

NON-CORRELATIONAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Badiou, the Logic of Appearance, and Ideology

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1. Introduction

Phenomenology is in a state of crisis. This alone is nothing new. One could view Husserl's repeated use of the subtitle 'Introduction to Phenomenology' in his works as an indication of a crisis of identity. Further, Heidegger's move away from consciousness to the 'everydayness' of *Dasein* marks a point of scission within phenomenology's attempts to situate itself. The contemporary crisis is different, though. This crisis stems not from an anxiety about producing the most adequate definition of phenomenology, but from concerns about the general relevance of phenomenology as such. The major classical works of phenomenology (signalled by proper names such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty) give one the feeling of reading something old-fashioned or otherwise anachronistic. The preoccupation with systematic philosophy,¹ the attempts to address traditional metaphysical questions, and the modernist writing style all give phenomenology the "smell of

1 By systematic philosophies I mean those which attempt to address metaphysics, ethics, politics, etc. all within a single systematic framework. The word 'totalizing' also has about the same meaning, though I don't share the same suspicion of totalizing critique that many contemporary phenomenologists do—in fact, I think it's necessary for navigating current political debates—so I avoid using it. See the end of Section 2.1 for more information about my views concerning totalizing critique.

mothballs” as Graham Harman put it.²

Recent attempts to address this existential crisis could be lumped under the heading of ‘critical phenomenology.’³ There is a large body of literature that falls under this heading, but most of the texts could be seen to fall in line with what Michel Henry said was necessary for any contemporary renewal of phenomenology: that “it [phenomenology] should be radicalized in such a way that what depends on it would be overturned and, subsequently, everything would in fact be changed.”⁴ Though this is a difficult goal, I

2 Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2005), 2. The full quote is worth putting here: “For more than a decade I have been disappointed by the direction of recent continental philosophy, which is preoccupied almost entirely with written texts and minor modifications to historical narratives already posited by others. While the banner of phenomenology still flies here and there, it too often has the smell of mothballs about it, and is utilized more as a means of summoning forgotten terminology from the dead than as a way of returning to the things themselves.”

3 The term ‘critical phenomenology’ is somewhat vague, covering a large number of tendencies and theoretical orientations. Thus, referring to those who write under the label of ‘critical phenomenology’ involves referring more to a constellation of publications rather than a specific philosophical position. Generally, though, texts that would be gathered into this term all share a conviction that phenomenology can’t be a process of passively and neutrally describing the givenness of the world—instead, the conditions which make it possible for the world to be received as given in a certain way need to be reflexively meditated on in the process of theorizing. (See Section 2.1 for some critiques of this reflexivity.) In other words, critical phenomenology is responsive to the many critiques of phenomenology that have been leveled at it by feminists, critical race theorists, disability activists, and eco-theorists. A small sample of attempts to address these critiques from a space within (or at least tangent to) phenomenology can be found in the following texts: Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (London: Duke University Press, 2006); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (London: Duke University Press, 2010); and Elizabeth A. Wilson, “Organic Empathy: Feminism, Psychopharmaceuticals, and the Embodiment of Depression,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 237–64. Many other things could also have been cited to give a sense of this still-developing tendency.

4 Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 2.

believe that many of the people working in this sub-field of phenomenology have made major strides towards achieving it. The problem, though, is that critical phenomenology has generally tried to cause such a ‘radicalization’ of phenomenology by way of a critique of the subject—transcendental, political, or otherwise. I have found that a basic theory of subjectivity is necessary for thinking through contemporary politics: we need to know who, in general, is capable of political action today. In other words, there is a need to get the ‘lay of the land’ politically, even though this land is fractured and craggy. Even when these phenomenologists have retained a theory of the subject (usually the political rather than transcendental/metaphysical/etc.), they typically think of this subject in terms of individuality, whereas the critical tradition has historically been more dialectical in prioritizing the whole over its parts, and in doing so these phenomenologists have done damage to ideas like ‘truth’ and to the crucial political category of solidarity (which involves creating common coalitions out of radical difference).

Getting a sense of the political landscape involves recreating a robust sense of objectivity. Against a prevailing tendency in political thinking today which tries to simply *describe* the richly textured state of our contemporary situation through appeals to *individual* experiences of this situation, there is a need to speak about commonalities within experience and the generalities that exist between various social groups.⁵ In particular, there is a need to resuscitate the category of class (without this reducing, of course, to ‘economic class’).⁶ The tendency toward political particularity

5 See Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3/4 (2013): 231–46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23611519>. for a critique of this general tendency of eschewing generality in political organization and practice. Not only is the rejection of structure ineffective for establishing long-term change, it also tends to reproduce structure—but only implicitly, thus removing any sort of accountability.

6 See Tithi Bhattacharya, “How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 68–93 for a wonderful example of how the category of class can

involves more than a shift in orientation, though: it has become a kind of *doxa* in various leftist political currents to think that objectivity isn't just *politically* impossible, but also *metaphysically* impossible. In this sense, these currents of thought are direct inheritors of the Kantian legacy in presuming that there can be no means of thinking about the object *itself*, outside of the reflexive movement of thought to think about its own necessary involvement in the process of thinking. As Meillassoux has put it, this tendency is related to the fact that

contemporary philosophers have lost the *great outdoors*, the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory—of being entirely elsewhere.⁷

If there are no means (political, epistemological, or metaphysical) for 'stepping outside oneself' to make factually true statements about the world *as it actually is*, then attempts at creating a form of objectivity are doomed to failure—along with any attempts to create a map of the contemporary political landscape which allows for strategy, planning, and action. The contemporary task, then, is to forge a means of thinking about this 'absolute outside' of pre-critical philosophy without thereby becoming a pre-critical thinker (that is, without becoming a dogmatist).

The goal of this essay is to create the foundations for a phenomenology which is critical in orientation, but which retains the

be given new life in political theory without simultaneously pushing aside the various critiques of a certain image of class that have been produced for the past 75 or so years. Bhattacharya's essay doesn't work within a phenomenological framework, but her analysis is essential for anyone who wishes to do a *critical* phenomenology in the contemporary period (in the classic political sense of 'critique'—that is, in the sense of a form of discourse which has the revolutionary transformation of social relations as its goal).

7 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008), 7.

possibility for theorizing about the situated subject, while also attempting to show how phenomenology can be a tool for thinking about experiences within an actual world which doesn't depend on such a situated subject for existence. In attempting to address the possibility of objectivity, the goal is not to shy away from a critical tradition which has been suspicious of objectivity, especially as it's been used to squash the particularities of experience in terms of gender, race, ability, and so on. Instead, I emphatically agree with the spirit of many of these critiques and only wish to think through the possibility of objectivity as a means of responding to the problem of how to figure out what can be done in the present to remove these forms of oppression. Put otherwise, after decades of focusing on radical particularity, it seems like an important task for theory today is to figure out how to create coalitions across differences—not to erase the particularity of various struggles, but to elaborate how to move forward after such particulars have been recognized or brought to light.

In attempting this (merely preparatory) analysis, I am greatly indebted to the work of Alain Badiou. Badiou's recent work has focused on creating a systematic analysis of appearing in worlds which isn't dependent on the presence of any human consciousness—that is, he's creating an 'objective phenomenology.' Taking this work as a jumping off point, this essay will proceed in the following manner: first, I will give a more thorough description of critical phenomenology and address some of the problems that I see in this developing field (Section 2), both showing how this field overly relies on reflexivity as the ground of critical thinking (Section 2.1) and how it falls into a larger problem of prioritizing standpoints over situations (Section 2.2); second, I will give a description of Badiou's logic of appearing by working through his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*⁸ (Sections 3.1 and 3.2); and finally, I will compare Badiou's phenomenology with some of the major principles of classical phenomenology (by appealing to the major 'characteristics'

8 Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Louise Burchill (Malden, MA: Continuum, 2011).

which Sokolowski lists in his *Introduction to Phenomenology*)⁹ to show both how Badiou’s work fits in with phenomenology generally understood and how it marks a genuine improvement over past theories (Section 3.3). In the end, I will conclude that by attempting to bring Badiou’s objective phenomenology into conversation with critical phenomenology, we can open up the possibility for critical phenomenology to use the tools of ideology critique.

