egoic libido. It is the realm of difference, but of a difference encrypted by the enclosure in the object itself, the cause of desire, a difference made with the materials of selfhood and desire of the self. In this respect, [Han](#) observes that:

‘It is not only the oversupply of other others that leads to the crisis of love, but also the erosion of the other, which takes place in all areas of life and goes hand in hand with an excessive narcissism of one’s selfhood. In reality,

the fact that the other disappears is a dramatic process, but it is a process that progresses without, unfortunately, many people noticing it. (2014, p. 9-10).

In this same sense, [Bauman](#) considers that love is the only experience capable of singularizing the other and converting him/her into someone defined, that is, transfiguring him/her into an authentic difference (2005). Love thus draws a dialectical unfolding that begins in the One, proper to the narcissism of sexual enjoyment, to then transit towards the encounter with the other (the Two) and found an infinite but unique truth for the subjective community that the lovers make up and at the same time within the reach of anyone ([Lanza González, 2018](#)).

Through this identification of truth with the infinite, indiscernible, and random, Badiou reproduces the Platonic gesture that links love with truth. Note that at the climax of the Banquet (209e-212a), specifically in Diotima's description of the ascent of love (210a-210d), the Form of Beauty is presented as the ultimate object of love, the reason for which everything else is loved. The aleatoric construction of such indiscernible infinity can be interpreted as the contemporary equivalent of this path of ascent:

Now, what does Plato mean when, in The Banquet, he states that by contemplating a beautiful body one is already on the way to the contemplation of the Idea of the beautiful? - On condition, of course, of loving that beautiful body! -. It means that love is what opens a singularity (a beautiful body) to something more than itself, to the Idea of the beautiful. The Idea of the beautiful is in the beautiful body and, at the same time, is more than it: Plato calls this "participation". The beautiful body participates in the Idea of the beautiful, but, in a certain sense, the Idea of the beautiful exceeds the beautiful body. Love as effective power always sees in the other something more than its simple objective existence. ([Badiou and Tarby, 2013b, p. 77](#)).

If one follows Reale's reading of the Banquet, one can argue that Badiou updates the Platonic thesis according to which love is not the search for the lost other half or a totality, for "a 'whole' resulting from the sum of two individuals, but the search, together with the beloved, for that whole of being that is configured in the absolute Good" ([Reale, 2004, p. 200](#)). In Reale's interpretation, Eros, more than a god, is a mediating demon (Banquet, 202e-203a) between the sensible and the intelligible world, between the mortal and the immortal (Reale, 2004). This same function is assumed by the Subject in operating as an intermediary between the event and the production of truth, a juncture between the dimension of the sexual desire of the individual (the human animal) and the infinitude of truth (the immortal)<sup>20</sup>.

One cannot fail to mention in this parallel the distance that Badiou marks between love (eros) and friendship (philia). For the philosopher, sexual desire is the core of the difference between the two (2012b), because while desire has its law, that of the drive, love, not having the object of desire as its cause ([Badiou, 2012b](#)), is oriented towards the totality of the other. However, desire must be incorporated into love to be distinguished from friendship, as [Agamben \(2005\)](#) exposes, friendship possesses an ontological and at the same time political rank, since the friend is an immanent alterity (alter ego) and a "com-partir", that is, a "con-sentiment" of the pure fact of being" with the other (Agamben, 2005, p. 12). This idea is also found in Badiou's vision, where the being of the other is taken as an object, but against a background of difference or alterity. [Jollimore \(2019\)](#) asks, for example, the question of whether love requires sexual desire; Badiou's position in this sense allows us to understand that the realization of sexual desire constitutes a material moment of love insofar as it is part of the post-event process; its incorporation creates an irresolvable tension between the two, a tension between objectification and de-objectification of the other ([Jollimore, 2019](#)).

