

Dominik Finkelde [ed.]

Badiou and the State

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Rüdiger Voigt

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Dominik Finkelde [ed.]

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© Coverpicture: A photomontage combining the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan with a portrait of Alain Badiou. Artist: A. Henseler.

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Editorial

Throughout the course of history, our understanding of the state has fundamentally changed time and again. It appears as though we are witnessing a development which will culminate in the dissolution of the territorially defined nation state as we know it, for globalisation is not only leading to changes in the economy and technology, but also, and above all, affects statehood. It is doubtful, however, whether the erosion of borders worldwide will lead to a global state, but what is perhaps of greater interest are the ideas of state theorists, whose models, theories, and utopias offer us an insight into how different understandings of the state have emerged and changed, processes which neither began with globalisation, nor will end with it.

When researchers concentrate on reappropriating classical ideas about the state, it is inevitable that they will continuously return to those of Plato and Aristotle, upon which all reflections on the state are based. However, the works published in this series focus on more contemporary ideas about the state, whose spectrum ranges from those of the doyen *Niccolò Machiavelli*, who embodies the close connection between theory and practice of the state more than any other thinker, to those of *Thomas Hobbes*, the creator of *Leviathan*, to those of *Karl Marx*, who is without doubt the most influential modern state theorist, to those of the Weimar state theorists *Carl Schmitt*, *Hans Kelsen* and *Hermann Heller*, and finally to those of contemporary theorists.

Not only does the corruption of Marx's ideas into a Marxist ideology intended to justify a repressive state underline that state theory and practice cannot be permanently regarded as two separate entities, but so does Carl Schmitt's involvement in the manipulation conducted by the National Socialists, which today tarnishes his image as the leading state theorist of his era. Therefore, we cannot forego analysing modern state practice.

How does all this enable modern political science to develop a contemporary understanding of the state? This series of publications does not only address this question to (political) philosophers, but also, and above all, to students of humanities and social sciences. The contributions therefore acquaint the reader with the general debate, on the one hand, and present their research findings clearly and informatively, not to mention incisively and bluntly, on the other. In this way, the reader is ushered directly into the problem of understanding the state.

Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Voigt

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Introduction – On the Excrescence of Universality

The state as a form of political representation can be defined as a structured organism, which by the definition of its sovereignty does not account for voids and gaps in the constitutional form of its territory. This hierarchical and well organized body of the state is already present in the famous frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* from 1651. It furnishes the state's being with a fictional unity of one corpus and one people. However even such a rigid structure, as that depicted in the frontispiece in the form of an armored carapace, cannot prevent the coming of political potentials of universal scale that exist in in-existence below the armor. These potentials, "eventual sites,"¹ or as Alain Badiou calls them as well: "singular terms,"² are of special value in the French philosopher's texts. They are subject to the order, but cannot be grasped as part of the order itself since their elements are not represented. The consequence is that these singular terms might bear universal ethical value but in their claim they can only appeal as being justified by themselves. Why? Because what "counts" for them as being of normative importance below the state's radar of representation does not "count" normatively for the state as well. Now, wherever a *counter*-counting act of agency, against an established form of political representation of political counting, establishes itself, an "event" in the Badiouian sense of this term occurs. A normative claim strives from its lack of political existence to establish its universality, accepting, even in the generic process of itself, a radical and uncompromising confrontation with the field of political representation.

Nowadays Badiou's philosophy of the event receives much acclaim. It does so especially for the rigorous and systematic unfolding of this theory, presented by him in his mayor publications *Being and Event* from 1988 and *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2* from 2009. However, it is true as well that the French philosopher has almost received more critique than praise due to the implications of his thought outlined above. Is Badiou's philosophy not undermining the value of political representation? How can his theory be harmonized with practical philosophy? Or with ethics? Can it be compared to classical theories of the state? And what implications do Badiou's continued references to political violence, Marxist thought, and the Communist idea have? The failure of the Soviet Empire has proven these 'ideologies' to be fundamentally defective – hasn't it?

