

## Singular and universal in Alain Badiou and the psychoanalysis scientificity hypothesis

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the psychoanalysis scientificity hypothesis from an analysis of the singular and universal concepts by the contemporaneous philosopher Alain Badiou. Without intending to exhaust the proposed themes and even proposing to begin a debate, we shall make indications in two directions. The singular concept and a fragment of an illustrative clinical case are presented in the first direction. Then we analyze the “orientations in thinking” proposed by the philosopher and the possible places of Freud and the psychoanalysis in such categorization. Badiou’s theses and the manner as the philosopher avoids the present ontotheology (for example, in the Modern Science) are presented in the direction of the universal concept. We conclude with a proposal on how the psychoanalysis employs the singular and universal concepts to differentiate itself from other types of science.

**Keywords:** singular, universal, science, psychoanalysis.

Alain Badiou writes a philosophy that is strongly based on logic and mathematics, and which extends to politics, psychoanalysis and aesthetics. He proposes his ontology (namely: mathematical logic) in two fundamental works: *Being and event*, 1988, and *Logics of worlds*, 2006. These are dense and difficult works, impressive both for their fluent and assertive language as for their ability to concisely dialogue with propositions ranging from the historical foundations of Western philosophy and mathematics to their most contemporary advances. Badiou not only dialogues with philosophers and mathematicians of all ages, but also proposes something unheard of to them. If Heidegger (1996a) advocated that we take a “step back” (p. 196), Badiou (1991) invites us to take “a step further” (p. 5), and does so with vigor and calculation.

In constructing our hypothesis about the scientificity of psychoanalysis, we first ask what the sciences are and, secondly, whether it would be possible to formulate the existence of something common to the way of practicing them, as well as to the modes of investigation of researchers. Would there be a universal of sciences? And what about singularities in scientific procedures? And further: can one apply to a science that works with man (whatever that science is) the same generalizing, predictive, and intervening principles and procedures of the sciences that deal with that which is not human?

What underlies these questions is, of course, a discussion on the conceptions of universal and singular that support modern scientific practices. We believe a reflection on this subject is necessary, to avoid what we consider to be mistakes of a certain tradition (extending to

contemporary times) based on the distinctive features of a metaphysics that we would call, as did Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), ontotheological. Ontotheological is any general orientation in thought that speaks of things beyond (*goal*) worldly realities (*physis*) and which, putting aside the fundamental difference between being and entity, takes an entity (a man, a nonhuman object, an idea, a procedure etc.) by the being, and takes it as realizer of the Absolute, of the fullness of Being and, finally, as God. Traits that would support this metaphysical ontotheology would be the entification of being and the subjectification of entity, precisely translated by the philosopher in the following terms:

The understanding of being (*logos* in a very broad sense) that previously illuminates and directs all behavior towards the entity is neither a grasping of the being as such [for this would be to entify the being] nor a reduction of it to the concept [which would be to subjectify the entity]. (Heidegger, 1996a, p. 118, emphasis added)

### The concept of singular

Aiming at the concept of singular, we start from Badiou’s (1996) elaboration on the issue of the One, multiple and void in the book *Being and Event*, in which he formalizes his ontology understood as mathematics itself, which is presented by him as the “science of being-as-being” (p. 13).

For Badiou (1996), everything that is presented is multiple. The One, it never presents itself. Just like the being. To give consistency to the multiple, the *being* and the *one* are reciprocable but not the same. What is, then, regarded as one if there is no One?

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As there are only multiplicities, what counts are the multiples. Thus, every element is a multiple and every multiple is a multiple of multiples. Just to help picture it: a body contains many systems and each of them several organs; each organ has a multiplicity of cells and each of them a multiplicity of atoms of chemical elements, which are also decomposable into leptons and *quarks*, and so on. Beyond this example, we may think that each element of a “chain” is a multiple of multiples – as one can easily perceive –, which can unfold in various directions. This means it can be included into a chain as well as be the producer of other “chains”, thus forming networks of multiplicities that can be counted in different ways.

We do the math to avoid emptiness, inconsistency, or to reestablish a consistent multiplicity (a situation). As Badiou (1996) observes, the fixation of void as a representation of the unrepresentable would be Chaos and the destruction of all giving of being. An important difference from Heidegger (1997): in paragraph 40 of the book *Being and time*, the philosopher situates distress as a privileged way for the human being to take a place in the world and, thus, to assume its own potentiality-for-being. For the French philosopher, in turn, distress is rather a *defense against emptiness*: “What Heidegger calls the care-of-being, which is the ecstasy of the entity, can also be called: the situational anguish of emptiness, the need for defending oneself against it” (Badiou, 1996, p. 82).