2. A Critical Approach to Critical Phenomenology: Or, On the Insufficiency of Reflexivity and Particularity

Historically, phenomenology has had an uneasy relationship with the critical tradition. This is because phenomenology has traditionally tried to style itself as a philosophy primarily concerned with the accurate description of essences as experienced. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in the introduction to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, phenomenology “is the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without any consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian, or sociologist might offer of that experience.”¹⁰ This falls short of the famous directive Marx gives in his “Theses on Feuerbach” where he said that “philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”¹¹

9 Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

10 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), lxx. In fairness, Merleau-Ponty does note directly afterwards that “Husserl[’s final works] mention a ‘genetic phenomenology,’” implying that phenomenology may not be a simply descriptive methodology but may be able to account for the genesis of that which is described. This still isn’t enough, though. Accounting for the genesis of the object of critique is only the first step: you also need to speak about the genesis of the social relations that made that object possible. Further, the method that one picks for making sense of this genesis (that is, whether the approach is dialectical or not) is important for seeing whether the genetic account is critical or not.

11 Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed.

This line from Marx could be seen as one of the guiding threads of what it means to attempt to do critical theory—that is, to produce theories which can serve as tools in the revolutionary project of changing the whole of society—a goal which phenomenology¹² has often had no interest in trying to pursue.

At the same time, some phenomenologists have attempted to explicitly align their work with more revolutionary currents.¹³

Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 143–5, 145.

12 Here it's worthwhile to say a bit about what I mean in referring to 'phenomenology.' This is one of the most diverse fields in philosophy which has been linked up with an immense array of other sub-fields and has taken on several crucial positions within philosophy (and theory more generally). Given this, the field also has some hazy boundaries: figures like Levinas and Derrida could be seen as in line with phenomenology, despite being astute critics of the discipline/method. To help clarify, in this essay when I speak of 'phenomenology' I mean one of two things. First, I'm referring to what could be called 'classical phenomenology' originating in Husserl (or possibly Brentano) and running up through its various, largely French inheritors. To put a fine point on it, we could say that this form of philosophy stretches from Husserl to Beauvoir and includes those who have intentionally taken up the mantle of 'phenomenology' (thus excluding figures such as Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, etc. that are heavily influenced by phenomenology but reject the method in crucial ways). Secondly, I'm referring to the recent surge in authors claiming to be a part of 'critical phenomenology,' which has strong ties with 'feminist phenomenology.' This form of phenomenology is one that sees itself as continuing the project of phenomenology, though with some critical distance. This critical distance isn't meant as a rejection of phenomenology, but as a means of furthering it (as the earlier quote from Michel Henry indicated). In talking about this second form of phenomenology, I mean to point towards those thinkers that explicitly take up the title of 'critical phenomenology,' though those working in related fields of feminist phenomenology, new feminist materialism, and object-oriented philosophy could also be subject to the critique I put forth in this essay.

13 Here, I have in mind Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (along with his later, more explicit political turn in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Thao's *Phenomenological and Dialectical Materialism*, and even things like Gordon's "Existential Dynamics of Theorizing Black Invisibility," which is both phenomenological and existential in approach. All these texts, in various ways, see the political importance in talking about lived experience while also recognizing that this experience isn't simply 'given' in some unmediated way.

In these more overtly political texts, phenomenologists have recognized the praxical potential of detailing the ‘everydayness’ of experiences which were excluded from the dominant social imaginary—that is, they saw that this description was a precondition for the kinds of revolutionary activity that would (potentially) change the whole of social relations. In these texts we get the recognition of identity as something generated by various social relations and whose genesis takes place within (and whose continued existence reproduces) an undesirable hierarchy of power, rather than the kind of ahistorical presentation of identity which governs most liberal accounts. Even more, at their best moments, these texts also think of the phenomenological subject as caught within the dialectic of individual and society—that is, as a *situated subject*.

Although works belonging to this explicitly ‘critical’ genre of phenomenology include some of the most important works in phenomenology, taking the field in its generality we can see that these critical trends are the exception to the rule of phenomenology’s descriptive character. This contrasts with critical theory’s dependence on an analysis of impersonal structures—Marx’s *Capital*, for example, wasn’t an account of the lived experiences of workers, but was a dialectical unfolding of the *necessary* elements of any capitalist mode of production¹⁴—which phenomenology generally doesn’t leave room for. This is because phenomenology takes experience to be something immediately given, something which must be unfolded on its own terms without accounting for the historical *production* of such experience or the various other forms of mediation through sensuous, material activities which structure experience.¹⁵ Even when the historical genesis is included in the analysis,

Thus, they are all major sources in trying to think through the potentials and limits of ‘critical phenomenology.’

14 That is not to say either that phenomenology can’t attend to impersonal structures or that critique can’t be grounded in lived experiences. Such a view would be antithetical to the whole argument being presented here. As a great example of where critical impulses meet with the importance of everyday, *situated* life, see Simon J. Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

15 As an aside, this is why phenomenology has historically been so

often this genesis is taken as some brute fact of ‘what happened,’ rather than being enmeshed in an explicit logic of historical development and progress.¹⁶ Any approach that tries to create the foundations for a truly *critical* phenomenology, then, will have to provide a framework that allows for the descriptive analysis of experiences *as is*, while also leaving room for the dynamic and dialectical development of spaces of possible experience as they unfold through material practices.

2.1 Critical Phenomenology and Social Atomism

Adequate attention to the dialectical development of material practices has been missing from most accounts of critical phenomenology. Here, I only wish to point out two examples of this tendency. The first example is Gayle Salamon’s “What’s Critical About Critical Phenomenology?” Salamon’s article takes place in

closely allied with philosophical idealism (in the Hegelian rather than the Berkeleyan sense): it excises the material unfolding of history as it occurs through practical, material relations in order to ground an analysis on immediacy (or stages of immediacy as presented through Spirit’s historical progression), but then this ground is taken to be ‘obvious’ and immanent in its conceptual presentation, presents itself as necessary, and is articulated as if it generates itself autonomously, without any prior dependence on a material base. That is, phenomenology classically generates its ground conceptually by saying “some such element of experience is *obviously* the primordial or originary point of any analysis of experience” with this obviousness never becoming justified. (We see this movement in Husserl, for example, when he analyzes ‘pure consciousness’ as an ‘obvious’ point of departure for the phenomenological *epoché* and with Heidegger when he posits being-in-the-world as a foundational point of his existential analytic of Dasein (see §14). This tendency to ideally ground first principles in what appears as ‘obvious’ to the phenomenologist in question is the source of the first part of Adorno’s critique of Husserl in Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique: Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, trans. Willis Domingo (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

16 This is to say that these theories which invoke historical development without also explicitly citing a historical *logic* that they’re working with, tend to implicitly invoke a certain historical logic—usually that of liberalism—even though this logic may be at odds with the project at large.

precisely the context I've been analyzing here: the recognition of the uneasy historical tension both between critical theory and phenomenology and between describing the genesis/transformation of social relations and patiently detailing the contours of 'everyday' experience. Her article is invaluable both as a historical tracking of the term 'critical phenomenology' into its current use and as a contribution to the attempt to bridge the gap between critical and phenomenological traditions. That said, the essay still betrays an idealist tendency to prefer description over transformation, as if simply exposing the real structure of various social relations was equivalent to their transformation (or, perhaps, a neutralization of the effects of these structures). In discussing the central concern of her paper, Salamon says that

when asking what a critical phenomenology is, we might maintain that it *reflects* on the structural conditions of its own emergence, and in this it is following an imperative that is both *critical in its reflexivity* and phenomenological in its taking-up of the imperative to describe what it sees in order to see it anew. In this, what is critical about critical phenomenology turns out to have been there all along.¹⁷

The problem here stems from reducing practices of critique to acts to 'reflection' and 'reflexivity.' This alone is not enough. To say that reflexivity is a requirement for critical theory is simply to say that such theories need to theorize about the situatedness of their being theorized.¹⁸ This doesn't involve either looking into

17 Gayle Salamon, "What's Critical About Critical Phenomenology?" *PUNCTA* 1.1 (2018): 8–17, <https://doi.org/10.31608/PJCP.v1i1.2>, 12. Emphasis is mine.