1 Badiou 2005, p. 173.

2 Ibid., p. 189.

The articles collected in this volume, written by outstanding experts of Badiou's philosophy, refer time and time again to these questions, which lead directly into the central themes of Badiou's philosophical theory. The texts go back to the conference *Badiou and the State* at the *Munich School of Philosophy* in Germany on January 18-19, 2016. The texts underline how Badiou's theory has gained shape in the last four decades of his exceptional career, which started (at the latest) with Badiou being a radical French Maoist in the student revolution of May 1968 in Paris and attained its academic peak with the directorship of one of the most prestigious departments of philosophy in the world, at the *École normale supérieure* in Paris.

The topics and themes of the papers presented in this book reflect in particular on Badiou's political philosophy and its relation to the question of the state. They show how his work is grounded in a broad tradition of continental and analytic philosophy alike, from antiquity to our present era. Since many of the authors of the following articles presuppose basic knowledge of Badiou's thought, the following paragraphs of this introduction will serve to present his philosophy along the general lines of some of his mayor works dedicated to the question of the state. They might be especially helpful for readers not yet familiar with the French philosopher's oeuvre. Experts in the field are very welcome to skip them. They present briefly his career (1), introduce the reader into mayor works of his ontology (2-4), and finish with some comments on his political philosophy in general (5), and his reception in contemporary philosophy (6).

1. Life and career

Alain Badiou was born on January 17, 1937 in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, as the son of Raymond Badiou, who became later the mayor of Toulouse (1944-1958). After his studies in Paris at the *École normale supérieure* from 1955-1960 he taught at the lycée in Reims and joined in 1967 a study group organized by Louis Althusser in Paris. Here he became both increasingly influenced by Jacques Lacan and, during the student uprising of May 1968, a member of rebellious groups within the political and social movement of French Marxism and Maoism. In the late 1960s he joined the faculty of the *University of Paris VIII* (Vincennes-Saint Denis) which grew out of the student movement and become a center of critical theory and counter-cultural philosophy. He taught there from 1969 until his appointment as director of the Institute of Philosophy at the *École normale supérieure* in 1999. In 1982 Badiou published a collection of essays under the title: *Theory of the Subject* (Engl. 2009) in which he combines different areas of philosophical investigation such as ontology, mathematics, set theory, and ethics. They gain shape, with new systematic distinctness in his *opus magnum* from 1988: *Being and Event* (Engl. 2005). In this book,

which is accompanied by a second volume published in 2006 under the title *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2* (Engl. 2009), Badiou presents a theory of political agency, which he unfolds in reference to Cantorian set-theoretical formalizations and the works of such diverging philosophers as Plato, Hegel, Kant, and Heidegger. In addition, Badiou has also become known to an international audience through a variety of books on ethics, aesthetics, the theory of communism, and with a study on Christian universalism (*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, 1997; Engl. 2003). A variety of his publications also refer to concrete debates in French politics (*The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 2007; Engl. 2010) and to international politics. His essay “The Uses of the Word Jew” (2005, Engl. 2006) has triggered especially many polemical debates, as Badiou criticizes, among other things, the misuses of the memory of the Holocaust for political purposes of Israel, especially its politics of apartheid towards the Palestinians. Despite this broad scope of topics, his oeuvre is nevertheless devoted primarily to political ontology and, especially, to theories of the state, where the latter term is interpreted simply as a common form of political representation. Badiou analyzes the state systemically through his examination of political representation which is exemplified both structurally and set-theoretically. In this respect, the state is for him not so much an invention of the early modern period but rather it is always already rudimentary at work in almost all of the political structures, which order communities into hierarchical layers of sets and their counted (and uncounted) subsets. For Badiou the nature of political representation via the state relies on monopolizing what is represented. Consequently any radical opposition to the form of representation cannot be represented itself. This thesis is developed particularly in *Being and Event*, where he advances his understanding of political representation and his theory of the event, where the latter is understood as an entity that disrupts the form of representation itself.

