

The Necessity of Philosophy

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Introduction

All around us we hear the screams of discontent, and a moment later the march of protest. And yet, all of this clamor, all of these protests and cries, are followed in almost every case by a silence – a silence that is as deafening as it is heavy to bear. What is the cause of this failure? Why is it that all of this anger, all of this will, all of this rallying of discontent amounts to nothing? Here in the West, we cannot say that this silence is solely the work of some heavy hand. Certainly there is repression, there is brutality, and there is a sophisticated structure of censorship – but could we in all honesty, maintain that anything other than this silence would follow from all of our screams and shouts, our anger and our discontent, if that which we oppose were to get out of the way? Can we really blame the weakness and impotence on that which it opposes? It is not without a bit of irony that while we so often recite some lines pointing at the world, we too seem to be passing from one day to the next without an Idea.¹

I affirm that the question ‘how to account for the weakness of the left in a time when capitalism is going through a crisis?’ is a question that very much *exists* in our world. Its existence cannot be in doubt, it is a fact. The left is weak, the left is impotent, the left, in spite of its frantic activity, is, on the whole, paralyzed. It is on these grounds that we must understand Slavoj Žižek’s call for reversing Marx’s infamous 11th thesis – philosophers have only contemplated the world, the point is to change it:

“the first task today is precisely NOT to succumb to the temptation to act, to directly intervene and change things (which then inevitably ends in a *cul de sac* of debilitating impossibility: “what can one do against the global capital?”), but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates.”²

In short, the philosopher’s point is that what is necessary today is precisely to return to the philosophical task of thinking the world. And if this is a philosophical task, then philosophy is not concerned so much with the provision of answers as with the reformulation of questions, the reformulation of problems. Žižek, in fact, suggests that the philosophical task is to expose how the very way we conceive of a problem may itself be part of the problem. This implication of our conceptualization of the problem leads us to a minimal definition of ideology: it is these ‘wrong

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1 We can define an Idea as the knotting of a truth, a world and a subject, or, as Badiou himself has translated it, a real (truth), a symbolic (world) and an imaginary (subject). See *The Idea of Communism*, in *The Communist Hypothesis*, Badiou 2010.

2 Žižek 2011, p. 170.

questions which we can call ideology'. In consequence we must be careful with the very assignment of the cause of this weakness of the left – there is nothing innocent, nothing objective in the way we understand the problem. Indeed, it carries radical consequences. The first question, therefore, is how to conceptualize the problem without opening the way to the temptation of despair, of cynicism or skepticism, of a resignation to a fate, which would be constituted by the act of the resignation itself. In a peculiar logical twist, just because there is no History, no Fate, no predetermined End, does not mean that one cannot become necessary. Perhaps the only way to evade this road to Fate is to reverse *the reversal*, that is, conceive of the cause as strictly logical and not ontological. In which case, the first task for thought is to turn the mirror, so to speak, on ourselves and ask what is it that we are doing, or not doing, what it is that we are thinking, or not thinking, that is the support of the very cause of our discontent, its permanence, and its seeming inescapability. Psychoanalysis, we know, was brought into the thought of emancipatory politics precisely to respond to this seemingly paradoxical problem – to unravel the mystery of our attachment to our enslavement, and to our discontent. This text is not on psychoanalysis, but on philosophy, on what philosophy can do, on what role philosophy in its very weakness can play in revitalizing the left. My wager is that to cast off this impotence, and to cast off this temptation, what we need today is something that itself was castoff long ago, thrown away as irrelevant, misguided, guilty even, and certainly un-useful. My thought is that what the left needs today is philosophy.

The existing question, then, takes on a little more specificity for us here: it is no longer 'how can we assume this problem' – for there are may be many ways to do so – but: *how can philosophy, as philosophy, assume it? What is it that philosophy can do to help nudge the present off its current track, and give it a chance at some other direction?*

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The first step, naturally, would be to affirm that capitalism is, in fact, in such a crisis. We cannot, however, do that here. Nonetheless – for it is a useful supposition – let us consent that there is such a crisis, and so, an opportunity. From the above question we can subtract two points:

- 1) There is something is missing (for the left)
- 2) There is the question of radical change (how it would be possible, and by the same pivot, why is it not taking place)

The two, can then be formed into one:

3) That which is missing is the pivot that turns the continuation of the present into the production of a new future.

Nietzsche once said that no man can see around his own corner—something that was already obvious from the very outline of *ubermensch*. And Marx, for his part, could never fully (and was never fully concerned to) describe the future society that would be the overcoming of the contradictions of the present. That there is always a wager and a risk with the new is the only inevitability. This problem of change, of its possibility, its destination, its place, has often been said – and it has certainly been implicitly proved – to be the most difficult of philosophy’s problems.³ But, as fate would have it, it is also its most essential problem. Though philosophy may be in the present, its problem, its cross to bear is how to think of the possibility of the new, how to think the possibility of the passage from the present to a new future – a passage we would call historical, a passage that would not be just a development, an extension of the present. And so, perhaps the idea of putting philosophy to work on this problem is not so strange, and is not only a possibility but something of a duty, a duty of philosophy..

