Thought-Activism and the Poiesis of that Which Is Not

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Abstract

Written Component: Thought-Activism and the Poiesis of that Which Is Not.

This dissertation devises two philosophical discourses: “Thought-Activism” and Visitor. Thought-activism will be posited as a strategic and an ontological approach to the categories of “language” and “seeing” concerning the formation of a mutually inclusive account for “action” and “thought”, i.e., acting contingent upon thought, and thinking if and only if acting. In short, thought-activism is to be thought of as where the question of “what is to be done?” is bound with that of “what is to be thought?” and vice versa. The subject-figure of the Visitor is a reconfiguration of the category of the art spectator and of the art audience into the encountering subject position of the art Visitor. The subject-figure of the Visitor is the praxis and tactical presentation of the strategy of thought-activism within the fields of art, politics, and critical thinking. The Visitor renders obsolete the characteristic triptych of art, that is artist-artwork-spectator, and subsequently replaces it with the progressive triptych of visitor-object-visitor, which rearticulates the relation that artistic practice occasions on the basis of “encountering.” The key companion thinkers in this exegesis are Alain Badiou and Martin Heidegger.

The core question of this exegesis is the contradictory unity of theory and practice formulated under the aegis of the following equation: ‘theoretically-led practice’ equals ‘practically-influenced theory’.

Creative Component: Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy) Exhibition
*Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy)* was a solo exhibition and publication (itself considered as a part of the exhibition), held at the Ag Galerie of Tehran (Iran) in January of 2019. The exhibition was comprised of a series of photographic and text-based mixed-media objects, a series of sculptural installations, and light-box images, and a publication including essays by myself, Matt Browning, Gareth James and Mohammad Salemy. The publication is attached in the “appendices” section of this dissertation.
Lay Summary

This dissertation presents two new models for a critical approach to historical and contemporary issues in art, politics, and philosophy. These models are *Thought-Activism* and *the Visitor*. This work is deeply influenced by the philosophy of Alain Badiou, supplemented by the philosophy of language of Martin Heidegger. This text is written in conjunction with the exhibition *Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy)* held at the Ag Galerie in Tehran (Iran) in 2019. As with my relationship to theory and practice in general, I consider these two components to act as a torsion of one another.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Mohammad Ali Ahadi.

Photos used in this dissertation are the property of Mohammad Ali Ahadi and are produced by him. Some of these photos are published in *Shit Yes Academy (Goh Ballet Academy)*, Ag Galerie Press, 2020. The latter is attached as an appendix to this dissertation.
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Acknowledgments

I keep it simple but sincere.

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Dedication

To Kami (Kaamran Bijarchi)
Introduction

Broad View

This exegesis is the written component of a practice-related course of doctoral study and research. The concluding research of a practice-related doctoral program consists of a “creative element” and a “critical reflection”. The creative element was a solo exhibition of a body of visual artworks, entitled *Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy)*, held at the Ag Galerie of Tehran (Iran) in January of 2019.

My interdisciplinary practice traverses the domains of the visual arts and critical theory. Grounded in the interrelations between what I name the “aesthetics of contingency,” “ontological analysis of language and of seeing” and “politics of subjectivization,” my practice spans from site-specific installations to sculpture, photo and video-based works, writing, translation, and public speaking.

The core contribution of this research falls under the general category of the relationship between “art and discourse” and “art and life” (politics). In short, this exegesis attempts to suggest some answers for the following questions:

What relations do the discursive and philosophical arguments have with the empirical practices of art and the formation of novel forms in its history? (My discussion of the questions of “contemplation” and “spectatorship” in chapter 4 will indicate an approach to this question).
What modality for “thinking” can be fomented by artistic and intellectual practices that hold fast to the notion of “contingency”? (Building upon the discussions of thought-activism and Subject-thought in chapters 2 and 3, I identify the notion of Visitorability in chapter 4 as a response to this question.)

Finally, I ask whether such a view of art and aesthetics (along with the paradigm of thinking it supports) provokes a change in our understanding of the relationship between the categories of life and of the social? (The proposed theory of the Visitor and the paradigm of Visitor-object-Visitor elaborated in chapter 5 are to be thought as responses to this question.)

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In contrast with what can be referred to as theoretically loaded art, and by being attentive to the perils associated with the determination of art by external theoretical production, this exegesis attempts to elaborate on the imperative of a relationship that ought to exist between contemporary theory and practice and which ought to abolish the historical divisibility of the two. The objective is to leverage the dialectics between a theoretically-led art practice and a practically-influenced art theory. Under the light of this dialectics, my practice and research are a torsion of one another. In other words, they are one and the same thing.

In studio practice, I permit theory to come to my aid in thinking with and through the material, rather than employing the operational material to illustrate external thoughts and Ideas (Critique of “didactic art”). This way art’s possibility can be conceived of as the production of the intellectual and the sensible through and not in the objects. On the other hand, in intellectual and
discursive practice, I embrace the existing relationships between aesthetics and politics to engender a praxis of activism. It is through such an entanglement and interconnection that my research and practice are in confluence with one another.

**Primary Questions, Project, and Contribution**

As its primary project, this exegesis formulates two major theoretical discourses. First, I will construct a theoretical account for the concept of *thought-activism* and, second, I will elucidate thought-activism’s attendant practicality under the theory of the *Visitor*. Primarily, these concepts contribute to the fields of contemporary visual art and critical theory.

Thought-activism is a strategic and ontological approach to the categories of “language” and “seeing,” within the mutual determination of thought and action: i.e., acting contingent upon thought, and thinking if and only if acting. In short, thought-activism is to be thought of as where the question of “what is to be done?” is bound with that of “what is to be thought?” Specifically, thought-activism will be anatomized as a particular form of linguistically-charged yet ontologically-alert relationship to the world (situation).

With respect to the relationship between language and “reality” (i.e., all-that-is-there) thought-activism engages language as the operational materiality of the form. It is crucial to note that by *form*, in lieu of the extant configuration of reality-as-it-is, we mean the change of that reality. Such an account of change is both formal and ontological insofar as it attempts to alter the logic
of the “there” of “all-that-is-there” — the world.

The construction of a theory for thought-activism requires a comprehensive accounting of each of these elements: “logic,” “world (situation),” “the subject,” “discourse,” “thought,” “action,” “the singular,” (vis-à-vis the particular) and “change.” This task will be undertaken in the literature review chapters 1 and 2 of this exegesis.

As the methodological principle of thought-activism, the theory of the Visitor will be devised and proposed as a reconfiguration of the category of the art spectator and of the art audience into the encountering subject position of the Visitor. The subject-figure of the Visitor is the praxis and tactical presentation of the strategy of thought-activism within the material exercises in the fields of art, politics, and critical thinking.

The Visitor renders obsolete the characteristic tripartite organization of art, that is artist-artwork-spectator, and subsequently replaces it with the progressive tripartite organization of Visitor-object-Visitor, which rearticulates the relation that artistic practice occasions on the basis of “encountering.”

The topology of thought-activism, and of the Visitor, informs a map between the categories of language, seeing, aesthetics, and politics.

This research eschews the longs-standing question of what is art, in favor of asking what is it that art ought to be? It contends that asking this question is an obligatory exercise for contemporary
artistic practices, and that it should be pursued with all the discursive and material practices at its disposal. The distinction between these two disparate questions is equivalent to the differences between an essentialist and holistic approach (i.e., what is) versus a situation-based approach (i.e., what is it that ought to be). The former takes art as an a priori category, whereas the latter maintains a paradigmatic view to it. In contrast with the holistic view, the paradigmatic view rejects the question of the a priori, and instead, takes into account the impact of historical determinations on the expansion of the questions that art ought to come into grips with.

Holding fast to the implications of the second approach, this research investigates the possibilities for proposing a new paradigm of an encountering relationship, on the one hand, between the artist and his operational and intellectual material, and on the other, between the work of art and the subject-figure it meets at its receiving end, i.e., the category of the spectator. In short, this exegesis argues that in order to surmount the formal stagnation of contemporary art, we must distinguish between so-called artistic “subjectivity” and the “subject” of art. What lies at the heart of such a distinction is an attempt at theorizing a complete negation of art’s romantic paradigm of the ‘subject-object’ relationship. In its place, I construct an inter-subjective paradigm in relation to which the theories of thought-activism and of the Visitor are respectively a strategy and a tactic. This strategy and tactic (thought-activism and the Visitor) have been under development in both my scholarly and studio-based practices since 2012. The early stages of these concepts were previously presented under the theory of ‘Ephemeral Subject, Precarious

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1 In the chapter reviewing Badiou’s subtractive ontology, it will be thoroughly argued why the dominant forms of contemporary art practices are indeed the fulfillment of the “romantic-formalism”, or post-modern, paradigm of art. A paradigm, in which, art has on the one hand dispensed with the idea of the universal and its attendant “inhuman truth of art”, and on the other hand, remains absolutely obsessed with the humanistic and neo-liberal instances of particularisms, such as the romantic primacy of the individual, “self”, and its expression of body and its finitude, identity and desire, and so on.
Object’ in a 2012 paper entitled *Politics of Subjectivization: On the Necessity of Contingency and Event for a Contemporary Revolution*. This exegesis delivers the outcome of this ten-year long research.

The concept of thought-activism and its associated subject-figure of the Visitor also provide the basis for thinking critically about a set of secondary questions. These questions have seemingly lost their historical necessity within the ‘democratic’ and liberal disposition of contemporary arts. The very general and ‘democratic’ conviction that culminates in the declaration of formal equality among an interminable span of particularities, that is, the span of objective legalities and acknowledged descriptive predicates in the world — e.g., *expressions of self, languages, bodies, identities, cultural and sexual differences, etc.*

*Thought-activism* posits that art is a mode of thinking and argumentation, a mode of *Subject* production. The argument is that *thought-activism*, as a mode of the unity of theory and practice, offers the way out from the contemporary impasse of art and politics, whose symptoms will be discussed in the section of *the Contemporary Impasse* (chapter 2). The discussions around the questions of “the particular” and “the singular” (chapter 2) as well as the argument on *the Problem of the Other* (chapter 4) engage with the *impasse* at some length. Subsequently, the theory of the Visitor and the protocol of *Visitorability* (chapters 5 and 4) will attempt to propose the way out. This exegesis presents thought-activism as a strategy that foments the necessity of “discursive argumentation” about the possibilities of *singularities* in contemporary art and thinking. The concept of singularity adopted throughout this exegesis is that of an emerging
procedure and not a particular (i.e., discernible in predicative description) and objective state of being.

After all, it is the lesson of Lacan, that the real may only occur through the contest with the symbolic that the state and its language is. Thought-activism and the Visitor are attempts at the level of counter-symbolizing the language of art and typical thinking, proposing a united account for thinking and acting — thought-acting.

The Historical Context of a Separation: Thought and Action

From early Greek philosophy all the way to the advent of Western metaphysics and the dawn of its subsequent European “modern thinking,” the question of the relation of thinking and acting to Being has been symptomatized at the core of the history of development of philosophy. From Parmenides’s famous saying ... τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι (... for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be)\(^2\) to Hegel’s expansion of that (via Kant) into the absolute (i.e., Being is Thinking)\(^3\) and, finally, to Heidegger’s radical denunciation of these European

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\(^3\) See, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. Terry Pinkard, Cambridge University Press, 2018, P. 34:

“\textit{When I say, “quality,” I say, “simple determinateness”; it is by way of its quality that one existent is distinguished from another or that it is even determined that it is an existent at all. It is for itself, that is, it stably exists through this simplicity with regard to itself. However, by doing so, it is essentially thinking. – It is here that one conceptually grasps that being is thinking, and it is here that the insight which tries to steer clear of that ordinary, non-comprehending talk of the identity of thinking and being finds its place”}
misunderstandings of Parmenides’ axiom⁴, we can see that the orientation of every philosophical system is dependent on the account of “thought” that has been used as its formative axle.

“The Enlightenment obscures the essential origin of thinking. In general, it blocks every access to the thinking of the Greeks. But that is not to say that philosophy after the Greeks is false and a mistake. It is to say at most that philosophy, despite all logic and all dialectic, does not attain to the discussion of the question “What is called thinking?” And philosophy strays farthest from this hidden question when it is led to think that thinking must begin with doubting.” (Heidegger, What is Called Thinking? P. 211)

On the other hand, with the project of Enlightenment, thinking becomes the highest activity of “understanding” in the broad sense of the “judgment of reason,” and subsequently, acting is rendered subsidiary to the primacy of that judgment.⁵ Such an asymmetrical duality of thinking and acting, with the supremacy of the former, constitutes the foundation of rationalism and its analytic devotion to positivist thinking and reasoning (ratio).

Under the aegis of the Enlightenment, one must think critically and thus act accordingly. Yet by what merit could thinking be accorded the mark of “critical”? Critical thinking demands one to maintain a critical distance from the object of thought (or the object of experience), and then act

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in accordance with the goals designated by critical and rational reasoning. In other words, in order for thought to bear the attribute of criticality, the object of thought must be left free and independent from the means of thinking. Thus, it is no coincidence that Western metaphysics is all about the veneration of the two “theoretical” senses, sight and hearing, over taste. For taste, writes Hegel, ‘does not leave its object free and independent, but deals with it in a really practical way, dissolving and consuming it’. T6 Taste in such a vision is regarded as a knowledge that does not know but enjoys.

The formation of the concept of taste, from the beginning of the sixteenth century until its final enunciation in the many eighteenth-century treatises on taste and the beautiful, betrays its metaphysical origin through the secret solidarity it presupposes between science and pleasure. Taste appears from the beginning as a ‘knowledge that does not know but enjoys’ and as a ‘pleasure that knows’. (Agamben, Taste, P. 22)

This contested relationship between the tasteful knowledge that does not know but enjoys and the pure reasoning (ratiocination) which knows without enjoying, informs the alleged gulf between aesthetics and epistemology as two disparate domains of knowing. This dispute occupies a central place in Western thought until its incorporation into the rather recent reformulation of the problem, for instance, as it is proposed in the works of Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben, under the relationships between aesthetics and politics.8 The more profound roots of such

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6 Ästhetik, G. W. F. Hegel Aufbau-Verlag, 1995, p. 696
8 Against this trajectory of the Western tradition, and contrary to the general view, the so-called “Eastern” paradigm of thinking is by no means to be seen as an opposing category, in which the mentioned asymmetrical duality of
division, however, are to be located in the problem of the subject-object relation and its concomitant contemplative detachment of the subject from the exteriority that the world and the category of the social are.

To continue with instances of this symptom, we may also comprehend the closer to our times’ reputed separation of theory and practice, and that of contemplation and praxis; the divorce between the philosophers’ interpretation of the world and the revolutionaries’ aspiration for the change of it, all as the legacy of this symptomatic dichotomization of thinking vis-à-vis acting. For instance, the way in the German Ideology, Marx and Engels root the separation of thought and action to the social division of labor, specifically the division between intellectual and manual labor, represents an accounting for thought and action whose basis is to be located within the Enlightenment’s dividing of the two categories.

The political axiom of the red years of the 1960s and 70s, gathered under the world revolution paradigm with the influence of certain Marxisms — Maoism’s axiom of perpetual practice in thinking and acting is transposed, thus the primacy would now lie on the side of acting. What marks the distinction between the two paradigms has so little to do with the geometry of the relationship between thinking and acting. Rather, it is an altogether different account of “thought” that must be conceived of as the core characteristic of that which could be referred to as the “Eastern” way of thinking. In other words, if the estrangement of taste from sight and hearing in the Eastern tradition is not as bold as it is the case in the West, this is not because acting in this tradition is regarded as a primary and determining value in knowing. It is the absence of Western metaphysical subject-object orientation that allows the removal of the “critical” distance between the self and the world that is to be thought about. In there, there is no prescribed necessity for the object of thinking to be left free and independent from the means of thinking. The directive is to dissolve, hear, see, and taste the integrated nature of Being in the call that stems from the beings. We may trace such a vision from certain figures of Taoism all the way to prominent Islamic philosophies, such as Avicennism, the philosophy of Illumination, Neo-Platonism, etc. The latter is due the influence of the early Greek philosophy, which the Islamic philosophers drew upon through Arabic translations (The Translation Movement). Hence, we can see that the duality of thinking and acting, even with the larger primacy of the former, remains intact in the Eastern tradition as well.

particular which granted primacy to “action” over “discourse” — was indeed an enduring effect
and a response to the Enlightenment’s separation of thinking and acting. This was, of course,
proceeded by the experience of the failed Marxist model of the Soviet Union represented in the
Stalinist’s centralization of the State and practiced through those irreconcilable purges, enforced,
not by the “people”, but by the very same centralist state party. The experience of learning about
Stalin’s purges through the wide-reaching leakage of Nikita Khrushchev’s Secret Speech\textsuperscript{10} did
not cease to haunt the heart of the entire socialist world and triggered a world-wide split all the
way from the South and the Middle-East to the European thinkers of the 1960s and 70s. Around
this time, the external reception of Mao and his “Cultural Revolution” (mostly among the
Europeans) appeared to be perceived as a radical Other and an alternative to the Soviet Marxist
model. The intellectual figures at the back end of the events of May 68, although in a transient
fashion, saw Maoism capable of offering a reconciling solution to the long-standing symptomatic
tension between theory and practice; strategy and tactic; abstract concept and experience; “the
concrete experience of the life-world and the universal concepts of rational thought”\textsuperscript{11} or, in other
words, the tension between phenomenology and logic (Hegel).

\textit{After about 1960, younger philosophers who had found existentialist reductions of}
\textit{Hegel to the endless dialectic of unhappy consciousness philosophically}
\textit{inadequate (and likewise, as the French always had, rejected a culmination of}

\textsuperscript{10} Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech: On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences”, delivered at the 20\textsuperscript{th} party
congress of the communist party of the Soviet Union (February 25, 1956). The speech mainly focused on
denouncing Stalin’s cult of personality with respect to the purges of the late 1930s, executions and sending of
thousands of people into political work camps (Gulags). A publication of a complete text of the speech can be seen
Publication, New York, 1962”.

\textsuperscript{11} 13. Gary Gutting, Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960, The Oxford History of Philosophy,
dialectic in absolute knowledge) were naturally drawn to a rethinking of the role of the concept (rational structure) in Hegelian terms. (Gutting, Thinking the Impossible, P. 32)

The French philosopher Alain Badiou points to this as an ongoing tension in French thought, whose roots are to be located back in Descartes, viewing the history of French philosophy, at least from 1940s onward, as a struggle to find a way for bringing together the philosophy of experience with that of abstract concept (scientific structure)\(^\text{12}\). It is in such contexts that Mao’s Cultural Revolution, arrives to propose the alternative, that is “stressing the centrality of ideology” while maintaining the primacy of “revolution in signifying practice” to create the condition for “perpetual practice in the living world.”\(^\text{13}\)

It is against the backdrop of the above historical context that this exegesis proposes the concept of thought-activism. Thought-activism will be discussed as a contradictory yet united account for theory and practice, thinking and acting. It will be shown that it does not consist of the separate activities of “thinking” and “acting”, but of “thought-acts”.

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\(^{13}\) Leihua Weng, “Revolution and Event: Mao in Alain Badiou's Plato's Republic”, Comparative Literature Studies, Vol. 52, No. 1, Special Issue: Global Maoism and Cultural Revolution in the Global Context (2015), pp. 47-64, Penn State University Press
The primary Figures

The key companion thinkers in this exegesis are Alain Badiou and Martin Heidegger. Not only have the works of these figures guided my practice and research, but as will become quickly evident, the contribution of this research is also the result of my *fidelity* to the encounter that I have had with the philosophy of these figures. Although Badiou’s work will have a seemingly more extensive presence throughout this exegesis, this exegesis formalizes its argument and contribution with respect to the shortcomings of Badiou’s philosophical edifice. It is these shortcomings that demand the presence of Martin Heidegger as the other companion thinker of this research. Besides explicating both the alignments, as well as the discrepancies between the ways that these philosophers restore “ontology” to its central place in philosophy, I will argue on the necessity of a renewed thinking of Heidegger’s *ontological analysis of language* to supplement the shortcomings in Badiou’s philosophy.

A constellation of theories from a range of secondary figures — such as, Guy Debord, Jacques Rancière, Julia Kristeva, Walter Benjamin, Homi K. Bhabha, Roland Barthes, Maurizio Lazzarato, Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Lacan, Dave Beech, Graham Harman, Reza Negarestani, Giorgio Agamben, Hegel, Mao Zedong — have been employed to mediate the agreements and discrepancies that occur between Badiou and Heidegger, and between my engagement with their work and my own artistic practice.
Why Badiou?

The appearance of the French philosopher Alain Badiou in the pantheon of the French thinkers took place in the early 1980s with the publication of his seminal work, *Théorie du Sujet (Theory of the Subject, 1982)* preceding the publishing of his *magnum opus*, *L’Être et l'Événement (Being and Event, 1988)*. Prior to this, however, and as a political activist, he was one of the founding members of the Unified Socialist Party (PSU) in the early 60s. The events of May 68 turned out to be of a pivotal importance in Badiou’s political life, bringing him toward a more militant engagement with politics, of which we can point to his involvement with the Maoist organization *Union des Communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste* (UCFml) in the late 60s. The 80s for Badiou were the years of returning to more academic engagements, leading to the publishing of his seminal philosophical contributions. Despite the crucial importance of Badiou’s philosophical system, his reticence to engage in the European conflict of continental and analytic philosophy, saw him marginalized from the canonical circle of French intellectuals. For Badiou, each of these philosophical categories were sources capable of doing something important. Therefore, he saw such a conflict between the two more as a side show eclipsing the crucial role of philosophy, i.e., taking part in emancipation of the oppressed people. It was only his contributions to art discourses that elevated his public status as a philosopher again and brought him back to the spotlight in the final years of the twentieth century.

Badiou is the key figure in the reconfiguration of the category of “Subject” in contemporary philosophy. His intervention into the category of “Subject” is singular. It stands against the dominant current of French critical theory of the mid 60s and 70s, i.e., structuralism and post-
structuralism, in tandem with the postmodern elimination of the “subject” through its reduction to a mere ideological category. Badiou develops an account of the Subject that fits neither the tenets of post-modernism, nor those of modernism. Taking the lead from Lacan (the real), Plato (idea), and Mao (perpetual practice), Badiou’s Subject is an anomaly. Contrary to the popular elimination of the subject, which took place by situating it within the postmodern axiom of interminable difference, interminable particularities (there are only bodies and languages), Badiou strives to save the figure of the subject through creating a conjuncture between phenomenology and logic. In other words, his Subject hovers between the context of science and structure, on the one hand, and the Sartrian legacy of the subject (for-itself = nothingness) on the other hand.

Despite welcoming how structuralism injected “a breath of scientificity into the intellectual scene,” Badiou holds that structuralism reduces the subject “to the status of an object for science, of a bogus or even bourgeois category” because it went too far in stripping the subject of all its idealist attributes. Structuralism’s attack on the dominant phenomenology of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the conception of the subject as “meaning” and “experience,” entirely delegitimized the category in the order of philosophical discourse.14

This was the case, for example, with Althusser, one of my masters and at the time the leader of the movement for a scientificized Marxism. For him, history was a subjectless process, an a-subjective determination. I've never been Althusserian when it comes to this issue. For me, there is a subject, and that notion must be retained,

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14 See, What Is to be Done?, A Dialogue on Communism, Capitalism, and the Future of Democracy, Alain Badiou and Marcel Gauchet, Chapter 1 (The Encounter with Communism), Polity Press, 2016, p. 7-9
while also taking account of structuralism's advances. If the subject is definitively eliminated, political activism is no longer thinkable or tenable. In fact, I note that those whose adhesion to communism was based on a background of this sort couldn't stick with it and ended up throwing in the towel. The very short horizon of total scientificity, the exclusive recourse to rigid structures — all this ultimately undermines political engagement and dooms it to a dead end. (Badiou, *What is to be Done?*, P. 7-9)

Badiou’s vital contribution lies in his fidelity to the fact that no political resistance/activism is conceivable without a subject. This fidelity is, of course, a militant resistance against the “linguistic turn” and postmodernism in politics, art, and culture; resistance against the perils associated with the abolition of the *universal*. The symptoms of this postmodern abolitionist approach can be listed as ‘the total exhibition of particularism and the historical equality of formal means'\(^{15}\) leading to the obsessive infatuation with identitarian practices, expressions of the self, cultural differences, limits and laws of the body, sexual desires and fantasies, the replacement of historical materialism with cultural materialism, and reducing the status of existence to individuality, while regarding the individual as tantamount to the body. Badiou’s Subject precisely appears to propose a way out from this contemporary impasse, and the concept of thought-activism, is explicitly coordinated in relation to his account of the Subject.

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In thinking with Badiou, the main attention of this exegesis will be to the concepts of “the formal theory of the subject”, “the transcendental”, “Event”, and the questions of “the particular”, “the singular” and “the universal” with respect to what he calls “the encyclopedic zone of the world.” In short, I will conduct a comprehensive and critical review of Badiou’s subtractive ontology. By doing so, I will show that the artistic “situation” — whether that of the artist while making art, or that of the spectator/Visitor while attending a work of art — will be treated as an artistic world. Taking into account Badiou’s axiom of “the thinkability of a being,” it will be asserted that thought can be made possible if and only if a being that is not [an existence] happens to come to appearance as an existence belonging to a world. The main attention will be to Badiou’s seminal works such as, *Logics of Worlds, Theory of the Subject, Being and Event, Theoretical Writings, Conditions, Polemics,* and *Theory of Contradiction.*

**Why Heidegger?**

It is often said that The German philosopher Martin Heidegger is among the most significant figures of the 20th century philosophy. His influential contributions to the fields of existentialism and phenomenology (Sartre), his impacts on the formation of 20th century Hermeneutics (Gadamer) and on post-structuralism and its associated “linguistic turn” (Derrida and Foucault), his influence on the work of the Frankfurt School (Habermas, Marcuse, Adorno), are by now irrefutable facts. By introducing the concept of *Dasein (being-in-the-world)*, his debut magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time, 1927),* restores ontology once again to a central place in

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16 Badiou, *Logics of Worlds,* P. 113
philosophy, yet in a radically distinct fashion from conventional Western metaphysics. In Heidegger’s philosophy, there is no place for “dialectics,” “consciousness,” or the “subject-object” relationship. He conceives of these paradigms as the outcomes of the Enlightenment and as the cause behind the spell cast by modernity on the possibility of thinking. For Heidegger, Western metaphysics and the European Enlightenment are, on the one hand, the reasons behind the philosophical error that anthropocentrism is, and also what hold thinking away from having access to the early Greek way of thinking, or in other words, to what Heidegger considers to be the only true way of thinking whatsoever.

The crucial significance of Heidegger for this research, however, is located in his ontological analysis of language. The importance of the latter is that it situates the analysis of language outside the relatively normative frameworks of linguistics or the analytic philosophy of language.

*It is well known in many quarters that Martin Heidegger’s long encounter with the question of language was not restricted to a kind of linguistics or a traditional philosophy of language. This is not to say, however, that Heidegger’s writings concerning language had nothing to contribute to those approaches to language and many others. Quite the contrary; Heidegger’s influence on those interested in the question of language has been far and wide [... speaking] to many disciplines and many concerns, including but not limited to metaphysics, poetry, the political, logic, and the very possibility of philosophy.*
Many of the above concerns and more have been joined to the question of language for the simple reason that the twentieth century has been characterized as the century of language. Linguistics in its contemporary form, as well as a proliferation of French discourses with different yet related concerns, began with Saussure. The analytic tradition was particularly intense as evidenced by Russell, Frege, and Wittgenstein. Within the continental tradition, the question of language occupied the center of debate beginning with Husserl’s Logical Investigations, and it remains either at the center or in the background of virtually every debate today. Granted the importance of Husserl, it is nevertheless Martin Heidegger who has shaped and given force to the question of language throughout the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first. (Powell, Heidegger and Language, p. 1)\(^{17}\)

What was new to philosophy with Heidegger’s remarks on language, is that they regard language neither as an expression nor as an activity of man. For Heidegger, ‘language is language;’ ‘language speaks,’ and the only way to thinking, or to respond to the call of thinking, is to hear what language says to us in its speaking. To establish such a vision of language, Heidegger provides a series of rather complex ontological accounts for notions such as “thinking,” “discourse,” “understanding,” “attunement,” and “what is spoken purely.”

This research extensively benefits from the possibilities that these ontological accounts set forth for the construction of the concept of thought-activism. As the schema of his “ontological analysis of language” forms major parts of Being and Time and the core contribution of many of

his later works, the main attention of this research will be to *Being and Time*, as well as to some later works such as, “Language” from *Poetry, Language, Thought*, “The Way to Language” from *On the Way to Language*, and finally, *What is Called Thinking?*

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The argument of this exegesis, first, enjoins *thought* to arrive at the ability to envision what in Alain Badiou’s philosophy is referred to as the ontological question of change, i.e., the destabilization of the transcendental of a world. Second, it attends to Heidegger’s remarks on the ontological analysis of language; in particular, those on the relationships between language and discourse, in order to suggest a practice of the *reversal* of such a relationship as a tactic to supplement the shortcomings of Alain Badiou’s philosophy.

I will demonstrate under what condition “thought” can be conceived of as tantamount to the “Subject” in the same manner that “to do” can be one and the same thing as “to think” — hence, ‘Subject-thought,’ thus, *thought-act*.

The crux of examination is to explore the following question and then suggest the subsequent contemporary imperative:

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Is “thought” (Subject-thought)¹⁹ possible within the reciprocal and act-based procedures of art and politics? The strategy of thought-activism will be posited as the positive answer to this question. It will be argued, however, that the attainment of such a strategy is itself subject to an understanding of the necessity for organizing a synthetic relationship to the categories of “subtractive ontology,” “language,” and “seeing.”

Thus, this research holds:

It is imperative for contemporary art practices and political thinking to fully embrace the strategy of thought-activism. Thought-activism, on the one hand, consists in holding fast to the emancipatory potentials of the Badiouian ‘materialist dialectic’ and its concomitant “Subject-thought”, while on the other hand, it acknowledges the lack of proper attentiveness in Badiou to the ontological roles that some linguistically charged activities can play in setting the condition for the formation of this subject-thought. The elaboration of these supplementary and particular activities (thought-activities) is precisely the contribution of this research into the field of art and critical thinking.

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¹⁹ See, Alain Badiou, Theoretical Writings, “Eight Theses on the Universal”, p. 149: ‘By “thought”, I mean the subject in so far as it is constituted through a process that is transversal relative to the totality of available forms of knowledge. Or, as Lacan puts it, the subject in so far as it constitutes a hole in knowledge.’
“Without thought going to the limit, no strategy, thus no tactic, thus no action, thus no real thinking or initiative, thus no writing, no music, no painting, no sculpture, no cinema, etc., are possible.” (Althusser, L'unique Tradition Matérialiste, II Machiavel, P. 102)\(^{20}\)

“The possible is a subjective category [catégorie en subjectivité] which problematizes the approach of what can be with respect to what is, in the future as well as in the past. What can be, in comparison to what is, traverses the future, the past and the present in equal measure. Not qua unrepeatable, but as follows: what takes place does not abolish its preceding subjective contents. The prescriptive possible is therefore composed of subjectivities and practices whose content has presided what has taken place.” (Lazarus, L’Anthropologie du nom, P. 152)\(^{21}\)


“I would say that the concept is a system of singularities appropriated from a thought flow. A philosopher is someone who invents concepts. Is he an intellectual? No, in my opinion. For a concept as system of singularities appropriated from a thought flow... Imagine the universal thought flow as a kind of interior monologue, the interior monologue of everyone who thinks. Philosophy arises with the action that consists of creating concepts. For me, there are as many creations in the invention of a concept as in the creation by a great painter or musician. One can also conceive of a continuous acoustic flow (perhaps that is only an idea, but it matters little if this idea is justified) that traverses the world and that even encompasses silence.” (Deleuze, Seminars on Leibniz)\textsuperscript{22}

**Foreword: Thought-Activism, a Hyphenated Logic**

The concept of *Thought-activism* consists of a *logical* and a *linguistic* aspect. To be able to establish its linguistic specificities, we, first, need to critically review Alain Badiou’s ‘subtractive ontology’ in tandem with Heidegger’s ‘ontological analysis of language’. This task will be accomplished in the next two chapters. The core task of this chapter, however, is to construct and establish the logical tenets of thought-activism. It will do so through conducting an expansive historical, as well as a theoretical investigation of the relationship between the two long-standing questions of *theory and practice, thought and the action*.

\textsuperscript{22} Gilles Deleuze, *On Leibniz*, Cours Vincennes - St Denis, BNF & Webdeleuze, 15/04/1980
Nevertheless, as soon becomes evident, such a task itself requires the construction of a map that brings together a disparate set of existing concepts and discourses by way of locating them with respect to each other. Unlike the tradition of scientific inquiries and writings, the creation of philosophical concepts and the invention of their attendant discourses (*thought-activism*), are a function of constant conversation, and/or, critical navigation within existing currents of thoughts and discourses. Thus, even though the reviewing of literatures officially commences in this chapter of the exegesis, the act of thinking *through* literatures will maintain its ubiquity all the way throughout the forthcoming chapters. In other words, in this exegesis, the reviewing of literatures and creation of concepts are two equiprimordial activities.

Let us thus begin by explaining the relationship between the act of reviewing the literature of a debate and the invention of concepts, by way of illustrating how the theoretical thesis and contribution of this chapter, i.e., the concept of *thought-activism* has come about.

Since, at this point, we are not yet able to fully unfold what *thought-activism* is as a concept, for the time being, we should suffice by commencing our task with reflecting on it only as a sound-image. The neologism “thought-act” together with “ism”, i.e., the suffix of practice and production, would denote a practice that has to do with “thinking” and “acting”. The hyphen that connects “thought” to “activism”, however, suggests something other than the logic of an “and”, which implies a combination of two autonomous entities. The hyphenated structure signifies more a conjuncture of two things rather than their combination. The distinction can perhaps be explained as follows. The elements in a combination merge into one another, whereas in a conjuncture, the elements join without merging; or really, they are brought together by way of
separation. Therefore, in thought-activism, we are dealing with a unique conjuncture of two separate entities. Unique, in the sense that we are not dealing with ‘1 + 1’, i.e., the relation between two “ones”, but rather with a ‘one that is two’ or ‘1 = 2’. That is to say, thought-activism does not consist of the separate activities of “thinking” and “acting”, but of “thought-acts”.

Yet what about the constitutive elements of this conjuncture? Or to put it differently, what accounts of “thinking” and “acting” are at the stake in the operational system of this concept? Although the core attention here is on the nature and meaning of the conjuncture thought-activism, it would be an enormous mistake to begin this mission without first explicating what particular accounts of “thought” and of “act” are utilized here to form the conjuncture. Afterall, the philosophical history behind each of these two terms is as long as the history of philosophy itself.

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To commence the process of establishing the concept of thought-activism, this exegesis attends to a literature of debate around the question of Maoism. It is crucial for it to demonstrate what is at the kernel of Maoism’s thesis of ceding primacy to practice, to action over thinking, to politics over philosophy and discourse. This is because the question of the relationship between thought and the act, between theory and practice, forms the nucleus of thought-activism, and no other philosophical/political doctrine has before expanded upon this question with the same degree of centrality like Maoism.
At a very basic level, the general understanding of Mao’s *perpetual practice* has been formulated under the maxim of ceding primacy to action over discourse, or in other words, the primacy of practice over theory. Nevertheless, as Richard Wolin put it, by illuminating the possible disjunction between base and superstructure, we can see that there is a lot more in Mao’s theory of contradiction than the abolition of [metaphysical] thought in favour of mere action. By suggesting a new theory of participation, the Cultural Revolution gained its charm for French thinkers as it appeared to offer a way to resolve the perpetual tension between philosophy (/theory) and politics (/practice), between theoretical aristocratism and mass politics. This new theory of participation drove more devout Maoists like Badiou to take political participations not only as an obligatory exercise for philosophers, but also as immanently constitutive of philosophy itself.

*Mao’s conception of “unequal development” had revamped inherited notions of dialectical materialism. Whereas a vulgar conception of dialectics mandated that history always proceed according to a necessary and implacable sequence (for example, feudalism, capitalism, and communism), Mao’s notion of contradiction showed how, often, base and superstructure remained disjunctive, thereby allowing for new and original permutations in the logic of class struggle. At certain historical junctures, the economy, although pivotal, might cede primacy to cultural and ideological factors. This characterization appeared to accurately describe the May student revolt, which had accorded pride of place to considerations of “everyday life” and “cultural revolution.” Thus [...] Maoism harbored distinct political*
advantages, for by stressing the centrality of ideology, it appeared to open up the field to the “revolution in signifying practice,” which was after all the Telquelians’ forte. In their estimation, one of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’s primary achievements was to have opened the door to the radical innovations of a cultural avant-garde. As Sollers claimed in 1971, “There is not an avant-garde writer who is not intimately concerned with the Chinese Revolution.” At stake was “a practical, new, and contemporary revolution of language.” (Wolin, The Wind from the East, p. 273)

Therefore, it must be clarified that even with Maoism the question has never been reducible to a mere call to action at the expense of abolishing philosophy. Rather, the question was how to maintain the centrality of thought in mass political activism; in other words, how to participate in mass politics actively while thinking — how to conjoin thought and action.

Theory/Practice Dialectic (Thought/Act) and Theory of Contradiction: Maoism and the Case of Alain Badiou

In contrast with the post-structuralist linguistic turn of 70s, and unlike the Frankfurt School’s ceding primacy to discursive-epistemological contemplation over the classic Marxism’s optimism for mere activism, the typical understanding of Maoism has been reduced to its maxim

of the centrality of practice vis-à-vis the peripherality of theory. In other words, speaking of Maoism and Mao’s “theory of contradiction” has been made equivalent to dispensing with philosophical thinking and advocating a sort of mere holding fast to action. This general understanding is certainly inadequate. We will see that the real question at the heart of Mao’s theory of contradiction, along with his maxim of “perpetual practice”, reveals nothing other than the unity of theory and practice.

Let us investigate this question further by looking at an important text, written around the time that the European philosopher’s zeal for Maoism was on the verge of its decline: Alain Badiou’s *Theory of Contradiction* (1975).24

The structure of the book forms around Mao’s famous statement, ‘*Marxism comprises many principles, but in the final analysis they can all be brought back to a single sentence: it is right to rebel against the reactionaries.*’ For Badiou, Mao’s statement sets an equivalence between “rebellion” (practice/the act) and “the place of the correct ideas” on the one hand, and between “reactionaries” and “those whose destruction is legitimated by theory” on the other. Therefore, Mao’s sentence, writes Badiou, ‘*situates Marxist truth within the unity of theory and practice*’. By stating that, he argues that what bonds theory to practice, reason to rebellion, is itself an internal condition of theory.

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24 See Alain Badiou, *Theorie de La Contradiction*, Union Des Communistes De France Marxiste Leninist (U.C.F.M.L.), 1975. (No complete English translation of the book is available. Nevertheless, the first chapter of the book (Une these philosophique essentielle: on a raison de se relever contre les reactionnaires), which has been subjected to this exegesis course of reviewing, is translated by Alberto Toscano, under the title: *Theory of Contradiction, Chapter 1: An Essential Philosophical Thesis: “It Is Right to Rebel against the Reactionaries”* https://sok.bz/content/3-clanky/9-2011/20111130-alain-badiou-teorie-rozporu/alain-badiou-theory-of-contradiction-1.pdf
If we now quickly go back to our starting point, that is the symptomatic dichotomization of thinking and acting, and return to Badiou’s thesis, we could amend Badiou’s thesis by replacing “theory” with “thinking” and “practice” with “acting”. Our intervention would read: what bonds thinking to acting, discourse to practice, is itself an internal condition of thinking.

There is hardly a truer and more profound statement in Hegel than the following:

“The absolute Idea has turned out to be the identity of the theoretical Idea and the practical Idea. Each of these by itself is still one-sided” (Hegel, Science of Logic).

For Hegel, absolute truth is the contradictory unity of theory and practice. It is the uninterrupted and divided process of being and the act. Lenin salutes this enthusiastically: “The unity of the theoretical idea (of knowledge) and of practice—this NB—and this unity precisely in the theory of knowledge, for the resulting sum is the ‘absolute idea’” (Lenin, Philosophical Notebooks).

(Badiou, Theory of Contradiction, p. 3-4)

There are two unity/dualities in Badiou’s reading of Hegel’s account of “absolute truth” here, which must be attended to carefully. The first one lies in the sentence “For Hegel, absolute truth is the contradictory unity of theory and practice”, and the second resides in “It is the uninterrupted and divided process of being and the act”. Let’s try to read them again, since, remarkably, they divide the words “being” and “acting” each into two.
The absolute truth is the contradictory unity of theory and practice. The question that must be posed here is as follows: is truth, the absolute truth, then, a “result”, a “product”, of this contradictory unity of theory and practice? Or is truth, the absolute truth, this very unity itself, i.e., absolute truth as the contradictory unity [of theory and practice]? I think the answer is to be located in the second sentence. Let’s look into that again. It is the uninterrupted and divided process of being and the act. This sentence clearly shows that “absolute truth” is a process and not a state of being. Nevertheless, this process is one that is uninterrupted and divided at the same time. The complexity of this sentence lies in the question of the possibility of a process that may be divided while remaining uninterrupted; in other words, how could this process be divided without having been exposed to an external cut?

Although this text is written in 1975, that is thirteen years before the publishing of Being and Event, and thirty one years before the publishing of Logics of Worlds — the two seminal works of Badiou’s philosophy in which he centres his philosophical effort on a rigorous articulation of the relation between “being” and “thought”, and “being” and “act” — we can see that the seeds of this inquiry are to be already found in the influence he takes decades before from Mao’s theory of contradiction, Plato’s notion of “idea”, and Lacan’s account of “the real”. Before proceeding, let us have a quick leap forward here. On May 31, 1995, during his seminars on Lacan25, Badiou says:

Because if analysis is a thought — “thought” meaning something that is neither theory nor practice but something in which theory and practice are

indistinguishable from each other — the space of this thought is the act involved in the analytic process. (Badiou, Lacan, “Seminar 8”, p. 187)

We will come back to this quote many times, but for now, let’s see how it can, in tandem with Badiou’s reading of Hegel’s account of absolute truth in 1975, help us construct an understanding of the phrase, the uninterrupted and divided process of being and the act.

First of all, a new element, i.e., “thought”, has been added to the previous equation: “Thought” meaning something that is neither theory nor practice but something in which theory and practice are indistinguishable from each other’. The addition of “thought” to the table, at first adds yet another layer of complexity, another level of signification, to the relationship between being and the act, theory and practice, i.e., the equivalence between thinking and being (Parmenides). However, this addition could dialectically reduce the complexity of the relationship we are trying to unravel between being and the act as a process that is both divided and uninterrupted.

For if thinking and being are one and the same thing (Parmenides), and if thinking is located at the point of indistinguishability between theory and practice (act as the place of thought, Badiou), we can see that what this Platonic-Lacanian-Maoist Badiou is asserting here is nothing other than the following: being, and the point of indistinguishability between theory and practice are one and the same thing.
Now, this dense reading, fatally on the verge of being tautological, can only be elucidated by understanding what account of “being” is deployed in Badiou’s sentence, the uninterrupted and divided process of being and the act. When we delve deeper into Badiou’s philosophical system in the next chapter, we will dwell much longer on this question. However, for the sake of establishing our understanding of Mao’s unity of theory and practice here, let us suffice with quickly mentioning that the term “being” in this sentence is deployed in the sense of the process through which pure being (being qua being) is transformed into an existence (being-there). I will name Existentiation the process through which this transformation takes place. The neologism existentiation helps us avoid the linguistic tautologies that get in our way while dealing with different levels of the significations of the term “being”, i.e., when something is, when something exists, and when something happens.26

Being deployed in the above sense, i.e., that being which is part and parcel of the same divided yet uninterrupted process that also involves the act, is, indeed, a becoming. It is the transformation of being into existence. To put it differently, it is the transmutation of something that is pure being into something that is there in a world and is there in a world right now. Being in this sense is tantamount to something that has gone from being without a place to something that has now taken (a) place. And if we like to define “being” in the above sense from the vantage point of the world, we must then say that “being” is when the “there” of the “being-there” (the world of the being-in-the-world) has undergone a transformation.

26 Badiou designates three different levels of the significations for the category of ‘being’, namely, when something is i.e., ‘being qua being’, a multiple of multiplicities; when something exists i.e., when something is in a world; and when something happens i.e., the Event, when something happens for a world and places a cut in its continuum.’ (See The Subject of Art, LACAN.COM, The Symposium 6, 2005, p.1)
We are now able to answer our question, that is, how can “the act” and “being” stand in an uninterrupted yet divided process? I mentioned earlier that Badiou’s sentence, remarkably, divides the words “act” and “being” each into two, and it is precisely because of such a disposition that we should explore it more carefully. For something to go from not having a place to now having a place in the world, something needs to happen, and that something is the act. It is the act that triggers the process of such a transformation. On the other hand, this is the only way that “being” as a pure thing (being with a low level of appearance, low degree of identity) can stand in a process at the end of which it will become a “being-in-the-world” (a thing with a higher level of appearance, higher degree of identity). And for all this to happen, what is needed is the act.

It is now clear that the “being” deployed in Badiou’s sentence is, on the one hand, a thing with no place, and on the other hand, what has become of it as a thing now with a place in the world. In Theory of the Subject (1982), Badiou refers to this as the dialectic of “splace [esplace]”/“outplace [horlieu]”, or the dialectic of ‘the subjects that truths induce as the form of a body.’

Now, let us go back to the quote from Badiou’s seminar on Lacan, and ask a second question: how could “being”, which may be the same thing as “thought”, be that ‘something in which theory and practice are indistinguishable from each other?’ In other words, how could “being” be determined at the point in which theory and practice are indistinguishable? I mentioned earlier

27 What is meant by “identity” is the consistency of a being in the world, or how a multiple-being in a world is identical to itself or some other beings of the same world. (See Badiou, Logics of Worlds, Exposition of the Transcendental, p.102-104). Identity in this sense is distinct from the general usage of the term: i.e., the racial or cultural particularities attributed to a being to distinguish it from other beings.

28 Alain Badiou, Logics of Worlds, p. 45-46
that we may amend Badiou’s sentence by replacing “theory” with “thought” and “practice” with “act”. And we should remember that for Badiou (via Lacan) the act is “the space of thought,” which itself is indistinguishable from practice/the act. With that said, and on the backdrop of our above clarifications as to the two levels of the significations of the term “being”, we can reformulate our question in the following way: how could “being” be determined in the space of “thought,” i.e., through “the act”? “Thought,” if we bring in Parmenides’ principle, is already synonymous with “being”. Yet this time we are dealing with the second signification of the term “being”, that is, what has become of a being with no place when transformed into a being now with a place in the world. This is precisely where the term “act” is also divided into two. First, act as the place of thought, and second, as that which materially induces the process of existentiation, i.e., the transformation of being into existence. It is in this precise sense that thought dialectically stands for, first, what can only be grasped through the act, through the happening, and second, the profound reason beyond the particularity of the act yet for which the act must take place (theory).

Let us summarize these complex relationships: if thinking and being are one and the same thing (Parmenides) and if being and the act can stand in an uninterrupted process, therefore, thinking equals the act, which itself equals the being (being-in-the-world). Hence, I think (act) therefore I am (become).

*In Lacan, act is a purely negative category, which (in Badiou’s terms) stands for the gesture of breaking out of the constraints of Being, for the reference to the Void at its core, prior to the filling in of this Void. In this precise sense, act*
involves the dimension of death drive which grounds the decision (to exercise fidelity to a Truth), but it cannot be reduced to it. (Žižek, *Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism: The Case of Alain Badiou*, P. 257)

After this rather complex course of deconstruction, we can now better comprehend the link between Mao’s statement, *it is right to rebel against reactionaries*, and Badiou’s reading of it, that is, *what bonds theory to practice, reason to rebellion, is itself an internal condition of theory*. With the context we have constructed regarding the dialectical relation of being and thinking to acting, we can also better validate the intervention we made into Badiou’s reading by amending it to: *what bonds thinking to acting, discourse to practice, is itself an internal condition of thinking*.

Constructing the foregoing context was essential to the understanding of why the *doxa* around Maoism, i.e., the general opinion about it formulated under the thesis of “ceding primacy to practice at the expense of abolishing theory” is superficial, rather than critical. Once again, the true question is the contradictory unity of theory and practice, of thought and the act.

Taking the lead from Lenin, to make possible the understanding of this contradictory unity, Badiou situates the question within the nutshell of “knowledge”. Let us read Lenin’s sentence again. ‘The unity of the theoretical idea (of knowledge) and of practice—this NB—and this unity precisely in the theory of knowledge, for the resulting sum is the “absolute idea”’. In this precise sense, theory as knowledge is dialectically opposed to practice.
Theory and practice form a unity, that is to say, for the dialectic, a unity of opposites. But this knowledge (theory/) practice contradiction is in turn the very object of the theory of knowledge. In other words, the inner nature of the process of knowledge is constituted by the theory/practice contradiction. Or again, practice, which as such is dialectically opposed to knowledge (to theory), is nevertheless an integral part of knowledge qua process. (Badiou, Theory of Contradiction, 1975).

Badiou asserts that the word knowledge always comes in a scission; ‘designating either theory in its dialectical correlation to practice’ or what signifies the overall process of this dialectic, ‘that is the contradictory movement of the two terms, theory and practice.’ Despite considering Mao’s maxim of perpetual practice as what ‘situates truth within the unity of theory and practice’ (and not practice alone), for Badiou, the dialectic of the theory of knowledge and knowledge as process must still commence its movement from practice. The movement of knowledge, writes Badiou, ‘is the practice-knowledge-practice trajectory.’ By citing a passage from Mao’s “Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?”, Badiou clearly demonstrates that this reading of knowledge is what he has directly inherited from Mao: ‘Often, correct knowledge can be arrived at only after many repetitions of the process . . . leading from practice to knowledge and then back to practice. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge, the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge’ (Mao Zedong, Five Philosophical Essays).

Mao’s statement simply places a sharp difference between knowledge and “correct knowledge”. The latter can only be achieved after multiple repetition of the knowledge as a process; a process
that must start off from practice to knowledge (theory) and then come back to practice again and again.

[...] we will call “theory” the term in the theory/practice contradiction whose overall movement will be the process of “knowledge.” We will say: Knowledge is the dialectical process practice/theory. On this basis we may expose the reactionary illusion entertained by those who imagine they can circumvent the strategic thesis of the primacy of practice. It is clear that whoever is not within the real revolutionary movement, whoever is not practically internal to the rebellion against the reactionaries, knows nothing, even if he theorizes. (Badiou, ibid)

Again, despite the unity of theory and practice being what Badiou sees as the hidden kernel of Mao’s sentence, and notwithstanding all the effort he puts into constructing a reading of this contradictory unity, here we can see the lucid emphasis on the strategic thesis of the primacy of practice. It is also evident that for Badiou (via Mao), not any type of practice could be accorded the attribute of being an internal condition of theory, it is, rather, only the “rebellion against the reactionaries” that bears such a property. The question that must be posed here, nevertheless, is what is that “reason” that justifies such a strategy? After all, we began this entire investigation from the sentence, ‘what bonds reason to rebellion is itself an internal condition of the reason (theory)’. Therefore, it is valid to ask what is that reason, or at least what is that which bonds reason to rebellion? Feeling the same necessity for answering such a question, Badiou confirms that ‘theory, in turn, does not externally legislate on practice, on rebellion: it incorporates itself in the rebellion by the mediating release of its reason’ (Badiou, ibid).
The sentence says: *primacy of practice. Rebellion does not wait for its reason, rebellion is what is always already there, for any possible reason whatever. Marxism simply says: rebellion is reason, rebellion is subject.*

*Beyond the particular causes that provoke the proletarian uprising, there exists a profound reason, which cannot be uprooted.*” (Badiou, ibid)

The Logic of Thought-Activism: A Theoretical “Profound Reason” Beyond the Primacy of Practice
(The Necessity of Conducting a “Symptomatic Reading” of Badiou)

It appears that from this point onward, everything in the text is there to support the thesis of the primacy of practice over theory, or that of the act over thought. Although the above quoted passage, too, holds fast to that thesis, there is a point in the second part of it that we must further explore; something that beneath what it says, cloaks something else from being said. Let us attempt, this time, to see what Badiou’s text is actually *not* saying. In other words, let us locate what the second part of this passage is repressing from representation. Doing that requires us to conduct a *symptomatic reading* of this second part.  

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29 “Attributed to Louis Althusser, this method of reading literary and historical texts focuses not on what a text evidently expresses, but on what it is unable to. For Althusser, fundamental ideological presuppositions in the socio-historical context in which a text is realized repress certain facts from representation. To make these repressed facts explicit, symptomatic reading identifies ‘the invisible problematic contained in the paradox of an answer which does not correspond to any question posed.’” (Ali Ahadi, “Pandemic, Time for a Transversal Political Imagination”, SDUK Issue #7, (Tilting 2), Toronto: Blackwood Gallery Publication, May 2020).

To do so, we should, however, begin with the sentence that Badiou writes before the passage quoted above: ‘theory incorporates itself in the rebellion by the mediating release of its reason.’

Here it appears that although theory is not “reason” itself, it is that which, nevertheless, has “its” own reason. This logic, however, seems not to be identical with the one Badiou employs earlier in the same text in the form of an equivalence set between theory/practice, on the one hand, and reason/rebellion on the other, i.e., where he writes ‘what bonds theory to practice, reason to rebellion, is itself an internal condition of theory.’ Here, theory and reason are one and the same thing, and so are rebellion and practice. Yet in the sentence, ‘theory incorporates itself in the rebellion by the mediating release of its reason’, they no longer are one and the same thing. This is where the ideological presuppositions of the text seem to hold sway over its logic of representation. What are these ideological presuppositions? The symptom of it is to be found in the Marxist announcement of the supremacy of he who takes part in real revolutionary movement over the one who knows nothing “even if he theorizes”. Now if we return to a symptomatic reading of the final sentence of the quoted passage, i.e., ‘beyond the particular causes that provoke the proletarian uprising, there exists a profound reason, which cannot be uprooted’, we are confronted with a nagging question: if theory, according to Badiou, is that whose overall movement constitutes the process of knowledge (theory/practice dialectic), then what is that “profound reason” that is beyond any particular cause that provokes rebellion (practice)? We understood that the process of knowledge must start off its movement from practice leading to theory and again back to practice. So, it is clearly evident how crucial is the role of practice in engendering “correct knowledge”. Yet this final sentence ushers in another layer of contradiction where beyond this entire process and movement of knowledge, Badiou
asserts, there exists a “profound reason, which cannot be uprooted”. The disposition of anything being so rooted implies a conceiving of it as something deeply grounded, akin to a certain conviction, an ideological faith, a militant fidelity to a sublime cause — in one words, “a profound reason.” Although the process of knowledge must begin from practice, i.e., rebellion, riot, insurrection, etc., this profound reason exists beyond whatever causes that provoke such practice. In other words, this profound reason exists beyond any instances, such as events, ruptures, systemic discriminations, material realities, class difference, accumulation of capital in the hands of a few, etc., that trigger a rebellion.

From this vantage point, this “profound reason” appears to be the sublime and the universal promise, the assurance, designating what the “correct” process of knowledge ought to be, i.e., the practice-theory-practice process. This profound reason is universal because it exists beyond the level of situational particularities. Particularities are always already there and everywhere, the infinite difference of worldly beings, yet what exists beyond that difference, are the general contradictions induced by the way these worldly beings are deployed in every situation. These contradictions, despite their singular moments of coming to surface, are universally locatable within all situations.

Therefore, the material realities, the ruptures, the systemic discriminations, and so forth, are always there in their own particularities, and surface in their own singular ways. Yet, what remains unclear is that which guarantees that true knowledge, the truth, always lies on the side of taking part in the affirmation of these contradictions. In other words, how could one be sure that the affirmative practice of rebellion against these contradictions would ultimately construct the
truth? This must be what Badiou refers to as the profound reason existing beyond the particularities of whatever causes induce the rebellion. The question is, what could really cause fidelity to this universal “profound reasons”, to this assurance, other than a theoretical conviction? In other words, by way of expanding our symptomatic reading, we could affirm that the process of knowledge is a practice-theory-practice process. Yet, beyond this process there exists a profound theoretical conviction, rather than a “reason”, which attests to the truthfulness of this process; a reason so profound that cannot be uprooted.

We know that the question of affirmation, for Badiou, is a whole problem in itself. He suggests that we ought to think against the grain of classic dialectics, especially Marxist ones, and ‘find a way of reversing the classical dialectical logic inside itself so that the affirmation, or the positive proposition, comes before the negation instead of after it.’ Affirmation in this sense is something of the matter of the future that comes before the negative present. Although rebellion is nothing but the negation of the existing order, we must, as Badiou puts it, ‘try to understand exactly the conditions under which we may still have anything like the possibility of concrete negation. I believe this can only really be realized in the field of primitive affirmation.’ And this primitive affirmation, for Badiou, is the question of Event and Subject.

This is literally what the logic of thought-activism reveals: the affirmation of the existence of a theoretical conviction beyond the contradictory unity of theory and practice. What affirms such a thought-activist’s thesis, is the theory of negation of negation itself. “That which the movement

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31 Ibid
of the contradiction destroys, also prepares a scission within the destructor term” (Badiou, ibid, P. 34).

Translating the above theory into our symptomatic reading, we can say the following: the strategic thesis of the primacy of practice objectively renders possible its own opposite term, i.e., a theoretical/ideological conviction to the trueness of such strategic thesis. To put it short, the strategy is the primacy of practice. Yet the holding fast to the truthfulness of this primacy is itself a theoretical directive. It is crucial to understand that by no means is this symptomatic reading trying to diminish the crucial role of practice in the contradictory unity of theory/practice. Quite the reverse, the intention of conducting such a reading is to highlight the significance of the question of the contradictory unity between the two. That is, the significance of Badiou’s point of departure in his argument, even if, along the way, he situates it at an inferior level in favor of the question of the primacy of practice.

Why this is happening is due to the ideological presuppositions that hold sway over the text. We should beware this text is written in the times that the fate of the events of May 68 has made many to give way to despair. The years preceding Deleuze’s text May ’68 Did Not Take Place32; the demise of many other French philosopher’s zeal for Maoism; the predomination of post-structuralism; the times of the compulsion for return to theory to investigate the reasons of this defeat; the directive for thinking over acting. And Badiou here seems to be ideologically resisting this renegade wind of change, upholding the flag of practice within the trench of

32 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Les Nouvelles littéraires, May 3-9, 1984, Trans. Hardwick Weston, P. 75-76
Maoism. Such a conviction is what wields power over his text. ‘[...] whoever is not practically internal to the rebellion against the reactionaries, knows nothing, even if he theorizes.’

After this rather lengthy review of Maoism’s maxim of “perpetual practice”, we can now have a better grasp of the predominant approach to the question of the relationship between thought and the act, between theory and practice, during the red years of the 1960s-70s. The years whose philosophical concern was to construct a bridge between phenomenology and logic, between “the concrete experience of the life-world and the universal concepts of rational thought”; the years of finding a radical Other to the failed experience of the Stalinist Soviet Union; the era of European passion for Maoism, which didn’t remain impervious to the post-structuralist linguistic turn, as well as the Frankfurt School’s directive for a return to theory and epistemology.

Perhaps we can end this section with the following quote, which seems to do justice to represent the political soul of those years; to demonstrate the crux of the matter in the thesis of the primacy of practice within the contradictory unity of practice and theory. It is in the following sense, that for devout Maoists such as Badiou, political participation, beyond being an obligatory exercise for philosophers, is constitutive of philosophy itself. Philosophy in this precise sense is nothing but the act of dialectical conceptualization of political contradictions.

Rebellion is allergic to Kant’s moral maxim: “You must, therefore you can.”
Besides, Kant concluded that an act thus regulated in terms of pure duty had doubtless never taken place. Morality is a defeated prescription. But the workers’ rebellion has indeed taken place, and it finds in Marxism its place of victorious
prescription. Marxist reason is not an ought, a duty to be, it is the affirmation of being itself, the unlimited power of what stands up, opposes, contradicts. It is the objective victory of popular refusal. Materialistically, workers’ reason says: ‘You can, therefore you must.’” (Badiou, ibid)
Chapter 2 - Thought-Activism and the Poiesis of that Which Is Not: 
Part II: (Badiou’s Subtractive Ontology, Shortcomings, and My 
Suggested Methodology)

Foreword: A Summary and Some Definitions of Thought-Activism

We have already established the logical aspect of thought-activism and now we have a better image of what accounts of “thought” and of “the act” are utilized in the hyphenated structure of thought-activism. In other words, by attending to the question of the contradictory unity of theory and practice, and by arguing that there exists a profound theoretical reason beyond the particularities of action, we showed what account of these two terms are at the stake in the operational system of this conjunctural concept.

After schematizing the topology of conflict around the questions of thought and action, we can better see the veracity of the statement in the outset of the previous chapter: “After all, the philosophical history behind each of these two terms — thought and action — is as long as the history of philosophy itself.” Against the backdrop of this historical schema of the topology of conflict, the concept of thought-activism strikes us as an anomaly.