18 Since I begin to use the term 'situation' (and some of its variations) more frequently here, it's worth stating where the motivation for this language is coming from. It's become more common to talk about the *political* character of social interactions rather than talking about them as 'situated.' I find the prevalence of this way of speaking—especially when it leads to claims that 'everything is political'—very worrying. The worry stems from the feeling that speaking of the political character of everyday situations seems to muddy the waters of the term 'political,' which I prefer to reserve for collective actions which have (at least potentially) transformative power. Politics is a collective

the historical conditions which *produced* that situatedness, nor does it involve the praxical activity of theorizing in order to be able to revolutionize such a situation. For Salamon, at least as she defines critical phenomenology here, it is enough for me to simply note that I theorize from the situation of being both white and male (as one possible subset of relevant details that I could list) and that this situation provides me with certain benefits or privileges which overcode the position from which I theorize in various ways. While all of that is true, the relevant theoretical features are still presupposed in the act of reflecting on the predicates of my identity: without both accounting for the ways in which whiteness and maleness were produced historically as socially intelligible identity properties—along with the ways that various systems of power were simultaneously produced—and without speaking to the fact that the goal is to overturn such violent, generative social relations, then this version of ‘critical phenomenology’ falls far short of what has been expected of critical theorizing historically.¹⁹

Admittedly, some of this is unfair. Salamon’s essay was writ-

action: everyday situations are not political by virtue of having a history. For example, it seems wrong to say that my being white is ‘political’ on its own. It takes place within a certain social and historical *situation*, sure, but that in no way implies the existence of a politics. The political element would involve something like organizing with others to create tenant unions in poor, non-white neighborhoods (or, on the flip-side, it could involve weaponizing my whiteness by participating in various white nationalist movements). The motivation for using the term ‘situation’ stems from Badiou’s work. For more information, see Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), especially 23–30 and 93–111. Further, as far as I can tell, Badiou’s use of this term is borrowed almost directly from Beauvoir, though she is never cited. For more on her importance in thinking through ‘situations,’ see Section 2.2.2.

19 Of course, I’m not saying that every text that gets grouped under any form of ‘critical theory’ has to do all this work. My point is that stating that theoretical reflexivity is both a necessary and sufficient condition for what counts as ‘critical,’ as Salamon does here, is to state too little. Instead, reflexivity is a necessary *but not* sufficient condition for doing philosophical critique. Thinking otherwise is what leads Salamon to conclude that phenomenology has always already been critical in orientation, the exact kind of historical revision which critical theory rejects.

ten as the introduction to a journal issue on the topic of critical phenomenology and, as with many of these sorts of introductions, it smooths over some nuance in order to present a (more or less) coherent picture of the conflicting essays which follow. But I look to her essay because it's representative of a tendency in some more recent forms of 'critical' theory which take reflexivity—the simple act of stating that 'I/she/they/etc. theorize from a certain social and temporal location'—to be sufficient for performing a critique.

This leads me to my second example: Oksala's *Feminist Experiences*. Oksala's goal in her book is to create space for the possibility of doing feminist philosophy.²⁰ She states that she wants to create such a space by analyzing both phenomenology (often through Husserl) and critical theory (through Foucault) to bring out what is useful in them for developing a specifically feminist approach to philosophy.

In many ways, I think Oksala is successful and gives us a book with a lot of material that can be used in developing a critical phenomenology. I would like to examine one line in her work. In her chapter on the topic of a phenomenology of gender—probably the central chapter of her work—she says that

[P]henomenology can account for gender by helping us to understand how gendered experiences are constituted and how

20 Johanna Oksala, *Feminist Experiences: Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016). This is stated on the first page of her work and is a constant theme throughout. Though there isn't space to go into detail here, this thesis (that feminist philosophy needs to be justified) seems odd to me. Insofar as Oksala takes this justification to be one that's needed in order to argue against those who don't think feminist philosophy is 'philosophy proper,' I agree with the need for such a work and see it's immediate relevance. But insofar as this justification is meant to vindicate feminist philosophy *within* the realm of feminist writing and theorizing, I'm at a bit of a loss. Stating that there's a need to justify feminist philosophy within such a realm seems to ignore, to an extent, the major contributions of feminist philosophy and the impact that this philosophy has had both theoretically and practically. In other words, this seems to ignore the fact that feminist philosophy occupies a somewhat central location within feminist theorizing as-is, which is why Oksala's project seems, perhaps, to lack a proper target at times, although it is generally an excellent text.

their constitution is tied not only to embodiment, but also to the normative cultural practices and structures of meaning. This can be accomplished by a subject who, *through radical philosophical reflection*, manages to take critical distance from certain forms of experience. What my postphenomenological [Oksala's term for her specifically feminist and critical phenomenology] reading suggests, however, is that in order to achieve this critical distance it might be more useful for me to read psychological reports or ethnographical studies than to analyze my own experiences of women or embodiment.²¹

There are a few things to note in the quote. It is difficult to see how this account of gender would be 'critical,' when it says that our understanding of gender must be tied to the way that gender is constituted through "normative cultural practices and structures of meaning," since this doesn't (dialectically) account for either the ways that gender reproduces these practices and forms of meaning-making, nor does it account for the genesis of the larger 'structures.' It thus would only give us a very partial view of things. Further, it's surprising that this analysis of the constitution of gender is both supposed to be conducted solely through practices of reflection and that the critical element of these reflective processes is the fact that they allow us to distance ourselves from our experiences (as if the creation of distance, alone, was a means of changing the social relations of gender). Finally, this idealist stance causes Oksala to claim, in the same breath which she is using to try and talk about the possibility of a specific kind of critical philosophy, that theory (since it is here ungrounded) cannot even achieve the men-

21 Ibid., 108. Emphasis is mine. Oksala expresses something very similar on page 5 of this work when she says that "we have to ask how we have come to understand the world around us as hierarchically gendered, for example, and how genders and their relationship could be *conceived* otherwise" (my emphasis). The fact that Oksala stops at saying that we should merely *conceive* of gender differently, rather than working towards the total overturning of the oppressive system of gender—and further, the fact that she thinks of 'conception' as something which can change social structures, rather than social practice—is representative of the politically idealist stance that she often (intentionally or not) takes up in this work.

tal distance she’s valorizing: it is better achieved through empirical fields such as ethnography. In other words, just as she removes all material content from the methodological practices of her critical phenomenology, Oksala then goes on to evacuate even philosophy from having any definite content, since its aims are better achieved by different fields. This is worrying for a project whose central aim is to create the possibility of a feminist philosophy.