Louis Althusser once proposed that the duty of philosophers was to conceive of how philosophy could be put at the service of sciences and that this, as opposed to making the sciences subservient to philosophy, would be the properly emancipatory use of philosophy.⁴ If we assume all that which is denoted by Althusser by ‘sciences’ we could well say that the thesis here is Althusserian. But the thesis is also – I believe – fully Badiouian, in that we must maintain a specific definition of philosophy, a definition which restricts its ability to produce any truths. And it is truths, and truths alone, that make history, that can move the present off of its path - in our case, a path that is certainly moving towards catastrophe.

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³ *Some Ambiguities in Discussions Concerning Time* 1963, p.107. Nietzsche, for instance, writes: “these reflections are also untimely, because I attempt to understand as a defect, infirmity and shortcoming of the age something of which our age is justifiably proud, its historical education. I even believe that all of us suffer from a consuming historical fever and should at least realize that we suffer from it. If Goethe has said with good reason that with our virtues we also cultivate our faults, and if, as everyone knows, a hypertrophic virtue – which the historical sense of our age seems to me to be – may bring about the decay of a people as much as a hypertrophic vice, one may as well allow me my say. ... , [to be untimely is] to act against the age and so to have an effect on the age to the advantage, it is to be hoped, of a coming age”. See Nietzsche 1995, p.87.

⁴ Althusser 2011, p. 69 – 165.

We confront, therefore, a very specific problem: *what can philosophy, despite its limitations, contribute to the creation of a new possibility, maybe a new future?*

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Let us begin with a question that is so often addressed to philosophers: what is it that you do? And let us admit that it is a fair question, not least because we ourselves are largely unable to provide a response any more than a consensus. What is it that we do, after all? Some of us, of course, study Kant, others Nietzsche, others still turn to Hegel and the Ancient Greeks – this is all well and good, and, maybe, important. After all, philosophy – and perhaps art, as well – is one of the few forms of thought for which an understanding of its past is essential, to the extent that it could even be maintained that the very subject of philosophy - its definition, its essence - is revealed by its history.⁵ And yet, if philosophy is reduced only to the study of its history, then it is, in fact, something other than philosophy - it is scholasticism. If philosophy is reduced merely to the recollection of its past, it is but a museum of itself.⁶ What then is it that philosophy does? Of course, there exist, common answers to this question: philosophy is the love of knowledge, the love of wisdom, maybe the love of truth, or even, philosophy is that which relentlessly asks questions. That we are unsure of what philosophy is, of what it does, is made obvious by the sheer vacuity of these responses, as much as by the fact that they are too often assumed as synonymous, as interchangeable, when, in fact, they all imply something quite distinct, and even in opposition to each other.. What is it, then? Is it the thought of truth? And if it is, is it a construction, or a discovery? Or is it some higher knowledge? Does it judge, or construct? Does it appropriate its other, or does it determine the same? Or, finally, is it just the passive serenity of wisdom?

Let us assume a definition, in fact, let us assume the most famous of philosophy's definitions, Hegel's: *philosophy is its time in thought.*⁷ But to simply state this definition does not resolve our problem, for we can ask:

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5 Hegel 1997, p. 207-218. Badiou, on the other hand proposes that the ethics of philosophy is the history of philosophy, an idea which – given what this ethics is, and what history is, is not all that different for it would reveal and force the central element of philosophy's decision for Badiou, its emptiness, the emptiness of Truth. See Badiou 2008, p. 25.

6 Badiou 2008, p. 3-5.

7 Hegel 2002, p. 9.

to what end, or, what is the consequence, the purpose of this thought? Is it the pinnacle of an age? The genius of its time? Its self-consciousness? Is it the key to its time? Maybe. But again: what of it? What do we do with this thought? Or, what does this thought do? If there is nothing more to philosophy, if there is no consequence to this thought, no end to it, then philosophy is nothing more than a very complex, and very beautiful, history of ideas. If such a thought merely consummates the genius of its time, and its use is exhausted by retroactive comprehension of some near or distant age, then philosophy is of use only to historians – or, at best, any other use can be revealed through historians. But even such a circuit does not itself resolve our question, it merely displaces it from the confused hands of philosophers to the fumbling ones of historians. If philosophy's existence is to be justified – and by extension, the thesis of this short text – then it is we who must answer the question of what *it* does. So we can ask: *what is the function of this thought of its time, of this thought of thought?*

We can begin with something of a concrete situation. In 2010, amidst the continuation of austerity measures, the British government cut funding to higher education. These cuts, of course, were not equally distributed across the faculties: the faculties of science, medicine, engineering and business would see a reduction in funding, but would largely remain unaffected, while what is often called the Faculty of Philosophy, the faculty wherein the liberal arts and humanities are studied, would see its funding reduced to zero, or next to zero.. These cuts were defended on the grounds that these fields make no contribution to the state, and so there is no justification for their continued funding and subsidizing by the state. And we must admit that this is in fact correct: philosophy does not contribute anything to the state. As we are all so fond of history, let us give a historical argument: the first contradiction encountered by philosophy was that between itself and the state.⁸ This is not, of course, to say that philosophy has no role in the state as such – in fact, we could even maintain the Platonic thesis that philosophy (and the philosopher) is simultaneously impossible outside of the state and within the state, that philosophy is as necessary to a rational state as it is dangerous, or at least, useless to the particular state within which Plato and Socrates found themselves.⁹ This impossibility, and the paradoxical

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8 Koyre, 1945: p. 53–106.

