

Vibration, Singularity, Event: Deleuze and Badiou on Poetic Language

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Abstract

Here I first look at Badiou's "analytic" view of poetic language in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, where he distinguishes it from logical-mathematical language. Whereas mathematics is "thought that exists precisely inasmuch as it is thinkable," poetry is an unthinkable thought and a pure event, a pure singularity that cannot "name" the very "power of language" that it manifests. I then contrast this with Deleuze's theory of poetic language, which emphasizes the physicality of voice and sees the poem itself as a totalized, vibrating or "stuttering" language-body. After suggesting how Mallarmé's three "fan" (*éventail*) sonnets easily fit the Deleuzian notion of poem as vibrating body, I turn to Badiou's reading of passages from Mallarmé's "Monologue of a Faun" and from a pre-Islamic ode by the Arab poet Labid ben Rabi'a. I will suggest that Badiou and Deleuze, who both look at poetic language as a singular event, also both note the indeterminacy or disappearance of the difference between the poem's "outside" (form) and "inside" (content). Thus finally I briefly explore Badiou's and Deleuze's approaches to Mallarmé's long poem "*Un Coup de Dés*," where once again we see these two thinkers' predictable differences but also their common awareness that we finally cannot distinguish between a poem's form and content, between the indefinitely delayed "dice-throw" taken as the driving force or *utterance* of the poem and taken as its *actualization*, its meaning.

Keywords: Badiou, Deleuze, Mallarmé, poetic language, mathematics, singularity, event, vibration, dice-throw

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Alain Badiou talks about poetry more often and explicitly than does Gilles Deleuze. He situates philosophy in relation to four “truth conditions”—science, love (desire), art (poetry) and politics—and is more concerned than Deleuze with the historical practices of philosophy and poetry and their historical relationships, although Deleuze of course wrote books focusing on individual philosophers such as Nietzsche, Spinoza, Kant and Bergson. While Deleuze tends to speak of poetic language (as in *The Logic of Sense* and *Essays Critical and Clinical*) as a sort of vibratory *force*, a form of physical energy or noise closely related to physical-biological voice and music, Badiou in various works explores this in relation to logical, mathematical and ontological systems and conceptions.

However, both thinkers emphasize “singularity” and “event”—more explicitly in relation to “poetry” in Badiou’s case—so these will be key issues. After their general conceptions of poetic language are compared, a Deleuzian interpretation of Mallarmé’s three *Éventail* (fan) poems, which sees them as vibrating language-bodies, will be set alongside Badiou’s more traditional and conceptual reading of passages from Mallarmé’s “Monologue of a Faun” and a pre-Islamic ode by Arab poet Labid ben Rabi’a. The central argument will be that in spite of their obviously differences, the fact that both philosophers stress poetic singularity and the poetic event means they are also both attuned to the collapse of the traditional outer-form/inner-content duality in the poems they are reading. This also holds true of their approaches, however different in other respects, to Mallarmé’s long poem “*Un Coup de Dés*.” This common focus on singularity and event and on the dissolution of the inner/outer distinction will be interpreted in relation to the ancient conception of poetry’s power to both predict and enact (actualize) the future.

Badiou

In “The Discourse on Language” Foucault, expanding on his third and fundamentally Nietzschean exclusion—truth arbitrarily excludes falsity—points out that the meaning of “true discourse” actually changed through the course of ancient Western history. Here he returns to the “sixth century [BC] Greek poets,” whose “true discourse” inspired “respect and terror, to which all were obliged to submit, because it held sway over all”; this true discourse of the poets “meted out justice” and “prophesied the future, not merely announcing what was going to occur, but contributing to its actual event” and “weaving itself

into the fabric of fate” (Foucault, “The Discourse” 150).¹ Foucault wants to distinguish this sort of prophetic-poetic and perhaps also “mad” discourse—his second exclusion is the arbitrary exclusion of madness by rationality, whereas he claims that “madness is the other side of reason”—from the rational philosophy of Socrates and Plato that began from late in the fifth century BC.

With Plato, he says, “the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse *was*, nor in what it *did*; it lay in what was *said*. The day dawned when truth moved over from the ritualized act . . . of enunciation to settle on what was enunciated itself. . . . A division between Hesiod and Plato, separating true discourse from false . . .” (Foucault, “The Discourse” 150). Thus, says Foucault, the old mythopoetic-prophetic discourses, which once expressed the *truth*, will now begin to be seen as *false*, while Plato’s philosophy with its logical statements—and following from Plato and Aristotle, the western sciences—now become the discourse of truth and power. But 2300 years after Plato banned the “irrational” poets from his republic, Nietzsche undermined this Platonic redefinition of true-and-false discourse, at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*, by calling logic “a useful fiction” and stressing the importance (even for survival) of deception and falsity. A century later Foucault in “Madness, the Absence of Work” says:

Literature itself (undoubtedly since Mallarmé) is in the midst of becoming . . . a language of which the utterance enunciates . . . the linguistic code that renders it intelligible as utterance. . . . By the end of the 19th century . . . literature had become utterance that inscribed in itself its own principle of decipherment. . . . Hence, too, that strange proximity between madness and literature.” (296-97)

At the beginning of his chapter on “Philosophy and Art” in *Infinite Thought* (originally in *Conditions*, Editions du Seuil, 1992), Badiou reminds us that the later Heidegger also prioritizes poetry, giving it a special relationship with philosophy where both disciplines are fundamentally nostalgic or backward-looking. Like Foucault, Badiou takes us back to the Pre-Socratic philosopher-poets:

In the Pre-Socratic sending of thought, which is also the destinal sending of being, the logos is poetic as such. It is the poem that takes ward of thought, as we see in the *Poem* of Parmenides, or in the sentences of Heraclitus.² [However,] I wish to begin

¹ By these “poets” Foucault means the *circa* ninth century BC Hesiod whose *Theogony* explains the origin of the gods, the sixth century BC Pre-Socratic philosophers like Heraclitus and Parmenides who speak of Lady Justice (*Dike*) as a kind of fate, and the fifth century BC tragic dramatists like Aeschylus and Sophocles, whose “mad prophets” (Cassandra, Tiresias) use a lyric-poetic discourse to prophesy the future. Derrida in “Plato’s Pharmacy” will deconstruct Plato’s *logocentric* “true utterances” (even logical tautologies like A=A) saying their meaning is (as with writing) indefinitely deferred.

