

The problem of philosophising in the context of the event of learning

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Abstract

Thinking the event requires us to distinguish the philosophical from the political. According to Badiou (2009), it is only then that the subject is able to recognise both the philosophical nature of the situation in which he finds himself and the philosophical task that thinking the event will require him to perform. Recognition of the philosophical task is made problematic by the paradoxical nature of the situation and the fact that the subject must invent where there is not yet a measurement for making judgements. What if, instead of posing this problem as a problem for the philosopher, as Badiou does, we posed it as a problem for both teacher and student? That is, what if the teacher and the student were to be faced with the problem of thinking the event of learning through distinguishing between the way in which the philosophical and the political influence their experience of education? The examination of this question will involve an allegorical use of Badiou's interpretation of philosophical situations and the philosophical tasks; the purpose being to explore the manner in which these tasks – the illumination of choice, the measuring of distance and the thinking of exception – might contribute to our understanding of how the student and teacher might think the event of learning.

Keys words: *Philosophical situation, philosophical task, decision, distance, event, learning event*

I insist on this point: it is not because there is something that there is philosophy. Philosophy is not at all a reflection on anything whatsoever. There is philosophy, and there can be philosophy, because there are paradoxical relations, because there are breaks, decisions, distances, events (Badiou, 2009, p. 16).

Philosophy is not a dialogue. Name me a single example of a successful philosophical dialogue that wasn't a dreadful misunderstanding (Žižek, 2009, p. 50).

Introduction

What kind of problem is the problem of introducing philosophy to secondary school students? The problem of philosophising in the context of the learning event is a problem bound by the situation in which the event itself is formed. Whenever this situation defines education as an experience that involves the teacher and student in a dialogue, we would presume that the development of the student's capacity to philosophise would be bound by the limits and possibilities that the dialogue between these two subjects would suppose. Already, there is the supposition that the learning event would require philosophy subjugate itself to means and ends of politics, that it take up its role on a secondary and less consequential plane. While this may be the case and even a rational summation of what is required of education, it turns out that philosophy, to use Žižek's words, "is not [in fact] a dialogue" (Badiou & Žižek, 2009, p. 50). If politics pretends both to manage philosophy and, at the same time, to facilitate its protagonism in realising a learning event, then the dialogue that, supposes to enable this learning event, has through forcing an agreement, compromised the role of philosophy. There can be no agreement if learning is to continue because all philosophy ends with agreement.

To this effect, the kind of problem that is the problem of introducing philosophy to secondary school students is one that will be understood here as a problem that requires us to distinguish between politics and philosophy with respect to their respective roles in the learning event. To conduct this exploration, I will use Badiou's explication of what makes a philosophical situation and, furthermore, how this situation enables us to recognise the philosophical task that is particular to this situation (see Badiou & Žižek, 2009, pp. 1-48).

The intention is to examine Badiou's thinking for its allegorical value, in that while Badiou's exposition in 'Thinking the event' (Badiou & Žižek, 2009) involves an examination of the role of philosophy, his text does not speak to the role philosophy might have in relation to problems in education¹. Of particular interest will be the extent to which the philosophical tasks, which enable us to fulfil the role of philosophy, might be ascribed to the teacher's and student's task of thinking the learning event.

Before beginning, attention will be given to the discussion of some of the key concepts that will inevitably be influential in conditioning the formation of the philosophical situation in education. It would seem to be crucial to explain the concepts involved in order to clarify how the domain of education might be particular to itself with respect to how we might later think the event of learning. Furthermore, it is deemed important to explain both how Badiou comes to problematise the role of philosophy and how this process of questioning leads him to focus on what he refers to as the philosophical situation.

1.