Of course, both Oksala and Salamon would disagree with these characterizations. Neither of them have any intention of vacuuming out the material contents of philosophical practice—their express aim is to participate in critical phenomenological theorizing! Regardless of intent, though, the way that both thinkers characterize the practice of critique prevents them from better realizing a ‘critical phenomenology.’ The reason that both thinkers fall back into idealistic structures is simple: they both begin, whether intentionally or not, from a social model that is grounded in isolated, atomized individuals.²² The name for this social model is ‘intersectionality.’²³

David McNally, in his “Intersections and Dialectics,” argues that intersectional theory is analogous with a Newtonian physical model which sees physical elements as simply colliding in space

22 Put more pointedly, they both begin from the position of liberalism.

23 In what follows, I deal with a model of ‘intersectionality’ as it has come to be taken up both in academic literature and in activist spaces. This model starts from the position of investigating various identity categories as discrete ‘objects’ that happen to intersect in the form of individual bodies. This is in stark contrast to the original presentation of ‘intersectionality,’ which attempted give a foundation that would allow one to analyze mutually constitutive systems of oppression (e.g. sexism always already operates through categories of race and ability, so you can’t disentangle them *as social systems*—thus, it’s not a theory of *identity*). Intersectionality was originally a dialectical thesis which prioritized the whole over the particular (thus, it views gender as *already* racialized because of their mutual participation and interpenetration within the whole of contemporary white supremacist, ableist, cisheteropatriarchal capitalism, as a *structured totality*). Personal identity plays a much more minor role here. See Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139–67 for more information.

semi-arbitrarily, all situated by notions of absolute space and time. The Newtonian model of the “universe of abstract mathematical space-time is thoroughly consonant with the world of the capitalist market”²⁴—and by association, so is intersectional theory. This is because such a theory, as the metaphor at the heart of the name would indicate, starts from the position of assumed fixed and stable identities and then works from a social model which sees these identities as ‘colliding’ somehow in some social space. One can see this in the way that that identity combinations, such as ‘white and male,’ are often conceptualized in intersectional theory as if there existed some identities ‘white’ and ‘male,’ free-floating and divorced from their historical production, that just happened to coincide in certain bodies and ways of living. There’s no way of thinking through the fact that the two identities are both materially produced and reciprocally shape each other (along with the totality of social relations in which they are embedded). One could imagine, without too much caricature, an intersectional theorist fully identifying with their Newtonian foundations and claiming something like “if W is the set of all elements composing ‘whiteness’ and M is the set of those elements which compose ‘maleness,’ then we define ‘white male,’ WM , as the set $(\forall x)((x \in W \ \& \ x \in M) \leftrightarrow (x \in WM))$ for x at some time t .”

24 David McNally, “Intersections and Dialectics: Critical Reconstructions in Social Reproduction Theory,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 94–111, 98. To ward off possible confusions, it’s worth mentioning that McNally isn’t opposed to abstract mathematical modeling as such. There’s nothing anti-science in this essay—this can be seen in the way that on the next page he praises “contemporary scientific thought” for “moving away from mechanics towards dialectics” (by which I take him to mean the movement away from assuming the presence of closed systems in physical models towards more recent trends in studying ‘complex adaptive systems’). The problem isn’t that mathematics is used: it’s that the Newtonian use of this language presumes that objects exist in isolation from one another, instead of beginning from the position of the reciprocal determination of elements in a system in their co-constitution of the totality of that system (that is, instead of beginning from a dialectical position). This is essentially the critique he extends to intersectionality.

This stratified and analytic approach is only possible if one abandons totalizing critique (one of the cornerstones of critical theory).²⁵ In abandoning this sort of critique, we are left with no means for making objective, true claims about the social structures we inhabit. But critique alone isn't enough to ensure objectivity. We also need to take up a metaphysical realism of some sort—that is, we need to have a philosophical foundation that allows us to say that claims about the world are actually about *the world*, not just about a certain apprehension of the world from a certain viewpoint, at a certain place in time, from a certain subjectivity/language game/etc. If we refuse any realism, we are left with a kind of radical skepticism which is no longer 'radical' in any political sense; this kind of skepticism is instead the contemporary dominant mode of being for the 'everyday' person. This is also a skepticism that's utilized by those on the right (think of the repeated claims about climate change being 'just a theory').²⁶

In opposition to my claims here, many critical theorists would claim that of course they think some everyday statements

25 Of course, I mean 'totalizing' not in the sense of 'covering over every element in the whole' but instead in the sense of 'a critique of a social totality,' that is, a social structure in which the elements of that structure are partially determined by the structure and in which those elements in turn also determine the whole of which they are a part. In other words, 'totalizing critique' would be a form of critique that would never think to treat race and gender (and ability, and class, ...) as separable forms of identity, since they make up the whole of society and are co-constituted through the reproduction of society.

26 In this small discussion of skepticism, I have in mind Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 225–48, where Latour mentions that a kind of knee-jerk critical disposition is the norm in society today, and that the only way to combat that is to create a philosophical system that can handle the veracity of various everyday truth claims without sacrificing a critical spirit. This is why we need realism today: realism doesn't negate any critical impulse, but instead gives us the ability to say that certain claims about the world are simply *false* (rather than 'harmful,' or inadequately 'open' to the other, or anything like that, since none of this is adequate for opposing the ascendancy of various far-right political groups globally).

are true. Were I to ask Judith Butler whether it's raining outside, for example, she'd likely respond with either a 'yes' or a 'no' without any major problem. But this says nothing about whether or not philosophical *theories* can adequately handle such everyday claims without reinterpreting them into some kind of purely subjective apprehension of the appearance of some phenomena in the world (for example, "Yes, it's raining outside...if you accept that visual empirical data is unproblematically related to a certain subjective experience of what 'rain' is meant to capture, and if you fall back into the pre-critical idea that 'rain' actually corresponds simply to some event in the world..." etc.).²⁷ Žižek humorously makes this point in relation to an imagined scenario where he asks Butler "What is this?" while pointing to a bottle of tea: "She would never have said 'this is a bottle of tea.' She would have said something like 'if we accept the metaphysical notion of language clearly identifying objects, and taking all this into account then may we not'—she likes to put it in this rhetorical way—'reach the hypothesis that, in the conditions of our language game, this can be said to be a bottle of tea?'"²⁸

None of this disparages either critical theory or phenomenology as such. Exactly the opposite: both fields produce work that fills me with the hope that theory can actually contribute to ongoing political practices and to sites of political struggle. At the same time, if these theories have become so reflexive and so ungrounded from the material relations that make possible such theorizing that everyday truth claims are beyond their scope, then in a sense both critical theory and phenomenology have failed us. If this is the case, though, this failure doesn't just belong to critical

27 This is essentially the problem taken up by Meillassoux in the first chapter of his *After Finitude* where he analyzes the ways that various 'ancestral' statements (such as literal statements about when the universe began or when the earth was formed) would have to be interpreted by various hyper-critical epistemological approaches to knowledge and truth.

28 Astra Talor, *Žižek!* (Zeitgeist Films, 2005). The quote has been cleaned up slightly since this was originally spoken in the context of an extemporaneous lecture that Žižek was giving in the film.

theory or phenomenology. There has been a general movement in leftist theory over the past thirty years (at least) away from discussions of general oppressive structures to a focus on identity as the locus of politics. And this identity has increasingly been framed in terms of radical particularity: it's not about an identity that one may share with others or the objective structures that produce that identity category within a social totality, but is instead about *one's own* viewpoint, the way that the world unfolds for an individual from a purely particular *standpoint*.

2.2 Standpoint or Situation: How to Think About (Feminist) Objectivity

One of the places where we can see this most readily is in the field of standpoint epistemology. Although this field had its beginnings in an engagement with Marxism and the idea that one can speak from the 'standpoint of the proletariat,'²⁹ it has since then turned into a celebration of liberal individualism. To bring out the consequences of this shift in emphasis, I hope to focus on a distinction that runs through this literature between a theory that begins from a *standpoint* and one that begins from a *situation*. To an extent, this division is artificial: almost no work in standpoint epistemology would fall perfectly into either side of this division. It's a matter of emphasis. But by analyzing these two theoretical orientations, I hope to both clarify what the problem is with the form of 'inter-

29 Nancy Hartsock makes this point most directly and her work marks one of the first attempts to think through this problem of situated knowledge explicitly. In the framework I set up in the rest of this section, though, Hartsock's analysis would be viewed as emerging from a critical intervention on a *situation* rather than a *standpoint*. Given this, if everything from my discussion about standpoint epistemology was rejected save for one item, the part I would choose to save is this: as critical theorists, phenomenologists, or just generally people interested in a revolutionary theory that can help guide actions that create a better world, we would all be served better by returning to Hartsock's work. See Nancy C. Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983).

sectionality' I spoke of above and to provide a clearer picture of what I mean by 'objectivity' in this essay, especially as it's used in Section 3 below. Further, by utilizing Beauvoir's notion of a 'detotalized totality' in Section 2.2.2, I aim to highlight one prominent example of a 'classical' phenomenologist who helps us get at an understanding of objectivity which can potentially open a path for a more thoroughly *critical* version of phenomenology.