9 Ibid.

relationship underlying it, can be read in many ways. For example, we could take this to mean that philosophy is always political, that is to say, a true philosophy is not at liberty to choose whether it is or is not political any more than it can choose to be concerned with art, science, and so on. Another possibility would be to understand this statement to mean that although philosophy 'corrupts', its wager is that corruption is not enough, put differently, philosophy involves a further step than nihilism, skepticism or sophism.¹⁰ Philosophy, in the case of the latter possibility, maintains a thesis homologous to that of Saint Just when he announced the necessity of institutions to prevent the French Revolution from ending in the pure event of its uprising.¹¹ In its own terms, we could say that philosophy maintains that desire alone is insufficient, that desire must be institutionalized, that it must become love.¹² The infamous – and in fact not at all ridiculous, but rather very rational – solution of Plato was the philosopher king – a thesis which, although I cannot defend it here, is not at all a suture for Plato but precisely what we could call a structural necessity for a rational state, a rational totality.

This somewhat paradoxical relationship between philosophy and the state does not resolve our question, but it does point us in the right direction – at least insofar as we assume that 'state' is another name for structure, or better, the structuring of a situation.¹³ In which case, philosophy as the thought of its time, as the thought of thought, maintains a homologous relationship to the structure of a world as did the Greek philosophers to Athens. Philosophy, then, is both useless to the state, unrecognizable to it – a 'fools blabbering', a corruption, and a blasphemy¹⁴ – and a subversion of the same state.

To begin to defend our thesis that philosophy has some use in our common predicament, we must first be more precise on the nature of philosophy. It is, however, impossible to provide a full articulation of its very complex definition, and so let us be content with positing

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¹⁰ We can consider, for example not only Plato's (and then later Badiou's, in his re-writing of *The Republic*) move from the question of what is justice, in the subjective sense to the question of what is a just state, but also the very endeavor of writing *The Republic*, of thinking the republic, as a way to structure the philosophy of Socrates – the book, in some sense, is Socrates's attempts to construct a state fitting to his thought.

¹¹ Badiou 2008, p. 26-32.

¹² Badiou 2012, p. 66.

¹³ Badiou 2005: p. 93-103.

¹⁴ Plato 1997, p. 503; p. 17-36.

the following: philosophy does not create truths, but constructs the Truth, which is a compossibility of the various operations of the truth-procedures. This conditioning and immanence of philosophy demands that we conceive of it as strictly empty before the appropriation of forms, operations and concepts which are created by the truth-procedures. In this respect, philosophy is an operational space that is simultaneously within and in exception to its conditions. Moreover, from this it follows that philosophy is distinct both from sophistry (in that it affirms truths and constructs the Truth) and religion (in that it constructs the Truth out of historically generated truths) – in this respect, philosophy is something like the thought of truth without God. In consequence, philosophy must resign any substantial superiority over the conditions, in the sense that it would assume some access to a higher truth or knowledge by which it could determine the conditions, be it in the present or the future, and yet it is what affirms truths. To this we can add that a philosophy is the same as its Truth, that is, as the compossibility of truths. Finally, we can say that the function of philosophy (thinking the totality of its time) and the conditioning and space of philosophy (it is immanent and exceptional) carries the consequence that the addition of philosophy to the world, its inclusion in it, makes the world evental and properly infinite. As should be obvious, our definition of philosophy is Badiou's.¹⁵

Given this definition, it is obvious what philosophy does in a situation where truths exist – it reflexively constructs a Truth, the Truth of its time, and, in a loop, affirms the truths out of which it composed itself. The question that is far more difficult, far more obscure, and, in fact, far more important, is: what philosophy does, or what can it do, when the truth-procedures are not active, when we live in a world without truth(s)? Philosophy itself cannot produce truths, and so in their absence it seems to be in a position of absolute impotence: it is both impotent, for it cannot itself produce the pivot of the shift, and impossible, for there are no active truth-procedures out of which it can compose itself. In short: it is impotent and inexistent. After all, if philosophy is its time in thought, and so the thought of thought, then the thought of which it is the thought must pre-exist it. Such a situation, *our situation*, therefore, only further complicates our initial problem, and, by extension, our thesis. Finally, we can recognize here that we have again arrived at Hegel, who further

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¹⁵ It is possible, in fact, to say that the definition of philosophy is *Being and Event*, which is also the Truth of it time, or, our time.

defined philosophy as the Owl of Minerva, taking flight at dusk.¹⁶

This fuller definition of philosophy, when made concrete in our world, has, therefore, not only failed to resolve our initial problem, but has only further complicated it. The very thing that I proposed can operate the passage that would resolve our problem is impossible precisely at the moment of its necessity. Our question, consequently, can be reformulated, and it is again two-fold: *what can philosophy do in a world where truths do not exist, which is also a world that determines it as impossible?* And, second: *what is missing?*

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We can begin with the latter question. That we live in a world where truths do not exist, at least not with sufficient intensity, is a thesis that – like the state of capitalism today – we cannot defend or prove here. As such, we will merely assume it. The argument is that in the place of truth-procedures, today we find only their perversions: in the place of art there is culture, in the place of science, technology, in the place of love there is but sex, and, finally, in the place of politics we have management.¹⁷ Two things follow from this set of distortions: First, that the conditions are truth-procedures is no more a necessity than that an event follows from a site – that truths are produced is merely a possibility. Consequently, the fields can be divided: there can be conditions without active truth-processes and conditions with active truth-processes. To the former we can give the name ‘knowledge’ and to the latter ‘thought’. And second, we can suppose that there is something the presence or absence of which is the operator of this distinction, further adding that it is this something which is ‘what is missing’ from the left today.