Subject and problem

To pose a problem in philosophy, to pose philosophy as a problem and what is more, to propose that philosophy has a role in, for instance, secondary school education, supposes the need to explain how one understands the role of philosophy in the constitution of the subject. For the subject of education to be capable of philosophising in relation to his experience of the world, it would seem fundamental that his constitution as a subject should be intimately related to how we understand the role of philosophy in education. Perhaps the role of the philosophy in education today in the formation of the subject could be explained as a problem of education by looking at the question of whether or not we believe students are protagonists in their own learning and if so whether this learning serves them well when they are faced with a crisis in later years. What if, for example, we were to speculate on how secondary school graduates of 10 to 15 years ago would engage with a serious crisis today – an environmental disaster, a serious health problem, a violent culture or religious conflict and all on a scale that provided no escape routes; that could only in any event imply the immanence of a paradigm shift in personal circumstances?

With such a scenario in mind, how would we address, for example, Alain Touraine's question, when he asks: "[i]s society still capable of using its ideas, hopes and conflicts to act upon itself?" (2001, p. 1.)? Would these subjects as students, with or without philosophy in school 10 to 15 years, be able to act upon themselves and, as such, think the event that this said crisis presented itself as? What kind of role would have philosophy needed to have in their education 10 to 15 years ago for there to be a reformation of the relationship with the self and world? Of course, the ideas, hopes and conflicts, in relation to which these students constituted themselves 10 to 15 years ago would have changed but it is not the ideas, hopes and conflicts themselves that will save them; if philosophy has no object that it can call its own (Badiou, 2005) then they could only be an obstacle. On the other hand, what if these students had the capacity to philosophically intervene in the process via which they were formed at school and, furthermore, were able to continue to develop this capacity after school, then isn't there some likelihood that they might be better able to act upon themselves with respect to the manner in which they found themselves to be implicated in the formation of the contemporary crisis. If philosophy has no object that it can call its own, it matters less what the experience (idea, hope or conflict) the student constituted himself in relation to than it does how he thought the event of his formation. Therefore the problem is: how should we teach philosophy in school in such a way that the student of today will be capable of intervening on his own behalf in the process via which he is going to need to form himself in 10 to 15 years time – an experience which education cannot foresee? What role should the philosophy of education have today that would make the experience of learning an experience that would serve the student's relationship to a problem in the future.

Governmentality and political subjectivity

Philosophy's role in the constitution of the subject is conceptualised as being played out in our understanding of power relations when framed by Foucault's concept of governmentality (see Foucault, 2000, pp. 201-222); but, with a significant modification. Whereas for Foucault, the student should refer to the relationship he has with the self when accepting to be governed by the other (teacher) (see Foucault, 1997a, p. 88, p. 300), I believe that the reflective aspect of this event needs to be modified; to acknowledge, on the one hand, the student's relationship with the world and, on the other, to acknowledge that the teacher himself must accept to be governed by the world; that is, by the politics of education. I have made this modification to address the problem Foucault he has when he says that, while he understands the theory's role in the relationship with the self, he does not understand how to relate this same theoretical understanding to the fact that theory can be thought to play a role in transforming the world (see Foucault, 1997b, pp. 130-131).

This said, this modification does nothing more than describe the situation in which the subject is formed and forms himself as a subject of education. The modification, as such, does not solve Foucault's problem – his problem is not a problem to be solved by others; such an act drains it of its genealogical value, which is always subjective in nature. Rather, this modification attempts to articulate the problem of power relations that exists as a consequence of the ambiguous relationship sustained between the self and the world; that is, when the power relations that exist in the relationship the subject has with the self interact with the power relations that exist in the relationship the subject has with the world. How should one intervene, for example, in the power relations that exist in the relationship one has with the self (for example, with those that relate to one's beliefs about one's possibilities in life) such that this intervention would inform or be informed by a philosophical understanding of the power relations that govern one's relationship with the world (for example, with those that relate to how economic enterprise understands these same possibilities)? As such, our relations with the self and the world are bound to be paradoxical: they are not made of the same thing and they must be engaged as if they intrinsically relate to one another.