2. Universality and the event

According to Badiou’s philosophy events carry a universal truth-value, which emerges from within the field of political representation but, and this is important, from the place of their constitutive lack of representation. Out of their place-without-representation they compete for their future normative recognition. What makes them and their generic “truth procedures”³ unique is that they can be based on illegal norms and values. This is what makes their status politically precarious. They are by definition hostile to a structure of legal representation, which is hierarchized and equipped with political institutions within its body politic.⁴ Badiou’s philosophy of

³ Badiou 2005, pp. 327-37.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 93-103.

the event consequently focuses on deeds which question the given normative orders within a community. This does not mean that these events have self-serving egoistical ends or are simply arbitrary violations of the prevailing *doxa* (= the political common-sense within a community). Events in the form of political deeds are for Badiou “supernumerary,”⁵ since their truth-values are lacking representable signifiers but are, because of their universality, not lacking in moral appeal. Within the so-called political “space of reasons” (a concept going back to Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom) with its procedures of “giving and asking for reasons,”⁶ they cannot be discussed easily, because their values are generally defined by a lack of justification. They don’t fit within the confines of what is justifiable in the first place. This aspect in Badiou’s philosophy as well as his defense of the “idea of communism” (understood as an idea of the “bien commun”) brings forth, to this day, many critics who see in his theory a democracy-hostile political philosophy, because it questions reason on a fundamental level from an anti-discourse-ethical stance.

Badiou interprets the state as a political structure of order, whose political sovereignty is based on the elimination of gaps and voids within its constitutionally delineated sovereign power. He speaks in this context about the result of a “count-as-one”⁷: an operation through which subsets of the state are represented in the act of counting (or better: administering). The state assumes the procedure of counting with the effect that the total amount of all representable elements of its subsets is the perfect expression of sovereignty. This illustrates the aforementioned frontispiece of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* fittingly. What is politically represented is counted, and what is counted is, within an operational order-system, an identifiable part of the state within its inner and outer limits. However, this does not imply that there are no other political potentials beyond the forms of counting included within state-accounts. They are present but not represented. These “singular terms are subject to the one-effect, but they cannot be grasped as parts [of the State, D.F.] because they are composed, [...] of elements which are not accepted by the count.”⁸ Unrepresented political potentials/virtualities are included but do not belong within the limits of the situation they are in. “All multiple-presentation is exposed to the danger of the void: the void is its being.”⁹ Each political situation needs to “ward[...] off the void”¹⁰ and it is the task of the state, as the breeding ground of ethical claims with universal validity, to have these claims eliminated. Their elimination is a premise of the established form of state-sovereignty, since representation-deficiency is the state’s condition. This nevertheless does not prevent the fact that people living under the count of the state

5 Ibid., p. 178.

6 Brandom 2000, p. 11.

7 Badiou 2005, pp. 23-34.

8 Ibid., p. 99.

9 Ibid., p. 93.

10 Ibid.

might perceive in an illegal Badiouian event a convincing normative appeal, which confronts the state with a void/gap within its structural blindness. The state has to prohibit the “catastrophe of presentation which would be its encounter with its own void, the presentational occurrence of inconsistency as such, or the ruin of the One.”¹¹ Badiou talks about a potential disaster for the state in the encounter with such a void, as the exclusion of this void is for the prevailing *doxa* its systemic pre-supposition. Since political coherence is dependent on exclusion of otherness, this otherness becomes a hazard when it gives birth to itself as an advocate of a universal truth contra the state. Consequently, that space within the state-system, as an excluded site of otherness, is always also the potentially dialectical turning point from which the status quo can, at some later point, itself plunge into illegality. In this case, as it is exemplified by every political revolution, an old form of government dissolves into a new one.

3. Illegal self-designation in the “count-as-one”

According to Badiou, every political revolution stands for the disruptive visibility of the aforementioned void. It embodies a dialectical re-mark(ation) where the lack of representation itself becomes an Archimedean point of a new certainty: a site of political excess. Badiou refers in this line of thought repeatedly to the French Revolution as a movement, which succeeded in generating its own generic “count-as-one” in opposition to the operating order of the Ancien Régime.¹² Another example of how a “generic term” wrestles his way up from the underground is to some extent the revolution of 1989 in the last months of the *German Democratic Republic*. Badiou does not mention it, but the analogy to the French Revolution is easy to see. The participants of the famous Monday-demonstrations in Leipzig designated their lack of representation as the speaking void that counts itself as “one,” i.e. as “the people” in the slogan “We are the people.” As such this self-designation had the potential of universality, since through it all political organs of representation became the void of what the term “people” now in the final weeks of 1989 stands for. The assertive speech act “We are the people” is subversive because it denotes citizens striving for political change as being included in the state, but as not being represented. A gap shows up that the state cannot bear to tolerate. A “generic truth-procedure” starts.¹³ In the case of its success it gives the self-proclaimed void in the process of its performative, illegal self-designation retroactively a sufficient reason for being truly one with “the people.” But this act of retroactively becoming “the peo-

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., pp. 180-1. Badiou / Milner 2014, pp. 41-7.