It would be impossible, in a text of this size, to consider in detail the singular distortions of each of the generic-procedures. It is also

16 Hegel 2002, p. 10. This thesis is in no way restricted to Hegel – even the anti-Hegelian Althusser, for instance in *Lenin and Philosophy*, confirmed it when we spoke about the necessary lag of philosophy behind the sciences, and we too must affirm this limitation of philosophy by way of its conditioning, and by way of restricting the production of truth to the generic-procedures.

17 Badiou 2003, p. 12. Specifically, Badiou writes: “The contemporary world is thus doubly hostile to truth procedures. This hostility betrays itself through nominal occlusions: where the name of a truth procedure should obtain, another, which represses it, holds sway. 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 homogeneous 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.”

unnecessary to do so, since the cause of the distortion is in some sense the same in each case. Badiou, in fact, suggests as much when he states that the contemporary 'culture-technology-management-sexuality system' occludes the 'art-science-politics-love system'. In place of a singular analysis, let us wager that the distortion is on account of what we can call perversion, which can be minimally defined as the disavowal of castration. Put another way, it is the disavowal of a certain impossibility, and the consequent activity on top of this negation. Specifically, in psychoanalysis, it is the objectification of oneself into the supposed object of the other's desire. There are, here, three implications: the supposition of a knowable object in the place of a lack; a certainty of the knowable object and more fundamentally, that there is an object; and, third, the constitution of the other as whole. Such a structure, consequently, conceals the very possibility of what psychoanalysis calls truth, which is what 'pokes holes in knowledge', or the fact that the other does not exist (as whole). We can translate this as follows: perversion is the consistency of knowledge made possible by the negation of some impossibility, some inconsistency. Such a move supposes that there are objects of knowledge and nothing in exception to them, and, thereby, allows the situation to appear as consistent and whole – the only un-known is that which can become known, without disrupting the consistency of the situation. The perversion of the conditions, therefore, is the very condition of what we call 'the end of history'. In consequence to this definition of knowledge, we can define thought as that which forces or carries with the same inconsistency.

We arrive here, at a first response to our initial problem: what is missing – such that there is no structural change despite the existence of a crisis – is truth(s). The construction of a new concept of truth is one of the fundamental tasks of *Being and Event*,¹⁸ and we cannot here venture into a full description. Rather, let us again be satisfied with a minimal definition: the being of a truth is, naturally, determined by ontology, and so it is what Badiou calls a generic multiple, a subset of a situation which finding its origin in the eruption of the void within a situation, is constructed through a series of subtractions. It is, thereby, also infinite and eternal, despite arising out of a specific situation and a singular site. Truth, as a process sourced from such an eruption, exposes or forces into existence that on whose negation the situation attained consistency. Therefore, not only are truths strictly speaking immanent

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18 Badiou 2005, p.3

and historical, despite being infinite and eternal, they are also the very vehicles of history. Their construction, their coming into existence, or their appearance in the world, is impossible without a radical change in the very structure of the world from which they arose. History, therefore, is always and only the history of eternal truths.¹⁹

This response, however, is rather obvious and tautological, and, moreover, does not allow us to resolve the problem with the aid of philosophy, since producing truth is precisely what it cannot do. And so, our task must be to consider: *why it is that within the logic of the contemporary world the conditions for truths do not exist?* The state of our situation, which is to say, our world, is structured by the logic of that Badiou calls constructivist. Thus, we must consider what of the conditions of a truth is obstructed within this logic.

Before we can see how this is an occlusion of the possibility of a truth, we must fix some terminology, namely: situation state of the situation, constructivism, and within these, the void. A situation is any consistent multiplicity, but a consistent multiplicity is not a presentation of being itself, for it is the result of an operation, the name of which is count-as-one. The being of being, in so far as a situation is the result of an operation, we can conclude is not one, and so is multiple. This multiplicity, however, in that it is without one, is a pure or inconsistent multiplicity. That is, a multiplicity of multiplicity, of multiplicity, and so on until we reach the only possible point of termination, the void. The void, therefore, like pure multiplicity is a deductive supposition, the grounds for which follow from a two-fold thesis: mathematics is ontology, set theory being the articulation of what we can know of being today, and to ontology can be known. The count-as-one, therefore, is the operation that both installs “the universal pertinence of the one/multiple couple for any situation”, and forecloses being as such, which is to say, the inconsistent multiple. The count-as-one, finally, is the condition for the possibility of any experience – which is another way of saying: everything is a situation.

