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Strhan, Anna (2010) The Obliteration of Truth by Management: Badiou, St. Paul and the Question of Economic Managerialism in Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42 (2). pp. 230-250. ISSN 0013-1857.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00534.x>

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The Obliteration of Truth by Management: Badiou, St Paul and the question of economic managerialism in education

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42(2), 230-250 available online:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00534.x/abstract>

Abstract

This paper considers the questions that Badiou's theory poses to the culture of economic managerialism within education. His argument that radical change is possible, for people and the situations they inhabit, provides a stark challenge to the stifling nature of much current educational debate. In Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, Badiou describes the current universalism of capitalism, monetary homogeneity and the rule of the count. Badiou argues that the politics of identity are all too easily subsumed by the prerogatives of the marketplace and unable to present, therefore, a critique of the status quo. These processes are, he argues, without the potential for truth. What are the implications of Badiou's claim that education is the arranging of 'the forms of knowledge in such a way that truth may come to pierce a hole in them' (Badiou, 2005, p. 9)? I will argue that Badiou's theory opens up space for a kind of thinking about education that resists its colonisation by the cultures of management and marketisation and leads educationalists to consider the emancipatory potential of education in a refreshing new light.

Introduction

The only education is an education *by* truths. (Badiou, 2005, p.14)

truth is a process, and not an illumination. In order to think it, one requires three concepts: one that names the subject at the point of declaration (*pistis* generally translated as 'faith,' but which is more appropriately rendered as 'conviction'); one that names the subject at the point of his conviction's militant address (*agapē*, generally translated as 'charity,' but more appropriately rendered as 'love'); lastly, one that names the subject according to the force of displacement conferred upon him through the assumption of the truth's procedure's *completed* character (*elpis*, generally translated as 'hope,' but more appropriately rendered as 'certainty'). (Badiou, 2003a, p. 15)

Pistis, agapē, elpis: theological concepts that sound strange, unfamiliar, scandalous within contemporary educational theory and philosophy. Yet, as we see in the quotation above from Alain Badiou's highly provocative *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, these concepts assume fundamental significance in his presentation of the nature of truth and subjectivity, fundamental to his conception of what education is. Education, for Badiou, is an education by truths, but to think what truth is, he suggests that we need the concepts 'conviction', 'love' and 'certainty'. Elsewhere, Badiou describes education as the process of arranging 'the forms of

knowledge in such a way that truth may come to pierce a hole in them.’ (Badiou, 2005, p. 9) What then are we to make of Badiou’s notion of education as an education *by truths*, and furthermore, why would such an idea be helpful for thinking about education, given the way that current educational thinking is predominantly structured by alternative discourses, emphasizing such concepts as performance and assessment, or inclusion and the politics of identity? In what follows, I will outline why Badiou’s use of Saint Paul provides an opening for an educational discourse that challenges the prevailing hegemony of managerialism and performativity within education. I will consider why this hegemony is problematic, and some of the responses that have been posed to these discourses, for example from the Critical Theory and postcolonial discussion of exclusions and marginalization. After considering why Badiou rejects these discourses, I will show how Badiou’s conception of education provides us with an opportunity to re-envision the very nature of educational practice and some of the possible practical implications of this approach.

Why Paul? Weaving new fabric out of a ripped yarn

Given that it is unusual to find the epistles and biography of Saint Paul as the subject of a study by a contemporary philosopher, and possibly even more rare to find reference to a religious saint in a journal of educational philosophy, why does *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* among Badiou’s works have any significance for our thinking about the issues of managerialism and performativity within education? In arguably his most vivid and concrete exploration of the process of subjectivity, Badiou shows how Christ’s resurrection was for Paul an ‘event.’ Through the paradigmatic figure of Paul, Badiou considers how the event and the subject’s fidelity to it emerge against a background state of a situation. Through comparing Paul’s position with the current state of the situation, which we will examine later, Badiou reveals the ways in which late capitalism’s exchange system is without capacity for truth. This is vital for our understanding of how Badiou’s notion of education – as an education by truths - challenges the pedagogical problems related to the dominance of economic managerialism and performativity. Thus, Badiou allows us to consider what truth procedures might mean within a situation of education dominated by the discourses of the market. If these are my reasons for choosing, in this paper, to question the dominant educational discourses through Badiou’s examination of Paul, why does Badiou himself choose to examine Paul?

To allay suspicions of a latent missionary agenda in Badiou’s choice of Paul at the outset, it should be emphasised that Badiou is not interested in Paul in relation to theology or religion: ‘For me, truth be told, Paul is not an apostle or a saint. I care nothing for the Good News he declares, or the cult dedicated to him’ (Badiou, 2003a, p. 1). What he finds of interest in Paul is Paul the ‘poet-thinker’ reflecting upon what it is to be subject to an event which has ruptured his former ways of thinking and being, his epistles representing the struggle to work out what fidelity to that truth-event means for him and for the churches he founded. Furthermore, precisely because Paul’s faith in the Christ-event is alien to Badiou himself, it allows Badiou to demonstrate that the meaning of the event may only be recognised as constituted by the subject for whom it becomes an event. Simon Critchley puts this point clearly:

Badiou’s choice of Paul as paradigm for the event is all the more compelling because his act of faith is so strange to the modern atheist...

The choice of Paul is intended to show the extreme subject-dependency of the event, that is, that the event is not reducible to the act of a subject, but that the event is only visible as such to the subject who acts in such a way as to pledge themselves to the event. (2005, p. 226)

It is precisely, therefore, *because* the resurrection is a ‘fable’ for Badiou that it draws attention to the question of belief / faith, ‘or that which is presupposed beneath the word *pistis*’ (Badiou, 2003a, p. 5). And it is through showing what *pistis* means for Paul that Badiou is able to demonstrate that the Pauline figure of the subject offers genuine revolutionary potential: a potential actualized through his refusal to submit to the order of the existing situation and, in being faithful to the event, his struggle to work and live for a new world. As Badiou argues, Paul’s subjectivity in relation to the event of Christ’s resurrection demonstrates the necessity to reorganize existing knowledge in light of the event as expressed through his Gospels. Why, however, does Badiou claim that Paul speaks particularly to our *contemporary* situation?