A - We showed that thought-activism is a strategy for which the core question is not the identification of thinking and acting but that of a conjunctural structure between the two — i.e., thought-acting. The crux of the [thought-activist] matter is that of positing a particular
relationship between theory and practice; one in which, thought and act are each perceived as a torsion of the other.

B - *Thought-activism* does not devise its relationship between theory and practice in the unity of subject and object as a way out of the historical impasse of contemporary thought and action. Rather, it argues that it is necessary for contemporary thought and practice to distinguish “the subject” not from the “object” but from “subjectivity”.

C - Such a strategy necessitates the formation of a mutually inclusive and praxical account of both “action” and “thought”, i.e., acting *contingent upon* thought, and thinking *if and only if* acting. In short, thought-activism is to be thought of as the point of indistinguishability between the questions ‘*what is to be done?’* and ‘*what is to be thought?’*.

D - In its core, thought-activism is a strategic and an ontological approach to the categories of “language” and “seeing”. Specifically, it will be anatomized as a particular *form* of linguistically-charged yet ontologically-alert vision onto the world. The praxis of such a strategic vision (formulated under the figure of the *Visitor*) in one’s every-day, artistic, and political exercises, aims to achieve the task of changing a “situation”. In other words, the Visitor strives towards the very objective of activities for which the question of *change*, i.e., destabilization of the transcendental of a given “situation” (or world), occupies a central position.

E - With respect to the relationship between language and “reality” (i.e., between representation and all that is there), thought-activism engages language as the operational materiality of *forms*. 
It is crucial to note that vis-à-vis the extant configuration of reality as it is, by *form* we mean the change of that reality. Therefore, to make a change happen, to make it take place, is exactly the same thing as constructing a form. Such an account of change is both *formal* and ontological insofar as it attempts to alter the logic of the ‘*there*’ of ‘*all-that-is-there*’ — the *world*.

**F** - Given that the order of every situation (world) is maintained by its *logic* (the transcendental), the concept of *thought-activism* holds that such maintenance of order is exerted through logically directed discourses. In this sense, *discourse* is to be conceived as that which governs every and each situation. Therefore, thought-activism considers the formation, as well as the active operations of new discourses, as the opportunity for new semiotic and counter-discursive acts. These acts provide the basis for the emergence of subversive forces that aim at the disruption of the logic of each situation. Consequently, we should state that the “Subject”\(^{33}\) (as will be shown) is the disruption of the logic of the world, and the thought-activist is the Subject’s *figure*, i.e., the active agent, of such an operation.

**The Procession of This Chapter**

Now that we have diagrammatized the topology of conflict and schematized the concept of “thought-activism”, it is clear that to construct a theory for ‘thought-activism’, first we have to deliver a comprehensive account of the conceptual elements at work in our concept’s associative conceptual network.

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\(^{33}\) To distinguish the Badiouian from other accounts of the term, I will capitalize Badiou’s conception of the subject.
In the next chapter, I will attempt to give an account of the *linguistic* aspect of the concept of thought-activism. I will do so through *constructing* an asymmetrical alignment between Alain Badiou’s subtractive ontology and Martin Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language. Such a task, however, requires us, first, to comprehensively review Badiou’s subtractive ontology. Doing that will help us grasp the main network of concepts in relation to which thought-activism stands as a strategy. Having a profound grasp of these concepts is absolutely essential to understanding the core problem of contemporary politics and critical thinking — i.e., the question of *the Subject, the Universal, and That Which is Not*.

Moreover, it is this very course of reviewing that provides the basis for establishing my remarks on the shortcomings of Badiou’s subtractive ontology and the necessity of Heidegger’s “ontological analysis of language” as a supportive supplement.

A *Brief Outline of the Asymmetrical Theoretical Alignment*

In our asymmetrical alignment, the primacy is with Alain Badiou’s “subtractive ontology”. After all, thought-activism is a strategy whose core concern is to devise a way for maintaining the centrality of Badiou’s philosophical ontology while plugging its shortcomings. This plugging, as mentioned above, will take place through a critical yet pragmatic employment of Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language. This alignment will provide a theoretical platform from which we can formalize the complete conjuncture of the linguistic and logical aspects of thought-activism.
This platform consists in a theoretical triangulation between the concepts of “the transcendental” (logic), “language”, and the syntax of the “spectacle”. Such a platform informs the contemporary necessity for the fields of critical thinking and art to relocate the foregoing concepts from their individual abode and thereby make possible a novel thinking of them, this time, in a synthetic fashion. As the result of this labour, this exegesis will argue that the interrelations, between Badiou, Debord, and Heidegger’s philosophical projects will enable a dialectical thinking through which this exegesis fosters a new theory to surmount the shortcomings those projects face while operating independently.

The Position that Thought-Activism Occupies Can Be Summarized as Follows:

It is imperative for contemporary art practices and political thinking to fully embrace the strategy of thought-activism. Thought-activism, on the one hand, consists in holding fast to the emancipatory potentials of Badiouian ‘materialist dialectic’ and its concomitant “Subject-thought”, while on the other hand, it acknowledges the lack of proper attentiveness in Badiou to the roles that some linguistically charged activities can play in setting the condition for the formation of this Subject-thought. The elaboration of these supplementary and particular activities (thought-activities) is precisely the contribution of this research into the field of art and critical thinking.

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Badiou’s account of the Subject also provides a philosophical basis for grappling with Heidegger’s elision of the category of subject and of dialectic, which had impacts on the
formation of certain currents of post-structuralism and hermeneutics (Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer). I have mentioned before how fatally inaccurate is the common conception of the difference between Badiou and Heidegger’s philosophical projects (formulated under reductionist statements such as “Badiou the left Heideggerian”). The real discrepancy between the two projects cannot be reduced to a level whose syntactic induction is only a “left” versus a “right” or, in other words, a “radicalism” against a “conservatism”. Such reduction obscures the problematic notion at the kernel of this discrepancy — that is, the question of the subject, a question that is fundamental to Badiou’s project but eliminated from Heidegger’s philosophical system. The issue of philosophy with or without ‘a subject’, however, is not simply specific to the discrepancy between Badiou and Heidegger, but is, in fact, what determines the topological difference of major philosophical deployments from the mid-twentieth century onward.

The category of ‘subject’ has been criticized from the right, through its Heideggerian incorporation into metaphysical nihilism. But also from the left, through its reduction to a mere ideological operator. Althusser argues both that History is a ‘process without a subject’ and that the distinctive feature of ideology—opposed to science as the imaginary is opposed to the symbolic—is to ‘interpellate individuals into subjects. Only pious phenomenologists or conservative Sartreans would have come to the defense of the subject if Lacan had not entirely refounded its concept, while taking on board the radical critique of the subject of classical humanism. That is why traversing Lacan’s anti-philosophy remains an obligatory exercise today for those who wish to wrest themselves away from the reactive convergences of religion and scientism. (Badiou, Logic of Worlds, p. 522)
It is lucidly clear how the contested category of the subject becomes the final arbiter of whether philosophy should be confined to a merely metaphysical sphere, or whether it could be rendered an active agent for changing the existing realities. If the subject is retained, thus goes the argument, philosophy could become militant, and taking part in practice, an obligatory task of the philosopher. It is in this precise sense that participation, within the practice-theory-practice process of knowledge, is both a vital task and constitutive of philosophy itself — hence, the contrary unity of theory and practice. For Badiou philosophy is absolutely empty. It could only get charged if its conditions are available (politics, love, art, science). The Subject, therefore, becomes the intermediary between philosophy and its conditions of possibility.

The difference between thought remaining a metaphysical category and/or it being an agent of change, cannot simply be conceived of as a matter of philosophical choice. The actual difference lies in the long-standing question of the finite/infinite vision to the world. For Heidegger, the biggest error of metaphysics is in modeling “Being” on “beings” (Eagleton)\textsuperscript{34}, and hence the category of the infinite becomes illusory. Heidegger also posits that this illusion makes possible the dichotomization of the subject (thinker) and the object (the world) which in turn leads to both the philosophical error of anthropocentrism, and the falling into oblivion of the question of Being — hence, nihilism.

By holding the thesis of pure multiplicity (i.e., Being is always multiple and pure being — being qua being — is the multiple of multiplicity), Badiou, remarkably, surmounts the impasse of

\textsuperscript{34} Terry Eagleton, “Materialisms”, \textit{Materialism}, Yale University Press Publication, 2016, p. 16
finitude by situating the question of Being in relation to that of the multiplicity. Multiplicity is another term for the infinite\textsuperscript{35}, the category in relation to which the Subject can be constructed. Such an account of the Subject by no means implies a person, a body, or a thinker, but a \textit{process} between the body and the thought that has been summoned by the infinite. We will see that at the kernel of Badiou’s ontology and his theory of the Subject, the main question that must be attended to is the dialectic of the finite/infinite.

With the Heideggerian elision of the subject, thinking is no longer an act but a “remembering” of our link to the nature of beings, the ‘taking to heart of the presence of what is present’, the ‘concrete seeing and saying of the way the world \textit{is}\textsuperscript{36}. The striking truth, however, is that human without a subject is either doomed to remain in symbiosis with the pathos of finitude or to find consolation in falling into the trendy deity of object agencies. The latter locates the task of philosophy in ‘the emergent properties’ of objects, the third culture between the culture of phenomenon and that of the noumenon, between the scientific world of electrons and the phenomenological world of objects’ effects on human (E.g., Object Oriented Ontology, Graham Harman)\textsuperscript{37}. Let us call this the problematic paradigm of the philosopher as the professional \textit{employee} of thought.

With the Badiouian Subject, however, thinking \textit{is} the act. In lieu of the seeing and saying of the way the world is, thinking is the Subject’s declaration of \textit{the way} it is possible for the world to become. Instead of remembering our link to the nature of beings, thinking is the process through

\textsuperscript{35} A.J. Bartlett and Alex Ling, “The Imperative Category”, Alain Badiou, \textit{Mathematics of the Transcendental}, P. 271

\textsuperscript{36} Martin Heidegger, \textit{What is Called Thinking?}, P. 237-238

\textsuperscript{37} Graham Harman, “The Third Table: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 085”, Erschienen im Hathe Cantz Verlag, 2012
which the being that is not (inexistence) becomes part of the world, i.e., an existence. Thinking in this precise sense lies on the side of the transformation of ‘being-in-itself’ to ‘being-for-itself’. Instead of taking to heart the presence of that which already is, thinking becomes the coming to appearance and representation of the hitherto unrepresented. Let us call this the paradigm of the philosopher as the militant employer of thought.

The vitality of Badiou’s Subject precisely lies in this enabling of man to still maintain his infinite agency within the scope of the finitude that the world is, in making possible the thought of change and innovation, in highlighting the imperative of acting toward the expression of the body in socialism (vis-à-vis the postmodern expression of body in sexuality).

_That we are a product of so many forces is not to claim with the eliminativists that human agency is a self-serving myth. It is rather to insist that what self-determination we can achieve exists within the context of a deeper dependency._

(Terry Eagleton, “Materialisms”, Materialism, p. 21)

This enabling capacity of the Subject, however, requires the invention of an account for the infinite. In other words, it necessitates replacing the category of “the world” with that of worlds; a task Badiou achieves by recourse to set theory.

**To Begin from the Beginning**

No matter how true the saying is that “one must begin from the beginning”, when it comes to the
Badiouian theory of the Subject, I strongly believe, the basis for most misunderstandings and accusations lies in not beginning from the very beginning. The list of misunderstandings spans from misconceiving the Subject as a form of subjectivity, to what is reducible to a faithful body, and/or as a form of persona. The accusations also vary from regarding the concept to be indifferent toward the principles of humanities, cultural and identitarian particularities, all the way to seeing it as a fallacious figure between humanism and inhuman truth, a fanatic ego between logic and correlational idealism. However, to unpack Badiou’s notion of the Subject we have to begin from his account of subtractive ontology. After all, it would be a futile effort to understand a being without first understanding the ontological organization of the world in which such a being is or could come about.

The Shortcomings of Being and Event

I mentioned earlier that the characteristic feature of Badiou’s philosophy lies in the solution he provides to surmount the constraints of finitude, i.e., replacing the concept of “the world” (the super object) with that of “worlds”. Among Badiou’s seminal works, the concept of world receives its highest degree of attention in Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II (2006) in which he attends to the shortcomings of Being and Event (1988). Badiou confirms that Being and Event did not propose a proper theory of change and possibility within a given world. Moreover, in that book the term “situation” has been insufficiently defined as a multiplicity and not enough attention has been paid to examining the structure of any given situation, that is, to the question
of ‘what, in fact, constitutes a world?’.

On the other hand, Being and Event falls short of a proper account of the question of universality. Could any multiplicity be universal? We know that for Badiou, a multiplicity is universal insofar as it is only a generic set (generic subset of the world). Yet, in Being and Event, ‘universality is given only a negative definition — that of genericity — where the generic is not directly reducible to the properties of a situation. Logics of Worlds sets forth a new theory of singularity. Add to this that the Subject in Being and Event is only laid out as a positive concept (faithful Subject), and the book does not account for different types of Subjects, such as the ‘reactive’ or ‘obscure’ Subject. Finally, the core task in Being and Event is to scrutinize the being of a truth. According to the book, the ontological structure of a truth is that of ‘a generic subset of the situation’. This is while for an ontology to properly situate itself beyond the ontology of finitude, the additional question that must be addressed is the distinctions between being and existence. A proper revolutionary ontology ought to define truth ‘by the intensity of existence’ rather than studying its mere being. In other words, the project must answer the question of how truth as a being passes from a “being-in-itself” to a “being-for-itself”; from being as such to being-in-a-world.

That truths are required to appear bodily [en-corps] and to do so over again [encore]: that was the problem whose breadth I was yet unable to gauge. It is now clear to me that the dialectical thinking of a singular subject presupposes the knowledge of what an efficacious body is, and of what a logical and material

39 Ibid, P. 95
excess with regard to the bodies–languages system might be. (Badiou, Logic of Worlds, p.46)

Desanti’s Critique

Before proceeding further, it is worth pointing to the figure whose critique of Badiou’s Being and Event instigated his shift of attention from the study of pure being to also taking into account the question of existence and universality.

In the essay Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou, the French philosopher of mathematics, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, devises a critique of Badiou’s famous assertion, mathematics is ontology. Desanti holds that set theory cannot be the sole reference if one is to set an equivalence between ontology and mathematics. The inadequacy of set theory for Desanti lies in set theory’s very nature to be solely a theory to study ‘the idea of substance’. Every set is a unity of elements and set theory could only maintain the relations of these elements to one another within the fixed entity to which they belong — the set. Badiou writes, ‘Desanti accused me of remaining a substantialist in the field of ontology and claimed that if mathematics is ontology, it is not because it is a theory of multiplicities but because it’s a theory of relations.’

By ceding primacy to a theory of relations over that of multiplicities, Desanti holds that what

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41 Badiou, Sometimes, We Are Eternal, P. 98
assigns to mathematics the attribute of being identical to ontology is the question of category theory (relations) and not set theory (ontology seizing the thing itself).

 [...] category theory works with a completely different system in which mathematics is seen as a general theory of relations and cannot be reduced to a theory of various entities or sets. [...] Category theory works not only with a classic presentation of functions connecting sets, it also proposes a new thinking of relations among objects. What these objects are does not matter: they can be sets, but there is no obligation for an object to be a set. (Badiou, Sometimes We Are Eternal, “Logics of Worlds: What is a World?”, p.98)

Badiou places Desanti’s critique at the centre of Logics of Worlds. To gauge the importance of this critique to the development of Badiou’s project it suffices to mention that he had already begun rectifying his philosophical system by attending to the question of category and topos theory even before publishing Logics of Worlds in 2006, for example in works such as Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil (2001) and Theoretical Writings (2004). Nevertheless, Desanti’s critique never persuaded Badiou to recant his assertion that “mathematics is ontology”. Rather, it did induce his designation of ontology as the field of pure being, a field distinct from the question of universality and existence which belong to the field of category theory.
In *Logics of Worlds*, the word situation (multiplicity) is substituted with *world* (inaccessible multiplicity). Now it is time for us to see what a world is and what constitutes it.

A world is an inaccessible multiplicity. It is a multiplicity because, essentially, any world is a set. It is inaccessible because this set is big enough so as to be inaccessible, ‘where inaccessibility is a form of infinity — in fact, it is the first form of radical infinity’. Nevertheless, what is crucial here is that inside each world there are different sets and that every set has a ‘structure of order’. This structure of order is not the same thing as the structure of the world as such, rather it is itself an element of the world. Badiou defines the structure of order as the measure of difference between the elements that exist in a world.

 [...] inside the world, there is a set that has a structure of order between a minimum, $\mu$, and a maximum, $M$. A world is an inaccessible multiplicity with a structure of order. This is not a structure of the world as such, but inside the world there is structure of order that (as with all that exists in the world) is itself an element of that world. If we have two elements in the world, $a$ and $b$, there is always a measure of their difference; that is, a measure according to which the two elements $a$ and $b$ are different or identical, which I name a function of identity, $Id$. Thus, the world is a universe where we can have a relationship of identity or difference; the measure of the difference between elements $a$ and $b$ is in the structure of order, all of which — that is $a$, $b$, and the order structure itself
— are inside the world. If the relation of identity between $a$ and $b$ is maximal, then from the point of view of this world, $a$ is strictly identical to $b$. If the identity between $a$ and $b$ is minimal, then $a$ and $b$ are absolutely different (again, from the point of view of the world). After that, there are many possibilities of identity between $\mu$ and $M$, depending on the structure of order. So, between absolute identity and absolute difference, there are multiple grades of identity or difference. This is what constitutes a world. (Badiou, ibid, p.102-103)

Here there are two crucial points we must attend to carefully:

First, when it is said that the world is an inaccessible set, an inaccessible multiplicity, it means that once we have a member/element of the world, all the subsets of this element, ‘all the multiplicities of the components of this multiplicity’ are as well inside this world. There are, of course, infinite ways of counting/naming these multiplicities of the components of the bigger multiplicity that the world is. One may conceive of a multiple of multiples in a binary/opposite manner (Hegelian dialectic) or in combinatory manner (degree of difference). For instance, if there is white supremacy in a world, then there also is marginalization and exclusion of the human of colour, thus overabundance of the labour of colour. If Israel is an entity in the world, so is the [not existent] Palestine as well. If the bourgeoisie accumulates capital in the hands of a few, so does it enable the possibility for the rebellion of the precarious class. If social democracy’s welfare state is the ruling system, so is a degree of capitalist oligarchy, and so forth. The crucial question, therefore, is not the being (the is) of these multiplicities. Rather, it is the degree of their difference or identity with one another as well as the degree of their appearance in
the world. The second factor we must be attentive to is the degree of an element’s identity with itself, in other words, the degree of the element’s appearance in the world. Thus, we see how an element could be (is) without yet being an existence (having maximal degree of appearing in the world).

Under the light of the notion of ‘the structure of order’, we can now understand the notion of identity and difference between the elements of a world. In the above passage Badiou states: ‘If the relation of identity between \(a\) and \(b\) is maximal then from the point of view of the world, \(a\) is strictly identical to \(b\). If the identity between \(a\) and \(b\) is minimal, then \(a\) and \(b\) are absolutely different (again, from the point of view of the world).’ Nevertheless, what is usually the case is a grade of difference/identity between the elements of a world rather than their absolute identity/difference.\(^{42}\)

(Figure 1)\(^{43}\):

From the point of view of the world:
\[
E(a) = \text{Id} (a,a) \\
\text{Id} (a,b) = M \quad \text{Id} (a,a) = M \\
\text{Id} (a,b) = \mu \quad \text{Id}(a,a) = \mu
\]

\(^{42}\) It is absolutely vital to understand the incommensurability between the term identity as deployed in mathematics (i.e., the degree of sameness) and the common usage of the term (i.e., a cultural, racial, biological, sexual element of differentiation).

\(^{43}\) Ibid, P. 108
Two Crucial Outcomes of the Concept of “World”

With the notion of the “world” as an inaccessible multiplicity, there are two crucial outcomes we must attend to. First is the distinction between “being” and “existence” and our understanding of them as fundamentally different things. The concept of world, ultimately, is the field of such a distinction. The other, and the most vital, outcome is that Badiou’s concept of “world” permits the observation that something can be in the world without yet existing in it, and this second outcome is by no means a contradiction. The vitality of this second outcome lies in its remarkable provision of the basis for a profound reason for the rightness of rebellion and militancy against the State of any world. The “profundness” of this “reason” is similar to our discussion of the contradictory unity of theory and practice in the previous section. We have already witnessed the ‘profound reason existing beyond the particularity of uprising, the reason which cannot be uprooted,’ is itself a theoretical reason. Here as well, the theoretical distinction between being and existence, allows us to say that in the world(s) there are always beings whose being is negated by the state of the world. In other words, there are always things announced not
to be by the state of the world. This second outcome haunts those totalitarian worlds whose structure (State of the world) announces the not-being of such beings.

With the distinction between being and existence, under the aegis of the concept of “world”, we can always hold fast to this profound theoretical reason and make it our central ideological principle, our profound reason for rebellion — i.e., there are things which are not existing. To put it differently, there are always things present in the world without being represented, and this is an ontological fact. Such an outcome with its attendant provision of our profound reason, always proves wrong any state of any world announcing the nothingness of certain beings. This is, of course the case, with any world, be it the world of politics, of art, of science, or of love.

As discussed earlier, the question is the degree of appearance of an element in the world. The question of appearance and representation is the question of identity, or better to say, the degree of identity. Once an element of a world is identical with itself, it both means that such an element has now an existence in that world, and that it has achieved a high degree of appearance with regard to the structure of order of that world (i.e., the transcendental of the situation).

It is in this precise sense that something can be without existing. This is the case when the relation of identity between that thing and itself is minimal. So, the thing is in the world but has no representation or appearance. With the notion of existence, the question, immediately, becomes that of law and order and not of mere ontology. In different words, it is related to category theory and not set theory. It is precisely why, even though Desanti’s critique shifting
Badiou’s attention to the question of world and theory of relations, it did not persuade him to recant his assertion that *mathematics is ontology*.

*The existence of an element of the world is the identity of this element with itself. Immediately, we have Aristotle’s principle of identity: a is identical to a, but there is no obligation for the relation of identity between an element and itself to be maximal in a world, so there is no obligation for the existence of any element of the world. In fact, there are different possibilities for the modality of existence of an element in a world.* (Badiou, ibid, p. 103)

‘*Being is Multiple’, ‘Mathematics is Ontology’: The Infinite

Now that we have reviewed Badiou’s notion of the world and studied how such a notion provides the basis for understanding the ontological difference between “being” and “existence”, we must move one step further and investigate his two famous assertions: *Being is multiple* and *mathematics is ontology*. Doing so will bring to us two fundamental outcomes, both of which are necessary to have a profound understanding of Badiou’s philosophical project. The first outcome is to have a better grasp of what *the infinite* is, and the second is to see why Badiou’s ontology is *subtractive*. 
**The Infinite and the Empty Place**

“The finite – which Hegel describes as the iterative transgression of its own limit – is essentially that which allows, and thereby demands, a supplementary inscription. Thus, what is constitutive for it is the empty place where that inscription which it lacks is possible. A number $x_n$ is that which determines ‘to its right’ the place of its successor: $(x_nS) \rightarrow (x_nSx_{n+1})$. To be inscribed at one of the places distributed by S is to assign to the other place [l’autre place] the constraining exclusivity of the blank space. The numerical effect exhausts itself in the incessant shunting along of the empty place: number is the displacement of the place where it is lacking [où il manque].

However, this operation presupposes a (unique) space of exercise, that is to say, an out-of-place blank [blanc] where the place is displaced in the retroaction of the inscribed – this is what Mallarmé characterized as the initial or solitary or more profoundly as the ‘gratuitous’ blankness or whiteness, since it is what is written that bestows upon it its status as place of the writing that takes place.” (Badiou, “Infinitesimal Subversion”, *Concept and Form*, p. 290)

At first glance, the above quote seems to be very dense; it, indeed, is. Yet there exists concealed in it a rather simple principle.

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The finite [...] is essentially that which allows, and thereby demands, a supplementary inscription. Thus, what is constitutive for it is the empty place where that inscription which it lacks is possible.

What do these sentences tell us? The constitutive of the “finite” is an empty place. What does this statement mean? It appears what we immediately have here is the dialectic of finite/infinite. Another immediate relation here is to Aristotle’s principle of matter and space: matter and space are equiprimordial, yet by no means are they one and the same thing. So is time equiprimordial to matter and space. The principle of equiprimordiality means that, at least, two, or more beings are mutually interconnected and, thus, neither has a being superior to the other. The discourse of equiprimordiality is opposite to that of foundationality, in which one (or more) being is based upon another. If the finite is constituted by an empty place, then the empty place is to be thought of as the location of the finite’s supplementation i.e., the infinite.

We also know that for Hegel, the finite is the existence, and the infinite is the being-in-itself (pure being) of the finite. Yet the finite is here, but the infinite is there ‘as a beyond, at a nebulous, inaccessible distance outside which there stands, enduring, the finite⁴⁵.

Thus, the infinite does not stand as something finished and complete above or superior to the finite, as if the finite had an enduring being apart from or subordinate to the infinite. (Hegel, Science of Logic, p138, §274)

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⁴⁵ Hegel, Science of Logic, “The infinite in general”, p. 111
Therefore, with both Hegel and Aristotle, we can see how crucial, the question of the location/space of existence is. There can be no matter without being in space. In other words, with the dialectic of the finite/infinite what is at the stake is the underlying there of the being-there (finite). This underlying there constitutes the finite, and the empty place is where the supplementary inscription, which is demanded by the finite, is possible. In this precise sense, we can see that the empty place (outplace) becomes the location of the infinite, the location of the supplementary inscription that the finite demands.

If we are to translate the above densities into more familiar terminologies, which we have already discussed, we can say that the main question with the dialectic of the finite/infinite is once again the distinction between being and existence. Of course, the former falls on the side of the infinite and the latter on that of the finite. This way, the location of the finite is the world, which was comprehensively discussed earlier, and the empty place is the location of pure being, the location of the non-existent. In fact, the infinite is the negation of the finite, which is itself a negation. Hence, writes Hegel: ‘The infinite is the negation of the negation, affirmation, being which has restored itself out of limitedness. The infinite is, and more intensely so than the first immediate being; it is the true being, the elevation above limitation’ (Science of Logic, § 273).

We know that the “immediate being” is the phenomenological being. Thus, it is to say, that the infinite — opposed to the finite, as logic is opposed to phenomenology — is the logical being. Ultimately, we can see that the dialectic of the finite/infinite is essentially that of
phenomenology/logic. And more importantly, that the question of change (*existentiation*, being becoming an existence), is the question of the passage of logic to phenomenology.

However, what is of vital significance with regards to the Badiouian notions of the world and the infinite, is to be aware that the infinite is by no means an immaterial being, i.e., the opposite of the materiality of the finite being. The infinite is actually material. What makes it an infinite being is that it stands outside the descriptive regime of the established predications of the world (language). Therefore, from the point of view of the world, the infinite exceeds signification and, thus, makes no sense (again, from the point of view of the world).

I have mentioned before that the nucleus of Badiou’s project must be thought of as an attempt to enjoin thought (‘*Subject-thought*’) to grasp the “infinite” via a *materialist dialectic*. To do so, it is imperative to preserve the Subject at the heart of philosophy; to place the foundation of ontological inquiries on the distinctions between being (being *qua* being) and being-*there* (existence), between *onto-*logy and *onto-*logy; and ultimately, to account for the notion of the infinity of *worlds* against the *One of universe*. It is through organizing such a system that he attempts to save philosophy from the pathos of finitude and the impossibility of “change”. Such an impossibility for Badiou is the sole product that the idea of finitude can bestow upon thought and is indeed where Heidegger’s philosophy founders on something.

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46 In reviewing Badiou’s formal theory of the Subject, I will describe how the Subject is ultimately summoned by thought and, hence, can also be called a “subject-thought”.

[...] the ontology of every oppressive figure organizes itself based on an imperative of finitude. Now I launch into the counterpart of this negative observation: the aim is to establish that wherever human action liberates itself from the order that constraints it, it is a matter of an encounter with the infinite, in the figure of a work. [...] philosophy must shut itself away in an analytic of finitude which is able to complete, as we’ve seen, a phenomenology of being-for-death; this is also normal today, notably in the world called “continental,” where analytic philosophy and phenomenology divide up the academic power today. [...] I will rely on what I find new in the contemporary conditions of philosophy. Coming to my aid indeed will be the sophisticated mathematics of entangled infinities, the artistic appreciation for the finished work without finitude, the existential experience of amorous infinity, and the finished political sequences of the infinite communist strategy. The contemporary mathematical theory of the infinite is called the “theory of grand cardinals.” Well, let’s just say that the theory of grand cardinals is certainly just as real, if not more, than the Big Bang or global warming. (Badiou, Immanence of Truths)\(^4\)

We should, therefore, be able to see that the infinite — contrary to the theological account of the term as indicative of the realm of God, the realm of the super object — is simply the very zone that is subtracted/excluded from the world’s structure of order. The infinite is that which falls outside the representational activity of the state of the world; it is that which is, but has no

\(^4\) Badiou, “Four Accesses to the Infinite” (Badiou), Translation of: Alain Badiou, The Immanence of Truths, Section III, Chapter c11, parts 1-4 (out of 12), February 2020, Trans. Timothy Lavenz. (https://fragilekeys.com/2020/02/22/four-accesses-to-the-infinite-badiou/)
maximal degree of appearance in the world. To employ the set theoretical language here, we can say that the infinite is the being whose effect upon any being, with a minimal degree of identity with itself (µ/low appearance), will situate that being in the processes of gaining a higher degree of identity, and thereby, coming into a higher degree of appearance. It is these very attributes that refute the assignment of immateriality to the notion of the infinite. *The infinite is material.*

*The Multiplicity of Being and the Not-Being of One*

“Being is Multiple”

*Being is Multiple* is the other ground-breaking assertion of Badiou. In what follows, I will attempt to unpack different levels of the significations of this assertion.

For Badiou, the experience of the world is a constant experience of multiplicity. At every moment, the world is multiplying itself on different scales of our observation. Therefore, Being is multiple. The two crucial words here are *experience* and *observation*. I will come back to them shortly. Yet, for now, let us see, in a simple language, what it means that at every moment the world is multiplying itself on different scales of our observations. At its core, the assertion means that there is no such a thing as a unified grasp of any world. We mentioned before that the “world” is an inaccessible multiplicity. Therefore, no world as such is given as *One*. What is given is always a multiple of the multiplicity that the world is. This simply means that you have interminable ways of counting everything that is given in the world as One. Let us explicate this by way of using a couple of examples.
Suppose a room with certain number of objects in it. Suppose this room is your bedroom. You can simply count all the elements (objects) of this room as one. At the same time, you can count the bed in that room as one in tandem with all the other objects remaining in the bedroom, themselves also as another one. You may also count the pillows on the bed as one. You may perhaps count the pillow covers as one. You may count every single cotton thread existing the fabric of the pillow cover as one. You may count every single particle within every single cotton thread of the fabric of the pillow cover as one. And there is no end to these infinite ways of counting certain objects as one. At the end, the world is a set. Accordingly, every element belonging to this world is itself a set, and this principle applies to an infinity of steps — i.e., a set of a set of a set multiplied to $\infty$ (multiplicities of multiplicities of multiplicities $\times \infty$).

We can also look into the example Badiou himself provides:

[Suppose] you are reading a book; you are dealing with a multiplicity. You find yourself that the book bores you, you will notice that you will still have 123 pages to read; that is also an experience of multiplicity. If you want to go somewhere in Paris, you will cross many unknown streets; there you are in multiplicity. Multiplicity is even the first thing a baby discovers when he is born. He cries because he discovers the multiple. He understands that he and his mother are not one and the same thing, and after that this experience never stops! Each and every of these things is itself a multiplicity. Therefore, you are dealing with the multiplicities of multiplicities of multiplicities. (Badiou, A film by Gorav Kalyan and Rohan Kalyan, 2018)
The first result of the assertion *Being is multiple* is that you can never count a situation (a world) as *one*. What there is, is always a multiple of multiplicity. Pure being, pure multiple, being divested from all the relations that make it an individuated being, is what Badiou calls inconsistent multiplicity (uncounted multiplicity). Therefore, being-there (i.e., a being with appearance) is a *consistent* multiple, whereas pure being (being qua being), or indifferent multiple, is an *inconsistent* multiple. So, once we divest being of every single of these multiplicities, we won’t arrive at the One, but rather at a pure multiplicity or multiple of multiples.

The second result of this assertion is that a pure multiple (inconsistent multiplicity) can only be thinkable once it is in relation to another being, i.e., once it belongs to a world.49 In other words, you can only arrive at a plausible being once you *decompose* reality into certain layers of what is given (akin to the examples above).

The third outcome of the assertion of the multiplicity of Being is that it sheds light on the fact that Badiou’s philosophy does not presuppose a One. All that there is, is the multiple of the multiples, and the thought of this pure multiple belongs to ontology, which is itself the function of mathematics. Hence, the other assertion: *mathematics is ontology*.

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49 "A Being is thinkable only insofar as it belongs to a world", *Logics of Worlds*, P. 113-117
When there is no presupposition of the One — here we are concerned with a quantitative (material) notion of the One\textsuperscript{50} — you cannot define what a multiple is. There are only sets and everything that is in it is itself a set (multiples of multiples of multiples \(\times\infty\)). Therefore, the question of philosophy is not to define what there is, rather to see what is \textit{to be done} with the multiplicities that are there. This is exactly why philosophy for Badiou, before being about anything else, is a matter of decision making. It is in this sense that his philosophy is an axiomatic philosophy.

Subsequently, mathematics as a means of formalization is not to subject philosophy to the immanence of metaphysics. Rather, mathematics is employed to formalize the principles and the \textit{profound reasons} that can verify philosophical axioms (i.e., the to-do list of philosophy). It is no coincidence that for Badiou there is nothing legitimate, or interesting, in epistemology.

\textit{Since Manifesto for Philosophy, I have maintained that there are four philosophical conditions: science, love, art, and politics. Equally I defend the idea that these four conditions are truth procedures. In their particular way they produce truths. Thus, philosophy operates on the basis of multiple truths, and certainly does not generate them itself. [...] Philosophy, which requires the deployment of four conditions, cannot specialize in any one of them. I am opposed to every academic division of philosophy into would-be objective domains: there}

\textsuperscript{50} It is very important to note that for Badiou, as opposed to Hegel, One is a quantitative feature of being and not a qualitative feature. It is in this precise sense that the logic of being, for Badiou, contrary to the traditional association of logic with metaphysics, is only captured by mathematics. Therefore, Badiou’s assertion that “mathematics is ontology” is indeed, from a different angle, propounding the substitution of metaphysics with mathematics.
is nothing legitimate, or interesting, in what is termed ‘epistemology’ (philosophy of sciences), ‘aesthetics’ (philosophy of art), ‘psychology’ (philosophy of affects) or ‘political philosophy’ (philosophy of the practices of power). (Badiou, Metapolitics, P. xxxi)

Let us return to our starting point in this section. The experience of the world is a constant experience of multiplicity. At every moment, the world is multiplying itself on different scales of our observation. I mentioned earlier that the two crucial words here are experience and observation. Since both of these words are indicative of the domain of phenomenology and its concomitant “immediate subject/observer/perceiver”, we can conclude that the assertion Being is multiple remains intact insofar as it is in relation to the question of “self-consciousness”.

Therefore, it would not be erroneous to state that ‘multiplicity of Being’ is an effect of correlationality. In other words, at every moment that a multiple of multiplicity (a being in a world) is made manifest and plausible, it has been made so because it has been in relation to another being (the observer) who himself is a multiple. After all, ‘Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged and recognized.’

Without retaining a certain degree of correlationalism, there can be no philosophy as a matter of decision making, as an obligatory and militant participation in the practice-theory-practice process of knowledge. Philosophy can simply hold fast to correlationalism without falling into the malady of anthropocentrism, and that is no contradiction whatsoever.

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Badiou’s ontology is subtractive insofar as it holds that pure being is what falls outside the activities of the State of the situation, namely: “naming”, “counting”, and “controlling”. From this vantage point, being, pure being, is that which is in the world, but at the same time is separated from what is being represented in the world. In this precise sense, pure being is a being, yet it is treated as nothing. Let us call this (via Badiou) a “being nothing”. Nevertheless, the State of the situation — i.e., the transcendental of the situation whose mission is counting the elements of the situation — constantly propagates that there is nothing else in the world other than what is already counted, and thereby, represented. Accordingly, from the point of view of the world, pure being is that which is not. In other words, it is a “not-being” (again, from the point of view of the world).

In the essay “The Categorical Imperative”, A. J. Bartlett and Alex Ling provide a remarkable articulation of the subtractiveness of Badiou’s ontology, which also contextualizes from a different perspective the distinction I laid out between being nothing and not-being:

[...] Badiou’s ontology is subtractive insofar as it does not purport to convey being as presence. To the contrary, being – pure being (or pure multiple multiplicity) – is that which defies any form of presentation (or representation, for that matter).

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52 Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, “Jacques Derrida”, p.140-141
Radically withdrawn from all unification, being is nothing other than uncounted – and therefore unpresented – multiplicity [...] Badiou's ontology is also subtractive in a second sense, in that it 'subtracts' being from its capture by the One (which, as Badiou argues in Being and Event, is the dominant trope of classical metaphysics).... Badiou's ontology is subtractive in that its fundamental gesture, curiously enough, is to subtract being itself from ontology. For ontology is ultimately a discourse which prescribes the rules by which something can be presented or 'counted' as one – its sole operation being that of the count – and the 'one' thing that necessarily fails to be counted is nothing other than inconsistent multiplicity, or being itself. So, technically speaking, being isn't actually given in ontology; rather, it is retroactively posited on the basis of conceiving the one as a 'result' (of the operation of the count). To repeat: pure multiplicity is not something that can be known (or again, while we certainly know that being is, we cannot know what it is); rather, the nature of being is something that must be decided upon, in an axiomatic sense.” (A. J. Bartlett and Alex Ling, “The Categorical Imperative”, P. 4-5)

We discussed earlier how, with Badiou, ontology becomes the matter of decisionality, and thereby philosophy becomes axiomatic. We also mentioned that for Badiou once we divest any given being (being-there/with appearance) from all its qualitative determinations, once we isolate it away from its phenomenological context, we won’t ever arrive at One but at the multiple of the multiples. A. J. Bartlett and Alex Ling confirm, via Badiou, that this is literally the being of the

53 A.J. Bartlett and Alex Ling, “The Categorical Imperative”, Mathematics of the Transcendental, Alain Badiou, P. 4-5
object: ‘Crucially, there is no “atomic” halting point to this infinite de-composition; what we arrive at is not the “One” (that is, some form of primordial unity), but rather the void, nothingness itself – the in-finite dissemination of multiple multiplicity’. Once again, it is precisely in response to the multiplicity of being that Badiou declares that mathematics is ontology:

For if ontology is, as Aristotle declared in his Metaphysics, the science of being qua being – and if pure being, or being subtracted from all of its particular qualities and attributes, is, as Badiou argues, none other than inconsistent (or 'uncounted') multiplicity – then the only science adequate to thinking such multiple being is mathematics. Indeed, thinking pure multiplicity is precisely what mathematics does on a daily basis. No other discourse – be it theological, linguistic, relativist, vitalist, phenomenological, or whatever – so much as comes close to being up to this task; mathematics and mathematics alone gives us the thought of being. (Ibid, P.4)

The crucial point that Bartlett and Ling add is that by no means should we infer from this assertion that ‘being itself is mathematical’. This is yet another common misunderstanding of Badiou’s assertion that mathematics is ontology. After all, being itself is not ontology, but is the object of the discourse of ontology. Such misunderstanding lies in conflating ontology (the discourse on being) with the object of this discourse (being itself).
By now, the main achievement of our ontological expedition is perhaps that we demonstrated how ‘the metaphysical error par excellence is to have identified the non-existent with nothingness’. The point, was to prove that the non-existent is.

‘We are nothing, let us be all.’ That is the very definition of Revolution: a non-existent uses its being-multiple in order to declare that it will exist in the absolute sense. And for that to happen, we have to change the world of course, change the world’s transcendental. The non-existent is nothing. But being nothing is by no means the same as not-being. To be nothing is to non-exist in a way specific to a determinate world or place. (Ibid, p. 141)

Therefore, the true definition of change (of revolution) is to existentiate, i.e., to act for the passage of a nothing (non-existent) to an existence. Such a task, asserts Badiou, requires to ‘change the world of course, change the world’s transcendental’. To change a world and to change the worlds’ transcendental are one and the same thing. It is absolutely crucial then to understand what is this transcendental, whose change is tantamount to changing the world. We know that change, requires rebellion against the enemy, transcendental is therefore the enemy.

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50 Alain Badiou, Pocket Pantheon, “Jacques Derrida”, p.140-141
The concept of the *transcendental*, in different works of Badiou, has also been referred to as the “State of the situation”, and as the “structure of order” of the world. After all, they are all alternative terms for what in his technical language is called the *transcendental*.

Now that we know what a “world” is, we can simply define the transcendental as the regime whose main function is to maintain the established order of the world through performing the operations of counting, namely, naming and restricting all the elements of that world, in a manner that the result adds up as a One — one consistent world.

*Kant vs. Badiou*

Since the concept of the transcendental is strongly entangled with the name of Kant, before unpacking what the transcendental is for Badiou, we should first demonstrate its difference with the Kantian conception of the term.

The transcendental for Kant is a *subjectivated* construction. That is why the complete form of its usage — within Kantian terminology — is the “transcendental subject”. As we know, the transcendental subject is entangled with the empirical subject’s power of knowing. In other words, it is the *a priori* cognitive ability of the subject who experiences the world. Ever since Descartes, writes Badiou, ‘this is the essential trait of an *idealist* philosophy: that it calls upon the
subject not as a problem but as the solution to the aporias of the One (the world is nothing but formless multiplicity, but there exists a unified Dasein of this world).”

Badiou’s materialist-dialectical thought, however, leaves no room for any vision of the subject ‘as a place of the solution to a problem of possibility or unity (possibility of intuitive certainty for Descartes, of synthetic judgments a priori for Kant)”

Subject for Badiou is always posterior to the world, a posterior and ‘problematic’ construction. In full contrast with Kant, not only the transcendental for Badiou is not on the side of the Subject, but also it is an immanent given of any world (situation) whatsoever. Thus, the transcendental is a matter of ontology and the world, and not that of the subject. From this vantage point, the transcendental is always anterior to any subjective construction within the world. In other words, there can be no world without a transcendental already imposing its power on it. That is, the transcendental and the world are equiprimordial. The former imposes upon the latter the logic, i.e., the rules and laws, of being-there. This means that the “being-there” (the multiple) has been allowed to come to representation “there” (in that the world) due to: first, the law and conditions of appearing; and second, the rules ‘in accordance with which the ‘there’ of being-there allows the multiple to come forth as essentially bound.”

The transcendental is that which imposes all these operations upon every situated multiplicity. Therefore, if the world is made intelligible for all that is there (being-there), it is because of the operations of the transcendental, not because of the a priori cognitive ability of the subject (Kant).

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57 Badiou, Logics of Worlds, “Necessity of a Transcendental Organization of the Situations of Being”, P. 101-102
58 Ibid, P. 101
59 Ibid
Later, I will argue that we can set an equivalence between the Badiouian account of the transcendental and the Heideggerian notion of discourse. This equivalence, I argue, is due to the very disposition of the transcendental as the regime which makes the world an intelligible manifestation. Such equation between “discourse” and “the transcendental” is essential, both for constructing the linguistic aspect of thought-activism, and also for my critique of Badiou’s conception of language not an ontological force, but merely as predication.

Before going back to our review of Badiou’s greater logic, let us take notice that keeping the transcendental away from the subject, and treating it as the operator of the world’s order, is certainly another trait of Badiou’s attempt to situate philosophy between the scienticity of structuralism and the phenomenological legacy of Sartre.

Against the traditional traits of all idealist philosophies, it is exactly here, in the relationship between the transcendental and logic, that we can locate the characteristic feature of Badiou’s materialist and dialectical ontology. Let us read Badiou’s remarks on the transcendental:

That every world possesses a singular transcendental organization means that, since the thinking of being cannot on its own account for the world’s manifestation, the intelligibility of this manifestation must be made possible by immanent operations. ‘Transcendental’ is the name for these operations. The final maxim can be stated as follows: with regard to the inconsistency of being, ‘logic’ and ‘appearing’ are one and the same thing. However, it does not follow, as in Kant, that being-in-itself is unknowable. On the contrary, it is absolutely knowable, or even known (historically-
existing mathematics). But this knowledge of being (onto-logy) does not entail that of appearing (onto-logy). (Ibid, p. 101-102)

**Transcendental and Greater Logic**

I mentioned earlier how Desanti’s critique of Badiou’s *Being and Event* induced Badiou to understand the necessity of treating situations (worlds) as sites of the being-there of beings, instead of mere ‘multiple-neutrality’ (inconsistent multiplicity). This passage of attention (taking place in *Logics of Worlds*) results in proving that “being-there” as “appearing-in-a-world” has a relational consistency. There are two ground-breaking theses coming out of the foregoing assertion: First, *mathematics and being are one and the same thing*. Second, *logic and appearing are also one and the same thing*.  

Lest we think that the first thesis contradicts our previous assertion that ‘mathematics is ontology’ does not entail that the object of the ontological discourse, i.e., being, is itself mathematical. We have to emphasize that, here, the thesis that *mathematics and being are one and the same thing* means that mathematics and the *thinkability* of being (thought of being) are one and the same thing. With this we are immediately back in the sphere of the Parmenidean axiom: ... τὸ γὰρ ἄτονον νοεῖν ἐστίν τὸ καὶ εἶναι (... for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be). If *to be thought* is the same thing as *to be*, since the task of thinking pure being falls to mathematics, thus, mathematics and being are one and the

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60 See *Logics of Worlds*, p. 99-100
same thing. The other variation of this thesis could be *mathematics and thinking are one and the same thing*.

The second thesis, *logic and appearing are one and the same thing*, must also be understood on the basis of Badiou’s treatment of the term logic as ‘purely and simply the cohesion of appearing’⁶¹. This definition of *logic* is in contrast with logic in its usual sense, i.e., the formal regulation of statements. It is in this precise sense, that Badiou confronts any philosophy which attempts to locate the examination of language in the center of thought (post-structuralism, linguistics, etc.). Assigning language to the centre of philosophy, for Badiou, is to consign philosophy to ‘fastidious grammatical exercises.’⁶²

To repeat: *logic* is the law of appearing of a world’s multiplicity (being-there). Existence is being-there. Essence is pure being (being qua being). Hence, to exist in a world is to have been passed through the operation of logic. And we know, with Hegel, that there’s a dialectical correlation between being and being-there, between essence and existence.

**Heidegger vs. Badiou: Existence vs. Inexistence of the Whole**

A discrepancy between Badiou’s and Heidegger’s ontologies is that while Heidegger seeks to provide a wholistic vision of the world through evoking ‘beings-as-a-whole’, for Badiou ‘every singular being [étant] is only manifested in its being [être] locally’⁶³. Therefore, ‘the appearing of

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⁶¹ Ibid, p. 100  
⁶² Ibid  
⁶³ Ibid, 102
the being of beings [l'être de l'étant] is being-there. It is this necessity of the ‘there’ which, for a being thought in its multiple-being, entails a transcendental constitution (without subject).\textsuperscript{64} In other words, there must be a “there” for a being to come forth and be-there as bound. Let me draw three essential points from this:

1- This subjectless “there” (world) is equiprimordial with the transcendental (State).

2- By summoning the “there”, the transcendental allows us to think being only as that which is localized (worlded) in there.

3- Manifestation, appearing, being-there are all one and the same thing.

This discrepancy is, of course, not new to our discussion. We have already elucidated the characteristic distinction between Heidegger and Badiou, i.e., the question of finitude (Heidegger, the world) and that of the infinite (Badiou, worlds). What is pointed to above, is looking at the same characteristic distinction, this time, from the perspective of the possibility of ‘beings-as-a-whole’.

We know that for Heidegger we are thrown (Werfen) into the whole that the world is. It is through presupposing this whole and the thrownness into it that there can be a unified Dasein of the world. At the same time, it is the existence of this very consistent whole, as the philosophical presupposition, that functions as the sole reason behind the impossibility of change, or better, the absence of politics, in Heidegger. The identification of non-existent with nothingness amounts to nothing better than a passive acceptance of all that is there, and the conception of all that does

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid
not exists as not-being. That is simply why for Heidegger the clearing in a forest (lichtung, räumung)\textsuperscript{65} is emblematic of true thinking — taking to heart the presence of what is present\textsuperscript{66}.

For Badiou, however, there is no such thing as a whole, no universe: ‘there are several worlds, since if there were only one it would be the universe.’ The universe is the ‘empty concept of a being of the whole’, whereas the world is ‘a complete situation of being’\textsuperscript{67}.

\textbf{Transcendental’s Determination of the World}

The main outcome of the identical relationship between logic and the transcendental can be summarized as the following:

\begin{quote}
As a situation of being, a world is not an empty place—akin to Newton’s space—which multiple beings would come to inhabit. For a world is nothing but a logic of being-there, and it is identified with the singularity of this logic. (Badiou, Logics of Worlds, P. 102)
\end{quote}

Now that we know the transcendental as a structured operator of the world, it is necessary to know how this \textit{structured operator} operates. To be able to answer this question, let us have a flashback to our discussion in the section of “World”. There we argued that the question of the

\textsuperscript{65} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, P., 171, 214, etc.
\textsuperscript{66} Heidegger, \textit{What is Called Thinking?}, “Lecture XI”, p. 229-244
\textsuperscript{67} Badiou, \textit{Logics of Worlds}, p. 101-102
existence of an element (a being) in the world depends on the degree of its identity with itself, as well as with other beings, under the ‘structure of order’. If an element’s degree of identity with itself is maximal ($M$), the element exists in the world; and if minimal ($\mu$), it does not (of course, from the point of view of that world). The degree of an element’s identity or difference with itself is evaluated by the transcendental. And since the transcendental always makes possible the ‘more’ and the ‘less’, in any given world, there are always degrees and values of identity and difference rather than absolute identity or difference.

Badiou names the operation performed by the transcendental operational phenomenology. For the transcendental to form a ‘complete phenomenology’, the performance of three operations is needed: ‘a. A minimum of appearance is given. b. The possibility of conjoining the values of appearance of two multiples (and therefore of any finite number of multiples). c. The possibility of globally synthesizing the values of appearance of any number of multiples, even if there is an infinity of them.’

A world is determined once all these three operations are made complete by the transcendental. In other words, when we say that we have a world, it means that the transcendental has completed these three successive operations: it has, first, allowed the existence of an element to be thinkable by giving it a minimum appearance; then it must have set the laws with regard to the relations of at least two beings-there; and ultimately, it has posited the existence of an ‘envelop’ for all different parts of the world.

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68 Ibid, p. 103
The Formal Theory of the Subject

*Truth Procedure and its Construction of the Subject: General Outline*

It would have been an absolutely futile attempt to say a word about *the Subject* without, first, attaining a necessary understanding of Badiou’s subtractive ontology. We had no choice but to begin from the beginning. Lack of sufficient familiarity with Badiou’s subtractive ontology is the core drive behind most critiques of his account of the Subject, mostly rooted in erroneously conflating the Subject with subjectivity. The former is the rebellious agency of a being-in-the-world, whereas the latter is an external ideological product of the world imposed by its State (transcendental) on beings-in-the-world. Subjectivity, using Lazzarato’s language, is the product of ‘social subjection’ and ‘machinic enslavement’\(^{69}\), and not a form of thought in relation to the infinite of the world that the Subject is.

The publishing of Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject* (1982), in the view of many, instigated a paradigm shift in the field of critical theories, in particular those concerning the questions of subject, subjectivity and the politics of subjectivization. With the *Theory of the Subject*, an altogether new conception of the category of “subject” appeared in the lexicon of contemporary philosophy. This category is neither conceivable as psychological, nor is it reducible to the categories of the moral (corporeal/practical subject), or the phenomenological

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\(^{69}\) Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, P. 7-22
(descriptive/immediate subject), or the structuralist (imaginary/ideological subject). Moreover, the Badiouian Subject sets itself apart from any identification of the term with the Cartesian Cogito. The Subject as devised by Badiou is in full contrast with any conception of the term as representative of a state of being.

For Badiou, after all, subject, if it represents a state of being is nothing but an object. Accordingly, any theorization of these types of subjects — irrespective of the particularities and disparities they might assume within different discourses — is nothing other than a theory of an object. It is of no difference if that particular object appears cloaked as “subject” in diverse philosophical discourses.

The absolute starting point is that a theory of the subject cannot be the theory of an object. That is indeed why it is only theoretical (its only empirical content is metaphorical) and tends towards the formal. That the subject is not an object does not forbid but rather requires not only that it have a being, but also that it have an appearing. (Badiou, Logics of Worlds, P. 49)

Right from the outset, the above quote highlights the question of the “body” within the category of the subject. It is not difficult to understand why certain contemporary critical theories with their infatuated devotion to the body (Foucault, Butler), are worried by any account of the subject that is not substantiated within the framework of the body’s particularities. The source of this confusion lies in visions that identify the being of the Subject with the being of the body (as
a being-in-the-world). I will elaborate that, contrary to the typical critique/misunderstanding of Badiou’s Subject, the question is not whether the Subject has a body, or whether it bears any sensorial faculty.

Unlike any conception of subject for which body stands as the final arbiter, the Badiouian Subject is *not reducible* to the category of body nor to that of language. Irreducibility to body and language is the very disposition that qualifies the Subject to meet the required conditions of an account of the subject, i.e., that which is not an object. Understanding such a disposition of the Subject requires us to be dispensed with the rather disputed field of body and subject, and instead, set the real contest between the categories of subject and subjectivity.

In Badiou’s account, it is neither thinking nor consciousness that assigns the Subject to a being. Quite the opposite, thinking (*Cogito*) in tandem with the consciousness to which it is subordinated are only *ontologically necessary* elements for the formation of the Subject. These ontologically necessary elements, together with the *fidelity* of the body to the Event — that which has summoned for the construction of the Subject/thought — form the Subject. I will later elucidate what I mean by *ontologically necessary,* yet let us first give an outline of the above distinctions between the Subject and other concepts of subject (as subjectivity).

The distinction falls neatly into the subtractive ontology Badiou uses to develop his theory of the Subject. In contrast with “subject” as a fixed entity (body) located and/or operating within a situation, the Subject is a *process.* The ontological mission of this process is to transform the
logic of the situation (transcendental) by forcing\textsuperscript{70} the truth of the Event that has interrupted the situation’s continuum (logical consistency).

Once again, the absolute starting point is to understand that the Subject is by no means a state of being but a process. It is a process borne by a body within a world; a process continuing insofar as someone\textsuperscript{71} maintains navigating through it. In other words, in order to construct a relationship with the trace of an Event, someone enters the process of the Subject. The Event happens outside the world (the infinite), i.e., in the excluded part, the evental Site, and only its trace enters the framework of the world. The trace of the Event is materialized in the form of a statement declared by the someone who has encountered the event. Such statement is called the evental statement. For Badiou the relation maintained between the body and the trace of the Event is precisely what the Subject is (figure 2).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{(Figure 2)}\textsuperscript{72}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{70} Discovered by Paul Cohen, \textit{Forcing} is a mathematical technique used for proving consistency and independence results in set theory (Cohen, 1963).

\textsuperscript{71} In some of his works such as \textit{Ethics: An Essay on Understanding the Evil}, Badiou uses the term “someone” as the counterpart for body (general body). “Someone” contrasts with the notion of the “new body” (generic body), which has no place in the existential classifications of the world hitherto the Event.

\textsuperscript{72}Alain Badiou, “The Subject of Art”, LACAN.COM, The Symposium 6, 2005, p.1
It is precisely for being a process that the Subject cannot be identified with a state of being such as a psychological, phenomenological, structural, or a biological entity within a situation. For a person (an individual body) who contributes to the formation of something cannot be identified with the totality of that thing. From this vantage point, the Subject is a process that someone both constructs and also becomes a member of. The question of membership, and the constant declaration of that membership, is of crucial significance in Badiou’s treatment of the Subject.

The Subject is that which is constructed by someone’s fidelity to the Event. Thus, someone as an individual body will not become the Subject, rather only by becoming a member of the Subject, does someone act toward the construction of what is in Badiou’s terminology called the new body, which is a singularity (generic). This new body, and this is remarkably important, can vary from the formation of a political organization all the way to ‘a scene of the two’ in an amorous relationship, to a new paradigm of art, and so forth.

In this prospect, the Subject can be seen as the process through which someone proceeds towards the contingency of both being transformed and transforming the world (i.e., transforming the world’s transcendental). By being affirmative to this transformation, the new body gains the chance of becoming, a new body that bears in itself the trace of something that is truthfully generic and singular. In other words, to become a member of a Subject is to enter a process unconditionally, in order to find the condition for local formation of something that is fundamentally generic.
Here, the question of the “genericity” of the new body is so crucial. The universality of the product of the Subject, i.e., the ‘truthfulness’ of the new body, always situates itself on the side of “genericity” and can only be understood through its recognition as ‘the generic truth’\textsuperscript{73}.

It is precisely because of this distinction between the generic and the general — the contrast between the unnameable and that which is already predicated and named within a situation — that the Subject as glossed above cannot, and must not, be equated with anything like cultural, gender, ethnic, and racial identity. For identities, in essence, are nothing but the discursive supremacy of general particularities advertised as generic singularities. We will come back to this when we discuss the question of the universal, the particular, and the singular in this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, the terms “situation” and “world”, are two equivalents for the mathematical notion of set. We also showed that to explicate the logical relations between a set and the Subject, Badiou, thinks the nature of being through mathematical formalizations, i.e., through his intense devotion to set theory (theory of pure multiplicity) and category theory (theory of relations). It is, however, crucial to avoid identifying mathematics itself with a condition for philosophy. Mathematics despite being what positions philosophy to its conditions\textsuperscript{74}, itself cannot be conceived of as a condition for philosophy. Mathematics is the sole means for formalizing the nature and mechanisms of the relations between subsets, the laws of these relations, the logic of appearances of subsets, as well as presentations, and ultimately, the

\textsuperscript{73} Alain Badiou, \textit{Philosophy for Militants}, “Politics as a Non-expressive Dialectics”, P. 71-76

\textsuperscript{74} For Badiou, these conditions are divisible into four domains of thought, namely, politics, love, art and science. For him, it is only in these domains that an Event can emerge; produce the Subject along with its induced ‘truth procedures’, constitute the generic truth, and ultimately \textit{force} the truth to \textit{be} as that which did not exist within the existential framework of the world before the Event.
representations of the subsets. From this perspective, the Subject is an *ontological* Subject, and, thus, mathematics is not a supplementary paradigm for ontology. Rather, since all the foregoing functions fundamentally fall on the side of ontology, *mathematics is ontology*.

**Three Different Levels of Significations of the Category of “Being”**

Badiou distinguishes three different levels of signification for the category of “being”, namely, when something *is*, i.e., “being qua being”, a pure multiple of multiplicities; when something *exists*, i.e., when something is in a world (consistent multiplicity); and when something *happens*, i.e., the Event, when something happens *for* the world and places a cut in its continuum. The Event always comes from the void as the sole competitor of the world.

Amongst all the above significations, the significance of Badiou’s ontology lies on the side of the third signification, where it addresses the category that I refer to as *that which is not*. Here is exactly where Badiou’s ontological project deviates from Heidegger. While for Heidegger, the question of the Being of beings lies on the opposite side of “potentiality”, “becoming” and “appearance”, potentiality, becoming, and appearance, for Badiou, are the fundamental questions that set up the problem, in regard to which the question of Being is posed.

To understand what is exactly meant by *that which is not*, we should immediately amend our question by asking *where is that which is not?* In other words, *where is it that that which is not can potentially come forth as an existence in the world?* The answer is: *that which is not* is, indeed, in the world yet not as an existence. For me, here is exactly where Badiou’s ontology
offers a way out from the contemporary impasse set by neo-liberalism and its concomitant discursive *doxa*. Let me repeat that again. *That which is not* is, indeed, not in *a* world as an existence. This statement of course does not signify that *that which is not* is a not-being. Nevertheless, the identification of non-existence with not-being is exactly the core characteristic of neo-liberal politics.

I think any true approach to Badiou’s ontology must start off from remembering the answer to the question where is that which is not? To have a more profound view of the distinction between “being-yet-not-existing-in-a-world” and “not being”, we should therefore understand the distinction between “the generic” and “the general”. For Badiou, “the generic” lies on the side of the infinite, thus, on the side of universality, versus “the general” which is always counted under the phenomenological operations of the transcendental, thus, it is within the pathos of finitude (Figure 3).75

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75 Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, “Philosophy and Mathematics”, chapter 8, P.121
**Subtractive Ontology and the Thought-Activist Ethics**

Subtractive ontology is the domain in which the main imperative is to disclose the possibility for the passage of that which *is* in a world (yet is not counted) to an *existence* under the transcendental of that world. A task that itself requires the change of the transcendental of that world. In other words, the agenda is to transform the existential framework of a world, of a set, or, of a situation, thus, that which is *present* without being *represented* can come to representation (*existentiation*). Indeed, a non-existent being always *is*, yet it is just not allowed to be there in the world as an existence. The latter is due to its qualitative determinations, such as its low degree of appearance, which is imposed on it by the transcendental.