The concept of situation, is not, however, the end of structure. Structure is the sum of two levels or operations: presentation, i.e., the situation, the count-as-one, and representation, i.e., the state of the situation, the count-of-the-count or forming-into-one. The necessity of the second operation is immanent to the function of the first. It secures

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19 'History' is here used as distinct both from History and historicism, indeed 'history' here implies precisely that which is opposed and irreducible to both of the others, that is, to historicity.

the situation from confronting its void by counting that which is the sole indicator that the situation is not being itself, but the institution of a count-as-one. It is a representation, it counts the count. More specifically, since everything is a set – for instance, a kitchen is a set, but so is a table, and so is a cup, and so is the content on the cup, and so on – then the full definition of the count of the count, of the state of the situation, is that it counts all that which is an element of each set, of each count-as-one. The consequence of this is that representation reveals itself to be the doubling of presentation. The final result of this structuring is the one/multiple couple. For instance: a person is a one and a multiple, it is one but it is also a multiple of other ones (features, characteristics, papers, licenses, interests, etc., etc.), which are themselves multiples of other ones, and so on towards infinity. The function of the state – its forming into sub-sets those things which themselves are the groupings of sets – is to constitute the semblance that everything is some one thing. The consequence is the foreclosure of the void, of the pure multiplicity of the situation, precisely by giving the situation the semblance of being a set of counted ones, and not a set of *count-as-ones*. By this operation, the state is able to cover over, or conceal, the irreducibility of being and existence, by reducing the former to the latter. Put another way, the gap in existence the name of which is pure multiplicity, or the void, is concealed by the very operation of securing that every set is a one, a one multiple, which is to say, whole.²⁰ The essential point is that the second count is a necessity because the very fact of the first count, i.e., *the counting itself*, is the mark of the fact that there is an irreducibility between being as such and its presentation, i.e., of the fact that there is a void. *Representation, therefore, conceals this gap by concealing the structure of structure, by concealing the fact or form of structure.*

The structuring of the situation produces three types of terms: normal terms, which are presented and represented, excrescent terms, which are represented but not presented, and singular terms, which are presented but not represented. The second constitute the infinite surplus of representation over presentation, of included terms over ones which belong – the precise size of this excess is equal to two to the power of the number of terms in the situation, or two to the power of the cardinality

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²⁰We can say that pure multiplicity, or the void is the gap in existence since it is that which is supposed to exist on the basis of a rationality that is always within a situation. We cannot directly experience pure multiplicity – as the count-as-one is the most elementary condition of experience – but with mathematics, i.e. set theory, we can nonetheless think it, write it, and in some sense, know it.

of the situation. The third, on the other hand, mark the *irreducibility concealed by the second count*. The presence of the third – specifically, in its radical form, a term none of whose elements are themselves presented²¹ – makes a situation historical. Given that the singular is produced and concealed necessarily, we can confirm that *every situation is ontologically historical*, and so we can also confirm that the stake for us is a logical problem, and not an ontological one. Moreover, we can absolutely confirm Walter Benjamin's thesis that the end of history is always ideological.

It is this concealment of excrescence and the count, inherent to every structuring of a situation, that allows us to say that every established situation is, ultimately, constructivist.²² The primary characteristic of which is that it maintains, as a solution to mastering this excess and concealment, the supposition that all represented one-multiples are always already presented.²³ This solution is made possible by the placement of the situation under complete jurisdiction by language, which admits as existing only that which is explicitly, and already, nameable.²⁴ The specific function of language is to demand that the representation of anything already be presented in the situation is that it contains a certain recognizable, i.e., already named, property or sub-multiple. In fact, that all of its elements are themselves presented, and, further, still represented. Language, therefore, is here posited as the bridge discernibility (presentation) and classification (representation). Hence, if to the constructivist question of 'what is that?' we cannot respond with properties already existing in the structured situation, the response will be 'it is nothing'. Constructivism is, ultimately, a radical nominalism: that which is not already named by language, or cannot be named by some construction of language, is simply denied existence. Further still, since the structuring of the situation already reduces being to existence, language determines, and can deny, being as such. That 'nothing', therefore, is simply 'not', it is 'non-being'. The co-ordinated movement of these three functions (discernment, classification and language) is

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21 This is the definition of an evental site, that is, it is a site where none of the terms grouped are themselves presented, it is, therefore, a radical singularity.

22 Badiou 2005, p. 281–294.

23 Badiou 2005, p. 286.

24 Badiou 2005, p. 504.

called *knowledge* - the objective knowledge of the state of the situation.²⁵ The price of this consistency of knowledge is the negation of the void of the situation, and the consequent claim that all that exists, and all that exist is, therefore, are knowable objects. *Constructivism, therefore, is the structural logic of the perversion of the truth-procedures.*

It is possible to condense this logic – with respect to our venture – into a set of propositions:

1. The knowledge of the world is constituted on a certain ignorance.
2. This ignorance is the ignorance of the very structure constitutive of knowledge.

Put another way:

3. There is some unknown-known, there is some knowledge²⁶ irreducible to the knowledge within a structured situation.

The logic of constructivism allows us to account for the fact that in our world possibilities are reduced to different variations of what already exists. In the case of politics, consequently, what we have are various possibilities of *managing the world*.²⁷ The possibilities admitted as possible are, however, only as different as they are the same. *This is the fate of the world.* And it is a fate since nothing new – wherein ‘new’ is distinct from new arrangements of the same – is possible. Indeed, all that is possible in such a world are different configurations and intensities of already known existences, and what is not possible, consequently, is some new existence. What is not possible is a radical change – a change that necessitates the construction of a *new structure* of the situation. In short: what is not possible in a constructivist world, what is not possible within its logic, is a truth. And why? Because the conditions for what

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²⁵ Badiou 2005, p. 328.