In ‘Paul: Our Contemporary’, Badiou provides his answer. The significance of Paul, for Badiou, is his unprecedented gesture of ‘subtracting truth from a communitarian grasp, be that of a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a social class’ (Badiou, 2003a, p. 5). Truth as universal singularity for Badiou is manifest within a world of difference, but cuts through that difference: ‘What matters, man or woman, Jew or Greek, slave or free man, is that differences *carry the universal that happens to them like a grace*’ (p. 106). Thus, truth as universal singularity, entirely subjective, ruptures and necessitates a reappropriation of prevailing abstractions and particularist protests. For Paul, these were the legal abstractions of being a Roman citizen and the various identities asserted within that realm (even those using identities to protest against that realm). Badiou explains the prevailing abstraction that operates for us today in terms of the (false) universality of the rule of the market, subsuming within it even discourses which might appear to subvert it. Ray Brassier (2004) puts this point well:

Integrated global capitalism is a machine – and a machine is nothing other than an automated axiomatic system – but an astonishingly supple and adaptive one, singularized by its fluidity, its metamorphic plasticity. Whenever confronted by a limit or anomaly, capitalism has the wherewithal – the intelligence? – to invent a new axiom in order to incorporate the unexpected, constantly reconfiguring its parameters by adding a supplementary axiom through which it can continue expanding its own frontiers. (2004, p. 53)

For Badiou, the purely abstracted quantitative universality of monetary exchange is without potential for truths in the realm of political thinking and processes:

No, we will not allow the rights of true-thought to have as their only instance monetarist free exchange and its mediocre political appendage, capitalist-parliamentarianism, whose squalor is ever more poorly dissimulated behind the fine word ‘democracy.’ (Badiou, 2003a, p. 7)

Under the universality of the market, Badiou also describes in *Saint Paul* how the politics of identity and particularist protests are subsumed. His notion of truth as universal singularity is aimed at exposing what he sees as the deficiency of the cultural and historical relativisations of the question of truth. This he sees as part of the current state of the situation, comparable to the state of the situation for Paul. Truth and thus thought, he argues, have been reduced ‘to a linguistic form, judgment’, which rejects this universalism. In this situation, Badiou argues that all forms of the cultural and historical relativisations of the question of truth operate under the abstraction of monetary exchange and the rule of the market, a process he describes as without truth:

What is the real unifying factor behind this attempt to promote the cultural virtue of oppressed subsets, this invocation of language in order to extol communitarian particularisms (which, besides language, always ultimately refer back to race, religion, or gender)? It is, evidently, monetary abstraction, whose false universality has absolutely no difficulty accommodating the kaleidoscope of communitarianisms. (pp. 6-7)

The pervasiveness of the rule of the market in the current situation, comparable to Paul’s, is all-encompassing. This rule of exchange, the system that seeks to liquidate ‘everything substantial according to a rule of universal exchangeability’ appears to know no limits, to constantly redefine its boundaries:

there is an extension of the automatisms of capital, fulfilling one of Marx’s inspired predictions: the world finally *configured*, but as a market, as a world-market. This configuration imposes the rule of an abstract homogenization. Everything that circulate falls under the unity of a count, while inversely, only what lets itself be counted in this way can circulate. (pp. 9-10)

Badiou considers at length the way in which the abstract rule of circulation – ‘only what counts will be counted: only what can be counted counts’ - absorbs within itself the relativist ideology that accompanies the process of fragmentation and differentiation of identity. The creation of differing identities ‘creates a figure that provides a material for investment by the market’ (p. 10). Indeed, the market requires the appearance of difference or non-equivalence so that the equivalence of exchange can constitute a process. Thus, he provocatively writes:

What inexhaustible potential for mercantile investments in this upsurge – taking the form of communities demanding recognition and so-called cultural singularities – of women, homosexuals, the disabled, Arabs! And these infinite combinations of predicative traits, what a god-send! Black homosexuals, disabled Serbs, Catholic pedophiles, moderate Muslims, married priests, ecologist yuppies, the submissive unemployed, prematurely aged youth! Each time, a social image authorizes new products, specialized magazines, improved shopping malls, ‘free’ radio stations... Deleuze put it perfectly: capitalist deterritorialization requires a constant reterritorialization. (p. 10)

It is important to note that Badiou is not in any way ‘against’ difference or the creation of different identities. His seeming criticism of the politics of identity relates to the way in which the politics of identity can lead to particularism, and the privileging of some groups over others. He clearly states that difference is the inevitable state of the world: ‘in the situation (call it: the world), *there are differences*. One can even maintain that there is nothing else.’ (p. 98) However, in relation to capitalism, his main contention is that the politics of identity feeds the system of global exchange on the one hand and thereby denies any possibility for the critique of the system on the other. As he asserts, the identities that are configured ‘never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market.’ (p. 11)

This interplay of the homogenization of the global market and the permanent process of the creation of (new) cultural and territorial identities is, for Badiou, without the potential for truths. Indeed, they are *hostile* to truth procedures and this is demonstrated by ‘nominal occlusions’:

The name ‘culture’ comes to obliterate that of ‘art.’ The word ‘technology’ obliterates the word ‘science.’ The word ‘management’ obliterates the word ‘politics.’ The word ‘sexuality’ obliterates love. The ‘culture-technology-management-sexuality’ system, which has the immense merit of being homogenous to the market, and all of whose terms designate a category of commercial presentation, constitutes the modern nominal occlusion of the ‘art-science-politics-love’ system, which identifies truth procedures typologically. (Badiou, 2003a, p. 12)