In his most recent reflections on love, Badiou has re-emphasized this idea of the experience of the world from a difference. However, as [Madarasz \(2014\)](#) points out, now he does not reduce difference exclusively to sexual difference but extends it to what may well be called minimal communism. But "difference" admits in this context at least two senses: first, it refers to a struggle or identity politics, something Badiou calls "democratic materialism"<sup>21</sup>. This sense is criticized, for it represents the idea of difference promoted by the cultural world of capitalism, in which the "phantasm of sexual emancipation" and the liberation of desire is in reality the expression of the imperative of enjoyment and not the expression of an emancipatory power. Secondly, if the difference is assumed, not as a political aspiration but as the ontological presupposition of any collective ([Badiou, 2012b](#)), love acquires an emancipatory power that delimits the amorous Subject concerning the capitalist world. In the psychoanalytic terms in which [Albano, Duarte, and Vorano \(2018\)](#) formulate it, capitalism, by concluding love, causes in its place to return the non-existence of the Other and "the dissatisfaction that constantly forwards demand, a demand to which it responds again and again with objects of consumption" (p. 270). Thus, the amorous Subject embodies



minimal communism from the moment when, instead of subscribing, like the collective Subject, to a political program of better redistribution of wealth or elimination of private property, he declares his struggle against individualism ([Badiou, 2012b](#)).

Love, consequently, rises as an emancipatory experience from the moment it assumes, in the contemporary world, the challenge of overcoming identity by making difference a lasting and creative construction; in this, and only in this sense, love is communist. This is why [Badiou](#) can affirm that “love begins where politics ends” (2013b, p. 60). Indeed, while the political procedure involves the annulment of extra-political differences to make way for the construction of a single and unique truth for the political collective, love on the contrary proceeds in reverse: it annuls identity or equality to produce an infinite generic multiplicity based on differences. As [Copjec](#) explains, “Love is antithetical to groups not because it builds smaller, less unwieldy and more powerful groups, but because love creates an ‘intersection’ or linking of subjects in a fundamentally different way” (2005, p. 124).

As Hegel already did about the relation between love and ethics ([Hegel, 2010](#)), Badiou thus marks a distance or separation between love and politics. When the boundary between the two is diluted and love becomes involved in the construction of collective equality, it is disfigured, polarized, and reordered “according to the love of transcendence”, as in the case of religion, or it becomes libidinal love or pure fetish of the masses towards the leader or the Party, as [Freud \(1992\)](#) already saw.

Finally, another way in which love is constituted as an ethical-political principle of emancipation is through the dissolution of its ties with the family. Just as love frees the individual from his or her egoism by incorporating him or herself as part of a Subject in a process of construction and experience of the world from difference, so too love “should organize the disintegration of the family” ([Badiou and Tarby, 2013b, p. 74](#)). This passage requires elucidation since the critique is directed exclusively to the historical role of the family as a state form, that is, as an institution hierarchically structured around the sovereignty of the Freudian totemic father - a figure that Lacan unimagines in his formulas of sexuation - and his law of socially or religiously ordered and sanctioned loves, but not to the family itself, since Badiou even affirms that the family universe is part of love. So, what the quoted passage points to is to indicate that love can make the family a point of exploration of the indiscernible, proposing on its terms, predicates, and non-state relations. Badiou even draws an interesting parallel between family and State (or power):

And just as in love, to socialize management, there is the family, in politics, to repress enthusiasm, there is power; the State. Between politics, as collective thought practice and power; or the State as management and standardization there is the same difficult link between love as the wild invention of the Two and the family as the base cell of property and selfishness. (2012b, p. 56)

After writing these lines, Badiou hastens to conclude that love may well incorporate the family scenario into its inventive process. Although he does not develop the idea further in his *In Praise of Love*, we think that he opens the space with the latter to a novel articulation between love and family through the vindication of difference; from this perspective, love as an inventive process admits alternative ways of thinking the family to the extent that, as happens with the relationship between politics and the State, its structure, dynamics, and ends can be brought within “a politically open, egalitarian, revolutionary point of view” ([Badiou, 2012a, p. 57](#)). It is therefore a matter of making the family a locus of exploration of the inventive process of difference and not an end; its position can be situated in an intermediate place between the traditionalist conservatism that defends the family institution as a mechanism of the perpetuation of the species or class privileges, and the anarchism or nihilism that rejects it and declares it an oppressive agent of sexual freedom, a liberation that today, after its economic integration into the world of capital, claims the just equality of rights and benefits of family life that same-sex marriages allow ([Roudinesco, 2007](#)). That in-between place takes on the task of overcoming the state organization of the family through “the figures of free association and creation” ([Badiou, 2013b, p. 75](#)). Perhaps these figures are to be found in the new forms of family, in the calls for a reinvention of affective relations within family life after the death of the symbolic authority of the father ([Roudinesco, 2007](#)).