²⁶ ‘Knowledge’ here is not to be misunderstood as synonymous to the way we have proposed to use the term, i.e., as designating the understanding within and extending of a condition devoid of an active truth. Rather, by this ‘knowledge’ we intend something like form of knowledge, which, incidentally is not all that far from thought, or, at least, it is closer to it than the knowledge it makes possible.

²⁷ A world can, at its most elementary, be defined as the sum of knowable objects and their relation – relations (and hence the objects themselves) which are not only not restricted from modifications, but whose continuous modification constitutes the particular development of a world.

would be a truth are concealed. This is, again, a very complex structure, but for our intents it is sufficient to say that the conditions of possibility for a truth-process are: the existence of a singularity; a site, moreover an eventual one; the possibility of intervention;²⁸ and, following this, the processes of fidelity²⁹ and forcing.³⁰ The first pair are strictly impossible from the position of the objective knowledge of a constructivist situation. Since in constructivism only terms whose elements themselves are terms of the situation are granted existence, there can be, from the point of view of the knowledge of the situation, no recognizable site within the situation. Put another way, the knowledge of the situation does not recognize anything that could disrupt it. And second, since intervention requires not only the decision that an event has taken place but also the capacity to name something which is in-existent to the situation, intervention demands of language something that is strictly beyond its reach, according to the logic of constructivism. This reduces it to circulating between what is already discernable and the potentially infinite cross-classifications of these terms – namely, the capacity to stretch itself beyond objective existence. It is with this in mind, that we can understand why the reliance on poetry in *Being and Event* is not metaphorical, but strictly a condition of philosophy, that is, a condition of the construction of the process of a truth, i.e., of Truth.

Within such a world, it is not only that truths do not exist, but that their very conditions of possibility are negated or concealed. Meaning not only the void, which is concealed by every situation, and its marker, by every structuring of a situation, but also the possibility of a singularity, of a site and intervention are made impossible with a situation such as this. This is not, however, to say that an event is impossible, *but only that it is impossible from the point of view of the objective knowledge of such a world*. Hence the Žižekian thesis with which we began: what is necessary today is to return to a philosophical comprehension, or analysis of the world, of the structure of the situation.

Žižek again captures the predicament of the impotence of our wills and intentions, perfectly:

“In an old joke from the German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by censors,

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28 See Badiou 2005, p. 201-211.

29 See Badiou 2005, p. 232-254.

30 See Badiou 2005, p. 391-430.

he tells his friends: "Let's establish a code: if a letter from me is written in blue ink, it is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false." After a month, his friends get the first letter written in blue ink: "Everything is wonderful here: stores are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, movie theatres show films from the west, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair - the only thing unavailable is red ink..."³¹

What is missing, therefore, is precisely the immanent possibility of the very conditions of a truth, at least in so far as we continue to think within the ideological co-ordinates, that is within the objective knowledge of the situation. We have, then, another definition of ideology: "ideology exploits the minimal distance between a simple *collection* of elements and the different *sets* one can form out of this collection", such that it limits the possible to its own extension.³² What is missing, therefore, is precisely the capacity to assume the conditions for that which would, or by which it would be possible to, articulate *the cause* of discontent – an articulation that would already be a first step towards some Idea.³³

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The most elementary thesis of philosophy, Badiou has proposed, is that of the void, and so it is natural to propose that what philosophy can and could transmit is precisely this thesis. However, what would it mean to transmit the void? After all, the void is, first, the proper name of the inconsistent multiple, of being as such, and so, a retroactive supposition of what is anterior to presentation, and *not something visible from within a situation*.³⁴ It is, therefore, precisely that which must be nothing for the pertinence of the one-multiple pair to attain consistency, and so from the point of view of any presentation it is strictly speaking a nothing equivalent to a non-being. It is, of course, not equivalent to non-being, but precisely the marker of the irreducibility of being to existence. This, however, is only articulable by ontology, which is to say by the presentation of presentation, and meta-ontology, and not visible from within a presentation. Moreover, despite the fact that the void is necessarily within everything in a situation, that it haunts the entirety of the situation, the void is not itself directly graspable. And so, we

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31 Žižek 2002, p. 1.

32 Žižek 2009, p. 105.

33 Žižek 2010.

34 Badiou 2005, p. 52.

must ask: what could transmission of the void, to whichever route or place, mean? Could it even be transmitted directly? And if it could be transmitted as a thesis, what could the consequences of this be on the conditions? Certainly, to transmit the void is, in some sense, a solution to the problem posed by a constructivist logic, but it appears as a something of an impossible one, or, at least, an ineffective one. If it is not directly graspable within a situation, and everything is a situation, then could the effect of its transmission be anything other disavowal? To be very naïve, we can ask what would be the effect of saying to the conditions ‘the void is’? Would the response not be something along the lines of: ‘I know very well, but...’? Finally, we can further ask: how does such a transmission square with the minimal definition of philosophy we assumed at the outset – that it is the reflexive thought of its time, the reflexive thought of thought.