How then is it possible to step outside of the dominant hegemony? Is it possible at all? Badiou provides us with the example of Paul as a subject to truth and shows us how for Paul, the truth of the resurrection, experienced as a universal singularity, pierced through the prevailing abstractions (i.e., Roman Empire) and particularisms of his situation (i.e. Citizen, Jew, Gentile). A truth, according to Badiou, is not structural, axiomatic or legal. And significantly and controversially in the current state of the situation in which the question of truth is relativised, Badiou argues that a truth cuts through every communitarian subset as a universality. At the same time, a truth is radically subjective in that it is experienced by the subject for who recognises an event as such. Thus Badiou states:

Truth is diagonal relative to every communitarian subset; it neither claims authority from, nor (this is obviously the most delicate point) constitutes any identity. It is offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer of this address. (p. 14)

Conditions of identity clearly do exist, but, as Badiou states, truths are universal and do not belong to any particularist subset of identity or the false universalism of economic exchange.

[U]ltimately it is a case of mobilizing a universal singularity both against the prevailing abstractions (legal then [in Paul’s time], economic now), and against communitarian or particularist protest. (p. 14).

In relation to Paul as paradigmatic figure for Badiou, such prior conditions of particularist identity and the very categories of knowledge were called into question by the universality of the Christ-event. This is why Paul can proclaim in Galatians 3: 28 ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ,’ The truth of the event and the practical working out of what fidelity to that event means as the process of subjectivity, displace and distance the subject from these legal abstractions, particularisms of identity and the apparatus of opinion. So in relation to our contemporary situation, truth as universal singularity cannot belong to the count of capitalism. The truth of the event is here ‘entirely subjective (it is of the order of a declaration that testifies to a conviction relative to the event)’ (p. 14): for Paul, the truth event of the resurrection is not established through what would have been for him the ‘objective’ categories of Jewish Law or Greek Logos, and indeed, the Christ-event leads to a critique of these laws, a critique which, as Badiou points out has become both obsolete and harmful. So, as stated, it is not Paul’s message that Badiou sees as harbouring potential for delineating the nature of subjectivity, but rather Paul the subject who has experienced the Christ-event as entirely subjective and yet universal in its appeal, necessitating a radical reappropriation of the structures of knowledge and identity and working out what that fidelity actually means.

What then does this mean for education? In *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou links education to the event of truth disrupting the established forms of knowledge and the state of the situation:

‘education’ (save in its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that truth may come to pierce a hole in them. (2005, p. 9)

He elaborates further:

[T]he only education is an education by truths. (p. 14)

In other words, according to Badiou, education references a process of subjectivity, in that education involves truth piercing through established forms of knowledge and the subject’s subsequent reappropriation of those structures of knowledge in the light of the event. Here, truth and, by implication, education, are processes rather than illuminations: ‘now we see only in a glass darkly’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). A truth-procedure is the practical working out of what fidelity to the event means, a process both instituted in the event and yet still being worked out. It is fidelity to the event that is the process of subjectivity. The event itself is not a teaching or something that can be known, but is rather pure gift, ‘a kind of laicized grace.’ (Hallward, 2003, p. 115)

The subject is thus, for Badiou, ‘constituted by evental grace’ (Badiou, 2003a, p. 63): the event and its truth cannot be contained within the rule of exchange and the market and indeed grace bursts asunder the economy of monetary exchange. The event is pure contingent gift and not something that could be demanded or the result of my own action, and cannot be contained even by thought: ‘Thought can be raised up from its powerlessness only through something that exceeds the order of thought.’ (pp. 84-85) It is important to note that this is not simply a secular colonisation of the Christian

tradition in terms of the old ‘true/false consciousness’ debate in Marxism: ‘Know the truth and the truth will set you free.’ No: Paul is paradigmatic for Badiou because he illustrates the entirely subjective nature of the event as that which is both a singularity and a universal. It is a singularity because it could only occur in particular circumstances, but universal in that an event is a potential for all. Badiou’s discussion of Paul’s articulation of the meaning of the event for him shows that truth-procedures involve the radical reassessment of the forms of knowledge we have inherited. Subjectivity as the working out of the conditions of fidelity to an event cannot simply be reduced to a true/false dichotomy.

It is important to emphasise that the event here is not the reification of some sort of epiphany, comparable to a road to Emmaus type experience. In *Ethics* (2001), Badiou gives a useful clarification of what we are to understand by the terms event, fidelity and truth as he uses them:

The three major dimensions of a truth-process are as follows:

- the *event*, which brings to pass ‘something other’ than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges; the event is a hazardous, unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears;
- the *fidelity*, which is the name of the process: it amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself; it is an immanent and continuing break;
- the *truth* as such, that is, the multiple, internal to the situation, that the fidelity constructs, bit by bit; it is what the fidelity gathers together and produces. (pp. 67-68)

Badiou goes on, in *Ethics*, to discuss the Haydn-event in classical music as a concrete example of these terms useful for thinking through their application to education. The event is ontologically situated: with the Haydn-event, the emergence of the classical style is situated in a situation governed by the baroque style. The event reveals the void at the heart of the state of the current situation, a void that could not be perceived within the state of the situation prior to the event. Within the baroque style, the void, according to Badiou, was ‘the absence [*vide*] of a genuine conception of musical architectonics. The Haydn-event occurs as a kind of naming of this absence’ (p. 68). The event then necessitates the reordering of the knowledges that have been disrupted by the event, which is the construction of truth. Following the Haydn-event, new musical knowledge was organized around the classical style, knowledge that could not have been formulated prior to this event. This reorganisation of knowledges subsequent to the event Badiou describes as the forcing of knowledges:

A truth punches a ‘hole’ in knowledges, it is heterogenous to them, but it is also the sole known source of new knowledges. We shall say that the truth *forces* knowledges. The verb *to force* indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks that sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning. If a truth is never communicable as such, it nevertheless implies, at a distance from itself, powerful reshaping of the forms and referents of communication. (p. 70)

Although knowledges are forced by the event, and the truth procedure takes place through the reworking of new knowledges in the immediacy of the situation, the event itself is a grace that could not be forced. In response to this gift, the working out of the conditions of fidelity to the event in which I become a subject, I am an agent of change. The subject then emerges in the process of subjectivization, the transformation that takes place through the actions of the individual in response to the event that took place, which was, for them, a gift. The investigation by the subject of the consequences of the event that occurred and disrupted the economy of exchange as pure gift, as Feltham and Clemens note, ‘entails not only the active transformation of the situation in which the event occurs but also the active transformation of the situation of the human being’ (cited in Badiou, 2003c, p. 7). Thus education, in *this* view, entails this process of a transformation that necessarily breaks the closed totality of the economy of monetary exchange.

Within this conception of subjectivity the subject needs to reappropriate the meaning of the structures that have been disrupted by the truth procedure in ‘not... but,’ articulation. This is to weave a new fabric out of the ripped yarn of the situation. Eric Santner describes this idea clearly:

[H]uman subjects undergo tears in the fabric of their lives, tears that, in principle, allow not simply for new choices of objects of desire, but rather for the radical restructuring of the coordinates of desire, for genuine changes of direction in life. Ethical consistency will mean something like the creation of new fabric *out of a tear*. (2005, p. 110)

This idea raises the question of the extent to which formal education, as currently woven with the yarns of economic managerialism, performativity and marketisation, might allow truth to break through and the subject to weave new fabrics with their lives. If education, according to Badiou’s definition, involves the tearing and breaking of the current coordinates of the state of the situation, to what extent is this actually possible within the current environment, dominated by market policy?

The economy of exchange and the marketization and customerisation of education

I’m only here [at school] to get good enough grades to go a good university, so that I can get a good job and earn decent money one day. And it’s the teacher’s job to make sure I get those grades.

These words, spoken to me by a 17 year-old student at a school in an affluent area of west London over five years ago, could be seen as reflecting the pervasiveness of the ‘customerisation’ of teaching and learning, stemming from the prevailing ideologies of marketisation and managerialism within education. This student saw the school as the provider of his education, reflected in the ‘good grades’ he desired that would enable him to achieve his career goal of ‘earning decent money.’ The application of business models leading to a managerialistic approach to the organisation of formal education, with an emphasis on production-oriented service delivery is already well documented (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin, 2000, Apple, 2001, Preston, 2001, Bridges and Jonathan, 2003, Love, 2008). Even if such language sits uneasily with many, it is now commonplace for students or their parents to be described as the

‘consumers’ of education (the product), which is ‘delivered’ by the ‘providers’ (schools, universities). Bridges and Jonathan give several examples to demonstrate how in the UK, for example, the Labour government has shown just as great an enthusiasm for the application of market principles to education as its Tory predecessors:

extending rather than limiting parental choice of schools and the assessment and league tables that are supposed to inform such choice; enabling popular schools to expand; introducing student fees in the context of higher education, and showing some favor toward universities that wish to introduce differential charging; and taking on teachers’ unions in a battle over performance-related pay (2003, p. 126).

They describe the conditions for this ‘marketisation’ of education as the creation of diversity and choice and the placing of information and purchasing power in the hands of the ‘consumer’. This process of the marketisation of education has been widely documented across North America and in Britain, but is no longer solely a feature of the Anglo-American liberal conservatism that has held sway across North America, the UK and Australasia. Bridges and Jonathan point out that ‘regimes in such diverse political environments as Russia, Ethiopia and Vietnam are all sending government ministers and officials on courses in market economics and wrestling with the application of market principles to social policy’ (p. 127), and a number of international bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have all supported policies associated with managerialism. The application of market principles has led to the widespread dominance of economic managerialism within education. Tom Woodin (2008) suggests that the concept of managerialism implies the over-use of managers and management techniques, particularly in the public services. The notion depends on the idea that social, economic, political and cultural issues can be solved through better management, according to certain key principles of management technique, such as emphasis on target setting and achievement. Thus, management is seen to lead to value for money, efficiency and improved customer service.

Essential to managerialism, as Preston (2001) outlines, is the ability to meet quality / performance targets, as part of an ‘Audit Society’ or Foucault’s surveillance society (Foucault 1991), in which all activities that can be measured and assessed ought to be measured and assessed. So in Britain, for example, schools now use ‘value-added’ scores, to assess the quality of a student’s grades relative to the initial ‘input’ of the student’s ability. As Preston writes, ‘the accuracy of the word processor and the health of our school children are reduced to the same Ethic of Effectiveness, a Quality good with value-added components.’ (Preston, 2001, p. 348) The desire for information and norms against which to assess quality within education reflects a wider desire for information and feedback by which to judge the quality of service provision within society. In Britain, we have league table rankings of just about every ‘service’ in which ‘consumer’ choice is possible, from restaurants and hotels, now to schools, universities and even hospitals. Within British schools, the ‘performance’ of individuals teachers is assessed through spreadsheets of their students’ exam grades and observations by external examining bodies, while in some British schools, teachers are required to enter all their lesson plans into the school network so that the

senior management can monitor that they are planned to meet the criteria of ‘the model lesson’. All of these factors have had a significant impact on the degree to which teachers feel they can exercise curricular autonomy and many feel stifled by this rhetoric of the market. By this, I do not mean to imply that the practice of auditing in itself, through examination, observation, inspection and other means of assessment, is necessarily forbidding. It is clearly necessary in some ways. The problem outlined by Preston and others is that audit as an idea overreaches its originally financial aim of ensuring that the money spent on education is delivering quality. Thus the process of audit becomes institutionalised as an entire principle of social organisation, leading to a state of constant vigilance within educational systems and within society as a whole.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine the complex reasons lying behind the rise of the discourses of managerialism, performativity and marketisation within education. Although a shared concern for value for money and efficiency might explain the application of market principles in different educational contexts, it is worth noting that educational theorists have outlined different ideological reasons underlying the rise of managerial models. In Britain, for example, studies of the use of the managerial model within public services by New Labour have suggested that this can be linked to a desire to bring about greater democracy and inclusion. Jenny Ozga outlines this position:

New Labour’s modernization of education, which uses managerialism as its vehicle... [seeks] to create an enterprising culture of the system, the institution and the self. It privileges waged work as the passport to inclusion, as well as the creation of wealth (common and individual) and in so doing it seeks to remove the need for separate recognition of the social and cultural work that education does, because that is now encompassed within programmes that promote achievement. The pursuit of achievement is the route to employment but it is also the means of ensuring appropriate socialization and cultural integration. (2000, pp. 222-223)

The emphasis here on the deployment of a managerial model of education in order to seek fuller inclusion differs from what Michael Apple sees as the ideology lying behind similar practices and discourses in the US, which he links to a shift to the right in education policy, guided by a neoliberal vision of the weak state:

What is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad. Public institutions such as schools are ‘black holes’ into which money is poured – and then seemingly disappears – but which do not provide anywhere near adequate results. For neoliberals, one form of rationality is more powerful than any other – economic rationality. Efficiency and an ‘ethic’ of cost-benefit analysis are the dominant norms. (Apple, 2001, p. 38)

However, both Apple and Ozga’s analyses of British and American systems of education – as driven by the rhetoric of efficiency - imply a shared underlying aim of education: to prepare students for economic participation in society. Students are thus seen as human capital: ‘The world is intensely competitive economically, and

students – as future workers – must be given the requisite skills and dispositions to compete efficiently and effectively’ (Apple, 2001, p. 38). Thus the marketisation of education is seen by neoliberals, according to Apple, as necessary to prevent schools from ‘sucking the financial life out of society’ and ensuring that students as human capital are prepared for paid work. Crucial to this, Apple argues, is the idea of the ‘consumer’:

For neoliberals, the world in essence is a vast supermarket. ‘Consumer choice’ is the guarantor of democracy. In effect, education is seen as simply one more product like bread, cars, and television. By turning it over to the market through voucher and choice plans, education will be largely self-regulating. Thus, democracy is turned into consumption practices. (p. 39)

We can see, then, that underlying both these ideologies of managerialism is the view that education is conceived instrumentally as a vehicle for participation in waged work and reproducing the current state of the situation as ruled by the principle of monetary exchange. And this is achieved through the application of models of performativity and auditing in order to ensure that value for money is being achieved in the provision of education and that students emerge from education ready to earn capital. The various negative consequences of these processes have been documented as leading in some situations to the social and economic exclusion of those who do not succeed within the standardised testing system, while also leading to dissatisfaction among teachers and a strangling of thought. Fred Inglis writes of the emphasis on auditing within the managerial structures of British schools and universities:

The preposterous edifice of auditing, the mad rout of acronyms – HEFCE, TQM, OFSTED, TTA – blinds vision and stifles thought. Their most certain consequence is to make inquiry servile, knowledge instrumental, and, above all, to make all of us, teachers at whatever level, boring exhausted and hating the job. (2000, p. 429)

Before we turn to examine how Badiou’s notions of education, truth and subjectivity can help us think outside of the prevailing ideologies and re-envision the emancipatory potential of education, let us first briefly consider the standard responses to the management problematic from educational theorists working within the discourses of Critical Theory and, linked to this, the so-called ‘politics of identity’.

The rule of the market under attack

Given the history of Critical Theory as a reappropriation and revision of Marxism, albeit having travelled a significant distance from its roots, it is not surprising to find analyses of capitalist schooling as instruments of corporate power and domination coming from those working within this tradition. Within such approaches, there remains a commitment from Marxism to a liberation from ‘false consciousness’, although not in the original Marxist formulation of that idea. In examining current hegemonic discourses within education, those who have been influenced by Critical Theory tend therefore to have a transformative vision of the potential of an education

that does not seek to reproduce existing inequalities and social divisions, but rather one that might empower groups who are marginalised within society and thereby lead to greater democracy. This approach is exemplified in Michael Apple's attack on US education policy. He places race at the centre of his attempted interruption of the hegemony of the marketisation of education, focusing on how existing schooling systems with their emphasis on standardised testing have the result of excluding those with least access to economic, social and cultural capital. His argument is for a politics of recognition that will challenge the inequalities that are reproduced within the current systems of education: it is 'not possible to be color-blind... only by noticing race can we challenge it... By placing race squarely in front of us,' we can challenge 'the state, the institutions of civil society, and ourselves as individuals to combat the legacy of inequality and injustice inherited from the past' (Apple, 2001, pp. 203-204). Education, in this view, could and should offer up a space for considering key issues involved in the politics of representation and diversity. Inequalities related to representation and diversity can never be resolved within the domain of managerialism, given that the current hegemonies tend to have the effect of reproducing inequalities. Apple describes his critique as part of the politics of identity, but is critical of previous theorists of identity for not going far enough in attacking the conservative policies he describes as underlying the hegemonies of marketisation and performativity within education:

This is partly an issue of the politics of 'identity,' and increasing attention has been paid over the past decade to questions of identity in education and cultural studies. However, one of the major failures of research on identity is its failure to adequately address the hegemonic politics of the right. As I have been at pains to show here and elsewhere, the conservative restoration has been more than a little successful in creating active subject positions that incorporate varied groups under the umbrella of a new hegemonic alliance. It has been able to engage in a politics inside and outside of education in which a fear of the racialized Other is connected to fears of nation, culture, control and decline – and to intensely personal fears about the future of one's children in an economy in crisis. (p. 211)

Critiques drawn from Critical Theory that include multiculturalist problematics in the interests of radical democracy have been put forward by several other prominent educational theorists, such as Henry Giroux (1983) and Carlos Torres (1998). Giroux has, however, stressed the importance of moving from critique to a discourse of hope: hope that there are ways of resisting the imposition of market and business models within education, and emphasising the role that schools have to play as spaces in which a false consciousness might be dissolved, leading to a positively formulated vision of democracy.

Another type of criticism that has been posed to the culture of managerialism and the market in education comes from those theorists who emphasise the importance of personal well-being. John White is an exponent of such a position. In 'Education, the Market and the Nature of Personal Well-Being' (2005), he outlines educating students to lead personally fulfilling lives as a key aim of education. He points out that the market *can* bring with it goods that help an individual to live a flourishing life, suggesting:

The market, in opening up its own range of options to meet the consumer's autonomous preferences, reinforces the implicit messages about personal well-being that the educational bodies have been transmitting. (White, 2005, p. 100)

However, the values of the market must always, according to White, be seen 'in the light of wisdom already accumulated within the culture about what makes for a flourishing life' (p. 107). Thus, the rule of the market within education might be challenged if it does not tie in with what White describes as collective wisdom about what contributes to human flourishing.

Given then that there have already been numerous critical responses to the rule of market and managerialism within education, what does Badiou add to our understanding of this problematic? It is clear that we can recognise what Badiou describes as our current state of the situation in *Saint Paul* as also the state of the situation in education. Let us briefly remind ourselves of how Badiou summarised the state of the contemporary situation:

Our world is in no way as 'complex' as those who wish to ensure its perpetuation claim. It is even, in its broad outline, perfectly simple. On the one hand, there is an extension of the automatism of capital, ... the world finally *configured*, but as a market, as a world-market... On the other side, there is a process of fragmentation into closed identities, and the culturalist and relativist ideology that accompanies this fragmentation. (Badiou, 2003a, pp. 9-10)

It is easy to recognize this as the state of the situation in education, subsumed within abstract homogenization of monetary exchange through the imposition of market principles as I have outlined above. And although Badiou does not extensively treat the subject of education policy, in an interview he does comment on how the French have followed British policy in applying the principles of the market to education which the State defends using the 'propaganda' of economic necessity:

[E]very State uses propaganda to convince us that all the decisions they take are necessary. Let us take for instance the French government (although the same could be said about the British government). What is the French government saying to us? As the British government before, it is destroying public hospitals, public schools etc. It follows the British and follow it will. What is the State explaining? It is explaining that specific policies *must* be implemented... [T]hey claim that such policies are mandatory. But is this truly the case? It is his policy to say that it is necessary, it is the State policy. This is the government's way of situating this State policy in an economical context that is part of State decisions. (2003b, p. 189)

It seems then, that Badiou himself might suggest that politics of decision-making in education have been replaced by management: education policy comes to be defended by reference to economic 'necessity' rather than any other criteria. Thus education is absorbed by the rule of the market in order to facilitate its better functioning. Within

education policy, we have seen the pervasiveness of management, indeed the replacement of politics by management. The structures of management do not allow the question of truth into discussions about how formal education should be organised or about what education is or should be. All, as Badiou suggests, can only be explained with reference to economic necessity. Thus, the question of truth in education has indeed been obliterated by management.

The abstraction of monetary exchange and the principle of circulation we can see therefore as the state of the situation in education. We can also see, moreover, that the responses from Critical Theory also fall within the state of the situation as outlined by Badiou in *Saint Paul* – one that accepts identifications as the problem to be solved via access to the count of the market, a problem that can be rectified by ‘proper’ economic distributions and recognitions. We have already discussed how Badiou sees this situation and its allegedly critical contestations as without the potential for truths. According to Badiou, therefore, ‘[t]he capitalist logic of the general equivalent and the identitarian and cultural logic of communities or minorities form an articulated whole.’ (2003a, p. 11) Thus we might say that both the imposition of economic managerialism within education and the responses from Critical Theory form part of what Badiou has outlined as our contemporary situation. What is particularly significant therefore about Badiou’s challenge for education is that he alerts our attention to and steers us between the Scylla of economic management and the Charybdis of an identitarian politics that can lead to bigotry. As Peter Hallward argues:

We live in supremely reactionary times. Ours is a moment in which inventive politics has been replaced with economic management, in which the global market has emerged as the exclusive mechanism of social coordination. Ours is a moment in which effective alternatives to this mechanism find expression almost exclusively in the bigotries of culturally specified groups or identities, from ultranationalism in Germany and France to competing fundamentalisms in Israel and Algeria. Among contemporary thinkers, Badiou stands alone in the uncompromising rigor of his confrontation with these twin phenomena (2003, p. xxxvi)

Having therefore shown that Badiou’s outline of the state of the situation in *Saint Paul* is a situation we recognise within current educational discourses and institutions, how is that his notion of education as an education by truths helps us to re-envision the nature of education in a way that can be mobilised against the distortion of education by managerialism?

Is education possible in schools?