² Parmenides says that we must distinguish Being from Non-being, but cannot distinguish Being from “the *thought* that *it is*”; his *Dike* or (Lady) *Justice* holds the Sphere of Being tightly within her chains.

the reconstruction of an *other relation*, or non-relation, between poetry and philosophy. When Parmenides [invokes the] Goddess, [we must] maintain that this is . . . *not yet* philosophy [which] exists only through its desire to tear [poetry's] veil. The poetic form, with Parmenides, is essential; it [maintains] discourse in the proximity of the sacred [while] philosophy can only begin by a desacralization. . . . (*Infinite Thought* 70)³

Thus in “Art and Philosophy” (*Handbook of Inaesthetics*), Badiou (again like Foucault) returns to Plato’s exclusion of the poets in his *Republic*. Here he emphasizes the nature of the work of art (and of the poem in particular) as an “event” which is always singular and unnamable, a pure singularity, and which gives rise to “truth” where truth is always a multiplicity. “Every truth originates in an event [and] the work of art must be thought of as an evental singularity, rather than as a structure”—therefore “it is impossible to say of the work *at one and the same time* that it is a truth and that it is the event whence this truth originates” (*Handbook* 11, italics original). While the poetic event as an “immanent emergence” (of meaning or truth) need not imply prophesy, it does imply a sort of singularity which would prohibit any interpretation coming from “outside itself” (from outside the poem itself), and thus we think again of Foucault’s idea that the modern poetic utterance (*énoncé*, announcement) “inscribes in itself its own principle of decipherment” (“Madness” 297).⁴

In “What Is a Poem?” (*Handbook*) Badiou notes that in Plato’s philosophy we can only reach the highest level of absolute Ideas like Truth, Justice, Goodness and Beauty, and ultimately reach the One Being—which lie(s) beyond the sensible world and even beyond the “mathematical objects” (numbers, geometrical figures)—by moving up from the level of mathematics through the force of thought or *dianoia*. But for Badiou, this means that the ultimately unified, perhaps univocal “truth” of philosophy must be qualified by the separate and incompatible truths of mathematics and poetry.

[E]ven presuming the existence of a thinking of the poem, or that the poem is itself a form of thought, this thought is inseparable from the sensible. It is a thought that cannot be discerned or separated as a thought. We could say that the poem is an unthinkable thought. Mathematics is instead a thought that is immediately written as a thought, a thought that exists precisely inasmuch as it is thinkable.⁵ (*Handbook* 19)

³ The later Heidegger will not want to make such a clear distinction, and will bemoan desacralization.

⁴ This could still imply, though presumably Badiou does not intend this implication, a purely “immanent” divinatory or prophetic utterance, one which harks back to the true-and-false prophetic speech of Foucault’s pre-Platonic poets. Of course, in the modern world we cannot already know if the reality being predicted will really “come true” in the future, and in this sense cannot “judge the truth” of the prophetic-poetic statement, which will arguably limit our ability to fully “interpret its meaning.”

⁵ Badiou’s apparent correlation here of “writing” with the “thinkable” (the logical-mathematical side

Badiou thus claims that in the movement of *dianoia* up to the absolute ideas, Plato must at first banish “poetic thinking” since this is unthinkable, and rely on mathematical thinking insofar as it is thinkable. But finally he is forced to use poetic metaphors like the “sun” and “cave” and to see the opposition of mathematical and poetic thinking as “the opposition in language between the transparency of the *matheme* and the metaphorical obscurity of the poem” (*Handbook* 19). Plato saw then that philosophy needs both mathematics, which involves the thinking of a thought, and poetry, which is not the thinking of a thought (already a duality) but rather its singularity. Both mathematics and poetry are in fact defined by their own “self-exclusion.” As for mathematics, “the principle of consistency is what assigns [it] to an ontological situation of thought,” yet paradoxically it is “not possible for a mathematical theory to establish the statement of its own consistency as veridical” (Badiou, *Handbook* 24).⁶ As for poetry, “what characterizes its effect is its capacity to manifest the powers of language itself. . . . Nevertheless, this power of language is precisely what the poem cannot name.” Badiou concludes that “when thought must be absorbed in the grasp of what establishes it *as* thought, we witness Plato himself submitting language to the power of poetic speech”—this is, not to the thinking of a thought but to the singularity of thought itself (*Handbook* 19-20).