The ground-breaking *act* of extricating the “being nothing” from what the transcendental treats as “not-being” is crucial. It is in the crux of this very act that *thought-activist ethics* finds its substance. Thought-activist ethics is, in essence, a *situational ethics*. It is an ethics liberated from the agony of its reversal forms, i.e., “ethics of the other”, “ethics of tolerance”, “ethics of difference” and so forth. It is exactly through this thought-activist ethical act that the question of “change” inscribes itself on top of Badiou’s philosophical imperative. What imperative? To absolutely pledge to the veracity of the fact that there is always something *generic* on the margin of a world that is *generally* not represented. Hence, the question of change within a world/set can be interpreted as letting *that* which is nothing become *that* which is something. Badiou asserts that in order to allow such a change, one needs to be affirmative to any happening that brings about the capitulation of the State of the set under the very construction that supplements the set with a new
deployment of its subsets. By new deployment of the subsets, I refer to a new arrangement (envelop) in which the subsets are mixed in such a fashion which hitherto had no place within the existential framework of the set. In short, to make change is to allow the inconsistent multiplicity become a consistent multiplicity (existence).

**Event and Contingency**

The cause behind this transformation is the Event. The Event is the undecidable which contingently occurs from the exteriority of the set (world). Although it is a form of being, yet it has the nature of a happening. We know that happening, for Badiou, is a signification of being, in which appearing and disappearing are one and the same thing. Therefore, an Event disappears right after it appears. Only its trace enters the world and creates a rupture within its established order — it places a cut in the continuum of the set. Faithful to this happening and its concomitant rupture in the world, the Subject is the process that aids the completion of the ‘truth procedure’ i.e., the construction of the generic truth of the Event. The Subject, in fact, is in service of the emergence of the new body. In other words, it is in service of giving existence to a new mix of the world’s subsets. The Subject in this precise sense is the process through which one thought-acts to bring into existence the unnameable and the uncounted that were hitherto subtracted from the finite classifications of the world (set). Let us see this procedure better, by way of collapsing “figure 3” onto “figure 2” (i.e., figure 4).

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76 See *The Subject of Art* (LACAN.COM, The Symposium 6, 2005, p.2)
It is enough for us to suppose that a real rupture has taken place in the world, a rupture which we will call an event, together with a trace of this rupture, ε, and finally a body C, correlated to ε (only existing as a body under the condition of the evental trace). The formal theory of the subject is then, under condition of ε and C (trace and body), a theory of operations (figures) and destinations (acts). (Badiou, *Formal Theory of the Subject: Meta-Physics, P. 50*)

Everything in Badiou’s philosophy is about assisting a nothing become a thing in the world, about discovering, and therefore, *forcing* what characterizes itself as having no name and no place in the classifications of the world. Mathematically speaking, the entirety of Badiou’s ‘truth

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77 “Throughout, we presuppose that in the ‘world’ where the subject unfolds its form there is: an event, which has left a trace. We will write this trace ε. A body issued from the event, which we will write C.” (See, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 49)
procedures’ is about locating, in every singular set/situation/world, the object that refuses to be named or re-constructed — to locate *that which is not*.

By embracing the American mathematician Paul J. Cohen’s axiom of ‘non-constructability’ as well as the technique of “forcing” (both concepts used in set theory), Badiou argues that if any singular situation is an infinity of multiplicities, therefore, there absolutely exists, within the infinity of those multiplicities, an object (a pure multiple) that is not simply definable, as it has no established signification in the hegemonic discourse of the grand multiplicity.

This multiple of multiplicities is a non-constructible. In other words, it is fundamentally against the *great law* of the set. For if the great law, in set theory, means that all sets are constructible — meaning that what is true about a multiplicity is therefore universally true about all other multiplicities — the non-constructible set (the generic set) means that there is a *singular* multiplicity that is extremely generic. This extreme genericity is characterizable as the radical competitor of the ruling order of the State of the set (the transcendental of the grand multiplicity).

This object (a pure multiple) is, indeed, an object of pure contingency. For it is only through the contingencies of an Event that this object can be discovered. The question of contingency, however, must be immediately distinguished from that of possibility or probability. For speaking of probabilities is still a matter of the transcendental trope, of the *language* of the rule of law, whereas pure contingencies exceed the descriptive predicates of the world.

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78 For theories of “Non-Constructability”, “Great Law”, Generic Set, See Philosophy for Militants, “Politics as a Non-expressive Dialectics”, P. 61-80
Contingency, pure contingency, as Reza Negarestani puts it, ‘is the concomitant expression of possibilities.’ That is to say, contingency means there might be some possibilities or no possibility at all. Accordingly, the discovery of the pure multiple of multiplicities, or if you prefer, the discovery of the pure object of desire, is extremely contingent upon the occurrence of the Event along with the formation of its ontologically necessary truth procedure i.e., the formation of the Subject, the fidelity of the Subject to the generic truth of the Event and so on (figure 5).

All the aforementioned, can only be explained in an axiomatic sense, or to put it differently, through mathematical propositions. The following, for instance, is the mathematical proposition for truth procedures in the domain of politics: \( \sigma, \varepsilon, \pi(\varepsilon), \pi(\pi(\varepsilon)) \Rightarrow 1 \).\(^{80}\)

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\(^79\)Reza Negarestani, “Contingency and Complicity”, The Medium of Contingency, Elie Ayache, Reza Negarestani, Matthew Poole, Miguel Abreu, Scott Lyall, Urbanomic, 2011

\(^{80}\)Elaborating on politics as truth procedure, Badiou delicately illustrates — in the case of the political event — that each situation is an infinite of a multiplicity that presents all its elements, symbolically written as \( \sigma \); each situation has its own State that is characterized as an errant-representational-measureless power, written as \( \varepsilon \). According to Badiou, the State of the situation always exceeds the situation. The power of the state of the situation is measureless until the excessive and interruptive force of politics, a contingent event, is able to put the state at distance in order to interrupt as well as to measure its power. This is written as \( \pi(\varepsilon) \). And finally it is the ‘political prescription’ — the incorporation of event’s consequence; the new discipline that will not be achieved unless by the fidelity to the fidelity — that leads to the whole procedure of the appearance of the singular truth, that is written as \( \pi(\pi(\varepsilon)) \) and 1. Thus, the numericality of this conditional procedure will be: \( \sigma, \varepsilon, \pi(\varepsilon), \pi(\pi(\varepsilon)) \Rightarrow 1 \)

(Ahadi, Politics of Subjectivization: necessity of contingency and Event for a contemporary revolution, 2012, P. 30)
**The Contemporary Impasse**

Once again, the reason for taking such a detailed reviewing of Badiou’s subtractive ontology is by no means to conduct an academic *companion to a professional philosopher* type of text. It is precisely because of the revolutionary faculties that a specific reading of Badiou’s philosophy — i.e., finding a solution for its shortcomings — can provide in order to get out of the contemporary impasse of thought, art, and politics. Let us be a bit more forthright here. There is nothing legitimate or even interesting in “professional philosophy” as one’s employment in academic thinking. There is absolutely no point in troubling with unpacking one’s *subtractive ontology, differences between being and existence*, etc., if no praxis, no revolution can come out of it.

The sole purpose of theorizing such concepts as the “world” (inaccessible multiplicity) and the ontological distinctions between nothingness and not-being, is to arrive at our *profound reason* (our profound theory), at our faith to the ontological/scientific *fact* that there are “always” beings
in the world that are not represented (not yet existentiated). Hence, any state/corporate/media related condescending language that attests to their not-being, is telling us nothing other than obscene baloney. So, the point is how to be confident in our rightness to be dispensed with contemporary non-sense and the democratic forms it assumes through launching different subjectivities on a daily basis. In other words, the point is how to advance situational practices of art and thinking from the current impasse and its symbolic order.

This contemporary non-sense, this historical impasse, is what we should properly refer to as democratic materialism. Obsession with legalized particularities in the form of identitarian and cultural practices (identity politics); annihilation of politics through state controlled advocation of political correctness; self-aggrandizing infatuation with hyper moralization of typical thinking vis-à-vis critical thinking; finding consolation in expressions of the self, culture, body, sexual differences, and the individual, at the expense of eliding the contemporary ethics of the same; replacing the people with doxa and public opinion through the media’s unilateral enforcement of an infantilizing language; mass production of economically motivated micro ideologies and social subjectivities at the expense of suppressing the Subject of change, and many more, are instances of what the general conviction of our contemporary democratic situation is.

After all, it is the lesson of Lacan that the real may only occur through the contest with the symbolic that the state and its language is. That is why thought-activism is the attempt at the level of counter-symbolizing the language of art and typical thinking. The crux of the matter for thought-activism is the dialectics of theory and practice. We have already elucidated the

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81 See Logics of Worlds, p. 1-9
contradictory unity of theory and practice in the previous chapter when we reviewed Mao’s thesis of *perpetual practice* and Badiou’s reading of it. There, and against Badiou, we mentioned that the profound reason beyond the particularities that cause events and ruptures, ‘the profound reason that cannot be uprooted’, is itself a form of theoretical reason, a form of thinking that summons the Subject. So, it is now time to see in what sense Badiou’s Subject is a form of thought, and therefore, is by no means an object (phenomenological, or structural, or moral subject).

**“Thought”: The Subject is Subject-Thought**

By "thought", I mean the subject in so far as it is constituted through a process that is transversal relative to the totality of available forms of knowledge. Or, as Lacan puts it, the subject in so far as it constitutes a hole in knowledge. (Badiou, *Eight Theses on the Universal*, P. 149)\(^2\)

The Subject is not an object. Let us keep this statement as our anti-postmodern guideline.

To recapitulate: the Subject is a process and not a corporeal or intellectual being. It is precisely because of its incorporeal nature that it is legitimate to call it Subject. The Subject concerns the body only to the extent that it is carried by an intra-worldly body and, really, nothing more. We know that for Badiou truth’s mode of being is to (in)exist. The reason for this is that truths are

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beings without substances in the “there” of the “being-there”. In other words, truths have no substantial existence. Therefore, they are merely generic multiplicities. So, it is vital to discern things (existences, corporeal and intellectual beings) from truths (in-existences). It is, thus, legitimate, writes Badiou, ‘to call “subject” the local existence of the process that unfolds these generic multiplicities (the formula was: ‘A subject is a point of truth’).”\(^8\)

Here is the crucial synthesis we can organize from the above summary:

The Subject is always called upon as a form of thought, and as the result of an encounter between the body (someone) and the infinite (the universal). At the same time, this point of being called upon is that part of the process which itself helps inscribe the universal in the world. What is important here, is that despite Subject being that which is called upon as a form of thought, itself contributes to the formation of “thought as such”. Hence, thought is the synthesis of a dialectic in which the Subject-thought forms a part.

\[\text{The subject is invariably summoned as thought at a specific point of that procedure through which the universal is constituted. The universal is at once what determines its own points as subject-thoughts and the virtual recollection of those points. Thus, the central dialectic at work in the universal is that of the local, as subject, and the global, as infinite procedure. This dialectic is constitutive of thought as such.} \]

(Badiou, *Eight Theses on the Universal*, p. 149)

\(^8\) Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 6
It is here that all our previous endeavors on elucidating the ontological relationships between thought and the act, theory and practice, thinking and being, will come to fruition. The Subject is a form of thought, a process, yet at the same time it is that which could only be formed through practical fidelity to the trace of the event (infinite), and ultimately constitutes thought as such (truth). Hence, we can lucidly see here the contradictory unity of theory and practice, of thinking and acting; we can see how thought can only be constituted as a form of act and the reverse. In short, we can have a flashback to the statement I maintained in the start of this exegesis: acting contingent upon thought and thinking if and only if acting.

**Materialist Dialectic vs. Democratic Materialism: The Antithesis of Contemporary Impasse**

Let us now continue with the question of the contemporary impasse we posed earlier in this section. I mentioned that Badiou names the general condition of contemporary era democratic materialism, the antithesis of which, Badiou calls a materialist dialectic. The axiom of democratic materialism is that there are only bodies and languages. Thus, ‘the individual as fashioned by the contemporary world recognizes the objective existence of bodies alone’. The equation of such a vision is that ‘existence = individual = body’. The axiom of materialist dialectic, however, is that ‘there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths’.  

We will see that the syntax “except that” in the axiom of materialist dialectic is literally the Subject we have been investigating for a while now; i.e., that which has been altogether elided in

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84 *Logics of Worlds*, P. 1
the pantheon of post-structuralism/postmodernism. Polemically, and with no hesitation in
expression, Badiou posits that “postmodern” is a possible name for contemporary ‘democratic
materialism’.

Let’s propose to call postmodern – why not? – all representations of artistic
production that come under the banner of a spectacular exhibition of desires, of
fantasy and of terror; and under the banner of abolishing the universal, that is, the
total exhibition of particularisms and the historical equality of formal means.
(Polemics, “Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist Art”, P. 134)85

By satirically citing a part of Tony Negri’s letter to Raúl Sanchez (15 December 1999), at the
outset of the Logics of Worlds, Badiou defiantly sets the tone of his ontology as an antithesis to
the bankrupt project of post-structuralism in tandem with its formalization in art, i.e.,
postmodernism. Let us read through a passage of Negri’s letter: ‘Today the body is not just a
subject which produces and which—because it produces art—shows us the paradigm of
production in general, the power of life: the body is now a machine in which production and art
inscribe themselves. That is what we postmoderns know.’86

85 In Logics of Worlds, Badiou exemplifies another symptom of democratic materialism that concerns contemporary arts: “the most inventive artists—choreographers, painters, video makers—track the manifestness of bodies, of their desiring and machinic life, their intimacy and their nudity, their embraces and their ordeals. They all adjust the fettered, quartered and soiled body to the fantasy and the dream. They all impose upon the visible the dissection of bodies bombarded by the tumult of the universe. Aesthetic theory simply tags along.” (Ibid, p.2)
86 Ibid, p. 2
Man under such a vision, i.e., ‘the power of life’, is precisely reduced to an animal ruled by the law of the body, to a thing — a particularity — whose subject is nothing other than the ideological imaginary imposed on him by the state apparatus, by dispositif, etc.

_Human rights are the same as the rights of the living. The humanist protection of all living bodies: this is the norm of contemporary materialism. Today, this norm has a scientific name, ‘bioethics’, whose progressive reverse borrows its name from Foucault: biopolitics. Our materialism is therefore the materialism of life. It is a biomaterialism. Moreover, it is essentially a democratic materialism. That is because the contemporary consensus, in recognizing the plurality of languages, presupposes their juridical equality. Hence, the assimilation of humanity to animality culminates in the identification of the human animal with the diversity of its sub-species and the democratic rights that inhere in this diversity. This time, the progressive reverse borrows its name from Deleuze: ‘minoritarianism’. Communities and cultures, colors and pigments, religions and clergies, uses and customs, disparate sexualities, public intimacies and the publicity of the intimate: everything and everyone deserves to be recognized and protected by the law._ (Badiou, _Logics of Worlds_, p. 2)

Thus, contemporary materialism is democratic because it supposedly recognizes the equality of all particularities in the world: plurality of languages, and equality of their juridical rights; all the while we simply know that from the point of view of the world, from the perspective of the transcendental and its dissemination of “the language of tolerance”, all particularities are not equal. There are _good_ particularities and _bad_ particularities; there is English as the hegemonic
language, and peripheral languages; there is terrorism (why not? as a particularity) and the ‘war on terror’ (as another particularity); there are civil prisoners and Jihadi detainees, etc., without their plurality and diversity presupposing the equality of their juridical rights whatsoever.

In short, what is at work with democratic materialism is the reduction of multiplicity into duality, i.e. into the religious duality of good and evil. The simplest fact that divulges how empty such formalism is, is that any particularity that does not recognize the ‘universal juridical and normative equality’ of all other particularities, of all other languages, does not deserve to be treated as equal with others. What is at the stake, then, is simple totalitarianism advertised as democracy; neo-liberal culture advertised as multiculturalism, and so on. At its core, democratic materialism is one language, one particularity, that regulates and governs all the other bodies and languages.

The formal contrary to this democratic materialism is, as Badiou names it, ‘aristocratic idealism’; a project that at the bottom, and despite the revolutionary language it adopts, is, indeed, the incarnation of nostalgia and a poetics of defeat. It is nostalgic insofar as its agenda is to preserve the grandeur of the past. It is a poetics of defeat since the object it attempts to preserve is already gone. Hence, no revolutionary programme would come out of it since it is doomed to nihilism. Badiou’s critique of aristocratic idealism encompasses a wide range of thinkers and artists all the way from surrealists, the situationist international, to post-modern Heideggerians.

*Endorsing an aristocratic idealism has tempted many a good mind. Often under the shelter provided by a communist vocabulary, this was the stance taken by the*
surrealists, and later by Guy Debord and his nihilist heirs: to found the secret society of the surviving creators. It is also the speculative vow of the best of the Heideggerian legacy: practically to safeguard, in the cloister of writings wherein the question abides, the possibility of a Return. [...] it cannot partake in the creation of a concept for the coming times. The struggle of nostalgias, often waged as a war against decadence, is not only endowed—as it already is in Nietzsche—with a martial and ‘critical’ image, it is also marked by a kind of delectable bitterness. All the same, it is always already lost. And though there exists a poetics of the defeat, there is no philosophy of defeat. (Badiou, Logics of Worlds, P.3)

As a devout dialectician, Badiou (via Hegel) holds fast to the principle that the essence of ‘all differences is the third term that marks the gap between the two others’\textsuperscript{87}. Therefore, what stands as the marker of the gap between the general hegemony of bodies and languages is “truth”. The effective antithesis of democratic materialism is, thus, the materialist dialectic whose axiom is ‘the Three supplements the reality of the Two’\textsuperscript{88}. Once again, we remember — our discussion in the section of Infinite and Empty Place — that the nature of the infinite (truth) is always to supplement the inscription of what the finite lacks: \textit{There are bodies and languages, except that there are truths.}

We have discussed, several times, that the Subject is not a corporeal or intellectual being, and since the Subject is that of truth, therefore truths are also not corporeal or intellectual bodies. Truths are not bodies nor are they languages (predicates), they are generic supplements,\footnote{Ibid, p. 4} \footnote{Ibid}

\[87\] Ibid, p. 4
\[88\] Ibid
‘languages devoid of meaning’ (exceeding significations). It is also very crucial to keep in mind that Badiou’s materialist dialectic is not to be identified with the classical conception of the term in which the struggle is between two opposite structural contradictions (expressive dialectics).

For Badiou, in what he names ‘non-expressive dialectics’, truths are always moments (not structural) and separated from intra-worldly contradictions. It is due to their momentary nature that they can at the same time be singular and universal. They are singular because they occur in a moment and in a locality, and universal because they represent the general contradictions of the world. Truths are always suspended on the side of the infinite, on the side of the void as the real competitor of the world. It is in this sense that truths are always an exception to ‘what there is’, a cut in the continuum of the logic of ‘there-is’, an exception to mixture of bodies and languages that are there in the world. Hence, the syntax of truth is not, an addition or a combination, but the except that. ‘Every world is capable of producing its own truth within itself’.

A truth is thus what insists in exception to the forms of the “there is”.

Since the Subject is that of truth, the crucial consequence is that the syntactical induction of the Subject cannot be marked with the pronouns “I”, “We”, “They”, “It”, etc., but with “aside from” and “except that”. This is another proof that the Subject cannot be reducible to a body, and thus represented in the political discourse of particularities that identity politics is. The Subject is not particular but singular.

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89 Badiou, Philosophy for Militants, “Politics as a Non-expressive Dialectics”, P. 71-76
90 Logics of Worlds, P. 8
91 Ibid, P. 6
92 See, Formal Theory of the Subject, Ibid, p. 45-50
Typology of the Subject: The Encyclopedia, The Universal, The Particular, and The Singular

As stated earlier, one of the main shortcomings of the projects of Being and Event and Theory of the Subject, was that there the Subject was laid out only as a positive category (Subject faithful to the Event), while we know that the Subject cannot be regarded as merely ontological, but is also at the same time ethical — i.e., a matter of decisionality. In Logics of Worlds, by providing a typology of the Subject, Badiou attends to this shortcoming.

*Event is not a necessity. An event, because it is an event, does not indicate its own evental character — it does not tell us that it is an event. We must decide that an event is an event, and this decision is the first manifestation of the subject. The act of the decision is to name the event; this is a first recognition, an acceptance of the event as such. But complete recognition of the event means accepting its consequences — engaging in the consequences and becoming an activist of the event. In my vision, there is no creation, no truth, without an activist of this truth.*

(Sometimes, We Are Eternal, “What is A world?”, p.99)

Before proceeding with the typology of the Subject, it is important to quickly note some remarks regarding the questions of “law” and “desire”. In the interest of brevity, it suffices to mention that the question of law is always that of existence. It is the question of existence insofar as law is to accept the existing parts of a world (set), i.e., those with a name, and to deny the being of its unnameable parts. In this sense the question of law, besides being a juridical question, is also an ontological one.
Therefore, I posit, that in tandem with law, *language* and *discourse* become of primary importance as they are the sole means of the world for enforcing the representational activities of “the State of situation” (its transcendental, its logic). *Desire*, on the other hand, and in contrast with the machine of pleasure that capitalism is, is that which in regard to law does not exist. Thus, as Badiou puts it, ‘pure desire is the affirmation of pure singularity across and beyond normality’. ⁹³

**Typology of the Subject**

With regard to the Event, Badiou classifies three types of Subjects: **A. Faithful Subject**, **B. Reactive Subject**, **C. Obscure Subject**.

**A. Faithful Subject** ‘recognizes the Event and accepts its consequences, then engages in its consequences, and becomes the activist of the Event’ ⁹⁴. Therefore, what is at work with the faithful Subject is the production of truth. For Badiou, there can be no production of truth without the activist of truth.

**B. Reactive Subject** recognizes the Event but refuses to accept its consequences. Therefore, what is at work with the reactive Subject is the ‘denial of truth’.

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⁹³ *Philosophy for Militants*, “Politics as a Non-expressive Dialectics”, P. 71-76
⁹⁴ Badiou, *Sometimes, We Are Eternal*, “What is A World?”, p. 100
It recognizes the possibility of something new but affirms that it is not necessary to become an activist of this novelty. It organizes the situation so that the event will have no consequences. The consequences of an event are not something predetermined or necessary; they are a subjective realization. And it is possible to accept the existence of an event while simultaneously incorporating it in the world as it is. This is a kind of normalization of the event, its final reduction to a pure fact. (Sometimes, We Are Eternal, “What is A world?”, p.100)

The operations of the reactive Subject, for instance, may be seen in the local movements and insurrections that occur in the world today (e.g., BLM, #MeToo, etc.). We can see how the corporate state of the world normalizes them through either incorporating their language into the state and media-enforced political correctness, or through recuperating their radicality into acceptable formal and academic representational activities of identity politics.

C. Obscure Subject absolutely negates the existence of the Event. ‘It attempts to prevent or destroy all realization or consequences of what it considers to be a false Event (Fascism, for example).’

Whether productive or counter-productive, a Subject, for Badiou, always presents itself as ‘that which formalizes the effects of a body in accordance with a certain logic’. Therefore, once again, the body cannot itself be the Subject, but only subjectivized. If a body is capable of producing the effects (truths) of an event, which exceed the semiotic regime of body-language, that body is

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95 Ibid, p. 100
then subjectivized. For instance, the communist party, in the twenties or thirties, Badiou asserts, was a subjectivated political body (new body/faithful Subject). Or the anti-leftist fight of the French Communist Party between May 68 and the elections of 1974, was a reactive effect (reactive Subject); and finally the German Communist Party with its disastrous liquidating effects at the beginning of thirties was a great example of obscure effects (obscure Subject).\textsuperscript{96}

Now we can have a better grasp of why the theory of the Subject is a \textit{formal} theory. Because, after all, the sole task of the Subject is to construct a system of forms and operations with respect to a certain logic, i.e., the logic of the Event. The body is what materially support these formalizing operations in the world. That is precisely why the only empirical content of the Subject is metaphorical. Therefore, the body that bears the Subject is indeed a metaphor for the Subject that is essentially an ‘index that must be constructed within a field of thought’\textsuperscript{97} — Hence, it is \textit{Subject-thought}.

The body, in contrast with the individual, is always composite and the Subject is that which inscribes in this composite the effects of a truth. This composite being may be a political organization, a lovely scene of the two, an artistic paradigm, etc.

\textsuperscript{96} Logics of Worlds, P. 46
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, P. 47
The Encyclopedia: The Bankruptcy of Contemporary Identity Politics

I call “encyclopedia” the general system of predicative knowledge internal to a situation: i.e., what everyone knows about politics, sexual difference, culture, art, technology, etc. (‘Eight Theses on the Universal’, P. 153)\textsuperscript{98}

Let us begin this section by some basic definitions of “the particular”, “the singular” and “the universal”. For Badiou, the particular is ‘whatever can be discerned in knowledge by means of descriptive predicates.’ Therefore, the particular is that which is already in the world and can be represented by the established discourse/language — because as we know, for Badiou, language is ultimately nothing but predicates. “The singular”, on the other hand, is that which ‘although identifiable as a procedure at work in a situation, is nevertheless subtracted from every predicative description.’\textsuperscript{99} Therefore, the singular is that which can be recognized in the world but is not accepted — or, if you like, does not make sense — in the existing language-discourse structure of the world.

What is clear so far is that the particular has an objective existence in the world. The singular also has a momentary objective being in the world (liminal existence). So, they both occupy the form of objects, although this objective formalization for the singular is only momentary. There is another outcome of the above definition and that is the relationship between the particular and the singular. By definition, all the cultural, ethnic, racial, and sexual traits of any given

\textsuperscript{98}Badiou, \textit{Theoretical Writings}, Chapter 12: “Eight Theses on the Universal”, 4, A Universal Initially Presents Itself as a Decision about the Undecidable, P. 153
\textsuperscript{99}Ibid, 150
community or population are particular. The singular, on the other hand, is that which traverses these particularities, and through destabilizing the established predicates of itself (its intra-worldly meaning), ‘universally summons a thought-subject’\textsuperscript{100}, and ultimately becomes singular. The outcome is that there is no such thing as a singular \textit{a priori}. The singular, in essence, is a particular that has liberated itself from the constraints of the world’s transcendental, and by moving beyond and across its particularities, is going to possibly become \textit{universal}.

Let us take, for instance, Mohammad Bouazizi, the street vendor who set himself on fire in Ben Arous (Tunisia) and induced the events of the so-called Arab Spring — an instance of a momentary objective formalization of the singular. What took place with Mohammad Bouazizi was singular because, first, it was only a \textit{moment} (a point of Subjective formation) in a locality and nowhere else in the world whatsoever. Second, his \textit{act} traversed the particularity of his being — i.e., who he was, what his class status, skin color, ethnicity, and other specificities were, etc. Precisely through this traversing of intra-worldly particularities, his act represented the general contradictions of the world which forced a vendor to set himself on fire (the formation of the universal). Thus, there can be no universality without there being at the same time a singularity. Once again, as we saw in our discussion of the transcendental, no infinite (universal) can be the result of a transcendental constitution.

Now let us take another example. A year after what Bouazizi did in Tunisia, a vendor in Tehran’s grand bazar committed the same act and set himself on fire. Nevertheless, the singularity of his deed leads to no revolution or collective insurrection. Let us suppose an

\footnote{\textsuperscript{100} Ibid}
imaginary accuser proclaiming that such a discrepancy between the consequences of two acts proves wrong the thesis that ‘every universality is a singularity’. We can, of course, defend the legitimacy of the thesis, yet to do so we should first conduct a more careful elucidation of the ontology of the universal.

_That thought is the proper medium of the universal means that nothing exists as universal if it takes the form of the object or of objective legality. The universal is essentially ‘anobjective’. It can be experienced only through the production (or reproduction) of a trajectory of thought, and this trajectory constitutes (or reconstitutes) a subjective disposition._ (Ibid, P. 149)

Having the discussions about the dialectics of finite/infinite, the conception of the ‘world’, and the logic of the worlds (transcendental) behind us, it becomes clear that nothing universal (of a matter of infinite) can ‘take the form of the object or of objective legality’ in the world. The universal (truth) can only be formalized in the form of an effect of a body. Here we remember that, in contrast with an individual, the body is a composite being in the world that can only come about and be inscribed within its existential framework through Subjective fidelity and through the act. Thus, the universal is always a matter of Subjective constitution and can’t be an objective and locatable existence already in the world. Now we can defend the thesis before the imaginary accuser: every universal is singular. But this axiom does not presuppose the veracity of its reverse. In other words, it is to say that despite the vendor’s act in Tehran was an absolute singularity, yet it did not lead to formalization of the collective Subject that the construction of _the universal_ demands.
Singularity is not necessarily universality, yet it has the chance to become one if and only if the ontologically necessary conditions are available. The most important of these ontological necessities is the formation of Subjective collective fidelity. Such fidelity was formed after Bouazizi’s death in Tunisia and did not form after the same incident in Tehran’s grand bazar. Therefore, one singularity succeeded in constituting the universal and the other did not. Subject is a point of universal, of truth.

Therefore, the question of singularity is always a question of existence and not of being, albeit a very liminal degree of existence, since it is momentary. By the same token, the universal is not of the order of existence, but of sudden emergence, i.e., of happening, of appearing and disappearing. This is because the origin of every universal is the Event, which itself is that which disappears right after it appears and only its trace will remain in the world. In short, the universal is that which must be produced in the form of effects of a body. In this sense, the universal and truth are one and the same thing.

[...] the universality of the practical statement “a country’s illegal immigrant workers must have their rights recognized by that country” resides in all sorts of militant effectuations through which political subjectivity is actively constituted, but also in the global process of a politics, in terms of what it prescribes concerning the State and its decisions, rules and laws. That the process of the universal or truth - they are one and the same - is transversal relative to all available instances of knowledge means that the universal is always an incalculable emergence, rather
than a describable structure. By the same token, I will say that a truth is intransitive to knowledge, and even that it is essentially unknown. This is another way of explaining what I mean when I characterize truth as unconscious. (Ibid, p. 150)

A Thought-Activist Critique of Identity Politics

Here, we are getting one step closer to be able to establish our critique of identity politics as they are deployed in our times. Identities are a body of particularities, of course with different degree of representation in the world (different degree of existence). We have already said that particularities are discernible by means of descriptive predicates of the world as it is. On the other hand, no matter how much the state apparatus, media, academia, etc., advertise that these body of differences are instances of singularities, we should still regard identities as a body of legislated generalities (not genericities and not singularities).

We have also shown how the axiom of multiculturalism — i.e., the universal equality of particularities — is in practice the reduction of multiplicities into the duality of good particularities and bad particularities. Particularities, of which identities are constructed, are already existences within the world under the constraint of its transcendental. This is while we have the knowledge that the world can change only insofar as its logic, its transcendental, undergoes a change. In other words, change can never be the effect of that which is already in the world. It is the effect of “that which is not” [in the world] but violently forces itself upon the world as a new existence.
On the backdrop of the abovementioned, the fate of identity politics cannot *logically* exceed two general scenarios. First, to remain representative of marginal particularities in the world as it is, and only alleviate their symbolic radicalism within the academia or in the global neoliberal market of contemporary art as its financial booster. This scenario is really the contemporary situation of identity politics. Second, to traverse the constraint of its particularity by moving toward a singular act, and thus gain the chance of constituting something universal. But for an act to be *singular*, it must exceed the legal framework of the world as it is. The contradiction is that identities are already recognized — even if problematically — under the restraints of legal formality. Thus, to move toward real politics means to transform legal particularity into singularity, whereby, identity politics might attain the chance of becoming the universal representative of the absolute contradictions of the world. But such translation constitutes a paradox because it demands identities to cease remaining identities as such.

All political activism that operate solely on the level of political symbolism (identity) without understanding the significant role universal political economy plays in their ontological being, end up turning into objective legalities within the world as it is. They end up being objects already acknowledged by the state’s hegemonic discourse. Their discourses can also be easily incorporated into the bogus language of human rights and multiculturalism, on the one hand, and into financial drive for institutional art exhibitions, biennales, art fairs, etc. on the other.

It is crucial to repeat that the point is not to say that identities (as forms of particularities) have no effectual political or artistic agency. Rather, the point is that they can do so *if and only if* they take particularity as a point of departure, and then succeed to transcend themselves into moments
of singularity and, thus, into a universal constitution that is not already in the world. The lack of such an agenda and consciousness is precisely what forms the malady of contemporary identity politics.

Let us further explicate this by returning to the question of *Encyclopedia*. We quoted from Badiou that ‘encyclopedia is the general system of predicative knowledge internal to a situation: i.e., what everyone knows about politics, sexual difference, culture, art, technology, etc.’ Badiou’s subtractive ontology shows us that at the margin of this encyclopedia, there always exist ‘certain things, statements, configurations or discursive fragments whose valence is not decidable in terms of the encyclopedia. Their valence is uncertain, floating, anonymous’\(^{101}\). The instances of these undecidable particularities (beings) are: anything that elicits a ‘maybe, maybe not’; ‘everything about which knowledge enjoins us not to decide; ‘people who are living here, but don’t really belong here’\(^{102}\); refugees, illegal workers without official documents; Palestine; black African American, precarious sessional laborers, and many more.

Now the question is whether these “bad” particularities\(^{103}\) — i.e., particularities with a much lower degree of existence than “good” particularities — want to be recognized by the world’s encyclopedia (multiculturalism) or do they desire to change it. In those attempts that stand on the side of the second agenda, particularities/identities gain the chance of constituting something universal. For instance, when the situation unfolds in a way that Palestine becomes the epitome and representative of classic imperial and capitalist colonialism and not of the so-called Arab-

\(^{101}\) Ibid, 153-154
\(^{102}\) Ibid
\(^{103}\) “Bad particularities”, of course, from the point of view of the world.
Jewish “conflict”; the black or indigenous person becomes the universal representative of humanity as such, and not the mere representative of this or that particular cultural trait. A problem whose linguistic symptoms are simply detectable in objective legal words such as “blackness” (instead of black), “indigeneity” (instead of indigenous), Muslimhood (instead of Muslim), etc. Conversely, particularities lose their chance of becoming singularities once they are integrated into the world’s encyclopedia, i.e., once they become part of the general system of predicative knowledge. The undecidable exists in the world but on the margin of the world’s encyclopedia. Event is what forces the situation to decide about the undecidable, to decide about the encyclopedic zone of indiscernibility. What did not exist, before the event, is the decision and the change of status in terms of the valence of the undecidable. In short, the singular and the universal are the results of the very particular particularity that has subtracted itself from identitarian predicates of the world.

There is no possible universal sublation of particularity as such. It is commonly claimed nowadays that the only genuinely universal prescription consists in respecting particularities. In my opinion, this thesis is inconsistent. This is demonstrated by the fact that any attempt to put it into practice invariably runs up against particularities which the advocates of formal universality find intolerable. The truth is that in order to maintain that respect for particularity is a universal value, it is necessary to have first distinguished between good particularities and bad ones. In other words, it is necessary to have established a hierarchy in the list of descriptive predicates. It will be claimed, for example, that a cultural or religious particularity is bad if it does not include within itself respect for other particularities.
But this is obviously to stipulate that the formal universal already be included in the particularity. Ultimately, the universality of respect for particularities is only the universality of universality. This definition is fatally tautological. It is the necessary counterpart of a protocol - usually a violent one - that wants to eradicate genuinely particular particularities (i.e., immanent particularities) because it freezes the predicates of the latter into self-sufficient identitarian combinations. (Ibid, p. 150-151)

The Shortcomings of Badiou’s Ontology and my Suggested Methodology

After such a lengthy expedition through Badiou’s subtractive ontology, we can now argue what its shortcomings are and what could come to our aid in supplementing them. It is exactly through following this agenda that thought-activism is to be thought of as a philosophical strategy whose plan is to operate on the basis of Badiou’s subtractive ontology while attending to its shortcomings. It was with a view to these shortcomings, that I stated earlier that thought-activism, on the one hand, consists in holding fast to the emancipatory potentials of the Badiouian materialist dialectic and its concomitant Subject-thought, while on the other hand, it acknowledges the lack of proper attentiveness in Badiou to the ontological roles that some linguistically charged activities can play in setting the condition for the formation of this Subject-thought.

To establish our project, let us have a quick recapitulation of what we have investigated so far:
We showed that the Subject is an ontological process insofar as it operates to transforms the existential framework of the world. By that, we meant the change in the transcendental of the world, which will lead into a new arrangement of the world’s beings — i.e., a new mixture of its subsets. We also discussed that the Subject laid out as such, is fundamentally different with the “Western” paradigm of subjectivity as that which is either reducible to body or to the external semiotic/machinic/ideological operator on the body (the subject of enjoyment, the materialist subject). The Subject is also not to be identified with the so called “Eastern” paradigm of subjectivity as that which is fundamentally separated from body (the subject of sacrifice, the metaphysical subject).  

The Subject is that which formalizes in the world a process that helps the passage of a being-nothing into an existence — i.e., the operation of existentiation. To existentiate in this way is akin to Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’, i.e., ‘the inscription of the non-existent’, with the key difference that for Derrida, such a task is mostly feasible in the processes of writing while with the Subject, existentiation is the incorporation of a singular thought into the everyday practice of the body. In other words, existentiation is the Subject’s formalization of praxis on the body.

We learnt that in order to have a complete ‘truth procedure’, it is necessary to have the formation of an ontologically necessary process, namely, the Event, the fidelity of the body to the trace of the Event (engaging with the Event’s consequences), and constant declaration of this fidelity (the question of membership, and fidelity to the fidelity). From this perspective, the existentiating

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104 Alain Badiou, “The Subject of Art”, LACAN.COM, The Symposium 6, 2005  
105 “What is at stake in Derrida's work, in his never-ending work, in his writing, ramified as it is into so many varied works, into infinitely varied approaches, is the inscription of the non-existent. And the recognition, in the work of inscribing the non-existent, that its inscription is, strictly speaking, impossible. What is at stake in Derrida's writing [...] is the inscription of the impossibility of the non-existence as the form of its inscription.” (Badiou, Pocket Pantheon, P.132)
Subject is a rarity; its complete succession is dependent on the condition of having all the other ontologically necessary components already present in the world.

On the backdrop of the above summary, I will pose some necessary questions:

First, how can someone recognize the Event as an Event? How can the body recognize that which has happened is exactly what could bring with itself the generic truth; the being which has been separated from the world through its transcendental regulatory operations? In other words, what is to be done in order to increase the possibilities of having the Subject as a ‘faithful’ subject rather than a ‘reactive’ or ‘obscure’ one?

Second, an Event vanishes once it appears. Its only remainder in the world is a trace, which itself is to be oppressed at any moment by the transcendental (state of the world). If the Subject fails and is not decisive in recognizing the Event, or if it cannot maintain the momentum for forcing the truth of the Event, we know that in practice, the trace of the Event will also vanish shortly. The question is then, how can someone be prepared and also help prepare the world for such circumstances?

_The Shortcomings and the Suggested Supplements_

To evade the peril of slipping into the dominant trend of his time, i.e., poststructuralist’s ‘linguistic turn’ and ‘deconstruction’ with their concomitant elimination of the subject, Badiou completely turns away from accounting for language in his subtractive ontology. The true nature
of truth, for Badiou, is graspable only by mathematical formalizations. In other words, truth’s being, for him, exceeds the framework of logos. Ruling language out is significant enough for him to inform his philosophy by an articulation of this decision in the form of recognizing the major enemies of his subtractive ontology as the sophists of our time. For Badiou, at bottom, what comes out of the “linguistic turn” and its concomitant sophistry is the very notion of finitude of the world and the constraints of reason — After all, the linguistic turn is Heidegger’s true heir. In contrast, Badiou’s grand thesis is that the only way to grasp ‘the real’ is to surmount the limits of linguistic determination and resort to set theory’s mode of thinking — hence, his theory of eternal truth as the infinite.

I avidly adhere to both the veracity and the necessity of the above thesis for contemporary thought. Yet, I argue that conceding to this thesis should not come at the expense of eliding altogether the ontological capacities that certain linguistic performances have, to serve the very objective of that thesis — i.e., to destabilize the transcendental of the world. We know that, for Badiou, language is only predicate. I will argue that such a vision is problematic.

Badiou, clearly knows that the limits of any world are, indeed, the limits of its language. While trying to avoid the long-standing argument of ‘language as calculus vs. language as universal medium’, I argue that we must hold fast to the principles of Badiou’s subtractive ontology (i.e., mathematics is ontology) while still accounting for certain ontological roles that language can play in maximizing the chances of imposing an external disturbance upon the world’s transcendental. I also argue that such a thesis is not in contradiction with the idea that logos is

\[^{106}\text{For a reference, see Martin Kusch’s Language as Calculus vs. Language as Universal Medium: A Study in Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 198}\]
incapable of grasping the being of truth (the real). Despite the fact that Badiou, in his ontology, is not at all interested in language, I argue that there is a great area of commonality between his subtractive ontology and the ontological analysis of language.

Let us briefly locate two of those areas. First, we say, with Badiou — once stripped of its mathematical terminology — that the transcendental, at bottom, is in charge of making intelligible the manifestation of the world. In other words, it is because of the transcendental’s operations that the world is made an intelligible manifestation for all that is there (being-there). Here intelligibility is a matter of significance. I argue that there is a great relationship between such an account of the transcendental (i.e., the cause behind the intelligibility of the manifestation of the world) and ‘discourse’, as defined by Heidegger, as ‘the articulations of intelligibilities.’

If we apply the “base and superstructure” metaphor to the logical operations of the transcendental, we can infer that at its base, the transcendental’s phenomenological operations concern the logic of the world (appearing). Yet, at its superstructure, all its activities are representational, symbolic, and in one word, discursive. Here we can employ Lazaratto’s idea of ‘social subjection’ and ‘machinic enslavement’, and confer that at its core, the transcendental operates to produce subjectivities whose mission is to counter the Subject. Finally, and we have said this several times already, it is the most crucial lesson of Lacan that the real may only arise in contest with the symbolic. The task, then, is to produce counter-discursive discourses (thought-activism).

\[107\] See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 150
Second, we say, via Badiou, that the Event always happens around the margin of the encyclopedic zone of the world where there are things, statements, and beings whose valence is uncertain. When the Event occurs, its trace is materialized in the form of an Evental statement (ε). The Evental statement is all that someone needs to make a decision about — either engaging it and embracing all its consequences or denying it — in order to form the Subject. As Badiou himself puts it, ‘all that is required in order for the universal to unfold is to draw all the consequences within the situation, of the Evental statement.’ He also argues that the Evental statement is something that is at once: ‘a real of the situation (since it was already there); but something whose valence undergoes radical change, since it was undecidable but has been decided. It is something that had no valence but now does.’

The point is that the Evental statement is merely a linguistic statement. For instance, the “I love you” of the amorous encounter with all its consequences to be decided about; the “we are legal” of the illegal workers who occupied the church of St. Bernard in Paris; the “Shah must go” of Iran’s 1978-79 revolution; the Duchampian “art is somewhere between the object and the spectator”, and many more.

Therefore, the most sensitive part of Badiou’s subtractive ontology, i.e., when the Event disappears in its appearance and only leaves behind an Evental statement, is indeed to decide about a highly language-related matter, a linguistic statement. Paying the attention that such a point deserves, need not make us fall into some sort of post-structuralist elimination of the

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108 Badiou, Theoretical Writings, “Eight Theses on the Universal”, P. 154
109 Ibid, p. 153
subject, but is, indeed, the most crucial step in the processes of the formation of the Subject. The latter is precisely what Badiou’s ontology refrains from accounting for.

I argue that it is fundamentally necessary for the body (i.e., the Visitor) to embrace a profound knowledge of the ontology of language, in his/her activities for preparing a situation for the intervention of an external Event. The word ontology in “ontology of language” is crucial. Unlike the structuralist focus on the structures of language, I suggest it is understanding the ontology of language that supplements the Visitor’s thought-activism.

It is from this perspective that I see the re-thinking of Heidegger’s *ontological analysis of language* necessary for the formation of *ontologically preliminary activities* in today’s contemporary artistic and political activism for which the Badiouian theory of the Subject is of primacy. In other words, and besides the major discrepancies between the two ontologies, we should conduct a synthetic reading of the two by way of making an asymmetrical alignment in which the primacy is on the side of Badiou’s subtractive ontology.

The motivation here for aligning Badiou’s theory of the Subject with Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language is to employ the philosophical potency of the latter to assist the realization of the directives of the former.
This chapter begins its tasks by examining Martin Heidegger’s approach to the questions of ‘consistency’ vs. ‘causality’. It will thus problematize his account of the questions of thought and action. This task demands a careful attendance to Heidegger’s seminal work on the subject, i.e., ‘What is Called thinking?’, in which he offers a different reading of Parmenides, and thereby denounces Western thinking. Despite arguing against the problematic nature of Heidegger’s account of thinking and particularly his notion of “authenticity”, I will argue for the necessity of a renewed engagement with his ontological analysis of language.

At several points throughout this exegesis, I have pointed to certain discrepancies between Badiou’s and Heidegger’s ontologies. The main distinction, as already discussed, is that while Badiou embraces the infinite (through the tenets of set theory as well as category theory), for Heidegger being-there (Dasein) can only grasp the pure actuality of being-in-the-world through the finitude of his existential characteristic, i.e., his being-toward-death. To put it differently, the distinction can also be thought of as that between potentiality and actuality: the infinite potentialities that the Event places in between horizontally adjacent subsets (Badiou), and the finite actualities situated in the verticality of being-toward-death (Heidegger). Moreover, for
Heidegger, and quite contrary to Badiou, truth, or the Being of the beings cannot be formalized through mathematical propositions.

Notwithstanding these discrepancies, I attempt to organize a synthetic reading of certain concepts developed in Heidegger’s ontological analyses of language and others belonging to Badiou’s theory of the Subject. I will do so to establish the following thought-activist thesis: to prepare a world for the sudden emergence of an Event, and thereby for being affirmative to that Event in order to form a Subject, it is necessary to embrace the knowledge of the Heideggerian ontological account of language without being Heideggerian.

**Consistency vs. Causality: the problems of Thought and the Act**

For Badiou, the question of consistency, consistency in the terrain of being, concerns the question of ‘what about the being of what is?’. The question of causality, for him, seeks to answer ‘the problem of supreme being, by which the world is the form of “what is”. The first is an ontological question and the second, a theological one. Metaphysics, which Heidegger attempts at its destruction, is defined as the concealment of the first question by the second. Moreover, Badiou asserts that ‘Heidegger wishes to put an end to the philosophical idea of a guarantee of consistency by the cause’. From this perspective, Heidegger, attempts to dismantle the inability of thinking caused by metaphysics.\(^{110}\) In fact, for Heidegger, it is due to metaphysics that one is no longer able to think authentically, and thus, be authentically.

\(^{110}\) See, Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, P. 234-235
Let us pose a couple of questions here: *What does it mean to put an end to the idea of the ‘guarantee of consistency by the cause’? and how does Heidegger wish to do that?*

Consistency in the terrain of being can be conceived of as a guarantee of the absence of *that* which places a cut in the continuum of a world. Consistency in this precise sense, is the guarantee of the absence of Event. For Event is essentially an exterior interruption to the world’s consistency of beings as maintained by the State of the world. We can also say that Event places an immanent cessation into the *form* of what is — the world. Consistency is always guaranteed by the idea of the existence of a great cause behind it; be it a supreme cause (God), or the imposition of the State of the world (the transcendental). Hence, to put an end to consistency, in the Badiouian sense, is to give way to the sudden emergence of that which *is not* (*existentiality*).

On the other hand, to put an end to consistency in a Heideggerian way, is to turn toward what he calls ‘the task of thinking’, followed by the affirmation of ‘the end of philosophy’: *‘We may venture the step back out of philosophy into thinking of Being as soon as we have grown familiar with the provenance of thinking’*111 To know the *provenance* of thinking, for Heidegger, is the key to *think* the Being of beings. One should, therefore, be able to see here the impenetrable equivocity between Being and thinking. That for Heidegger the question of Being is that which has fallen into oblivion, therefore, is precisely because one is no longer able to *think*. To defeat this alienating disability — unleashed by metaphysics — Heidegger suggests, one ought to obtain the ability of having a *more careful use of language*, i.e., to obtain the ability of poetry.

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111 Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, P.1
There is also an equivocity between Being and thinking in Badiou’s treatment of these concepts. To unveil such an equivocity, one must conceive of the question of thinking as an anti-law act. Indeed, to think is to inscribe the non-existent, to acknowledge that which is not, which is essentially against the laws of the world. In other words, the crux of thinking for Badiou is to decide about the fate of the “being-nothing”, which the state proclaims as not-being. To think in this sense is to act insofar as it is ontologically relevant to the question of being.

As I argued earlier, we should conceive of the equivocity between “thinking” and deciding about “that which is not”, as the equivocity engendered by language’s symbolic operations. Thinking accounted as such, is thus tantamount with the “appearance” of that which is separated from a world. Notwithstanding, I emphasize here, as opposed to the mainstream reading of Badiou’s theory of the Subject, that what potentiates thinking and, subsequently, the appearance, is by no means mathematical formalization. Rather, it is only the desire through which such task can be accomplished. Hence, mathematics is nothing more and nothing less than what formalizes (localizes) the truth of the desire — the real. Let us, once again, recite Badiou’s definition of desire here: ‘the affirmation of pure singularity across and beyond normality’.

112 The question of equivocity is of crucial significance, as it grants the pure chance for thinking multiplicity. In what is philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari assert that multiplicity is ‘exactly what happens between the two’, between the actual and virtual, between the actual state of affairs and virtual events. I would say that equivocity is, therefore, what facilitates the procedures of thinking what happens between the two. Despite the differences between Badiou and Deleuze’s treatment of multiplicity — particularly in the topological account each develop around the concept — they both agree upon the question of dualism that is attached to the concept multiplicity. For Deleuze, multiplicity is a set of exterior relations, whilst for Badiou, multiplicity is a set of relations that are not necessarily exterior. The latter can be seen in the account that Badiou gives on the relations between the multiplicity (being-there) and the multiple of multiplicity (infinite, pure multiple) that is exterior to the world — i.e., a vector from exterior to the interior. Heidegger, too, employs equivocity in his brilliant use of the language of paradoxes. Ultimately, for Badiou, truth (the universal) is univocal to the extent that is the result of a yes, or, no to the Evental statement and not the equivocality of plural meanings. Nevertheless, equivocity to me is a tactic to destabilize the world in order to bring about deciding (with a yes or no) about the undecidable.
It is precisely through this commensurability that I locate between Heidegger’s account of poetics and Badiou’s conception of desire that I vindicate the principle of thought-activism. To repeat: *To prepare the intra-worldly body (someone) for an Event, and thereby, for the formation of a faithful Subject, requires one to embrace the knowledge of Heidegger’s ontological account of language without being Heideggerian.*

By now, for several times, I have argued how the pathos of finitude in Heidegger’s thought is precisely the antithesis of the possibility of change and that of revolution. More importantly so –– as I briefly showed in the foreword of the previous chapter — Heidegger’s account of thought is by no means aligned with that of Badiou. For Heidegger, thinking is to take into heart the presence of that which is present (the world as it is). While for Badiou, to think is to decide (act) about the undecidable. It is precisely because of his inactive notion of “thinking” that I hold, instead of embracing Heidegger’s entire philosophical system, I only utilize his ontological analysis of language to supplement Badiou’s ontology. There can be made revolutionary benefits from Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language, and that, really, does not necessitate one to be a Heideggerian.

**A Critique: What Thinking Is, and What It Is Not, for Heidegger**

The thought-activist directive of this exegesis for utilizing Heidegger’s *ontological analysis of language* without being Heideggerian may possibly sound journalistic. To circumvent such a
judgment, it is vital to establish a succinct critique\textsuperscript{13} of Heidegger before proceeding with our synthetic reading of Heidegger and Badiou.

\textbf{Here is the essence of my critique:} \textit{The sole reason for the impossibility of “change”, or really “politics”, in Heidegger lies in the inert account of thinking his philosophy provides.}

It is imperative for us to familiarize ourselves with such an account of thought. Doing so will help us surmount the fashionable contemporary return to Heidegger in the form of artistic practices of “new materialism”, “object agency”, and the problematic deployment of the term “poetics” in art and culture, and so forth.

For Heidegger, to see the provenance of thinking we ought to go to early Greek thinking, and by that he means thinking before Aristotle. As J. Glenn Gray puts it, for Heidegger, ‘If “the most thought-provoking thing about our thought-provoking age” is “that we are still not thinking,” it has always been thus since the early Greeks.’\textsuperscript{14}

Let us first see what thinking, for Heidegger, is not. Thinking for Heidegger is not having an opinion. Nor is it to have an idea (\textit{vorstellen}) about a thing or a situation. Thinking is not also “ratiocination”, i.e., deploying a series of reasonings toward a conclusion. Finally, thinking is not

\textsuperscript{13} I must also make this clear that by no means the concision of this critique presupposes the lack of significance in Heidegger’s project to deserve a more comprehensive critique. Heidegger is by all means the most important figure in the philosophy of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Thus, any attempt to attend to fundamental aspects of his philosophy, in a proper academic fashion, requires an independent dissertation on that subject matter. Here, our task, however, is to establish the concept of \textit{thought-activism}. Therefore, it is necessary to demonstrate that despite our utilization of Heidegger’s analysis of language, what is meant by thought in the conjuncture of thought-activism is literally the antithesis of the Heideggerian account of thought.

\textsuperscript{14} Heidegger, \textit{What is Called Thinking?}, p. ix
a “conceptual” or “systematic” act — as it is the case in German Idealism and the Hegelian concept of *Begriff*. To summarize: thinking is not *doxa* (opinion), a form of expression (representation of an idea), reasoning (ratiocination), and conceiving (conceptual and systemic).\(^\text{115}\) Thus, thinking for Heidegger stands in contrast to all notions of thinking deployed by the enlightenment. Let us remember his words on this contrast again:

*The Enlightenment obscures the essential origin of thinking. In general, it blocks every access to the thinking of the Greeks. But that is not to say that philosophy after the Greeks is false and a mistake. It is to say at most that philosophy, despite all logic and all dialectic, does not attain to the discussion of the question “What is called thinking?” And philosophy strays farthest from this hidden question when it is led to think that thinking must begin with doubting.* (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* P. 211)

For Enlightenment philosophers, *thinking* becomes the highest activity of “understanding” in the broad sense of the “judgment of reason”. Enlightenment’s approach to thinking, renders *acting* secondary with respect to the judgment of reason.\(^\text{116}\) We have already discussed how such an asymmetrical duality of thinking and acting, with the supremacy of the former, is a constituent of rationalism and its analytic devotion to positivist thinking and reasoning (*ratio*). While, from a hermeneutical standpoint, the task is to investigate the universal condition of understanding, instead of holding fast to an empty notion of the universality of the judgement of reason. In other

\(^{115}\) See Ibid, p. 229-244

words, the task is to understand understanding. Doing so, will lead us into the realization that all understanding is a matter of self-interpretation of the world.

Now let us see what thinking, for Heidegger, is. First, we should know that Heidegger is concerned with the nature of thinking and not that of knowledge and science. For Heidegger, by no means does thinking produce knowledge. It is precisely in this regard that he conceives of the Greek notion of Techne as a way of exposing truth and Being. Yet he asserts that the omnipresence of techne in our time requires us to respond with thinking and not with techne itself.  

Thinking, for Heidegger, is to see things as they are and not as they are preconditioned and given to us — as hermeneutics posits — already interpreted in language. In this precise sense, thinking for Heidegger is not a voluntary act that one can do out of his volition. Thinking is that which befalls on us, albeit if we are ready to ‘hear its call’ and say yes to it in a proper manner. In other words, thinking is a matter of contingency.

Thus, at least on the surface, Heidegger’s notion of thinking seems to resemble Badiou’s notion. Yet they do not have identical conceptions of the term. Let us explicate this further. It is true that for Badiou too, thinking is a matter of contingency insofar as it is the act to decide about the undecidable, and the undecidable comes to surface only as the result of a contingent happening (Event). But we should not forget that this contingency lies on the side of acting. It is also true that for Badiou, akin to Heidegger, thinking is not reducible to the ‘judgement of reason’ as is

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117 Heidegger, What is Called Thinking, P. ix
the case with the Enlightenment. Yet for Heidegger, thinking is not an act whatsoever but a remembering of ‘who we are and where we belong’. Moreover, for Heidegger, thinking is absolutely a separate category from knowledge and practical wisdom, while for Badiou (via Lacan), thinking is that which puts a hole into knowledge. In other words, for Badiou, thinking is the act whose animosity is exactly toward knowledge.

The other thing is that for Heidegger truth is the ‘revealing of what is concealed’. This, too, sounds very similar to the Badiouian account of truth as the appearance of the excluded. Yet what Heidegger means by the revealing of what is concealed is to see and hear the nature of things as they truly are — thinking a mountain, a stone; clearing in a forest (lichtung, räumung); the relation between Dasien and other beings to Being as such, etc. While for Badiou, the appearance of the excluded is the appearance of that which has been subtracted from the status quo of the world. It is a matter of changing a social order and not mere individual contemplative relation to the Being of things.

In short, the two accounts of thinking are similar, because they both prioritize ontology. Yet these ontologies are absolutely distinct, because they each deploy a completely different accounts of the world. One sees the world as the finite form of all there is (Heidegger) while for the other, the world is an inaccessible multiplicity with the infinite beside it (Badiou).
**Heidegger and a Different Reading of Parmenides**

I stated at the outset of the previous chapter that from early Greek philosophy all the way to the formation of what we know as Western metaphysics and the dawn of its subsequent European “modern thinking”, the relation of “thinking” and “acting” to Being has been symptomatized at the core of the history of philosophy. No other philosophical saying has ever been more influential on this symptomatic relation than that of Parmenides: τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι (... for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be). We know that the Enlightenment, German Idealism, and Western-European modern thinking in general, have employed this saying of Parmenides as ‘their basic theme’. From Kant’s above translation of it and Hegel’s expansion of that (via Kant) into ‘the absolute’ (i.e., Being is Thinking).

It is also on the basis of this saying of Parmenides and Kant’s translation of it, that Heidegger denounces modern thinking. Heidegger argues that the core of the problem resides in an incorrect translation of Parmenides’ axiom. He posits that, in depth, thinking and being are not one and the same thing for Parmenides. Rather, what the axiom indicates is ‘taking to heart the presence of what is present’. Let us see how Heidegger arrives at such a conclusion.

*What Kant calls synthetic judgments a priori is the modern interpretation of λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ’ ἐστίν 'ἐμμεναι. In that proposition, Kant tells us that, and how, thinking — the forming of ideas concerning the Being of empirical beings — belongs together with the Being of beings. But for Kant, the individual being appears as an object of experience. “Being” indicates the objectivity of the object. The variation of*
Parmenides’ statement runs: “The conditions of the possibility of experience in
general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of
experience” (Critique of Pure Reason, A 158, B 197). The “at the same time” is
Kant’s interpretation of τὸ αὐτὸ, “the same.” What this statement says is radically
different from what Parmenides’ saying (fragment 5) says. Parmenides’ statement
cannot, therefore, be interpreted in Kant’s terms, while the reverse is both possible
and necessary. Though Kant says something absolutely different, his thinking moves
nonetheless in the same (not the identical) sphere as the thinking of the Greek
thinkers. What Parmenides says in τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι is different
also from the statement by which Hegel transposes and transmutes Kant’s principle
into the Absolute, when he says that “Being is Thinking” (Preface to Phenomenology
of Spirit). (Heidegger, What is Called Thinking?, P. 243)

Heidegger argues that the correct translation of τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι instead of ‘for
it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be’ is: “… for the same: taking-to-heart is so
also presence of what is present”.118

Let us see how Heidegger maintains such a different translation whose meaning flips the
foundation of the relation between thinking and being, which is so central to modern Western
thinking. Through a complex etymological analysis, Heidegger argues that “νοεῖν” instead of
“thinking” must be translated as ‘taking-to-heart’, and “ἐστίν”, instead of “to be”, must be
translated as ‘being-present’. For him, the word “to be” ‘always dissipates like a vapor, into

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118 Ibid, P. 241
every conceivable vague signification’, while ‘the word “present” speaks at once more clearly’\textsuperscript{119}. What is present means what is with us. Therefore, he suggests that in translating Parmenides’ axiom, we should replace “being” and “to be” with “present” and “being present”.

There are two vital results that can be made from the above translation. First, it is in this precise sense of “presence” that being, for Heidegger, can no longer be conceived as the object of experience, as it was the case with Kant. Rather, being is that which is with us and we are with. In order to think this being, one must be able to hear the call from the nature of things; to hear that which calls on us to think.

The second result, and this one is more important, is that with Heidegger, there is no such thing as “critical distance” from the object of thought. No more Hegelian independence of the object of thought, and no more primacy of “sight” and “hearing”, but the engagement that is required by taste, by ‘a knowledge that does not know’. Although Heidegger does not use the term taste, yet when he suggests thinking implies the seeing of what is told and that ‘the seeing is more than just the seeing with the eyes of the body’\textsuperscript{120}, he is implying something of the matter of taste.