13 Badiou 2005, p. 349.

ple” is only possible after a shift within the political *doxa*. With respect to the revolution of 1989, the “generic fidelity,”¹⁴ another of Badiou’s key-terms, consisted of the continuation of the Monday-demonstrations, in which the participants continued to self-designate themselves as the emptiness within the old structure of counting. This definition of themselves became an excess and, as consequence, a starting point of a counter-count.

The event and the state-order (whether in totalitarian or democratic societies) stand in opposition of mutual exclusion. “The state of a situation is the riposte to the void obtained by the count-as-one of its parts.”¹⁵ While the state may award its subsets legality, so can an event award morality to those who believe in its future. For Badiou, it embodies a surplus of universality and in combination with it an anti-legal moral impact. But as a consequence, the event also incorporates the risk of putting one’s name in for the wager about a future that still awaits the victory of the conquest enabling it. And this victory is far from guaranteed. Badiou considers the militant political groups involved in the procedures of “true events” as being morally legitimized to proceed against the state even violently, because political innovation is not conceivable without events like these. Badiou, like his colleague, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek,¹⁶ accuses representatives of poststructuralist philosophy, especially in the tradition of deconstruction, of lacking insight into universal truths within politics. As such he sees in their support and glorification of cultural differences a philosophical mentality at work that passively supports a society of global capitalism, in which the focus on irreducible differences and the rejection of metaphysical truths within politics are two sides of the same coin: global capitalism, as the alternative-lacking ideology of our era.

4. Sets, multiplicities, and multiplicities of multiplicities

Georg Cantor’s set theory provides Badiou with the medium of analysis he uses in his philosophical-political ontology. “Mathematics is ontology,” he writes. It is “the science of being qua being.”¹⁷ The conceptual benefit of set-theory is grounded in its capacity to account ontologically for a world of “inconsistent multiplicity”¹⁸ whereas the ontology of classical metaphysics finds itself time and time again bound to a limited and potentially coherent understanding of the ultimate reality as “being.” Worlds of multiplicity is what Cantor discovered when he differentiated between in-

14 Ibid., p. 237.

15 Ibid., p. 98.

16 Žižek 2003, pp. 140-1.

17 Badiou 2005, p. 4.

18 Ibid., p. 25.

finities of different “cardinalities,”¹⁹ where some are countable and others not. Cantor showed in his uncountability proof that the so-called real numbers, which incorporate both rational numbers (fractions) and irrational numbers, cannot be taken as countable, compared, for example, to the infinite but nevertheless countable sets of natural, and rational numbers. While the latter two sets are in their infinity bijectively countable, the real numbers are uncountable. This discovery proves a difference of “cardinalities” (= the number of elements of a set) within the space of mathematical infinities.

A set is commonsensically understood as a kind of bag where a function or an axiom defines its elements: for example the set of natural numbers $\{0, 1, 2, 3, \dots, n + 1\}$. This set is infinite yet nevertheless potentially countable. Cantor proved against this common understanding of countability that it is possible for sets to have no limit whatsoever – for example the set of real numbers – with the effect that infinities of different cardinalities emerge in the realm of abstract numerical entities. Badiou’s political philosophy is strongly influenced by this dichotomy between countable infinities and un-countable or supernumerary infinities, since it enables him to explicate the supernumerary dimension of an event with the supernumerary dimension of countless subsets.

