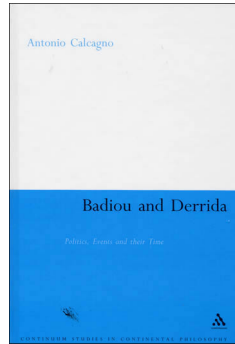


○ **REVIEW OF ANTONIO CALCAGNO, *BADIOU AND DERRIDA: POLITICS, EVENTS AND THEIR TIME***
(CONTINUUM: LONDON, 2007)

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Author studies are problematic in reproducing patriarchal modes of thinking. The author invariably assumes the place of authority, and is thus caught up in the institutional reproduction of scholarship. Calcagno's attempt to reconcile and even synthesise two major philosophical figures of the late twentieth century ventures onto even more problematic terrain, as the convergence of philosophical systems creates a positivist, even hysterical assurance of philosophy's authority. Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida both offer concise and coherent collections of philosophy, but Derrida at least remains critical of those institutional apparatuses within which he is implicated. Calcagno's attention to the politics of the contemporary Badiou and the later work of Derrida comprehensively ignores these conditions of power. His argument is that Badiou and Derrida are to a great extent commensurable in a theory of pre-political time that creates the event (Badiou) or in a democracy of the future (Derrida). The difference between the event and the multiple preconditions for its appearance, between May 1968 and the multiple dissatisfactions that produced it, becomes the hinge upon which Calcagno rests his synthesis. The strategy is familiar to the discipline of philosophy, that maps out the way in which thinkers can be reconciled in some metaconceptual map. But it was always Derrida's project to call an end to such metaphysics, to pull the world apart rather than to create new models for it. It is also the function of author studies to empty out the patriarchal place of the major thinker to reveal the fissures and contradictions of their thought. The major thinker becomes a site for contestation rather than reconciliation, the empty place by which discourse is enabled.

This is not to say that Calcagno has misunderstood Badiou or Derrida. On the contrary, his description of Derrida's democracy to come is clear and brilliant, the stuff of a sustained and insightful mind at work. Surely, though, this democracy should be read as a site by which the present state of democracy can be critiqued, rather than as an affirmation of its state of becoming. Instead of dwelling on the complexity of his historical examples, such as May 1968 or American independence, he rushes through them to arrive instead at a philosophy of time implicit in the

suspension and reinvention of democracy. The paradoxical content of the future, the double-bind of the possible and impossible, celebrates the deferral of utopia rather than its actualisation. The undecidability of this present, of this perpetual pre-political that anticipates politics, is sutured to Badiou's notion of the event that is also an undecidable condition for politics. It is this pre-political space that Calcagno proposes is the supplement to the undecidable condition for the politics of these French philosophers. It is as if they are writing about the same thing, as if as pre-political concepts the undecidable and democracy possess the same sense. It is also as if French philosophy has a history of its own, and proceeds on terms that it defines for itself, rather than being tied to and even dependent on the history of the French left. Derrida's later political work, for instance, was an engagement with human rights, and responded to criticisms of appropriations of deconstruction that took the politics out of the text. So too Badiou's work is something of a response to the crisis in France today, in an obscure response to the demands of the Other, yet a political response nonetheless. It is ironic that Calcagno's declarations of the political, in the name of philosophy, ignores these philosophical meditations on politics itself.

If Calcagno has opened a line of enquiry with this reconciliation of Badiou and Derrida, he has also closed one. The immensely productive differences between Derrida and Foucault, or Badiou and Žižek, stand as sites by which students are educated to critique the world around them; by which activism negotiates its strategies, and philosophy has anguished over its place in contemporary life. This productivity is not reproduced in this account of two major thinkers. Instead there is agreement, commensurability, a lack of difficulty and struggle with the problematic place of their thought in a political world. There is an oscillation between multiplicity and singularity, absence and presence, possibility and impossibility, the political and pre-political, that resolves itself in the same. I would have liked to see more engaged readings of the texts at hand, more of an commitment to unravelling the history and politics that are the declared subject of *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and their Time*, just as they are the subject of these major thinkers. One way to solve the problem would be to pit them against the Hegelian tradition in Marxism, the pre-eminent philosophy of contemporary history, and with which Badiou and Derrida have had running debates. In simply bypassing this tradition and its plethora of political debates, the notion of a political time, its implications for the present and the future, is horribly impoverished. In this, Calcagno reproduces the transcendental aspect of Badiou, which has remained incommensurable with other currents of philosophy and critical theory. Here is a Kantian who reassures us that transcendental thought is still possible, even necessary, and that affect and pathology are, even after a twentieth century ravaged by the perversions of reason, negligible after all. The sense that democracy is a transcendental force is taken at Badiou's word by Calcagno here, as he confidently accounts for Derrida's notion of a democracy to come. Yet it is not with positivity that we should be thinking of democracy today, as the term is largely mobilised on behalf of idealism or an aggressive international economy. If democracy is to survive, its implication in warfare and the abuse of human rights must be accounted for. This is why later Derrida and Badiou use the term cautiously, with regard to its deferral (Derrida) and its multiplicity (Badiou). It is with a view to recalling the premises rather than the promises of deconstruction that an account of the pre-political might be thought, with the sense of its negativity and criticality rather than its positivity and potentiality. This is to recall the revolutionaries of May 1968, speaking for both the end and beginning of democracy, who also wanted to put an end to the institutional history of philosophy, its models and idealism.