We have already considered Badiou’s notion of education as an education by truths. But what might this mean in more practical terms? In a recent interview with Oliver Feltham, Badiou makes the following comment upon the organisation of schooling:

Junior high school should be abolished: between eleven and fifteen years old all young people without exception should be integrated into productive work, with perhaps half the time spent studying, or a quarter. They will come back to full-time study once they are sixteen years old,

having all acquired a tenacious ‘worker’ configuration. These later studies will not decide their future but provide an initiation to truth procedures. (Badiou, 2008, p. 138)

This point is worth pondering, particularly given the fact that Badiou has worked within systems of education, as both schoolteacher and within a university, throughout his career. Is Badiou serious, and if so, what would be the purpose of such a radical rethinking of education policy? Furthermore, how does this relate to Badiou’s theorization of the nature of education? Before we answer these questions, I would like to draw attention to a criticism made by Nigel Blake and Jan Masschelein about the use of Critical Theory within educational theory:

Like its European counterparts, American critical pedagogy remains attached to a strongly instrumental and functional concept of educational practice, because it has not questioned the very concept of educational *praxis* itself but conceived it as an *instrument* for liberation or repression. Educational *praxis* still receives its meaning from the goal or end at which it should aim... Critical pedagogy thus formulates essentially and fundamentally a technological project. Its first step is the formulation of an ideal or utopia, which it uncritically supposes both possible and necessary. It thus remains itself subject to the same instrumental logic that it deplores at the heart of the capitalist system. (Blake and Masschelein, 2003, p. 50)

The same criticism could also clearly be directed against the managerial model of education (aiming to reproduce the dominant hegemony and to maximise the creation of capital) and the personal well-being model (aiming at a utopian vision of human flourishing). I do not wish, in saying this, to disparage the ideal of a utopian inclusive democratic state, or the aim of enhancing students’ flourishing. But Blake and Masschelein’s criticism of the notion of education in critical pedagogy serves to highlight what is particularly distinctive in Badiou’s presentation: its anti-instrumentalism.

We might say that Badiou’s notion of education as an education by truths is at its very core anti-instrumentalist. School should not be a place for preparing people for work, but rather a site of ‘initiation into truth procedures.’ The challenge of Badiou is therefore a radical one: to see structures of education not as a place for preparing people for economic participation, but rather as sites that might enable the beginning of the processes of subjectivity, introducing students to past events and enabling them, potentially, to begin to work out what fidelity to past events might mean, just as teachers are also struggling to work out the conditions of fidelity. It would be impossible to plan for events within education. As Badiou states: ‘it is of the essence of the event not to be preceded by any sign, and to catch us unawares with its grace, regardless of our vigilance’ (2003a, p. 111). However, even if we can’t wait for events to happen we can still be working out the conditions of fidelity to past events:

Many events, even very distant ones, still require us to be faithful to them. Thought does not wait, and it has never exhausted its reserve of power, unless it be for him who succumbs to the profound desire to conform, which is the path of death. (p. 111)

Oliver Feltham provides a helpful example to illustrate this idea:

There are high-school teachers in France who try to educate students in line with the maxim inscribed over the front door of every public school: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. These teachers are still trying to work out just what the French revolution is, and what it entails, in the field of education. The French revolution is not yet closed. *Aux armes citoyens!* The revolution is not yet over. (Feltham 2008, p. 103)

Badiou's call for us to be faithful to past events in the current situation requires that the current situation be read in the light of such events; a reflection difficult to read given the invisible abstract universalization of the market count to which education is accountable in contemporary situations.

The challenge of Badiou therefore is to recover education as a space for what he describes as 'true-thought', which means a thinking that has not been colonised by the processes of managerialism and performativity, and therefore might provide emancipation from and challenges to these discourses. The current state of the situation in education does not count students as capable of thought. Hallward puts this point well:

Badiou's presumption is that by itself no ordinary situation ever really counts its members as thinking beings, i.e. in terms that respect those indefinable or inconsistent qualities that allow them to *think*, precisely – their immeasurable potential, their affirmative intensity, their infinite capacity for inspiration, and so on. Only rarely does it happen that people act not as objects evaluated by an employer, an educator or a friend, but as participants in one of the few possible fields in which pure affirmation is possible (in the fields of politics, art, science or love). For a truth to proceed in an employment situation, for instance, the criteria normally deployed to distinguish employers from employees, and profitable employees from unprofitable ones, would somehow have to be suspended in an affirmation or generic equality. (2004, p. 7)

Badiou's radical proposal of a system of education that is divorced from preparing students for waged work might allow for students to be initiated into truth-procedures and to recognise and respect them as thinking beings. There is not space here to consider what this would mean in terms of curriculum planning for this later stage of education as initiation into truth-procedures that Badiou proposes. However his comments in *Saint Paul*, that truth procedures within the fields of art, politics, science and love having been obliterated by the 'culture-technology-management-sexuality' system, might help us to think about what would and would not be desirable when planning educational curricula. (Badiou, 2003a, p. 12)

Badiou's proposal for a system of education from age sixteen which is not a preparation for work but rather the site of initiation into truth procedures is, however, likely to be dismissed by most educational theorists as unworkable. Joseph Dunne, for example, explains very clearly why it is so difficult to divorce education from utilitarian economic concerns, as Badiou seems to advocate:

The relationship between education and the economy has become a reciprocal one, with dependency running in both directions. On the one hand, the productiveness of the economy depends on the educational system for the supply of a skilled workforce (what is increasingly called ‘human capital’). On the other hand, the educational system depends on a productive economy for funding on the scale which is required by a modern democratic system of schooling... This interlocking of education with the productive and economic sphere circumscribes the autonomy of education, rendering problematic the ideal of a humanistic education without utilitarian purpose. (Dunne, 2005, p. 149)

Given then that the rule of economic necessity, as suggested by Dunne, dictates that it is highly unlikely that Badiou’s proposal will come to pass, and there may be other reasons for opposition to his proposal, what can be done within the current state of the situation to enable education to become a potential site for the initiation into truth procedures?