We can apply this insight to the “manifest image” of our every-day world, a term coined by Wilfrid Sellars in opposition to the concept of a “scientific image” of the world as established by modern science.²⁰ If we think of the “manifest image” in terms of Cantor’s universe of multiplicities then our commonsensical reality is nothing but a limited extraction of uncounted infinities as depicted in Cantor’s set-theoretical “scientific image.” From within this perspective, or more precisely: from within this Cantorian “scientific image,” reality (“the manifest image”) itself becomes a small sector of worlds of ungraspable infinities and as such is always vague, constructed, and incomplete. The reason is that the human mind cannot process its justified beliefs without putting on it the bounds of clear-defined extensions against uncounted sets and their subsets or power-sets. Consequently, reality is never all, or rather “non-all.” It is by definition impoverished, compared to what is potentially hidden in its “layers,” so to speak. Events can reveal potentials as they try to force their way through into another logic of a world.

The aforementioned reference to vagueness has less to do with a principle of semantic ambiguity in the human language (*de dicto*), but with reality itself (*de re*). There is an ontological incompleteness for Badiou in reality at its most basic level, which underscores how every political “state of a situation” has to abide by procedures of order to diminish the stress generated by normative leftovers in the space of reasons.

19 Cantor 1890/1891, p. 75-8.

20 Sellars 1963, pp. 1-40.

Badiou is aware that the question of understanding these multiplicities, in a Cantorian sense, can take place only within a horizon of the one, i.e. in reference to a transcendental illusion of a totality, a pseudo-coherent “world picture.” Kant speaks, in a similar context, prominently of the regulative idea of “the world” that reason has to evoke unthematically in order to be able to locate experiences in a pseudo-defined space of objective facts, which are thought of as the “sum total of all appearances.”²¹ The “world” as a unity allows for the experience of multiplicity. Un-countable multiplicities are repelled to diminish the stress involved in the process of cognition needed for the organism to survive. And under functionalist conditions, this repulsion is justified. Nevertheless, it proves that reality can even be *more than real* and events bear witness to this.²²

5. “The one is not.”

The assertive proposition “the one is not” is crucial for Badiou’s philosophy.²³ It breaks a stalemate in which the mind is generally trapped, between its inevitable alteration of “the one” (the World, Being, Reality) as the constitutional background of experience itself and the many contingent facts and states of affairs that necessarily fall within the one. Declaring “the one is not” is not a proof, that the one does not exist, but rather, for Badiou, it is a decisive axiom to plead for a world of unending multiplicities with its hidden universals. The performative act of a decision (as scission), like in the case of Badiou’s own speech act “the one is not,” is for Badiou the source of political subjectivity. Since this is what a subject can effectively do: subjectivize axioms, so that – within a stalemate of certain facts – new facts can performatively be installed. In certain situations this kind of enactment may be useful for a future to come, even if there are no negotiable reasons at the moment of its execution.

Take Saint Paul as an example. The so-called apostle of the gentiles, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, transforms the term “Christ” into a principle of universality against Hellenistic-Jewish policy of the first century. He didn’t accomplish this necessarily, according to Badiou, in the name of a “better argument” within the prevailing space of reasons. He did it in the name of his faith in a new paradigm where “universalism in Christ” is the medium for others to follow his ax-

21 Kant 1998, p. 406 (A 334 / B391).

22 Badiou nevertheless writes against the transcendental concept of the one or “the world”: “We find ourselves on the brink of a decision, a decision to break with the arcana of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried, phoenix of its own sophistic consumption. This decision can take no other form than the following: the one is not.” Badiou 2005, p. 23. See also my study on *Excessive Subjectivity* in: Finkelde 2017.

23 Badiou 2005, p. 23.

iom. “Christ is not a mediation,” writes Badiou in his book on Saint Paul. “[H]e is not that through which we know God. Jesus Christ is the pure event; and as such it is not a function, even were it to be a function of knowledge, or revelation.”²⁴

In other words: Paul refers, strictly speaking, not to Jesus of Nazareth who with his social messages paves the way towards faith in him as being the “Christ” argumentatively. It is the other way around: Christ, the risen Messiah, transforms the life of a young Zealot in Galilee and Judea into a readable event with cosmic repercussions in the aftermaths of his crucifixion. It is only when an axiom reveals its effect that it can be read as the cause, as an apparent moment preceding the effect.