The void so much avoided is neither global nor local. It is not a term of the set, nor a consistent multiple or multiplicity, but something that is subtracted from the account result. It is not the whole either; on the contrary, it is the nothingness of the whole: “All we can say is this: every situation implies the nothingness of its whole” (Badiou, 1996, p. 52). Therefore, it is a part of the whole. According to the Meditation Eight of *Being and Event*, the void, not being a part that is worthy as one, is, at last, a submultiple. It helps to compose consistent multiplicities that are, in turn, counted as one. Thus, each multiple carries within a submultiple, an “empty” component. If, for example, we think of a melancholy patient who literally complains he is feeling a “void” in his life that paralyzes him to the extreme, we can work with him to make the void become operational, so to speak. To avoid the fixation in the void and the inertia that makes him (the patient) stay put. Never a simple task.

The wandering void can arise anytime, in any situation. “Situation” is any consistent multiplicity presented, i.e., “multiplicity composed of several ones, themselves counted by the action of the structure” (Badiou, 1996, p. 394), which is what is prescribed for the presentation of the count-per-one regime itself.

To prevent the void from fixing, only the structure (the presentation of a multiplicity, the count-per-one) is not enough. A meta-structure must be created. Here we add the concept of “state of situation”.

A state of situation is “that by which the structure of a situation – of any structured situation – is counted as one” (Badiou, 1996, p. 83). In other words, to chase away the danger of emptiness and its wandering excess (“danger” because the void presentation would be a catastrophe; “excess” because, in the mathematical situation, void *is the name of the being*; “errant” because it cannot be found), what escapes the account of a situation (the account itself) should also be counted. Every structure must be duplicated into a meta-structure that prevents the fixation of the void: “I only say this: the fact that Chaos is not the form of the bestowal of being results in the obligation to think that there is a count-per-one reduplication” (Badiou, 1996, p. 82). Thus, every situation is structured twice. There is always presentation and representation, simultaneously.

The concept of singular appears when Badiou (1996) establishes how the elements of a group can be recognized in terms of structure and meta-structure. Belonging and inclusion are the key to all reasoning regarding terms and situations:

I will call *normal* a term that is both presented [belonging to a situation] and represented [included in the situation]. I call *excrescent* a term that is represented but not presented. I will call *singular* a term which is presented [pertaining to the situation] but not represented [not included in it]. (Badiou, 1996, p. 86, emphasis added)

An example from our clinical practice: the ever surprising habit of a woman who squeaked like a bat presented itself to her family’s (and her own) ears as absurdly strange, annoying, even frightening. Ultimately, as “craziness”. And, as for the convenience of thought (read “laziness of thought”) it is acceptable to take the whole for one of its parts, our patient (this non-whole woman) was taken as all madness.

What can be singular about this? Certainly not the woman’s own squealing, for even figures in the popular imagination could do so. At most we had a strange particularity here that, coupled with others – not so strange, though unusual today, such as her refusal to let boyfriends have more intimacy with her and her fear of being naked in a mirror –, it would be easily translated by a third, one from the field of “knowing”, which would thus state: “it is a hysterical one”.

Her treatment did not lead us specifically to a *sinthoma* (*sinthoma* meaning here a unique and personal way for someone to tense their unconscious enjoyment and desire), but allowed us to come to some truths through facts and connections previously unconscious to her. This is the path we want to use here as an illustration/example of the concept of singular in Badiou.

To summarize: that woman in her early twenties had a difficult childhood, in a poor rural area infested

with troublesome animals of all kinds. That in her childhood her mother moaned peculiarly when she had sex with her husband, and that, to escape what the moans suggested and the terror they caused to her, the girl had, as displacement, began to pay attention to the bats that flew over her room at dawn, in the gap between the roof and the “ceiling coating” (something that served as a slab). She repressed that and later, on the couch, her analysis brought that back to the scene.

The screeching of bats, the moans of her mother and the fear experienced in those early hours were all included in her psyche—her language apparatus, as one might infer from Freud’s works<sup>1</sup> –, but did not present itself to consciousness. They were there as excesses that would be nonexistent for consciousness (they did not present themselves). They were represented in the state (of the situation), that is, in their consciousness, as an excrescence classified as “madness.” They were included as an excess that seemed odd, weird; as a part of herself that would exist on the fringes of the rest of her own “healthy” self (“I find it weird to do so,” she complained). With the analysis, this excess included as a part to be discarded, unrepresentable in the field of rationality, came to present itself as a puzzle to be worked out, unfolded. In an inversion of position, it went from excrescence (inclusion that does not belong to the field of knowledge) to a singularity (now belonging to the field of consciousness, although not allowed to be included by the knowledge of consciousness). From disposable part, it became a puzzle to be unfolded.

That, in a given session, we have come to soothe her anxiety as a side effect of a series of interventions throughout her analytic process, and then to further unfolding; this in itself does not explain how the excrescence has become a singularity. To carry forward the scientificity hypothesis of psychoanalysis, we must ask ourselves how such event took place. Which multiple made it possible for us to produce truth in that session?

We will adopt Badiou’s nomenclature (1996) again. The multiple that made such analysis possible is an unnatural and totally abnormal multiple. Despite being present in the situation, therefore belonging as an element in the field, it does not allow itself to be included as part, i.e., it cannot be grasped by the knowledge of that situation, preserving itself as a riddle to be unfolded, constructed. This is what the philosopher calls the “eventual site” (Badiou, 1996, p. XXX). From it, we believe, the “sciences” are born. We shall discuss

this concept on another opportunity. We only say that a site is a multiple whose elements are not present in a situation, but that even so, and for this reason, is the founder of something unheard of. The psychoanalyst and the practitioner of psychoanalysis must revisit this place with each new patient and each new instance of an analytical process, or its function will be over.