Here Heidegger is lucidly pointing at the relationship between language and being. In other words, he is emphasizing the relationship of saying to being. In this relationship, what is to be seen has already been said. Thus, one must be able to see what is told yet with more than just the eyes of the body. Although, what Heidegger suggests here can be seen as the root of the poststructuralist idea of the dominance of language over perception, yet we must be heedful to

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, p.242-243
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, p. 232
the fact that, for Heidegger, there is no other way of taking to heart the presence of being but through this very language. Albeit, what is prescribed here is the poetic use of language.

Therefore, despite being the main influence on the poststructuralist treatment of language, Heidegger is not critical of language in the same way as poststructuralism is — i.e., maintaining the directive for exiting language.

Ἐόν speaks of what speaks in every word of the language, and not just in every word, but before all else in every conjunction of words, and thus particularly in those junctures of the language which are not specifically put in words. Ἐόν speaks throughout language, and maintains for it the possibility to tell, to state. (Ibid, p. 233)

Therefore, thinking, for Heidegger, requires us to transpose ourselves into Ἐόν (being-present).

That which is present not only is that which is told but also that which is seen. Heidegger further asserts that one can never prove what has been seen by way of reasoning or counter-reasoning. It is precisely why thinking for Heidegger, contrary to the history of philosophy from Aristotle onward, has nothing to with doxa, expression of opinion, conceiving, or reasoning.

The word thinking itself for Heidegger signifies, thanking, memory, and thinking that recalls.121 By the same token, to understand ‘what is called thinking?’, he suggests that one must think of ‘that which calls on us to think’; one must remember who we are and where we belong; one must

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121 Ibid, p. 229
think ‘what is that which directs us to think?’ For Heidegger, it is through losing the track of ‘the presence of what is present’ that Western-European thinking has fallen into being obsessed with the objectivity of objects, and with intellectual grasping. He argues that Western logic has become *logistics*, and that is the cause behind technology, in whose nature man sees the Being of beings.122

It is thus clear that thinking for Heidegger is *letting the nature of things lie before us* through individual openness to the world. One’s openness to the ocean, to the sky, to the taste of a cherry, etc. His critique of logic as “the absolute subjectivity” — i.e., what is inherited from Kant to Hegel — has nothing to do with Badiou’s account of logic and transcendental as discussed in our section on his subtractive ontology. Again, despite the superficial similarity between the two accounts of thinking, the nucleus of discrepancy lies in Heidegger’s notion of the world as a finite totality vs. Badiou’s inaccessible multiplicity. No theory of change would, of course, come out of the pathos of finitude. Consequently, thinking within the restraints of the finite is not an act but to understand the world as it is.

It is in the above sense that I posit *thought-activism* as a way of benefiting from Heidegger without being Heideggerian. While the problem for Heidegger is how to *be* authentic, the question for this exegesis is those precarious beings for which the priority is not whether to have an authentic life. Authenticity in their world functions as a discourse romanticizing their precarity, their poverty. The question for precarious beings is that they simply don’t want to be

122 Ibid, p. 238
what they are. In other words, they do want to be what they are not. Therefore, I only utilize Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language to supplement Badiou’s subtractive ontology.

**Thought-Activism (Logic and Linguistic Together): An Asymmetrical Alignment**

**Summary and Some Further Definitions**

In the foreword of the previous chapter, I offered some preliminary definitions of thought-activism. Let us quickly recapitulate them here. We said thought-activism is a strategy for which the core question is not the identification of thinking and acting but their conjuncture structure — i.e., thought-acting. We also discussed that the crux of the matter for thought-activism is to propose a relationship between theory and practice, thought and act, in which each is to be perceived as a torsion of the other. We confirmed, in order for such a relationship to happen, thought-activism suggests that we ought to come to discern the Subject from subjectivity. Insofar as subjectivities are discursive and social products (both semiotic and machinic), in contrast to the Subject, thought-activism regards subjectivity as a matter in direct relation to language and discourse. To preserve the possibilities of ‘the Subject’, thought-activism operates as counter-subjectivity.

On the other hand, we identified the shortcoming of Badiou’s ontology in its lack of attendance to the ontological roles language can play in countering the transcendental. Therefore, thought-
activism is a strategic and an ontological approach to the categories of “language” and “seeing”. In specific, it is a form of linguistically-charged yet ontologically-alert vision to the world. The praxis of such a strategic vision (formulated under the figure of the Visitor) in one’s every day, artistic and political exercises, attempts to change the “situation”. In other words, the Visitor strives towards the very objective of activities for which the question of change occupies a central position — i.e., the destabilization of the world’s transcendental (State of the situation).

I have named form the change of reality. In this context, for thought-activism, language is the operational materiality of form. Given that the order of every situation (world) is maintained by its logic (the transcendental), the concept of thought-activism holds the order is maintained through discursive activities of the transcendental. In the foregoing sense, discourse is to be conceived of that which governs each and every situation by articulating them as manifestations of intelligibilities. Thought-activism, thus, considers the formation, as well as the active operations of new discourses, new semiotic opportunities, as counter-discursive acts that provide a basis for the emergence of subversive forces that aim for the logic of each situation. In short, thought-activism is the practice of the reverse of language-discourse relationship (in Heidegger) toward the realization of ‘change’ in the Badioutan subtractive ontological sense.

In what follows, I will elucidate the above thought-activist thesis, first, by explicating concepts such as ‘discourse’, ‘understanding and attunement’, ‘idle talk’, ‘interpretation’, ‘assertion’, and finally ‘what is spoken purely’ in Heidegger; and second, by providing a critical view to the similarities, and to some extent, the supplementarities, of the functions of the above concepts and those in Badiou’s ontology, i.e. ‘the Subject’, ‘transcendental (State of situation), and ‘desire’.
Now, let us investigate this *language-discourse* relationship in Heidegger and its relevance to Badiou’s subtractive ontology.

**On the Necessity of Rethinking Heidegger’s Ontological Analysis of Language**

It is not a coincidence that reflection on the ontology of language grants a concrete basis to the thinking of both the early and the later Heidegger. The critical fact that for Heidegger language, and more precisely, *the speaking of language*, ‘takes place as that which grants an abode for the being of mortals’, does not seem to be simply reducible to an ontological statement that a philosophical project has reached. Quite on the contrary, for Heidegger, the preceding assertion is just a starting point for a philosophical enquiry to get underway. I will elucidate later what is meant by the ‘speaking of language’, and that how it relates to the philosophical enquiries. But, first, I would like to provide an outline of what I am going to draw out of Heidegger’s reflection on language.

On the one hand ‘language is the house of being’, Heidegger asserts. On the other hand, Dasien is un-reflexive (pre-ontological) about his own being and, thus, has an un-reflexive understanding of every situation in which it proceeds. This un-reflexivity is due to the functions of ‘attunement’, ‘understanding’ and ‘discourse’, as the three equiprimordial constituents of

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123 The centrality of language in Heidegger’s thinking can be seen, for instance, in the full chapters of *Dasein as Understanding* as well as *Dasein and Discourse: Language*, in Being and Time (The early Heidegger), and also in works such as *On the Way to Language*, the article *Language* from ‘Language, Poetry and Thought, and *What Calls for Thinking* (The later Heidegger), to name a few.
Dasein’s being-in-the-world.\textsuperscript{124} We also know that the problem of forgetting the question of Being, shapes the cornerstone of Heidegger’s philosophical enquiry; the problem that, in Heidegger’s view, has layered human life with \textit{inauthenticity.}

I argue, not quite akin to Heidegger’s suggestion, if language is the house of being, therefore, the forgotten question of Being must be asked not only where the being dwells, i.e., within language, but with respect and face-to-face with language itself. In other words, the question is shall the question of Being remain only within the territory of language? Answering this question requires us to, first, answer a more fundamental question: Why is it an imperative for any philosophical project to ask the forgotten question of Being?

The type of Heidegger reader that I am — one who desires to make a place for the question of ‘change’ in Heidegger — convinces me that the answer to the above question is what immediately links us to Badiou’s project. Aside from any individual, Sufistic, or spiritual outcome one might find in it, for me, the \textit{only} significance of asking the forgotten question of Being is to shed light on the question of \textit{that which is not} (that which can come about) and thereby to place it with respect to the question of \textit{that which already is}. Again, we know that the latter has never been of a concern for Heidegger given his vision to the world as the totality of the finitude. In other words, if there is any significance in asking such questions, it is to demonstrate how we can facilitate the procedures of \textit{existentionation}. These procedures require ‘the change of the transcendental’ of the world under whose governance one has no choice but to be obliged to forget the great question of Being (the thought of the infinite).

\textsuperscript{124} See \textit{Being and Time}, P. 134 -162
Let me elucidate why I find Heidegger’s ontological thoughts on language to be necessary for every contemporary political or artistic activism. Heidegger’s impact on the formation of some of the major philosophical currents of the 20th century is indubitable. Sartrean existentialism, Gadamerian hermeneutics, post-structuralist semiotics (particularly in the works of Foucault and Derrida), are some of the key instances. In all foregoing instances, we can especially identify the lucid traces of Heidegger’s reflections on the essence of language. This is, of course, in tandem with other effects his treatment of human animal — i.e., for the first time treating it in its earthly, worldly, and everyday experiences — has had on diverse aspects of the 20th century continental philosophy.

Nevertheless, I argue that the philosophical pantheon of 20th century is mainly influenced by Heidegger’s unique theses on the way human animal does, or ought to, understand his own being alongside other ‘beings’. This is while, the social and revolutionary utilities that his ‘accounts of the essence of language’ can set forth, have rarely been investigated in a deserved and proper manner.

As mentioned before, these theses on language, are massively useful, not merely to allow one to reflect on his own being, but to enable this human animal to make decisions about the being of the world. And I am well aware that such decision making (as will be shown) has never been of an interest to Heidegger. In other words, these theses on language are of a great deal of importance if they are used as tactics to disrupt the representational structures of the world, i.e., its transcendental. In doing so, they equip the body that is proceeding in the world with
formalizing linguistic abilities that can bring about the change of the hegemonic form of worlds. Again, let us remember that many of these inquiries are absolutely of no significance or even meaning for Heidegger himself. For him, questions such as representation, dialectics, subject-object relation, etc., are all utterly baloneys, as he asserts it falls to metaphysics to deal with them.

*Metaphysics thinks about beings as beings. Wherever the question is asked what beings are, beings as such are in sight. Metaphysical representation owes this sight to the light of Being. The light itself, i.e., that which such thinking experiences as light, does not come within the range of metaphysical thinking; for metaphysics always represents beings only as beings. Within this perspective, metaphysical thinking does, of course, inquire about the being which is the source and originator of this light. But the light itself is considered sufficiently illuminated as soon as we recognize that we look through it whenever we look at beings.* (Heidegger, “The Way Back into the Grounds of Metaphysics”, P. 207)

The above quote demonstrates the discrepancy between the Heideggerian question of Being and what we have been pursuing throughout this exegesis, namely, the question of thought-activism and change. Nevertheless, such a discrepancy does not rule out the service that Heidegger’s insights on the essence of language can provide. I argue, any non-Heideggerian thinker for whom the question is the *logic* behind the metaphysical representation of the world can benefit from those insights. Doing so, will come to their aid in thinking of ways to expose the world’s logic to the contingencies of transformation.

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In addition, rethinking Heidegger’s insights on the *ontology* of language will be of a great importance, given the post 9/11 epistemological turn; a devotion to epistemology and vitalist ontology that since the Enlightenment has been unprecedented. One can simply detect in such currents of thought — e.g., “new rationalism”, “new materialism’, with some strains of “vitalism” and “object agency” — the imperative of prioritizing epistemology and vitalism over the politico-ontological investigations of the state of affairs. One can see in these currents of thought the ceding of primacy to questions such as *what* are the beings that are there? Or *what* is the ‘there’ in which beings are? With them, there is an ardent impulse for a contemplative vision of the world, for thinking the ‘energy’ between noumenon and phenomenon, for animating the entire material world around humanity. Why? Simply because, (as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost want us to think) ‘materiality is always something more than “mere” matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creating, productive, unpredictable.’

Resisting such a problematic impulse, my return to Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language is more in line with Terry Eagleton’s critique of “new materialism” whose slogan was quoted above.

> It is obvious enough from *New Materialisms* that the brand of materialism it advocates is really a species of post-structuralism in wolf’s clothing. Where thinkers like Jacques Derrida say ‘text’, new materialists say ‘matter’. Otherwise, not much

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has changed. Like many an apparent innovation, then, the New Materialism is by no means as new as it seems. It shares post-structuralism’s suspicion of humanism — of the belief that human beings occupy a privileged place in the world — and seeks to discredit this view with a vision of material forces that flow indifferently across both human and natural spheres. (Eagleton, “Materialisms”, P. 11)\(^{127}\)

Without any worry to fall into the perils of anthropocentrism, and against such a vitalist and epistemological turn, I argue that the true question that our contemporary thought-activism must pose is: why do ‘being-nothings’ not exist out there? \(^{128}\) In other words, the directive is to fight against the prioritization of the finitude of “what” over the infinitude of “why”. The task is to contest the dominant deflation of ontological enquiries, which take place in posing questions such as ‘where concepts navigate?’, \(^{129}\) instead of asking what is that which conceals the governing modes of concepts’ navigation?

To Hear the “Saying of Language”: Examining Heidegger’s Ontological Analysis of Language

Under the aegis of subtractive ontology, we saw that to speak of change is to speak of the ontological difference between existence and being. We also saw, in our discussion of logic and the transcendental, that such a difference is fundamentally a question of appearance and

\(^{127}\) Terry Eagleton, Materialism, “Materialisms”, Yale University Press Publications, 2016, p. 11

\(^{128}\) This question is, indeed, the reversal of Heidegger’s famous question: why is there something rather than nothing?

\(^{129}\) See Where is the Concept?, (Localization, Ramification, Navigation), Reza Negarestani, Urbanomic, 2015, P. 225-251
I would now posit the thought-activism thesis anew in the following manner:

*To comprehend the procedures through which the difference between being and existence is concealed, demands to understand the very nature of the logic, with which the world represents “that which is not” as “not-being”. In short, it requires us to understand the very nature of discourse.*

I will review three major works in which Heidegger elucidates such a topic: First, the essay “The Way to Language” from the *On the Way to Language* (1959); second, the essay “Language” from *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1975); finally, the chapters “Dasein as Understanding” and “Dasein and Discourse: Language” from *Being and Time* (1927).

The first two essays are succeeding the chapters in *Being and Time* by almost thirty and fifty years respectively. Despite the noticeable shifts in some of Heidegger’s fundamental thoughts during these five decades, we can still see that his later investigations on the nature of language are rooted in those concepts developed in *Being and Time*. For instance, later axioms of Heidegger such as ‘language speaks’, or ‘language is language’ and ultimately ‘to speak is to respond to language’s speaking’, can be utterly traced back in some of the existential concepts

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130 I should, however, clarify that Heidegger, also draws on the foregoing difference between existence and Being. He does so, however, from the perspective of his specific phenomenology in which the question of being lies on the side of the totality of finitude, on the side of *actuality*. This view, of course, deviates from the ontological approach that crystallizes the question of being within the infinity of *particular* worlds. The latter is concerned with the sudden emerging *potentialities* for overcoming a world’s transcendental, i.e., that which represents the being-nothing as the ‘not-being’. 
he develops in the chapters “Dasein as attunement” and “Dasein as understanding”, as well as in the notions of “silence” and “idle talk” in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger attempts to arrive at language *qua* language. In other words, he attempts to reach language in language — i.e., language *per se*. Undoubtedly, his endeavours for doing so are not to be identified with what can be referred to as conceptualization of the universal of language. Rather he seeks to formulate a treatment of language whose nature is not reducible into a concept. From this perspective, his attempt by no means fits the analytic philosophy of language. Nor does it fit the psychoanalytic approach to language, i.e., the structuralist, the Lacanian thesis that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’\(^{131}\). Far away from the foregoing fashions of linguistic enquiry, for Heidegger to reflect on what language is, is to reach the *speaking of language* ‘in such a way that this speaking takes place as that which grants an abode for the being of the mortals.’\(^{132}\)

To make the above statement more intelligible, we need to look at what resides in the kernel of Heidegger’s enquiry into the being of language. ‘*Language is language*’, Heidegger asserts. By such equivocal statement, he immediately deviates from any conception that reduces language, first, to expression of inner emotions, and second, to an activity performed by humans. ‘In its essence language is neither expression nor an activity of man. Language speaks’.\(^{133}\) He also severely opposes the ideas identifying language as audible utterance of anything that is existentially internal, and therefore, it is represented externally through the means of language.


\(^{133}\) Ibid, p.194
No matter how correct the above scientific and philosophical explanations of language may be, Heidegger’s main problem with them is that ‘they don’t bring us to language as language at all’\textsuperscript{134}. Therefore, for Heidegger, language cannot be identified as representation by image and/or by concept.

The question then is, how to arrive at language as language? If language is the house of being, to arrive at language, therefore, paradoxically is to arrive at where we already are. This is precisely the locus of the problem. The problem is that we are both with-language and within language. We are with language not in such a way that we are with the “speaking of language”, rather we are with-language and stuck in ourselves. Hence, the key to crack into this staggering question is on the side of deciphering what the ‘speaking of language’ is.

Heidegger proclaims that ‘language speaks.’\textsuperscript{135} In the article \textit{the nature of language}, he takes this assertion even further by maintaining that it is the “being of language” that speaks as the “language of being”\textsuperscript{136}. To understand such fatally tautological statement, we out to grasp that, for Heidegger, we only are \textit{users} of language and not its speakers. In fact, this is the language that speaks. In its speaking it \textit{says} something. This “saying” constitutes the cornerstone of Heidegger’s reflections on the essence of language. What language says in its speaking is, indeed, the very essence of language that Heidegger wants us to arrive at.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, p. 191
\textsuperscript{135} Heidegger, “The way to language”, \textit{On the Way to Language}, Trans. Peter D. H Ertz, Hyper and Row Publisher, 1959, P. 111
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, p. 79-80
On the other hand (as will be shown later) the saying of language in its essence contains convergent vectors of addressing, pointing, and showing things. In human’s physical and concrete everyday experience (ontic), this addressing, pointing, and showing is the cause behind the very problem whose characteristics is to cast a spell over what Heidegger calls ‘authentic thinking’, and subsequently over ‘authentic being’.

By ‘showing’, language, first, brings things into their own. In other words, it sets up the delusion in which they are uprooted from the network of relations they have with the other things. Second, ‘showing’ is that which forces us to presume that things are there in the world only for the sake of our reflection (anthropocentrism). By bringing things into their own, language engenders the false consciousness that we are in the world (subject) and things are there only for us to be reflected upon (objects). This is literally the orthodox subject-object relation, which Heidegger conceives to be the root of nihilism and the legacy of metaphysics. The problem is when, through processes of showing, pointing, and ultimately naming, things are brought into their ownness, they are subsequently at the stage of being possessed (owned up) by our cognitive faculty, and this is a true problem (figure 6).
It is precisely because of this possessive property that language places in between Dasein’s being-in-the-world and Dasein’s being-with-others, that one is unable to think authentically the being of himself along with the being of beings. Hence, the problem of forgetting who we are and where do we belong.

**Thinkability of a Being and the Question of Signification: A Structuralist Reading of Badiou’s Logic**

Let us have a quick return here to Badiou. We know that ‘a being is thinkable only insofar as it belongs to a world’.[137] This is the crucial lesson of Badiou. For a singular being to be there — when its being does not prescribe anything about the “there” to which it is consigned — two criteria are necessary. First, that being must differ from itself (being-there is not identical with

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[137] *Logics of Worlds*, p. 113-117
being qua being). Second, that being must differ from the other beings of the same world. The fact that appearing is one and the same thing as logic, is because ‘it is nothing but the coding of these differences world by world.’

We can somehow see here the trace of a famous structuralist principle that is collapsed into the language of logic and of ontology: the essential characteristic of any sign is to be what other signs are not. As mentioned many times, despite Badiou’s intention to move away from this linguistic lexicon, I see a fundamental similarity being at work here. My argument is that this logico-ontological transcendental whose function is to code the differences of a being with itself and with others, is structured like language and has discursive operations. Let us expand this argument a bit further.

When a pure being (being qua being) is worlded, it has gained appearance in a world. The latter, we learnt from Badiou, takes place at the expense of the being undertaking a difference from itself and also from the other beings. How do the phenomenological operations of the logic of the world (i.e., its transcendental) code such differences?

This operation, I argue, happens through the procedures of the being turning into a sign (i.e., the signifier-signified compound). In other words, a being is worlded once it has, first, passed through the gate of the transcendental structure (discourse), and then, gained a univocal name by its discursive activities. Therefore, for a being to become a being-there, both self-differentiation

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138 Ibid, 117
and *other*-differentiation is required. This way the constitutive relationship between the same and the other (Hegel) remain dialectical and intact, and therefore, identity in the sense of a particularity cannot remain a pure dialogical exteriority (identity politics). In other words, an “I” in the form of appearing in a world, is at the same time something other than “myself” and then something other than the “other” (Lacan and the split in the subject). We can therefore argue that the essential characteristic of every being (once consigned to a system of signification, to a signifying world) is to be both what other signs are not and what “itself” is not. Now we can complete this structuralist principle that a ‘world is made up of relationships (difference) rather than things”¹⁴⁰ — which is principally a “logical” statement — by adding to it that this relationality that the world is cannot abolish the pure being of a thing (the same). Hence, we can understand that logic is always the matter of more or less (the difference), whereas ontology is the matter of the same.

*Since a being, once worlded, is and is not what it is, and since it differs from those beings which, in an identical manner, are of its world, it follows that differences (and identities) in appearing are a matter of more or less. The logic of appearing necessarily regulates degrees of difference, of a being with respect to itself and of the same with respect to others. [...] the connections of identities and differences are logically regulated. [...] That goes to show that the ontological determination of beings and the logic of being-there (of beings in situation, or of appearing-in-a-world) are profoundly distinct. QED. (Logics of Worlds, p. 117-118)*

¹⁴⁰Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, p. 17-18
Heidegger’s the Saying of Language VS. Badiou’s Thinkability of a Being

We said that by language’s pointing, addressing, and showing, that is, by way of language’s saying, things are brought into their ownness. Hence, they are named. Accordingly, the univocity of the name detaches things from the set of relations that are also another cause behind their appearance in the world. To put this differently, naming transmutes the things’ genericity into particularity, and thereby engenders the paradox of a being.

This paradox must be understood here as internal, or constitutive, of beings-there. For a being-there is constituted, at once, by a difference from the other and a difference from the self (consciousness), or the being-there of the things is at once a discrete singularity (linguistically), and at the same time a generality (relation to other beings). We said before (via Heidegger) that through this process things are brought into their ownness and are thus owned up by our cognitive faculty. This possessive property of language places the false gap of anthropocentrism between Dasein’s being-in-the-world and Dasein’s being-with-others.

We can link this problem to the question of multiplicity and the equivocity that multiplicity requires in order to be thinkable. In other words, the equivocity is that which negates the univocality of a thing as a sign.

Multiplicities are the opposite of the One. In this sense, each multiple is a set of relations. Multiples are sets of relations that are not necessarily exterior to the world. However, we know
that a multiple can at the same time belong to different worlds (situations). Owing to the univocity that the economy of naming imposes on the named, the named gets detached from the infinity of the multiplicity of the world, and therefore, it will deceitfully be represented in the world as a discrete singularity (figure 6). This problem is the core obstacle on the way to think the being of beings. That is why, Badiou suggests, that thought can only grasp the multiple in an Event. Because only an Event can place something of the infinite (inconsistent multiplicity) into the consistency of the world. Thus, in the aftermath of the Event those beings that are in the world but are not represented with a high degree of identity, will come forth as thinkable and decidable (question of change).

For Heidegger, in contrast, the problem of univocity blocks the way of thinking the truth of the being of what already is, i.e., the being of an existent (question of authenticity). Despite their fundamental differences, we can see how the question of equivocity is of an emancipatory significance to both visions. For Heidegger, to help authentic thinking, and for Badiou (although he does not attend to this issue), I argue, to help destabilize the consistent multiplicity that the world is.

Heidegger holds that to reflect on what language is, we need to enter the speaking of language in such a way that we may stay with its speaking, and cease remaining within our own\(^{141}\) — where remaining immanent in our own is caused by the ontic language-use we are accustomed to. Therefore, I posit that by drawing a distinction between “within our own” and “within language’s speaking”, Heidegger seems to assert that there is a distance between “our own” and

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\(^{141}\) Heidegger, “Language”, *Poetry, Thought, Language*, p.188
the language’s speaking. For language already exists out there, and we are not expressing ourselves by using it, rather we are only responding to language’s speaking.

Let us try to make the above statement more intelligible by way of a logical joke. Let us take the problem of plagiarism, which means ‘appropriation, stealing and publication of another’s language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions and the representation of them as one’s own original work’. The situation with Heidegger’s statement is akin to that of plagiarism. Language has been formed and now exists out there. We are not speaking it, rather we are under its supremacy, and by nature, are only allowed to respond to its speaking. So, that we are using language out of our volition is nothing more than a false supposition. In other words, *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with language, and the word was language.* Hence, the language-user animal, after all, is a type of creature whose nature is plagiarism. In other words, to open tongue is to plagiarize. The only solution Heidegger offers, is to turn against this plagiarism by entering the realm of poetry.

Poetry for Heidegger is the only way out of being imprisoned by the restraint of language. It is in poetry, that instead of only remaining passive responders to its speaking, we may speak the speaking of language. In doing so, we are seeking the saying of language that lies in the poetry of what is spoken, *what is spoken purely.* Meanwhile, it should be noted that for Heidegger poetry is by no means an elevated and transcended form of everyday language. It is, rather, quite the opposite.
Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (melos) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer. (Ibid, P. 205)

To fully grasp the question of the existentiality of language as an external phenomenon, however, I suggest that one must turn back, almost by half of a century, to Being and Time. In chapters of Dasein as Understanding (BT, P.143), and Dasein and Discourse: Language (BT, P. 155), we will be able to find the seeds of Heidegger’s account of the essence of language, fifty years later.142

I am certain that it is only in this return that one could grasp what is truly meant in axioms such as ‘language speaks’ and that ‘we are seeking its speaking in the poetry of what is spoken’. More importantly, essential to understanding the above axioms is understanding the relations between language and discourse, accounted in Being and Time. A profound grasp of the relations between language and discourse gives way to our understanding of the relation between Heidegger’s conception of poetry and Badiou’s notion of desire.

142 Nevertheless, it is astounding to see the difference between the methodological language of the Being and Time in comparison to the language of the Way to Language, or What Calls for Thinking, per excellence. It is not a coincidence, or a matter of taste, that Heidegger’s later works take up on a poetic, metaphoric and ambiguous language. He strongly challenges the methodological language of Western philosophy to be complicit in the spell that metaphysics has cast over the history of thought. Therefore, no one can fully grasp the crux of his thought by approaching his writing via the Aristotelian logic. To think ‘what is called thinking?’ first requires abandoning the language of metaphysics. It is perhaps due to this attachment to the language of metaphysics that despite having written for almost half a century after Being and Time, the dominant attention of the Western reader is still to this very early work of Heidegger.
It is also necessary to note that when Heideggerian concepts are applied to the Badiouian “world”, they are, indeed, appropriated from the existential-world context (finite) and scaled down into the context of particular-ontological-worlds (infinite).

“What is Spoken Purely”: Return to Discourse as my Suggested Methodology

Let us recall Heidegger’s statement once again: ‘to reflect on language thus demands that we enter into the speaking of language in order to take up our stay with language, i.e., within its speaking, and not within our own’. To reduce the gap between “our own” and the “language’s speaking”, Heidegger’s solution is a formula: ‘to bring language as language to language’. It is through this formula that we can reach the speaking of language in “what is spoken purely”. On the other hand, “what is spoken purely” is ‘that in which the completion of the speaking that is proper to what is spoken is, in its turn, original.’

Taking the lead from Aristotle, Heidegger contends that speech implies the creation of articulated sounds by voice. In speech, language shows itself as activation of the phonic instruments that we possess, namely, mouth, lips, tongue. One could discern here a sharp distinction set between voice and sound. The latter lies on the side of language. In fact, here language is put beside speech with an equal measure. What is crucial, however, is that we must be heedful to the distinction between voice and articulated sounds.

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143 Heidegger, “The way to language”, On the Way to Language, P. 398
145 Heidegger, “The way to language”, On the Way to Language, P. 400
With the abovementioned said, let us pose a few questions: where do these articulated sounds come from? In what kind of mechanism, natural or social, have they been articulated? And finally, can we conclude that in speaking we are implying that which has already been articulated (organized) through operations of an external regime? The answers to all these questions lie in our grasping of what *discourse* is. Such a task requires us to outline the definitions of other concepts that have a fundamental relationship with discourse, namely, ‘attunement’, ‘understanding’, ‘interpretation’.

In *Being and Time*, ‘attunement’ and ‘understanding’ are sketched as the two *equiprimordial* constituents of the being of Dasein (the being of being-here). On the other hand, “understanding” is a fundamental mode of the being of Dasein. ‘Interpretation’, for Heidegger, is the appropriation of what is *understood*. Equiprimordial with ‘understanding’ and ‘attunement’, “discourse” is the articulation of what has been intelligible in the world.

*To say that Dasein, existing, is its there means: World is “there”; its Da-sein is being-in. Being-in is “there” as that for the sake of which Da-sein is. Existing being-in-the-world as such is disclosed in the for-the-sake-of-which, and we called this disclosedness understanding* (Ibid, P. 139).

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146 Coined by Heidegger, the neologism *Equiprimordial* signifies equally original, equally basic and mutually interdependent; integrally connected that one cannot exist without the other; neither is derivable from or based on the other. See *Being and Time*, P. 181
147 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, P. 143
148 Ibid, P. 155
If we attend to these definitions carefully, we will notice that “interpretation” lies above “understanding”, “attunement”, and “discourse”. In other words, if the relations between “understanding”, “attunement”, and “discourse” are *equiprimordial* (horizontal), then they all have a *foundational* relation to interpretation (vertical). Akin to the existing relation between interpretation and discourse, is the relation between language and discourse, meaning that language is also founded upon discourse.

*language has its roots in the existential constitution of the disclosedness of Da-sein.*

*The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse* (Ibid, P. 155).

Therefore, ‘language’ and ‘interpretation’ are ontologically placed on the basis of ‘discourse’, ‘understanding’, and ‘attunement’. In other words, the first two are founded on the basis of the other three. This clearly means their relation is not existentially equiprimordial, meaning, they are ‘not equally original’ and ‘not mutually interdependent’. Hence, it can be concluded that language is ontologically *dependent* on discourse. We should also bear in mind in reading Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, that for him, ‘discourse’ is always ‘discourse about’.*

*The Thesis: Transcendental is Discursive*

I will now draw the following thesis based on the foregoing definitions:

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*149 Ibid, P. 156*
If discourse is the articulation of intelligibility (Heidegger), it is therefore the articulation of what has, so far, been allowed to appear in the world, and thereby, be ‘sensed’, named, and finally ‘interpreted’.

It is in this sense that, earlier, I maintained there is a direct relationship between Badiou’s concept of ‘the transcendental’ and Heidegger’s notion of ‘discourse’.

We saw that the transcendental is that which is in charge of making intelligible the manifestation of the world (Badiou: logic/appearing). On the other hand, Heidegger defines discourse as the articulation of the intelligibilities. Therefore, by way of a conjunction, we can clearly state that the transcendental’s phenomenological operations are discursive. In other words, it is due to discourse (Heidegger)/transcendental (Badiou) that a pure being is allowed to appear in the world (worldly manifestation) as a being-there, and thereby, become sensible, nameable, signifying and signifiable, and interpretable.

Given discourse is always discourse about, I will thus amend the description as follows: discourse is always discourse about particularities. That is to say, discourse is about whatever in the world is discernible by descriptive predicates and not about anything that might exceed it.

What is structured as such in the “aboutness” of discourse is what Heidegger calls the ‘totality of significations’. This totality is that which is put into words through discursive impositions on Dasein. Thus, by forcing Dasein to “listen” and stay in “silence”, discourse becomes an existential constitutive of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. It is through “listening” and “silence” that
the functionality of discourse becomes clear for Dasein. Accordingly, discourse is expressed through Dasein’s use of language. At the same time, the totality of the significations of intelligibilities — that which is put into words by discourse — does accrue in discourse by archiving words into it. *This is exactly what I name the transcendentalizing of discourse.*

The above process, to me, is the key to understanding the very problem of language’s power of reification. Let us review this process again.

On the one hand, discourse is the articulation of the intelligibility of beings-in-the-world. We should also remember that discourse is only the articulation of what has, so far, been allowed to appear and thus be experienced in the world. Hence, it is not to be identified as the articulation of the totality of *possible* experiences in the world (discourse is *discourse about particularities*). On the other hand, the totality of significations of intelligibilities is put into words. Now, the univocity of words begins accrue back into discourse. Indeed, words that were themselves the outcome of the exclusive impositions of discourse — i.e., detached by that imposition from the multiplicity of beings — now start to get accumulated back into discourse. This accumulation utterly results in making discourse stay away from the “genericity” of the world and become even more particular than what it already was. I call this problem the problem of *transcendentalization of discourse.*

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150 It is through this reading of “discourse” that we can detect such a lucid trace of Heidegger in the formation of Structuralism. For structuralism, particularly in the works of Foucault and Derrida, ‘the experience of the world is always an experience of discursive imposition. To be in the world is to be marked by discourses, marked even in our flesh, body, sex and so on’ (Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon*, P. 133).
“What is Spoken as Such”

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger briefly mentions that ‘in all discourse there is *what is spoken as such*’. Indeed, discourse is the articulation of what is *discussed* (discourse is discourse about), what is spoken, and finally, what can be articulated of the intelligibility of being-in-the-world. Let me open a quick parenthesis here. One can simply notice how, for instance, Roland Barthes’ argument on *Death of the Author* is planted in this Heideggerian field. Barthes’ argument that all texts are essentially an assemblage of quotations from other texts, which themselves are also assemblage of quotations from other texts (multiplied to infinity), can thus be understood both in the context of Heidegger’s notion of “what is spoken as such” and/or in relation to my logical joke on plagiarism. In this sense, discourse is the category of *the already-said*.

Let us resume with Heidegger and see what for him constitutes discourse. The constitutive factors of discourse are “what discourse is about”, “what is said as such”, and “communication”. Heidegger defines communication as being ‘attuned with one another’ or ‘being-with understandingly’ which itself becomes only possible in discourse.

*In talking Dasein expresses itself not because it has been initially cut off as “something internal” from something outside, but because as being-in-the-world it is already outside* (Ibid, P. 157).

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151 Ibid, P. 156
153 Ibid, P. 157
We can now better grasp what Heidegger means when, fifty years later, he states ‘language speaks’ and ‘we are responding to its speaking’. Among all the above existential ontological constituents of discourse, the later Heidegger, however, becomes more interested in ‘what is spoken as such’. This interest goes to such an extent that he contends poetry is the only domain in which we can stay with ‘what is spoken purely’ in the speaking of language, rather than merely staying “within our own” as responders to the expressions of discourse communicated by language.

**Manifesto for What is Spoken Purely**

It is now time to recall what “what is spoken purely” for Heidegger was: ‘that in which the completion of the speaking that is proper to what is spoken is, in its turn, original’.  

If I am to pronounce a manifesto for “What is spoken purely”\(^\text{155}\), it would then read as follows:

- What is spoken purely is a derivative of the “aboutness” of discourse, of what is discussed in the world.
- What is spoken purely must be understood as a counterpart for the authentic experience of Dasein’s being-in-the-world.

\(^{154}\) Heidegger, “Language”, *Poetry, Thought, Language*, p.192

\(^{155}\) In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the expression “what is spoken as such”, as one of the existential constitutive of discourse, instead of “what is spoken purely”. The latter is a different syntactical version of the same concept, which Heidegger uses in his later works.
- This experience remains authentic until it gets superficial due to discourse taking supremacy over Dasein by the means of language.

- What is spoken purely is that which resides in the hidden kernel of discourse before it gets *transcendentalized*.

- What is spoken purely is disclosed in one’s manner of keeping away from the univocity of names.

- What is spoken purely is disclosed in not-naming.

- What is spoken purely is poetics.

Therefore, the very quality of *being* authentically, is to resist the reification of beings out of their set of relations (multiplicity). This resistance involves refraining from the passive usage of language. What is spoken purely is then poetry.

It is crucial to note that poetry as such is not reducible to the crafting poems in its conventional sense. Although Heidegger is interested in a specific style of poetry, which to some extent, 

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The type of poetry Heidegger is interested in, is the poetry of what I call the language of paradoxes. By the language of paradox, I refer to a specific language-use, which highlights the question of not-being face to face with that of being nothing. For instance, I can cite one of Rumi’s well-known poems here which, to me, remarkably, highlights the language of paradox:

*Oh how nameless, how free I am!*  
*When will I see myself as I really am?*  
*Tell me your secrets here and now, you said.*  
*In this realm, I said, where is the here and now?*  
*How can my soul be still*  
*when I am whirling in stillness?*  
*My sea drowned in itself.*  
*What a wondrous, shoreless sea that I am!*  
*Not in this world, not in the next I am.*  
*Where I am, both worlds disappear.*  
*Like a not-being, I am free of profit and loss.*  
*How singular, I neither gain nor lose.*  
*I said: My Soul, you're the light of my eyes.*  
*Where I am, he said, no need for eyes.*
relates to the term poetry in its conventional sense, I would like to emphasize that “poetry” here must be understood in its Greek original sense of *poiesis* (ποίησις). We know that poiesis means *making*, bringing forth, bringing into being that which did not exist before. Hence, poiesis is simply synonymous with *existention*. It is in this precise sense that poetry must be conceived of as the *act* to dismantle the spell that is cast over “thinking” by language. To conclude, poetry is one’s manner of *declaring* the multiplicity. We must, therefore, discern poetics and/or poiesis from the contemporary deployment of the term, i.e., the ahistorical and individual contemplative vision to the world.

**The Poiesis of Thought-Activism: Summary of My Thesis**

In the previous section, I discussed that ‘communication’ (being-with understandingly) has an equiprimordial relation to the existential constitution of discourse (the articulation of intelligibility). I also argued that the problem of the limits of language has its roots in what I named the *transcendentalization of discourse* (the reverse accumulation of words into discourse).

Nevertheless, given the way “discourse” was sketched out in the previous section, there still is a risk for identifying discourse with language. To repeat: language is that which becomes possible

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*That’s what you are, I said. Stop it!*
*he said. No words can capture me.*
*I said: Since you are more than tongue can tell,*
*behold how eloquent I am without a tongue.*
*Like the moon, without legs, I race through nothingness.*
*See how fast I can run without legs!*
*A voice called: Why so fast?*
*Look into the hidden, find my true face.*
*The moment I saw Shams of Tabriz*
*I became a treasure, a gem, the rare pearl of the sea.*
on the basis of discourse. In other words, as Daniel O. Dahlstrom puts it, “language is a discourse that has been voiced”\textsuperscript{157}. We have already recited Aristotles’ conception of ‘speech’ as the creation of articulated sounds by voice. On the basis of Aristotle’s saying, we can maintain that discourse is the organization of \textit{articulated sounds}, which through the \textit{voice} it receives from human’s phonetic instruments becomes language.

Now that we are familiar with the existential procedures of the formation of language, we can proceed to the question of the supplementarity of these concepts to Badiou’s theory of the Subject.

As stated several times, there is a great overlap between “discourse” in the Heideggerian sense and Badiou’s notion of ‘transcendental’ (the State of the situation). We said that each situation (world) has its own state (governor) that is characterized as an errant-representational-measureless power. Akin to the function of discourse, the “State of the situation” is to guarantee that “\textit{what is}” is always perceived as all that is \textit{possible}.

For Heidegger, discourse maintains the same task through the supposition of its ‘truthfulness’ from the point of view of the being-in-the-world. Likewise, the “State of the situation” does so through its representational activities. The \textit{truthfulness} of discourse is due to the existence of ‘idle talk’ (gossiping and passing the word along).\textsuperscript{158}

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\textsuperscript{158}Although not used by Heidegger, I suggest — to better understand how ‘idle talk’ causes the supposition of the truthfulness of discourse — we can conceive of idle talk as doxa, i.e., public opinion; that which goes without saying.
\end{flushright}
Discourse has the possibility of becoming idle talk, and as such of not really keeping being-in-the-world open in an articulated understanding, but of closing it off and covering over innerwordly beings ... the groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its being public but encourages it. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter. Idle talk already guards against the danger of getting stranded in such an appropriation. Idle talk which everyone can snatch up, not only divests us of the task of genuine understanding, but develops an indifferent intelligibility for which nothing is closed off any longer (Being and Time, P. 163).

This function of discourse in its possibility of becoming idle talk (doxa), and by ‘covering over innerworldly beings’, is exactly similar to that of the State of the situation. To put this in a mathematical paradigm, once discourse becomes “idle talk”, it guarantees that all the ‘innerworldy’ beings (subsets of a world) are counted as One. And finally, through its ‘truthfulness’, discourse guarantees that which is not (the unnamed parts of a set) is not possible to be at all.

In other words, ‘idle talk’ is that by which the “aboutness” of discourse is communicated. On the other hand, “communication” is being-with one another understandingly. Let us reformulate this as the following: once transcendentalized[^159], discourse communicates itself through idle talk.

[^159]: Heidegger does not use such an expression. Instead, he occasionally uses the term ‘genuine discourse’, which can be interpreted as the contrary to my notion of “transcendentalized discourse”. Nevertheless, it should be noted that his usage of ‘genuine discourse’ takes place within a different context, which does not necessarily overlap with the one used in this exegesis.
Idle talk, at the same time, becomes an obstacle on the way of genuine understanding. Hence, it can be concluded that transcendentalized discourse is the cause behind one’s inauthentic experience of the world — i.e., inauthentic being.

Against the notion of idle talk, Heidegger develops the concept of ‘silence’. Silence is the capacity of Dasein for resisting idle talk. In other words, — employing our conjunctural Heideggerian-Badiouian terminology here — silence is the capacity of Dasein for resisting the idle talk’s establishment of generalities in the world. Likewise, ‘the Subject’ is the capacity of someone for maintaining fidelity to disclosedness of the genericities in the world.

In order to be silent, Dasein must have something to say, that is, must be in command of an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself (Ibid, P. 159)

‘Communication’ as one of the existential constituents of discourse, is being-attuned-with-one-another, i.e., being-attuned with the restraint of possibilities of being-in-the-world. Therefore, ‘the Subject’ as a process maintained between the trace of an Event and the body, can be reformulated, I argue, as “being-attuned-with-new-interpretation-of-being-in-a-world”. In fact, the translation of the Subject into a Heideggerian terminology can read as a genuine understanding of the possibility of a being outside the classification of a world. Such translation highlights the designation of the thought-activist’s notion of authenticity, which is quite distinct with that argued by Heidegger.
It is through constructing such an asymmetrical alignment between Badiou’s theory of the Subject and Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language, that I maintain another thesis of thought-activism:

To prepare a situation for the emergence of an Event, and thereby altering that situation by subjectively being affirmative to the Event, requires particular linguistically charged actions against the dominant discourse/transcendental of the situation. These linguistic actions are informed by a militant reading of Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language. Strictly speaking, to prepare a situation for the emergence of an Event is to become a thought-activist, i.e., the poet whom I name the Visitor.

Let us dwell a little longer here to expand the elucidation of thought-activism. The mission of the Subject, as broadly discussed before, is to change the transcendental of the world, i.e., to destabilize its discourse. We also learned that the ‘truthfulness’ of discourse (communicated by idle talk) makes the use of language possible. Thought-activism is thus an import of Heidegger’s analysis of language into Badiou’s theory of the Subject to turn the foregoing equation on its head.

Suppose we put this equation in reverse. The result will read as follows: to make possible the destabilization of discourse necessitates the creation of a poetic and desiring mode of language-use. Before proceeding further, let us quickly remind ourselves here of Badiou’s account of “desire”. We saw that desire, in contrast with the machine of pleasure that capitalism is, is that
which in regard to law does not exists. Thus, ‘pure desire is the affirmation of pure singularity across and beyond normality.’

We said that it is an ontological condition of any language to presuppose the existence of a discourse. We also said that language is the *voiced* discourse. Therefore, there can be no language without a discourse already existing in its foundation. It is why in using language one is, indeed, responding to the speaking of language which is articulated in discourse.

Thought-activism is to turn this foundational relationship on its head. Therefore, when we say a *poetic*/desiring use of language destabilizes the existing discourse, it does so through the same ontological procedure. That is to say, this language of desire — which affirms that which is beyond normativity — also produces the assumption that it has presupposed a discursive ground for its use. Indeed, it produces a Subjective ‘truthfulness’ for that presupposed discourse. However, such a discourse *Subjectively* presupposed by the language of desire does not *exist* in the world, yet it is to come about.

Let us now suppose an imaginary accuser who would challenge the thesis of thought-activism for being abstract. In other words, let us suppose he who proclaims that the thought-activist’s directive for the reversal of discourse-language equation has meaning only semantically and not in “real life”. I would invite this imaginary accuser to take a good genealogical study of the formation and evolution of the post-internet language that is currently in its full supremacy.
To see how the reverse of language-discourse relationship is simply possible, it only requires a close examination of the procedures of cybernetics’ takeover in tandem with the social media’s ‘techno linguistic automatism’ as its dominant language form. One can clearly see that this language, contrary to the way that “historical languages” are formed, is merely the language of simulacra. By the latter, I mean not only this language has not passed through the existential procedure we thoroughly discussed, but it is also literally the result of its reversal. All its lexicon, terminology, syntax, and finally, its doxa, has been produced over digital vectors and through a close mimesis of reality, which it precedes and thereby constructs it. Hence it is the language of simulacra (Baudrillard, 1981).

This language is the result of the creation of a fiction, a fictional ‘language’ whose project is to construct a fictional discourse, and thereafter, impose it as the real. Quite contrary to historical languages formed as the result of body’s direct experience of being-in-the-world, the contemporary techno-language is created in a void, the void of body’s separation from the world. It is created in the cybernetic, in the groundlessness that online networks are, and subsequently renders the individual bodies compatible with its discursive impositions. Simply put, opposed to the process we studied, here it is the language that produces the discourse and not the other way around. Accordingly, the discourse that is conversely, constituted by this language has only one project: to create (by automatizing an economically driven language) a form of social unconscious subjugating the individuals to embrace manufactured doxa (e.g., political correctness, dissolution of logic, etc.). Given such a mode of production, it is no surprise when Guattari outrages that we have the unconscious we deserve, or when Debord cries out

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160 See, Bifo Berardi, The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance, Semiotext(e), 2011, P. 7-23
161 Félix Guattari, “Logos or Abstract Machines?”, The Machinic Unconscious, Semiotext(e), 2011, P. 9
that the language of the Spectacle is the language in which one learns how to speak.\footnote{Guy Debord, \textit{Comments on the Society of the Spectacle}, Verso, 1990, p. 31} We will explore this issue further in the chapter on \textit{the Visitor}. Let us now proceed with our thought-activist thesis.

Although by a repressive neoliberal machine and not in the service of \textit{generic truths}, we can, nevertheless, see that the strategy of putting the discourse-language equation in reverse has been already at work in real life. Even such repressive language comes from a poiesis. Its poiesis is to bring into being different forms of subjectivities and launch them on bodies on a daily basis. Its remarkable job is to merchandize these subjectivities cloaked as “desires”. In other words, to subjugate bodies to unconsciously buy into its rhetoric and believe that all these subjectivities are true desires, i.e., they come from inside the body and are not dialogical exteriorities. This is truly why we should confront with our full power the contemporary romanticization of the term \textit{poetics} by constantly asking, “what desire?”, “whose poetics?”

Before concluding this chapter, let us have a quick return to Heidegger. One of the key concepts in Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language is ‘\textit{assertion}'. Assertion lies on the side of “understanding” and “interpretation” — the two at the basis of which discourse exists.\footnote{\textit{Being and Time}, P. 149-154} Assertion, existentially, makes “statement” possible. It is, indeed, to point out at things in order to let them be seen as what they are. In other words, assertions are themselves effects of discursive impositions.
On the other hand, we will have the concept of ‘the Visitor’ as the praxis of the strategy of thought-activism. I will discuss that the Visitor is what I name the body who has embraced the thought of contingency, i.e., the affirmative manner someone is equipped with in encountering the trace of the non-existent. The Visitor is he who is ontologically open to non-existing possibilities, a body that desires to prepare the situation for the emergence of an Event.

Now, in the light of the idea of reversing the discourse-language relation, it is to the Visitor body to embrace the Heideggerian account of assertion. Yet, the goal is to embrace “assertion” in the reverse of discourse-language equation, i.e., in language-discourse equation. Assertion in this way, is essentially to point out at “that which is not”; it is to point out at the non-existent. Let us call this tactic thought-activist-manipulative assertion.

Since assertions are based on interpretations and understandings, it is therefore to say, that manipulative assertions presuppose non-existent’s understandings (disclosedness of being-in-the-world in for-the-sake-of-which) as well as non-existent’s interpretations (implications of understanding). Now, if I collapse the embracement of “manipulative assertion” by the Visitor onto Badiou’s diagram of truth procedure, the result will look as follows (figure 7):
Since the Visitor is aware of the ontological procedures through which language is formed, he is *Subjectively* faithful to the very fact that there are things in the world (possibility of different subsets) that due to discursive impositions are not allowed to be represented in there.

Accordingly, the tactic of manipulative assertions functions akin to passing along rumors and statements about *that which is not* (the counteract to *idle talk/doxa*). This passing along takes place in such a way that *that which is not* is strategically propagated as *that which is right there*.

Such a tactic circumvents discourse by creating new semiotic opportunities within a situation (world). These semiotic opportunities are serving the non-existent, serving *the unnamed* subsets of the world, serving generic and inconsistent multiplicities. Once it finds a way to become collective (Evental statement, political slogan, etc.), such a tactic will result in destabilization of the established impositions of discourse.
It is to remember, however, that by *manipulative assertions*, the Visitor creates semiotic opportunities within the very locality of a particular world (art, love, politics, etc.) for the sake of which exists a *void* (the only immediate being, the infinite).\footnote{For Badiou, the void is the only immediate being, thus it figures in any world whatsoever. ‘Without the void there is no world, if by ‘world’ we understand the closed place of an operation. Conversely, where something operates [*où ça opère*] — that is, where there is world—the void can be attested. [...] man is the animal that desires the worldly ubiquity of the void. it is —as a logical power —the *voided* animal. (See *Logics of Worlds*, p. 114)} Finally, these semiotic opportunities promise *that which is not*, is *here* and is here right *now*. What can we call this very tactic of the Visitor, if not militant poiesis?
Chapter 4 - The Problems of the Other and Abstraction

Foreword

This chapter will investigate two major problems of the contemporary era: identity and abstraction. Social abstraction and incorporated-identity-politics form a dialectic, with the latter as a response to the former. Such a dialectic produces the contemporary obsession with false particularities under whose domination the possibility of the common vanishes. If we read the mechanism of this dialectic under the light of our previous discussions, it is to say that by producing subjectivities in the cloak of “desires,” this dialectic suppresses the possibilities of Subject-thought. It is the predominance of this contemporary problem-set that motivates and necessitates the production of the theories of Thought-activism and the Visitor.

In the first section, I will explicate the problem of the Other, on a fictional account of which, identity politics is predicated. The second section, in which I will examine the problem of abstraction, is comprised of two parts: In the first part, I will scrutinize the question of spectatorship and social alienation with respect to the question of “contemplation” via a critique of Jacques Rancière’s the Emancipated Spectator and demonstrate the contemporary necessity for the theory of the Visitor. In the second part, I will address the problem of contemporary
artistic abstraction and propose the notion of Visitorability as a protocol of abstraction and a way out from the impasse of contemporary art.

Section I: The Problem of the Other

Introduction

In contrast to the contemporary incorporated rhetoric of identity politics that ceaselessly creates and multiplies reified identities, this section proposes that the Other ought to be analyzed as a matter of temporality and futurity\textsuperscript{165} and as constitutive of the self. Such analysis will provide the basis for the argument that the language of the Visitor is to be conceived of as the localization of a third language between the language of the periphery and that of the center — i.e., it is the language of the stranger who translates.

At its surface, the idea of the third language of the Visitor immediately resonates with Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space\textsuperscript{166}. Despite the similarities, it is necessary to explicate the discrepancies between the two theories. For Bhabha the Third Space is the space of enunciation, ‘which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this


\textsuperscript{166} See Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, Routledge, 2004
mirror representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code.'

The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious.

What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation. (Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p. 53)

For Bhabha, a critique of the discourse of “cultural diversity” (vis-à-vis “cultural difference”) giving rise to the liberal notions of multiculturalism, requires an understanding that all cultural systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation of the subject. Therefore, there is no such a thing as “inherent originality” or “purity” of culture(s) of the Other. And lastly, Bhabha holds that it is the exploration of this Third Space that allow us to ‘emerge as the others to our selves.’ Therefore, the language of the Third Space of negotiation and translation is ‘neither the one nor the other.’ Bhabha sees, and correctly so, that for a major part of the pantheon of the Western critical theory, difference and otherness become ‘the fantasy of certain cultural space’ and ‘a form of theoretical knowledge’ to ‘deconstruct the epistemological

\[167\] Ibid, p. 54
\[168\] Ibid, p. 56
“edge” of the West.’ Thus ‘the Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse.’

I think that Bahabha’s discourse delivers a great pathology of the problem, specifically, in seeing that opposed to “cultural diversity” that reduces the Other to an epistemological object, the way out is on the side of the processes of ambivalent and uncertain signification and enunciation. The discrepancies, between the Third Space and the activities of the Visitor, however, lies in where Bhabha identifies the location of this signification as well as what he identifies to be the content of this enunciation, i.e., respectively, culture and difference. Following Fanon, he sees the ‘time of liberation’ as ‘a time of cultural uncertainty, and significatory or representational undecidability.’ The question is what is the material condition with which the Other can establish its oppositional discourse, its undecidable temporality? In other words, in what material condition do the grammatical places of “I” and “you” get ‘mobilized in the passage through a Third Space’? Although Bhabha usage of “difference” verges on the Derridean notion of différance in which the question is “non-identity” and a deferral of meaning, once used in the context of “cultural” difference, such a distinction could become susceptible to a hybrid conceiving of “difference” as matter of identity. Bhabha rightly holds that the political can be made possible as the result of the discursive ambivalence. This ambivalence, however, for Bhabha takes place in “writing”. Therefore, writes Bhabha, “‘What is to be done?’ must acknowledge the force of writing, its metaphoricity and its rhetorical discourse, as a productive matrix which defines the social and makes it available as an objective of and for, action.”

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169 Ibid, p. 46
170 Ibid, p. 51
171 Ibid, p. 34
Thus the political subject, and/or subject of politics, is a “discursive event” produced in textuality. It is the result of a theoretical statement, one that emerges out of what he calls negotiation (vis-à-vis negation) and translation taking place in the Third Space.

Under the aegis of the distinction between subjectivity and the Subject, the discrepancies between the language of the Visitor and Bhabha’s Third Space go as follows: For the Visitor, the political Subject is not a discursive event, but an anti-discursive process (ambivalence) summoned by thought and by the Event, which itself takes place outside the realm of discourse and its descriptive and predicative regime. In previous chapters, we saw that the place of thought is the act. Also, the contradictory unity of theory and practice showed us that the process of knowledge (political knowledge) commences its movement from practice to theory and back to practice. Thus, theory and “writing” alone cannot be the act, i.e., the location for articulating and informing the political/the singular of the object and objective of change. Despite the great similarity between the in-existence (Badiou) and Derrida’s différance, “writing”, as Badiou puts it, cannot be conceived of as the material condition and the primary mode of inquiry about in-existence. The Event and the singular act occur as the result of the very socio-economic material condition of the individual or groups. When the Event occurs, what can the discursive and textual-grammatical practices do is to reduce the power of the established discourse, the power of bourgeoisie, for reifying and incorporating the radicality of the singular act into the mediatized discourse of the status quo. Other than that, really theory and writing cannot themselves foment the singular.
For Bhabha, ‘the enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present.’ In the following section, I will attempt to demonstrate that the triumph of the contemporary neo-liberalism, however, consists in its power to forge a phantastic-compound-time in which a simple present and a future perfect form a dialectic that enforces the global division of labour, that mobilizes all “identities” (the Other) as global workforce. The question is how to reverse the terms of this dialectic and instead be able to conceive of the master and its differences as the Other? While desiring the master’s desire is what keeps the contemporary individual and groups confined within the realm of difference, the question for politics and for the Subject, therefore, seems to be how to enunciate the same? The Visitor knows that its third language cannot itself make the same happen. Rather, only when it happens, by performing thought-activism, it attempts to make it more difficult for the central discourse to reduce its power by incorporating it into the category of difference.

The Calamity of the Other

The contemporary impasse of politics, art, and thought is of course multifaceted, but in the final analysis it emerges out of a single problem: the problem of the reified Other (with a capital O).

If we cannot say that time is literally money, we can at least concede that nothing is more crucial to capital than time. Time is the most important produced commodity in capitalism, which by design wants humans to take it for granted. The question of neoliberal economy is not how to

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172 Ibid, p. 51
produce and sell, but how to sell *on-time*, and such an objective itself requires the *invention* of different notions of time collusive to selling out in a timely manner. In what follows, I will argue that the key element, and/or the core drive in the constitution of capitalist time is the notion of the *Other*. In contrast with neoliberal advocation of it as a matter of dialogical exteriority, the *Other* is really nothing but a matter of time and temporality in favour of capital’s movement. In the final analysis, my argument suggests that a specific application of the question of the *Other* functions as an igniting drive for the neoliberal and imperial capitalist machinery.

An essential and longstanding characteristic of the neoliberal economy is to assign to the *Other* a central role in the production of subjectivities that induce and accelerate both the physical distribution of the global workforce — both locally and globally — as well as the construction of a specific notion of futurity that is essential for such a distribution. This notion of futurity involves the production of “desires” (subjectivities)\(^\text{173}\) for contemporary individual and group subjects to attune them to ever-deteriorating working and living conditions. Such “desires” are dispensed through motivating discourses that operate on both local and global scales. Discourses of *progress, job promotion, corporate emulation* are instances of their local operations. And the most prominent instance of the global operation of such desires is evident in the discourse of *immigration*, or the global dissemination of workforce. In other words, in neoliberal economy, we are dealing with two main categories of time. One engages the human/labour time — necessary for on-time production and circulation so that *value* will be safeguarded. The other

\(^{173}\) Parenthetically glossing the word “desire” as “subjectivity”, I try to emphasize the distinction between capitalist subjectivities advocated as desire, and *desire* qua desire. Capitalism produces subjectivities through processes of *social subjections* and *machinic enslavement*. Yet the real triumph of this production is accomplished when the individual is persuaded that these subjectivities are desires coming from the inside and not the outside. This is distinct from the psychoanalytic notion that desires are always beyond and across the normativities of the situation, and thus, against the symbolic order by nature.
engages the psychological capitalist notion of futurity.

What is it that we actually desire when we desire to make progress or to get promoted? We know that desire must correspond to an object, which exists for that desire, an object that constantly exacts full recognition from the subject. Our “masters” are exemplary instances of such objects: the boss, the promoted colleague, the tenured faculty member, the internationally acknowledged artist, one’s glamorous post-immigration life in the “land of opportunities”, and in one word, the Other. Yet, are these instances completely reducible into the level of objects or should we also conceive of them as constituents of our own subjective constitution? Desiring the Other in this sense is not grasped by Lacan’s famous axiom: ‘man’s desire is the desire of the Other’\textsuperscript{174}, or in other words, man’s desire is desiring the Other’s desire. Desiring in the neoliberal sense of the term is desiring to be the Other – desiring a possibility for the self in the “future”, which at the same time is desiring the current reality of the Other in its “present”. The capitalist psychological notion of futurity is produced at the intersection of these present and future temporalities/tenses.

The contemporary neoliberal Other is axiomatically conceived of as a dialogic exteriority. This axiom — a most prevailing contemporary doxa — is based on an absolute objective externalization of Otherness. Such externalization entails that the Other is external to my own desire. It is an object out there, or as Badiou puts it, it is a ‘border at which my desire is forever rejected, and so I attempt to destroy them.’\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{175} Alain Badiou, “The Other”, I know There Are So Many of You, Trans. Susan Spitzer, Polity, 2019, p. 21
Despite the entire facade of discourses such as identity politics, multiculturalism, and political correctness, that advocate the “tolerance” of otherness, at the deepest level and ironically, these discourses themselves are based on the objective externalization of otherness. This basis indicates two things: first, that one has an identity independent of the Other; and second, that there are interminable ethnic, cultural, racial particularities, which deserve equal juridical rights. However, multiculturalism, in practice, is nothing but the reduction of the multiplicity that it discursively advocates into a duality that it materially practices — i.e., the duality of good versus evil particularities. The most crucial error of the various incorporated, mediatized, advertised brands of identity politics is their astounding failure to understand that without the Other as internal constituent there can be no identity. In other words, they fail to understand that the Other far from being reducible to an object of desire, to a pure exteriority, is a ‘figure of the subject’\textsuperscript{176}, a figure of the same.