But is this “power of language” which remains for the poem *unnamable* then to be something closer to that earlier power of the Pre-Socratic (Pre-Platonic) philosophers and poets—the “mad” and “prophetic” power of speech that not only predicts the future but contributes to its coming-about—than to the power of Foucault’s knowledge/power/discourse where now this is the logical power or force, critiqued by Foucault, of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy and the western sciences? Badiou does not really want to abandon the idea of language as something that has form and structure, just as mathematics has its own form and structure, and yet he clearly sees the poem as a special form or use of language, for the poem is a “singular event.” On the other hand, “Every truth”—the truths of science, history and philosophy as well as of poetry—“originates in an event [and] the work of art must be thought of as an eventual singularity, rather than as a structure” (*Handbook* 11).

of philosophy) seems to fit Foucault’s distinction between poetry’s spoken voice and Plato’s thought, but how might we relate this to Derrida’s breaking-down of the distinction between Plato’s logocentric speech whose “truth is self-evident” and a writing whose meaning is always deferred (note 1)?

⁶ Badiou is referring here to Gödel, and claims that “after Gödel, . . . consistency is *precisely the unnamable point of mathematics*.” The German mathematician Kurt Gödel proved his two incompleteness theorems in 1931, in an article entitled “On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems.” See Feferman, et al.

Deleuze

While both Badiou and Deleuze are much influenced by mathematics (including set theory) and the sciences as well as classical Greek, Roman and European philosophy, on the question of “poetic language” we might say Badiou stays closer to a traditional notion of verbal language as being based on the rules of syntax, thus closer somehow to a mathematical model of language—even if he wants to distinguish poetic from mathematical language. Deleuze, however, is clearly closer to physics as a science of pure force. Indeed the concept of *vibration* is central to Deleuze’s conception of language and particularly of poetic expressions of language, though inasmuch as *poiesis* means “making” it may almost seem that for Deleuze all expressions of language, including musical language and (which may be the same thing) the non-human languages of animals, are “poetic.”⁷

In *The Logic of Sense* (1969) Deleuze goes back to the anti-Platonic, anti-Aristotelian school of the Greek Stoics and their theory of language and meaning:⁸

According to the Stoics, all that exists is a body (including such things as the soul, qualities and virtues). Each body, like a growing plant, is a dynamic entity which possesses an inner force that brings it to its completed form. . . . [T]he “greening” of the tree is a mere surface effect . . . [and] an event rather than a state of things . . . , and the Stoics insist on expressing such events as verbs. . . . For the Stoics, words are bodies, in that they are sonic entities that possess real being. . . . Both words and things, then, are bodies upon whose surfaces incorporeal *lekta* [“expressibles,” “surface effects,” “events”] “insist” or “subsist,” the surface effects of words being “meaning,” and those of things “events.” [Since] meaning and events form a single surface, [meaning is a] simulacrum, a paradoxical, contradictory unity. (Bogue 67-69, 73)

Having then developed a Stoic theory of meaning and a genetic theory of language in *The Logic of Sense*, where the radically open “infinitive Verb” (epitomized by “to become”), seen as the virtual “event of language,” emerges

⁷ In the “Of the Refrain” chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, human “music” is taken as the “deterritorialization of the “refrain” (*ritornello*), where the latter refers to the much wider domain or milieu of animal communication. *Autopoiesis* (self-making, self-organizing), a foundational concept in cybernetics, chaos theory and information theory, apparently lies outside the fields of Deleuze’s primary interest.

⁸ The Stoics had some common points with the Epicureans and atomists, and the atomist Democritus said that everything, even our mind or soul, is made up of indivisible atoms. In “Another Use of the Concept of the Simulacrum,” Ryan Johnson speaks of the Lucretius’s notion of simulacra (“copies of copies, copies without originals,” 81), which more obviously influenced Deleuze, and of the clinamen, an unpredictable “swerve” in the uniformly chaotic universe (in “nature”), “an excess to the system; . . . a gap or tear in being” (78), an opening which makes possible self-ordering through repetition.

at the “bodily surface”—after the schizophrenic *inner noise* of the body passes out through successive stages of “voice” and “speech” to reach this surface—in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze moves, with Guattari, completely beyond semiotics, theories of metaphor and of meaning, to the idea that all language consists not of syntax but of “*énonciations*” or “*mots-d’ordre*,” words which forcefully order or command. This view, while influenced by speech-act theory with its performative utterances, brings language still closer to a conception of noise, sound, physical force, and thus ties it to such transformations as that of Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, whose becoming-insect is also a becoming-noise.⁹

In his late book *Essays Critical and Clinical*,¹⁰ Deleuze in some respects returns, in “He Stuttered,” to the traditional semiotic model of Saussure and Jakobson in order to break it down and so pass beyond it. Here he first speaks of two ways in which a novelist can “make a character stutter.” The author can just “*say it without doing it*” by writing, for example, “‘My name is Richard,’ he stuttered . . .”; or he can actually *do it* by making him stutter in his speech—by saying, for example, “M-m-my n-n-name is Rich-Rich-Richard.” Now Deleuze goes on to speak of a third way, “when saying is doing,” which he calls a “poetic operation”:

This is what happens when the stuttering no longer affects preexisting words, but itself introduces the words it affects [which] no longer exist independently of the stutter. . . . It is no longer the character who stutters in speech [but] the writer who becomes a *stutterer in language*. He makes the language as such stutter. . . . Is it possible to make language stutter without confusing it with speech? [If the language] system appears in perpetual disequilibrium or bifurcation . . . , then the language itself will begin to vibrate and stutter, but without being confused with speech If language merges with speech, it is only with a . . . poetic speech that actualizes these powers of bifurcation and variation, of heterogenesis and modulation, that are proper to language. . . . Language trembles from head to toe. This is the principle of a poetic comprehension of language itself: it is as if the language were stretched along an abstract and infinitely varied line. [But] can we make progress if we do not enter into regions *far from equilibrium*? Physics attests to this.