Six years after the publication of *Being and event*, when writing about truth and the nameless in “For a New Theory of the Subject” (Badiou, 1994), the philosopher deduces the concept of singular from a clinical example by asking what the analysis of a so-called hysterical woman puts into play. His answer is a consideration that “hysteria” is a clinical type of a psychic structure (the so-called neurotic structure), and that the “type” would not be a singularity, not by far. That woman’s discourse could characterize her as hysterical, but since she is also a whole, that is, a multiplicity, she brings other indicators that are indicative of other things she is and that require listening beyond what this classification offers us. It is precisely when the components of knowledge about her (all referring to the keyword “hysterical”) “subtract the whole [*this woman*] from the predicate of hysteria, that a truth and not a knowledge emerges in its singularity” (Badiou, 1994, p. 67).

Let us add: a clinical practice, even a psychoanalytic one, that is guided solely by a structural consideration, will only ratify the structure, losing that presence, that “*sui generis* realization” of which Lalande (n.d.) speaks: “To pass from the last species (*species infima*) to the singular notion, what is added is a principle of individuation, which is no longer a characteristic or a sum of characteristics, but a presence, a *sui generis* realization” (p. 655). This because our thinking tends to the One. This tendency obeys what Heidegger (1996) denounced as the metaphysical ontotheology, already mentioned. Many mindsets are formed with One as the name and idea of Science, or God, or Power. It is not easy to find, at least in our civilization, a thought that is not oriented by the One. For us, it is more convenient to make hasty (if very fragile) links between immediate elements than to face the void of a scansion between two multiplicities or between two signifiers. Betting on thought without-One to talk about being, as proposed by Badiou (1999), is to maintain that “that which is thinkable exists in the form of the radical multiple, the multiple that is not under the power of the One... multiple-without-One” (p. 30).

## Orientations in thought and Freud’s place

In our reflection on what the sciences are and how psychoanalysis would be included there, we are initially proposing to remove from the hegemonic “idea of science” what underlies and adheres to it, i.e., that orientation in thought that takes it for One. To paraphrase

<sup>1</sup> We say “language apparatus” because we consider with Garcia-Roza (2001) that since its inception Freud proposed that the neurons where conscious perceptions occur give rise to an inscription - the signs of perception - inaccessible to consciousness and that constitutes with these signs, the psychic apparatus itself: “The important thing is that from then on, what will be offered as content of the psychic apparatus are signs (*Zeichen*), signs that will be inscribed (*Niederschriften*) and retranscribed (*Umschriften*), so something whose proximity to writing is indicated by Freud himself in choosing the terms used” (p. 204).



Badiou (1996), we sustain that, that of the scientific being which is thinkable, exists in the form of a multiple that is not under the power of the One. We have to think, and also regarding the scientific being, in the form of a multiple-without-One.

As we link our thinking to being, we are unaware of the orientation in thought that leads us: “it is when we decide what exists that we link our thinking to being. But, then, we are unaware of being under the imperative of an orientation” (Badiou, 1999, p. 56). Many researchers (or perhaps our civilization as a whole) are guided by the One without realizing it. First, because they are unaware that they were formed – from and even before their academic degrees – in the spirit of culture oriented and ratified by the One. Second, because, unaware of the thought orientation they have received, these researchers inadvertently continue to pass it on to new generations. And, thus, the meta-structure that educates them greatly guarantees the erasing of the void that would allow the emergence of new truths in place of truthfulness (knowledge of the *establishment* of any human procedure), always presented and represented by the state.

But this is not just the unnoticed, or merely unreflected (which is a lot, already) social transmission of an orientation. One must consider the excess point theorem (Badiou, 1996), according to which there are always submultiples which, although included in a situation, are not enumerable in it as terms of the situation. There is an “irredeemable” excess of submultiples (components of those multiples) that do not belong to the situation (they are not presented in it) and, thus, such terms or submultiples do not exist. They are an excess of which we are unaware and that wanders in thought. Freud (1917/2014, p. 310) already warned us that the *self* is not master of its own home. Orientations in thought are established at the real point of this wandering excess (Badiou, 1991).

In *Being and event*, Badiou (1996) defines orientation in thought as the latent pre-decision that will refer to (albeit unidentified) the inaccuracy of the quantitative excess between the situation and the state of the situation. There is a mismatch, a nonrelation – which Badiou (1996) calls “unrelation” – between each situation and its state. A un-relationship mathematically formalized in set theory by the aforementioned excess point theorem, according to which “it is formally impossible, whatever the situation, that *everything* included (every subset) belongs to the situation” (Badiou, 1996, p. 85, emphasis added). Such a condition forces the thought to confront and try to resolve the excess of being where it is no longer exactly sayable. A thought is then defined as the desire to end the exorbitant excess of the state.