From Plato all the way to Hegel, Lacan, and Sartre, the question of Otherness has been examined as an internal figure and in the framework of dialectic. Plato treats this dialectic as an ontological category, which is not necessarily applicable to the question of human relations. In other words, it involves the question of the other as not-being and the question of the same as being, so this way the same could be distinct from the other (theory of contradiction).\textsuperscript{177}

For Sartre the relationship between self-consciousness and the other is structural. What he calls ‘the for-others’ is the internalization of the problem of the other as constitutive of the subject.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} See Plato’s \textit{Sophist}, or Badiou: “The Other”, \textit{I know There Are So Many of You}, p. 28
We can see the perfect articulation of this thesis in the amendment he applies to Heidegger’s definition of Dasein: ‘Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question insofar as this being implies a being other than itself.’ Therefore, the Other is an internal element of the constitution of self-consciousness. We know that for Sartre this relation takes place with the intersecting of two objects’ demanding a response from one another as subjects — i.e., the reciprocation of two beings in-themselves demanding a passage to being for-themselves from one another. Sartre calls this reciprocal structure the revolving door of the two alternative ways of relating to the Other: sadism and masochism. Let us read Badiou’s remarks on this Sartrean structure:

*They are two possible positions of freedom. Either I exercise my freedom by reducing consciousness to a state of pure nothingness, by expelling being-in-itself from myself and offloading it onto the Other, or I do the opposite: I interfere with the Other’s nothingness through the fiction that I am, freely, a pure object, an in-itself [...] Freedom can only exist if the Other responds to my demand, but since this is also the case with theirs, they, too, cannot exist as a free subjectivity unless I respond to their demand. If the demands intersect, then there’s what Sartre calls a revolving door [un tourniquet]. And, at bottom, the relation to the Other often takes the form of a revolving door [...] the revolving door of the duality of the relation to the Other, the reversibility of sadism and masochism. (Badiou, “the Other”, p. 25-27)*

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178 *Certainly, we could apply to consciousness the definition which Heidegger reserves for Dasein and say that it is a being such that in its being, its being is in question. But it would be necessary to complete the definition and formulate it more like this: consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself* (Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Pursuit of Being”, *Being and Nothingness*, p. lxii)
Lacan examined the relationship to the Other from a different angle. For him, this relationship is both a structure and a process. In the lecture “Can Psychoanalysis Constitute the Kind of Ethics Necessitated by Our Times?”¹⁷⁹, he establishes a dialectical account of the questions of the Other, desire, and the ethics of psychoanalysis. The lecture is formed around Freud’s examination of the Christian commandment, love thy neighbor as thyself, explored in Civilization and its Discontents.¹⁸⁰

*I undoubtedly love myself, and with all the persistent passion in which life’s bubble seethes and swells in a palpitation that is both voracious and precarious, not without fomenting in its bosom the sore point from which its unity will spring forth anew, disseminated by its very shattering. In other words, I am tied to my body by the characteristic energy that Freud placed at the core of psychical energy: the Eros which makes living bodies come together to reproduce, which he calls libido. But what I love, insofar as there is an ego to which I am attached with a mental concupiscence, is not the body whose beating and pulsation are all too evidently beyond my control, but an image that misleads me by showing me my body in its Gestalt, its form. It is beautiful, big, and strong - it is all the more so inasmuch as I am ugly, small, and pitiful. I love myself insofar as I essentially misrecognize myself - I merely love an other, an other [autre] with a lowercase initial o, hence my students’ use of the term “little other.” There is nothing surprising in the fact that it is myself alone that I love in my semblable. (Lacan, “Discourse to Catholics”, P. 33-34)

¹⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, W. W. Norton, 1961
We know for Lacan semblance signifies false appearance. It is a ‘source of error’\(^{181}\). Semblance relates to that which pertains to the realm of the imaginary, as opposed to the symbolic, in which there’s nothing of the observable (sight) but structures which cannot be observed but deduced. Hence, when ‘it is myself alone that I love in my semblable’, I am immediately confronted with the problem of thyself, thyself as the result of “my” identification with an image that, at bottom, is not me but the inhuman other. This is what Lacan names the ethical face of “mirror stage”\(^{182}\).

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\textit{Owing the identification with his imaginary form, man believes he recognizes the core of his unity in the guise of self-mastery by which he is necessarily duped, whether it is illusionary or not, for this image of himself in no way contains him [...] No analogy can henceforth be established between physical reality and any sort of universal man, Physical reality is fully and totally inhuman. (Lacan, Ibid, P. 35-36)}
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Through this psychoanalytic lesson we can see that otherness is immanent in all identity. For Lacan, this question is entirely tied to the problem of desire and fantasy. It is in fantasy that the self wants to see and experience itself at the level of the Other.

Quite in contrast with the capitalist baloney of “desire”, real desire is the ‘thick absence’ in which man creates himself. That is why we must always remind ourselves, taking the lead from Lacan, that desire has no object. ‘It happens to manage to signify, whether in a flash or in a permanent relationship, the confines of the Thing — in other words, of this nothing around which all human passion tightens its spasm with shorter or longer modulation and periodic

\[^{181}\text{Lacan, } \textit{Triumph of Religion}, \text{ p. 11}\]
\[^{182}\text{Ibid, p. 34}\]
return’.\textsuperscript{183} It is from this gaping place that nothing questions us about our own existence: ‘This is the place where we have to love the neighbor as ourselves, because in him this place is the same. Assuredly, nothing is closer to us than this place.’\textsuperscript{184} This Freudian Thing\textsuperscript{185} to which Lacan links the questions of the Other and desire, is no object but a disappearing subject.

\begin{quote}
The Thing is thus that which – in any living being that discourse comes to inhabit and that offers itself up in speech – marks the place where he suffers from the fact that language manifests itself in the world. In this way, being appears everywhere that the Eros of life encounters the limit of its unitive impulse.” (Lacan, Ibid, P. 41-42)
\end{quote}

It is, thus, due to the Thing (nothing) that man languishes in language. Or, as Julia Kristeva has it, the Thing is the source of the foreignness (Otherness) to the self, whose cause and symptoms are given in the subject’s encounter with their use of language. Therefore, the Other is the place where the subject is truth without consciousness and without recourse. That is why truth is always unconscious and inhuman. Desire happens to manage to signify the confines of the Thing.

Now we are much closer to see the political perils of identitarian externalization of the Other as object. We can also begin to see in what sense we must conceive of the capitalist notion of the other, cloaked as it is in the discourse of multiculturalism and political correctness, as a matter of an invented economically driven notion of time.

\textsuperscript{183} Lacan, \textit{Triumph of Religion}, p. 45-46
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, p. 47
\textsuperscript{185} See Jacques Lacan, \textit{The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis}, Ecrits, P. 334
All these complex readings of the relationship between the self and the Other can be simplified once they are brought back to Hegel’s lord-bondsman dialectic.

*Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness.* (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Section B)

For Hegel any consciousness is a being that is both in-itself (a thinking interiority) and for-itself (an objective reflection). The latter implies that for every being in order to comprehend itself as a thinking interiority, there must exist another consciousness (being) who reflects this reflective capacity as constitutive of their being. In other words, as Badiou puts it, ‘it is in the encounter between two consciousnesses that each consciousness is constituted as a consciousness.’¹⁸⁶ To put it differently, a being is thinkable only insofar as it belongs to a world.

It is literally from this moment that the calamity begins. Hegel shows us that every consciousness wants to exact full recognition from the Other, but such business is always asymmetrical, and hence its title: *the struggle for recognition*. Each consciousness wants the ‘Other to recognize them as a reflective objectivity’, as a for-itself. In fact, each of us relates to the Other based on the following formulation: ‘I will expect the Other to recognize me for what I think I am.’¹⁸⁷ According to Hegel, the one who recognizes more is the slave and the one recognizing less is the master. But the master is the slave’s figure of the subject, he is constitutive of the slave’s subject at the level of self-consciousness. In short, the master is in the slave and vice versa. It is irrelevant how much material work has the bondsman been assigned to do for the master. *The real* work, the real labour, that must be problematized is this subjective

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¹⁸⁶ Badiou, “The Other”, p. 30
¹⁸⁷ Badiou, Ibid, p. 31
recognition, this business of desiring the desire of the master, that constitutes the slave’s
realization of themselves as the slave.

Any account of identity independent of the Other, any objective externalization of the Other,
instead of considering the Other internal to our own desire, is a problematic fiction. It either
leads to violent forms of identity politics such as Fascism, white supremacy, sexism, etc., or it
fosters gestures of victimhood – of non-recognition by the superior Other. Like it or not, both are
simply fictions, which in practice favour the accumulation of capital in the hands of the world’s
oligarchy — the real masters.

Neoliberal capitalism enjoins all subjects to be fatally amused with their interminable realm of
particularities — expressions of sex, race, culture, ethnicity, etc. — and in one word, with, what I
name, their identity-without-the-Other. With this paradigm, the “problem” of the world becomes
that of some particularities not enduring some other particularities. The problem then, as
simplistically as it sounds, is reduced to the question of bad majority versus the victimized good
minority, bad people against good people, good self against the evil Other, and vice versa. At the
same time, the capitalist ‘ideological state apparatuses’ overseeing the task of ‘social
subjections’ creates a unilateral language to be practiced by these individuals so they would take
consolation in the delusion that the problem will be resolved by them talking and talking and
talking — that is, the language of political correctness that attacks nobody but a straw man.

Differences and particularities are everywhere. What is concealed, however, beneath this
omnipresent realm of differences is the same. It is the same that universally stands behind this
lack of recognitions. It is the same drive that has been orchestrating this asymmetrical dialectic
of recognition all the way from the time of ‘primitive accumulation’ to exploitation and
exclusion of African Americans; colonization of indigenous’ lands; The queen’s Britain gifting Palestine to Zionists in the Balfour Declaration; overthrowing democratically elected governments one after the other in a chain of American coups in the Middle East; transforming the so-called Arab Spring’s revolutions into civil wars, and thousands of more examples.

It would be a fatal mistake not to see the economically driven synchronicity between all these events and phenomena. It would be unforgivable to remain immanent in political symbolism and political imaginary and not see that the real (the hand of political economy) could only arise in contest against the symbolic order. It is absolutely myopic to conceive of history as a constellation of isolated episodes in which a catastrophe has taken place, to fail grasping the identification between the “black”, “woman”, “Palestinian”, “illegal immigrant”, “the indigenous”, “the precarious worker”, and so forth, all as the generic representatives of humanity.

The idea of the Other as objective exteriority is an invention of neoliberal capitalism that fosters a view of history as segregated phases of hermetically sealed territories; and advocates the fetish of difference at the expense of concealing the same, that is, the global accumulation of capital. It makes all individuals narcissistically enjoy hearing their own voices reverberated in the echo chamber of academic symposia, social networks’ performative activisms, and Netflix’s multicolor inclusive series – in one word, in the language of political correctness. This way that the chance for a singular/universal thought-act is suppressed.

To get out from this impasse, we must, first, ask ourselves: ‘does the Other even exist?’ and then answer affirmatively, “yes, it does exist yet only insofar as we regard it as ‘me-myself-at-a-
distance”. I am the Other as much as he is myself. In other words, as Badiou states (via Hegel and Lacan), ‘I am only myself insofar as I am the Other of that Other for whom I am myself.’ The problem, however, is that one is put to work (recognize) more for the Other.

In contrast, we can translate identity politics’ principal complaint as the following: why does the Other who is totally himself not recognize me being totally myself? Hopefully, we have already succeeded to convey how meaningless such complaint is. Therefore, it is not even a question whether I contain the Other in me or not. What we must problematize is the relation to ourselves in which the Other resides. We should ask how it happened that I am assigned to work more for this interior Other?

[...] the person who works is actually the real winner. Indeed, the person who works to maintain their position must invent and create, while all the Other does is sit around in their easy chair being admired and recognized. Hegel even goes much further since he explains [...] the one who is the slave, the bondsman, who works for the master or lord, is the one who will invent a new figure of thought. The one who, simply to survive in this very difficult situation of not being recognized, will invent a new culture. That’s Hegel’s word. So intellectual creativity, in Hegel’s eyes, is a capacity of the person from whom a master has exacted what is ultimately false recognition, since what will prevail in the end, what will be recognized by everyone,

188 “What I cherish is that me-myself-at-a-distance which, precisely because it is ‘objectified’ for my consciousness, founds me as a stable construction, as an interiority accessible in its exteriority” (Alain Badiou, Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil, p. 21)
189 Badiou, “The Other”, p. 33
will be the result of the work of the one who was dominated. (Badiou, “The Other”, p. 32-33)

The objective externalization of otherness against the subjective internalization of it leads to two fundamentally distinct approaches to politics; *identity politics* (politics of the Other) versus *politics of the same*.

One might accuse the critique of politics of the Other (identity politics) leading into political passivity. The truth is quite the reverse. Actual passivity resides in every cell of the politics of the Other losing its radicalism to capitalism’s recuperation of it and thereby transforming it into an entertainment industry of commodity-subjectivities. The chance of politics is all the more on the side of *the same* against which we all must mobilize. Politics requires enemy, and the first enemy is the language of the hegemony, the language of political correctness that we have all the profound reasons to rebel against. Hence, we must embrace the language of the foreigner, of the stranger, of *the Visitor*, yet in a particular way that will be discussed soon.

*There is no one I could consider more Other than I myself am and therefore less human than I am. So, liberty, equality, and fraternity are in every case different ways of saying that otherness is immanent within all identity and consequently that the project of humanity as a whole [...] is based on the key issue of the immanence of otherness rather than its exteriority. Thus, the Other is the touchstone of affirmative existence [...] That is why the Other – the foreigner, the nomadic proletarian, the refugee – is the main category of any true politics.* (Badiou, Ibid, p. 34-35)
To better grasp the economically driven synchronicity between historical events, we must once again equip our thinking with theories such as *The Modern World-System* (Immanuel Wallerstein, 1974)\(^{190}\) and *The Synchronicity of the Nonsynchronous* (Ernst Bloch, 1935).\(^{191}\)

Doing so, will assist us enormously to understand why identity politics cannot be any more erroneous in understanding of our contemporary and historical issues as problems reducible to the questions of the Other and particular identities pertaining to particular geo-historical moments and nation-states.

The crucial lesson of *world-systems analysis* is that in our world the unit of socio-historical analysis must be the world-system and not the nation-state. Categorizing the world into “core”, “semi-peripheral”, and “peripheral” countries, Wallerstein demonstrates how the transnational division of labour across these three categories is interconnected. In other words, not only there is a simultaneous relationship between the economical (and of course socio-political) situations of these regions, but also, they are in an equiprimordial relationship. Each national situation, despite its different cultural system, is part of the same world-economy and the same inter-state system that all others, and thus would not exist without the others.

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\(^{190}\) Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (four volume), University of California Press, 2011

\(^{191}\) Ernst Bloch and Mark Ritter, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics”, New German Critique, No. 11 (Spring, 1977), Duke University Press, p. 22-38

A world-system is not the system of the world, but a system that is a world and which can be, most often has been, located in an area less than the entire globe. World-systems analysis argues that the units of social reality within which we operate, whose rules constrain us, are for the most part such world-systems (other than the now extinct, small minisystems that once existed on the earth). World-systems analysis argues that there have been thus far only two varieties of world-systems: world-economies and world-empires. A world-empire (examples, the Roman Empire, Han China) are large bureaucratic structures with a single political center and an axial division of labor, but multiple cultures. A world-economy is a large axial division of labor with multiple political centers and multiple cultures. In English, the hyphen is essential to indicate these concepts. “World system” without a hyphen suggests that there has been only one world-system in the history of the world. (Wallerstein, “Word-Systems Analysis”, p. 25)

Let us take one of the well-known cases of the Twentieth century “identity” related issues: Palestine. Under the aegis of world-system analysis we can see, for instance, that the long-standing question of Palestine cannot by any means be explained with journalistic, postcolonial, and identity politically related labels such as “Muslim-Jewish issue”, “Palestinian-Israeli conflict”, “anti-Semitism”, etc. Instead, we must situate the issue within the context of post-WWI world-economy. The Palestinian lands were handed over to the Zionists as the result of decline of Othman Empire, itself a result of the colonial expansion of the European world-economy. World-system analysis shows us that in order for one region (let us say the core countries) to accumulate capital and focus on ‘high-skill’ and ‘capital-intensive production’, it is
essential for peripheral countries to be subproletarianized and underdeveloped into centres of ‘low-skill’, ‘labour-intensive production’ and resources of cheap labour and raw materials. One can pay attention, for instance, to how Israel over the past few decades has been transformed from an agricultural entity — from the Kibbutz system employing Palestinian cheap labour to work on their previously owned lands — to a global market economy and a ‘welfare-warfare’ state, and thereby, becoming one of the main engines of neoliberal capitalism within the Middle East.192

Therefore, the question is, as it has always been, land, raw material, and transnational exploitation of labour to extract surplus value (and not necessarily this people or that country). If over here the indigenous were slaughtered, and over there Muslims were thrown into the sea; if Allende was overthrown in an American coups in 1973 following the fate of Mossadegh in 1953; if one day Bin Laden (and the Mujahideen) was fully funded by American as an “Anti-Soviet Warrior”193, and another day thrown into the sea as the culprit for 9/11 (or, the beginning of the contemporary time); if the “Islamic-ness” of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was first tolerated by Western capitalism — as then it could function as a barrier between the Soviet bloc and the oil of the Persian and Arab countries around the Persian Gulf — and then turned into a key node in the “Axis of Evil”, and so many other ifs; we must try to understand all this as an interrelated world-system and not a constellation of singular cases. This is a world-history, and not the history of this isolated moment or that particular country. If there is a matter of identity and of the Other in any of these cases, it is only so at the level of their not so thinly veiled superstructure. The choice is ours, either to remain amused in lamenting the fiction of the non-existing Other in our

193 A description used for Bin Laden in the Independent News Paper article, December 6, 1993
particular stories, or to unite beyond the level of particularities/identities and rebel against the same that the current world-system and its language of political correctness are.

We can also think of the modern world-system under the light of Ernst Bloch’s synchronicity of the nonsynchronous, which attempts to conceptually grasp the transnational multitemporal disposition of the capitalist process of modernization, which involves, but most importantly necessitates, ‘uneven temporal’ social development in different geographical spheres of the world. Or as Jameson puts it, it involves ‘the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history — handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance.’

Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others. Rather, they carry earlier things with them, things which are intricately involved. One has one’s times according to where one stands corporeally, above all in terms of classes. Times older than the present continue to effect older strata; here it is easy to return or dream one’s way back to older times. Certainly, a person who is simply awkward and who for that reason is not up to the demands of his position, is only personally unable to keep up. But what if there are other reasons why he does not fit into a very modern organization, such as the after-effects of peasant descent, what if he is an earlier type? In general, different years resound in

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the one that has just been recorded and prevails. Moreover, they do not emerge in a hidden way as previously but rather, they contradict the Now in a very peculiar way, awry, from the rear. [...] The workers are no longer alone with themselves and the bosses. Many earlier forces, from quite a different Below, are beginning to slip between. (Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics”, p. 22)

Over and above a great deal of false nonsynchronism [non-simultaneity] there is this one in particular: Nature, and more than that, the ghost of history comes very easily to the desperate peasant, to the bankrupt petty bourgeois; the depression which releases the ghost takes place in a country with a particularly large amount of pre-capitalist material. It is important to ask whether Germany is not more undeveloped, even more vulcanic than, for instance, France, in terms of its power. Certainly, it has not formed and evened out capitalist ratio nearly as synchronously. (Ibid, p. 30)

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Within this context I establish my theses: First, the key element, and/or the core drive in the constitution of capitalist time is the notion of the Other, thus, the Other is a figure of temporality. Second, the Other is assigned to contribute the production of subjectivities (false desires) that induce and accelerate both the physical distribution of global workforce — locally and globally — as well as the construction of the capitalist psychological notion of futurity that is essential for such a distribution.
What we can see in the constitution of the Other as a figure of time, is indeed a conjunctural structure consisting of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and Bloch’s *synchronicity of the nonsynchronous*. Such a conjunction indicates that the Other not only is an immanent figure of the Subject (Hegel), but also is the synthesis of an internal dialectical entity; that of the simultaneity of two non-simultaneous times (Bloch). The Other in this sense oversees the processes of desiring a possibility for our *self* in the “future”, which is *at the same time* desiring the current reality of my Other in their “present”. To put this syntactically, this dialectic would read as that between the *present participle* of the master that at the same time is the slave’s desiring *future perfect*. Capitalist futurity and capitalist desire are produced at the intersection of these two tenses. But that is not all. This temporal structure of desire functions to suppress the possibility of imagining non-standard futures. Therefore, not only identity is constituted by the subjective internalization of the Other, but also, under capitalism, we must conceive of the Other as a *socio-economic* notion of temporality. In other words, I argue that under the logic of late capitalism, it is insufficient to regard of *the synchronicity of the nonsynchronous* only as the external logic of uneven socio-economic development. We should, also, conceive of it as a force that psychologically constitutes individual subjectivity.

In contrast with the capitalist promotion of the fictional Other, it is up to us to devise discourses emphasizing the temporal conception of the Other. Doing so, will help increase the subversive tension between the *core* and the *periphery*, and thereby, imagine non-standard futures. One way to increase that tension passes through the realization that under the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, and with the omnipresence of its English cybernetic, media, and discursive apparatuses, both the core and the periphery are now *in* each of us functioning as two
synchronized non-simultaneous temporalities — the central master and the peripheral slave.

*English is the Other: The Visitor and the Synchronicity of the Nonsynchronous*

One of the characteristic features of the contemporary world is that the English language is globally conditioning the possibilities of thinking. It does so through forces that its symbolic, social, and cybernetic apparatuses exert upon bodies. In other words — using our Heideggerian analysis here — in the contemporary world, one is either marked and affected by voicing/responding to the speaking of English, or one is equally left unmarked and still affected by not being able to voice that speaking. To put it differently, one is either an English-speaking-thinking subject or one is simply defined as the negation of it. Therefore, the Visitor is to be conceived of as performer of the negation of the negation. With the omnipresence of English every peripheral language (vis-à-vis English) attempting to connect to the world becomes a torsion of English.

From the above vantage point, and with an eye on the Hegelian *Lord-Bondsman* dialectic, as well as Ernst Bloch’s concept of *the synchronicity of the nonsynchronous* as explicated by Fredric Jameson\(^{195}\), the question of English will be investigated within the paradigm of the “Other”.

The Visitor is well aware that the Other (i.e., English) is not a mere dialogic exteriority (i.e., a purified, absolute Other) and internally constitutes his own subject-figure. Therefore, the language of the Visitor can by no means be a language of “identity” or of any cultural particularity — it is rather an always-already translated and translational language, non-identical with itself. The Visitor is irreducible to one’s body or language. It is a syntax/grammar counter-symbolizing the grammar of English. The Visitor could only do so if he conceives of English and the institution of art as the Other.

Not only the ESL Visitor does not objectively externalize English as a barrier at which his desires are rejected, but also, he perfectly knows that English is in him and internally constitutes his subjectivity. In this sense English is a figure of the subject. We can now see how the Visitor’s task, instead of reenforcing the particularities of his own peripheral language (identity politics), is to transform English as the internal master constituting the world’s subjectivity.

Every English-speaking subject is also non-English-speaking, and every non-English speaking subject is definitely an English-speaking subject. The problem is, of course, the extremely unequal struggle for recognition between the two, the asymmetrical proportion of this dialectic.

In relation to the dominant discursive, rhetorical, and operational material of the world (be it that of art or politics), it is important to understand the topology of the thought-activist Visitor as a localization of the stranger, or the bondsman, who translates, and for whom the master is not an external objectivity (objective Other) but the internal constituent of the subject.

It is only the slave who can create new figures of thought (Hegel). This is equally important with
respect to the languages of the periphery and the semi-periphery vis-à-vis English. For languages of the peripheries to be conscious of their own being (to be for-themselves), they must be in relationship with another conscious being (a core being) other than themselves i.e., the English language. Once again: ‘Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness.’ The question we must attend to, however, is the quality of this relationship to the Other conscious being

What is crucial, is the quality of this relationship to the core Other consciousness that the desiring of whose desire constitutes our subjectivity. If there is a lesson that we can take from Lacan, that lesson is the realization that desire is the thick absence in which man creates himself. Thus, for the Visitor to disrupt the established external discourse, he must first reinvent himself through an internal intervention into the temporality of this dialectics of desiring.

To become political, the Visitor first has to rebel against the enemy inside. This rebellion is not to be confused with what Žižek calls the reduction of politico-economic struggle to ‘the pseudopsychoanalytic drama of the subject unable to confront its inner traumas.’ Rather, it is to help the subject recognize that the lack of recognition is not rooted in the “difference” of the Other but elsewhere, i.e., where the money is — in the realm of political economy. This is an internal contest whose external manifestation is a specific Visitable form of language use. A language that is neither reducible to the language of identity politics nor is it aspiring to become the language of the master. As Deleuze and Guattari put it: ‘[philosophy] uses sentences of a standard language to express something that does not belong to the order of opinion or even of

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In this sense, the language of the Visitor is the synthesis of an interventionist dialectic between the language of the periphery and that of the core. This means that the language of the Visitor is a modified and paradoxical version of the language of the master. When it comes out, it sounds like the master’s voice, yet due to its paradoxical nature, it cannot be authenticated by the established discourse (the transcendental). Once mobilized (written about, discussed, used, etc.), such a paradoxical language, creates its own discourse, in which the master is no longer the same old lord, yet a non-standard future. Lacan was right in telling the revolutionary students at Vincennes University that ‘what you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one’\textsuperscript{197}, yet what he did not say there, is that there is nothing wrong with desiring a subversive master.

\[\text{[...] capitalism not only aimed at the expropriation of productive activity, but also,} \]

\[\text{and above all, at the alienation of language itself, of the linguistic and} \]

\[\text{communicative nature of human beings, of that logos in which Heraclitus identifies} \]

\[\text{the Common. The extreme form of the expropriation of the Common is the spectacle,} \]

\[\text{in other words, the politics in which we live. But this also means that what we} \]

\[\text{encounter in the spectacle is our very linguistic nature inverted. For this reason, the} \]

\[\text{spectacle’s violence is so destructive; but, for the same reason, the spectacle still} \]

contains something like a positive possibility - and it is our task to use this possibility against it. [...] In the society of the spectacle language not only constitutes itself as an autonomous sphere, but also no longer reveals anything at all — or, better yet, it reveals the nothingness of all things. (Giorgio Agamben, “Shekinah” from “Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle”, Means Without End, p. 82 – 84).

These words of Agamben, attest to the effectiveness of the Visitor’s intervention into the language of the master. The Visitor is well aware that what satisfies the master the most, and thus, perpetuates the condition of the dialectics, is to have the slave amused in claiming his own particularities — being a slave, having an identity independent of the Other, being a victim, etc. What the master cannot tolerate at all is a singular act from the slave without claiming an identity.

In the final analysis, the state can recognize any claim for identity [...] But what the state cannot tolerate in any way is that singularities form a community without claiming an identity, that human beings co-belong without a representable condition of belonging (being Italian, working-class, Catholic, terrorist, etc.) And yet, the state of the spectacle — inasmuch as it empties and nullifies every real identity and substitutes the public and public opinion for the people and the general will — is precisely what produces massively from within itself singularities that are no longer characterized either by any social identity or by any real condition of belonging: singularities that are truly whatever singularities. (Ibid, p. 86)
Such whatever singularities are, indeed and in practice, particularities that are advertised as singularities. They are absolutely incapable of fomenting anything universal. We remember that the singular is is that which “although identifiable as a procedure at work in a situation, is nevertheless subtracted from every predicative description.”

When the spectacle ‘substitutes the public opinion for the people’, the spectacle replaces the people with doxa, and we saw (via Heidegger) that doxa (idle talk) is that which speaks in us. Thus, in the final analysis, the Visitor knows that under the spectacle, language substitutes people. In this sense, everywhere that there is a paradox there is also something of the matter of people being reinvented. Against the spectacle, the people is paradox and language ought to be paradoxical — Hence, the language of the Visitor.

Section II: The Problem of Abstraction

Introduction

In the previous section, I demonstrated how the potential existing in the discourse of identity politics leverages the problem of reified and incorporated identities, which in practice aid the state apparatuses to suppress the possibilities for politico-economic struggle.

198 Badiou, Theoretical Writings, Chapter 12: “Eight Theses on the Universal”, 4, A Universal Initially Presents Itself as a Decision about the Undecidable, P. 150
This section will focus on the problem of “abstraction” as the other wing of the contemporary problem-set. It will first investigate the questions of “spectatorship” and “contemplation” with respect to the notion of the “Spectacle” as a regime of both social and aesthetic abstraction. Secondly, it will attend to the problem of “artistic abstraction” and proposes the notion of Visitorability as a protocol to surmount the formal stagnation of contemporary arts. In tandem with the discussion of the previous section, the critique of this section will illuminate the necessity for the encounter-based theory of the Visitor.

Part I. Spectator and Contemplation; The Inadequacy of an Abstraction: Critique of Jacques Rancière’s “The Emancipated Spectator”

Jacques Rancière is of course well known for his discussion of aesthetics and politics, but at the same time, a recurring topos of his theoretical edifice is his critique of an underlying Platonism which, according to him, informs the philosophical presuppositions of postmodernism and critical theory. In The Emancipated Spectator too, Rancière offers a critique of the Platonic idea of mimesis and its contemporary reformulation in Guy Debord’s remarks on the Spectacle. Debord’s Platonism, Rancière argues, explains the erroneous presuppositions on which his theory of the Spectacle is founded.

We need to see what kind of relationship does Rancière’s argument have to the philosophical speculations and/or the empirical traditions of art’s history, and perhaps what happens when one forces to treat both in a coordinated way? In any case, I argue that Rancière’s criticism of the
Spectacle is inconsistent and his method of abstraction in his theory of the emancipated spectator fails to propose a *practical* alternative.

Let us see what is the argument that *the Emancipated Spectator* sets forth.

Rancière’s “spectator” is an abstraction set up on the basis of the assumption that there is no ‘obvious theoretical relationship between the intellectual emancipation and the question of the spectator’\(^{199}\). Such lack of relation, argues Rancière, provides a chance to propose a radical reconstruction of the ‘network of presuppositions that place the question of spectator at the heart of the discussions between art and politics’\(^{200}\). In an attempt to fill such a gap, and in contrast to Debord, he strives to argue for the existence of an emancipatory capacity inherent in “viewing”. For him, there won’t be any emancipation unless we entirely abandon, once and for all, all the existing presuppositions that, for hundreds of years, have determined our understanding of the roles that are set problematically between the spectator and the actor. Accordingly, for Rancière, such an abandonment will help us, first, arrive at an understanding that *to view* is itself nothing but an act, and ultimately, transform the problematic distribution of roles between the actor and the observer.

Rancière arrives to this proposition by identifying the working of the Platonic critique of theatre at the heart of Debord’s denunciation of the spectator — in other words, by demonstrating how that denunciation is already presupposed. Plato’s critique of theatre, Rancière argues, serves as a foundation for both modern and post-modern attempts to restore theatre to its essence, i.e., to a

\(^{199}\) *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 1-2

\(^{200}\) Ibid, p. 2
form of living community, in which the participants are to confront themselves as a collective.\textsuperscript{201} From a Platonic standpoint, ‘being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing’, and second, ‘it is the opposite of acting’\textsuperscript{202}. Therefore, theatre must be ‘abolished in favour of what it prohibits; knowledge and action’.\textsuperscript{203}

Rancière argues the reason that the critique of Spectacle is essentially Platonic, is because if the true Platonic theatre — \textit{a theatre without spectator}\textsuperscript{204} — embodies the living community, then to restore theatre to its essence requires a radical critique of “the Spectacle”. This is why, Rancière continues, for Plato, there is an opposition between \textit{choros}, as the truth of theatre, and theatre as the simulacrum of the Spectacle, in which one’s absolute chance for learning is replaced by one’s mere seduction by images.\textsuperscript{205}

From this Platonic perspective, Rancière concludes, the critique of Spectacle remains the only key to help humans repossess what they have been dispossessed of. In other words, to help humans repossess that which due to the tyranny of the Spectacle has been alienated and therefore must be taken hold of again — i.e., \textit{the human essence}. And this, for Rancière, is precisely where the problem is situated.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid}, p. 5
\item \textit{Ibid}, p. 2
\item It is, therefore, important to note that knowing (not knowledge) and acting, in this sense, are not two entities derivable from or based on one another, but mutually interconnected — i.e., they are \textit{equiprimordial}. I will come back to this when I unfold the concept of \textit{the Visitor}. Here we can see a variation of the question of the \textit{contradictory unity of theory and practice}. We argued before that knowledge is a process that must commence its movement from practice to theory and then back to practice again. This way, knowledge can be conceived of as the action of knowing, and action as that which is guided by knowledge, and ultimately, beyond this process exists a \textit{profound reason} vindicating the rightness of this process, which I argued is itself a theoretical conviction.
\item \textit{Ibid}, p. 2-3
\item \textit{Ibid}, p. 6
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
To Contemplate or Not, This Is the [False] Question

Through this analysis Rancière launches a general critique against the romantic vision of truth as non-separation, and in particular against Guy Debord’s denunciation of the Spectacle.

According to Rancière even though the facade of Debord’s critique of the Spectacle seems to be anti-Platonic, the very Platonic idea of mimesis provides the basis upon which Debord’s critique of the Spectacle is situated. To see what exactly is being criticized in Rancière’s critique of Debord, let us place here a rather lengthy quote from The Emancipated Spectator:

What in fact is the essence of the Spectacle for Guy Debord? It is exteriority. The Spectacle is the reign of vision, and vision is exteriority – that is, self-dispossession. The malady of spectating man can be summed up in a brief formula: ‘the more he contemplates, the less he lives’. The formula seems to be anti-Platonic. In fact, the theoretical foundations of the critique of the Spectacle are borrowed, via Marx, from Feuerbach’s critique of religion. The basis of both critiques consists in the Romantic vision of truth as non-separation. But that idea is itself dependent on Plato’s conception of mimesis. The ‘contemplation’ denounced by Debord is contemplation of the appearance separated from its truth; it is the Spectacle of the suffering produced by that separation: ‘Separation is the alpha and omega of the Spectacle.’ What human beings contemplate in the Spectacle is the activity they have been
robbed of; it is their own essence become alien, turned against them, organizing a collective world whose reality is that dispossession.

Thus, there is no contradiction between the critique of the Spectacle and the quest for a theatre restored to its original essence. ‘Good’ theatre is “one that uses its separated reality in order to abolish it. The paradox of the spectator pertains to the curious device that adopts Plato’s prohibition of theatre for theatre. Accordingly, it is these principles that should be re-examined today. Or rather, it is the network of presuppositions, the set of equivalences and oppositions, that underpin their possibility: equivalences between theatrical audience and community, “gaze and passivity”, exteriority and separation, mediation and simulacrum; oppositions between the collective and the individual, the image and living reality, activity and passivity, self-ownership and alienation” (ibid, P. 6-7).

Now, it seems to me that there is a subtle fallacy in Rancière’s criticism. But before explicating this fallacy let me emphasize here that we must be able to detect and address such a fallacy regardless of our position toward Debord or the situationist’s remarks on the critique of the Spectacle. Rancière’s critique of Debord is principally pointed at Debord’s denunciation of the realm of “vision” as that of exteriority. In other words, Rancière accuses Debord’s denunciation of our “contemplation” of the Spectacle, and by arguing how contemplation is a natural human condition, he attempts to prove wrong the entire theoretical edifice of Debord for being built on an erroneous presupposition. In fact, Rancière criticizes Debord’s denunciation of a particular kind of contemplation, that is, contemplation under the regime of the Spectacle, in the name of the generic idea of contemplation as a natural human condition. This appears to be a deductive fallacy, that is, deducing a logical conclusion by setting an equivalence between a particularity
and a generality. But Spectacle it is not really difficult to see what Debord identifies as the source of alienation in the consumer society of the Spectacle, is not contemplation *qua* contemplation, i.e., contemplation as an epiphenomenon of our basic cognitive faculty. Rather, it is ‘the alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object’ that Debord is critical of:

*The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives.* (Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, §30)\(^{206}\)

For the sake of our argument, let us momentarily suppose that Rancière is right. I mean, let us think if the object of Debord’s critique was contemplation as a generic category and not a particular type of contemplation. If so, then how could he justify the strategic effectiveness of the “emancipatory” tactics he and the situationists avidly advocated? In other words, how could *détournement, dérive, psychogeography, Unitary Urbanism*, etc., in tandem with the *paradoxes* they claim to instigate, be explained if Debord’s critique was aimed at “contemplation” *qua* contemplation?

Let us look at *détournement* as an instance here. By definition, détournement is ‘the integration of past or present artistic production into a superior environmental construction. [...] *détournement from within old cultural spheres is a form of propaganda, which lays witness to

\(^{206}\) Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Black & Red, 1970
the depletion and waning importance of these spheres.” Détournements are mostly created by hijacking existing “spectacular” images, posters, comics, etc., and then subjecting them to subversive language-uses — i.e., replacing the original language with a situationist one — which in turn, would destabilize the doxa of the original image. Such a tactic is claimed to be effective due to the paradoxes the détourned language-image montages could set forth. Despite its claim to be “revolutionary”, confronted with a détournement the beholder is still dealing with the economy of an image, that is, with vision and seeing. So, we should ask Rancière, how a détournement and its paradox could ever be understood, sensed, or perceived without presupposing active “contemplation” of its beholders? In other words, if all images induce contemplation and are thus ontologically “bad things”, then what is the point of producing détourned images?

Therefore, at least to honour history, we should acknowledge that the type of contemplation condemned by Debord is contemplation in the form of recognizing oneself in the dominant image of need, which dialectically prevents one from understanding one’s own true desires.

the more [man] accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the Spectacle in relation to the active man appears in that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator

207 “Definitions”, Internationale Situationiste, Issue #1, central bulletin published by the sections of the situationist international, Director: G.-E. Debord, Editorial Committee: Mohamed Dahou, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, Maurice Wyckaert, June 1958
does not feel at home anywhere, because the Spectacle is everywhere. (Debord, 
Society of the Spectacle, §30)

It is also important to note that the term “contemplation” is not a main concept in Society of the Spectacle. The primacy in Debord’s above declaration, is on the side of the term profit and not contemplation. For it is the ‘profit of the contemplated object’ that, for Debord, becomes the drive behind the separation of truth and the appearance of the image – the exteriority!208

Whether we ascribe any contemporary value to the Debordian (or the Situationist) tactics for conquering the Spectacle; apart from whether or not we think that reversal of the reversal is still an efficient strategy to retrieve the robbed off human essence (as if it ever was); or even more fundamentally, regardless of whether we identify with those who could still lament that ‘everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation’209; or if conversely, we hold that human nature is to have no nature at all — aside from all these — we should note that Rancière’s criticism of Debord is made possible by a logical fallacy. Recognizing this fallacy does not necessarily presuppose one’s vindication of the academic or the bohemian fetishistic relationship to Society of the Spectacle. Rather, it helps us understand that Rancière’s seemingly

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208 From the first English translation of the Society of the Spectacle published by Black & Red (1970) to its revised version (1977) ‘incorporating numerous improvements suggested by friends and the critics of the first translation’, the term “profit” remains unchanged in all these English versions. Nevertheless, in Ken Knabb translation (published in 2014 by the Bureau of Public Secrets), the term profit is dropped, and the translation reads: ‘The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects […]’. To me, it is not clear at all why the term “profit” is dropped and wherefrom the term “reinforcement” has come, specifically since the original text reads: L’aliénation du spectateur au profit de l’objet contemplé. Some argue that the reason for such a translation might be due to Debord having not used the term “profit” it in the economic sense of the term. Regardless, even though the term profit is not a literal synonym of the economic “surplus value”, it is still the drive behind alienation into either a direct consumption of goods, or to a form of being demanded by the capitalist logic of endless accumulation. Therefore, of whatever signification this term might be, I argue that its function eventually will bring about economic profitability.

209 Society of the Spectacle, Separation Perfected, §1
compelling argument to emancipate the spectator, is really nothing more than a reformulation of the problem cloaked in the skin of a solution. 210

While Rancière’s argument principally pertains to two socio-historical phenomena, i.e., art and spectator, it is surprisingly situated in an ahistorical bubble. Due to the contingencies of history and various determinations of social practices, both art and the spectator, as socio-historical phenomena, are in a constant state of flux and change. In his critical review of Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator*, Dave Beech points at this issue. For him, the characteristic error of Rancière’s argument is that he presupposes that discursive questions about art can simply be settled through discursive and theoretical debates isolated from the contingencies of practice. If we translate Beech’s argument into our own discussion of the thought-activist unity of theory and practice, we can say that the process of knowing what art is or ought to be must commence its movement from practice to theory and back to practice again.

*My purpose is [...] to show that Ranciere's generalisations, which might seem convincing within his abstract argument, have no sticking power. [...] Ranciere's error is to assume that abstract questions about art can be settled through abstract debate. This error can be avoided if it is understood that controversies about what art is or ought to be are rarely if ever fought on abstract terms (we don't work out what art is and then proceed to develop instantiations of the general definition).*

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210 For a more compelling critiques of Debord, see, for instance, Régis Debray’s *Remarks on the Spectacle* (New Left Review, 1995), which precedes Rancière’s text by almost a decade, and Rancière’s text is rather reminiscent of it both rhetorically and with regard to its content.
It must be stressed here that it is never a question of identifying one variant over another, as if, say, beauty is always preferable to the grotesque, or participation is always preferable to solitary contemplation. The key is to see these specific disputes, which always have far-reaching ramifications for art per se, as conjunctural. That is to say, it is necessary to avoid the temptation - or pressure - to take sides, affirmatively or critically, once and for all, abstracted from the contingencies of practice and history. It is important to insist, on the contrary, that what is at stake in these detailed questions about art changes according to specific historical conditions. (Beech, “Encountering Art”)

Beech’s point that Ranciere’s argument is ahistorical is definitely true, however, my purpose so far was to show that Rancière’s argument is also logically inconsistent even within its own abstract parameters. Hence, contrary to Beech, I cannot see how Rancière’s argument can even be settled within the abstract realm.

To continue with the issue of ahistoricality, we can see that Rancière’s critique of Debord is based on repudiating Debord’s famous assertion ‘the more one contemplates the less he lives’ (SOS, §30). Rancière’s aim is to liberate both the spectator and his habit of contemplation from a certain historical sin (i.e., “spectator is passive”). But he fails to see that the type of contemplation denounced by Debord is incommensurable to the one that exists, or ought to exist, between art and its perceiver. In other words, what is at stake is the modality of contemplation, not contemplation per se. The question is which mode of contemplation might result in

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emancipation and which mode might bring about alienation? It is rather unclear why Rancière refuses to do the same thing here that, for example, he did when repudiating the overarching character of Althusser’s *ideological structures* in determining social roles. There, Rancière feels the necessity of examining *historical* configurations and discovers the documents of Gabriel Gauny. It is on the basis of these same documents that he launches, against so-called scientific presuppositions, his thesis of aesthetics as ‘distributions of roles, senses, and positions’, and reconfiguration of one’s relationship with the perceived world.

*JR:* I decided on a critique of Althusser, and of all theories which claimed that Marxist science had to help those people who live in a state of illusion to attain consciousness. [...] To test my critique I would have to take on a historical study that would allow me to gain a genuine understanding of labour history, and of history from the bottom up. So, I set about doing work on the labour archives, about the period in which Marx began to write. [...] But my great discovery was the documents of Gauny, a carpenter from the nineteenth century who was a Saint-Simonist [...] There were eight boxes at the archive, with texts, letters, poems, the collected writings of a Saint-Simonist carpenter who had experienced the nineteenth century as a writer. Here, someone ‘from below’ had left traces! [...] I was searching for a true workers’ thinking, or people’s thinking, whose foundations lay in the culture of the people, the workers. It then became clear to me that the workers’ activism had come about through an attempt to liberate themselves from a particular workers’ identity that was defined by domination.
PE: To become part of the bourgeoisie?

JR: To reach a way of thinking and of perceiving the world where one no longer thinks as a worker, but rather begins to have a share in all forms of culture and thought which the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals and the different factions of the ruling class had hitherto claimed for themselves. The bourgeoisie, the great writers, said to the workers, ‘Write Folk songs!’ but the workers wanted to write tragedies not folk songs. (Rancière and Engelmann, Politics and Aesthetics, p. 5-9)

It is not clear why Rancière refrains from the same methodology in The Emancipated Spectator. How is it that workers are historical subjects, but art spectators are generic homo sapiens whose ability to contemplate is a “natural condition” that remains impervious to historical examination? Rancière’s argument refuses to take into account the fact that despite the universality of contemplation, its conditions are immensely social and historical. How could we not see the diverse yet determining effects that historically changing technological/ideological apparatuses of image production impose upon the spectators’ mode of contemplation? Is it the same, for instance, to contemplate the grandiosity of the Fuji Mountain while sitting at its hillside, or while reading Kobayashi Issa’s haiku, ‘Climb Mount Fuji/ O snail/ but slowly, slowly,’ or when watching a “hyperreal” commercial for a three-day tour of the Fuji Mountain on Instagram Reels? Of course, they all demand one’s contemplation. The question, however, is whether all these three different instances of contemplation follow the same modality, and if there exists an equal quality for emancipation in all of them? Or, if I pose my question here in Debord’s words,

does the “profit” (benefit) of the Fuji Mountain as a contemplated object remain the same in these three different cases?

We know how directly linked one’s contemplation is to one’s subjectivity (not the Subject) that is externally produced and internally embodied under the cloak of “desire” — a unilateral movement from the socio-economic to the psychologic. In Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity213, Maurizio Lazzarato shows how the production of subjectivity in capitalism takes place through two different structural vectors of ‘social subjection’ and ‘machinic enslavement’.

Social subjection equips us with a subjectivity, assigning us an identity, a sex, a body, a profession, a nationality, and so on. In response to the needs of the social division of labor, it in this way manufactures individuated subjects, their consciousness, representations, and behavior. But the production of the individuated subject is coupled with a completely different process and a completely different hold on subjectivity that proceeds through desubjectivation. Machinic enslavement dismantles the individuated subject, consciousness, and representations, acting on both the pre-individual and supra individual levels. (Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, P. 12)

We can see, via Lazzarato, how subjectivities are produced on a daily basis and how they constantly mutate along with socio-historical changes. ‘Subjective mutation’ takes place through

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213 Maurizio Lazzarato, Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity, Trans. Joshua David Jordan, Semiotext(e), 2014
a paradoxical relationship between discursive and non-discursive apparatuses: between social subjection through media, school, information, social network, institution, culture, etc. on the one hand; and the asignifying and existential ‘affirmation and the apprehension of the self, others, and the world’ determined by a machinic assemblage, or through machinic enslavement on the other hand.214

Therefore, Rancière’s argument fails to take into account the socio-economic structural effects, which determine the very modality of contemplation. But to grasp the historically changing quality of the social structures that condition our modes of contemplation, itself requires us to

214 Maurizio Lazzarato, Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity, P. 16

It is important to note that Lazaratto also criticizes Badiou, and contemporary critical theory in general, for a fatal lack of accounting for the “machinic enslavement” in their characteristic devotion to the questions of subject and subjectivation. Such a critique can be considered a social critique of a metaphysical category. Lazzarato writes:

‘Among contemporary critical theories (those of Badiou, cognitive capitalism, Judith Butler, Slajov Žižek, Rancière, etc.), it is largely a question of subjectivity, the subject, subjectivation, and the distribution of the sensible. But what they neglect is how capitalism specifically functions – that is, through "machinic enslavements." [...] Nowhere in their analyses do we encounter these technical and social machines in which "humans" and "non-humans" function together as component parts in corporate, welfare-state, and media assemblages. Rancière and Badiou have radically elided them altogether. Thus, machines and machinic assemblages can be found everywhere except in contemporary critical theory.’ (Ibid, p. 13).

Or in another place, he criticizes Badiou for assigning only a political (discursive) entailment to the subject and for overlooking the force of the non-discursive (economic-machinic) as another constituent of the subject:

‘the production of subjectivity cannot be separated from “economics”, it cannot be separated from “politics”. How must we conceive of a political subjectivation? All political subjectivation entail a mutation and a reconvention of subjectivity that affects existence. It cannot be only political in the sense that both Rancière and Badiou give the term’ (Ibid, p. 16).

Such a critique is due to an inaccurate reading of Badiou’s formal theory of the Subject, because it assumes Badiou’s account of the Subject as a state of being, a person, and in one word, a subjectivity. But, as discussed earlier, Badiou’s Subject is distinct from subjectivity. It is an anti-logical (anti-transcendental) process toward an inhuman truth, summoned by the trace of the Event, which itself exceeds signification, descriptive predicates (language), and in one word, the discursive. It is literally for its being a non-discursive process that it requires one’s fidelity, because without faith there is no way to maintain fidelity to something that does not [discursively] make any sense with respect to the established logic of the world. The Subject is in this sense the faithful process of counter-subjectivity. But Lazaratto is talking about capitalism’s production of subjectivity through a dispositif. Hence, not only Lazaratto is wrong in assigning a discursive entailment to the Badiouian Subject, but also the entire point, for which thought-activism stands as a way out, is actually that Badiou’s philosophy lacks a proper account for the roles of language and [counter] discursive practices that can bring about the formation of the Subject of the inhuman truth.
first understand contemplation as a *mode*. These structural effects, however, should not be confused with a sort of cause-effect relationship that is classically thought to exist between the contemplator and the contemplated.

The classical cause-effect relationship assumes a ‘gulf of knowledge’ between the passive contemplator and the active contemplated. Rancière suggests, and correctly so, that such a gulf, created by and maintaining a ‘stultifying logic of pedagogy’, must be problematized and entirely abandoned. However, what Rancière does not consider in his critique of Debord is the fact that in contemplating under the Spectacle, one is dominated by images whose nature of signification is super intentional. In the *Rhetoric of the Image*, Roland Barthes explicates the nature and mechanisms of this type of image in the case of advertising.

*We will study the advertising image. Why? Because in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading: the advertising image is frank, or at least emphatic.* (Barthes, p. 33)

We know that Rancière is heavily critical of Barthes for his overarching structural and discursive reading of images, signs, culture, myths, etc., for not giving the viewer a chance to be actively affected in a supra discursive level, for not allowing him to compose his own possible poetry

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215 *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 11-12
from the image he is looking at. For Rancière, in structuralism, everything is overtly determined structurally and is analyzable scientifically. It is from this background that in *The Future of the Image*, Rancière is surprised how the structuralist Roland Barthes of *Mythologies* can also be the poetic writer of *Camera Lucida*, who now leaves a room for the immediate wordless, senseless, pathetic, effect of an image (photograph) — *punctum*. ‘It is unlikely that the author of *Mythologies* believed in the para-scientific phantasmagoria which makes photography a direct emanation of the body displayed.’ 217

Here, in talking about Barthes, Rancière commits the same error as he does in his critique of Debord. He situates his critique on the abstract level where all images are the same and all acts of seeing are impervious to external modes of conditioning. Why? Maybe because, for him, to see is simply a “natural” human condition. With Rancière, there is no substantial difference between the images put in motion in a reality TV show and those in Robert Bresson’s *Au hasard Balthazar*. And if there are qualitative differences between them, the viewer can simply discern them from one another and figure out how to ‘venture into the forest of signs’ and compose his own poetry. 218

> The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of things and signs surrounding it, so as

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218 Although such a reference has not been made in Rancière’s text “[...] comme il a appris à s’aventurer dans la forêt des choses et des signes [...]”, the similar expression to ‘forest of signs’ is first used by Charles Baudelaire in his *Fleurs du mal* — “forest of symbols”:

> “La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles [...]”
to take its place among human beings: by observing and comparing one thing with another, a sign with a fact, a sign with another sign. If an illiterate knows only one prayer by heart, she can compare that knowledge with what she does not yet know: the words of this prayer as written down on paper. She can learn, one sign after the other, the relationship between what she does not know and what she does know. She can do this if, at each step, she observes what is before her, says what she has seen, and verifies what she has said. From this ignoramus, spelling out signs, to the scientist who constructs hypotheses, the same intelligence is always at work – an intelligence that translates signs into other signs and proceeds by comparisons and illustrations in order to communicate its intellectual adventures and understand what another intelligence is endeavouring to communicate to it. (Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, P. 10)

Let us examine the first line from the above quote: ‘The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue.’ We know that we learn our mother tongue in an indexical manner, in which the contiguity of enunciation in tandem with pointing and showing performed by the mother’s body creates a situation in which everything is implicit. Mother points at a thing and simultaneously enunciates a sonic signifier that is possibly attributed to that thing. Therefore, in learning our mother tongue we only posit what is being pointed at is one and the same thing as what is being enunciated through mother’s voice. In other words, in learning our mother tongue the world is just on the verge of being given to us already interpreted in language. The toddler still oscillates in the world of sense experience yet is right at the threshold of the world of meanings.
The targeted viewer of an advertising image, however, has been long living within language. Here, seeing is already determined by language. In other words, in advertising one is dealing with a loaded abstraction, abstraction in the sense of an absence: the absence of the mother. The simplest question here is, why would an advertising image leave its viewer with any chance to bother with implications, with assumptions, with a maybe-yes-maybe-not? With the pathetic, senseless, wordless effect of a punctum? Advertising images leave no room for an aesthetics of contingency, or, the contingency of significations. Such contingency, I will argue later, is an attribute of a Visitorable work of art.

When Barthes says that ‘the signified of [the] message’ of advertising images ‘is formed a priori’, he means that the image presupposes a guaranteed transmission of meaning to the viewer at the level of production. This a priori meaning is literally the “profit” of the object in which Debord detects the alienation of the spectator. Contemplating images carrying messages whose transmission to spectators is guaranteed because their signifieds are formed a priori, is one thing, and contemplating Mona Hatum’s Cube, for instance, is something altogether different. The types of contemplation at work while one is standing before a foggy lake, or when a philosopher is clearing off in the woods, or even while a child is learning their mother tongue, are not to be identified with the type of contemplation demanded by an image of the H&M’s commercial blown-up in a shopping mall. The latter as an image carries a guaranteed message about what “success”, “progress”, “beauty”, “good sex”, “true self”, “identity”, “difference” and in one word, “a truly joyful being”, would look like, when the viewer contemplates itself styled as the advertised image. And too much poetic ‘venturing into the forest of signs’ of that image (if there
is a forest to venture in at all), would ultimately lead to an ideological exposé of a series of clichés, and this H&M already knows way better than Rancière.

If there is anything common between the different modes of contemplation demanded by each of the above cases, it is certainly minimal. Each is supported by a different regime of image construction, which conditions its beholder’s mode of contemplation. In some, there is literally nothing to be understood, but to be purchased, while in others, there is nothing to be purchased but to be understood. Here, I should note that I am not using the term ‘understanding’ in the sense of one receiving knowledge as an existing a priori, but rather in its broadest ontological/Heideggerian sense discussed in the previous chapter, i.e., the articulation of intelligibilities and integration of signs, senses, percepts into a whole; in one word knowing, through the acts of interpretation, association and dissociation.

What is surprising is that while in different texts, such as The Future of the Image, Rancière himself uses a similar argument about the different regimes of images, yet that argument is absent from The Emancipated Spectator. Of course, such an absence is in favour of his critique of Debord. In the Future of the Image, Rancière truly argues that images are essentially operations ‘that couple and uncouple the visible and its signification or speech, which create and frustrate expectations. The image is never a simple reality [...] they are primarily operations, relations between the sayable and the visible.’ He argues that these operations ‘involve different image-functions, different meanings of the word “image”.’ Assigning such

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219 The Future of the Image, p. 5-6
220 Ibid, p. 5
221 Ibid, p. 6
ontological differences to different types of images, he categorizes them into three types of “naked image”, “ostensive image”, and “metaphorical image”. This categorization, adding to the surprise, is vividly structural. The naked image, for Rancière, does not constitute art as ‘what it shows us excludes the prestige of dissemblance and the rhetoric of exegeses.’ Ostensive image ‘asserts its power as that of sheer presence, without signification. But it claims it in the name of art.’ Metaphorical images, for him are more interesting, for one can see in them the true labour of art. The labour of art, for Rancière, ‘involves playing on the ambiguity of resemblance and the instability of dissemblance, bringing about a local reorganization, a singular rearrangement of circulating images.’ One can conceive of “naked images” as, for instance, documentary photographs, of “ostensive images” as, for instance, abstract paintings, and of “metaphorical images” as, for instance, what we see in installation art.

Given that images are only images insofar as they are seen by the eyes of the Other, the question now is what are these different types of operation other than different modes of contemplation dialectically demanded by the images? What is exactly being said when we say one type of image ‘exclude the prestige of dissemblance and the rhetoric of exegeses?’ Or what do we mean when we say one type of image ‘involves playing on the ambiguity of resemblance and the instability of dissemblance’? Where is the locality of these operations? Of course, I argue, not in the image itself, but on their other side, that is, in the contemplation of the beholder. Therefore, images are not just images, nor are they simple realities. Images have different image-functions.

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222 Ibid, p. 22
223 Ibid, p. 23
224 Ibid, p. 24
Such an argument that Rancière develops in *The Future of the Image*, is simply the antithesis of his argument against Debord in *The Emancipated Spectator*.

If the question “whether to contemplate” is simply a false question, then, it must be substituted by the question “how to contemplate differently”, i.e., how to contemplate heterogeneously? Or even better, how to relinquish alienating modes of contemplation in favour of emancipatory ones? In other words, how can we avoid contemplating images whose substance is to hijack our cognitive faculty and to manufacture for us a sense of what it is that we really want, even though we do not really need it? We must, therefore, define what type of contemplation is more likely to counter the symbolic regime of images and subsequently assist *the real* to possibly occur. How could we be enabled to discern in our acts of contemplation *a priori*-profitably-related-meanings from the types of meaning that are not to be perceived but constructed by the viewer? We must relentlessly develop new theories of subjects as well as philosophies of truth that are to supplement the contemporary individual and group subjects’ modes of contemplation — we need the thought of *thought-activism*.

Any discourse of contemplation that isolates its object from social and historical contingencies, and attributes to it any form of *a priori* ability to achieve ‘intellectual emancipation’, has no striking force, nor has it any truth. It is already defeated in the war it proclaims to wage against the classical attribution of “passivity” to “vision”, and against the stultification that results from assigning a gulf of knowledge between “seeing” and “acting”. The only alternative then is the process of *practice-theory-practice* under the existence of a *profound theoretical* reason — we need Subject-thought.
Emancipation and the Intellectual Adventure: The Problem of the a priori

Rancière constructs his defence of the spectator in correlation with his earlier conception of the Ignorant Schoolmaster. Borrowing the concept from Joseph Jacotot’s principle of the equality of intelligence and also inspired by his pedagogical methodology, Rancière argues that the “ignorant schoolmaster” does not know any stupefying distance that could turn into an ever-present gulf between his own knowledge and the ignorance of the ignoramus. Classically, this distance is expected to be overcome through the expertise of the “knowledgeable”, thus making knowledge transmittable. In contrast, the ignorant schoolmaster does not regard distance in knowledge to be an evil that must be obliterated, but as the normal condition of any communication. He believes in equality of intelligence.

‘The stultifying logic of pedagogy’ that creates an ever-present distance, for Rancière, is precisely predicated on the desire to abolish that distance. The distance is always allegedly abolished but practically maintained. In the intellectual condition set up by the ignorant schoolmaster, on the other hand, the distance the ignoramus must cover is not a gulf placed between the knowledge of the master and her own ignorance, but simply ‘the path from what she

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227 *The Emancipated Spectator*, P. 10
already knows to what she does not yet know.’\textsuperscript{228} It is a path that must be taken through ‘venturing into the forests of signs and things, observing and comparing them with facts and other signs’\textsuperscript{229}, subjecting them into the acts of interpretation, association and dissociation within the networks of relation that exist between everything that surround the ignoramus. Such a mission, according to the ignorant schoolmaster, is not to be accomplished for the sake of helping the ignoramus ‘occupy the position of the scholar, but so as better to practise the art of translating.’\textsuperscript{230}

It is, however, important to note that translation as the practice of the ignoramus not primarily a linguistic act. Rather, Rancière names translation the intellectual act of comparison, association and dissociation between signs, things, etc. This is important since the core disposition of the Visitor (as will be shown) is also a particular mode of translation which is not to be identified with Rancière’s use of term, particularly because the translation performed by the Visitor is a linguistically charged activity, between English, as the globally hegemonic language, and the languages of the periphery.

Rancière’s prescription for emancipating the spectator follows the same directives as those for the intellectual emancipation of the ignoramus in \textit{The Ignorant Schoolmaster}. He argues that it is the very set of presuppositions antagonizing contemplation and participation, seeing and acting, passive and active, that sustain the logic of stultification. According to Rancière, it only takes us

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid, P. 11
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid
to entirely abandon such presuppositions in order to see, once and for all, that the spectator begins his procedures of emancipation.