To suggest that the most elementary operations of the discipleship of a philosophy is the transmission of its basic thesis is not, however, immediately reducible to the idea of this transmission being a transmission of the void of being. What the void involved in the philosophical operation is requires a rather complex theory of the definition of philosophy, but for our purpose here it is sufficient to say that aside from understanding the ‘thesis of the void’ as relating to the void of being, we can also understand it as an ‘operational void’, or as the ‘void of address’.³⁵ In the Introduction of *The Praxis of Alain Badiou*, the editors suggest the following:

“If philosophy itself institutes nothing but the void of an address, the transmission of a philosophy requires its disciples to invent new modes of thinking adequate to supporting the singularity of this empty address; these disciples work to transform the emergence of this void address into letters, into marks that subsist and can circulate along routes and through places that previously would have found these marks unthinkable and/or unacceptable. ...”³⁶

It is interesting that with this idea of philosophy as evoking an operational void, which can also be called a void of address, there is a further return to Plato. For instance, consider *Euthyphro*, wherein Socrates’ central question is: do the gods love the pious because they are pious, or are they pious because they are loved by the gods? In other

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³⁵ Badiou 2008, p. 3–32.

³⁶ Ashton, Bartlett, Clemens 2006, p. 6.

words, where or what is the guarantee? With philosophy the guarantee of a proposition, of any proposition, is reason. In the case of Badiou it is a rationality that is strictly immanent to, or derived from, the conditions, while with religion, for instance, the guarantee is God. Put another way, there is a void of address of philosophy – philosophy has no sacred book, no sacred place of enunciation, and so on – and this questioning without guarantee can be read as an operational void. Put another way, these two voids ‘of address’ and ‘of operation’ demand that if something is true it is true if and only if it can be proved with reason, with argument, if it can withstand critique. Philosophy, then, as the transmission of this void is, naturally, very much the Platonic or Socratic procedure of questioning professed knowledge by an incessant and rather hysterical pursuit of its grounds, of its conditions.

But let us propose, instead, that philosophy, in order to make possible the shift from the continuation of the present to the construction of a new future – from knowledge to thought – must do something other than transmit the void. The idea is that all philosophy does, and all that it can do – given that it cannot itself produce truths – in such a situation such as ours is add itself to the world: *to make possible the movement from knowledge to thought, philosophy must add itself to the world. Philosophy adds to the world all that it is, and all that it has - it adds Truth.*

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What exactly is it that is added to the world by philosophy? There seem to exist two possibilities: one, philosophy adds a duplicate of the world to the world – it adds the thought of its time to its time; and two, philosophy in that it is something like the world’s unconscious, by adding itself adds the unknown-known of the world to the world. These two possibilities, however, are, in fact, but one.

First let us ask: what exactly is this thought of thought that is philosophy’s operation? What is it that philosophy appropriates from the conditions? What is it that it thinks? To use two rather naïve terms, we can ask: does philosophy think the content of the thoughts of the truth-procedures, or their form, that is, the operations themselves? The answer is clear: the category of Truth – which is the thought of philosophy – is the trajectory of truths,³⁷ it is, as Badiou states in the Introduction to *Being and Event* the system or ‘general order of thought’ that can be practiced “across the entirety of the contemporary system of reference. These

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37 Badiou 2010, p. 105-120; Badiou 2010b, p. 43-51.

categories are available for the service of scientific procedures just as they are for those of politics or art. They attempt to organize an abstract vision of the requirements of the epoch.”³⁸ We can, again, and somewhat rhetorically, ask a naïve question: if what philosophy thinks is anything other than *the compossibility of the operations of the truth-procedures*, how could it propose the unity of a time? Badiou again confirms as much when he writes all of the following:

“[Philosophy] roots out truths from the gangue of sense. It *separates* them from the law of the world”³⁹

“The philosophical seizing of truths exposes them to eternity – we can say, along with Nietzsche, the eternity of their *return*.”⁴⁰

“[philosophy] seizes truths, shows them, exposes them, announces that they exist. In so doing, it turns time towards eternity – since every truth, as a generic infinity, is eternal.”⁴¹

We have here two important points: first, what philosophy seizes of a truth-procedure is precisely that which can be subtracted from sense; and second, in this way it places truths into ‘the always of time’, a place from which they can forever be resurrected.⁴² Philosophy’s thought, therefore, is not of the particular truths, but of what is timeless in them, that is: their forms and their operations. And philosophy, as we saw earlier, is this compossibility – a philosophy is its Truth, the Truth of its time. Philosophy, therefore, is something like an abstract duplicate of the world, but with a caveat: philosophy does not only think that which the world presents of itself, but also that which it constitutively negates.⁴³ This is evident in two ways: first, with ontology as the presentation of presentation, and the formalization of mathematics more generally, we can write being, and know that something must be negated from every

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38 Badiou 2005, p. 4.

39 Badiou 1999, p. 142.

40 Badiou 1999, p. 142.

41 Badiou 2005b, p. 14

42 See Badiou 2009, p. 65.

43 Agamben 2011, p. 10-19. And Nietzsche 1995, p. 87-96.

structured situation for what we have called knowledge to be possible - we could add that ontology also allows us to *think* this something. Second, if Truth is the constructed trajectory of truth-procedures, out of the procedures themselves, then that Truth thinks the passage of that which in a world passes from inexistence into existence, and thus, the subversion of the semblance of exhaustive consistency of any knowledge precisely by that passage. In short, what philosophy is able to think – along with and through truths – is the very form of knowledge, i.e., the necessary structure for knowledge, which is in each established situation its unknown-known. This unknown-known, we must add is both constitutive of the space of knowledge, and operative only insofar as knowledge is ignorant of it. In short, philosophy thinks that which is constitutively foreclosed from knowledge – it thinks *the real of knowledge*. We can propose then that philosophy is something like the double of the world, *and its negative*. *Our thesis, therefore, is that the act of philosophy is the addition to the world of the thought of itself – a thought that necessarily includes its unknown-known, its real, its constitutive ignorance. Also, that it is in this manner that philosophy can intervene in the world such that it opens the possibility of converting knowledge into thought, without suture.*

The addition of philosophy to the world – that is, the addition of reflexive thought to the world, or the addition of the Truth of the world to the world – has two consequences:

- 1) To add philosophy to the world of which it is the thought makes the world eventual.
- 2) To add philosophy to the world of which it is the thought makes the world infinite.