2.2.1 Standpoints: Or, Visual Epistemology

Sandra Harding is easily one of the most important founding figures within standpoint epistemology, especially within the domain of the philosophy of science. In her text , she makes the argument that classical ideas of 'objectivity' have gotten everything backwards. Classically, objectivity was thought to involve an attempt to think from 'nowhere,' since objective scientific results are supposed to be able to be reproducible by anyone, given similar experimental setups and/or observational conditions, etc. The idea that true statements are not grounded in concrete material situations *abstracts* these truths from the conditions that generated them. In some sense, this is a positive thing: if theories of gravity didn't apply to a large set of objects, then they'd be largely useless and if theories of evolution only applied to some living entities but not all of them, then the theory would have very little explanatory power. The problem is that scientists have gone too far in trying to abstract away the conditions which made the formulation of various true propositions possible. Truths don't come into the world fully formed, like Athena from the head of Zeus: they are formed through the labor and careful attention of subjects that are gendered in various ways, belong to a multitude of racial categories, and have bodies that are differentially able to perform certain tasks under certain conditions. These (and various other) 'local' aspects of truth-production (and thus of objectivity) don't dissolve when an academic publishes a paper; in fact, they were essential for generating such knowledge in the first place (for example, you can't

experimentally verify the existence of gravitational waves without stepping foot in a lab of some sort and you can't conduct an ethnographic study of working-class lives after the 2008 depression without actually coming into contact with working-class people).

This point, that objective knowledge *requires* locality and partiality, is one of the major claims of Harding's work. She is trying to create the foundations for what she calls 'strong objectivity' ('strong' because it's actually *more* accurate than 'weak' objectivity which tries to obtain knowledge that is somehow unmoored from any location, whether geographical, social, etc.). This point, in retrospect, seems almost obvious: if someone wants to know whether it's raining outside, then it makes more sense to ask someone sitting near a window than it does to ask someone sitting in a windowless basement in another country. Similarly, if someone wants to know about the negative effects of healthcare costs in the US, it makes more sense to ask disabled people who are directly harmed by such costs rather than the heads of various insurance companies (or people with adequate healthcare who aren't directly impacted by the situation). This has not been an obvious point in the history of epistemology, though—especially with the 'scientism' of people such as the positivists in the analytic tradition.³⁰ Thus, Harding says that "we can think of strong objectivity as extending the notion of scientific research to include systematic examination of such powerful background beliefs," such as one's cultural background.³¹ Harding's text could be seen as self-confirmation of her existential position: from the standpoint of a feminist working in the philosophy of science (that is, the standpoint of someone of whom culture demands a higher level of self-reflexive awareness of their body since they are often *reduced* to their body), the idea that knowledge is disembodied seems ridiculous.

Whatever the merits of Harding's approach, it places ultimate emphasis on the necessity of the (possible) self-understanding

30 Sandra Harding, "'Strong Objectivity' and Social Situated Knowledge," in *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*, ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo (McGraw Hill, 2008), 741–56, 744.

31 *Ibid.*, 748.

of one's position in this theory. The 'standpoint' that Harding is referring to is less concerned with the real dimensions of one's situation than it is with the ways that objectivity can be achieved through reflexivity—that is, through thought. This is why Harding doesn't say that 'strong objectivity' involves the study of objective social structures, but instead starts with listening to the voices of those who have been shoved out of positions of power within scientific knowledge production. Specifically, she says that 'strong objectivity' must begin from the

perspective from the lives of 'strangers' who have been excluded from the culture's ways of socializing the 'natives,' who are at home in its institutions and who are full-fledged citizens. It starts research in the perspective from the lives of the systematically oppressed, exploited, and dominated, those who have fewer interests in ignorance about how the social order actually works.³²

By beginning from the 'perspective' of those who have been excluded, rather from the analysis of what the nature of the world must be such that these views are excluded, Harding is here focusing on what I have been calling 'standpoints.' Her position here is similar to many contemporary political claims that ask us to 'listen' to the voices of the oppressed, without accounting for the way that the oppressed often have contradictory views about the nature of their oppression. Being situated in a subordinate position in society doesn't give one direct access to knowledge about the nature and genesis of that subordination, and a politics that hinges solely on the 'perspectives' of the excluded (at the expense of the actual structures of domination they are embedded within and of which one can have knowledge without *necessarily* being subject to such domination) is one that can't handle situations where there is disagreement *amongst* members of the oppressed group in question. This often leads to adopting the most conservative available position that allows one to still claim that one is listening to such 'voices,' since those are the voices that are most easily heard within the contemporary political situation.

32 Ibid.

This view, as we shall soon see, can be contrasted with Code’s more ‘situated’ version of standpoint epistemology. Before getting to her argument, though, I wish to begin the next section by clarifying what I’m referring to by speaking of a ‘situated’ form of knowledge.

2.2.2 Situations: Or, Material Epistemology

The term ‘situation,’ as I’m using it, comes not just from Badiou’s work but also from Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, which attempted to account for women’s situation as Other to men (that is, account for the genesis of women’s oppression and for the lived contours of such oppression, even if individual women are not aware that they are embedded within such a situation). While, Beauvoir provides no exact definition of what she means by ‘situation’ in that text—its meaning is pulled out of various scenes and structures that she illustrates throughout—she does provide a more succinct definition elsewhere. In her essay, “My Experience as a Writer,” Beauvoir gives her definition of the ‘world’ as a ‘detotalized totality.’ She goes on to clarify by saying that to define the world as a detotalized totality

means that, on the one hand, there is a world that is indeed the same for us all, but on the other hand we are all in situations in relation to it. The situation involves our past, our class, our condition, our projects, basically the entire ensemble of what makes up our individuality.

And each situation envelopes the entire world in one way or another.³³

The world is thus made up of individuals caught in their situations, each of which ‘expresses’³⁴ the whole of the world from their local-

33 Simone de Beauvoir, “My Experience as a Writer,” in *The Useless Mouths and Other Literary Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 275–302, 198.

34 Beauvoir intentionally uses this rationalist term on the next page to

ity. The world is a specific way though, for Beauvoir: it's not all a matter of interpretation, discursive formations, language games, etc. There is an explicit realist commitment at work. But the objective character of the world gets filtered through particular experiences of such a world—experiences which express the whole, even if they don't entail *knowledge* of the whole. Thus, to investigate reality beginning from situations is to reject both the idea that a single expression, formula, etc., can adequately cover the whole of the world *and* the idea that objectivity is solely a matter of attending to the voices and experiences of those on the margins. To start from situations is to start from recognizing the necessity of investigating the role that particularity plays both in forming and in being formed by the totality of social relations, but under the *objective* role that such particularity plays, not from some localized *viewpoint*.

This is the sort of approach that I see in the work of Lorraine Code. Code's essay "Taking Subjectivity Into Account" is concerned with expanding analytic notions of accurate knowledge claims which take the form of "S knows that *p*."³⁵ Her problem with this form of epistemology is that it doesn't take account of the fact that knowledge is always localized and thus 'objective' inquiries require that one begin from a recognition of the social/historical/political/etc. situation that one occupies. The majority of epistemological accounts which see truth-claims as something that must (or at least should) be case-independent thus fall short of being *objective enough*: they fail to account for the role that one's particularity plays in an individual person's apprehension of some object, phenomena, event, etc.

characterize what she means by a situation "enveloping the world in one way or another." She says that "implicitly, enveloping the world does not mean that one knows it, but that one reflects it, typifies it, or *expresses* it in the way that Leibniz spoke of *expressing* the world." Thus, every situation is like a Leibnizian monad that one inhabits: it marks the ground for a particular standpoint in the world which reflects the whole of the world (a totality) through that particularity.