## 5. Conclusions

This text has sought to fill a gap in the academic literature on Badiou’s work: the relationship between his ontological theory and his theory of love, mediated by a re-reading of Lacan’s ideas on human sexuality. Such a perspective allows

us to appreciate that Badiou's proposal goes beyond a critique of the existing forms of love in the contemporary world since it opens the possibility of rethinking love from the recognition that such a task requires the incorporation of non-philosophical knowledge (such as mathematics and psychoanalysis).

We have tried to show, firstly, that this articulation between philosophy, ontology, and psychoanalysis is argumentatively consistent; secondly, that his theory of love restores its irreducible status since it resists being equated with an emotion (classical view) or a behavioral disposition, by revealing itself as a subjective work whose persistence constructs a universal-singular truth. This point is relevant since it allows us to refute a common-sense thesis about love. Likewise, being the result or expression of a philosophical system, Badiou's theory of love can be placed in dialogue with other proposals of the same tone such as those of Jean-Luc Marion or Jean-Luc Nancy. Indeed, the conclusion reached by the three authors, despite the diversity of their proposals, is that the philosophical character of a discourse on love has to do with the possibility of sustaining it as an object of elaboration of thought.

Generally speaking, it can be concluded that Badiou's is a propositional theory of love, as opposed to an explanatory or descriptive theory of the erotic phenomenon: his approach is not prescriptive but is limited to proposing how we could imagine love today, a different way of loving. It is precisely for this reason that Badiou's ideas on love can be inserted in a series of reflections and analyses on a love that have gained momentum in the panorama of contemporary philosophy. Further work could, through a comparative analysis, trace the points of encounter and rupture between Badiou's position and the works on a love that in the Anglo-Saxon sphere are currently being developed (Martin, 2019; [Malinowska and Gratzke, 2017](#); [Mayer and Vanderheiden, 2021](#)). These works explore the erotic phenomenon in a multidisciplinary and cross-cultural way, and it is appropriate to assess to what extent Badiou's theses contribute to the analyses of these cultural theorists.

## Notes

1. According to Badiou, truth only exists in four otherwise independent fields: politics, art, science, and love. This thesis is the result of a change in the conception of the concept of truth, since, without going any further, it is opposed to the classical analytical vision of correspondence between language and reality, as well as to the Heideggerian idea of "desocultamiento". It may be useful, though not entirely accurate, to use the Hegelian image of historical unfolding to illustrate this. Badiou uses in part the theory of the epistemological break to point to the origin of truth and draws on the mathematical notions of undecidability and genericity to formalize it. Truth originates in an event, an unpredictable ontological rupture concerning existing knowledge: "The procedures of truth, or generic procedures, are distinguished from the accumulation of knowledge by their event origin. As long as nothing happens but what is in conformity with the rules of a state of things, there can be knowledge, correct statements, accumulated knowledge" ([Badiou, 1990, p. 16](#)).
2. "Philosophy is a construction of thought where it is proclaimed, against sophistry, that there are truths. But this central proclamation presupposes a proper philosophical category, which is that of Truth. Through this category, the "there is" of truths and the composability of their plurality, to which philosophy gives welcome and shelter, is said at the same time. Truth designates simultaneously a plural state of things (there are heterogeneous truths) and the unity of thought" ([Badiou, 2012a, p. 58](#)).
3. "Philosophy is only possible (1) under the four conditions that it declares to us; (2) by maintaining a distance from those conditions, that is, by resisting a suture of philosophy to any of its conditions or by renouncing the declaration that it is itself a production of truth" ([Zupančič, 2004, p. 193](#)).
4. Although he inherits the Heideggerian theme of the question of being, for which reason his thought is sometimes associated with the label "Heideggerian left" ([Marchart, 2009](#)), it is more appropriate to associate Badiou's interest in this question with Marx's diagnosis in the Communist Manifesto that "Capital is the general dissolver of the sacralizing representations that postulate the existence of intrinsic and essential relations", although such desacralization, Badiou continues, far from leading to nihilism, "is a necessary condition for such access [to being] to be open to thought. It is the only thing that can and must be saluted in the capital: it lays bare the pure multiple as the background of presentation" ([Badiou, 1990, p. 34](#)).
5. The empty set as the name of the being is all that is presented of it, it is the effect of consistency that the symbolic register imposes on the inconsistent being (the so-called "count by one" or structure).
6. This is the representative or meta-structural dimension of being. The theory of metastructure is developed in meditations seven through fifteen of Being and Event. In general terms, it is organized as follows: first, the symbolic order of language is formalized by recourse to set theory, employing its axiomatics, expressed in the language of first-order logic. This axiomatic has, from a philosophical perspective, two fundamental purposes. On the one hand, to introduce the distinction between consistent and