We will, however, here only consider the first of these consequences. Philosophy – the thought of a *philosophy*, the reflexive thought of thought – has two components. It is the duplicate of the world and it is the thought of the unknown-known of this same world. Consequently, its addition to the world brings about a somewhat paradoxical situation: there is something recognizable to objective knowledge, philosophy as the duplicate of the world, and something unrecognizable – philosophy as the unknown-known of the world. This odd addition of philosophy to its world, therefore, is possible only in the form of a singular site: the duplicate, recognizable to knowledge, is presented, but what is under this ‘thought of its time’ is precisely that which is necessarily unrecognizable to the world

as it is, and so is unrepresentable, and yet also completely immanent to its time. In fact, the structure of the site created by the addition of philosophy is totally singular – and so, eventual – in that nothing of this unknown-known is presentable. Philosophy, then, despite being recognizable is simultaneously unrecognizable, and so unknowable by the objective knowledge of the situation. Yet, its existence cannot be denied, since this knowledge sees itself in philosophy. That something is presented, and so exists, and not represented, and so does not exist, disrupts the consistency of constructivist knowledge by unsettling the reduction of being to existence on which constructivism hinges - since something exists but its elements do not. We can say, therefore, that for knowledge, philosophy has significance and not signification. To put it very naively, the addition of philosophy disrupts the consistency of knowledge, for it cannot deny the existence of something that is constitutively beyond it. That is, it cannot deny existence to something it cannot grant existence to, and so is forced to think.

By this transmission, or better, by this addition, philosophy introduces into the world precisely that which is concealed within a constructivist situation: the possibility of an eventual site. In short, philosophy introduces the fundamental condition for the possibility of what may one day be a truth. A condition that is, also, the very space of philosophy itself: the irreducibility of being and existence. Philosophy, therefore, constitutes its own conditions of existence in a double sense, when confronted with a constructivism world, a world where the truth-procedures are perverted. It does this first, by adding itself to the world – as its Truth – it forces the very space that is, and second, by introducing this distinction between being and existence, and therefore making the world eventual, or historical, it opens the possibility for the conditions to begin to think, that is, to produce truth. Therefore, philosophy constitutes the conditions of possibility for its own conditions of possibility. This, however, brings us to what is certainly the immediate objection to such a philosophical act: from where, and with what, does philosophy act in a world without truth – if it is absolutely conditioned, absolutely immanent to the world which it thinks? In some respect this is a fair criticism, since philosophy is absolutely immanent – constituting itself out of pre-existing conditions. However, philosophy does not only constitute itself by truths which it affirms, but to do so it subtracts them from history and places them into the 'always of time'. In fact, this is not only what Badiou's category of resurrection articulates, but is also what makes possible that truths can be resurrected, that is, it is a necessity if truths are eternal and infinite.

When philosophy acts in a world without truth, it acts by way of truths that have been subtracted from history and are now written in the history of philosophy. It acts, therefore, in some sense, by reminding the world of its past glory, of its moments of historicity. Maybe we can even say that in a world without truth, philosophy reminds the world of its past, it puts before is a mirror.

This is what philosophy can do: it can add to the world the thought of the world, the Truth of the world. It can add Truth to knowledge and thereby make the world historical. But this is the limit of philosophy – it can do no more without suture. Philosophy cannot tell us anything about what the future will look like, anymore than it can create the truths that will constitute it. It has been said that philosophy concerns itself with desire, that it concerns itself with the production of a new desire, a new desire for the world. This is true. But Badiou should not be misunderstood here as implying that philosophy directly produces desire, that it is the production of desire within the conditions, not least because in a text of this name⁴⁴, the desire of philosophy is articulated again in the 'abstract'⁴⁵ – involving the interplay of revolt, logic, universality, and risk. Philosophy itself is not the production of a desire for a more just state, a more complete form of art, and so on, as that would already be the first step towards suture. If philosophy is communist, it is – as Lenin would have said – communist because communism is true.

All philosophy can do is introduce some disruption into a stale world. It can corrupt it, by the act of adding to it its own Truth. Let us call this the cause – a cause induced by adding to the world its own real. By this addition the world becomes somehow paradoxical, it becomes infinite, it becomes paraconsistent, and it reveals itself to be historical. But after this humble act of returning to the world, the world itself in inverted form, philosophy can do no more than remind the procedures to give consistency to the cause. Which is, ultimately, nothing other than to say that is must live for an Idea.

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44 Badiou 2010, p. 29-42.

45 'Abstract' is here used in the sense that the 'general order of thought' in *Being and Event* is abstract.

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