(*Essays* 107-09, emphasis original)

⁹ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. And becoming-noise may also be seen as a becoming-molecular and a becoming-imperceptible of sound. The Stoic theory of language takes “meaning” as a virtual event, a surface effect of *langue*, and Deleuze-Guattari’s *énoncés* are clearly much closer to Foucault’s discourse than to the semiotics of Derrida or Lacan. Olkowski in *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* notes that *mots-d’ordre* can both “give orders” and “bring things into order” (229-30). She notes that “The performative must be the motion that inaugurates any such variation in language, for [it] is both language and body. The performative is language, in that it expresses sense in a proposition; it is simultaneously corporeal insofar as it actualizes something in bodies, it involves the actions and passions of bodies; it is doing by saying” (229).

¹⁰ Deleuze died in 1995; the English translation of the 1993 French edition (Les Editions de Minuit) of *Essays Critical and Clinical* appeared in 1997, one year before Badiou’s *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Editions du Seuil), whose English translation appeared in 2005.

Here Deleuze also moves beyond Saussure and Jakobson's classical model that pictures (poetic) language as having a horizontal-syntactic-metonymic axis, "connection or the consecution of combinables" (110), and a vertical-substitutive-metaphorical one, "disjunction or the selection of similars" (110). Thus a sentence like "The boy went to the store" can become (as in a poem) "The pig flew through the moon." Yet here, "far from equilibrium, *the disjunctions become included or inclusive, and the connections, reflexive*, a rolling gait that concerns the process of language and no longer the flow of speech. . . . It is as if the entire language started to roll from right to left, and to pitch backward and forward: *the two stutterings*" (*Essays* 110, emphasis original).¹¹

Deleuzian and Badiouian Readings

From this Deleuzian perspective, Mallarmé's three *éventail* ("fan") sonnets can be seen as vast language-bodies vibrating in space, vibrating beyond equilibrium.¹² Suggesting a throw of the dice,¹³ we get the "sky cast in fragments" in Mallarmé's "*Éventail*" ("Fan"): "But if my stroke liberates (*mon battement délivre*) / . . . like a profound shock (*choc profound*), / This frigidity will melt (*se fond*) / into the laughter of a drunken blossoming (*En du rire de fleurir ivre*), / To cast the sky in fragments (*A jeter le ciel en en détail*) . . ." (Mallarmé 67-68).¹⁴ In "*Éventail*" (*De Madame Mallarmé*)¹⁵ we read:

With for language (*Avec comme pour langage*)
 Nothing except a beating in the skies (*battement aux cieux*)
 The future line of poetry frees itself (*Le future vers se dégage*)
 From the most precious dwelling-place (*Du logis très précieux*),
 Wing swooping low, the messenger (*courriere*), / This fan. . . . (Mallarmé 65)

¹¹ One might also want to compare the "disjunctive" force of this vertical axis with the "deterritorializing" force of the vertical axis in a description of the *agencement*, "assemblage" given in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand, it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away" (88, emphasis original).

¹² In fact this "*éventail*" can also mean "range of choices," and as such it is related to and echoes *événement* 'event' and *éventualité* 'possibility.'

¹³ Before Mallarmé wrote "*Un coup de dés*," Nietzsche speaks of the dice table of the gods in his "Before Sunrise" passage of *Zarathustra* III (Kaufmann 276-79); see the later discussion.

¹⁴ The French "*en détail*" ("in fragments") reinforces our sense that the sky as an indeterminate whole (or One) gets broken into a perhaps also indeterminate multiplicity.

¹⁵ "Fan" (for the poet's wife).

And in “*Autre Éventail*” (*De Mademoiselle Mallarmé*)¹⁶:

O dreamer that I may plunge / Into pure and pathless delight
 Know how to keep my wing in your hand / By a subtle falsehood
 A twilight coolness / Comes to you at each fluttering (*battement*; “beating”),
 Whose captive stroke (*coup prisonnier*) / Delicately pushes back the horizon.
 Vertigo! (*Vertige!*) Behold space shivering / Like a vast kiss
 (*Vertige! voici que frissonne / L’espace comme un grand baiser*)
 Which, driven mad (*fou*) by coming to birth for no one (*pour personne*)
 Can neither gush forth nor calm itself (*Ne peut jaillir ni s’apaiser*)
 Do you feel the savage paradise (*le paradis farouche*)
 Like hidden laughter (*Ainsi qu’un rire enselevi*)
 Flow from the corner of your mouth
 To the bottom of the unanimous fold (*au fond de l’unanime pli*)?
 This is the scepter of rose-colored shores / Stagnant over golden evenings,
 This white closed flight (*Ce blanc vol ferme*) which you place /
 Against a bracelet’s fire (*Contre le feu d’un bracelet*). (Mallarmé 66-67)

We clearly get here the image or idea of “vibration” and the sense that the entire poem, in its throbbing, passionate excess, is “vibrating.” From a traditional structuralist and formalist (e.g. Mukarovsky’s) point of view, our sense that this language-body is vibrating and even virtually “breaking apart” comes from the wild or “violent” (i.e. totally unexpected) metaphorical “breaks” or connections “across-*langue*.” Thus, for example, normally we might metaphorically associate a word like “blossoming” with various things—the “blossoming of a new religion,” “he is a blossoming scientist”—but not so likely with “intoxication” as in Mallarmé’s “drunken blossoming.” And while the connection of “laughter” with “intoxication” and perhaps too with “blossoming” may seem not so far-fetched, we (our normally rational minds) are perhaps vibrated past equilibrium with combinations like “laughter of a drunken blossoming,” or “shores/stagnant over golden evenings,” or even “a beating in the skies.”¹⁷

But this is still the traditional, language-based way of analyzing poetry that Deleuze is going beyond when he “vibrates” the Saussure-Jakobson double-axis model of poetic language “beyond equilibrium.”¹⁸ For we can take these poems as *sound-blocks* in themselves (not blocks made up of words and sentences), as vibrating sound blocks that threaten to vibrate beyond equilibrium and perhaps

¹⁶ “Another Fan” (for his daughter).