Badiou’s philosophy is therefore, as this example shows, fundamentally guided by the axiomatization of thought. And mathematics gives him the conceptual tools to prove analytically what axioms, like the axioms of set-theory, can generate. He thus contradicts a broad tradition of practical philosophy. The latter often sees conflicts, within the justification procedures of norms and values, as a discursive or communitarian process where the ‘unforced force of the better argument’ (Habermas) wins. Badiou, on the other hand, develops a theory where through the axiom of its constitution a community creates its space of justifications. Just as a mathematician willing to acknowledge Cantor’s axioms of set-theory can actually perform set-theoretical calculations, the same holds for the believer in “Christ.” Only from within the axiom is the universality proclaimed by Paul meaningful. This affects all the contexts within politics where events struggle for their universality in a bet about the future and hope for retrospective justification.

6. Reception

Badiou has become, especially after the translation of *Being and Event* into English, a philosopher of international reputation. His work has been particularly well received in left-Hegelian circles of contemporary political philosophy. To name just a few members of which one can refer to Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Claude Lefort, Quentin Meillassoux, and his colleague and interlocutor Slavoj Žižek. The term “left-Hegelianism” refers to the fact that the authors mentioned above refer, like Badiou, repeatedly to Hegel’s theory of dialectics as the generic background-structure of normativity via experiences of negativity. Badiou distances himself from “poststructuralist” or “postmodern” philosophy, where the latter questions truth claims and so paves the way – at least according to Badiou – towards a global market economy that cannot be confronted and interrupted with radical interventions of universal truths. Cultural differences and the call for plurality for plurality’s sake be-

24 Badiou 2003, p. 48.

come, so Badiou's critique, glorified at the cost of universal struggles for the impoverished and marginalized. On the other hand, Badiou understands himself as being a philosopher in the tradition of Plato. The reference to the founder of the doctrine of ideas underlines his dedication to universal claims of truths, values and norms.

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Part I: Ideology and Ontology

On Meta-Stasis

1. Staatssprache / official language:

The English term ‘state’ appears verbatim for the first time, depending on the source, somewhere early in the 14th or 15th century, even though it only starts to gain its political significance in the 17th century (and much the same goes for the French ‘état’ and the German ‘Staat’).¹ État, Staat and state are all derived from the Latin ‘status’ which itself is derived from the Latin verb ‘stare,’ which designates a static and a stable kind of entity. The Latin ‘status’ has several meanings and they all seem to confirm that the entity one is dealing with, the state, is all about stability and statics. Status means ‘standing’ (as in the German *Stand*), which necessarily implies something that is put up, that is erected (Lacan will have to say some interesting things about this²); something that, because it is standing, can also not stand, can for example sit, fall down or crumble. Yet, the term state also has the meaning of an ontological, natural, or historical condition (*Zustand*) or even of a circumstance (*Umstand*) and it therefore likewise entails the meaning of position (including social, economic or political ones) and location. Through these different significations, the term ‘status’ combines social or political, but also topological and natural determinations. The state I am in can be a natural condition, a specific and individual – say mental – condition of this specific day or hour; as it also can be a socially or politically produced situation. The state I am in can also very well be Germany. The state I am in can be some of, all, or many of these things at the same time. Therefore, although the state itself and the state I am in seem constitutively stable and static, it is not immediately clear, at least if one starts purely from the literal meaning of the term ‘state,’ in which state I am. It might seem very clear to me right now that I am in Germany and hence there does not seem to be a problem at all. Yet, if Germany is a state, which kind of state is it? Is it a geographical location, a historical or natural, or even an ontological condition? Clearly it is something that has been erected. But maybe it is not as clearly something that may fall down. Yet, if it is something standing, might it not also be standing in the way, or in our way? I do not wish to overemphasize these literalities, yet I do want to point out that there is an internal

1 Cf. Loraux 2006.

2 See: Lacan 2006, pp. 75-82. This is part of what Lacan there calls the “orthopedic” form of [...] totality” (ibid., p. 78).

ambiguity within the literal meaning of the ‘state’ that springs from the concatenation of status, stability, static, and statics, whereby something like an excrescence of a multiplicity of possible and not immediately clearly distinguishable states (in which one is) is derived. Yet this excrescence is not grounded on a multiplicity of contradictory meanings inscribed into the term state or status – as one might want to emphasize with Hegel: ‘state’ is *not* a speculative word –, but this excrescence springs from a fundamental uncertainty of reference (concerning the kind of state I am in). Speaking of the state, language, official language, *die Staatssprache*, already indicates that the term – and we might here move from term to concept – that the term state, état, Staat suggests stability, but at the same time implies a problem of reference: a problem, so to speak, of measure and measurement. This issue brings with it a question, namely: how to measure which referential framework is adequate? There is something that is stable and static, yet it seems literally not clear what it is.