*But could we not invert the terms of the problem by asking if it is not precisely the desire to abolish the distance that creates it? What makes it possible to pronounce the spectator seated in her place inactive, if not the previously posited radical opposition between the active and the passive? Why identify gaze and passivity, unless on the presupposition that to view means to take pleasure in images and appearances while ignoring the truth behind the image and the reality outside the theatre? Why assimilate listening to passivity, unless through the prejudice that speech is the opposite of action?* (Ibid, p. 12)

Therefore, Emancipation simply begins, writes Rancière, ‘when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection.’ In fact, for Rancière, the spectator begins to be emancipated precisely when he realizes that the ability to challenge these presuppositions is given to him *a priori*. In other words, it only takes the spectator to *realize* that, instead of taking the problematic distribution of positions (i.e. active, passive, etc.) to be given *a priori*, he must conceive of his own ability to challenge them as his *a priori* human condition.

For Rancière, emancipation in this sense consists in the understanding that ‘viewing is also an

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231 Ibid, p. 13
action that confirms or transforms the distribution of positions.\textsuperscript{232} Such a transformation puts an end to all these ‘embodied allegories of inequality’ in which one possesses a capacity and the other does not. Ultimately, emancipation in this sense is fundamentally distinct from Debord’s account, i.e., repossessing the relationship to self that is lost in the process of \textit{separation} (Debord).

Rancière accuses the account of emancipation as the overthrow of the \textit{separation} from the self caused by the Spectacle of being Romantic. He considers it Romantic, because that idea is predicated on the desire to reduce what Rancière sees as irreducible distances, and also because it disregards the role of mediation and the autonomy of the third element between the Spectacle and the beholder – that is, between the artist and the spectator. Emancipation in the sense of militancy against the Spectacle, argues Rancière, is not ever to be achieved, since it regards the mediation of this third element as a ‘fatal illusion of autonomy trapped in the logic of dispossession and concealment’ \textsuperscript{233} Quite the contrary, Rancière identifies the way out in the idea of re-distribution of the sensible, places, and positions, which takes place in placing the spectator on the stage and the performers in the auditorium, and thus abolishing the differences between the two; by identifying the stage with taking possession of the streets, the town, or life. The spectator acts by seeing, selecting, comparing, and interpreting. ‘She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her.’\textsuperscript{234} Such a mission, nonetheless, only requires what Rancière calls the \textit{invention of an intellectual adventure}.\textsuperscript{235}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{232}] Ibid
  \item[\textsuperscript{233}] Ibid, p. 15
  \item[\textsuperscript{234}] Ibid, p. 13
  \item[\textsuperscript{235}] Ibid, p. 15
\end{itemize}
Rancière’s argument is quite captivating at first glance. He is right in locating the way out in re-distribution of places, roles, and positions, which require a full abandonment of current presuppositions. Of course, such a way out is opposed to the dream to overcome the separation (Debord), a task that the desire for its accomplishment itself causes the problem. Furthermore, Rancière’s identification of emancipation with ‘the reconfiguration in the here and now of the distribution of space and time’\(^{236}\) is completely accurate. Ultimately, I totally agree that to accomplish such a mission, what is required is the invention of an intellectual adventure. But it is exactly here that Rancière’s argument founders on something.

I argue that Rancière’s argument takes us into a long labyrinth whose other end connects back to where he started off. In other words, with Rancière’s argument, we only end somewhere where the only thing at sight is indeed the question itself with no answer.

Isn’t what Rancière advocates as the way out, i.e., ‘inversion of the terms of the problem’ or ‘invention of an intellectual adventure’, itself the question rather than the answer? Hasn’t this very task been precisely what every single movement in art, from the avant-gardes to postmodernism, strove to accomplish to end the malady of the spectator? No matter how successful they were, it must be acknowledged, at least historically, that all those movements somehow sought to figure out a way for the ‘reconfiguration in the here and now of the distribution of space and time.’ Symptomatically speaking, Rancière himself must know what he suggests is a question advertised as an answer. It is no coincidence that the issue of ‘the invention of the intellectual adventure’ is mentioned only passingly throughout his text.

\(^{236}\) Ibid, p. 19
Rancière seems to believe that we can simply change the value of terms and transform them from “bad” to “good”, while the structure of oppositions between these problematic categories remains the same and, thus, the problem remains unresolved. Nevertheless, it is not clear why he does not argue how and through what mechanisms could the spectator “invent” that “intellectual adventure”? Such an understanding itself might as well be the beginning of an end to the mere consumption of the Spectacle.

Rancière’s abstract analysis entirely avoids the fact that such an “invention” is not an a priori ability of the spectator and involves her understanding and implementation of a critical presupposition: one that regards knowledge not as what can be transmitted, but as what can only be produced in a process whose movement is practice-theory-practice. It is, of course, of no difference whether this production lies on the side of the artist or the art attendee.

One cannot simply assume that once the spectator is understood not to be “passive” and, thereby, liberated from the problematic task of overcoming a distance of knowledge, he is automatically emancipated. There won’t be any emancipation simply because the spectator ‘ventures into the forests of signs and things, interprets and associates a sign with a fact, compares a sign with another’, and in short, practices the ‘art of translation’.

The real problem, I argue, is the forest of signs itself. When the signs are themselves fully loaded, how could one compose an emancipatory poem out of them? In a situation where power is no longer despotic but rather exerted through a semiotic and machinic system, how could one freely venture into the forest of signs, and why would that be emancipatory?

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237 Félix Guattari referred to this as the semiotic power of capitalism, in which signs provide the means of controlling, and are, in fact, the repository of the problem. (Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics, 1972)
Today, the entire algorithm and interfaces of social networks are literally designed to enjoin the user to drift into the forest of signs. Their very spatiotemporality makes us randomly venture from one image, video, or Tik Tok, to another. You might be looking for a Jean-Luc Godard film and simply end up buying an adidas backpack instead. Let’s call this the cybernetic-capitalist dérive. How could any poem worthy of the name be composed when the problem resides in the forest itself, and when the spectator is made to venture randomly rather than freely?

Discerning this semiotic-machinic problem, i.e., the complicity between signifying semiotic regimes and ‘asignifying’ machines as the drives behind the production of the new drifting subjectivity, Guattari suggests that one must strive to ‘exit language’.

To map the “languages of infrastructures” and the modes of machine-centric subjectivation/enunciation, one must follow Guattari’s advice to “exit language” by doing two things: dissociate subjectivity from the subject, from the individual, and even from the human, and cease considering the power of enunciation exclusive to man and subjectivity. (Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, p. 62)

In the machine-centric universe, one moves from the question of the subject to that of subjectivity such that enunciation does not primarily refer to speakers and listeners – the communicational version of individualism — but to “complex assemblages” (Ibid, p. 60)

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238 Maurizio Lazzarato, Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity
With the capitalist passage of the subject to subjectivity, Guattari identifies the complex assemblage of ‘individuals, bodies, material and social machines, semiotic, mathematical, scientific machines, etc.’ 239 as the source of enunciation, which constitute subjectivities.

Another aspect of the contemporary forest of signs can be explained through Debord’s remarks on the systems and language of domination. In comments on the Society of the Spectacle, Debord argues that the basic interest of all modern systems of domination is the dissolution of logic.240

To avoid confusion of the term logic here with Badiou’s usage (i.e., appearance, the transcendental), let us first see what logic for Debord is. He defines logic as ‘the ability to immediately perceive what is significant and what is insignificant or irrelevant.’241 In other words, logic is that which due to the complete absorption of the Spectacle by the spectator has been perfectly dissolved. For Debord, dissolution of logic takes place through two different means. First, through ‘technology which the Spectacle has tested and popularized.’ Second, through ‘the mass psychology of submission.’242

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240 Guy Debord, Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, Trans. Malcom Imrie, Verso, 1990, P. 27
241 Ibid, p. 30
242 Ibid, p. 27
sensible world; who decides where the flow will lead as well as the rhythm of what should be shown, like some perpetual, arbitrary surprise, leaving no time for reflection, and entirely independent of what the spectator might understand or think of it. (Debord, Ibid, P. 28)

Firstly, contrary to Rancière’s claim, it turns out that after all Debord is not against contemplation. *Reflection* here signifies critical contemplation as opposed to contemplating the Spectacle. And what leaves no time and space for reflection is the fact that images are controlled and controllable.

Secondly, and more importantly, if signs, images, and their worldly manifestation are controlled by someone else (*the semiotic-machinic*); and if this “someone else” simply controls the ‘summary of the *sensible* world’, how could a ‘redistribution of the sensible’ take place without first conducting a critique of semiotic-machinic sensibility? When the individual is principally connected to the world as Spectacle through controlled signs, then one has to distinguish human being as the contemplator of natural phenomena (human condition) from the spectator as the absorber of the Spectacle. And the latter is the only mode of being that capitalism demands.

Let us now quickly return to the *Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Despite Rancière’s claim that the same idea of ‘equality of intelligence’ links the practices of the emancipated spectator to those of the ignorant schoolmaster, his argument in the two case are not entirely consistent. Despite its designation, it is clear that the *ignorant schoolmaster*, after all, is not *that* ignorant. Actually, he knows something very well. He knows that to *practically* make intellectual emancipation possible, first, he must know *theoretically* that knowledge is not to be transmitted but to be
produced. This necessary and primary knowledge is an equivalent of ‘the profound reason that exists beyond the particularities of the act, which cannot be uprooted’ as discussed in previous chapters. A profound reason that is nothing but a theoretical conviction.

Furthermore, utilization of such a vision by the ignorant schoolmaster will not automatically guarantee the commencement of his emancipatory practices. He understands that he is in need of employing a particular use of language (distance) that is essential in conditioning the emancipatory pedagogical scene. This language must be close to the poiesis discussed in the previous chapter. In contrast to stultifying language which is all about safeguarding the transmission of schoolmaster’s knowledge, poiesis embraces the thought of contingencies, is open to the course of encounters, and lets the course of pedagogy be drawn by the attractions of contingencies and accidents.

The emancipatory pedagogical scene is, therefore, that in which the normal distance of communication is intentionally, and by the agency of the ignorant schoolmaster, transformed into a distance of contingencies at which both the pupil and the schoolmaster have equal chances for learning. Such learning may find a different object for the pupil than the schoolmaster, or it may manifest itself in different values with respect to the same object for both.

Thus, emancipation becomes possible only under certain conditions, and it is mostly the schoolmaster who has to provide such conditions (economy). The logic of stultification would persist if only the pupil believes in the equality of intelligence and not the schoolmaster. If so,

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243 The case of a pupil conscious of ‘equality of intelligence’ despite the schoolmaster is of course a rarity. Under the governance of a repressive schoolmaster, the pupil would remain subjugated lest there has been an external Event that has made possible such pedagogical consciousness. Otherwise, there is no such thing as a priori consciousness on either end of this pedagogical scene.
all we can expect is either the preservation of the ‘logic of stultification’ and inequality of intelligences, or the pupil could possibly pass from being in-itself to being for-itself, and thus revolt against the schoolmaster, which is, of course, a different scenario than the one discussed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

The point is not whether to break off from the *exteriority* that the Spectacle or the ‘gulf of knowledge’ is — that is, what Rancière calls a ‘Romantic desire’. The point is how to impose upon this exteriority *Subjectivizing* forces. In other words, how we could embrace subversive language uses, i.e., *thought-acts*.

In my reading of the ignorant schoolmaster, what he is practically after in order to create the condition of emancipation, is indeed a practice of formalization. That is, he is practically looking for forms of language use that could help transform a subjugating exteriority into a subjectivizing one. Thus, he has to *problematize*, and not merely use, the signs. Therefore, the exteriority to which the pupil is subjected is distinct from semiotic capitalism. The former seeks to create a forest of signs ripe with possibilities of *encountering*, and the latter randomly generates mediocre poems of consumption and subjugation. To encounter is to find oneself faced with the incommensurability of things, signs, or images. Either due to the fact that one has never seen such signs, things, or images, or because the *form* they have taken in the *here and now* before one’s eyes seems to subject one to the unknowns and *paradoxes* (as opposed to the *doxa*) of the situation.
In *The Emancipated Spectator* there is nothing about the (formalizing) forces that could facilitate the ‘invention of the intellectual adventure’. Rancière finishes his argument by asserting: ‘to know that words are merely words and Spectacles merely Spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words, images, stories, and performances can change something of the world we live in’.\(^{244}\)

Although this seems to be all true, the instance it has descended from such a general level of abstraction into the contingencies of practice, its practical inadequacy will grow glowing. ‘An emancipated community is the community of narrators and translators’.\(^{245}\) Rancière uses these terms in a fashion as though they are universally defined terms. The question is what account of translation and which manner of narration? To arrive at such an understanding itself requires the agency of an embodied presupposition, a *profound knowledge*, that is that of *thought-activism*. Thought-activism as the contradictory unity of theory and practice, is a knowledge of how words and images, once used in particular ways (as will be shown), will counter the reign of established discursive structures, which themselves benefit from the *profitably-related-meanings* of words, signs, and images.

To simply let go of the historical denunciation of contemplation, as Rancière suggests, gets us nowhere. The way out is to ask how to contemplate differently, and what kinds of practice could provoke encountering spectatorship?

Besides inverting the structures of the problem, we must also create new terms, whose composition already enforces a critical distance from the old problematic presuppositions. We

\(^{244}\) *The Emancipated Spectator*, P. 23
\(^{245}\) Ibid, p. 22
need new terms that could help us substitute the logic of antagonizing categories with the logic of encounter-based *Visiting*. These terms shall define novel perspectives for translating and narrating. Most importantly, we need terms that consider these abilities as critical faculties to be acquired and not as given *a priori*. It is exactly for this inadequacy of Rancière’s thesis of ‘giving the spectator yet another chance’ that this exegesis finds it necessary to develop the theory of the *Visitor*.

**Part II: Visitorability (A Contemporary Protocol of Abstraction)**

The neologism *Visitorability* signifies a protocol of abstraction, as well as a possible attribute of a work of art, or an artistic situation, which provides the art attendee with the chance to *become* a Visitor.

To thought-activistically *abstract* oneself from the reign of *doxa* is the only way of making thought possible. However, the word “abstraction” is completely saturated today. It is everywhere in contemporary art, in every gallery, in every biennale and art fair, to the extent that it basically no longer signifies anything, just an empty brand for the “romantic-formalism” of contemporary democratic art.\(^\text{246}\) So, to abstract the word from the reign of *doxa* every contemporary art worthy of the name must have a protocol of abstraction as its own methodology that serves a greater strategy. A protocol that critically response to the questions

\(^\text{246}\) ‘Romantic-formalism’ is a description of the contemporary domination of postmodernism in art used by Alain Badiou. (See, *Polemics*, “Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist Art”, Trans. Steve Corcoran, Verso, 2011, p. 133 - 148
“what kind of abstraction?”, “abstraction from what?” and “why abstraction?” Visitorability is the protocol of abstraction that serves the strategy of thought-activism.

**The Question of Artistic Abstraction (Badiou vs. Negarestani)**

In a panel discussion on the occasion of Jean-Luc Moulène’s exhibition, *Objects*, in Miguel Abreu Gallery (New York, 2017), Alain Badiou and Reza Negarestani contested one another’s remarks on the question of artistic abstraction and its role in contemporary art.²⁴⁷

For Negarestani ‘the system of abstraction is the ambition of thought to liberate itself from the tyranny of the here and now’ and in order to do so, abstraction ‘must utilize and manipulate the material that holds sway over it’²⁴⁸ In response to that definition, Badiou says:

> Yes, abstraction involves this sort of manipulation. But we must note that there is a complete difference between abstraction as practiced in science and abstraction as it enters into the creation of a work of art. Why? because in the end, a work of art that operates on a high degree of abstraction always [...] ends up returning to the self-evidence of an object that, very simply, is there, and is there now. [...] In scientific abstraction, which requires entering the processes of great deal of apprenticeship, you no doubt escape the tyranny of the here and now. (Badiou, Matter and Form, P.

²⁴⁷ See Alain Badiou, Matter and Form, Self-evidence and Surprise: On Jean-Luc Moulène’s Objects, Trans. Robin Mackay, Sequence Press, 2019
One would say that Badiou’s definition of abstraction is simply descriptive while Negarestani points to the aspirations of an artwork operating on a level of abstraction but not necessarily what it accomplishes. None of them really specifies what ought to be the mode of abstraction that is needed for surpassing the impasse of contemporary art and both are treating the term on a general level.

For Badiou, abstraction is a process, a construction that is only for the artist and not for anyone else. For the viewer, the artwork is an object that is here and is here now:

*If artistic abstraction resides in the process of making the work rather than in the resulting object, then we must say that abstraction is “outside” the work of art as such. For a work of art is precisely that which leaves outside of its here-and-now, outside of its sensible self-evidence, the whole process of the making of this self-evidence itself.* (Ibid, p. 10)

Thus, for Badiou, abstraction is not borne in the art object itself. Rather, the object is just the result of the artist’s individual processes of abstraction. This is certainly at odds with Badiou’s own account of the place of the Subject of art, which, for him, resides exactly in the art’s object. In other words, for Badiou, the Subject of art is to be constructed only when art is attended to by its receiving end (the viewer).
Badiou holds that contemporary art’s inclination is ‘to present a sort of fusion, a formal identity, between the artwork as object and the artwork as creative process.’ Nevertheless, he is critical of this inclination as it ‘simply amounts to fulfilling the Hegelian prediction that art, conceived as the creation of a work in the strongest sense, an object closed upon itself, will become a “thing of the past”’. He finds Marcel Duchamp quite sincere in saying ‘that the idea of non-art was the only contemporary possibility for art.’ Yet, he continues, ‘looking at Moulène’s work, here and now, we can see how he subtracts himself from Duchamp’s sincere statement of a hundred years ago.’ Nevertheless, Badiou seems to be quite disappointing when he attempts to elucidate what is it that places today’s art (such as Moulène’s work) out of the paradigm set up by Duchamp.

For Badiou, a good work of contemporary art, such as Moulène’s work, is that which could bear the label of ‘idealist materiality’. Idealist, because the work imposes ‘certain unknown forms upon disparate materials.’ And materiality, because ‘beneath the novelty of the form, beneath its mathematics and its glamour, lies the traces of old materials, timeless gestures.’ He further argues that in order to appreciate the artwork’s universal significance we must forget all the biographical and individual processes that the artist has undergone so as to achieve the objective realization of the work. We must forget all that and return to the things themselves, which are in their ‘interminable solitude and under the tyranny of the here and now.’ This return for Badiou is a lesson in philosophy.

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249 Badiou, *Matter and Form*, p. 11
250 Ibid
251 Ibid
252 Ibid, p. 10
253 Ibid, p. 11
Badiou is right about the necessity of abandoning the artist as a biographical being. In order for an encountering relationship with the art object to be possible, one must absolutely disregard the artist’s presence (God) behind the object, including the presence that involves information about the individual process of abstraction the artist has undergone to realize the object. This abandonment is the first protocol at work for the Visitor to attend an art object in a secular fashion.

Despite all that, we must still conceive of art as the possibility for the sudden emergence of thought and of the sensible in multiple levels of temporality. In other words, we must conceive of art in multiple accounts of here-and-now. First, the here-and-now of the artist while creating the work (a thing of the past); second, the here-and-now of the Visitor attending the object while not recognizing the artist’s presence behind it (here and now induced by the thing itself); and third, the here-and-now of the artist himself Visiting/recreating his own objects, this time as a Visitor (again, here and now induced by the thing itself). Hence, the equation is Visitor-object-Visitor.

But what are the dispositions of objects that Badiou conceives as resulting from abstraction? He argues that objects that result from a high degree of abstraction are a mixture of ‘self-evidence’ and ‘surprise’. In other words, “self-evidence” and “surprise” are the results of artistic abstraction in a physical space, for instance, in the white space of the gallery:

*The self-evidence comes from the fact that what we have here, first of all, is the perception of the matter as such [...] For Aristotle, all that exists is composed of*
“matter” and “form” [...] Every natural object has a common name, and this common name is in fact the name of its form. A rock, an apple, etc. [...] If we cannot find the common name of the object, [...] we have no other solution than to say that we are dealing with a new object, one that awaits its proper name. [...] Abstraction is the delicious proposition, here and now, of the absence of any name at the very heart of the thing’s complete self-evidence. The object is the victorious and anonymous presence, here and now, of a new Aristotelian complex of matter and form. (Ibid, p. 14)

The great effect of the object that results from artistic abstraction, for Badiou, is indeed the presence of a monster in the here-and-now. A monster that symbolizes ‘the other side of the Cartesian Cogito.’ ‘As we all know Descartes posits “I think therefore I am”’. The monster, however, opens up an entirely different possibility by saying: “In any case, I am. But what do you think of my being?” The monster continues and insists: “I am, but you do not think.” 254 Akin to a true philosophical provocation, in fact, the monster’s being ‘is precisely an attempt at the objectivation of a clear negation of thought’. The monster tells me that I, the viewer, am, to such a degree that I can’t think. Thus, the monster is met with a contemplative pleasure, the pleasure of possible existence, here and now, of new truths.255

It is true that the result of abstraction is a monster imposing upon the viewer the question of thinking and that of decidability about its own being. I also agree that a monster induces the contemplative pleasure of the possible existence of new truths (truth of the Subject). Yet, the

254 See, Ibid, p. 26
255 Ibid
monster is not necessarily that which is lying before the viewer’s eyes, i.e., the object. The real monster must be *induced by* the object. In other words, in order to be able to surpass the postmodern impasse of contemporary art, the monster ought to be the synthesis of a dialectics of encountering — encountering a *paradoxical* object. An object capable of inducing a monster is itself an assemblage of disorganized relations between the optical and the semiotic/linguistic. The monster therefore is, and must be, an *object of thought*.

**The Problem of Badiou and Negarestani**

The disparity between my account of Visitorability and Badiou and Negarestani’s accounts of abstraction results from our different accounts of *here-and-now*. Let us unpack this disparity in three parts.

1- The Question of Here and Now: *The Phenomenological here-and-now vs. the Illogical here-and-now*

While Negarestani sees abstraction as ‘the ambition of thought to liberate itself from the tyranny of here-and-now’, for Badiou, a work of art that operates on a high degree of abstraction ‘always ends up returning to the self-evidence of an object that, very simply, is there, and is there now.’ Despite their disagreement, it seems they have no issue with one another’s account of *here-and-now*. What is, therefore, clear is that their accounts of abstraction are both deployed with respect to a *phenomenological* description of here-and-now.
However, *logically* speaking,\textsuperscript{256} phenomenological perception of things within the here-and-now of a spatiotemporality equals the perception of things that have already been acknowledged by language and discourse, which themselves designate the category of “the-already-said”, or the category of the “there-and-then”. In short, every *meaningful* phenomenological here-and-now is *logically* nothing other than a *there-and-then*.

Language always retains its legitimacy “*here*”, through a testimony to the “there-and-then” of discourse, to ‘that which has been spoken’. In other words, the *real* here-and-now cannot be understood unless by setting an account of an *illogical* (anti-logical) here-and-now. The latter is to be thought of as a form of thought’s subtraction from the tyranny of the phenomenological here-and-now (i.e., the “there-and-then” of language). It is through this subtraction that thought Subjectively affirms the absence of common language and *doxa* — whence, it affirms the *paradox*.

Through such a schema of here-and-now we can agree with Badiou, that, yes, the result of any true abstraction is always and simply a return to the here-and-now. But the anti-logical account of here and now, unlike its phenomenological account, is not susceptible to the linguistic subjugation of the spatiality of “here”. Rather, what it throws at thought is a praise for the temporality of an emergent “now”, which has subtracted itself from the discursive/transcendental/logical restraints of “here”, i.e., that which, in substance, is nothing other than the “there” that language and discourse are pointing at.

\textsuperscript{256} The term *logic* must be understood in terms of ‘the transcendental’ and appearing here (cf. Ch. 3).
We showed that artistic abstraction, for Badiou, resides in the process of making the work rather than in the resulting object. Therefore, abstraction for him is “outside” the work of art as such. ‘For a work of art is precisely that which leaves outside of its here-and-now, outside of its sensible self-evidence, the whole process of the making of this self-evidence.’

This is exactly where Badiou’s account of artistic abstraction founders on something. He is right that the process of abstraction that the artist undergoes while making the object is personal and its truth is not to be proven to anyone else. Nevertheless, the argument is that art is a modality, and it is so both in its production and reception end. Why would we conceive of art only as the result of a unilateral process between the artist and his material?

The other possibility of art is literally when the object is on display and susceptible to the gaze of the other. Therefore, the fact that the result of this self-sustaining artistic abstraction is an object which is there, and is there now, does not simply abolish that object’s capacity for eliciting a high degree of abstraction for the other that attends to this self-evident object. The Visitor attends to an object behind which there is no presence. This object, depending on its material and linguistic features, may be capable of being another source from which abstraction could be driven. Of course, this time abstraction is on the side of the Visitor and his procedures of making

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257 Ibid, p. 10
something of this encounter. This is where Negarestani’s aspirational account of abstraction resides. Yet the problem still is his normative account of here-and-now.

3- Pathological Critique: The Normativity of Badiou’s Account of Artistic Abstraction

When we strip off Badiou’s account of abstraction from its philosophical parlance, the remainder is indeed the most normative idea and acknowledged manifestation of “abstraction” in contemporary arts. In other words, although his definition of abstraction remains intact while isolated within the sphere of mere philosophical observation, once descended into the realm of practices of arts, it will formalize a description of rather conventional and concrete form of artistic practice that since modern art call for abstract art.

Let us once again remember the key features of Badiou’s monster. The monster for him is a mixture of self-evidence and surprise. It is self-evident because it is simply there and is there right now. It is surprising because its visual manifestation exceeds the possibility of giving it an Aristotelian “common name”. This view of abstraction in practice is nothing but the concrete doxa of contemporary arts. Abstraction conceived as the absence of language in an object, as that which is at the heart of self-evident object awaiting a proper name, is indeed the most concrete and hegemonic gesture (language) of contemporary arts. Everywhere, in every single art venue you can see abstract objects whose sole feature is that they can’t be named. These sensory alibis, these unnamable objects — which better be called bullies to one’s eyes — these normative monsters, are the typical forms of art practice, that ironically, Badiou himself is always critical of. He critiques them for being epitomes of ‘contemporary democratic materialism’ in art, the
dominance of the romantic-formalism that postmodernism is. It is then not clear at all why his definition of abstraction *practically* fails in subtracting itself from the most dominant forms of art with respect to which, *theoretically*, he takes the position of a sworn enemy.\(^{258}\)

Despite Badiou’s philosophical and political commitment to the elaboration of a new paradigm of thought and the Subject — with the latter summoned by the former — when it comes to a discussion of art, he seems to fall short of a Subject that has to do with *thought*. In other words, his rhetoric on practices of art, although different from the vogueish talk of “new-materialism” and “object agency” still falls into the category of the *sensory alibi*. Both Rancière and Badiou’s artistic abstraction lacks the protocol of Visitorability.

*Visitorability*

Visitorability regards abstraction as an imperative protocol and a methodology, or rather, as an artistic ethics, for contemporary arts. But what kind of abstraction? Abstraction from what? And why?

The main question is how art can propose a *paradoxical* account of abstraction. In a ‘democratic materialist’ world where ‘there are only bodies and languages’, and where, by way of mediatized and commodified languages, every day different forms of subjectivity are produced to govern

\(^{258}\) For Badiou’s critique of postmodern art, see (*Polemics*, “Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist Art”, Trans. Steve Corcoran, Verso, 2011, p. 133 – 148)
these bodies and languages, abstraction can only be that which imposes paradoxes upon the
dominant language of the world, and on the artworld in particular. In other words, abstraction,
instead of merely being the absence of “common name”, must be thought of as the
disorganization between the optical economy of the visible and self-evident object on the one
hand, and the linguistic economy of the sayable/visible language around the object (discourse) on
the other hand. To put it differently, we are thinking of titles or linguistic economies, if you like,
whose juxtaposition with the self-evident object disorganizes everything that the optical
economy of the object had seemingly intended to work on, and the other way around.
Visitorability is well aware that seeing is nothing other than saying or being told.\textsuperscript{259} Therefore,
problematizing the relationship between the sensible and the semiotic, between vision and
language is thought-activism’s symbolic intervention into the imaginary and ideological world of
art. This way art can increase the contingency of the real.

Therefore, the question of artistic abstraction cannot be reduced to the trivial question of whether
the sensible and self-evident object is visually recognizable (i.e., nameable). It may be or it may
not. In either case, the question of visual unrecognizability is not a sufficient criterion for

\textsuperscript{259} The phrase ‘seeing is nothing other than saying or being told’ is borrowed from Gareth James’ formula ‘such
seeing is nothing more than a saying’ developed in his essay “Here’s Shit in Your Eye”, (\textit{Shit Yes Academy}. Ag
Galerie Press, 2020). In this essay — which is written in companion with two other essays by Matt Browning and
Mohammad Salemy for the publication of my exhibition \textit{Shit Yes Academy} — James argues:

[...] in Ahadi’s exhibition a delirious linguistic economy arises to disorganize everything that the optical economy is
so intent on coordinating. The topology of this disrelation is a complex historical affair, and it is Ahadi’s
reformulation of the category of the audience and of the spectator into the subject position of the Visitor through
which we must approach it.

James’ reading of my work in \textit{Shit Yes Academy} has been of strong impact on the development of my account of the
\textit{protocol of abstraction} as the creation of an incommensurable situation between the semiotic and the sensible,
between the optical and the linguistic.
abstraction to take place. The question is how art, \textit{as a form of thought}, can facilitate the emergence of the unrecognizable, not in materiality but by its mediation. It can do so by disorganizing and disrupting all knowledge that exists around the way-too-recognizable objects that are just before our eyes. In an artworld where unrecognizability of the art object is itself the most recognizable form of practice, the only way of abstraction worthy of the name is to manage an incommensurability between the object and the linguistic sign.

In short, Visitorability requires a triangulation between the object, the Visitor, and language, insofar as the relations between the two opposing ends, i.e., the object and language, is incommensurable. Such triangulation is the ethical and the most imperative artistic tactic for surpassing the impasse of contemporary art. The triangle of Visitorability is the sole means for proving the importance of art today: \textit{Art is a modality which, by surmounting the dominance of the sensory alibi, could make thinking possible.} Once again:

\begin{quote}
By “thought”, \textit{I mean the subject in so far as it is constituted through a process that is transversal relative to the totality of available forms of knowledge}. Or, as Lacan puts it, \textit{the subject in so far as it constitutes a hole in knowledge}. (Badiou, \textit{Eight Theses on the Universal}, P. 149)
\end{quote}

For a work of art to be Visitorable, for its nature to lend itself to the procedures of being Visited, it must succeed in drawing this triangle of abstraction.
Some Features of Visitorable Works: The Mode of Signification

Visitorable works or situations are constructed by the elements (signs/objects) that appear as fully recognizable items in their individuality. Despite such recognizability in isolation, the way these elements are formalized and grouped together, interrupts the established signification of each of those individual elements. In other words, the abstraction in Visitorable works stems not from the appearance of an altogether unknown entity, but rather from the paradoxes that ensue from the placement of recognizable signs in an unknown chain of relations with other signs. This unknown chain (and not the individual links) is the main mode of signification of Visitorable works or situations.

To get this a bit clearer, we can take the constitution of a poetic sentence as an instance. What is at work in the poetic sentences is indeed the configuration of words (univocal symbols) whose way of being-with-one-another (the formalization of a sentence) is causing a break in the sentence’s chain of signification. Nevertheless, for a sentence to maintain its univocal meaning, it is necessary for its chain of significations to remain consistent and devoid of rupture. Therefore, what is at the stake with poetic sentences is the withering away of the univocity of meaning that typically shows itself in the doxical assembly of individual signs/words, in favour of the emergence of the equivocity of meanings.

Poetic here must be perceived only in the context of the philosophical trajectory through which it has been developed. “Poetics” from the Greek poiesis (ποίησις) meaning to make. Poiesis, as opposed to mimesis, which concerns the representation of reality, is a form of creating, or the act of making, something which did not exist before — that is, to bring into being that which is not.
Poiesis, albeit prior to its Platonic differentiation, also has a corresponding signification with the terms technē (know-how) and techniques, meaning how to originate something. On the basis of this context, the triangle of Vistorability is a “poetic constitution” and a protocol of abstraction. When a work or a situation possesses a poetic triangulation, it is in fact a Visitorable work or situation.

A Visitorable work or a situation is always re-constructible. The quality of the grouping-together of its constitutive elements is such that it forces upon the figure who is attending (to) it, the emergence of a Subject. Through the procedures of Visiting, the Visitor, as a subject-figure, will construct yet another poetic constitution out of the work. Owing to this poetic mode of signification, the Visitorable works of art always operate on a plane beyond the artist’s level of intentionality. Their forms give the Visitor access to the significant intention underlying them as a whole. The recreation of works through the subjective procedures of being Visited, renders meaning constructible rather than transmittable. The Visitor has only one fidelity, and that is not to artist’s level of intentionality, but to the work’s contingent mode of signification.

Ultimately, for this reconstruction of meaning to happen, what is required besides the Visitorability of the work, is the arrival of the subject-figure for whom to Visit means to practice the art of translation through encountering the contingencies of signs – the arrival of the Visitor.

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Chapter 5 - On the Task of the Visitor

Foreword

This chapter will devise the theory of the Visitor as a reconfiguration of the category of art spectator and of the art audience into the encountering subject position of the Visitor. The Visitor is a subject of praxis and tactically presents the strategy of thought-activism within the fields of art and critical thinking.

With regard to the problem of spectatorship in art, the theory of the Visitor holds that the question is no longer whether the “spectator” is passive (Debord) or active (Rancière). Rather, the necessity is to understand that the problem itself resides in the very fact that the term “spectator” has no force nor a truth to provide a way out from the contemporary impasse of art and thinking. It ought to be asked, therefore, if the time has arrived for the discursive domain of art to develop an alternative theory that could mark off a new signifier for the problem.

Instead of taking sides with the “active” against the “passive”, with the art’s participant against the art’s observer, or with the abolition of art (Debord) against ‘redistribution of roles’ (Rancière), we need thought-acts that help us abandon all the presuppositions that categorize art maker and art-perceiver as opposing entities, ontologically apart from one another. The Visitor is a thought-activist affirmation of such a total abandonment.
The Visitor is a conjunction of a ‘conceptual persona’, an ‘aesthetic figure’, and a ‘psychosocial type’ within the domains of art and critical thinking. It will be argued that the Visitor renders obsolete the characteristic tripartite organization of art, i.e., artist-artwork-spectator, and replaces it with the progressive tripartite organization of Visitor-object-Visitor, thus rearticulating the relation that artistic practice occasions on the basis of “encountering.” The topology of the Visitor informs a map between the categories of language, seeing, aesthetics of contingency, and politics. At its core, then, the Visitor contributes to the fields of contemporary art and critical thinking.

The Visitor is a conceptual persona insofar as it draws on the power of thought-activism as a concept. Taking the lead from the discussions of chapter two and three, it will be argued that to be a Visitor is to maintain a subversive ontological relationship to the logic (transcendental) and language of a particular given situation (world). The Visitor is also an aesthetic figure insofar as it both produces and draws on the power of affects and percepts while in the compositional situation of dealing with artistic operational material. Ultimately, the Visitor is a psychosocial type insofar as it is located on the margin of the socially established ‘encyclopedia’ of the worlds of language and vision.

The Visitor is irreducible to any of these features. Rather, to be a Visitor is to encapsulate an asymmetrical alignment of these three distinct features, each irreducible to the others, as a combination. To use Deleuze and Guattari’s language, each of these distinct features ‘refer to

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each other and combine without ever merging. The Visitor, as a conceptual persona produces thought-acts that surpass ordinary everyday opinions (doxa); as an aesthetic figure produces affects that transcend ordinary affections and perception; and as a psychosocial type makes the established language of the world (i.e., English) stammer.

Introduction

In the postmodern era the question of theory has become central to art, and a great deal of theories from diverse domains of thought have been incorporated in artistic discourse and practice. The question of spectatorship in art, however, has been asked less frequently. This chapter principally develops a theory concerning the question of the intersubjective in art – the theory of the Visitor.

Today it is very difficult to close one’s eyes on the fact that both the discursive and practical domains of art, which claim to have been pursuing the question of subjects encountering one another, have simply reached a theoretical impasse. In the previous chapters, under the name of democratic materialism, I sketched out this impasse as the takeover of postmodernism along with its romantic formalism in art, politics, and culture. I pointed at some instances of this impasse formalized under the fascination with the legalized particularities in the forms of identity politics and identitarian art practices; obsession with “new materialism” and “object

262 Ibid, p. 70
agency” (Object Oriented Ontology); eradication of politics in the name of political correctness; infatuation with hyper moralization of typical thinking vis-à-vis critical thinking; finding consolation in postmodern otherizing expressions of self, culture, body, sexual differences, at the expense of elimination of the ethics of the same; substituting people with doxa through the media’s enforcement of an infantilizing language; and many more.

**The Sensory Alibi**

I will argue that by constantly resorting to what I name *the sensory alibi*, art cannot escape the importance of argumentation as the core drive behind the expansion of its paradigm both ontologically and historically. The *sensory alibi*, as another symptom of contemporary art’s impasse, must be understood as the predominant prioritization of the individual’s pseudo-poetic contemplative vision in art. This is typically manifested today in the supremacy of artistic practices and discussions whose general axiom is: *art is not to make one think, rather to make one sense.*

I argue that such an axiom is categorically inconsistent. On the one hand it takes art as an *a priori* category, and thereby, fails to understand it is a paradigmatic phenomenon. On the other hand, and at best, it is representative of the obsolete debate of “sense experience of the world” vis-à-vis the hermeneutical vision. In other words, it claims that sensory perception precedes all argumentative interpretation. What this vision epically fails to grasp is that it identifies sense experience with *meaningful* experience. If we take the constructions of meaning as integration of things, signs, senses, etc., into a whole (structure), therefore we can simply see that to explain
our senses to ourselves, or even to explain why I sense the way I sense, we are immediately in the sphere of discursive and historical argumentation. In one word, the world is given to us already interpreted in language and that’s where the problem resides.

The sensory alibi is, therefore, a symptom of contemporary art’s inability to connect its sensorial mechanisms to the historical and geopolitical processes as the cause behind the history of art’s forms and senses. The sensory alibi, thus, emerges from a situation where art is not a modality of thinking and argumentation, rather it is simply a domain of ahistoricity, and obsession with body and culture and other forms of particularity.

To be sure, when today we say that everything is ultimately historical, or economic, or sexual, or indeed linguistic, we mean thereby not so much that phenomena are made up, in their very bone and blood cells, by such raw material, but rather that they are susceptible to analysis by those respective methods. (Jameson, The Prison-House of language, p. vii)

Therefore, the crucial task of thought-activism and the Visitor is to constantly ask what is it that art ought to be? How can art cease being a particular equivalent (sensory alibi) and become a generic equivalent (discursive and argumentative)? What ought to be the contemporary artistic strategy and what types of artistic methodology does such a strategy demand?

Everything in art is susceptible to discursive analyses, or as Dave Beech suggests, ‘after the

Avant Garde, anti-art, the readymade and Conceptual Art, shouldn’t we spend less time looking at art by the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Martha Rosler and Artur Zmijewski, and more time writing and thinking about it?  

In order to traverse such an impasse, it is imperative for the discursive domain of art to develop new theories that support a way out. Such a task, of course, requires us to problematize the theoretical presuppositions on the foundation of which contemporary art world has been operating. To surmount the formal stagnation of contemporary art, we are in need of theories that distinguish between the so-called artistic “subjectivity” and the “subject” of art. Since the real may only occur through the contest with the symbolic, that is to say, by challenging the operations of the transcendental (State of the world) and its language, hence, the Visitor is a thought-activist attempting to counter-symbolize the language of art and typical thinking.

**The language of the Spectacle and the Necessity of Neologism**

*Language is the work of no single individual, so that this badge of our humanity has a curiously anonymous air to it. It is less a personal possession than a medium into which we are born. For the most part, the finest of poets can give voice to their most intimate feelings only by drawing upon terms that innumerable men and women have employed countless times before. There are, of course, such things as neologisms,*

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but these make sense only in terms of already established meanings. So, we are faced with the materialist paradox that the human is born of the non-human. (Eagleton, *Materialism*, P. 20)\(^{265}\)

Subsequent to our critique of Rancière, we showed that our actual task consists in problematizing, and not merely consuming, signs; a task that immediately highlights the importance of our approach to dominant language. As Eagleton puts it (via Heidegger), language is not a personal possession but ‘a medium into which we are born’. This is universally true. But at the same time, in many eras of human history, there are also languages of domination, and, particularly in modern times, it is also possible to say that every individual in the world is at the same time born into a language of domination, since one’s mother tongue is also already subjugated to another language.

Under globalization, language of domination is the global transcendental articulator of the world as it is, of the category of the already-said, of ‘what has been purely spoken’ (Heidegger). Therefore, every individual peripheral language, which has its own category of the already-said, is practically nothing other than a subset of this dominant category of the already-said. Perhaps it is in this sense that Debord considers the language of commodity as the language in which one learns how to speak. To be able to critically challenge domination requires much more than merely speaking its language differently. The latter is, for instance, concealed in Heidegger’s insufficient suggestion for overcoming the nihilism cast by modernity — i.e., *to have a more careful use of language*. We need much more than just a careful use of language. We need to

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strategize ways for challenging the very syntax of the language of domination rather than simply grappling with its vocabulary.

Twenty years after the publication of the *Society of the Spectacle*, explicating the language of the Spectacle, Debord, identifies the most important aspect of spectacular domination’s success as follows:

> The individual who has been more deeply marked by this impoverished spectacular thought than by any other aspect of his experience puts himself at the service of the established order right from the start, even though subjectively he may have had quite the opposite intention. He will essentially follow the language of the Spectacle, for it is the only one he is familiar with; the one in which he learned to speak. No doubt he would like to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric; but he will use its syntax. This is one of the most important aspects of spectacular domination’s success. The swift disappearance of our former vocabulary is merely one moment in this process. It helps it along. (Debord, p. 31)\(^{266}\)

We can see — at least with the semiotic wing of ‘social subjection’ (vis-à-vis the machinic wing) — that the problem resides, in the very *syntax* of language. So, we need more than subjective and intellectual intentions to contest this language. In other words, as Marx writes in *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State*, ‘material force must be overthrown with material force’.\(^{267}\) This overthrowing material force, I argue, is a new language that is neither a different usage of the central language of domination nor is it deploying any peripheral language as the vehicle of a

\(^{266}\) Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, p.31

\(^{267}\) “Clearly the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons, and material force must be overthrown with material force; theory also becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses.”, Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, p. 251
particular identity. Rather, it is a third language in between the two — the thought-activist’s language of the Visitor.

**Neologisms**

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault declares that ‘the process of naming will be based, not upon what one sees, but upon elements that have already been introduced into discourse by structure. It is a matter of constructing a secondary language based upon that primary, but certain and universal, language’\(^{268}\). If the process of naming is based upon the elements that have already been introduced into discourse, how can neologism be understood in relation to this premise?

Let us first have a quick recollection here. Through Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language, we have shown that the relationship between language and discourse is not equiprimordial but foundational, in the sense that language is based upon discourse. With that said, we discussed that language is to be understood as a discourse that is voiced. Consequently, language posits the existence of an element in discourse when discourse is thought as ‘the articulation of intelligibilities.’

Neologisms, on the contrary, are not to be viewed as a form, or a function, of naming. Their function is not to allocate new terms to things that already exist within discourse, akin to what the media apparatus does, so that the old would get advertised as “new”. What is at work in the mechanism of neologisms is, indeed, the reversal of the explained relationship between language

and discourse. Neologisms implant in language new signifiers whose signified is yet to come into discourse. They are not structuralist means for making possible different understandings of existing realities. On the contrary, by reversing the foundational relationship between language and discourse, by forming *paradoxes* in the world, neologisms themselves create, and thereby, make intelligible other realities.

In this sense, neologisms may be understood as functions of *thought-acts* in so far as they concern not those things that already *are*, but those that are *not yet*. In other words, a neologism is an effort to let *that which is not* emerge into being. In this way neologisms, however provisionally, induce change within the *worlds*.

Before proceeding further, let us open a necessary parenthesis here first. To grasp the function of neologisms as formalizers of *paradox*, there seems to be no better way than going back to the etymology of the term *Paradox*. Paradox is from the Greek *para* (meaning besides, side by side, and beyond) + *doxa* [*endoxa*] (an established public opinion or a common belief). Therefore, a “paradox” is that which controverts the common belief or the public opinion within a situation, in so far as it counters, and goes beyond, the situation’s *doxa*. In other words, if the common sense and public opinion are maintained through a world’s symbolic ‘chain of signification’ , a paradox is to be conceived of as a break in that chain of signification.

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269 For a comprehensive account of “that which is not”, please see the chapters on Badiou’s ‘subtractive ontology’ and Heidegger’s ‘ontological analysis of language.’

Now, on the backdrop of our discussion of the spectator in the previous section, we must first discharge the spectator from the absurd delegation of *a priori* emancipatory capacities. We need to understand that to fulfil those capacities, the *spectator* lacks linguistic capabilities as well as historical courage. Ensuing from the spectator’s abdication, there must be proposed a new term that prompts an alternative *theory* of the Subject. This theory designates a different subject-figure in whose constitution abides a radical integration of, first, a total departure from the old presuppositions, and second, an immanent embodiment of the intellectual adventure that emancipation entails. Supported by such tactics we can traverse the contemporary theoretical impasse of the relationship between art and its perceiver. To propose a new term is, indeed, to propose a different mode of contemplation, thus a different mode of attending (to) art.

In what follows, I propose the *Visitor* as the bearer of such modality — the subject-figure of an absolute rupture from art’s all too familiar tripartite relation: *artist-art-spectator*. The Visitor is an encounter-based process around the axis of the work of art, which both the artist and the art attendee can achieve to *become*. Such a becoming, of course, requires a *Visitorable* artistic situation. Hence, the alternative equation reads as *Visitor-object-Visitor*.

*Etymological Potency*

Before I begin to elaborate on what it means to be a *Visitor*, let us briefly discuss, only on an etymological level, the reasons that qualify this term as a cogent choice for the theory of an encounter-based subject-figure.
In thinking of a new term that could, in its linguistic constitution, circumscribe the specificities of the thought of encountering, the etymological characteristics of the term visitor simply places it in a privileged position compared to its precedents such as “viewer”, “audience”, and “spectator”.

The term “audience” is derived from the Latin root of *audire* meaning *to hear*. It is as though the audience posits the existence of a *message* in the kernel of the work of art that only a *good listener* has a chance to receive. The problem then with “audience” is that it simply debilitates the art attendant from all he may be capable of, and diminishes him into a figure of listener. Here again with “audience”, we are faced with the problem of cause-effect relationship, and the question of knowledge as the existing *a priori*. In other words, the term sends us back to the repressing idea of the existence of a gulf between the presumed intentionality of the artist, i.e., the meaning of the work, and the ignorance of the audience. Within such a paradigm, the task assigned to the repressed audience is to conquer such a gulf. In fact, the term audience is emblematic of the religious paradigm of Western art. Let us explain this proclamation further.

From the moment that *the word* became flesh, and flesh became the representation of Christ in the catacomb of Rome\textsuperscript{272}, the Western paradigm of art is still the paradigm of God and his godly word (language). In other words, from the ‘15th of August, the day of the assumption of the immaculate virgin impregnated by the Word’\textsuperscript{273} all the way to the advent of “conceptual art”, the history of Western art is to be understood as the history of the “message” from the master who bathes language — *‘Language speaks and asks: ‘why am I beautiful? Because my master bathes*

\textsuperscript{272} One of the earliest depiction of Jesus, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 3rd century, Catacombs of Rome.

The entire history of the development of Western art has been the history of preservation of the divine word concealed in images and objects. This has been the case all the way from the commissioning of religious paintings by the church to our contemporary proliferation of different forms of visual arts. Persistent throughout this history is the presence of a historical absence that is the word of God. It makes no difference that contemporary art is not about the divinity but about the expression of sex, body, desire, and identity. Insofar as the paradigm of art is that of the audience and its identification of a “meaning” embedded in the art object, we are within a particularly Christian paradigm. The only difference is that God has been replaced by the artist and his word by the artist’s intention — *the meaning*. This paradigm is all the more religious because akin to the idea of God as the representative of the infinite behind a fixated super object (the world), here too, the audience remains unchanged as it is not allowed to affect the language of art and the artist by its presence. All the audience is sanctioned to do is to discover the voice of the artist materialized as the meaning embedded in an object. This is the malady of the audience.

*But what becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra? Does it remain the supreme authority, simply incarnated in images as a visible theology? Or is it volatilized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp*

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274 Paul Eluard, *Capitale de la Douleur* (1926)
and power of fascination - the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God? (Baudrillard, The procession of Simulacra, P. 4)\textsuperscript{275}

For the sake of clarity, it must also be noted that the paradigm of the so-called Eastern art, is not that different either. The only difference there — let’s take Islamic architecture, calligraphy, ceramic, etc., for instance — is that both the artist and the audience are theologically disciplined to understand that they are incapable of capturing the uncatchable word of God. All they must do is, instead, to take into heart the presence of the God that is in movement — i.e., the neo-Platonic unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity (Ibn Arabi). In one word, in the East the divine is not the word, because in the Eastern beginning there was no word nor was there flesh, but only God’s presence, for which the word is only a medium.

For an encountering relationship with the world, we need a secular paradigm of art, in which the art attendant is not designated to meet the artist by the intermediary of the art object. Secularizing art means rendering both the artist and the art attendant critical and creative Visors of the contingencies of their own material and linguistic activities. Thus, the Visitor is thought-activism’s attempt for secularizing the paradigm of contemporary arts.

Let us now continue with our etymological inquiry. With spectator too, the etymological background, from which the term has ensued seems to have played a detrimental role in its historical fate. The Latin roots of specere, and later, spectare, meaning to look and to gaze at, and ultimately the development of the quasi controversial “Spectacle” from it, have all helped

situate the term in the false battlefield of participation vs. beholding. This is while we are aware that the more interesting question in attending (to) art, specifically after Lacan’s take on the notion of the gaze, is not that of gazing at the object, but rather to be gazed at by it. It is in the latter that the uncanny and anxious feeling of being gazed at makes the viewer realize that not only he is also an object in the material world, but to also consider the other (here the art object) not as pure exteriority but as constitutive of his own subjective being. Therefore, with merely gazing at, and not considering to be gazed at, we are still within an anthropocentric subject-object relationship. Secularization of art, however, requires the agency of inter-subjectivity.

Visitor, on the other hand, has a common root, videre (to see), with the terms “vision”, “visible”, “video”, and most importantly, “idea”. The type of “seeing” indicated by videre within the roots of the terms “visitor” and “video” is different from “look”, “view”, or “observe”. Akin to the formation of an idea, videre signifies a mental and creative form of seeing in the sense of the mental formation of images in one’s head. The word “video”, for instance, comes from the Latin video (I see), which itself comes from the Greek ideo (to see) sharing a root with “idea” (idea). In short, all words of ido (to see), idea (idea), video (video), and eventually, visit, indicate both a physical as well as a mentally creative mode of seeing. The latter is, in fact, the very first step in the advent of an idea.

Social connotations of the term visitor are also not devoid of significance. The visitor as a social type comes to spend some time with someone or something to conduct an inquiry. What is crucial, however, is that the visitor always comes from outside (outplace) and attends (to) a world/situation. The quality of this spatiotemporal attentiveness is to be explained in the sense of
running a course of *inspection, examination, and sometimes punishment*. Hence, it is as if with the *Visitor* there is constantly at work a critical faculty for inspecting a thing’s *state of being*.

It is however important to note that none of these etymological and social potencies is meant to presuppose any inherent emancipatory subjective capacity in the term visitor. Rather, by pointing at these potencies, I merely intend to highlight the efficacy of the term to be chosen as a vehicle for my theory of the Visitor.

**The Visitor**

*In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful [...] Art, in the same way, posits man’s physical and spiritual existence, but in none its works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.* (Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”, P. 69)

In developing the theory of the Visitor, I will make extensive uses of Walter Benjamin’s notion of ‘translation’ as developed in his essay “The Task of the Translator”, originally written as an introduction to the translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*. My argument will gradually unravel on the basis of relationships I construct between the work of the translator and that of the thought-activist Visitor. There are however risks involved in incorporating an idea from one domain of art into another — here, from literature to visual art — as collapsing the specificities

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of one domain into another might simply elicit erroneous conclusions. To avoid such risks I strive to utilize the Benjiminian figure of *translator* as a “metaphor” in order to construct another idea, that is, the *Visitor*.

Meanwhile, against the background of my critical reading of Rancière, I will also build on his idea of the emancipated community as a ‘community of narrators and translators’, and his notion of emancipation through ‘practicing better the art of translation’. It is crucial to develop a proper account of translation and a manner of narration that is capable of coming to grips with the semiotic controllability of signs. Through this type of translation, the art attendant may be given a chance to have an encounter that itself requires the ‘invention of an intellectual adventure’. Such an account of translation is the linguistic praxis of thought-activism for which thought could only grasp something in the contingencies of the act. This is because thought-activism knows perfectly that the act is the *place of thought*.

*A Note on the Use of Metaphors*

There are always perils involved in using metaphors, particularly when metaphors are utilized toward the construction of concepts whose specificities and modes of significations are not the same as those of the metaphors themselves. The risk as such could be characterised as the condition in which the subjective process of the user of the metaphor loses the original thought. The latter happens in the sense that *thinking* forgets the utilitarian nature of the metaphor as a means, and instead, slips into treating it as an end. Consequently, and also due to the vortexical
disposition of metaphors, the original thought does not surpass the metaphor but remains confined within it. That is exactly what happens in Rancière’s romantic idea that the spectator would organically figure out how to be a good translator.

By *original thought*, I am thinking of what Gilles Deleuze refers to as the “image of thought”: the ‘presupposition of an image that serves as a fundamental ground for what is called thinking to appear’\(^\text{277}\). To be able to distinguish our own subjective process from that of memory, perception, and from ‘contingent features of the brain or historical opinions’ (*doxas*), we need to already have an image of what it looks like to *think*. I have already elaborated on this image in the chapter on thought-activism and the *contradictory unity of theory and practice*. For Deleuze, the image of thought ‘implies a division between fact and right’. Fact is the reign of *doxa*, while the image of thought ‘retains only what thought can claim by right’\(^\text{278}\).

Therefore, the risk at work in utilizing a metaphor toward the construction of another concept could also be conceived of as the distortion of the original ‘image of thought’ by the contingent features of the metaphor’s own image. In other words, the risk is that the image of the metaphor may end up dominating the ‘image of thought’. Accordingly, thinking’s subjective process will lose its most significant criteria — i.e., image of thought. The chance of such risk, nevertheless, varies depending on the type of metaphor that is at work. This is important because not all metaphors unfold in a similar fashion.

\(^\text{277}\) Gregg Lambert, *In Search of New Image of Thought: Deleuze and Philosophical Expressionism*, “What is an image of thought”, P. 1
\(^\text{278}\) Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, “The plane of Immanence”, P. 37
I use the translator as a means of discursive and thought-activist comparison. Thus my use of Benjamin’s figure will not make of it an equivocal poetic image as if it were a “baroque metaphors”. Rather, I attempt to construct a rational and discursive comparison between the translator’s mode of approaching a text and the Visitor’s mode of approaching art.279

**Translation: A Mode of Fidelity to Freedom**

The translator, ontologically, is an activist of the domain of literature who “creates” by bonding a text’s interior world to its supplementing outside (. The visitor too, bonds an interiority to its supplementing outside.

For Benjamin translation, which is more than mere transmissions of a subject matter, is a mode. Its modality is only to be comprehended by investigating the original, since it is only the original that contains the law that governs it, i.e., its ‘translatability’. For him, ‘the question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning. Either: Will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? Or, more pertinently: Does its nature lend itself to translation?’280 The question of translatability for Benjamin, nevertheless, does not relate to the technical feasibility of rendering the original in the syntax of another language. Nor does it mean that it is necessary for the original work be translated. Translatability means ‘that a specific

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279 Let me explain this a little further under the light of the distinctions between Cartesian and baroque metaphors. Cartesian metaphor is explanatory, ‘it wants A to stand in the same relation to B as C does to B. Whereas the baroque metaphor is more poetic, and it demands that A stands in the same relation to B as C does to D’ (See Antonio Negri, *The political Descartes*, “Metaphor and Memory”, Verso, 2006, P.28-29). I use the translator as a Cartesian metaphor, and try to refrain from the way baroque metaphors unfold from one element to the other.

280 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ‘the task of the translator’, P. 70
significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability’. Thus translation may be comprehended as an act that strives to wrest out of the original that inherent significance. A task that is only doable through a particular mode of rendering meanings. This inherent significance, however, is neither the exact meaning or the gist of the original, nor is it a singular feature of a particular text that may never be found in any other.

The key to understand the inherent significance of the original text is to be found in Benjamin’s view of the relationship between languages: ‘Languages are not stranger to one another but are, a priori and apart from the historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express’. The task of translation, therefore, is to facilitate the expression of that reciprocal relationship between languages — to arrive at a pure language. The kinship of languages, for Benjamin, manifests itself only in translation, albeit if translation is not concerned with a ‘vague likeness between adaption and the original.’ In each language, as a whole, there is an underlying intention wherein rests the ‘suprahistorical kinships of languages.’ Nevertheless, no single language, asserts Benjamin, is ever able to attain that intention by itself. Rather, such an intention is only realized by the ‘totality of their intentions supplementing one another: pure language.’ This is why the translator is, ontologically, an activist who creates by bonding a text’s interior world to its supplementing outside (outplace). I use ontological because only an ontology of language can help us understand what is meant by pure language, i.e., the totality of language’s intentions supplementing one another.

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281 Ibid, p. 71
282 Ibid, p. 72
283 Ibid, p. 73-74
284 Ibid, p. 74
It is worth noting that Benjamin is not alone in posing the idea of “pure language” as that calls for translation. His account of pure language — the totality of languages’ intentions supplementing one another — resonates with Heidegger’s notion of what is spoken purely as ‘that in which the completion of the speaking that is proper to what is spoken is, in its turn, original’ (Heidegger, Language, P. 192). This can be conceived of as what resides in the hidden kernel of ‘discourse’ before it is transcendentialized. Heidegger’s proposition for arriving to pure language, however, is not through translation. Rather, it is through an engagement with ‘a more careful use of language’, i.e., a more careful form of speaking that stays aloof from the reign of ‘idle talks’ and, instead, remains attentive to ‘the speaking of language’. To give this a context we should recall his famous assertion that ‘language speaks’, and in its speaking, it says something. Heidegger suggests that it is this ‘careful use of language’, which helps us hear what language says in its speaking. The latter is, of course, what assists man to have a more authentic understanding of his ‘being-in-the-world’, as well as his ‘being-with-one-another’.

There won’t be any firm grasp of what Benjamin calls the basic law of philosophy of language without distinguishing the intended object from the mode of intention:

*The words Brot and pain “intend” the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word Brot means something different to a German than the word pain to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to the intended object, however, the two words mean the very same thing. While the modes of intention in these two words are in conflict, intention and object of intention complement each of the two languages from which they are derived; there the object is complementary to the intention.* (Ibid, P. 74)
The task of the translator can then be demonstrated as identification of that ‘intended effect’
(intention) on the target language, in order to produce in that language the echo of the
original. Hence, the vital importance of the translator’s approach to the questions of
“fidelity” and “freedom”:

What can fidelity really do for the rendering of meaning? Fidelity in the translation of
individual words can almost never fully reproduce the meaning they have in the
original. For sense in its poetic significance is not limited to meaning, but derives
from the connotations conveyed by the word chosen to express it....A literal rendering
of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a
direct threat to comprehensibility... Translation, instead of resembling the original’s
meaning must lovingly incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making
both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater
language... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his
own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully
affected by the foreign tongue (Ibid, P. 78, P. 81).

The type of fidelity that concerns the translator is not a sort of loyalty to the exact rendering of
the meaning of the original. Rather, translator owes fidelity to the freedom of incorporating the
form of the original (its mode of significations) in the target language. What Benjamin refers to
as the ‘significance inherent in the original’ is indeed the original’s mode of signification.

Thus, when we say a work is translatable, it means that its nature, i.e., its mode of signification,
lends itself to a type of translation whose aim is to liberate the intention that is confined within
that language — to arrive at a pure language. Such a task is, however, accomplished at the
expense of the recreation of the original. This way both the original and the target language undergo a change. The original changes by being recreated, and the target language is transformed by being affected by the original’s mode of signification.

**Difference between the Visitor and Benjamin’s Translator**

Although Benjamin’s remarks on the task of the translator allow me to build my argument about the Visitor, there is no one to one correlation between the two figures. For example, unlike Benjamin’s translator, the Visitor does not treat languages at a suprahistorical level. The specificities of historical/materialist relationships between the language of the centre (English) and peripheral languages render the Visitor a ‘stranger’ and a linguistic interventionist. Thus, to repeat, the translator is a metaphor in reference to which the Visitor is conceived of — as if the Visitor was (not only a visitor but also) a translator.