¹⁷ With the first we move from “shores” to “water” to “stagnant water,” and then (a more radical break) reverse the up/down relationship of shore and sky; with the second we will think first of the “beating” of a bird’s wings, and then make the further metaphorical jump from “wings” to “skies.”

¹⁸ He and Guattari have already moved beyond it in *A Thousand Plateaus* when they say they do not wish to speak of semiotics, syntax, metaphor or even meaning, but only of the enunciating force of *mots-d’ordre*. Badiou, on the other hand, clearly does not wish to totally abandon syntax and meaning.

“explode”—just as each throw of the dice is in effect an explosion. Thus we could also see the vibration of these *éventail* (“fan” but also “event”) poems as vibrating the universe of language, bringing this language-totality “far from equilibrium.” We might also see (hear) these as *musical* poems insofar as Deleuze-Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* define music as the *detritorialization of the refrain* (*ritornello*, “return,” “repetition”), where the “refrain” is defined in terms of the trans-human sphere of animal communication, for example birdsong.

However, we would need to set this sort of “vibration” in relation, not just to the “event” but also to “singularity” as defined by Badiou and Deleuze. Deleuze relates the latter term directly to repetition (and difference) in his Preface to *Difference and Repetition*: “Repetition is not generality [or] resemblance. . . . Repetition . . . concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities. . . . And perhaps this repetition at the level of [the] external . . . echoes . . . a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal vibration within the singular” (1). Nietzsche speaks of the “singularity” of the mythic Lady Dawn (Eos, Aurora)—who rises above the horizon *alone* (before the sun) in Greek myth—in the “Before Sunrise” passage of *Zarathustra III*, which Deleuze alludes to later in *Difference and Repetition*. Here the male speaker says to the Dawn: “. . . you are to me a dance floor for divine accidents, . . . a divine table for divine dice and dice players” (Kaufmann 278). The image of the entire cosmos/sky/dawn as an *external* repetition (the sun rises each day) contains within it (*interiorizes*) the repetition of dice-throws, though these might be interchangeable and both could suggest the eternal return. Here again we think of Mallarmé’s “twilight coolness . . . that / Comes to you at each fluttering / Whose captive stroke / Delicately pushes back the horizon . . .”; his “beating in the skies.”

Badiou, as we know, says that “Every truth originates in an event [and] the work of art must be thought of as an evental singularity” (*Handbook* 11). Of course, he would say that other forms of knowledge or truth, e.g. mathematics, also originate in events, are also forms of “immanent emergence.” While mathematics “excludes itself” because it cannot prove its own self-consistency (to do which it would have to get “outside of itself”), poetry excludes itself because it “manifests the powers of language itself [which are] precisely what the poem cannot name” (*Handbook* 24-25). We might compare and contrast this apparently more formal-logical-mathematical or “static” model with Deleuze’s external vibration or repetition which has within it and indeed echoes “a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal vibration within the singular” (*Difference and Repetition* 1), where for both thinkers this model is not a uniquely poetic one, and yet poetry has a special way of representing or *enacting* it.

Foucault moves from that true discourse of the ancient poets which “meted out justice” and “prophesied the future, not merely announcing what was going to occur, but contributing to its actual event,” (“The Discourse” 150) to “literature since Mallarmé” which is “in the midst of becoming . . . a language of which the utterance enunciates . . . the linguistic code that renders it intelligible as utterance . . .” (“Madness” 297). Perhaps one could say that for both Badiou and Deleuze (who are very much in the wake of Mallarmé), though in different ways, poetic language is “singular” in the sense that its “inside” and “outside” are collapsed together, becoming indistinguishable. Thus in the case of Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés* (1897) the dice-thrower, with arm outstretched, hesitates to make the actual throw, and so the “event” we are waiting for—the *utterance* of the throw itself and/or that which the throw could have predicted or *meant*—is indefinitely suspended, and so we may no longer be able to distinguish between the outside and inside, the “form” and “meaning” of the poem.¹⁹ However, whereas Deleuze wants to maintain the sense of the violent vibration (beyond equilibrium, out of control) of the “poetic body” even if its inside has been “emptied out” (leaving only the vibration), that is, even if the inside-outside are collapsed together, the more formalistic and traditional (in terms of aesthetics) Badiou seems to maintain a more static sense of this emptied-out, hollowed-out, collapsed poetic frame or form.

Thus in his reading of some passages from Mallarmé’s “Monologue of a Faun” (an 1865 “piece destined for the theater”) in “Philosophy of the Faun” (*Handbook of Inaesthetics*), Badiou as usual proceeds in a somewhat formal, logical and categorizing way, quite the opposite of Deleuze’s Dionysian bursts. In his first section or category, “Dissolution of the Event in its Supposed Place”—which may already suggest something like the above mentioned collapsing-together of inside/outside—Badiou quotes this brief passage: “So clear, / Their light carnation, that it turns in the air / Drowsy with dense slumbers,” and makes this comment: “Transparency of air and latency of slumber: Just as in the *Un Coup de Dés* the feather floats over the abyss ‘without strewing it or fleeing’ (*sans le joncher ni fuir*),” the vanished nymphs, reduced to the semblance of a color, are (perhaps) scattered over the place where the faun does not himself know if he is waking up or falling asleep” (126). We get a clearer picture of the “hollowed-out inside” in Badiou’s fourth category, “Extorting from the Place the Name of the Event”:

O Sicilian edges of a tranquil marsh
That, rivaling the suns, my vanity plunders,
Silent beneath the flowering sparks, RELATE

¹⁹ Deleuze-Guattari’s *mots-d’ordre* (ordering or commanding words) are enunciations, utterances.