According to the philosopher, there are three orientations in thought: one of them is the transcendent one, which seeks to “differentiate a gigantic infinite that prescribes a hierarchical disposition where nothing

more could ramble” (Badiou, 1996, p. 226). In this case, there would be a representative multiple that, setting a stopping point for the wandering of thought, would close the multiplicities. Such a multiple would be the One, and transcendent thinking is oriented towards and through the One, in a way that is fond of, for example, theological experiences. The multiple being offered by mathematics to this orientation in thought is that of the doctrine of cardinals, which “bring together the virtual being that theologies require” (Badiou, 1996, p. 227).

The second is the constructivist orientation, thus named because it corresponds to Gödel’s doctrine of constructible sets, which “subordinates the judgment of existence to finite and controllable linguistic protocols” (Badiou, 1999, p. 54). Here, the state of the situation does not count all parts of the set. The meta-structure will only count “reasonable” representations in its field, leaving out the indiscernible ones. In this orientation, the state recognizes as part only what the very resources of the situation allow to distinguish. We could propose this would be, par excellence, the thinking orientation of the positivist sciences.

The third is the generic orientation, which “privileges undefined zones, multiples subtracted from some predicative collection, excess points, and subtractive attributions” (Badiou, 1999, p. 54). It identifies that the wandering of quantitative excess is the real of being: “The wandering of excess is, for generic thinking, the real of being, the being of being” (Badiou, 1991, p. 45). For this orientation, the essence of the situation in which the state operates is the indiscernible: “It is considered that what is representative of a situation is not what belongs distinctly to it, but what is evasively included in it” (Badiou, 1996, p. 226).

There is a fourth way, not named as an orientations, discernible, for example, in Marx and Freud: “It is transversal to the other three. In fact, it holds that the truth of the ontological impasse cannot be apprehended or thought of immanence to the ontology itself or to speculative metaontology” (Badiou, 1996, p. 227). Here, there is an unrepresented procedure of truth, a remainder left by mathematics and named by the philosopher as subject.

If we want to access a singularity in the psychoanalytic clinic, we must be careful that we do not give in to the inertia of our own, often transcendent and/or constructivist, thinking. For it is easier to think from a general One and or established protocols than to open oneself to singularities. And it is easier, by extension, to “lift our thinking” to some Supreme who releases us from the task of thinking and acting with the singular.

In striving to practice psychoanalysis as a science of the singular, which is nothing but a congruence to Freud’s original proposal, we strive not to be subjected to the constructivist and transcendent orientations of metaphysical meaning. If we say that a patient is this or that, if we refer to their clinical structure (neurotic,

perverse or psychotic) or modality of structure (hysterical, phobic, obsessive, melancholic, paranoid or schizophrenic), the “this/that” is at best a way of talking about one’s particularity, one of the ways that patient presents himself and thus appears to us as something. But this is still little in terms of achieving their distinctive mark, having as reference what is unique to them. One of the goals of psychoanalysis is to explore, with the analyzed, the immeasurable exercise of operationalizing oneself as a subject: “A subject-group is infinite” (Badiou, 1999, p. 173). Infinite in its multiplicity, in what it comprises as submultiples.

We consider the (partial) failure of Freud’s struggle for the recognition of the scientificity of his creation<sup>2</sup> is due to the fact that his historical moment was that of logical-experimental scientism and the affirmation and growth of the natural sciences as the only valid model of science (of course, to the ideologues of that kind of science). Now, more than a century after its outbreak, the truth of psychoanalysis as a science can be reexamined with reflective detachment. We need not abdicate its scientificity, just as Freud (1926/1980) did not abdicate<sup>3</sup>. Psychoanalysis is a science that cannot be reduced to the parameters of the hermeneutic sciences nor to the parameters imposed by the natural sciences (constructivist and/or transcendent). As for hermeneutics, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalyses are not reduced to it, even though they also work with interpretations – even if they do not fit any interpretation in the psychoanalytic clinic<sup>4</sup>.

S. Freud’s postulation of the unconscious was a singular event – in Badiou’s (1996) sense of “*événement*” – whose impact on Western culture is still felt today. In our view, Freud made a hole in the knowledge of medicine and the other sciences of his day. He has shown that there are indiscernible elements in one’s experience (which he calls the unconscious system) which can press and materialize as a distortion of consciousness in the form of dreams, jokes, lapses, sublimations and, in severe cases, in a pathological form (symptoms, psychological distress, “mental disorders” as naturalists say).

Freud’s work generated several loyalties. We have the Lacanian, Kleinian, Winnicottian, Laplanchean, among other schools (each often divided into subsets). This diversity, too, is a sign that psychoanalysis is on the order of a generic multiplicity. For what is proper

to the generic is that it is born from a singular event – in the case of psychoanalysis, all Freud’s work and intuition are involved in it –, and results in a multiple<sup>5</sup>: his theory, the schools, the extension of psychoanalysis to other fields of culture (mainly Western), as well as the truths postulated at each analysis of each new analyst-analyzed pair. This leads us to claim that there are psychoanalyses, not just psychoanalysis. Certainly, at least in the eyes of the authors of this text, some are more faithful to Freud and do not fail to study and re-study him (Lacan never ceased to be admittedly Freudian).