inconsistent multiplicity: the former represents the structural dimension of being, the symbolic regime of its presentation; the latter, the pre-symbolic, real domain of being, the source of all symbolization, which itself escapes symbolic. On the other hand, the axiom of excess, the central axis of the work, allows us to point out the existence of a distance or hiatus in principle unbridgeable between the mere presentation of being and its representation, that is to say, the passage from the symbolic order to the realm of knowledge that this order makes possible. If the structure has the function of presenting or allowing access to a situation, the metastructure is “the capacity to inscribe controllable denominations in lawful entailments” (Badiou, 2015, p. 327); that is, it provides what it is possible to know of a situation.

7. In Being and Event the mathematical construction of these other sets ends with the introduction of infinite sets (Cantor’s so-called transfinite sets).
8. The genuinely Lacanian core of Badiou’s identification of the self with the register of the real is to be found in what we can call the mechanism of the production of inconsistency. For both Lacan and Badiou, the real is a retroactive effect (or *après-coup*) of the introduction of the signifying chain (or structure). Lacan states, for example, that the retroactive effect of a signifier is revealed when the neutral events of the past acquire a traumatic meaning (or not) from the moment they are brought into the register of the symbolic by the subject, that is when they are discursively materialized in the present to organize the subject’s history (Lacan, 1989). In other words, the dispersion of drives is not an *a priori* or a given, but a consequence of the effects of the signifier on the subject (hence Lacan’s well-known thesis that the unconscious is structured as a language).
9. We follow in this sense the characterization of the real offered by Le Gaufey, according to which the real is that which escapes the register of the symbolic, albeit by the effect of the very incompleteness of the symbolic (2013). The register of the real expressed in that failure of the symbol represents for Badiou the authentic status and sense of being revealed by mathematics: “The Multiple is not for mathematics a (formal) constructed and transparent concept, but a real whose theory unfolded internal difference and impasse” (2015, p. 13). On the other hand, Badiou’s interest does not fall however on the subject of the clinic (neurotic, psychotic, etc.), but on the category of the subject as a theme that organizes the whole of modern philosophy (Badiou, 1990), which, with Lacan, forces to rethink itself according to the coordinates of a subject “delocalized from pure coincidence with itself” (Badiou, 2015, p. 473).
10. Although Badiou always refers to this conception, it should be mentioned that it was not the only view of love that Lacan held, as is clear from Allouch’s work *Love Lacan* (2011).
11. This object has its Freudian antecedent in the phallic organ as the organizer of the Oedipus complex. Lacan, however, ascribes to the phallus a purely symbolic function by defining it as “the signifier of the signified” (2007, p. 248). Thanks to this function, the phallus assumes its condition as the effect of a lack. The subject, beyond the imaginary experience of having or not having the phallus, faces sexual difference as a problem, a questioning of the meaning of what it is to be male or female (Gault, 2017). The absence of a signifier that makes it possible for the speaking being to answer the hysterical question “Am I a man or am I a woman?” accounts for the ontological void in which the subject is installed.
12. Copjec (2006) formulates in terms of these two types of enjoyment an asymmetry between the sexed positions, an asymmetry that no longer revolves around the phallus. While masculine enjoyment is completely linked to phallic enjoyment, feminine enjoyment, or that of the female position, points not only to phallic enjoyment but to something else, which is why it is affirmed that its enjoyment is different. According to Copjec, this enjoyment is “unlocatable in experience” and hence “cannot be said to exist in the symbolic order” (2006, p. 49).
13. It can even be affirmed that the understanding of love as a “scene of the Two” or “event of the Two” is part of a more general philosophical concern that goes back in fact to his first great work *Theory of the Subject*, in which the Two represents the presupposition of any dialectical thought that aspires to infer the One from a becoming-divided (2008c). The challenge faced by Subject Theory consists in postulating a Two that can elude a possible substantive interpretation, a Two thought not as the metaphysical substance or as a dialectical result, but as excess and process.
14. The basis of this conception lies, according to May, in a quest for wholeness, a yearning to overcome one’s individuality at the price of its very overcoming or dissolution (2019). In the philosophical tradition, in addition to the myth of the androgynous spheres of the Banquet, the vision of love as fusion is also found in the *fin’amors* or courtly love that was born in the time of the medieval troubadours and whose narrative summit is the story of Tristan and Isolde (Rougemont, 1993). Rougemont highlights two Freudian elements of this love: firstly, it is a passion inextricably linked to the death instinct (1993) and, secondly, to narcissism, since one loves the other as a reflection of one’s image (1993). Singer (1992) already situates in Platon the reflexive elaboration of fusion love, assumed as the full absorption of the individual in the One, the only guarantee of the salvation of the soul (1992). Le Brun (2004) includes these forms of love in the category of pure love, a love that, in its quest for ecstatic union with God, disbelieves the fear of punishment or reward and the very idea of salvation of the soul. Fénelon’s conviction is the loss or annihilation of self in the Other, that is, a form of destruction of the subject on the altar of the Supreme Being (Le Brun, 2004).
15. The individual or “human animal” is being for death (Badiou, 2004), a finite existence adhered to the imperative of the *jouissance* of the body. The subject is the one who is capable of producing or serving a truth “and thus becoming, in the subjective division, beyond the survival obligations of the human animal, an immortal” (1999, p. 70).