35 Lorraine Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account," in *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*, ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo (McGraw Hill, 2008), 718–41, 719.

In this sense, Code’s work fits in nicely with the version of Harding that I’ve presented here. However, the two accounts differ in the conclusions that they draw from this epistemological intervention. Where Harding argued that the necessity for particularity in objective accounts entails that we should focus on the voices of those who have been excluded from dominant accounts of knowledge,³⁶ Code argues that we need to re-map our epistemological terrain based on various social locations that one may occupy. Similar to Beauvoir, Code isn’t rejecting objectivity as a ‘view from nowhere’ only to end up celebrating individuality: instead, Code is only claiming that the world is fractured and craggy, since it’s cut through with multiple competing ‘situations,’ and thus that feminist epistemologists need to engage in the work of surveying the real features of this landscape in order to make accurate claims about forms of domination. As Code puts it, “the project I am proposing, then, requires a new geography of the epistemic terrain: one that is no longer primarily a physical geography, but a population geography that develops qualitative analyses of subjective positions and identities and the sociopolitical structures that produce them.”³⁷ This image of the critical geographer patiently mapping an evolving landscape—not infinitely diverse, but not uniform either—is useful for imagining what is involved in the kind of work that an epistemology centered around situations involves. Or, to pick a profession closer to Code’s other work,³⁸ we can imagine the ecologist in the field who studies the interactions that a bird has with their environment: the ecologist doesn’t (necessarily) care about the viewpoint of the bird (though they very well may care about the way that the bird *expresses* their singularity in an environment, just not what the bird thinks and feels about this singularity), but they do care about all the mutually dependent elements of the

36 This is true even in cases where this ‘voice’ is not coming from another person, but from one’s self. For example, we could imagine a biologist reflecting on the way that their social status as a man may color their interpretations of animal behavior. This would fit in with Harding’s account.

37 Ibid., 734.

38 Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

ecosystem that both situate the bird and which the bird's situation and actions impact. Thus, the situational epistemologist is also an ecological thinker.

I mentioned at the beginning of this section that my presentations of Harding and Code were caricatures in many ways. Though I do believe that Harding places more emphasis on *speaking* and *viewing* from a particular social, spatial, historical, etc. position and that Code is more concerned with the objective roles that particulars play in a social totality, elements of both 'standpoints' and 'situations' exist in the work of both authors. The important takeaway from this discussion is that a critical framework centered solely on 'standpoints' (or that at least treats 'situations' as less crucial) is unable to deal with conflicts between members of the same oppressed group. This is because such an epistemology is ontologically idealist (or at least agnostic about the existence of objects outside of human consciousness); thus, there is nothing that can be appealed to in order to ground debates when disagreements arise. Put another way, if standpoint epistemology is supposed to invoke a new 'strong objectivity' as Harding claimed, then such an epistemology has left wide open, to its detriment, the question of just what this 'object' is that one can be objective about. Alternatively, Beauvoir's account of a 'detotalized totality,' which specifically is concerned with the organization of the world "that is indeed the same for us all" and Code's ecological model of 'situated knowledge' both show us the way that one can speak about objective and real social forms without *either* lapsing into a pre-critical and dogmatic 'god's eye' form of objectivity *or* falling prey to the celebration of the *mere* articulation of the shades of difference that exist between people. Another philosophical project that aligns with both Code and Beauvoir on this issue, but without having to rely on a correlational and anthropocentric assumption that a situation is always a situation *for someone*—and is thus better qualified to give a thorough account of worldly existence as *situated* existence—is Badiou's "objective phenomenology." I now turn to a description of this kind of phenomenology to show how it is able to gesture towards a way of escaping—or perhaps even resolving—many of

the problems that have been discussed in this section.

3. Appearing for No One: Badiou's Non-Correlational Theories of World and Appearance

In this section, I will attempt to give a broad overview of Badiou's theory of worldhood and the appearance of particulars in a world. My goal is not to show fidelity to Badiou's presentation as such, but instead to use what he has given us as a tool for thinking through problems within critical theory and phenomenology.³⁹ I will do this in three steps: 1) first, I will address some of the motivating concerns for talking about worldhood in the first place; 2) second, I will briefly consider the six formal theoretical aspects that make up the content of Badiou's logic of appearance; and finally 3) I will clarify those theoretical aspects from the previous section by examining Badiou's phenomenological reading of a tree while also clarifying in what sense this theory counts as a *phenomenology*.

3.1 From Static Being to Dynamic Appearing

At first blush, it's a bit of a mystery why Badiou has begun to speak about either worldhood or appearing in the first place. Given that his first major work, *Being and Event*, was a treatise on general properties of being, there doesn't seem to be any need to speak about what it means to appear a certain way or to a certain degree within a specific situation. The earlier task was simply to attempt to describe what it means for something to either be or not be, not to get tangled in whether something 'kind of is.' This allowed Badiou to

³⁹ This is both for reasons of space and of need. There is no space to cover all the nuances of Badiou's theory of appearance, nor all the polemical battles that he is trying to fight with this theory. We can get a general picture of the theory and move from there. Thus, I largely avoid appealing to the more robust theory presented in Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009), preferring instead to work through what is a kind of summary of that theory as presented in Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*.

pursue a line of argumentation that explicitly put him at a distance from phenomenology, analytic ‘positivist’ philosophy, and various forms of poststructuralism (especially Derrida and Deleuze).⁴⁰ Peter Hallward echoes this when he says, in his survey of Badiou’s work, that

Perhaps the most striking general development [in this turn towards appearing] is a shift from a previously disjunctive approach organized essentially around the dichotomy of either-or to a more inclusive position arranged in terms of and-and. Where before the subtractive ontology of pure being qua being was emphatically opposed to more continuous or constructivist conceptions (say, Leibniz-Bergson-Deleuze, for short), the two approaches are now arranged as thoroughly distinct yet compatible or perhaps even complementary angles. Now nonrelational abstract being is itself endowed with a more relational, more emphatically situated ontological dimension: the dimension of its appearing or being-there.⁴¹

Thus, Badiou has developed alongside the ontology of static being a theory of the phenomenological appearance of objects in a world—that is, a philosophy of relations. To some extent, this was necessary. Badiou has long held the (controversial) thesis that “mathematics is ontology,”⁴² which entails that ontology/math-

40 For a polemical survey of why Badiou was writing in opposition to these various currents see Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), especially chapters 4–7.

41 Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 293.