## Badiou’s theses on the universal

To join the Mathematics, which since *Being and Event* was already defined by Badiou (1996) as a science of being-as-being, the philosopher subsequently summons logic, understanding it as the “mathematical theory of possible universes or general theory of the cohesion of being-there, or even, theory of relational consistency of appearing” (Badiou, 1999, p. 189).

In 2004, Badiou (2008b) publishes “Eight theses on the universal”, a text in which he develops the following formulations: a universal has the thought its own element; it is inobjective, incalculable, singular, subtracted from identity predicates and originated from an event (*événement*). A universal unfolds from an event to a faithfulness; it is univocal as an act, it is open/unfinished, can also be defined as the decision of an undecidable, and it is the faithful construction of a subset of a situation, not determined by any situational predicate.

To say that a universal has thought as its own element means, first, to accept it in the simplest grammatical definition: a universal is a statement about a universe – that is, it is not the universe itself. Because it is inobjective, a universal has its own thought, not an object: “The universal is essentially inobjective” (Badiou, 2008b, p. 41).

However, says Badiou (2008b), a universal is a statement that, in front of all others already exposed and subsumed to hegemonic logic, decides in favor of a truth that subverts that logic and its constituted knowledge – the truthfulness, or the established knowledge that, in principle, in order to establish itself as such, had to reject the indiscernible truth of the universal that was at its origin. This subversive effect comes as a result of the subtraction of this statement from all identity predicates that establish and guarantee the cohesion of a world at any given time. “Every universal is presented, not as a regulation of the particular or of differences, but as a singularity subtracted from identity predicates” (Badiou, 2008b, p. 43).

2 Kyrillos Neto & Moreira (2010) remind us how the non-acceptance of psychoanalysis by the university scientific community disappointed Freud, which, according to Poli (2008), made him create the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). Freud himself (1925/2011) writes in his autobiography: “I have not often heard the scornful claim that one cannot take seriously a science whose main concepts are as inaccurate as those of libido and instinct in psychoanalysis” (p. 122).

3 He defended it as science in all his work. For example, in writing an entry about his creation for the Encyclopedia Britannica, Freud (1926/1980) names it “the science of unconscious mental processes” (p. 302).

4 “For an interpretation to be fair, it has to be specific, because it is not about giving rise to any signifier, but the repressed signifier” (World Association of Psychoanalysis, 1996, p. 351).

5 “Here the central category is generic multiplicity. It finds the Platonism of the multiple, allowing one to think of a truth at the same time as a multiple result of a singular procedure, and as a puncture, or subtraction, in the field of the nameable” (Badiou, 1991, p. 64).

A universal – or a statement that presents itself as concerning an entire universe – is a logical and univocal act (Badiou, 2008b) that, by its singularity, results in the questioning and subversion of everything that was established around it as truthfulness. But this logical act depends on a fidelity, a subject-thinking that, deciding for a truth, creates a network of consequences from it. This is what Freud did as he became aware of the unconscious, copiously writing and publishing his “*insights*”, creating the Society of Wednesdays, founding the IPA, and so on. This thought-subject is what sustains the statement about a universe: “the subject is each time summoned as thought at a point in the procedure in which the universal is constituted” (Badiou, 2008b, p. 41).

A true statement about a universe goes from an eventual/event statement to a consequence that is loyalty. To be faithful is to subjectivize an event, which decides on an undecidable zone. It is what punctures the encyclopedic or established knowledge (the truthfulness cited above), causing subversion by means of a statement, of the value previously attributed to the real of the situation on which something was decided.

The statement that decides by the process of a truth, or the process of a universal, does not depend on acquired knowledge; the truth “is intransitive to knowledge and even ... is essentially not known. Which is one of the possible senses of its unconscious character” (Badiou, 2008b, p. 42). Just as unconscious and independent of what a subject assumes to know about himself and others are some psychic processes revealed by psychoanalysis.

Universality and singularity come together defined as “the act which, chaining a subject-thought, proves capable of opening a procedure of radical modification of logic and, therefore, of what appears as it appears” (Badiou, 2008b, p. 49). Would Freud’s inaugural act on the unconscious find better definition?

But if we say that a universal is a statement about a universe, we must ask: what is this, a universe? In Badiou (1999), it is a logically thinkable *topos*. *Topos* is a mathematical concept belonging to and included in a theory (*topoi* theory) which, along with Cantor and Cohen’s set theory, is pointed out by Badiou (1999) as the “silent event” that fundamentally altered the presentation style of contemporary logics. *Topoi* and set theory become important because they represent, for Badiou (1999), the best alternative to the linguistic turn of twentieth-century philosophy, promoted mainly by Heidegger and Wittgenstein: “We can draw Logics from its grammatical status, separate it from what we today call ‘the linguistic turn’ of contemporary philosophy” (Badiou, 1999, p. 183). Such a turn would almost have ended philosophy itself, since, with Heidegger and his “step back,” it would have meant a shift in philosophy more to the poetic than to the task of thinking.