2. Stasis

The conceptual marriage of a problem of reference or measure and the idea of stability that is literally inscribed into the term ‘state’ entails a further ambiguity that has been pointed out many times before and that can be related to the one I mentioned. If the state is (or is taken to be) a stable and static entity, what does the term ‘static’ mean? It is derived from the art of ‘*statika*,’ the art and doctrine of weighing things and creating a stable balance, an art that was performed by the *statikos* whose aim was to install and erect something, say a statue that was then supposed to stand in a stable manner. Yet, to do so the artist needed to create the statue such that it embodied the absolute equilibrium of weight. The stability as well as the static qualities of what the *statikos* puts upright implies that the erected stature will not and cannot move and, as is well known, such an absence of movement in Greek is called *stasis*.

Now, things get more intricate. The term *stasis* does not only contain many different meanings, but does have many contradictory significations: it means immobility but also upheaval and thus the term entails a static but also a dynamic usage. It oscillates, as Rebecca Comay convincingly remarked, “between the condition of standing and the act of standing up, between situation and event, steadfastness and constancy, and stability on the one hand; interruption, instigation, initiation on the other.”³ There is an oscillation, that is: a movement in the meaning of the term *stasis*, which moves between different meanings of movement and of rest. *Stasis* entails the movement between movement and rest, between change and the absence of

3 Comay 2015, p. 239.

change. In the term ‘stasis,’ one seems to be stuck with and within a certain movement between movement and rest. There is literally an internal stasis in the term stasis, as Comay argues.⁴ This complicates matters further – still in a literal sense. For this means firstly that the creation of stability that the *statikos* performs is part of the very movement between movement and rest that is stasis (and its stasis). It is part of a movement that leads or may lead to stuckness, a stuckness that leads or may lead to movement. To put this in an abbreviated manner: the stasis created by the installation and installment of a static stability leads to and thus retroactively shows to always have been a part of the movement of stasis. It therefore seems there is nothing but stasis. And if there is stasis in stasis (which is another way of saying: there is nothing but stasis), one can spell out its effects. One is the peculiar effect that too much stability “can be destabilizing, while excessive mobility produces deadlock.”⁵ A too much of stability ends up producing movement, a too much of movement ends up being stuck (in always the same move). The stasis that is literally inscribed into the installment of a statist order and which, because of its static and allegedly unchanging nature, etymologically makes the state into a state is linked to another peculiar and maybe even more fundamental problem of measure or measurement.

This problem is how to determine the right measure of movement for it to remain movement, which means for it to avoid creating a stuckness of its own, an immobilization. How to determine the right measure of stability of an order to avoid the production of causes for transformative movement(s)? How to determine the right measure of stuckness that is needed to create but also to uphold a movement, for example the right measure of stubbornness needed in defending an impossible position without falling back into a mortified and ossified dogmatism. How to determine the right measure of activity necessary to keep a movement going, and when does this activity turn into an unmoving habit? Because of this problem of measurement, which is linked to the stasis of stasis, which is once again literally linked to the ‘state,’ Nicole Loraux assigned stasis (and its inherent antimony) the status of a counter-sense,⁶ of a *Gegensinn* that Freud in turn assigned to the infamous ‘primal words’⁷ that suspend the law of non-contradiction yet stick to the law of the excluded middle (and therefore follow what logicians call a paraconsistent logic⁸). State is not a primal word, but since ‘stasis’ is what it seeks to attain, states are, literally and conceptually, linked to a movement of stasis of stasis. Here not only do we touch upon a problem of frame-of-reference or measuring that seems to be inherent to the literal term of the state – as a static and unchanging, stable entity – but also upon the dialectic of finitude and infinity.

4 Cf. Ibid.

5 Ibid., p. 240.

6 Cf. Loraux 2006, pp. 104ff.

7 Cf. Comay 2015, p. 241.

8 A longer elaboration of this can be found in: Ruda 2015.