As a teacher, I feel challenged by Badiou to want to create situations for my students to encounter past events and consider what it would mean to be faithful to those events today. I want to allow them the opportunity to see the universality of the rule of the market as a process without truth, and consider Badiou’s challenge that the truth domains of art, science, politics and love are occluded and indeed obliterated by the culture-technology-management-sexuality system. And so, as I reflect upon my experience as a teacher, Badiou’s writing speaks to me of the urgent need for the recovery of the following concepts within education: space and grace. I do not choose these terms because of a convenient assonance. ‘Space’ is a familiar term to be considering within education, while ‘grace’ sounds scandalous within the secular discourses of education with which we are familiar. Badiou encourages us to think of both terms in quite specific ways, so that their meaning exceeds how the terms have been conventionally used. I will outline each only briefly, but both invite further attention.

Space

In answering a question about his own struggle against the State apparatus, Badiou suggests that in order to oppose the ever-extending forces of the global capitalist machine, what is needed is space within which to think and develop one’s own methods of opposition:

We need a strategy that allows us to create our own space, to develop our own strategies and political decisions. The question of space is fundamental to politics... And political independence is to be able to choose your own space. (2003b, p. 189)

In relation to education, teachers are not allowed this space to question that is needed for political independence. The culture of economic managerialism that seeks to preserve and extend the capitalist hegemony does not provide opportunity for teachers to deviate from the accepted norms of discourse or space for teachers to question those norms. My teacher training (and it is significant that the very idea of ‘teacher

education' has been occluded by 'teacher training') followed, as is the norm, an apprenticeship model, in which I learnt to make model lesson plans, write schemes of work, the overriding importance of assessment. Of course, all of these are important skills within teaching, but there was no space given to questioning or exploring the political implications and ideologies behind the systems into which we were being initiated. And in my subsequent experience of teaching, I have seen little opportunity afforded to teachers to reflect upon and question their place within the prevailing abstractions that dominate educational discourses. In short, many teachers are initiated into and live in common places without space to access their potentials to engage in truth-processes. Badiou's critique suggests that if education is to be attentive to the question of truth, then space needs to be opened up for the possibility of thinking and acting that cannot be contained within logics derived from the economy of exchange. As it is with teachers so it needs to be for students to have space to think at a distance to the prevailing abstractions of the state of the situation, in considering, for example, the nature of past events and how these emerged against and disrupted previous situations and discourses. This is therefore not just a space that is required to think and reflect on one's practice, but rather space as the condition for the initiation into truth-procedures and for the possibility of *true-thought*.

Grace

'Grace' means that thought cannot *wholly* account for the brutal starting over on the path of life in the subject, which is to say, for the rediscovered conjunction between thinking and doing. Thought can be raised up from its powerlessness only through something that exceeds the order of thought. 'Grace' names the event as condition for an active thought. The condition is itself inevitably in excess of what it conditions. (Badiou, 2003a, pp. 84-85)

The significance of grace within Badiou's conception of truth-procedures can be seen as exposing the impoverishment of the type of thinking that can be contained, packaged, delivered and its quality assessed within current educational systems. Thought, as Badiou suggests, can only become powerful through that which exceeds the very nature of thought. Standish (2005) has argued that what is missing within the dominance of the economy of exchange is an 'economy of excess'. This he explores in relation to the significance of alterity and infinity in the thinking of Levinas. Within an economy of excess, education takes on a different character from the closed totality of exchange in which all learning can be planned for and assessed, according to the dictate of managerial approaches. Perhaps rather than focusing on developing transferable skills, acquiring subject matter content is best achieved in the service of what the subject seeks to know more of. In an economy of excess,

a subject of study comes to be understood as deepening and expanding the more one pursues it: as with the vista that extends as one ascends the mountainside, one progresses towards a greater understanding of what there is still to learn... There is nothing fanciful about this: this is the familiar experience of people who love their subjects; and against it so many aspects of current policy and practice, and of the prevailing discourse of teaching, learning and research methods, look palely narcissistic. (Standish, 2005, p. 52)

While limited by dominant logics, those moments of experiencing the subject under study deepening and extending that Standish describes as an economy of excess *do* happen within education. I have seen my students, and indeed myself as a student, become absorbed and changed by the texts and ideas under study. The truth of a play, a novel, a poem, *can* be manifest in the setting of formal education. And in *Saint Paul*, Badiou challenges the reader to consider the humility of such a manifested encounter:

Whoever is the subject of a truth (of love, of art, or science, or politics) knows that, in effect, he bears a treasure, that he is traversed by an infinite power. Whether or not this truth, so precarious, continues to deploy itself depends solely on his subjective weakness. Thus, one may justifiably say that he bears it only in an earthen vessel (2003a, p. 54)

Thus, as teachers, if we are to see our role as helping students to encounter truth-procedures, we are challenged to assist them to see the truths they encounter as precious, fragile and dependent on those who recognise past events as continuing to lead to new possibilities. All of this raises questions about curricular autonomy and the role of the teacher in these procedures, which demand further attention in the light of Badiou's challenge.

The event, as pure gift, could never be bought or exchanged. Despite the tendency of the managerialistic approach to abduct truth from the proceedings of education, it is still there, even if occluded, in the subjectivity of those who *are* working out fidelity to past events in such a way as new events might take place. The challenge of Badiou is therefore to be watchful and resist the tendency of the law of the count and the principle of (monetary) exchange to foreclose the possibility of live thought. As educators we must be aware that the current configuration of the education as measurable and deliverable misses the richness of education as the possible site of eventual grace. The one who is educated is *not* learning only in order to get good enough grades to get a good job. They are also potentially in the process of becoming subjects to truths and so agents of change. As educationalists, we must not allow the seeming obliteration of truth by management to hide this.

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