That psychoanalysis can use, in continuity with the work of J. Lacan, the topological theory and/or set theory to demonstrate its scientificity, this is the task that is open

and ongoing for many of its practitioners, highlighting Amster (2010); Darmon (1994); Granon-Lafont (1990); and Mazzuca, Schejtman and Zlotnik (2000).

## The transcendental: universality without ontotheology

In *Logics of Worlds*, 2006, Badiou (2008a) presents us with a concept of universal that avoids ontotheological thinking. That is the “transcendental”, an operative concept that would make sense of degrees of difference in intensity between one entity and another within the same world:

What is measured or evaluated by the transcendental organization of a world is, in fact, the degree of intensity of the difference of apparition, in that world, of two entities, not an intensity of apparition considered “in itself”<sup>6</sup>. (p. 145, our translation)

With it, one does not resort to any entity “itself”, including, in this category, any Supreme Being, *cause sui* which, in Heidegger (1996), would be God and the principle of all ontotheology. Badiou (2013) demonstrates in the seminar “The Immanence of Truths” that thinking with the “transcendental” is a strategy that need not include a separate transcendent, which he identifies with God:

From the point of view of conceptual strategy, it is for us to show that universal truths can exist without having to resort to a separate transcendence; this is what the immanence of truth means. We want to preserve the access of a thought to universality without, to do so, having to summon another world, which amounts to rescuing the very category of absolute, from its long complicity with theology. . . . The separate transcendence envisioned here is that of God’s existence<sup>7</sup>. (our translation).

A multiple thought of as such is one, which is not the theological One. It is a synonym for the appearing atom that is real: “The One – the atom – is the point of upholstery – *point de capiton* – of appearing in being. It is a postulate . . . which is stated very simply: every atom of appearing is real”<sup>8</sup> (Badiou, 2008a, p. 247, our

6 In the original: “lo que es medido o evaluado por la organización transcendental de un mundo es, de hecho, el grado de intensidad de la diferencia de aparición, en esse mundo, de dos entes, y no una intensidad de aparición considerada ‘en si’”.

7 In the original: “Du point de vue de la stratégie conceptuelle, il s’agit pour nous de montrer qu’il peut exister des vérités universelles sans avoir recours à une *transcendance séparée*; c’est cela que signifie « l’immanence des vérités ». Nous voulons préserver l’accès de la pensée à l’universalité sans pour autant avoir à convoquer un autre monde, ce qui revient à délivrer la catégorie même d’absolu de sa longue complicité avec la théologie... La transcendance séparée ici visée, c’est celle de l’existence de Dieu”.

8 In the original: “lo Uno – el átomo – es el punto de almohadillado – *point de capiton* – del aparecer en el ser. Se trata de un postulado . . . que si enuncia muy simplemente: todo átomo de aparecer es real”.



translation). We would prefer, perhaps, to write “lo Uno” without the first character of the capital “Uno”, which, in its own image, could refer the reader to something absolute, grandiose, and ultimately theological.

Thus we see that, in Badiou – in line with Heidegger in this respect –, the access of thought to a universality is detached from God or from the identification of being with God. A universal, or a thought about a universe, need not resort to God, either directly or by its disguised identification with any other element to which the supposed omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence usually conferred upon it (this is what one might do – and often is done – with science, for example). For these philosophers, we would have to deal with the elements of our world without resorting to a transcendent Whole that would save or act as the guarantor of any human project.

Reinterpreting the paradox of philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell, transmitted to Frege in 1902, concerning the impossibility of the existence of the set of all sets<sup>9</sup>, and broadening the scope of what relates in it “The Whole” and the inconsistency of “The Universe”, Badiou (2008a) writes: “It is not true that a well-defined concept necessarily corresponds to all the objects falling under that concept”<sup>10</sup> (p. 177, our translation). Similarly, on the subject of our research on the scientificity of psychoanalysis and as its necessary premise – since, at first, we have to solve the problem of what the sciences are –, we would propose not to be true that under the currently hegemonic concept of “Science” necessarily corresponds to everything we might consider to be science. This concept, based on Anglo-Saxon epistemology and created by those who practice it according to hypothetical-deductive and logical-experimental methods, does not contemplate other sciences that are made differently, either by ignoring them, or by ignoring their foundations or, simply because they prefer to disregard them. It is up to these sciences, just as we are trying to do about psychoanalysis, to demonstrate their scientificity and thus propose a modification of the hegemonic concept.

Badiou (1972), in his first philosophical work dating from 1969, *The concept of model*, already wrote in a way as to avoid a concept of science that was ontotheological, in the sense of claiming to be universalizing for all sciences: “We show that speaking of science was a symptom of ideology. Also is truly speaking of ideology in the singular. Science and ideology

are plural” (p. 13). It is this pluralism of the sciences that we also defend. Avoiding, however, the relativism.