*How I was cutting here the hollow reeds
 That talent tamed, when, on the glaucous gold
 Of distant verdures vowing their vines to the fountains
 An animal whiteness languorously sways:
 And to the slow prelude whence the pipes are born,
 This flight of swans—no! of Naiads—flees
 Or dives . . .* (128, italics original)

Here Badiou comments:

In these lines we have an example . . . of . . . the most general movement of Mallarmé's poems: The *presentation of the place, followed by the attempt to discern it within the proof of some vanished event*. The above passage includes a first sequence of the story in italics and between quotation marks. This story—attributed to the place itself, as if it was *about to confess the event that haunts it*—is a pure moment of prose that already persuades us that it will result only in doubt. Moreover, this result is inscribed into the interrogative oscillation between “swans” and “Naiads,” leaving open the possibility of a subversion of reality (the birds of the marsh) by the imaginary (the nudity of the women). Finally, the story can indeed lead us back to the solitude of the place, thereby exposing the faun to his first temptation. (128, emphasis added)

In his Category 7, “Second Temptation: To Be Content with the Artistic Simulacrum,”—which begins with the lines “Try then, instrument of flights, O Syrinx malign / To bloom again by the lakes where you await me!” Badiou comments in part:

The desiring faun is . . . distinguished from the artistic faun. [Yet] the erotic scene is presented as pure reverie, and consequently the event (the real advent of the nymphs) is nullified. [Here we have the] temptation [of] an objectless desire. . . . In the question of the event, the function of the void is central, because what the event . . . causes to arise, is the void of a situation. . . . [T]he event testifies that the being of the “there is” is the void. (*Handbook* 132)

Then, in Chapter 5 of *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, “A Poetic Dialectic: Labid ben Rabi’a and Mallarmé,” Badiou turns to this sixth-century-AD pre-Islamic Arab poet. In this *mu’allaqa* or pre-Islamic ode, which begins “Effaced, the encampments of days past and days to come,” there is again a sense of the collapsing-together of the inside and outside, poetic form and content, and—as befits the desert itself, now an actual human habitat as well as a metaphor—a powerful sense of emptiness and desolation. “Of the camp there remains a design bared by the waters, / Like a text whose lines the pen has reawakened. . . . What good is it to call upon / A deaf eternity, with an indistinct language?” (48) Badiou comments on this “poem of the nomad faced with the abolished encampment”:

The poem must be wagered in the closest proximity possible to the absolute revenge exacted by the indifference of the universe. The master can confer a poetic chance

upon a truth only at the point where (perhaps) there is nothing but the desert, nothing but the abyss. Where nothing has taken or will take place. [Thus] the master must risk the poem exactly at the point where a resort to the poem seems to have vanished. [Here] the vanished encampment is indeed compared to a “writing eroded by the secret of the stone. . . . It is . . . clear that the ordeal of absence and of the bare place is . . . that of a probable effacement of the text. . . . In very similar terms, Mallarmé evokes “these latitudes of indeterminate waves in which all reality dissolves,” and since it is a question of the master, the near certainty of a “shipwreck pertaining to man without vessel no matter where vain.” (48-49)

Badiou also compares these lines of Labid ben Rabi’a—“Under an isolated tree, up high, on the edge / Of the dunes that the wind scatters into dust, / The evening turns into a cloud of hidden stars” (55)—with those of Mallarmé in *Un Coup de Dés*: “The Abyss blanched, spread, furious, beneath an incline desperately plane on a wing, its own fallen back in advance from being able to dress its flight” (55). He comments here: “A truth begins with a poem of the void, continues through the choice of continuing, and comes to an end only in the exhaustion of its own infinity” (56).

Deleuze and Badiou on Mallarmé’s Dice-Throw Poem

As Mallarmé’s highly experimental and definitively *modern* (or *modernist*) poem, the 1897 *Un Coup de Dés*, has already been unavoidably mentioned and indeed predicted or heralded in various ways, here its opening, where the master of the sinking or sunken ship hesitates to throw the dice, will be quoted without further ado:

A THROW OF THE DICE NEVER, EVEN WHEN TRULY CAST IN THE ETERNAL CIRCUMSTANCE OF A SHIPWRECK’S DEPTH, Can be only the Abyss raging, whitened, stalled beneath the desperately sloping incline of its own wing, through an advance falling back from ill to take flight, and veiling the gushers, restraining the surges, gathered far within the shadow buried deep by that alternative sail, almost matching its yawning depth to the wingspan, like a hull of a vessel rocked from side to side . . . THE MASTER, beyond former calculations, where . . . he grasped the helm of this conflagration of the concerted horizon at his feet, that readies itself; moves; and merges with the blow that grips it, as one threatens fate and the winds, the unique Number, which cannot be another Spirit, to hurl it into the storm, relinquish the cleaving there, and pass proudly; hesitates, a corpse pushed back by the arm from the secret, rather than taking sides, a hoary madman, on behalf of the waves: one overwhelms the head, flows through . . . the man without a vessel, empty no matter where. . . .²⁰ (Mallarmé 220-23)

²⁰ While implying that the master hesitates to throw the dice, the lines “THE MASTER . . . hesitates,

Two sentences—above we only see the beginning of the first—which are written in larger letters and spread out across the incredibly long poem (so that at first we might miss them), give us what may seem to be the poem's two most rationally-stated philosophical messages: **“A throw of the dice never can abolish chance”** and **“Nothing will have taken place but the place . . . except perhaps a Constellation.”** And the poem's last line is this: “Every thought expresses a dice-throw.”²¹ Deleuze, looking at Mallarmé in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and *Difference and Repetition* and taking Nietzsche's eternal return of the same as a “repetition of difference”—indeed as a “repeated throwing of the dice” (where each “throw” will be different)—sees “A throw of the dice never can abolish chance” as paradoxically affirming pure contingency, the “absolute necessity of chance.”