42 Badiou, *Being and Event*, 4. This quote is often misunderstood. Badiou isn’t claiming that *being* is mathematical in some kind of neo-Pythagorean theoretical move, though I think he’d agree with Meillassoux that mathematical formulas express true things about the primary qualities of various objects (for this, see *After Finitude*, 3). Instead, Badiou simply means that mathematics is the language in which we speak of being as such, which is the same thing as ontology. Put another way, ontology is the discursive practice concerned with the fundamental properties of being, and mathematics is the form that this practice takes. This claim only seems controversial to a brand of continental philosophy that has become overly sutured with the field of art (specifically po-

ematics is a specifically situated form of discourse, relative to the historical development of mathematical practices. Thus, while *Being and Event* was crafted around insights derived from Zermelo-Frankel set theory (with the axiom of choice included) since this form of set theory had a major claim to being a foundational language for mathematics, it makes sense that Badiou, in these subsequent works, would change gears to talk about developments in category theory which have a similar foundational claim.⁴³

Still, the question remains: why talk about worlds and appearing at all? Žižek gives us one possible line of interpretation. He asks the rhetorical question “What if the concept of world was necessitated by the need to think the unique status of the capitalist universe as worldless? Badiou has claimed that our time is *devoid of world*—how are we to grasp this strange thesis?”⁴⁴ Žižek is on to something here, but it isn’t quite adequate. Badiou may have turned to discussions of ‘worlds’ in order to capture the fact that capitalism presents a situation in which it seems that we are totally devoid of a world (meaning that the objective structure of things has broken down and that we no longer have the conceptual apparatus to present *a* picture of the world). But this would only be at the level of appearance: it’s impossible for there to actually be a lack of a world for Badiou. Perhaps, then, Badiou has moved towards a discussion of appearance and of worlds in order to capture the way that the world’s presentation of the very “worldhood of the world” (as Heidegger would say) has been voided out or has

etry)—given that this thesis is basically Quinean in nature, I can’t imagine an analytic philosopher having too much trouble with it. (This is not to say they wouldn’t disagree, of course, but only that they wouldn’t find it incomprehensible as has sometimes been the case in Badiou’s continental reception.) Badiou takes up these issues more explicitly in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*, as indicated in note 40.

43 Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 295. He says there that “The main methodological inspiration for Badiou’s own logic of relation and appearing is provided by that branch of mathematical logic known as category theory.”

44 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 317–8.

otherwise become obscured.⁴⁵

All of this is to say that Badiou's turn to a logic of worldhood and of appearance (that is, a discussion of something that can seem to be the case while not actually being so) is an attempt to bring back the category of ideology. Though this isn't stated explicitly as far as I'm aware, I see no other way in which to interpret Badiou's turn towards an analysis of a logic of appearance that isn't reducible to the way that something appears to a given individual. This analysis allows us to talk about the ways that certain things fail to appear in a world (for example, the way that 'race' may fail to appear in the world of 'neighborhood zoning practices' as an explicit 'object') and also why some things appear with a heightened intensity (like how the apparent 'necessity' of capitalism appears within the current world of late capitalism) while also saying that those things (a failure to attend to dynamics of race or a failure to attend to the contingency of a capitalist mode of production) take place within a *false* picture of the world. This is why I appeal to Badiou in attempting to think through the problem of objectivity in critical theory and phenomenology: his work attempts to create the basis for a new theory of objectivity⁴⁶ by appealing to something which is structurally equivalent to ideology critique—a form of critique which contemporary theory has

45 This is equivalent to the claim that Hallward makes in *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 296: "Appearing appears here neither in Heidegger's phenomenological sense nor as a function of time, space, or the constituent subject. It appears as an 'intrinsic determination of being', a direct consequence of the impossibility of any totalization (or all-inclusive set) of being. In the absence of any Whole, 'appearing is that which ties or reties a being to its site. The essence of appearing is relation.'" The internal quotations come from an unpublished lecture series by Badiou titled *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*.

46 There isn't space to address the fact that Badiou's objectivity is a new form of objectivity *not just* because of his new theory of appearance and worldhood, but also because of his attempt to recreate a contemporary materialist theory of the body as a 'body of truths.' Though this analysis would be helpful for articulating the radical nature of Badiou's project, for the purposes of this paper 'object' can be thought of in classical terms without too much of a loss.

largely shunned.⁴⁷

With this background motivation established in broad strokes, I now move on to describe Badiou’s actual theory.

3.2 The Algebraic Structure of Worlds: The Six Elements of a General Logic of Appearance

Although Badiou’s theory of appearance has wide-ranging applications (from ‘concrete’ spaces like political action and urban planning to more ‘abstract’ spaces such as phenomenology and analytic theories of mereology), it is thankfully fairly simple to state. The theory is composed of six parts: a transcendental structure, an ordering operation, minimal and maximal elements, a conjunction operation, an ‘envelope’ of any set of elements belonging to the transcendental, and a theory of how conjunction distributes over the envelope. Although the last two points are important for a full theory of appearance and of worlds, their use is more subtle than we have space for in this essay. Therefore, I will merely present those two points without developing them any further (just as Badiou does in the *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*).⁴⁸ Let us list these six elements in some detail:

- *The Transcendental*: Start with a presented world of some sort. This

⁴⁷ This is essentially what Badiou says in the preface to his *Logics of Worlds*. On pages 37–8 he says that in line with the demand of a theory of truth which “governs the entire organization of *Logics of Worlds*” that “the question on which the exception that grounds the break of the materialist dialectic [Badiou’s term for his ontological system] with democratic materialism [his term for the contemporary pre-critical ontology which dominates thought today and which is basically synonymous with liberalism] depends on is that of *objectivity*.”

⁴⁸ This presentation is taken more or less directly from *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 144–7, fn. 2. Although the formalization isn’t very difficult to grasp, some of the background mathematical motivations for this structure are outside of my expertise (for example, explaining why Badiou’s schematic takes the form of a ‘Heyting Algebra’ (see p. 39) rather than some other kind of algebraic structure is a question that I am not able to answer).

world can take many different forms (from the world of global politics to the world of your morning jog); regardless, this world is composed of various objects and relations. Some elements appear with less intensity than others in this world (as may be the case with ‘global politics’ during a morning jog). The structure that orders the appearance of the world, however that structure is generated, is called the transcendental of the world. The transcendental is a set composed of ‘degrees’ which are stand-ins for “degree[s] of identity between two multiples that appear in the world.” These degrees are denoted with lower case letters (p, q, r, s, etc.).

- *Ordering Relation:* The transcendental of a world organizes the degrees within that transcendental with an ordering operation that is transitive, reflexive, and anti-symmetrical. This is what allows us to say that something appears ‘less than’ (with less intensity than) something else within that world.
- *Minima and Maxima:* There exists within the transcendental both an element which appears more than or equal to any other and one that appears less than or equal any other. Though this can be proven within the logical system that Badiou utilizes, here it is simply stated.
- *Conjunction:* Within the transcendental there is a binary operation, ‘conjunction,’ that takes two elements of the transcendental and produces a third element which is the largest element which is simultaneously less than either of the two original elements. In other words, if the conjunction operation is denoted with the symbol \cap , then we have $p \cap q \leq p$ and $p \cap q \leq q$ along with the fact for a given element t it’s true that if $t \leq p$ and $t \leq q$, then $t \leq p \cap q$.
- *Envelope:* For any subset of degrees in the transcendental there exists an envelope of that set, which is the smallest element within the transcendental which is either greater than or equal to all the elements of the subset in question.
- *Distribution:* The conjunction operation functions with the envelope of a subset of the transcendental conjoined with an element of this transcendental through a process of distribution. That is, the conjunction of an element of the transcendental and an envelope of this transcendental is equal to the conjunction of

that original element along with all the elements belonging to the subset in question.

Amazingly, Badiou says that “such a simple structure [is] capable of serving as the basis for the formalization of a complete theory of appearing and of worlds.”⁴⁹ Asserting that there exists a transcendental structure which is able to organize the various elements of a world into something coherent and in which various elements can interact with one another helps give us a means of beginning to answer various questions of appearance. For example, to the basic mereological question of why a table appears *as* a table rather than as a collection of four legs placed below a flat surface we can begin by saying that it appears as a table because of the transcendental ordering of the world in which the table is an element. Just what this specific transcendental is that does such an ordering is left as an open question (perhaps it is a biological or psychological transcendental). But Badiou’s system gives us a good starting language for talking about disputes over the mereological status of the table and of evaluating claims about how there actually is no table, only “mereological simples arranged table-wise.”⁵⁰ Beyond an analysis of static everyday objects, though, this structure gives us a means of addressing various issues with why certain things do and don’t appear in worlds (as with how the layout of a building can make disability ‘appear’) or with how changes happen in appearance (like how atoms used to appear as the ‘smallest unit of mass’ and how they no longer do). Pretty much every metaphysical problem runs through the logic of appearing that Badiou provides (questions of composition, being, causation, identity, time, space, etc.) along with the ways that those problems extend into various ‘non-metaphysical’ spheres (as with the question about the composition of the working class).