Central to this metaphor is Benjamin’s assertion that translation is a *mode*. A procedure’s *modality* is graspable only in its particularities, therefore, there is no such thing as a given *a priori mode*. Rather, *mode* is always immanent to the procedure itself. Each text lends itself to translation in a particular mode (just as each object of art lends itself to be Visited in a particular mode). However, translation is only possible because languages are already ‘interrelated in what they want to express’ in an ‘*a priori*’ manner ‘and apart from historical relationships’. And this interrelation, or ‘suprahistorical kinship’, *is* there in all languages in the form of an ‘intention’ which could be realized, or come into *existence*, only through translation. In other words,
translation, or the crossing over of something from one language to the other, is only possible because languages intend to be translated in an a priori manner. In other words, there is ‘a profound reason’, a ‘pure language’ that is there in all languages yet does not exist, that bestows the task of translation on the translator: to make room for the existentiation of pure language.

Whence the task of the translator is to make ‘both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language’; in other words, the translator is ultimately responsible to, and responds to the call of, that ‘greater language’ that only emerges through translation. A bad translator ‘preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.’ In other words, he only responds to the call of the general order (or the transcendental) of his own language, and tries to transmit the message of the original to the target language without disturbing that order. But a good translator responds to the call of pure language that intends to be realized through translation, and thus remains fidelitous to the freedom of incorporating the original’s mode of signification into the target language.

Just as the translator can translate particular modes of signification because there is a pure language residing in all languages in the form of an intention, or really in the form of translatability, the Visitor can Visit because there is a pure possibility of encounter in all Visitorable objects/situations. Of course not all situations are Visitorable. To rearticulate our critique of Rancière in the language of visiting, mass semiotic production and machinic enslavement make the forest of signs increasingly unvisitorable. In other words, the pure possibility of encounter is increasingly covered over in layers and layers of spectacular

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285 Ibid, p. 81
messages. In Visitorable situations, the Visitor conceives of both the artwork and the course of Visiting as fragments of a greater language of encounter. Responding to this language, he allows his institutionalized language of art, which condition his ‘ways of seeing’, to be greatly affected by the contingencies of the relationships between the visible and the linguistic. In other words, rather than the transcendental grammar of the artworld, the Visitor maintains fidelity to the contingencies (freedoms) of seeing and saying — as if he was translating the Visitorable situation’s mode of signification into the institutional language of art.

**A New Paradigm: Visitor-object-Visitor**

The Visitor is a process, once achieved, anyone in it is a maker. To Visit means to take adventure in encountering the contingencies of appearance while subjecting the body to the construction of a truth related to the ontological mechanism of this appearance. To Visit is to translate.

None of the Visitor’s characteristics are presupposed as natural or human condition of contemplation in the manner of Rancière’s emancipated spectator. The Visitor, on the contrary, is a trained subject-figure who has initially gained a critical faculty for abandoning the set of old presuppositions in which “seeing and acting”, “viewing and knowing” were pronounced as antagonizing categories. Following the development of such a critical faculty, he has also implemented the knowledge of, first, the ontology of language — that is, the relationships between language and discourse; second, the thought of contingencies and of encountering; and
above all, the thought-activist manner of reversing the language-discourse relationship in his own language-usages while producing or attending a work of art.

The Visitor is well aware of the necessity for relinquishing the “stultifying” idea of overcoming the gulf of knowledge that supposedly exists between one’s “ignorance” and the meanings in the object of contemplation. He maintains a critical distance from the object of contemplation. Thus he may adventurously problematize and intervene, instead of merely venturing, in the forests of signs. Through this course of intervention he is given the chance for embracing the contingencies of the objects’ significations. The assembly of these features constitutes the Visitor’s subject-figure.

This mode of contemplation, nevertheless, will never be accomplished, neither for the artists nor for the art attendees, if they fail to critically problematize both the discursive and the theoretical materials which historically determine what art is, or what is it that art ought to be? How should we attend art today that is proper to the historical specificities that condition art?

Akin to the translator, the Visitor believes that no work of art ever exists for the sake of the receiver. If no work of art exists for the sake of a receiver, the Visitor also need not be concerned with the existence of an artist behind the object. Thus, the Visitor is secularized from the burden of meaning imposed on him through the assumption of a vertical relationship between artist (God) and the perceiver: the quasi-theological duty to discover and receive, “the word”, the message, the meaning, the truth of the work by the intermediary of the object – the beholder’s ascetic process of abiding until the arrival of his promised redemption.
Such a mode of contemplation helps the Visitor posit that truth is not to be received, but to be constructed. This is of course distinct from Debord’s laments for the Spectacle concealing the truth behind the appearance of the image. What lies behind the Spectacle is not truth but the logical mechanism of the phenomenological operations of appearance. Truth, on the other hand, must be conceived of as that which traverses the predicative knowledge of the world (here the language and institution of art). It is a constitution, which results from the Subject-thought that is summoned by the singular.

Through implementing such theory of contemplation the Visitor becomes able to attend art the same way he has ever attended all the other things coming across his way throughout his life. A toddler never worries what a frog means. It only encounters what it can make of it, by squishing it, by putting it in its mouth, until the mother’s language cries out: “do not”.

The very same mode of Visiting is also implementable by the artist. An artist could manage to Visit both what he is doing and what he has already done, each demanding its own condition. To Visit what he is doing, he must embrace the contingencies of the material he is working with — i.e., thinking with and through material rather than employing them to illustrate his thoughts. To Visit what he has already done, he must embrace the linguistic contingencies of the object’s mode of signification.

In the procedures of making, instead of preserving his pre-making intentions, the artist can Visit and embrace the contingencies of the material with which he is working (both linguistic and non-
linguistic), and thereby, allow the process of making itself to be powerfully affected by those contingencies.

In Visiting what he has already made, he maintains a critical distance from the object, so to allow himself Visit the contingencies of the object’s mode of significations. This way, he permits his own understanding of the work to be powerfully affected by those contingencies, and thus, transformed into another object; this time, in the form of a recreated and a “contemplated” work of art. This recreation of an artwork through the course of Visiting is indeed to release art from the artwork. In other words, to Visit is to allow art work by being recreated as another “contemplated” artwork. Thus, art making is a mode of thought-act.

The task of the Visitor consists in making a work of art from what he gets to see, be this making from the position of an artist or from that of an art attendee — Visitor-object-Visitor.
Chapter 6 – *The Paradoxical Trinity of Philosophy*

Thought-Activism and the Paradoxical Trinity of Philosophy

*Expression as a content turns out to demand impression as its form, and we end up having to describe a structure of intellection in terms of what it “feels like” to think it.* (Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, P. viii)

*If philosophy is paradoxical by nature, this is not because it sides with the least plausible opinion or because it maintains contradictory opinions but rather because it uses sentences of a standard language to express something that does not belong to the order of opinion or even of the proposition. The concept is indeed a solution, but the problem to which it corresponds lies in its intentional conditions of consistency and not, as in science, in the conditions of reference of extensional propositions. If the concept is a solution, the conditions of the philosophical problem are found on the plane of immanence presupposed by the concept [...] and the unknowns of the problem are found in the conceptual personae that it calls up [...] A concept like knowledge has meaning only in relation to an image of thought to which it refers and to a conceptual persona that it needs.*

(Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 80 – 81)
The attempt of this exegesis was to establish that thought-activism is the strategic contradictory unity of theory and practice, whose tactic is to formalize the praxis of reversing the language-discourse relationship (The Visitor). Not only is the conjuncture of thought-activism paradoxical in its indication, its historical topology is paradoxical too. Thought-activism emerges out of the topoi between meaning and language, between logic and linguistic, between the problematic dichotomy of analytic and continental language schools, between knowledge of being (ontology) and knowledge of appearing (onto-logy).

Thought-activism is not reducible to a theoretical gesture, nor to a matter of affect, or to a mode of critical thought, or even to absolute pragmatism. It is really the result of a philosophy since in what constitutes philosophy, thought-activism forms a part. Deleuze and Guattari show that for every philosophy to take place it must present a trinity. ‘The prephilosophical plane it must lay out (immanence), the conceptual persona or personae it must invent (insistence), and the philosophical concepts it must create (consistency).’ A conceptual persona is always situated between the “concept” and the “image of thought”. The image of thought is implicit, subjective, and pre-conceptual. It is only a plane that must be occupied by a concept. Thus, every concept presupposes an image of thought. However, the diagrammatic plane of immanence (the image of thought) must not necessarily exist first and before the personae and concepts. It might exist first and thus supersede the other two. Yet sometimes this is not the case: ‘sometimes the persona seems to precede the plane, sometimes to come after it — that is, it appears twice; it intervenes twice.’ This is also the case with the philosophy of thought-activism. Thought-activism itself is

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286 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, “Conceptual Personae”, p. 76
287 Ibid, p. 75
the *created* concept. The Visitor is the *invented* persona. Yet, what about the third element, the plane of immanence, the image of thought with respect to which thought-activism as a concept and the Visitor as a persona could come to mean something? No concept or conceptual persona could mean anything without the problem. The concept is a solution yet:

* A solution has no meaning independently of a problem to be determined in its conditions and unknowns; but these conditions and unknowns have no meaning independently of solutions determinable as concepts. Each of the three instances is found in the others, but they are not of the same kind, and they coexist and subsist without one disappearing into the other. (Ibid, p. 81)

The relationship between each of these three philosophical elements could sometimes be much more twisted than it appears. For instance, I argue, via Deleuze and Guattari, that sometimes it is the persona whose invention makes possible the retroactive articulation of the plane of immanence, i.e., the problem. Since the plane of immanence (image of thought), or the problem-set, is implicit, subjective, and pre-conceptual, it must always be laid out. The image of thought is that which implies what it feels like to think. Thus, sometime, it is the primary invention of the persona that enables us to articulate what the problem is, to lay it out beyond the level of “feels like” so that it can be occupied by a concept.

The *problem* is always there like an amniotic sac, a suppressive layer stretched over Being embracing the form of it. Yet the true difficulty is to understand the problem as *problem*, to be able to envision it from outside without yet breaking it. Because to break out of this sac is
tantamount to obliterating it. Sometimes the anteriority of the conceptual persona, or of the concept, is what makes the articulation of the problem possible.

On several occasions, throughout this exegesis, I pointed at the problem linked to thought-activism as “the contemporary impasse”. We also discussed its symptoms, the different forms they take. Let us now see how the Visitor as the persona linked to the concept-solution of thought-activism, brought us to articulate what this contemporary impasse exactly is.

The Visitor is not completely a conceptual persona, nor merely an aesthetic figure, or simply a psychosocial type. Rather, it is a conjunction of all the three. The Visitor is a conceptual persona insofar as it is the tactical figure who performs the paradoxical thought-acts and is in service of the concept/strategy of thought-activism. Therefore, the Visitor as a conceptual persona occupies the plane of immanence (philosophy), the problem with regard to which thought-activism is the solution. The Visitor is also an aesthetic figure insofar as it produces paradoxical affects that transcend ordinary affections and perceptions. It also draws the consequence of the contingencies in the “plane of composition” (art). This production and drawing on takes place either when the Visitor deals with artistic production or the ‘artistic appreciation of the finished work without finitude”288. Ultimately, the Visitor is a psychosocial type insofar as it is an ESL figure, a “stranger” proceeding on the margin of the “encyclopedic zone” of the world, the world of

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288 The phrase is Alain Badiou’s, describing art as one of the conditions of philosophy. The full passage reads: [...] I will rely on what I find new in the contemporary conditions of philosophy. Coming to my aid indeed will be the sophisticated mathematics of entangled infinities, the artistic appreciation for the finished work without finitude, the existential experience of amorous infinity, and the finished political sequences of the infinite communist strategy. Ref: (Alain Badiou’s *L’immanence des Vérités: l’être et l’événement*, 3, Fayard, 2018.). The translation cited from Timothy Lavenz’s translation of section III, Chapter c11, parts 1-4 (out of 12)
vision and language. The Visitor is a psychosocial type since it makes the established language of the world (i.e., English) stammer.

For Deleuze and Guattari, a conceptual persona carries the power of concepts and an aesthetic figure that of affects and percepts; the former deals with the plane of immanence that is an image of noumenon while the latter deals with that of phenomena. The Visitor operates between \textit{logic} and phenomenology, between ‘the concrete experience of the life-world and the universal concepts of thought’. The Visitor in this sense is a figure of conjunction. These figures, Deleuze and Guattari argue, are ‘\textit{half philosophers but also much more than philosophers}’.  

\textit{The features of conceptual personae have relationships with the epoch or historical milieu in which they appear that only psychosocial types enable us to assess. But, conversely, the physical and mental movements of psychosocial types, their pathological symptoms, their relational attitudes, their existential modes, and their legal status, become susceptible to a determination purely of thinking and of thought that wrests them from both the historical state of affairs of a society and the lived experience of individuals, in order to turn them into the features of conceptual personae, or thought-events on the plane laid out by thought or under the concepts it creates. Conceptual personae and psychosocial types refer to each other and combine without ever merging.} (Ibid, p. 70)

\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy}? , “Conceptual Personae”, p. 65}

\footnote{Ibid, p. 67}
That Which Is Not and the ESL Manner of the Visitor

The Visitor, above all and before anything else, Visits language.

Of all the three facets of the constitution of the Visitor, being a psychosocial type is what enables him to understand the problem and connect it to the concept-solution that thought-activism is. The Visitor is a psychosocial type insofar as it is an ESL thought-activist, a “stranger” proceeding on the margin of the world, the worlds of vision and language. The ESL thought-activist transforms both his own language, as well as English as the language of domination. The Visitor perfectly knows that the void he is temporarily suspended in — i.e., the temporary disjunction between language and discourse — is the outplace/infinite of the world’s hegemonic language. Thus, he utilizes it as a moment of freedom, as a chance to turn the logic of mimesis to that of poiesis, and thereby to construct a Visitorable situation (i.e., performing the protocol of abstraction). It is through militarizing this foreignness of himself that he, as a psychosocial type, attempts to make the established language of the world (i.e., English) stammer.

I have already showed that the relationship between language and discourse is foundational – and not equiprimordial – in the sense that language is based upon discourse. We learned (via Heidegger) that ‘language is neither an expression nor an activity of man. Language speaks’. The speaking of it says something to us in ‘what has been spoken purely before.’ Let us tactically

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291 ESL: English as a Second Language
replace ‘what is spoken purely’ with ‘discourse’, knowing that the two are not exactly the same:

Language speaks. The speaking of it says something to us in discourse.

Discourse is ‘the articulation of intelligibilities.’ At the same time, it is in an equiprimordial relationship with understanding which, itself, is a fundamental mode of the being of man. Understanding, in Heidegger’s terminology, signifies that ‘being-in-the-world’ as such is disclosed in the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’. This disclosedness is called understanding. On the other hand, we have Heidegger’s notion of interpretation, on the basis of which lies discourse. Lastly, ‘interpretation’ is the appropriation of what is understood.

The relationship between ‘discourse’ and ‘interpretation’ is foundational. The outcome of this is crucial: What is referred to as “meaning” is in fact what can be articulated in ‘interpretation’. It can thus be concluded that ‘discourse’ is the articulation of what is “discussed”, of what is “said before”, of what is “spoken”, and in short, of what can be articulated from the intelligibility of ‘being-in-the-world’. In this sense, the ‘totality of signification’ is structured in discourse. This totality is exactly what is put into words while the language is at use. Hence, language is based upon discourse, and it is to be comprehended as a discourse that is voiced.

Akin to a child learning its mother tongue, the ESL person learns the second language in a mimetic fashion. The difference is that the ESL person’s relationship to this mimesis is not enforced through the maternal logic of the contiguity of pointing, enunciating, and implicating.

292 Despite their differences, and for the sake of maintaining the momentum of the argument, here I use the term ‘man’ in lieu of Dasein (being-there).
293 Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 139
performed by mother. In other words, the ESL person does not learn the second language in an indexical manner as is the case between the child and the mother. The ESL person’s logic of learning and mimesis is indeed paternal.

In the case of the child and mother tongue, and on the backdrop of the relationship between language and discourse, the child is already exposed to the practices of ‘discourse/the transcendental’ by living the instances of life. Thus, in an implicit fashion, it learns the language that is based upon that discourse, i.e., the language in which that discourse is voiced. In other words, the child arrives to language from discourse. In the case of an ESL person, on the other hand, one is dealing with the reversal of this relationship. In other words, the ESL person arrives to ‘discourse’ from language. Thus, he learns the language in an explicit and iconic fashion.

From the moment he is introduced to the symbols that words are, until he learns their meaning through the paternity of the “dictionary”, the ESL person is suspended in a signifying void, in the absolute absence of the foundational relationship between language and discourse. For him, however ephemerally, the two are disconnected. This is because the words the ESL encounters, are not yet fully loaded with the totality of signification put into words from the structures of ‘discourse’. With the ESL person, there is no such thing as what can be articulated through interpretation; the interpretation of the previously ‘articulated intelligibilities’ (i.e., discourse).

Since “meanings” are what can be articulated in ‘interpretation’, therefore the ESL person dwells in an ephemeral absence of meaning. Indeed, words for him are not yet complete signs (signifier/signified). Rather, they are only signifiers without any signified, mere physicality of
sounds, or abstract images devoid of any signification. Nevertheless, this lack of signification does not entail that those words cannot elicit any form of sensation in the ESL person.

From this void, by taking on the bypass of translation, the ESL person will first subject the unknown signifier to the discourse of his own mother tongue and, from there he commences his speculations on the discourse of the second language. The ESL person, therefore, learns the second language through absolute practices of reification and alienation.

This void, the disjunction between language and discourse, in which the ESL person is ephemerally suspended, is literally the infinite/outplace\textsuperscript{294} of the situation (world) he proceeds in. Thus, it can simply be the moment of freedom for him to transform the language he is learning/using. Such a task, however, involves a type of ESL who has already implemented a knowledge of thought-activism (i.e., the practice of reversing the ontological relationship between language and discourse). In one word, such a task demands a Visitor.

Let us remember that the Visitor is already equipped with the existence of the profound reason beyond the particularities of his acts, which cannot be uprooted (theory of thought-activism). Subsequently, the ESL Visitor makes of his own ignorance an adventurous driving force behind venturing into, and thereby, problematizing the forests of signs of the foreign language, from which he is privileged to already have a critical distance. Such a “distance” must be understood as the state of not being used to the signs, not having yet embodied them, and thus, not having

\textsuperscript{294} In the chapter on thought-activism and the ‘contradictory unity of theory and practice’, we discussed that in Theory of the Subject (1982), Badiou refers to this as dialectic of the “splace [esplace]”/the “outplace” [horleiu], or ‘of the subjects that truths induce as the form of a body.’
been subjugated by their univocal meanings. All Visitors attend art in the mode of the ESL person.

The Visitor Visits the language he is using/facing. Which is to say that he transforms the language he is using/facing. While encountering the signs, due to their lack of signification, he has the privilege of attending (to) them in the way the Visitor creates a Visitorable work of art. To put it differently, he maintains the protocol of abstraction. He creates an unknown chain of signification from known and recognizable individual signs (poiesis). In other words, he creates a triangle of object, body, and language, with a high degree of incommensurability between object and language. The Visitor uses/perceives words and expressions in their pre-transcendentalized state — that is, before them having completely become a language. This way the thought-activist Visitor accomplishes to allow the signs [of the foreign language] be powerfully affected by his mother tongue, and vice versa; to organize a linguistic synthesis that is the result of, on the one hand, his mother tongue being powerfully affected by the foreign language, and on the other hand, the foreign language undergoing morphological and syntactic change through the Visitor’s uses of neologisms, paralogisms, etc.

Through this regime of affection, the Visitor can detect in the signs, for instance, their constitutive individual parts, their etymological commonalities with other signs, their homophonic features, and so on. Advantaging from all these, he can achieve to associate and compare everything he is Visiting in that second language with things he has previously known. In this sense the Visitor is also an aesthetic figure because he produces and draws on the power...
of affects and percepts while in the compositional situation of dealing with artistic operational material.

Through these processes of association, dissociation, and interpretation, the Visitor creates new semiotic opportunities within distinctive situations. He does so by uprooting the signs of the foreign language from their discursive semantic field, and thereby, subjecting them to the courses of assertive manipulation, and ultimately implanting them in illogical semantic fields. This thought-act of assertive manipulation can take place in a variety of tactics: different forms of neologism; combining signs with one another akin to a readymade artist or bricoleur; or by implementing signs in paradoxical language-uses. Doing so provides the Visitor a basis for consigning subversive significations to these newly born signs.

Another tactic is paralogism or the illogical use of logic, which, for instance, is the case in many jokes. Paralogisms can be categorized within the two sets of verbal and conceptual. The former deals with relations between the signifiers, whereas the latter centers on relations among the signified. There also exists another type of paralogism that consists in a fallacious deduction touching upon the relationships between homophonic signifiers and humorous phrases. We may call these “witty paralogisms”. For Aristotle, this play on words is a form of argumentation capable of altering the direction of thought.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ In a close examination, the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno, mediates (via Freud and Aristotle) on the notions of joke and witticism. He deconstructs jokes into their ‘nature’, ‘structure’, and ‘logic’. For Virno, in their ‘nature’, jokes are innovative actions that take place in the public sphere in presence of a neutral third person. It is this very “third person” whose existence makes the joke possible — a figure without whom the joke would not exist. The significance of this “third person” is, one the one hand, due to the role he plays to the success of the joke, i.e., indicating whether the joke was effective. On the other hand, it is the figure who ‘authorizes the interchangeability of the joke and public action’. In their ‘structures’, jokes apply a rule to a particular or contingent situation, for which it demands to go beyond the established norms of that very situation. Ultimately, in their ‘logics’, jokes are
By creating and using these hitherto non-existent signs in different forms of language-use, the thought-activist ESL Visitor implants in the foreign language signs of transformation. On the basis of the preceding analysis, we can understand how the Visitor transforms both the foreign and his own mother tongue: by turning the logic of *mimesis* to that of *poiesis*. In other words, the Visitor creates forms of *simulacra* yet in a thought-activist manner.

The simulacra precede reality and thereby, in an imitation of reality, create it.²⁹⁶

_The era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials — worse:_
_With their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real (Baudrillard, _Simulacra and Simulation_, P. 2)_

Indeed, simulacra have no referent out there in reality. They themselves become the referent, to which refers the created sign, the created reality. In other words, the simulacrum is itself the referent for the sign that “reality” is. This is literally the case with the Visitor’s thought-acts. He creates signs whose signifieds are yet to come into the world. Yet, the very presence of the sign itself requires the assumption of the existence of a discourse. It is how the hitherto non-existing

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discourse does come into being; a discourse for which the Visitor’s poiesis/poetic simulacra are referents.

Of course, in order to become a Visitor, one does not need to be an ESL-figure. By utilizing the ESL metaphor, I am inclined to facilitate the demonstration of the relationship that exists between the Visitor and language while attending a work of art. For this very reason, it is vital to distinguish the ESL from the thought-activist ESL, or, the Visitor. But all Visitors, even those for whom English is a mother tongue, must attend the work of art in the mode of ESL. We have learnt all the way from Freud and Lacan to Julia Kristeva that human being is already a stranger to itself. This is because, as Terry Eagleton puts it, human subject is made from the non-human, that is, from language, history, heredity, social institutions, etc. As mentioned before, for Kristeva, the cause and symptom of this foreignness to the self is given in the subject’s encounter with their use of language. Moreover, Kristeva shows us how the experience of being a foreigner, how the subject-position of the stranger with respect to a foreign language, to a culture, to the Other, can help them better realize the strangeness within the self. Although the ESL feels this foreignness much better than anyone else, to Visit means, for everyone, to turn this universal foreignness into a privileged position as the thought-activist ESL does. In other words, to Visit a work of art necessitates employing a ‘thought-activist ESL approach to the language of domination and subjugation, that is, to English.

For Benjamin, there always remains something in languages that cannot be communicated; something that is symbolizing or symbolized. To regain the pure language fully formed in the

linguistic flux is to turn the *symbolizing into the symbolized*. And this is the incredible and only capacity of translation.\(^{298}\) Correspondingly, by decentralizing the signs of *the Visitorable* work or situation from their established context — that is, from the structures of language — the Visitor liberates them toward a much broader linguistic and semiotic flux, in which they can gain subversive capacity and signifying multiplicities. The multiplicity of signification is exactly what they were deprived of due to the restraints of language.

Instead of striving for the likeness of his understanding of the artwork to the artist’s intention, the Visitor concerns himself only with the significance inherent to the work’s mode of signification. Instead of directing his effort to turning an artwork into his own linguistic and semantic capacity, the Visitor strives to turn his own linguistic and semantic capacities into a work of art. The Visitor does so because he has dispensed with the false question of “*what is art?*” and so-called artistic “subjectivity”. He has understood the necessity for implementing his own strangeness to the dominant language of art as well as the artwork’s strangeness to his own language. So, he would be able to ask *what is it that the Subject of art ought to be* to address the universal and historical condition of strangeness? And eventually in this way, in Visiting, both the work and the Visitor’s language undergo a transformation. These transformations will remain afoot insofar as the discursive art world, that is pursuing the question of the intersubjective, does not fail in giving rise to its *Visitors*.

\(^{298}\) Benjamin, *Task of Translator*, P. 79 - 80
Conclusion

Thought-Activism and the Poiesis of that Which Is Not is produced in relation to Marxist thought. Although with a different methodology than that of classic Marxism — i.e., the socioeconomic analysis of the historical materialist division of labour — the concepts of thought-activism, the Visitor, and “that which is not” are to be conceived as responses to the philosophical and political Marxist inquiries. After all, it is the core lesson of Marxism that it is right to demand that which is nothing must become everything. Thought-activism directly engages with this directive as its own theoretical conviction, as the profound reason that exists beyond the unity of theory and practice that cannot be uprooted. It does so by providing philosophical accounting for the distinctions that ought to be understood between “being-nothing” and “not-being.” It argues how the operation of the states (transcendental) of the worlds consists in the constant processes of camouflaging the former within the rhetoric of the latter. Thought-activism, thus, presents itself as a strategy toward counter-symbolizing the language and the rhetoric of the state.

The core contribution of thought-activism falls under the categories of art and politics.

In art, it presents itself as the anti-thesis of the paradigm of the Sensory Alibi, which takes art as an a priori category and a mere realm of the sensible; a paradigm against the post-modern prioritization of the individual’s pseudo-poetic contemplative vision to art whose general axiom is: art is not to make one think, rather to make one sense.

In its place, thought-activism argues that art is a mode of thinking and discursive argumentation, a mode of Subject production enforcing the expansion of both the material and the formal
territories of the historical practices of art. The theory of the *Visitor*, the protocol of abstraction of *Visitorability*, and the replacement of the artist-artwork-spectator with the new paradigm of *Visitor-object-Visitor* are thought-activism’s contributions to enforce art as a mode of thinking and argumentation.

In politics, thought-activism identifies the neo-liberal, reified, and mediated rhetoric of identity politics as its enemy. After all, politics cannot exist without an enemy. It criticizes the thesis of “multiculturalism” formulated under the flawed axiom of the universal equality of legalized particularities. It finds it as an obligatory exercise to reveal the empty formalism of *democratic materialism* whose symptoms were investigated in chapter two of this exegesis under the question of *contemporary impasse*:

... annihilation of politics through state controlled advocation of political correctness; self-aggrandizing infatuation with hyper moralization of typical thinking vis-à-vis critical thinking; finding consolation in expressions of the self, culture, body, sexual differences, and the individual, at the expense of eliding the contemporary ethics of the same; replacing the people with doxa and public opinion through the media’s unilateral enforcement of an infantilizing language; mass production of economically motivated micro ideologies and social subjectivities at the expense of suppressing the Subject of change, and many more.

To establish the concept of thought-activism, this exegesis found it necessary to locate a historical contextualization and a summary of the traditions and debates in relation to which the
concept of thought-activism is developed. This task was attended to in chapter one of the exegesis. Chapter one began with an expansive historical and theoretical examination of the relationship between theory and practice and thought and action. It was argued that the philosophical history behind each of these two terms is as long as the history of philosophy itself.

To designate the topology of conflict over disparate approaches to the question of thinking and acting, this chapter took on a course of investigation into Parmenides’s famous axiom, τὸ γὰρ ἀνῶν νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι (... for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be), and its formative role in the history of philosophy. Different historical and philosophical readings of this axiom were then reviewed; readings which drove the formation of the Enlightenment and its concomitant “rationalism” (the primacy of the judgement of reason). This chapter also investigated Hegel’s take on Parmenides’s axiom, which informed his absolute identification of being and thinking. And finally, I addressed Heidegger’s radical denunciation of Western thinking, specifically his critique of Kant and the Enlightenment, founded on an erroneous translation of Parmenides.

As it was shown in this exegesis, thought-activism consists of a logical and a linguistic aspect. Chapter one focused on establishing its logical tenets. Such a task, however, took place through an extensive and critical review of Maoism’s axiom of “perpetual practice” and the general assumption of “ceding primacy to practice over thinking.” Through reviewing literatures of debate such as Alain Badiou’s take on Maoism, a symptomatic reading of Badiou’s Theory of Contradiction299 was conducted. Doing so, helped this chapter argue that the complex question

of the relationship between thought and the act, between theory and practice, forms the nucleus of thought-activism. This nucleus was formulated under the question of ‘the contradictory unity of theory and practice’.

To demonstrate in relation to what accounts of thought and subject the concept of thought-activism is developed, chapter two of this exegesis provided a comprehensive and critical review of Alain Badiou’s subtractive ontology. A constellation of individual concepts that constitute Badiou’s ontology had to be taken into scrutiny to demonstrate in what sense Badiou’s ontology is subtractive. A profound understanding of these individual yet interrelated concepts was essential for this exegesis to establish the notion of that which is not; a notion with respect to which thought-activism stands as a strategy. After all, for a subtractive ontology being qua being is not present in the world, i.e., it is subtracted from the existential framework of the world, and thus, is that which is not.

I argued that Badiou’s formal theory of the Subject is of crucial potential for surmounting the contemporary impasse of thought, art, and politics under the dominance of democratic materialism. It was then showed why Badiou’s Subject is, indeed, “Subject-thought,” and thus, is radically distinct from other notions of subject and subjectivity. The analysis of the concepts of “the singular,” “the particular,” and “the universal” in this chapter provided the basis for the exegesis’ critique of so-called “identity politics” and the contemporary dominance of the empty gesture of ‘universal respect for particularities.’
While examining each of the individual concepts involved in Badiou’s subtractive ontology, this exegesis also organized a critical analysis on their commonality, differences, shortcomings, with respect to similar concepts in Heidegger’s philosophy. The main aim was to highlight the questions of the infinite, the distinctions between “being-nothing” and “not-being”, and the similarity between “the transcendental” and “discourse.” Doing so, allowed this research to formalize the shortcomings of Badiou’s ontology and my suggested methodology. It is through demonstrating such shortcomings that I argued for the necessity of a supplementary ontological analysis of language. Chapter three thus concerned itself with establishing the linguistic aspect of thought-activism.

With a critical examination of Martin Heidegger’s approach to the questions of “consistency” vs. “causality” and a problematization of his presentation of thought and action, chapter 3 paid close attention to Heidegger’s seminal work on this subject, ‘What is Called Thinking?’, in which he conducts his reading of Parmenides, and thereby launches his denunciation of Western thinking. Despite the problematic nature of Heidegger’s approach to thinking and the question of “authenticity,” I argued that it is necessary to embrace his ontological analysis of language. The linguistic aspect of thought-activism was established through an asymmetrical alignment of Badiou’s subtractive ontology with Heidegger’s philosophy of language. My review of Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language consisted of examining his accounts of “discourse” and “language”, as well as the foundational (vis-à-vis equiprimordial) relationship between the two. This also demanded a scrutiny of the relationships between Heidegger’s accounts of “understanding,” “interpretation” and “idle talk” (Being and Time). Heidegger’s lectures, Language, and On the Way to Language were the key texts to access his notion of the ‘saying of
"language" together with his famous formula (prescribed to liberate thought from the spell of modernity and its concomitant nihilism) to bring language as language to language.

The discussions of the first three chapters enabled this research to establish the concept of thought-activism.

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Let us now once again look at thought-activism as a whole.

It was discussed that thought-activism is a strategy for which the core question is a conjunctural structure between thinking and acting in a way that each are perceived as a torsion of the other – thought-act. Through denouncing the Enlightenment’s paradigm of the subject-object relationship, thought-activism argues that it is necessary for contemporary thought and practice to distinguish “the subject” not from the “object” but from “subjectivity.” This way, the category of the subject can be liberated from the state economically-driven subjectivities that are advertised as the subject. Thought-activism formulates the following axiom that “acting is contingent upon thought, and thinking is possible if and only if acting. Therefore, it argues for the indistinguishability between the questions of “what is to be done?” and “what is to be thought?”

In its practical details, thought-activism is an ontological approach to the categories of “language” and “seeing.” It argues for the necessity of implementing the reversal of the discourse-language relationship, discussed in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, to remedy the shortcomings that exists in Alain Badiou’s philosophy of the Event. The final section of chapter
two of this exegesis attended to the provision of a detailed argument and accounting for these shortcomings. The crux of these shortcomings, however, can be summarized as the lack of proper attentiveness in Badiou’s subtractive ontology to the ontological roles that some linguistically charged activities can play in setting the condition for the formation of this Subject-thought, and thus, for the task of the change of the situation. It is on the backdrop of these accountings that in chapter three this exegesis suggests the practical implementation of the reversal of language-discourse relationship within the instances of art and politics. It argues for the value of tactics such as the production of neologisms, paralogisms, Visitorability, and the ESL manner, for the realization of the strategy of destabilizing the transcendental of situations; be it that these situations are in the domain of art or that of politics.

Thought-activism engages language as the operational materiality of forms. Against the normative account of form as the extant configuration of reality as it is, it conceives of form as the change of that reality. Therefore, for thought-activism to make a change happen, to make it take place, is exactly the same thing as constructing a form. Such an account of change is both formal and ontological insofar as it attempts to alter the logic of the ‘there’ of ‘all-that-is-there’ — the world. It was discussed in chapter two that given that the order of every situation (world) is maintained by its logic (the transcendental), the concept of thought-activism holds that such maintenance of order is exerted through logically directed discourses. In this sense, discourse is to be conceived as that which governs every and each situation. Therefore, thought-activism considers the formation, as well as the active operations of new discourses, as the opportunity for new semiotic and counter-discursive acts. These acts provide the basis for the emergence of subversive forces that aim at the disruption of the logic of each situation. Consequently, we
should state that the “Subject” (as will be shown) is the disruption of the logic of the world, and
the thought-activist is the Subject’s figure, i.e., the active agent, of such an operation.

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After developing the concept of thought-activism, this research could then investigate two
clueful questions that it identifies as the major problems of the contemporary era: identity and
abstraction. Social abstraction and incorporated-identity-politics form a dialectic, with the latter
as a response to the former. Such a dialectic produces the contemporary obsession with false
particularities under whose domination the possibility of the common vanishes. It is the
predominance of this contemporary problem-set that motivates and necessitates the production of
the theories of Thought-activism and the Visitor.

In section one of chapter four, with a view to the Hegelian Lord-Bondsman dialectic, and Ernst
Bloch’s concept of the Synchronicity of the Nonsynchronous, the question of the Other was
analyzed as a matter of temporality and futurity. It was argued that the key element, and/or the
core drive in the constitution of capitalist “time” is the notion of the Other. Subsequent to this
argument, it was then maintained that English is the Other. This chapter demonstrated that the
language of the Visitor is to be conceived of as the localization of a third language between the
language of the periphery and that of the hegemony. Thus, the Visitor’s language can by no
means be a language of “identity” or of any cultural particularity. The latter demanded an
accounting for the proximities as well as a description of the discrepancies with Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of the *Third Space*.  

The problem of abstraction as the other wing of the contemporary problem-set was analyzed in section two of this chapter. Such a task necessitated to investigate the questions of “spectatorship” and “contemplation” with respect to the notion of the “Spectacle” as a regime of both social and aesthetic abstraction. These questions were attended to in the works of Jacques Rancière and Guy Debord. Rancière’s remarks on Debord’s notion of “spectacle” and its concomitant denouncement of “contemplation” were then problematized. I demonstrated the inadequacy of Rancière’s account of “abstraction”, and his prescribed notion of “intellectual adventure” as a directive for the emancipation of the spectator.

Attending to the problem of “artistic abstraction” opened the way for this research to propose the notion of *Visitorability*. The neologism *Visitorability* was proposed as a protocol of abstraction that both surmounts the formal stagnation of contemporary art, as well can be analyzed as an attribute of a work of art or of an artistic situation providing both the artist and the art attendee the chance to become a Visitor. In tandem with the discussion of the previous section, the critique conducted in this section illuminated the necessity for the encounter-based theory of the Visitor.

The subject-figure of the Visitor was proposed as the methodological operation (praxis) of the concept of *Thought-Activism*. In chapter five, the *Visitor* was elucidated as a conjunction of a

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300 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994
‘conceptual persona,’ an ‘aesthetic figure,’ and a ‘psychosocial type’ within the domains of art and critical thinking. In the domain of art, the Visitor, is a reformulation of the categories of audience and spectator and as an encountering subject-figure, a translator, that takes effect on the plane of inter-subjective art. The Visitor formulates an encountering relationship between art and its receiver around the axis of the art object. The topology of the Visitor is both at the receiving end of art — i.e., the so-called spectator, audience, etc. — and at its production pole — i.e., artist. Therefore, the Visitor is to be conceived of as a radical rupture within art’s all too institutionalized and romantic tripartite relation, that is, “artist-artwork-spectator.” This rupture suggests a paradigm shift toward the encountering and intersubjective orientation of “Visitor-object-Visitor.” It was explicated that the Visitor is a subject-figure summoned by the thought of thought-activism. Nevertheless, given that the “Subject” is characteristically a process, it was demonstrated that the Visitor is a process that both the artist and art attendee may enter; a process that once in it, positions everyone as a creator.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s idea of the Trinity of Philosophy provided the ground to discuss how the psychosocial aspect of the subject-figure of the Visitor helps us understand the core aspects of the contemporary problem of thought and politics discussed in chapter five. Chapter six elucidated how the psychosocial aspect of the figure of the Visitor locates the Visitor as a “stranger” within the dominant fields of language and vision.

302 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, What is Philosophy?
On the backdrop of the above context, it became possible for this research to establish the notion of the ESL Manner of the Visitor, whose core focus is to elucidate the relationship between the Visitor and English as the language of domination. It was discussed that all Visitors, even those for whom English is a mother tongue, must attend a work of art in the mode of ESL. Thus, to Visit means, for everyone, to turn their foreignness to the self and to the Other into a privileged position as the ESL thought-activist does. In other words, to Visit a work of art necessitates the employment of a “thought-activist ESL” approach to the language of domination and subjugation, i.e., to English.

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After the discussion of this exegesis, perhaps the following questions can now sensibly be asked: Is there anything universal about art? Who does one make art for? What is the contemporary paradigm of semiosis in art? What is the relationship between art and discourse? What is the topology of meaning in art? What relationship ought to exist between theory and the empirical practices of art so that art can explain, at least to itself, its own relationship to “the contemporary”? How do theoretical reflections on the nature of language, the activities of discourse-making and word-making, help engender in art the possibilities for performing activism? What does the discursive question “what is it that art ought to be?” have to offer in response to the general idea that considers art not to be a mode of thinking, but rather a mode of sensations?
Art does many things. It *involves* the sensible and may cause sensations both in the artist and in the beholder, both during the processes of being made and those of being looked at when it ends up in the self-evidence of an object on display. Yet could any of this simply abolish the fact that discursive and intellectual argumentation are the resources to explain the logic and mechanisms of such sensations? Can art, by constantly resorting to *the sensory alibi*, escape the importance of argumentation as the core drive behind the expansion of its *ontological* paradigm?

How could the subversive exercises of the language of paradoxes, neologisms and paralogisms, of particular ways of using operational artistic material, of particular ways of attending to a work of art, and of the production of linguistic *statements/enunciations* about “that which is not,” all provide the basis for the occurrence and formation of new forms of thought?

One might embrace such a strategy in practical applications of artistic productions, in attending to a work of art, in pedagogical activism (vis-à-vis academic aristocratism), in taking part in “truth procedures” of the Subject of politics, or, and above all, in the everyday and ever-shifting practices of being a *generic* (not particular/general) citizen. Practical instances of such a strategy could be formalized in creative writing, in designing socially-engaged slogans, and in different forms of semiotic presence associated with the instances of visual art practices. It can be applied to a particular mode of art making, i.e., to follow the axiom of “Visitorability” as a contemporary protocol of abstraction. It can equip the art attendee with ways of encountering art, i.e., to Visit. And ultimately, in speech- and discourse-making while taking part in politics, especially when politics makes its demand on “us” to *affirm* the undecidable and the singular act of those who are languishing on the *encyclopedic zone of the world*. 
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Appendix: Shit Yes Academy (Goh Ballet Academy) Exhibition Publication

Foreword

Before proceeding to the publication of the practical component of this dissertation, i.e., the Shit Yes Academy (Goh Ballet Academy) exhibition, I think it is necessary to have some words with the reader of this exegesis about this exhibition. Specifically, it would be beneficial to lay some context both with respect to the genesis of these body of works, and more importantly about the relationship between theory and practice within the context of this exhibition. Afterall, the contradictory unity of theory and practice formulated under the concept of thought-activism forms the main inquiry of this dissertation.

At the very beginning of this exegesis, I mentioned that I consider theory and practice to act as a torsion of one another, in the sense that they could be conceived of as one and the same thing. I also mentioned that in my work — and under the aegis of thought-activism in general — the task is to leverage the dialectics between theoretically-led practice and practically-influenced theory. I argued how crucial it is to contextualize this dialectic in contrast with what could be referred to as “theoretically loaded art”. I clarified that:

In studio practice, I permit theory to come to my aid in thinking with and through the material, rather than employing the operational material to illustrate external thoughts and Ideas (Critique of “didactic art”). This way art’s possibility can be
conceived of as the production of the intellectual and the sensible through and not in the objects. On the other hand, in intellectual and discursive practice, I embrace the existing relationships between aesthetics and politics to engender a praxis of activism. It is through such an entanglement and interconnection that my research and practice are in confluence with one another.

As it became evident, in this exegesis an equivalence was set between theory and philosophy, on the one hand, and between practice and action on the other. Therefore, the question of the dialectics that ought to exist between theoretically-led practice and practically-influenced theory can also be thought of as the relationship between philosophy and art/politics.

To facilitate this laying of the context, let us assume the “reader” of this exegesis posing the following question:

*What is the relationship between philosophy and art in this research? Are you using the former to formalize and make sense of the questions that are at work within the latter? Or on the contrary, the practice of art is deployed in your work as a subservient to philosophy? In other words, are you assigning to art the task of transforming philosophical problems into artistic creations? Or as an artist you ought to become a philosopher to fulfill the task of providing the philosophical discourse for your work?*

I should first clarify that by no means should the above-mentioned dialectic be regarded as the confirmation of the obscure idea of “philosophical art”, or of art as a type of practice subservient
to the realm of philosophy. To be clear, and as far as my research and practice are concerned, there is no such thing as philosophical art. There can be artistic equivalences to philosophical inquiries, but the latter does not entail that art itself can be philosophical. Art does what it does independent of philosophy. In the end, they operate as distinct modalities. It is actually philosophy, as Alain Badiou maintains, that finds art as its own condition. This simply means that philosophy per se is empty and, thus, can only get charged if it finds its conditions. Art is one of philosophy’s conditions.

I can now return to those questions. First, Am I using philosophy to formalize and make sense of the problems that are at work in art? Second, am I translating philosophical problems into artistic ones? And finally, am I assuming the philosopher’s role to provide the philosophical discourse for my work?

Let me attend to these questions in a reversal fashion. The answer to the third question is a solid “No.” I (or any other thinker/philosopher) may provide discursive investigations on my artistic works, yet such a task is by no means itself a part of the relationship between philosophy and art implemented in the processes of my artistic practice. The answer to the second question is also an emphatic “No.” Translating philosophical problems into artistic ones is tantamount to what I earlier denounced — i.e., using material to illustrate pre-existing thoughts (theoretically loaded art) — and contradicting what I earlier proclaimed that I am doing, i.e., to think with and through the material. But the answer to the first question is a bit more complex.
Philosophy cannot originally be used as the articulator of the problems in art. By the latter, I mean that philosophy cannot be the point of departure for such a task of articulation. The point of departure is the practice and the contingencies associated with it. If we say that art is itself a mode of thinking, that means that it is the contingencies of the operational artistic material and of the practice in general that could engender ideas, questions, or thoughts and not the other way around. To put this in the language of the exegesis, it is to say that the process of “correct” knowledge commences its movement from practice to theory and then back to practice again — _practice-theory-practice_. Therefore, there are things that thought grasps only because of the contingencies of practice. Yet soon theory becomes essential to help the artist explain this grasping of thought to himself; to edit; to see which thought is in service of the project and which should be crossed out; or as Boris Groys puts it, ‘to [help artists] _explain what they are doing — not to others, but to themselves._’

Once again, _am I using philosophy to articulate the problems in art?_ Yes, but only under the above condition. Philosophy can be used to articulate the problems that have first arisen in the course of artistic practice and not the other way around.

I think I can now better address what is the relationship between philosophy, art, and art’s discourse in my research-practice.

My strategy as an artist is to use art as a realm of practice — indeed, a very particular realm of practicing with material — that could set the condition for the rise of ideas and questions that are

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for thinking and philosophy (and not necessarily for the aesthetic) to deal with. Personally, the latter is my strategic criteria to assess my own art, to see if I am happy with it or not. In other words, I assess my art through investigating whether my practice has provided enough possibilities for being guided toward questions that, although stemming from art, are not immanent to it. Subject, politics, desire and law, language and its roles on the formation of subjectivity, and many more, are instances of such questions. These questions come from my art but also allow me to go away from it and arrive at a different category in which these questions are of a practical significance — i.e., the category of life. If I am going to situate this strategy within the language of this exegesis, it is to say that I strategically use art as a mode of thinking and discourse production. Such a strategy, however, demands its own tactic, its own methodology, which for me and for any thought-activist is Visitorability as the contemporary mode of abstraction.

After the foregoing discussion, I can now walk the reader through the processes that brought about the formation of the Shit Yes Academy (Goh Ballet Academy) Exhibition at the Ag Galerie of Tehran (Iran) as one instance of my artistic practice.

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The image below shows my view to the Goh Ballet Academy’s building in Vancouver of Canada, that is located across the street from the cafe that I frequent at for many years. This cafe is located down the street from where I live. For years, sitting with my companions on the bench that is outside this cafe, I was deeply drawn to this building, absurdly, because of the presence of
the word “Goh” in its sign title. “Goh” is the family name of the business owner, yet in my mother tongue (Farsi) — with the same pronunciation — means “shit”.

Every now and then, while sitting in front of this building, I was snapping pictures of the people who just passed this signifier, *Goh*, with my cellphone, a practice that went on for a few years. So, I guess this was the most arbitrary formula that I had set up for myself to justify this activity of snapping these pictures. I had no idea whatsoever why I am doing this, or what I am going to do with these photographs. The result was an Instagram channel on which I was had posted hundreds of those images.
To give a linguistic significance to this activity I was performing, I had initially translated “Goh Ballet Academy” into Farsi in my head, and the result would read something along the lines of “The Ballet Academy of Shit.” And this was hardly providing anything interesting enough to work with. Until one day I underwent a linguistic event, giving me the impulse, this time instead of translating that signifying phrase, to transliterate it into Farsi. So, now Goh would still read as “Shit,” Academy as “Academy,” but Ballet would now read as “Yes.” The sonic signifier “Ballet” in Farsi (with the same pronunciation) means “YES.” Now, here I am with this new asignifying monster born out of such an event — Shit Yes Academy! It is important to note that by “monster,” I am referring to the notion that in the exegesis I developed both in relation and in contrast to Alain Badiou’s account of the term. Let me recite a summary of that argument here:

For Badiou, the great effect of the object that results from artistic abstraction, is indeed the presence of a monster. Similar to a true philosophical provocation, in fact, the monster’s being ‘is precisely an attempt at the objectivation of a clear negation of thought’ and, thus, it is the provenance of the idea. I argued that it is true that the result of abstraction is a monster imposing upon the viewer the question of
thinking and that of decidability about its own being. Yet, the monster is not necessarily that which is lying before the viewer’s eyes, i.e., the object. The real monster must be induced by the object, i.e., it ought to be the synthesis of a dialectics of encountering — encountering a paradoxical object. An object capable of inducing a monster is itself an assemblage of disorganized relations between the optical and the semiotic/linguistic. The monster therefore is, and must be, an object of thought.

_Shit Yes Academy_ exhibition literally is born out of incorporating this matter of contingency, this monster, into my material practice.
The exhibition is comprised of a series of images and objects that, somehow, depart from the Goh Ballet building in Vancouver and land around another building in Tehran, Iran.

What follows here, is a description of some of the works in the exhibition, narrated in the typical flow of the movement of the visitors through the gallery.

At the upstairs of the gallery, in different rooms we see a body of mono-patterned photographic and text-based images against their facade a permeable barrier of black lace mesh is stretched.

Lace is a central material in this body of works. For me, lace could be thought of as a sort of representational and desire-producing material, the functionality of which, whether in clothing or the image industry, can best be understood on the basis of it being always situated in an in-between position. It is a desire-producing material performing a mediating role, in the way that it induces one’s desire toward the body of the other by activating an ocular and voyeuristic mechanism, an incitement to desire to see more. And to see more of what? Of course, of that
which is placed behind the lace; the “body,” the “flesh,” or the representation of that which is advertised as “the real.” But what is interesting is that once one overcomes such a barrier, or in other words, once the lace is removed, you would see that there is not much of difference to be ascribed to these represented “bodies” or “realities.” What remains is more or less nothing but the *return of the same*. In fact, what you are facing here is an eternal recurrence, a repetition that is represented as difference. Indeed, lace functions through taking one up to the very threshold of the satisfaction of their desire, but by leaving them hovering over it, never allows them to pass that threshold. To me it seems that the very reason for the production of this material is also based on presupposing such a functionality it possesses — i.e., to take one to the threshold of satisfaction of desire yet always postponing the satisfaction to happen at a futurity that is to come.
When I came to Tehran to visit the space of the gallery to make sure whether Ag is a suitable space for this project, I noticed a gigantic building across the street from the gallery’s location. Later, I learned that the building is a gold and jewelry trading center. Coming across this building was itself another matter of formative contingency; indeed, what would later become a determining factor in the conceptual framework of the exhibition. After the incident with the name, “Goh Ballet” in Vancouver — which ushered in the Shit Yes as a peculiar monster, a floating signifier without a solidified signification — I had faintly started to think about the dichotomy of “gold” and “shit” and their relationship to the question of seeing. But now in Tehran, realizing that this building across from the gallery is a gold market, I was already determined that the Ag Galerie is the place I ought to do this installation at. Imagine a gallery in which one is going to “see” a type of art that is more or less concerned with the question of “shit”. It was obvious to me that such an exhibition cannot help but to be dialectically in a relationship with the question of gold as well, as these two together would form the extreme ends of a polar value system. Now, this gallery is literally located across from a gold and jewelry market. I could not ask for anything better.

In the courtyard of the gallery, I installed a sculpture that is basically made from the same lace which is stretched against the facade of all the images on display at the upstairs gallery. The reason for this sculpture to be made in the first place and then put in the courtyard was, first, based on assuming the customary movement of the visitors to the Ag Galerie, and second, to implement their a priori expectation of the gallery’s architecture, and of going to an art exhibition in general, into the overarching logic of the exhibition.
I was aware that the visitors to the Ag Galerie are habituated to begin their visits of the exhibitions from the upstairs space. Upstairs is where the Ag typically showcases the exhibitions. Thus, normally, the visitors head upstairs to check the “art”, and then end up downstairs in the courtyard without expecting to see more of “art”. Many of the works in this exhibition were basically produced with specific attention to this division of spaces in the gallery and with the thought of implementing the visitor’s movements throughout the gallery. With that said, I could suppose that the visitors who are running into the courtyard have already visited the upstairs’ works. Therefore, there were high chances for an association to be made between the optical experience they had with the image-based works upstairs and what they could see here in the courtyard. Yet this time this experience was with the very building of the gallery and with one another’s images.
Another piece in the exhibition, entitled *Untitled (Territory of the Semiotic)* was an aerial sculpture that the realization of its presence was very much contingent upon if someone possibly took up their head and saw the work. At first sight, the sculpture may have appeared as an overhead electrical wire having gone around the aerial space of the building. But in fact, it was a long line/rope made from the same lace used in different works of this exhibition. *Untitled (Territory of the Semiotic)* demarcates the areal territory of the gallery from its exteriority. I was aiming to visually separate the domain of the gallery as a distinct realm of signification from its exteriority. To do so, I had used a few metal poles installed on the top corners of the gallery’s building, which functioned as the armatures for this sculpture. On the tip of these poles, I tied an additional band of lace, thus, when they waved in wind one would recognize that this whole black wire-looking rope is also made from lace.
The other work in the exhibition is the *Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room)*. When the visitors came downstairs to head to the courtyard, they would possibly get attracted into a room from which a light was emanating outside. On your way toward the courtyard, this room is just before the courtyard’s door coming up. In the room, originally, there was a glass window through which one could see the courtyard and vice versa, i.e., one could see inside the room if looking from the courtyard. I had swapped this glass window for a one-way mirror window in a way that its glass side was facing the room and the mirrored side facing the courtyard. In this room, there was also another work, entitled *Untitled (Public eye Private nose)*. The work is a lightbox displaying an aerial image of Tehran, the area around the gallery’s building in specific. The lightbox leans against the wall to the immediate right of a window looking out onto the courtyard. In the focal point of this image, we see the plan view of a large building beside which the name of the street in which the gallery is located has been marked.
Among the upstairs works, there was a metal sculpture entitled, *Untitled (ShitGoldShit)*. The sculpture depicts the formal replication of the plan-view of the gold trading building as represented in the focal point of the lightbox image.
Now, if I go back to the *Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room)*, I can better explain the intervention that it performs. As I said, the mirrored side faced the courtyard, and the window side faced inside the room. Therefore, the visitors to the communal room who are spending time with the lightbox, would constantly get distracted by the visitors to the courtyard, who are checking on their own images reflected in the mirror, yet without knowing they are being seen by those inside the room. So, we see that there’s immediately a relationship made between those eyes looking at “art” and these “others” who are enjoying looking at their own images. The activity of the visitors to the courtyard interrupts the “art-seeing” of those who are inside, to the extent that the insiders would possibly give up on paying attention to the lightbox work and, instead, take pleasure in gazing, either furtively or evidently, at these others who are enjoying seeing themselves yet unaware of being seen. This whole dialectic became a material *for me* to *Visit* how images drive this consciousness that “the other” is, indeed, nothing other than the reflection of myself at a distance. Again, and this is important, by no means did I expect that any of these ideas are to be interpreted from these objects. Rather, for me, these objects, and the way all the other objects in this exhibition relate to one another in general, ideally provided me with a situation to *think* and *discursively* argue about these conceptual and economic questions.
And finally, there is this other work in the restroom of the gallery entitled, *Untitled (It is closer to You than It appears)*. The work is made by installing three individual mirrors in the bathroom. Thus, it would only work should a visitor decide to use the bathroom. In this sense, this work was the only work in the entire exhibition that could be experienced not through the mere act of looking and seeing, rather only through the act of using and producing. Suppose someone is using the bathroom, then due to the mirrors that were installed in front of different types of toilets in that bathroom, they would most probably face an image, which I believed it was much closer to them than it appeared. Of course, the users and the producers in the bathroom were not there thinking that they are in an “artistic” situation. It was only upon exiting the restroom that they would notice the title tag attached next to the restroom’s door indicating the phrase *Untitled (It is Closer to You than It Appears)*.

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I hope that by giving you this walkthrough to both the works of the exhibition, as well as to the production procedures of it, I could show that the very formative, or conceptual means making possible this shift of geography from Vancouver to Tehran, was just an act of paralogism, a linguistic event, and a pure matter of contingency, i.e., transliterating the “Goh Ballet” into the *Shit Yes*. Such an act of paralogism provided the basis to me to justify the production of the body of works showcased in this exhibition. Although there was no seemingly logical relationship between Mr. Goh, and the Farsi Goh (Shit), or between the French Ballet and the Farsi Ballet (Yes), but the transliteration of the Goh Ballet into *Shit Yes* was the most logical excuse to provide a *Visitorable* ground to make art that could guide me toward discourses and
argumentations on the questions such as value, modes of production, politics of subjectivization with respect to the questions of seeing and saying, and etc. And this was made only possible by embracing a Thought-activist ESL Manner during the contingencies of my practice.

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To see appendix A, go to the next page.
SHIT YES ACADEMY
(GOH BALLET ACADEMY)
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SHIT YES ACADEMY
(GOH BALLET ACADEMY)
by Ali Ahadi
Dear Reader,

Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy) was a solo exhibition and publication (itself considered as a part of the exhibition), held at the Ag Galerie of Tehran (Iran) in January of 2019.

This catalogue is the discursive component, and the extension, of a body of visual artworks showcased at the gallery. The exhibition consisted of a series of photographic and text-based mixed-media objects, a series of sculptural installations, and light-box images. It sought to circumscribe the function and subjectivation of the Visitor. It delineated the Visitor’s condition of vision within the long-standing dichotomization of, and reciprocity between, human excrement and gold, as two extremes of a polar value system in art (and beyond).

This publication includes essays written by the artists and thinkers Matt Browning, Gareth James, Mohammad Salemy, and myself. This body of writings attempt to provide a critical examination of both the material, as well as the discursive dimensions of the exhibition, in accordance with the question that contemporary art is.

The title of the exhibition comes from the name of a ballet academy in Vancouver (Canada) that once transliterated into my mother tongue (Farsi) would read as "شیت یا اکادمی" (Shit or Academy), whose English translation means "Shit Yes Academy" – Goh (Shit), Ballet (Yes), Academy (Academy).

Ali Ahadi
In 1991, I was on the verge of completing the installation of my first solo exhibition, at a gallery in Amsterdam. The gallery was closed for installation, but as I took a break for a beer in the bar behind the gallery, a stranger, an older man, walked in, sat down, made himself at home, and asked me if I wouldn’t mind telling him about the show. I gladly did so, barely suppressing my pride, and he listened attentively and enthusiastically. I explained to him that the front doors to the gallery would remain closed throughout the exhibition, that visitors would only peer in through the street windows before, in all likelihood, becoming distracted by the extraordinary display in the condom shop next door (the gallery was in Amsterdam’s Red Light district, and as such, any exhibition of art faced stiff competition in capturing a share of the visual attention of the city). Only the more determined spectators, I suggested, might realize that they could enter through the side door into the gallery’s offices, wind their way through the desks, telephones, computers, printers and the staff that operated them, that is, a spectator would enter the space of display from the rear and only after having navigated the space of administration. The stranger explained that he was moved to ask about the show because he himself was also an artist, one that had made an exhibition in that same space nearly two decades prior, and that he too had deployed the same gesture, spoke in the same architectural rhetoric of cancelling the liminal function of the front doors and diverting the spectators through the side entrance. Beyond this shared preamble, the stranger went on to provide a description of his exhibition that I’ve never recovered from, never want to, or intend to recover from.

It’s too late, always.

He had turned the entire front gallery into a darkened, light-proof room. The windows facing the street had been blacked out, and the audience (once they had passed through the gallery’s offices) had to then pass through a corridor that zig-zagged 180 degrees upon itself before leading to the rear entrance to the gallery, conveying the spectator into complete darkness. At the end of the corridor, small low-wattage orange lights offered the only guide for the blind spectators as they anxiously moved into the large gallery space. Gradually, as the spectators’ eyes acclimated to the low light levels, they would begin to dimly perceive framed photographs mounted conventionally.
to the walls, in addition to other stymied human bodies similarly undergoing the physical and optical effort of reacquainting themselves with visual spatial coordination. Comforting old habits of looking at visual artistic works on the wall of a gallery, that is, the comfortable old habits of being a spectator, ultimately reasserted themselves despite the unusual viewing conditions. Soon enough, the social habits of exhibition openings returned too - certainly not habits of looking at art, but of looking at each other, peppered with chit-chat and flirtatious conversations. As the opening reception reached a critical mass of excitable bodies mingling in the darkness, the stranger flipped an electrical switch connected to a bank of floodlights he had installed around the gallery. Sudden brilliant bright light expelled the previous intimate obscurity, and as the spectators recoiled from yet another test of their adaptability, they would gradually become aware that the photographs were newly adapting themselves too: turning darker, a swelling blackness came to occupy the frame, swallowing the images whole. As the stranger explained, the photographic paper had been exposed in conventional fashion, but pulled from their bath of developer without the fixative wash to carry away the developing chemicals that now, after what turned out only to have been a pause in activity, now continued its instinctive metabolic trajectory towards the annihilation of the very images that it had made possible. From camera obscura to camera lucida, the gallery was now the scene of a special type of image - the cadaver - of images consumed by the blind metabolism of the photographic process lining the walls and surrounding the no-longer developing bodies transformed into images and awash in a toxic fixative.