Ontology is the dice-throw, the chaosmos from which the cosmos emerges. . . . This is precisely what Nietzsche meant by will to power . . . —that dice-throw capable of affirming the whole of chance. . . . If “being” is above all difference and commencement, Being is itself repetition, the recommencement of being. . . , and an origin assigns a ground only in a world already precipitated into universal *ungrounding*. . . . This is the point at which the ultimate origin is overturned into an absence of origin (in the always displaced circle of the eternal return). An aleatory point is displaced through all the points on the dice, as though one time for all times. . . . The throw of the dice is in no way suggested as abolition of chance (the sky-chance) [but rather it] affirms the whole of chance each time. . . . (*Difference and Repetition* 198-202)

Like Nietzsche himself, then, especially in the latter's third version of the eternal return which appears in his later notes (compiled in *The Will to Power*), Deleuze looks here like a physicist contemplating the cosmos. He takes this cosmos (*kosmos*, “order”) as a repetition not of the same but of difference, where this repetition is now figured as a series of dice-throws, each of which reaffirms “the whole of chance.”

In *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Badiou says:

But if we confine ourselves—as we should—to the “Platonism” that functions as a prop for Deleuze's intuition, then it is certain that, in “the eternal return of the Same,” the return is subordinated to the Same, in the sense that what returns must be the copy of an Idea; that is, it must be the same as the Idea. . . . We must therefore understand that, for Deleuze, the eternal return is absolutely not a principle of

a corpse pushed back by the arm from the secret, rather than taking sides” may also suggest Foucault's point that the modern poem, which in the singularity of its unnameable event is itself a dice-throw, contains the key or “secret” to its own decipherment within itself, within the maze or chaotic “sea” of its own language. Yet insofar as pure “chance can never be abolished,” it would seem there could no pure meaning (at least no knowable one).

²¹ We assume Deleuze, more likely than Badiou, might also say “Every *poem* expresses a dice-throw.”

order imposed on chaos or matter. On the contrary, the “secret of the eternal return is that . . . it is nothing other than chaos itself, or the power of affirming chaos” (*The Logic of Sense* 264). . . . Let us note in passing that Deleuze’s intention here is in sharp contrast to that of Mallarmé—a thinker considerably whom Deleuze, between his strongly critical remarks in *Difference and Repetition* and the attempts at annexation in *Foucault* and *The Fold*, was to change considerably his position. In my mind, Deleuze’s initial attitude was the right one. Absolutely no compromise is possible between Deleuze’s vitalism and Mallarmé’s subtractive ontology. As regards chance, in particular, the maxims of the one and the other are diametrically opposed. The maxim of Mallarmé is: “the Infinite proceeds from Chance—the chance that you have negated.” That of Deleuze, as we are about to see, must be expressed as follows: “Chance proceeds from the Infinite—that Infinite you have affirmed.” (70-72)

James Williams, in *Gilles Deleuze’s Philosophy of Time*, cites both Badiou’s and Catherine Cazenave’s discussion (in *Cahiers Critiques de Philosophie*) of the Deleuze-Badiou difference regarding Mallarmé and the eternal return:

Catherine Cazenave traces the roots of this thought of chance back to Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. This . . . shows the birth of Deleuze’s interpretation of eternal return in relation to will to power and affirmative and destructive forces. . . . “Will to power and the dice throw are thus values of affirmation because they are inscribed in the movement of eternal return, where only an active dynamism rules” (Cazenave 108). Cazenave’s argument is critical in relation to Badiou because she notes . . . how Deleuze’s focus on Nietzsche allows him to distance himself from what he sees as a negative treatment of chance as treated by Mallarmé: “Deleuze’s first argument concerns the preponderance of negative values in Mallarmé’s poem” (Cazenave 111). Badiou [in] *The Clamour of Being* . . . comes down on the side of Mallarmé because he sees Nietzsche’s and thus Deleuze’s treatment of chance as still a thought of the One²² rather than a thought of multiplicity: “For Deleuze chance is the play of All, always replayed as it is” (Badiou 115). . . . Badiou . . . argues that Deleuze misunderstands set theory and the concept of multiplicity that comes out of it. . . . (Williams 186)

Conclusion

Even if the poem’s dice-throw had taken place, “A throw of the dice never can abolish chance.” It may mean that even if the throw *had* been made, “Nothing will have taken place but the place (*lieu*)”—since there would still be nothing but chance in the world (in the universe)—“except perhaps a Constellation.” Are we to think of this place as a bare surface of chance, and/or an empty form of chance, empty form that *is* chance? The various ways of thinking about this

²² Thus Badiou mentions Deleuze’s (Platonic) “repetition of the Same” in the above-quoted passage.