49 Ibid., 146–7

50 On this dispute, and the position of the ‘mereological nihilist’ which I have described in brief here, see Theodore Sider, “Against Parthood,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics: Volume 8*, ed. Karen Bennett and Dean W. Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 237–93.

I'm now in a position to show what exactly is non-correlational about Badiou's logic of appearing and how it constitutes a phenomenological analysis at all, let alone an 'objective' one. I will proceed by analyzing Badiou's reading of the appearance of a tree in a world and how this reading constitutes a phenomenological reading.

3.3 Trees, Rust, Planets, and Other Everyday Objects

So far in this essay I have attempted show that critical phenomenology is an exciting attempt to bridge two major theoretical trends, but an attempt that is often missing necessary objective criteria of the situation. I have also tried to show how Badiou's logic of appearing gives us a language for beginning to talk about problems of genesis, constitution, and political strategy which have stymied critical phenomenology thus far. What I haven't done is show that Badiou's project constitutes a *phenomenology*, nor have I shown what is particularly unique there. This is what I hope to do in broad strokes in this final section.

If I intend to justify that Badiou's theory of worlds and appearance constitutes a phenomenology, then I need to answer the question of what a phenomenology is. I am thus led back to some of the questions that opened the essay. While I'm not sure if one can present an absolute argument for what a phenomenology *must* be, I believe that we can at least get a general sense of some elements common to most, if not all, phenomenological analyses. At this point, Sokolowski's *Introduction to Phenomenology* becomes incredibly useful. In the third chapter of this work, Solokowski lists three "formal structures" which he sees as being essential for phenomenological research: 1) Parts and wholes, 2) The presence of identity within a manifold of experience, and 3) Presence, absence, and the relations between them.⁵¹

51 Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. The analysis of these structures begins on pages 22, 27, and 33, respectively.

Let's set up a scenario, taken from Badiou,⁵² in which there are two different experiences of some trees. The first type of experience comes in the form of someone lying underneath the trees, lazily looking up at the leaves and branches as light filters through. The second type is that of someone driving past this field of trees while in a rush to get somewhere. In the first form, the trees appear with a high degree of identity: there's a focus on *this particular* tree, on its branches and leaves, on its interaction with the surrounding atmosphere of the situation (light, air, etc.) and so on. In the second form, the tree nearly disappears: it is a blur in the horizon of one's vision and may not even be explicitly taken into consideration (elements with higher degrees of appearance in this 'world' may be things like the song playing on the radio or another car that just cut our driver off).

Both examples show how there is a relationship between parts and wholes. In the first form, the parts and wholes have a low degree of identity: they are totally separable from one another, as branches, leaves, and textures are all looked at carefully. In the second form, there is a high degree of identity: the tree appears as a kind of green and brown blob along the horizon, even blending into the identity of other trees. These examples also take part in Sokolowski's second 'structure': regardless of the degree of appearance, there's still a sense in which the tree appears *as that tree* within the manifold of other experiences. It may be difficult to discern (as with the second form), but it is still *that tree* which is difficult to discern, not some bundle of properties or something similar. Finally, both forms express a relationship between presence and absence and show us how degrees of either can change over time. For example, were the person in the first form to be greeted by some friends in our idyllic grove, then the trees may be folded back into a kind of absence, as objects such as 'conversation' and 'picnic' come to have a higher degree of appearance. Similarly, were the driver's car in the second form to break down, then the trees in

52 The example is taken from *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*. It's an example that runs throughout the work and is modified in various ways from chapter to chapter, but it is first introduced on pages 28–9.

the distance may appear with a greater degree of appearance as the driver stares at them while waiting for AAA to arrive.

This is enough to show us that Badiou's language at least allows us to cover all of the major themes of phenomenology. But there is more at work here. Whereas traditional phenomenology would be able to talk about objects appearing in analogous terms, they would always fold back this appearing into the ways that appearance occurs *for* some person. This is why intentionality is so important for traditional phenomenology:⁵³ without it, there is no world at all, because the world only appears for someone at some time. This is not the case for Badiou. Although our examples have revolved around the way that some trees appear for a person, this correlational relationship isn't necessary for Badiou.⁵⁴

Let's take another example. Say there was a load of iron existing under the earth's crust some number of meters down at a certain time. This iron is then thrust into the open air of the surface after some plate shifting activity which exposes the iron. Newly exposed, the iron begins to oxidize and rust. In this example, before a geological event caused the iron to surface, there was an extremely high (perhaps maximal) degree of identity between the rust and the air on the surface of the earth. The rusting that occurs after this event occurs (in part) because the iron and the oxygen in the air are put into a world in which their respective degrees of identity are lowered and they were able to come into contact. This experience can be described phenomenologically without any sort

53 Bernhard Waldenfels even goes so far as to describe intentionality as a "shibboleth of phenomenology." See, Bernhard Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien: Basic Concepts*, trans. Alexander Kozin and Tanja Stahler (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 21.

54 Part of this is due to the mathematical formalization that Badiou prefers. This is because many of the axiomatic statements that govern this formulation are expressed in the form of something like $\{\Box x \Box y \mid \dots\}$ which makes no presumption about the existence of x but only says that for all x , if x exists, then something or rather must follow from that existence. This also means that the properties of x aren't relative to the way that it appears to some human consciousness within experience. And this is why I find Badiou so useful for attempting to create a non-correlational phenomenology.

of appeal to a person who happened to see the iron become exposed to the air or anything similar. It can be described void of any experience or consciousness of the event.

A common objection to this point would be that it is at least *possible* that someone was present to see the iron exposed to oxygen. To this objection, any number of other examples could be cited. Say we wished to talk about the way that two galaxies were flung together and were pulled into each others' gravity wells millions of years before the first human existed? Or say we wished to talk about the evolutionary line of descent running from aquatic animals to the first landlocked animals? Or, again, say we wished to speak about the relationship between the moon and the tides shortly after the moon was formed but far before any human was around to look up at it? Either we allow that these phenomena can be talked about *on their own* or we submit ourselves to constantly having to make the "correlational two-step"⁵⁵ of having to say that these things only appear the way they do *for us*. That is, either we allow for some level of a critical or speculative realism, or we resign ourselves to a solipsistic metaphysics that constantly brings everything back to us. If we are truly to try to go back 'to the things themselves!' (whether the emphasis is on these things as situated *objects* or as *situated* objects) or attempt to create a phenomenology that doesn't always fold the other back into the same,⁵⁶ then we need to adopt some kind of non-correlationist metaphysics.

All of this is to say that any critical phenomenology worthy of its name must have a realist aspect to its metaphysics. It

55 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5.

56 This would be the goal of the whole Levinasian vein of phenomenology. If Levinas' project is to be tenable, though, he needs to have a metaphysics which allows him to speak about the being-in-the-world of the other (any other, human or not) that doesn't fall back into talking about how the other appears "as if" it was for me. That is, to be a committed Levinasian is to be a metaphysical realist of some sort, though neither Levinas nor many of his followers are very interested in pursuing this line of thought. On this question of the reduction of the other to the same, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Duquesne University Press, 1979).

must be able to make claims about the world that aren't fully reducible to some viewpoint, to some subjectivity, to some partiality. The category of the universal needs to be resurrected. Otherwise, phenomenology simply becomes a tool for reproducing the social atomism of capitalism and thus it falls short of being 'critical' in any transformative sense. At the same time, a dynamic and dialectical critical phenomenology is one that also rigourously opposes naive or dogmatic realism: this must be a critical realism to work alongside a critical phenomenology. There is much work to do on these issues. I only hope to have contributed partially to the development of these fields and to have suggested that Badiou's 'objective phenomenology' is an essential tool in forging future critical phenomenologies.