Badiou’s (1972) pluralism is neither relativism – perhaps resulting in a skeptical position – nor a reference to vague elements – perhaps reflecting or leading to a metaphysical position in the sense denounced by Heidegger’s (1996) philosophy. For in his philosophy every element taken into consideration about any world – for example, a song that causes us to experience art, or any scientific inquiry – has to be understood and/or referred to as its own multiple and as what it has of relational, since it is part of sets. “Relational,” not “relativistic.”

### For an affirmation of the scientificity of psychoanalysis

If the particular universe of the now predominant hypothetical-deductive and logical-experimental modern sciences takes as reference the predictions that those sciences define to establish the universality of the scientific field, we could now propose, in line with psychoanalysis, a conception of science whose “For all” is the exception to the wise classifications and hierarchies that each and every scientific field creates individually to organize itself.

We think of a conception of science that would not propose itself as the transcendent One of them all, but a conception in which the sciences would only be universalized in a hypothetical future of the past, after proving, step by step, what in the endless fields in which each of them locally operationalized would have uniquely thrown them, into a “for all”. A conception of science that, instead of departing from the universal to the particular, goes the other way, projecting from the local towards the universal – which implies operating as opaque knowledge in terms of one’s own ability to learn. Each of the sciences would thus have, as its goal, a knowledge about itself to be constructed, elucidated, and which would present itself not as a totalizing (transcendent) predication, but as the incomprehensible generic (immanent) element that would define that territory.

With psychoanalysis, we are in the field of “*object a*” and *sinthoma*, signs of what in each one indicates their own unconscious way of enjoying and desiring. This, in the eyes of psychoanalysis, is what makes each *discourse* radically different; this is something that can be produced through a procedure of scientific truth (psychoanalytic), whose conception of the universe is not guided by the unified Whole on which the natural Sciences are based. They seek to gather all men beyond their animality of being born, growing, reproducing, and dying, into a Single identity principle of ways of thinking and feeling. Quoting, rather than paraphrasing França Neto (2009), we will say that for psychoanalysis the universal is not in identity, but in what, diagonally, causes a breach and subverts its enclosure, thus undoing the totality of the situation and circulating the desire.

9 “Suppose there is  $\{x:x \notin x\}$  that is, there is the set of all sets that are not an element of themselves. Let  $S$  be such a set. Or that  $S \in S$  or  $S \notin S$ . Now let us see that in both cases we run into a contradiction. If  $S \in S$ , by the way  $S$  is defined (any of its element verifies the property of not being its own element) we conclude that  $S \notin S$ , which is absurd. If  $S \notin S$ , again by the definition of  $S$ , so  $S$  does not verify the property of not being an element of itself, i.e.  $S$  is an element of itself, i.e.  $S \in S$ . Absurd” (Ferreira, 1998).

10 In the original: “no es verdad que a un concepto bien definido le corresponda necesariamente el conjunto de los objetos que caen bajo esse concepto”.

Psychoanalysis is not about taking someone as comparable to others in any dimension – which, if taken seriously (in series), would, on the one hand, get them further lost in the games of the imaginary and its representations, and on the other, it would make them lose themselves in the cult of their individuality and in the uncompromising defense of their own particularities. Not at all. Psychoanalysis is a science that tries to put the subject in a position *to discover to which* has he/she remained faithful without realizing it, and which has probably not been easy for him/her or those around them. The breadth of the political consequences of this discovery, as far as the *polis* is concerned, will be, as always, entirely the responsibility of each subject's choices.

If, as we have been proposing, psychoanalysis is a science of the singular, then we should explain. Singular here is understood as the moment of an analysis that arises for the analyst-analyzed pair the *synthoma* of the latter – the unique way they have (and each one has) to tense in their body, in their psychic apparatus, the truth about their joy and desire. Singular is this passage of that which did not exist for the conscious state to the existing condition, and which, in relation to it, is preserved opaque to its knowledge, constituting a subject as fidelity to this trait, named by *synthoma*, and that is there to be explored. It was not there, but it was already “there,” in an unconscious void that allowed only the various names of suffering to appear (anguish, melancholy, phobias, delusions, anorexia, self-mutilation etc.).

On the other hand, that of universality, we will say that psychoanalysis obeys a subtractive logic in relation to established knowledge, not constructivist or transcendent, as occurs in the hypothetical-deductive and logical-experimental sciences, in which a “solid” and generalizable knowledge of something that already existed beforehand, just to be discovered, is built brick by brick. The universal of psychoanalysis is, on the one hand, what makes a hole in the knowledge that the analyzed has about themselves, and, on the other hand, what makes a hole in the knowledge the transcendental-metaphysical and/or constructivist sciences construct about nature when they take man as a natural object. Discussing a new methodology for psychoanalysis and reflecting on the debate of Badiou and Milner on science and universality, França Neto (2015) notes that “if we were

to bring scientificity to psychoanalysis, we should think of a universality that, instead of referring to in a ‘for all’ that presents itself as outside the cave, it would appear as a hole in the field of the wholified universal” (p. 207).

