

Translator's Note

Although I have tried to keep editorial interference with the text to a minimum—barring a handful of explanatory notes and indications of other works by Badiou, where concepts found in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* are given their proper doctrinal formulations—the last two chapters of this book posed significant challenges that deserve brief elucidation.

Chapter 9, “Being, Existence, Thought: Prose and Concept,” is a systematic reading, at once bold and meticulous, of Samuel Beckett's late prose text *Worstward Ho*, reconfigured here as a short treatise on ontology. The translation proved particularly arduous because, unlike most of Beckett's English prose, *Worstward Ho* was not translated into French by Beckett himself, and, moreover, what Badiou does with Beckett's text is overtly dependent on the abstractive capacity of Édith Fournier's translation and essentially pays no heed to the original text. It almost goes without saying that by inverting the direction of Badiou's operation, my translation of Badiou's essay has had to confront a number of serious challenges, often forcing me to test the resources of the English language in order to maintain the closeness of Badiou's reading and to accommodate the unique manner in which Beckett's own terminology is progressively appropriated into Badiou's prose. I hope that the distance produced by Badiou's having employed Fournier's translation will prove illuminating, even when the discussion of *Cap au pire* is translated into English and the citations are now from Beckett's original English version.

Chapter 10, "Philosophy of the Faun," is another "monograph" on in-aesthetics, in this instance concerned with one of Stéphane Mallarmé's most famous "Symbolist" poems, *L'après-midi d'un faune*. In order to maintain the consistency and indexicality of Badiou's commentary, I have been obliged to produce my own version of the poem, which is here quoted in its entirety. Far from claiming to have sought any poetic superiority over previous translations, I have simply aimed to maintain, to the best of my ability, the speculative armature identified in Badiou's discussion while simultaneously endeavoring not to inflict too much harm upon Mallarmé's language, and above all upon his syntax, which Badiou isolates as the crucial operator in the French poet's practice and thought. My effort here is deeply indebted to the translations by C. F. MacIntyre and Henry Weinfield and could in a sense be regarded as an amended hybrid of the two.¹

Illegitimate as it may at first appear, I would maintain that such a "literalization," together with the perilous "return" of *Cap au pire* to its English original, is entirely consonant with the claims of Badiou's philosophy in general and registers one of the most obvious effects of in-aesthetic discourse. Rather than seeking to welcome (that is, to absorb) the poem into the realm of speculative thinking in a hermeneutic vein, Badiou's approach is committed both to declaring the autonomy of artistic procedures (poetic or literary, cinematic or theatrical) and to registering what he calls their "intra-philosophical effects." (See the epigraph to this volume.) It is worth noting in this respect that the practice of translation, while constituting "an almost invariably disastrous approximation" (Chapter 5 below), nevertheless functions—as Badiou himself avows with specific reference to Beckett—as a potent weapon in the arsenal of in-aesthetics, preparing the extraction from the works in question of those traits that single them out as conditions for philosophical activity. In his own "flattening or punctuation" of Mallarmé's poems, aimed at discerning their "syntactical becoming"—what he in effect dubs their "translation"—Badiou concisely defines this operation as one in which "the poem is withdrawn from all poetry."² It is in line with such a "withdrawal" that I have opted for the consistency of reference and syntax over that of rhyme and in accordance with which I have modified some translations whose "poetry" is surely superior to my own.

The original text, in accordance with Badiou's customary practice, is devoid of references. All endnotes are my own. Following the reasons adduced by Daniel W. Smith in his translation of Deleuze's "Desire and Pleasure," I have chosen to leave *dispositif* in the French.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Nina Power and Roberto Toscano for reading through drafts of this translation and kindly sparing me some grievous errors and omissions, to Bud Bynack for his meticulous and insightful editorial comments, to John Felstiner for generously providing the two new translations of Paul Celan in Chapter 3, to Ray Brassier and Peter Hallward for their suggestions and their indispensable contribution to my understanding of Badiou's thought, and, finally, to Alain Badiou, for his assistance, friendship, and abiding support.