“place” and the act of “taking” or “having place” (*avoir lieu*) include Nietzsche’s image of Lady Dawn (who might also be correlated with the Constellation) as a “dance floor for divine accidents, . . . a divine table for divine dice and dice players” in *Zarathustra* III (Kaufmann 278).²³ They also include the idea of “place” as the encompassing “form” and/or inner “content” of the poem itself, a poetic outside-inside duality that gets collapsed, the duality disappears, leaving perhaps only a singularity.

But if “Every thought expresses a dice-throw” and a poem is made of “thoughts” then there **are** many dice-throws here, whether we would take them as constituting or driving the outer form or inner content, or both simultaneously. Yet Badiou says that a poetic thought is “inseparable from the sensible. It is a thought that cannot be discerned or separated as a thought. *We could say that the poem is an unthinkable thought.* Mathematics is instead a thought that is immediately written as a thought, a thought that exists precisely inasmuch as it is thinkable” (*Handbook* 19, italics original). Yet if every unthinkable thought “expresses” a dice-throw, we also have a series of dice-throws which for Deleuze embodies the repetition of difference and thus being as becoming; while Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* sees repetition itself as (a) singularity, Badiou says “the poem . . . permits us to forgo the claim that the singularity of a thought can be replaced by the thinking of this thought” (*Handbook* 27).

“Nothing will have taken place but the place, except perhaps a constellation.” Does the constellation then lie within the “throw” (“event” or “utterance”) of the poem or outside of it, above it? Whatever else the constellation may be, it appears to be a singularity, perhaps an “evental singularity.” Badiou, we recall, says a work of art is an “event” which is singular and unnamable, and gives rise to “truth” where truth is always a multiplicity—and with multiplicity we might think also of numbers and mathematics, and of the problem that mathematics cannot prove its own consistency, just as poetry cannot “name” the “powers of language” that constitute it. But if we are to see, on a Deleuzian model, the whole poem as *vibrating* and thus as being itself virtually indistinguishable from the cosmos that it expresses, might this too be a way to see the constellation?²⁴

Here then it has been suggested that in spite of these two thinkers’ different approaches—Deleuze’s being more physics-based, energy-based, vibration-based, voice/utterance-based, Badiou’s more linguistics-logic-mathematics-based—to

²³ Again reversing the vertical order, the speaker addresses Dawn: “O heaven above me, pure and deep! You abyss of light!” (*Oh Himmel über mir, du Reiner! Tiefer! Du Licht-Abgrund!*) (Kaufmann 276).

²⁴ *Constellatio* in Latin meant “to set with stars”; *stellare*, “to shine”; *stella*, “a star”: the later, more abstract meaning of “grouping” or “collection” was derived from the original, more concrete sense.

poetic language, finally it seems they both tend to see poetic language, poetry, poems as characterized by the collapsing or dissolving of the outer-inner or form-content difference. This operation might also be understood in relation to the ancient conception of poetry's power, through the very act of its *utterance*, to both predict and enact (actualize the event of) the future, where this predicting/actualizing difference is again dissolved. Yet one could also begin from the model of a dissolving or dissolution of atomic parts, words/sounds, numbers, a dissolving which is perhaps finally indistinguishable from their most extreme, far-flung "scattering"—especially if we think in terms of physics but also those of mathematics. Here again we come back to the idea that the poem or act of *poiesis* itself is an unthinkable thought, a pure event, pure singularity, and perhaps too to Foucault's point that "Literature itself (undoubtedly since Mallarmé) is in the midst of becoming . . . a language of which the utterance enunciates . . . the linguistic code that renders it intelligible as utterance . . ." ("Madness" 296).

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震動、特異性、事件： 德勒茲與巴迪歐論詩學語言

摘要

首先，本文探討巴迪歐(Alain Badiou)《非美學手冊》(*Handbook of Inaesthetics*)一書對詩學語言的分析觀點：他在該書中區分了詩學語言(poetic language)與邏輯數學(logic-mathematical)的語言。然而，數學被認定是基於可思考(thinkable)價值而存在的思維，詩詞則屬非可思考型的思維(unthinkable thought)，也是純粹的事件(pure event)、純粹的特異性(pure singularity)，它顯現出的語言向度(power of language)是無法被命名的。本文把巴迪歐的想法同德勒茲的詩學語言做對比：德勒茲強調聲音的物質性，把詩篇看成一個完整化、震動且顫抖(totalized, vibrating and stuttering)的語言肉身。本文提出，法國詩人馬拉美(Stéphane Mallarmé)的《愛凡泰十四行詩》(*éventail*)明顯地符合德勒茲的詩學語言概念—震動的肉身。在此，本文亦回顧巴迪歐對於馬拉美〈牧神的獨白〉(*Monologue of a Faun*)與前伊斯蘭時代阿拉伯詩人拉畢斑(Labid ben Rabi'a)作品的解讀。本人認為，巴迪歐與德勒茲皆視詩學語言這個概念為「特異事件」(singular event)，兩者皆關注詩詞當中消弭內外(inside and outside)、形式與內容(form and content)差別的不可確定或消弭。最後，本文簡扼地勾勒出巴迪歐與德勒茲對於馬拉美長詩〈骰子一擲〉(*Un Coup de Dés*)的分析。這裡，我們看到兩位思想家的顯著的不同點，但也看見他們共通的見解認知—詩篇本身的形式與內容已無法區別劃分，骰子延宕地一擲這個舉動，在這裡被看做詩篇本身的發聲行爲(utterance)，或是詩篇本身動能(driving force)的展現，也可被視作詩篇本身的實在化(actualization)與意義的顯現。

關鍵字：巴迪歐，德勒茲，馬拉美，詩學語言，數學，特異性，事件，震動，骰子一擲