Listening to this description, an uncared-for memory of pubescent end-of-year discos in the school cafeteria came to mind: feelings of exhilarated dancing in dark rooms, of ecstatic, gregarious sociability bought to a sickening end as the rows of fluorescent lights flickered and hummed into action, of the palpable sense of being captured and exposed by the renewed visibility of my sweaty spotty teenage face, the return of desperation in assembling my best effort with cheap, disharmonious or pass clothes and hairstyles that were more of an ego-ideal than an achieved expression, of the sudden rebounding contraction of my juvenile libido, of losing a precious extension with others, of retreating back into the lonely isolation of the impoverished confines of an individual but unremarkable body separated from all others. It felt cruel, as banal as it was - the ritualistic return to order of each shamed back into their place - and I was simultaneously relieved (not to have been in attendance at the stranger’s exhibition as the memory — a series of looping images and affects his description awoke — threatened to renew its terror) and yet gratified for its belated illumination. In revisiting this memory today, prompted by thinking about Ali Ahadi’s exhibition and its similarly disquieting extension of the photographic apparatus, it becomes hard to avoid the conclusion that I was receiving a certain kind of bodily and semiotic training: I was a dancer, like anyone and everyone, in the Goh Ballet Academy.

These opening anecdotes establish something like an art historical and psychical lineage within which I place Ahadi’s Shit Yes Academy, but identifying the conditions in which his work departs from the stranger’s exhibition opens onto the key conditioning element of his exhibition. Unlike these virtually wordless zones of intensity in which images and bodies circulate precariously within a primarily optical economy trading on the basis of the suspension of language, in Ahadi’s exhibition a delirious linguistic economy arises to disorganize everything that the optical economy is so intent on coordinating. The topology of this disrelation is a complex historical
affair, and it is Ahadi’s reformulation of the category of the audience and of the spectator into the subject position of the visitor through which we must approach it.

In a lecture about his work in Vancouver some years ago, Ahadi remarked of an image taken of himself at the airport in Tehran on the day, the hour, the moment that he relocated from Iran to Canada, his open hand down pulling [raking] at the right hand side of his face and eye in a gesture that we suspect is wiping away a tear, perhaps of exhaustion or doubt-ridden resignation, as he says goodbye to members of his family: *I’ve been becoming the audience of this image, of myself, myself*. Poised at an inflection point between two modes of life, this image becomes for Ahadi a representative of the splitting of his subject position between Iranian citizen and foreigner (or stranger) - that is, it stands as the sentimental proxy for other inaccessible photographic and bio-graphic forms of capture of the splitting of Ahadi between two distinct and asymmetrically overdetermining forms of state subjectivation. It was this revisiting of this image of himself, about to embark on a plane to visit Canada, from Canada, this image of himself with which he was no longer able to maintain a simple indexical identity (look there - I am) that led him to elaborate the consequences of this quotidian but nonetheless disaggregating experience for art in general: *I’ve begun to use the term visitor in place of the spectator, because the visitor is more linguistically capable of registering the aspect of “having an encounter.”*

It will become clear that when Ahadi talks about the visitor, he is not employing the same rhetoric of the institutions of art whose legitimacy are so often now asserted on the basis of the quantification of the collective noun, visitors. The visitor, in Ahadi’s formulation, bares more relation to the stranger. The competence of the one who attends to art is not here judged in terms of familiarity, knowledge and insight - the figures of the expert, the connoisseur, the sensitive spectator or detective - but in terms of a constitutive and non-negotiable de-familiarization. In a brief excursus on the question of the stranger, Georg Simmel declared that the status of the stranger is not one that can be exhausted by and overcome by a gradually increasing familiarity. Rather, what provokes Simmel to consider this apparently banal figure is not the popular notion of the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather ... the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. The stranger, in modern societies, has a radically and ceaselessly perturbing effect on the social groups into which the stranger ventures. Regardless of how long the stranger stays, regardless of the degree to which he might be accepted into the group, the stranger expresses an internal difference that Simmel describes in a dialectic of proximity - he is near and far at the same time - and moreover, this distance transforms the group: his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself.

Simmel adopts a sociological perspective whose focus falls on the history of mercantile exchange, and briefly but importantly on the manner in which diasporic Jews occupied the position of stranger within the Medieval Christian economies of Europe - a matter of relevance to Ahadi’s
Formally, similar to the usage of an Eruv in Judaism, a 49 meters long rope made of the same lace used in the entire installation has been installed to territorialize the aerial space of the entire gallery’s building, demarcating the courtyard and the gallery space by separating it from the rest of the city.
concern with the dialectic between shit and gold - but there is additionally a psychical dimension to Ahadi’s semiotic repositioning of the spectator as visitor that is not accessible from this perspective. For this we ought to turn to Julia Kristeva’s literary and psychoanalytic investment of the notion of the stranger and the foreigner. Freud, Kristeva insists, does not speak of foreigners: he teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. Without doubting or downgrading the reality of processes of identification and abjection that operate frequently with the greatest violence at the level of group subjects based on ethnicity, gender, religion, geography or political structures, Kristeva insists that every speaking subject encounters a foreignness that, far from being a matter of external distance to another subject, is an unfathomable distance within the subject herself, whose symptoms and cause are given in the subject’s encounter with their use of language. Like all poststructuralists, Kristeva rejects the notion that we are self-evident to ourselves, that language is a tool with which we simply and successfully communicate our intended meanings to other selves, and that poetry represents the highest form of the expression of the self, either for its self or others. For Kristeva, the semiotic fecundity of poetry is the quality that enables the drives to discharge all manner of unfathomable unconscious material into language. In Kristeva’s view, the semiotic dismantles rather than upholds the symbolic order, of which the ‘I’ is every subject’s point of adhesion. It is not simply—humanistically—a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself. Rimbaud’s Je est un autre [‘I is an other’] was not only the acknowledgment of the psychotic ghost that haunts poetry.

There can be little doubt that Goh Ballet Academy is also not only the acknowledgement of the psychotic ghost that haunts poetry. Rimbaud’s violent unworking of French grammar was not only directed against the insipid and moribund state of academic French poetry, but equally the concretion of the violence of the effort to establish the propre of the French language across large parts of Africa and the Middle East for whose subjects French was not a mother tongue, vainly seeking to guard it against the incursion of strange and foreign qualities that could not originate from within. Rimbaud would have had ample direct experience of this, having himself taken an active role in the colonial project as a trader in Africa. We can see from this how Shit Yes Academy is not only the logical production of poetry’s psychotic ghost, nor is it only a farce of technical questions of translation. Adorno wrote that it was Stefan George who said, correctly, that the task of a translation of lyric poetry is not to introduce a foreign writer but to erect a monument to him in one’s own language, or, in the turn Benjamin gave the idea, to extend and intensify one’s own language through the incursion of the foreign literary work but it is Ahadi’s achievement to recognize that Adorno’s salutary description of the task of the translator is not the same as the task of his visitor. Ahadi’s predilection for linguistic error as a source of semiotic opportunity is an acknowledgment of the haunting of the social and the historical by the linguistic activity of the stranger and the foreigner implicit in his conception of the visitor that overlaps with, but is not identical to translation. That is to say that the successful achievement of translation, notwithstanding Stefan George or Benjamin’s xenophilia, sublates the contingencies of the encounter between different linguistic systems into new formal
consistencies, whereas Ahadi’s visitor proposes a new formalization of contingency itself, as the aesthetic reality of the stranger and the foreigner, exerting pressure not only within the linguistic and discursive operations of art, but on the photographic apparatus and the optical space of the gallery.

At first glance, it might seem commonsensical to assume that the optical space of the Goh Ballet Academy, and of the works within it, would be impervious to the derangement of semiosis which would remain safely sequestered to the periphery of the exhibition, operating in the epiphenomena of titles and interpretations, and incapable of disrupting the rational, and natural stability of the spatial distribution of the gallery and its artworks. The overwhelming use of metaphors of vision (rather than linguistic metaphors) to attribute certainty to knowledge in the Western philosophical and scientific traditions - from popular expressions like seeing is believing to the etymological roots of words like evidence [from videre "to see"] - is symptomatic of this belief. Art, and picturing, have been willing accomplices ever since Alberti offered a systematic methodology for linear perspective based in mathematical precision, laying the claim to a degree of objectivity of man-made truth claims in picture-making by proving its correspondence with an external world governed by the unbending laws of Physics. But space itself, since Alberti, has become far too unreliable an agent to serve as anything like an objective ground for knowledge, metaphorically or not.

In 1600 CE, Johannes Kepler was working as an assistant to the astronomer Tycho Brahe. Though they correctly assumed that the moon did not change size nor move further away, they were troubled by the fact that the measurements of the lunar diameter they obtained through the use of a pinhole camera were different during a solar eclipse. It was Johannes Kepler’s insight that the inconsistency was not a feature of the celestial body’s movement but of the instrument of observation itself. As Svetlana Alpers has described, what was at issue was the way in which the aperture of the pinhole camera interacted with the rays of light. Kepler’s radical answer, Alpers stated, was to build distortion into our understanding, an answer that required turning the aperture of the pinhole camera interacted with the rays of light. Kepler’s radical answer, an external world governed by the unbending laws of Physics. But space itself, since Alberti, has become far too unreliable an agent to serve as anything like an objective ground for knowledge, metaphorically or not.

of his strategy is that he deanthropomorphizes vision. Where Kepler declines to venture however, is where Ahadi picks up. We could put it like this: added to the psychotic ghost haunting poetry, we can now conceive of the psychotic magistrate haunting picturing, a stranger in the field of vision.

Without his ceasing to persist as a stranger, at some point in our conversation in the bar in Amsterdam (I can’t recall when) the artist introduced himself as Ulay. Of all his collaborative performances with Marina Abramovic, none left such an indelible mark on the galleries of modern art as their Imponderabilia. Created a year after Ulay’s photographs were swallowed up by the darkness, Ulay and Abramovic famously stood immobile, naked, and facing each other, backed up against the door jams of a makeshift entrance to a gallery, forcing gallery goers to shuffle sideways between them in order to enter into the gallery, their bodies inevitably pressing up against those of the artists. Not only did their action make Freud’s allocation of art’s role in sublimating libidinal energy explicit, tangible and utterly unavoidable, it also forced each spectator into a decision that revealed how that sublimation was riven by the full complications of sexual difference. The ostensible heterosexual resolution of the spectator would be to face the member of the opposite sex brushing the heterosexuality spectator’s unguarded rear and thus vulnerable to sexual difference within their own bodies.
Imponderabilia offers an insight not only into the way in which our encounter with art is always conditioned in advance by desire: it has something to say about desire itself that needs stating less it be overlooked, something that draws a limit to our understanding of Shit Yes Academy within the terms of a psychoanalytic presentation of the relation between subjectivation and language. Deleuze and Guattari, writing a few years earlier, put it this way: desire does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, introducing therein breaks and captures—always nomadic and migrant desire, characterized first of all by its “gigantism” ... we always make love with words. The spectator’s quandary in Imponderabilia is hardly a matter of private individual agitation, the two artists serving as monuments of a binary choice within the symbolic organization of sexuality, or any other relation between identity and non-identity. The decision, or better, the parade of decisions Imponderabilia compelled was frequently chaotic and rushed, a crowded scene in which the question of desire was dispersed across multiple bodies, several spaces, and structures of inscription. But, as Maurizio Lazzarato has more recently put it: To clearly register the rupture with the classical conception of desire, Guattari emphasizes its artificial ‘nature’. Artificial, deterritorialized, and machinic desire means that it is not a “natural” or “spontaneous” force. Desire is not the equivalent of what Freud calls “drive” ... Desire does not come from within the subject, it always emanates from the outside, from an encounter, a coupling, an assemblage. ... A collective assemblage is indeed “a basis of relations and [ ... ] a means of assigning agents a place and a function; but these agents are not persons, any more than these relations are intersubjective.” Ahadi’s visitor, and his willful confutation of shit and gold, needs to be further understood as the result of a process of deanthropomorphization, analogous to Kepler’s account of vision, that denatures the body to the degree that it demonstrates how symbolic coherence is mispresented as biological necessity, rendering any simple effort to deploy psychoanalytic models based on the individual human subject problematic. However, while both Imponderabilia and Goh Ballet Academy could be said to share in the gigantism of the social distribution of the affects of attending to art (isn’t Shit Yes Academy characterized too by a gigantism that cannot be reduced to an identity with, or predicated on the sovereignty of the individual subject even when it exists being represented to the form of the group noun visitors?) Lazzarato’s elaboration on the critique of intersubjectivity suggests that this continuity may not remain intact beyond a restrictively formal level.

For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question. While Foucault described the historical emergence of the specifically biopolitical conditions that threaten to deprive psychoanalytic praxis of the horizon of the human, Lazzarato’s recent reappraisal of Guattari’s work on signification intervenes directly on the conditions of possibility for the regimes of signification that constitute the Goh Ballet Academy. Lazzarato summarizes what is by now a common claim: that in contemporary capitalism, subjectivity is no longer the relatively central place occupied by the inhuman operations of the metabolism of the photographic apparatus. To the extent that Ahadi has not given up on critical activity, we might assume that Shit Yes Academy continues to conceive of language as the condition of possibility for the political, social and aesthetic subject, but it equally observes Lazzarato’s injunction that one must follow Guattari’s advice to “exit language” by doing two things: dissociate subjectivity from the subject, from the individual, and even from the human, and cease considering the power of enunciation exclusive to man and subjectivity. In Goh Ballet Academy, Viennese Lace operates between both photographic and retinal objects, and as a linguistic object that entered language as a marker of the shameful complicity of the Austrian population unable to turn away from the transportation of their Jewish neighbours to the extermination camps. One-way mirror is deployed to operate on the spectator, producing the narcissistic recursion of the spectator’s visual attention. Viennese Lace appears again, but not as a mediating plane but as a linear semioterritorial marker in Untitled (Territory of the Semiotic). Such things are certainly available for interpretative, discursive and representational activities of attentive subjects, but they also induce actions and reactions in and on the visitor’s body. Ahadi has achieved something equivalent to Ulay’s profound defamiliarization of the place of visual art, by reasserting the primacy of the body in the field of representation not as a guarantor of a natural order that provides a sensible and coherent horizon for the human activity of meaning-making, but as the principle of a semiotic insensibility, a control point for the distribution of the expressive force of assignifying semiotics.

Roland Barthes (whose writing on photography has been so influential for Ahadi) had the following to say about Kristeva: Kristeva changes the place of things: she always destroys the last prejudice, the one you thought you could be reassured by, could take pride in; what she subverts is authority -the authority of monologic science, of filiation. I would propose that we ought to appropriate this description to help us understand Ahadi’s practice. Ahadi once remarked that the title he gave to a work from 2012 (Seven Steps to Disentangle the Dilemma of the Common Room) was a mouth-feeling title - a wonderfully accurate description - but now with Shit Yes Academy, it would seem that this self-deprecating joke has been given leeway to enact a more serious claim. Kepler’s discovery profoundly alienated picturing of the human (even while placing this activity more concretely within the interior of our bodies, whose retinal wall effectively becomes a gallery hosting traveling exhibitions) but I would argue that Ahadi changes the place of the image, so
Untitled (Shit Yes)
Inkjet print, wooden frame, acrylic, lace. 110 X 110 x 5.5 cm

Untitled (The Gaze of Shit)
Inkjet print, wooden frame, acrylic, lace. 110 X 110 x 5.5 cm
... each time we are presented with the cliché that seeing is believing, our eyes and ears should become attuned to the fact that we are not only confronted once more with the desperate avowal of the natural and unencumbered condition of both vision and belief, but also by a surreptitious disavowal and suppression of the fact that such seeing is nothing more than a saying.

that images tumble around together with words in the dark spaces of the mouth, get chewed up and deformed by a process more akin to mastication than to intellectual categorization. Ahadi makes art as though the mouth were the principal location not just of speech, but of all semiotic activity. In Goh Ballet Academy, the tendency to guarantee knowledge by vision, and therefore to credit the visual with the authority of knowing, is subject not only to an acceptance of the optical distortions Kepler insisted on, but subject to the types of distortions of language that Shit Yes Academy foregrounds too. The mouth is, after all, not so much a space in itself - like a cave from which speech emerges like the echoes of an idea - as much as it is an aperture that lays a claim to being merely the first in a series of apertures and shutters that runs through a twoheaded camera obscura on whose other side lies the last of all apertures. Significations leak through either end of this mouth-anus semiotic machine whose products our cultures only belatedly separates into either shit or gold. Goh Ballet Academy reminds us that what is seen is also always subject to the linguistic events that precede, accompany, and belatedly assist seeing much as speech is assisted in machinic enslavement. In other words, each time we are presented with the cliché that seeing is believing, our eyes and ears should become attuned to the fact that we are not only confronted once more with the desperate avowal of the natural and unencumbered condition of both vision and belief, but also by a surreptitious disavowal and suppression of the fact that such seeing is nothing more than a saying.
Untitled (A Commandment for Carlo). Inkjet print, wooden frame, acrylic, lace 46.6 X 70 45 cm

"Carlo, put your fingers like this, (and) say: I can not eat rice with my fingers like this."
This essay takes the following, and very brief, rehearsal of the categorical conditions of Western (global/geopolitical) art as a frame for considering Ali Ahadi’s work in Goh Ballet Academy: Shit Yes Academy at the Ag Galerie. This frame takes as a relative truism Peter Osborne’s diagnosis that “contemporary art” is post-conceptual, insofar as it is responsive (either affirmatively, critically, or negatively) to the legacy of Duchamp’s readymades. These works catalyzed a shift from artistic production to artistic selection, a movement which became “globally” hegemonized through the
minimal and conceptual reductions of the 1960s. The proceeding essay argues that Ahadi’s work practically tweaks this post-conceptual hegemony, enacting contingent proposals for how we might make, and attend, to art differently.

As a discursive institution, art *form-determines* the activity which takes place inside its boundaries. The parameters for normative trajectories as well as (potential) revolutionary ruptures of art’s histories, discourses, venues (museums, galleries, biennials), and practices are determined by the history of the category itself, and in the ways art’s activities engage, react to, and negate this categorical history. Even gestures as radical as Duchamp’s *Fountain*, which ultimately greased the move towards a century of “generic” artist-selectors, should be first understood as an attempted negation of the bourgeois “retinal” and productivist aesthetics of the 18th and 19th centuries as much as (an affirmative) testing of the limits of what might be conceded as “art.”

Form-determination is not, strictly speaking, a deterministic form of determinism. Rather, art’s categorical history and discursive conditions *form-determine* the *potential* for, and legibility of, negations such as Duchamp’s. The usurpation of craft and aesthetics by selection (nomination) and ideas/concepts (information) was a process born out of a critical response to the former modalities of making and looking. And yet, the attempted negation of craft and bourgeois aesthetics through the assertion of generic selection did not fully negate these previous forms of making and thinking about art. At the very least, aesthetics, optics, and canonical forms such as painting and sculpture continued to residually lurk within art’s boundaries. More plausible, as Marina Vishmidt has recently argued, was that the emergence of generic selection did not in fact negate the previous mode of Romantic aesthetic authorship (founded on a productivist aesthetics), but instead required this form as its (ongoing) foundation. In Vishmidt’s formulation, authorship remains a dominant form-determinant of the art object, whether produced or nominated, and habituated modes of aesthetic judgement become transposed onto judgements of concepts, references, and artistic selections. Working from this position, we may view the sporadic, form-determined negations of 20th Century avant-gardes less as negations and more as an expansive remodeling (like an addition to a house) of the activities which may qualify as, and thus be included, within art’s discursive boundary. This expansion ironically requires an increasingly strident maintenance, and defense, of this boundary so that seemingly infinite, disparate activities may still register as “art.”

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At a total level, *Goh Ballet Academy* presents a critically productive engagement of the abovesketched form-determinants of making and exhibiting of art. This reflection is grounded in large part in spatial, formal, and conceptual engagements with buildings. To begin at the end, or at least at the point of display (which we will find is not an end at all), let’s consider the Ag Galerie...

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1 See Osborne, Peter. *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. Verso, 2013, pp. 2-3, 19-20, 37-38, 46-51, 99, as crucial to Osborne’s definition.
2 See Fraser, Andrea. “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique.” *Artforum*, vol. 44 no. 1, 2005, pp. 105-106.
7 See Fraser, p. 105.
itself. When presenting exhibitions, artists inherit the flight paths to which viewers have become accustomed through repeated trips to/through buildings exhibiting art. After entering the ground floor of the Ag Galerie, the common route is to pump upstairs, circle through the second floor gallery spaces, and flush back down to disperse across the ground floor, the outdoor courtyard, or to visit the bathroom. The upstairs of the Ag Galerie has become the habituated zone for seeing art, and the downstairs has become the habituated zone for seeing people, for socializing. This division is architecturally reinforced by the ground floor outdoor gathering space, and discursively reinforced by a medium-sized room named the Communal Room, which contains a meeting table and a full-height window looking out onto the courtyard.

Ahadi assumes this typical flow through the building’s interior and uses it to force a friction between the ground and second floors. This friction is not immediately apparent, as visitors first (predictably) encounter medium-scale works adorning the walls of the second floor spaces. The works upstairs are framed with a dense, black lace stretched over all but one framed work, Untitled (Shitgoldshit), a treatment which renders a repetitious set of permeable monochromes. In order to visually access the photographs and panels of texts inside the frames, viewers must peer through, or look past, the flat lace surfaces.

Similar to Duchamp’s Etant Donnés, the works upstairs coerce viewers into self-aware performances of voyeurism. However, rather than peering through a peep-hole in order to visually access an aesthetically composed interior scene, as is the case in Etant Donnés, the lace obscuring the upstairs works is most effectively visually penetrated by raking the gaze laterally across their surfaces. This sliding movement mechanically aligns this mode of looking with reading, a looking-action which is doubled in the content of works such as Untitled (of the scatalogical) and Untitled (Dol). In these works, a fleshy pinkness emanates from beneath the laced frames, but as the visitor’s eyes and body slide along, printed definitions of “shit” and the single letter “D” respectively emerge. As the letter “P” pronounced aloud in English is phonetically identical to the word “pee,” so “D” pronounced in Farsi = “signifier.” Through the act of raking-looking, the desirability of laced flesh becomes overwritten by textual descriptions of an opposing quality, namely, shit. However, lest we hastily settle on a simple equivalence of raking-looking with reading, it should be noted that the row/column repetition of the printed page is absent in favor of a normative, “inherited” single line layout of discrete wall works. So while a viewer likely moves in a lateral reading motion across a given work, to move through the upstairs galleries is a process of bouncing, swirling or ricocheting from work to work and back again.

It’s also important to stress that the mode of reading coaxed by the works on the second floor is not synonymous with hermeneutical reading, a process in which an image’s or text’s depths are plumbed in order to uncover a unifying “deep” meaning. Rather, the discrepancy between sliding and penetrating, reading and looking (and bouncing and swirling) set up the discursive and structural paradoxes underpinning the exhibition. To return to Etant Donnés: this work is a continuation of Duchamp’s “anti-retinal” negation of bourgeois aesthetics precisely through its collapsing of “distinctive” modes of disinterested visual contemplation with “shameful” and violent acts of voyeurism. In Etant Donnés, the initial desire to look through the peep-hole is rendered paradoxical by the interior scene of a nude female form, possibly in repose, more likely the victim of violence. The laced works in Goh Ballet Academy present a related tension. Whatever desire may be stirred by glimpsing fleshy pink under lace is met with a definition of shit, or with
film stills selected from Pasolini’s Salo in which characters are being commanded to eat shit. The dichotomy of these encounters seems unilateral: the desire to look, to consume, or even to hermeneutically parse—the (representation of) shit. However, viewers flop from formal/aesthetic to textual encounters as they swirl through space, producing an affective confusion that remains in motion, rather than a positivistic argument such as “looking = shit”.

So, if not to “see” the works, nor to “read” the works, what viewing prescriptions might one obtain from a visit to Goh Ballet Academy? Or perhaps even more fundamentally, what sort of argument is advanced about the making and viewing of art?

I don’t believe, on first pass, the upstairs works offer a resolved set of prescriptive arguments regarding the above question. Rather, what is advanced upstairs is negative: the visitor is met with discursive material and dichotomies (desire and shit, shit and gold, looking and reading, the sensible and the semiotic), which, through the process of being revealed by looking, establish a negative/pejorative articulation less of looking itself, and more of a consumptive/interpretative mode of viewership. Looking is not shit, but perhaps contemplation is. And just as Ahadi problematizes the typical “viewing route” through Ag Galerie by using rather than diverging from it, the dichotomies presented in the works upstairs reveal themselves through normative looking relations (the visual contemplation of discrete works), even if those relations are materially and discursively troubled. Downstairs, the frictions and negations which remain relatively contained within individual works (placed in conjunctive, relational chains) upstairs, become split-out, concretized, and mobilized beyond the artwork-viewer relation. And yet, ironically, it is the existence of the upstairs works which form the discursive foundation for the productive/prescriptive capacity of the downstairs works. The downstairs builds on a semiotic and art historical foundation laid upstairs. This splitting is perhaps most apparent in the Communal Room, which hosts two works side by side: Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room) and Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose).

Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose) is a light box, approximately human scale, illuminating a satellite image of Tehran depicting the Ag Galerie and surrounding neighborhood. The central point of the image is dominated by the slate roof of a building much larger than any other in the frame: the Almas Karimkhan Complex, a gold and jewelry trading centre auspiciously located directly across the street from the gallery. The Complex’s roof has already been formally encountered in the rusted cut steel of Untitled (shitgoldshit), the lone interruption of the marching laced monochromes and, in a sense, the most visually/formally available work upstairs. In the Communal Room, the light box (and the second encounter of the Complex’s roof) leans against a stub wall to the immediate right of a window looking out onto the outdoor courtyard. Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room) is in fact this window, whose glass has been swapped for, eponymously, one-way mirrored glass. Visitors to the courtyard experience a mirror, and visitors to the Communal Room experience a window.

The brightness of the light filtering through Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room) and emanating from Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose) is similar. As such, the light box, at least in terms of its luminosity in relation to the window, may be considered as a second window in the space. However, what is framed by these two “windows” is markedly different. The aerial map contained in the light box is “anti-retinal” in the sense that the image is an informatic, noncomposed birdseye image representing the spatial outlay of a particular part of Tehran. Contemplation of a work like Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose) takes place on ideational and semantic registers. Against this habituated post-conceptual looking modality (which already challenges, but does not negate, the concentrated looking associated with bourgeois aesthetic judgement), Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Common Room) presents a voyeuristic distraction from Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose).

At the level of attention, Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose) simply cannot compete with Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room). As visitors to the courtyard pass in and out of view, pausing to adjust their clothes or hair or take selfies in the mirror, the attention of the visitor to the Communal Room is repeatedly pulled away from considering the light box and towards the action in the window frame. On one register of looking, this pull is no matter: Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose) is not a work to be visually contemplated in the first place. But at the level of attention itself, the looking paradox set up in the Communal Room is significant. At an abstract level, visitors find themselves struggling between seduction in the form of voyeurism, which, as discussed in relation to Duchamp’s Étant Donnés, is itself not properly aesthetic in the bourgeois sense, and informal/conceptual contemplation, which is also not properly aesthetic, but per Vishmidt, rests on foundational pillars of bourgeois aesthetics.

In relation to the upstairs works, the Communal Room presents an inversion of the assertion of language over seduction. Whereas a visitor upstairs is initially drawn to (apparently) laced flesh only to be met with language (or shit), a visitor to the Communal Room is met first with a work of language (a map), only to be pulled away by voyeurism. But rather than a simple inversion, new sets of considerations are elicited through the act of shuttling back and forth between different registers of attention from within the looking relation. Indeed, this shuttling back and forth from different drives and modalities of looking pushes the visitor away from an individuated mode of attentive contemplation and towards a fractured, distracted attendance to art.9 The fractured attention elicited in the Communal Room exceeds the struggle between image and text contained in the works upstairs. In other words, the push and pull between the light box and the window presents a situation of irrational non-choice in which the viewer is precluded from “properly” attending to either work.10

Again, we are following a generalized conception of typical visitor flow from the upstairs gallery space, downstairs to the Communal Room, outside to the courtyard, and then (perhaps) to the bathroom. An effect of this route is that, in addition to initially getting “stuck” oscillating between the two works in the Communal Room, visitors to the courtyard carry with them the understanding that the mirror in the courtyard is indeed a window. To use the mirror in the courtyard as a mirror is to implicitly (and contingently) make oneself visually available to whomever may be within the Communal Room. Considered from another angle, visitors to the courtyard may choose to interrupt to varying degrees the “contemplation” of Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose). That is of course if there is a viewer in the Communal Room at all. This contingency, that to pose in front of the mirror might mean you are seen from inside, sets up a much more mediated, convoluted dynamic of looking and being looked at than with Etant Donnes, which plays more singularly with the Sartrean dilemma of hearing footsteps in the hallway as you peer through a keyhole.11

The visitor to the Communal Room is (potentially) distracted, the visitor to the courtyard is (potentially) distracting, and most visitors will inhabit both positions as they move through the exhibition. On the ground floor, the dichotomies that viewers circulate through in the works upstairs become spatially and temporally exploded and variably inhabited by the visitors themselves rather than the artworks. In other words, bouncing and swirling around upstairs remains a component of individually attending to/moving between given works. Downstairs, the ricocheting of each visitor becomes immediately, materially productive in (per)formative ways, altering the works in real time. Like the institution of art itself, the potential contributions of the viewer to Goh Ballet Academy are form-determined by the works, their layout, and how one moves through the exhibition. Untitled (One-Way Mirror to the Communal Room) determines contingent instances of distraction (on both sides of the mediation), and yet the qualities of these distractions are produced through the visitors, not the artworks. This however attenuated, predetermined production on the part of the viewer presents an emergent argument on what making, and attending, to art might look like.

Dave Beech recently prescribed that contemporary art should send the viewer “back into the world” to read, research, and discuss.12 This argument, indebted to the collective work of Art & Language, is less a Duchampian negation of aesthetics per se than it is a perforation of art’s categorical/discursive boundary. For Beech, we should spend less time looking at contemporary art, as though careful looking alone will reveal its unilateral truth/message to the viewer, whose focused looking places them primarily in the role of receiver and judge, and should instead spend time writing, researching, and thinking about it.

Beech’s prescriptions fall on the side of the viewer of art, and what constructive capacities such a viewer may have in excess of the bourgeois fundaments of art objects themselves. His argument regarding viewership does not simply displace the uncovering of the artwork’s “truth” to some later stage in an expanded process of looking (and judging). Research and writing does not simply represent a second stage of the process of contemplation which occurs outside of the walls of an exhibition. Rather, discursively engaging a work of art becomes an act of intervention, an opportunity for the viewer of the work to productively contribute to its meaning in ways that need not be strictly fideltious to the artist’s own contents/intentions.

Ahadi’s research and practice has arrived at a similar prescription. Rather than categorically defining the artist and viewer as distinctly separate automatons placed in a mediated relationship by the work of art (artist-artwork-viewer), Ahadi suggests that both artist and viewer be considered as visitors, and that the “art relation” be semantically understood as

10 See Beech and Roberts, p. 126.
12 See Beech, p. 3.
A 9 meters long and 3.5 meters high screen of lace mesh diagonally divides the courtyard of the gallery. Upon entering the courtyard, the visitors should decide on which side of the screen they would like to be, and thus seeing the others as well as the gallery's building through the permeable surface of the lace.

To map these considerations back onto the ground floor: it is the very confusion of being stuck between "Untitled (Private Eye Public Nose)" and "Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room)" and of the decision to (not) perform in front of the mirror in the courtyard which may be considered as the productive visitation of Goh Ballet Academy. This is semantically reinforced by "Untitled (Put to Work)", a stretched lace screen diagonally cutting the courtyard into two separate spaces (front/back; retro/verso; image/viewer). This cutting barrier forces visitors to the courtyard to situate themselves across the lace sculpture, inhabiting only one zone/position at any given time, with no option but to see both the yard and/or one another through the permeable surface of the lace. While at a general level, "Untitled (Put to Work)" reproduces the visual experience visitors had upstairs, here visitors move from image to viewer and back again. This active but limited motility is secondarily bounded by "Untitled (The Territory of the Semiotics)"; a thin line of lace, suspended overhead, demarcating the perimeter of Ag Galerie and its courtyard. The stretched lace, bounding the total territory of the exhibition, mirrors the above claim that art is a bounded-yet-malleable discursive institution. In other words, semiotics bounds and determines the activity within the exhibition, even as that activity contributes actively, contingently to the production of (new) meanings.

A visitation to the bathroom supports and complicates the above reading of productive visitation. Whereas "Untitled (One-way Mirror to the Communal Room)" and "Untitled (Put to Work)" present conditions in which visitors productively interfere in each other's (bourgeois) contemplation, "Untitled (It is Closer to You Than It Appears)" reasserts an individuated, cloistered viewing experience. In the bathroom, three mirrors are arranged so that the visitor's genitalia and its products become plainly visible through the act of using its facilities. To "use" the bathroom becomes explicitly, visually synonymous with the "production" of one's own excrement. A comparison may be drawn between engaging "Untitled (It is Closer to You Than It Appears)" and the acts of contemplation upstairs, which ultimately culminate in images or descriptions of shit. Upstairs, bourgeois contemplation is shit. But is contemplation taking place in the bathroom? Or is it appearing in the bathroom? The appearance of it, however conceived, is borne out of a semiotic confusion in which using is producing, even if that product is shit, or P.
In the bathroom, one can't help but consider the work of Piero Manzoni who, on the eve of the minimal and conceptual reductions, produced 30 cans of his own shit, deploying his signature as a guarantor of the value of each can as equivalent to the market price of gold. *Artist's Shit*, 1961 represents the cynical rehearsal of the net-effect of the historical avant-gardes: anything can be art provided a guarantee of discrete objecthood ratified by the artist's signature and the discursive judgement by art's institutional participants that yes, *this is art*. But something additional is afoot in the visitor-artwork-visitor relation in the bathroom. While it's true that the mirrors are nominated according to the same logic that any matter or object is currently made semantically available to art's discourses, they also serve as mirrors of a production normatively understood as use. At least in American English, we *take* pisses and shits, we don't *make* them. The conceptual conflation of use and production (again, on the part of the viewer/visitor) experienced in the bathroom gives rise to the possibility of new conceptions of action arising from a joke, from a shit, or from semantic confusion.

Duchamp “took” a urinal and “made” it art, which might lead some to question the very assertion that the semantic confusion presented in the bathroom posits any new modality for art which exceeds the 20th century paradigmatic shift from production to selection. Against this, I would argue that the confusion in the bathroom should be understood not as conflation/ equivalence but as confusion: as the complication of the lightning-quick, reflex-like response of semantically sorting/idealizing our actions in the world. What takes place in the bathroom is not the rehearsal of a Duchampian polemic, not least because *It* is not artist's shit, and
after it’s flushed, you leave the bathroom. This is why Ahadi’s formulation of the visitor-artwork-
visitor relation is so crucial to complicating our now habituated post-conceptual paradigm. To be
visiting it from all directions is to be constantly confusing, distracting, and redirecting it, leaving
it and coming back to it.

Ahadi has speculated as to what it might mean to envision the visitor in his visitor-artworkvisitor
relation as an “ESL,” or English as a second language, visitor. Ahadi’s formulation of an “ESL visitor”
should be understood as one who misuses signs on an intentional register rather than simply
misrecognizing them, though misuse may be greased by misrecognition. The misuse of signs
might destabilize meaning through new correlations (contemplation and shit), or might reframe
the connotations of a given activity altogether (taking a shit is making a shit, visiting art is an
activity of taking/making). In both instances, the intentional misuse of signs undermines their
sanctity, their authority, and opens the possibility for the emergence of new, counterhegemonic
meanings. We might liken this approach to the realism of estrangement of Russian Formalists
such as Roman Jakobson, or of the discourse battles advocated by Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer
in the late 1980s. To estrange habituated abstractions, to mutate signs, has the capacity to
radically undermine hegemonic ideology at the level of its discursive (re)production.

It was in the spirit of this contingent, productive confusion that Ahadi first visited “Goh Ballet
Academy”: a building across the street from the coffee shop he frequents in Vancouver. An act of
transliteration, which converted the building’s name into “shit yes academy” in Persian, opened
the door onto the set of semantic dichotomies present throughout the exhibition. To submit
“Goh Ballet Academy” to an act of transliteration represents a productive move not towards
effective communication or (ideological) understanding, but towards a conjunctive semiotic logic
that conjured new productive material. In its most programmatic sense, we might understand
the above-sketched contingent maneuvers as praxes of visitation, both in the act of making
and attending to art. These propositions do not seek to negate the category art, or collapse
it into everyday life, as the historical avant-gards had proclaimed. Rather, they rattle those
foundational pillars of authorship and judgement. They help us begin to imagine a material-
discursive production which might resist economic condensation, motoring the field toward to-
be-determined articulations of itself, its activity, and its desires.

Let us imagine that Imam Quli Khan, the governor of Iran’s Fars, Lar, and Bharain provinces in the early 1600s during the Safavid rule, walks through the bazaar of the Multani gold-lace makers, looking at their crafts while accompanied by his advisor. Sometimes the two would play a philosophical game in which Imam Quli Khan would point at an item in the bazaar and ask his advisor to interpret the object as a symbol revealing a deeper truth only a mirror could. Let us then eavesdrop while they converse in front of a textile merchant from Iran’s old capital Isfahan.

Imam Quli Khan: “What is the deeper truth of these textiles, my good friend?”

Advisor: “I am delighted to answer, they don’t appear as they normally would because they are semi-covered. They are dressed up like you dress up a person. In fact, behind a layer of lace made from gold and silver threads called Golabatun, one may dress up the most atrocious truths or incredible falsehoods, as every object placed behind it will acquire a golden luster no matter how badly it is stained. Only by stepping closer and peeking through the holes may one find its obscured nature, but by then it might be too late if they have already committed to purchase the fabric.” Imam Quli Khan nodded, and while lifting a beautiful Noghrehdouz made with Golabatoun reflecting the sun as the moon does at night, he commented: “Such an old-fashioned way of doing business might be exhilarating so long as the buyer’s wealth permits, but those who can only afford a single purchase would suffer from a potentially fatal surprise, once the lace is removed.”

The advisor replied, smiling: “While I share this important concern with you, we should also consider that a human who has never experienced how appearances can distort the eye might have difficulty evading a trap that has been placed in their path. On the other hand, a person who is familiar with such tricks will be more secure in a matter of life and death, he will be more likely detecting that a trap has been set by his or her enemies and perhaps also hide this detectability such that nobody will see him or her as threatening enough to merit a trap to begin with. In most traps though, the bait helps to hide the capture device, but there are situations in which the opposite is true, when the bait is hidden behind what captures the prey. The victim’s safety in these cases has to do with how quickly they recognize what is drawing them to the trap is their self-image; as if the trap and the prey together form a false mirror in which the victim first must fall before falling into the actual prey.”

Imam Quli Khan: “It should be easy to learn this by merely looking into your reflection that you can see inside a pool of water. At first it seems to work just like a mirror, but once the surface of the water catches the smallest wind, the mirrored face twists into something that merely mocks your naiveté. This is why we should not disallow such a traditional practice of salesmanship as it sharpens the eyes of our city dwellers for even more dangerous situations.”

The advisor stopped for a short while as he tried to detect whether Imam Quli Khan was testing him again or not. He replied, “But maybe I can offer a different path for their enlightenment. What if we pay storytellers to perform one lie and a truth bundled into a story, and the person who is able to untangle them and discern between the lie and the truth gets a golden coin?”

Imam Quli Khan: “I see that my own laced sentence that is woven before you has been dismantled and you have found the mirror of truth underneath. Yes, let us make such an annual event in the marketplace, it will do the people of this city good.”

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Upstairs in the exhibit’s three rooms hang several groups of framed photographs (Various titles, 2019) wrapped in stretched lace. Starting with documentary style colour prints of a ballet school in Vancouver named Goh Ballet Academy, whose transliterated name in Farsi equates “Shit Yes Academy”, and ending with scenes from Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom, these pictures either directly or through mediation signify feces or its representation. In every room, the wrapping tempts visitors to linger on and peek through the holes in order to recognize the pictures’ content. The distance between the lace which covers the glass frames and the actual pictures creates a coordinating space with the movement of the visitors’ bodies, encouraging movement as a way of seeing more of the pictures.
The only work upstairs that is not covered by lace is a framed small steel sculpture cut from a rusty piece of metal (Untitled, ShitGoldShit, 2019) whose shape follows the “overheadview” of the gold market located across the street from the Ag galerie. As the visitors reach the end of their visit to the upstairs gallery and head downstairs, they begin to notice other elements of the exhibit occupying unusual parts of the building. For instance, the light emanating from the lounge attracts them to the large light box (Untitled, Public Eye Private Nose, 2019) illuminating the aerial photograph of Tehran featuring the area around the gallery and the gold market across from it, helping them understand the steel sculpture upstairs. Here the element of scale does the job of both relating the two works and bind them in a mathematical correlation, as if the precious metal upstairs has the ability to hold the value of real properties like land and buildings.

The light box is leaned against the wall on the immediate right of the window through which the visitors can look out to the courtyard. Unaware of the fact that the window is a one-way mirror, they begin to wonder why others in the courtyard stand in the window frame and stare inside or why some of them take out their mobile phones to take a picture of the window. Curious about the opposite view of the window, the visitors head outside and become aware of the trick to which they have been subjected by the artwork (Untitled, One Way Mirror to the Communal Room, 2019).

In the middle of the courtyard, Ahadi has erected a diagonal barrier made from the same black lace, taller than humans, which covers the works in the upstairs gallery, splitting the courtyard into two halves. The lace screen also splits the visitors depending on which side of it they have chosen to be once exiting the building into the courtyard. Regardless, they are able see one another or the gallery’s building through the lace holes, remembering the similar visual experience they previously had while looking at the works upstairs.

The exhibition comes into more focus if the visitors go to the bathroom where a series of mirrors (Untitled, It is closer to you than It appears, 2019) eerily reveal to them their genitalia and the processes of urinating and/or defecating. Outside, a series of tall poles and black rope made from stretching strips of lace (Untitled, Territory of the Semiotic, 2019) demarcates the gallery’s building and courtyard by literally separating the space from the rest of the city but particularly the gold exchange operations across the street.

Next to the exit door upon leaving the gallery, there hangs a single framed photograph covered in black lace (Untitled, After Fox Talbot, 2019), featuring a black and white photograph of a well-known photogram by William Fox Talbot’s Lace, Plate XX (1844) made from the exposure of light to a sensitive plate covered directly with piece of lace. This last work acts both as a postscript and the historical clue for understanding of the entire exhibit.
LACE

In its everyday use, lace rarely functions as camouflage, but more as a socially acceptable means for affecting visual distance, as protection or a partially transparent means of concealment. Wearing lace on one’s face might signify a desire to communicate mystery, shame, or even aloofness. To partially cover something so it cannot be properly seen and thus understood has wide-ranging implications. The phenomenon traverses religious rites, military tactics, electoral and legislative strategies, marketing campaigns, and any domain in which humans implement phenomenological barriers to effect asymmetrical distributions of perception, action, resources, and, ultimately, power. There are some who are able to update their first impressions of a situation or an object with inferences derived by coordinating what at first appear as epiphenomenal and sensory details. They do this through drawing conjectures about the likely source of a deception and its intended function. They can somewhat successfully transcend the illusions through a self-reflective stance, tracing their initial impressions to the device which is misinforming their perception; only they stand a chance to mitigate or invert the asymmetry between appearance and essence and evade the deception. In all of its shades and forms, camouflage is a politicized mythopoesis of primitive origin as it is practiced not only by animals hiding from predator or prey, but also by humans who attempt to make their tactics or ultimate aims hidden from enemies and rivals alike. However, what Ahadi distinguishes in Goh Ballet Academy is a particular form of this natural phenomenon and social practice with his use of lace as both physical and metaphysical material.

For Ahadi, lace also alludes to another historical marker—ballet’s role as an explicit space of eroticism and an implicit underworld of prostitution in the 19th century Europe as the birthplace of industrialization and photography. White lace strewn across the ballerina’s body hides only a bit of her legs, protecting the most sensitive or erotically charged flesh. It also prefigures her sexual potential after the show while indexing ballet itself as a kind of social lace, a custom in a bit of her legs, protecting the most sensitive or erotically charged flesh. It also prefigures her of industrialization and photography. For Ahadi, lace also alludes to another historical marker—ballet’s role as an explicit space of eroticism and an implicit underworld of prostitution in the 19th century Europe as the birthplace of industrialization and photography. White lace strewn across the ballerina’s body hides only a bit of her legs, protecting the most sensitive or erotically charged flesh. It also prefigures her sexual potential after the show while indexing ballet itself as a kind of social lace, a custom in which women choreograph their bodies circumspectly so as to covertly advertise decidedly less

circumspect movements available later.

Hiding parts of the human body has a direct erotic effect since the brain can then use that which is hidden as a canvas to co-construct a picture with what’s given to fit to the innermost desires of the person. By hiding the desired part but letting the mind wander from reality to the land of its deepest desires and wishes, the brain is able to supplant the hidden object and make it into a symbol of its deepest desires. Like a chameleon that reacts to its surroundings, the world is reconstructed by its viewers. It could be labeled as a countercurrent to the human desire to create a reproduction of reality, an anti-mimesis of sorts that recreates phantasies and dreams, in reality, acting as a layer that not only covers experience but also leads the senses to overwrite the real. It is easy to be fooled by a misleading first impression since it often constitutes the perception of an object. On the other hand, for many readers of a text, the first impression would remain the last. The tension between the semiotics of pictures versus text charges Ahadi’s exhibition when considering the work’s titles after seeing the works.

Untitled, After Fox Talbot refers to William Henry Fox Talbot and his 1845 photogram of a rectangular piece of floral lace which is housed in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. An accomplished scholar in mathematics, botany, and science, Talbot is also the inventor of negative-positive photographic process. According to MoMA, to produce his picture, Talbot placed a piece of lace on his newly invented light sensitive paper, allowing sunlight to gradually fix its exact negative image, “down to the smallest fold or imperfection.” Although the lace used in Talbot’s photograph was hand-made. However, in the 19th century, the technological advancement in lace-production had reached a level at which it became difficult to differentiate between handmade and machine-made lace, making Talbot’s photograph a visual forecast of the mechanization of the process of lacemaking. Thus, the human dilemma of distinguishing genuine lace from its machinic copy by expert human eyes emerged long before Alan Turing proposed the Turing test as a method for differentiating between a human and machine. What is common between these two examples is how at the level of intersubjective perceptual consensus, the borders between the machines and humans have been warping and warping for a long while. Never mind that machine-made lace was becoming so much more detailed and aesthetically convincing that not only it entered the luxury market, but that is also surpassed lace made by humans.

Historically speaking, the early computers designed (but never produced) by Charles Babbage belong to the space between the dawn of the industrial revolution and mechanized weaving looms and, later on, the invention of photography. Highlighting the links between weaving, industrialization, computation and photography is the little fact that Babbage, who had a particular interest in textiles and drew inspiration in his work from the techniques deployed by the textile industry, also owned a silk portrait of Joseph Marie Jacquard, the inventor of the Jacquard loom. In this respect, if lace primitively heralds a contemporary world mediated by pixelation, the lace-making loom prefigures a world fabricated by computationally-driven manufacturing of objects and images. It is no coincidence that Ada Lovelace, the first computer programmer who wrote both poetry and code for Babbage’s machines famously described the way his Analytical Engine “weaves algebraic patterns just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves.”

2. Jacquard Loom is one of the earliest weaving machines for implementing textile designs in which rows of holes punched into cards sequenced according to rows of stitching along the loom, coordinated the production of a particular textile design.
Mirrors are not ordinary reflective surfaces. In addition to their function as a physical tool, not only do they stand for the idea of unmediated truth, but they also point to the metaphysical process of reflection. Philosophy as the human mind’s two windows to nature and the nature of being often has been compared to a mirror. Not only mirrors foreshadowed the emergence of photography but also after the arrival of the medium, they acted as its double all the while fulfilling their traditional metaphysical duties by lending it to photographs. This is why it is not farfetched to propose that mirrors are the missing link in media history somewhere between paintings and digital screens.

Technically speaking, a mirror is a surface with a roughness smaller than the wavelength of the light that hits it. This technical definition applies to darker and less detailed mirrors historically made out of polished stones as well as what we call a glass mirror today. Meanwhile, transparent glass mirrors larger than a small saucer were invented much later, and, surprisingly, in Venice’s Morano district, not that much earlier and not that far from Florence when the idea of optical perspective (already mathematically theorized by Alhazen in Baghdad around 1000 AD) was applied to painting and architecture by Filippo Brunelleschi as the accurate algorithm for observing and representing the world. Transparent and large mirrors emerged as a rival to the art of painting and the need for humans to accurately represent the world. Unlike paintings, mirrors had the power to increase the light source, adding brightness by doubling the daylight or candlelight which an interior space could contain, of course for those who could afford an expensive and luxury item like a mirror. In the early 16th century, a high-quality framed Venetian mirror was more expensive than a painting by Raphael: while the mirror cost 8,000 pounds, the painting was only worth only 3,000.

Around the same time, the rivalry over the glass and mirror industry in Europe was such that France would routinely offer hefty compensation to lure Venetian glass blowers and mirror makers to resettle in France while Venice would go to wild extents to protect the secrets of its trade by organizing assassination attempts to murder glassmakers who had left to work for competing factories elsewhere. Mirrors were also met with economic restrictions due to how their high demand placed constraints on European economies. To prevent the flight of currency due to the high price and demand for mirrors, the Republic of Geneva enacted a law in which households were prohibited “from having more than one mirror in each room and from having any in excess of thirty-two inches in height.” According to Melchior-Bonnet, by the 18th century mirrors had totally overtaken interior design, supplanting tapestries and paintings to the point that contemporary art critic La Font de Saint-Yenne lamented what he called the “disastrous blow that mirrors delivered to historical painting”.

One way to understand the historical shift from an image of the world mediated by artists via painting to the world’s auto-image is to reread Velázquez’ Las Meninas painting as a site for situating this shift: while the ancient image regime is busy picturing the sovereign power in a painting, the sovereign itself already sees his true image not in the painting which is being made of him in front of his eyes, but in the mirror in the back of the room reflecting his image more realistically than any painting could.

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5 Melchior-Bonnet, 34.
6 Ibid, 91.
Against the prevalence of mirrors as the source of light and self-image stands the traditional prohibitions against this technology, adding to what we know about the social function of mirrors. There is a long history of different cultures defacing mirrors by turning them to face the wall, hanging a cloth or painting black over them, when dealing with death or mourning. The former practice is prevalent amongst Indian Muslims in order to avoid doubling the loss and the latter is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition by helping to forget oneself and instead only think about the lost member of the family or community. French philosopher Francoise Laruelle goes as far as anachronistically identifying the essence of photography as being photographic. Combining this with Lacan's insight on the role of mirrors in psychological development of humans, and Wilfred Sellars' concept of the "manifest image" of humans in the world bound by our phenomenological horizon, it is not hard to see how not only the development of the ego as the self-conscious component of subjectivity—who defines who we are—but also epistemology or how we come to know what we think we know. When we look at ourselves, we split into two. Very much like we are in front of a mirror. But when we look at a mirror, we turn into three. If looking at the world creates a pluto mirror, suffice to say that our interaction with mirrors separates and produces two other versions of ourselves as humans-in-the-world. This process can get infinitely doubled up with the help of physical technologies like photography or epistemological tools like philosophy and psychoanalysis.

**Photo-Fiction**

Between the revealing qualities of mirrors and the obfuscating function of lace sits photography as a mediation between the two, part revealing and part obscuring. The movement of photography in the 21st century has only highlighted its contradictory double duty. Perhaps the liminality of being subject to seeing and being seen is where the metaphysics of Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy), Ali Ahadi's comprehensive installation at Tehran's Ag Galerie, lies. By visiting the exhibition, viewers enter a cohesive world made of images, objects, and text whose goal is to function as spatial philosophy. GBA is an explicitly marked zone of contemplation in time and space where the production of artworks and their careful placement, as good art always does, proposes a new metaphysics of being and language as subjected to seeing and being seen. The work as a whole awakens a range of reflections without necessarily resorting to lengthy and cumbersome textual descriptions. By transforming the gallery into a theoretical laboratory for testing existing philosophical assumptions and his own new hypotheses, Ahadi's installation revisits the contradictory and at the same time intense concepts of panopticon and camouflage. The former is approached as an observation system in a carceral space room after room. It is safe to say that almost every component of the exhibit is visually filtered through either lace or mirror, making its dual technological function as what we call maquillage and semiopticon. We use maquillage not exactly in its French meaning as makeup but as a form of self-conscious and open camouflage, which both obscures and aestheticizes its subject. By semiopticon, we refer to devices or technologies that their surveilling power depends on how they interobjectively manipulate perception or subject "perception-at-large" to fixed and irremovable conditions. 7 In addition to the essential quality of the panopticon, namely how it keeps the subjects of surveillance aware of the operation, the semiopticon generalizes the surveillance, and by so doing makes it also appealing and even voluntary. On the other hand, maquillage functions by catching those exposed to it off-guard, subjecting everyone, equally and knowingly, to the alluring gaze of aesthetics. In GBA, the function of lace and mirror requires the viewers to visually decipher that one is reciprocating to the semi-surveillance function of the screen which openly obscures reality in the name of improving viewing pleasure. In other words, while the titivating function of lace is passive-objective—it is unintentional and built into its fabric as an object—the quasi-surveillance function of mirrors is only interobjective and thus must be activated collectively.

Let us imagine a laced mirror, a combination of maquillage and semiopticon. Such a hybrid between the powers of revelation and obfuscation will both trick humans as well as give them a sense of clarity. If the lace has a reflective surface like mirrors, the image would be two-fold containing two reflections: the one off the lace, depending on its current position, and the other from the mirror itself. In this situation, the mirror's attempts to reflect is sabotaged by the mirrored lace, becoming a permanent reminder of the process of reflection. If we take away the mirrored lace, the reflection would still be complete, whereas if we take the mirrored lace alone to a black wall, we would both see the parts of the wall that are visible through the holes as well as the parts of the wall reflected in the intricate patterns of lace. The true enigma of epistemology is similar to looking at a mirror covered with a mirrored lace. Such hybrid between

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maquillage and semiopticon is a true function of all epistemic machine as it requires the viewer to go beyond the prima facie presented by one singular mirroring, teaching them to filter the mere visual input through an epistemic filter—their brain.

Untitled (Petit a Made General)
Inkjet print, wooden frame, acrylic, lace 110 X 110 x 5.5 cm

Untitled (Put to Work)
Metal poles, lace, cable 360 x 900 x 6 cm
SHIT YES ACADEMY
(GOH BALLET ACADEMY)

By Ali Ahadi

Intending to visit this exhibition (in contrast with spectating it)¹, my first visit, therefore, would be of the its title: Goh Ballet Academy (Shit Yes Academy) (in Persian).

At the first glance or hearing, the title would imply a specific location. This is perhaps due to the presence of the word “academy” in the phrase “shit yes academy” (academy of shit yes). Facing the word, I cannot help but think of the fact that it originally comes from the name of a garden in the suburb of the ancient Athens, planted with olive and plane trees and surrounded by a wall constructed by Hipparchus; a wall that was ornamented with temples and statues of Athenian elites. The term “academy” itself comes from the name of the mythical Greek hero, Academus, who was in possession of the garden and later on left it to the citizens as a public space.

From here on, the term “academy” is tied to Plato who used the place for informal gatherings to discuss and teach philosophy. However, later on the academy was officiated as Plato’s school of philosophy. Aristotle also taught there for a while. In fact, today’s both discursive and everyday usages of the term “academy” are heirs to this very philosophical-Greek-Platonic background – “Academy”: the Platonic philosophical system based on skepticism; in usages nearer to our days, “academy”: a place for learning high knowledge; and ultimately, “academy”: an institution for advanced learning.

Now, once I return to the “shit yes academy” after this train of thought, I immediately find myself in a paradoxical situation. This paradox is certainly caused by the coming-together of the following signifiers: “shit”, “yes”, and “academy”. Let me dwell a little longer here on the question of “paradox”.

To have a profound grasp of the functionality of a paradox, there seems to be no better way than going back the etymology of the term. Paradox, from the Greek roots of para + doxa (endoxa); Doxa (endoxa) meaning an established public opinion or a common belief. Para, is a modifying Greek prefix, meaning besides, side by side, and beyond. Therefore, a “paradox” is that which controverts the common belief or the public opinion within a situation, in so far as it counts, and goes beyond, the situation’s “doxa”.

In the signifying syntax of “shit yes academy”, the juxtaposition of “shit”, “yes”, and “academy” confronts my habitual anticipation of the signifiers that could customarily sit beside one another in a chain of significations. In other words, a paradox is to be regarded a break in the chain of significations. What would, nonetheless, “shit yes academy” mean? Does it have any meaning at all, and if so, to what semantic sphere does its signifying system navigate the hearer, reader, or “the visitor”? If I am to construct a meaning for the exhibition’s title, while considering the different levels of the signification of “academy”, the results would perhaps be as follows:

1- A historical garden adorned with plane and olive trees, surrounded by the wall ornamented with temples and statues of the elites, and in which the “shit-yes” lives/exists/grows, or, a historical garden (with the preceding descriptions) in which the “shit” says “yes”.

2- (If we take philosophy as dialectical conceptualization of contradictions): The platonic philosophical system, based on skepticism, focusing on dialectical conceptualization of the contradictions of the “Shit-yes”, or, the platonic philosophical system focusing on dialectical conceptualization of the contradictions of the “shit” that says “yes”.

3- The place for studying the high knowledge of the “Shit-yes” (shit-yes-ology), or, the place for studying the high knowledge of the “shit” that says “yes” (shit-that-says-yesology).

4- An institution for advanced learning of the “Shit-yes”, or, an institution for advanced learning of the “shit” that says “yes”.

It is difficult not to note that none of the above definitions are referring to any meaning that is previously introduced to language by structure and discourse. Accordingly, it will not be an erroneous deduction if one regards all the foregoing definitions as a body of nonsenses, or at best, a form of paralogism. – i.e., an illogical use of logic that one may be able to see, for instance, in the function of jokes within a situation.

In a close examination of joke and its functions, Paolo Virno, the contemporary Italian philosopher, mediates through Freud and Aristotle’s usage of the notions of joke and witticism, so as to construct a “nature”, “structure”, and “logic” of jokes.

For Virno, jokes in their “nature”, are innovative actions that take place in the public sphere in presence of a neutral third person. It is this very “third person” whose existence makes the joke possible – a figure without whom joke would not exist. The significance of this “third person” is, one the one hand, due to the role he plays to the success of the joke, i.e., indicating whether the joke was effective. On the other hand, it is the figure who authorizes the interchangeability of the joke and public action.

In their “structures”, jokes apply a rule to a particular or contingent situation, for which it demands to go beyond the established norms of that very situation.

¹ See the Postscripts.
And ultimately, in their "logics", jokes are modes of reasoning and argumentation involving use of paralogisms.

Paralogisms can be categorized within the set of verbal and conceptual paralogisms. The former deals with the relations between the signifiers, whereas the latter centers on the relations among the signified. There also exists another type of paralogism, which one would call "the witty paralogism". They engage a form of fallacious deduction touching upon the relationships between homophonic signifiers and humorous phrases. For Aristotle, even this play on words is an authentic form of argumentation capable of altering the direction of thought.²

Perhaps the importance of joke-making is owing to this very characteristic of applying a transformative paradox onto a situation; an action toward the structure, aiming for its transformation.

² Virno, Paolo, Multitude Between Innovation and Negation, Trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, Semiotext(e), 2008
POSTSCRIPTS

To speak of, or looking at art, the best entry would be to begin, not by its 'there and then', rather, by its 'here and now'. To attain an approach of this sort, however, necessitates a radical abandonment of the art's familiar ontological and vertical triptych, i.e. artist-artwork-spectator (subjective experience of an object); a triptych that is essentially a product of cultural bourgeoisie and the romanticism it exerts. Subsequent to such an abandonment, it is crucial to reconstruct an altogether reconfiguration of the above equation. One that is, instead, formed around a horizontal axis, and in which both the artist and the viewer have the chance to engage the artwork from an encountering point of view (inter-subjective). The equation, as such, would read as: visitor-object-visitor.

The transformation of the spectator to a "visitor" renders the art attendant liberated from the agony of connecting to the artist's "level of intentionality", who is constantly presumed by the spectator to exist behind the artwork. The "visitor", on the contrary, is not occupied by the angst of whether he could achieve to receive the meaning of the artwork; The meaning that is supposed, by mediation of the artwork, is descending to the spectator's inferiority from the transcendence of the artist.

Analogously, the artist may arrange to situate himself as the "visitor" of his own work/material. This would, however, entail his detachment from the conceptual determinations he's aware of throughout the procedures of production. The artist becoming a "visitor", may, rather, employ his own critical faculties to encounter the semantic, semiotic, and psychoanalytic signs, which are contingently ascended by his self-made objects.

With the visitor-object-visitor, signification may not anymore be considered as that which can veer off from one state (artist) to another (spectator). Rather, it is that which may happen to be constructed by the "visitor" within a particular or contingent situation. It is, therefore, to say that in a situation that is intervened by the presence of the visitor, "signification" and "poiesis" are brought to their nearest proximity.
Carlo, put your

"I can not eat rice"
SHIT YES ACADEMY
(GOH BALLET ACADEMY)