At least in Freud's science, declaring a *universal* – which, as we have seen, means declaring a thought about a universe – is different from declaring that it is universalizable, if we understand as ‘universalizable’ the establishment of an identity singularity. As Badiou (2009) observes in writing about the apostle Paul, if we can say that every singularity, as a form of truth presenting itself, is immediately universalizable, it is nonetheless characterized by breaking with the identity singularity: “a process of truth can no longer anchor itself in the identity. For if it is true that all truth arises as singular, its singularity is immediately universalizable. The universalizable singularity necessarily breaks with the identity singularity” (p. 18). Declaring a universal is different from generalizing, situating a “world” in the dialectic between the general and the particular; this procedure, rejected by the philosopher, is as the positivist conceives: “to think is to question the dialectic between the local (subject) and the global (procedure), and not between the general and the particular as in Hegel's positivism” (Badiou, 2008b, p. 41). For Badiou, the question is rather between the local and the global, or between a subject and a procedure of truth.

Strictly thinking, we may argue that declaring the universality of a scientific theory in the sense of a generalization does not serve “wholly” even to the conclusion of the nonhuman beings surveyed. Physics itself recognizes that its “laws” about nature have a limited universalization/generalization range, when, for example, in cosmology it precisely defines *singularity* as a “region of spacetime where the currently known laws of physics collapse” (Mourão, 1987, p. 738).

It should not be a coincidence that astrophysicists look to topological figures, such as the Möebius band, for explanatory models of the problems involving spacetime. As Lacan (1960-1961/1992) did with the unconscious<sup>11</sup>. The good problematization must also pass through the mathematics. But the answers, as far as the human being, will be constructed by each one, in a very own process, truly unheard of; one could even say, as Badiou (1996), eventural.

## Singular e universal em Alain Badiou e a hipótese da cientificidade da psicanálise

**Resumo:** Este trabalho apresenta a hipótese da cientificidade da psicanálise a partir de uma reflexão sobre as concepções de singular e de universal do filósofo contemporâneo Alain Badiou. Sem pretensão de esgotar tais conceitos e, antes, propondo uma abertura ao debate, faremos apontamentos em duas direções. Na primeira, apresentaremos o conceito de singular e o fragmento de um caso clínico ilustrativo. Nesse âmbito, refletiremos sobre as “orientações no pensamento” propostas pelo filósofo e sobre os possíveis lugares de Freud e da psicanálise nesta categorização. Na direção do conceito de universal, apresentaremos as teses

11 In *Seminar 8*, Lacan (1960-1961/1992) calls for a “just topology” to address transference. It is the topology that will underlie the foundation of an ethic of desire, a “rational ethic” (p. 102).



de Badiou e o modo como o filósofo evita a ontoteologia presente, por exemplo, nas ciências modernas. Finalizaremos com uma proposta de como a psicanálise apropria-se dos conceitos de singular e de universal para se diferenciar das outras ciências.

**Palavras-chave:** singular, universal, ciência, psicanálise.

### **Singulier et universel chez Alain Badiou et l'hypothèse de la scientificité de la psychanalyse**

**Résumé:** Ce travail a pour but de présenter l'hypothèse de la scientificité de la psychanalyse à partir d'une réflexion sur les conceptions de singulier et d'universel du philosophe contemporain Alain Badiou. Sans vouloir épuiser les thèmes proposés et en suggérant plutôt une ouverture du débat, nous formulerons des remarques en deux directions. Dans la première, seront présentés le concept de singulier et un fragment d'un cas clinique illustratif. Ensuite, nous réfléchirons sur les « orientations dans la pensée » proposées par le philosophe et sur les possibles lieux occupés par Freud et par la psychanalyse dans cette catégorisation. Dans la direction du concept d'universel, seront présentés les thèses de Badiou et la manière par laquelle le philosophe évite l'onto-théologie présente, par exemples dans les sciences modernes. Nous terminerons par une proposition de comment la psychanalyse s'approprie des concepts de singulier et d'universel pour se distinguer d'autres sciences.

**Mots-clés:** singulier, universel, science, psychanalyse.

### **El singular y lo universal en Alain Badiou y la hipótesis de la cientificidad del psicoanálisis**

**Resumen:** Este trabajo presenta la hipótesis de la cientificidad del psicoanálisis a partir de una reflexión sobre las concepciones de singular y de universal del filósofo contemporáneo Alain Badiou. Sin la intención de agotar los temas propuestos y, antes, proponiendo una apertura al debate, realizaremos notas en dos direcciones. En la primera, son presentados el concepto de singular y un fragmento de un caso clínico ilustrativo. Enseguida, reflexionaremos sobre las "orientaciones en el pensamiento" propuestas por el filósofo y sobre los posibles lugares de Freud y del psicoanálisis en aquella categorización. En la dirección del concepto de universal, se presentan las tesis de Badiou y el modo cómo el filósofo evita la ontoteología presente, por ejemplo, en las ciencias modernas. Finalizamos con una propuesta de cómo el psicoanálisis se adueña de los conceptos de singular y de universal para diferenciarse de otras ciencias.

**Palabras clave:** singular, universal, ciencia, psicoanálisis.

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