16. [Marqués](#) calls this “the Borromean knot between event, subject, and truth” (2017, p. 348).
17. [Gómez Camarena \(2012\)](#) correctly characterizes Badiou’s theory of love as an attempt to de-psychologize love in the sense of reducing it to an emotion, feeling, or affection. Badiou’s Subject, as in Lacan’s psychoanalysis, is located beyond the imaginary realm of the interiority of the self (je), of the individuality of mental or psychological life ([Gómez Camarena, 2012](#)).
18. The latter allows a reading of the Subject in a Marxist key, that is to say, materialist, since the Subject is nothing more than it is own doing, it is a productive force, not of value, but of truth. To affirm that the subject produces truth is, as a materialist thesis, an ontological thesis, not an epistemological one (relativist, transcendental, etc.). As [Hallward](#) rightly proposes, it is the subject that constitutes itself through the truth procedure it performs (2003).
19. Hence the thesis according to which truth exceeds or is subtracted from knowledge; is a real understood, not in the sense of an absence or lack of knowledge, but as something that surpasses it: “generic thought assumes the indiscernible as the mode of being of all truth, and considers the erring of the excess as the reality of being, as the being of being” ([Badiou, 1990, p. 53](#)).
20. [Lozano \(2014\)](#), in her essay on love in Plato and Badiou, resorts to the Phaedrus (Plato, 2008) to show how both thinkers share the idea of love as an experience of truth. The author interprets that, in the same way, that Badiou opposes a love limited to sexual enjoyment and the absence of risk, Plato, in his critique of the thesis which in love “one must please the one who does not love, more than the one who loves” (227c) - whose background is the opposition between *sophrosýne* and *hýbris* -, opposed a vision of love based on an agreement between lovers to achieve mutual benefits without running the risks of amorous passion, identified with this *hýbris* or love in excess ([Lozano, 2014](#)).
21. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou refers to this difference as “communities and cultures, colors and pigments, religions, and priesthoods, uses and customs, disparate sexualities, public intimacies and publicity of the intimate: everything, everyone, everyone deserves to be recognized and protected by law” ([Badiou, 2008a, p. 18](#)).

### Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

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