Overcoming the ambiguity of these relations requires political subjectivity: the capacity to intervene on one's own behalf in the process via which one is being formed. Political subjectivity refers to a simultaneous acceptance and overcoming of the governmentality that characterise one's relations with the self and world; it is to think philosophically the event of one's acceptance to be governed by the other (the teacher). Of course, while there is an acceptance of the politics, there is no agreement with the philosophy that is the instrument of the politics that governs. Political subjectivity presumes the ongoing presence of a discussion where paradox is likely to be uncovered as against reconciled; well, more than often, this is the case. And what is more, the situation of the argument is yet to be established.

Situation and event

In this discussion, our understanding of the concepts situation and event is informed by Badiou's analysis of these concepts in 'Thinking the event' (Badiou, 2005, pp. 141-148), the text that will become the main focus of the latter part of this paper. The situation that provides a possible event is characterised by its collective and infinite aspects. Collective is not a numerical concept but a concept that provides "a virtual summoning of all thought" (p. 141), meaning the situation is forever *open*, the implication of which is that infinite subjectivities are constituted as a result of the manner in which events are thought. Furthermore, the collective is universalising in its orientation and supposes the infinite extent of the situation in the sense that the "thought that is is the thought of all" (p. 142). Within the infinite extent of this domain of experience (for instance, the domain of possible learning), the event becomes immanent according to the manner in which we conceive of the procedure that produces it. Badiou conceives of the event as requiring an engagement of three operations:

1. The infinity of the situation ... is summoned as such through the collective dimension of the political event, which is to say, through the supposition of the 'for all' of thought. ...

2. The infinity of the state of the situation ... is summoned by repression and alienation, because it supposedly controls all collectives or subsets of the situation. ...
3. The fixing by political prescription, under eventual and collective condition, of a measure for statist power. Through this prescription, the errancy of statist excess is interrupted and it becomes possible to use militant watchwords to practice and calculate the free distance of political thinking from the state (2005, pp. 147-148).

In the above sequence of operations, the manner in which politics anticipates the possibility of an event (or learning event) becomes progressively evident. In the first operation, it remains possible to say that the learning event is not delimited to the formation of any particular subjectivity; the teacher's or the student's. If "for every x, there is thought" (Badiou, 2005, p. 141), meaning all are possible thinkers, teacher and student, irrespective of how hierarchy predetermines the political function of their situation. However, in the second operation, politics as exercised by the administrative subject (the teacher), defines its role in terms of how political relations are to be played out if they are to be successfully oriented towards the notion politics has for what should be learnt; as identified, for instance, by curriculum documents. This operation is not necessarily oppressive: it might have more to do with the categorization of what is being discussed and the provision of explanations that clarify the nature of the ontology employed than it may have to do with a demarcation of the parameters of discussion; alienation and repression being, by nature, subjective experiences. In the third operation, the possible event is more evident. The situation now demands the subject (student) engage formally with the metaphysics of governmentality: the student needs to refer to the relationship he has with the self and world in the context of accepting to be governed by the teacher. This operation supposes that there is an *intuitive incongruence* within the situation; an incongruence that relates to the fact that "[t]he power of the state is always superior to that of the situation" (p. 144), meaning the teacher, as statist, is always likely to provoke the student to re-think the distance between his kind of thinking and that of the teacher's before agreeing to be governed. As such, the learning event inevitably "construct[s] its own autonomy, or distance, and is able to effectuate its maxim from within that distance" (p. 151).

2.

Badiou begins 'Thinking the event' with the questions "to what extent does philosophy intervene in the present, in historical and political questions? And in the end, what is the nature of this intervention? And why would the philosopher be called to intervene in questions regarding the present" (Badiou & Žižek, 2009, p. 1)? Badiou's initial concern when addressing these questions is to distinguish the philosopher's role, when addressing a problem, from the role that requires one to address a problem of popular culture. The example he uses is the situation in which the philosopher is confronted in an interview on television with problems of popular importance, where the importance of problems is defined by the interests of television and not by an interest in how philosophy might have a role in our experience of the world as one that produces these problems. As Badiou intimates, television will never provide sufficient time for the necessary reconceptualising of questions that would be required if what is regarded to be a popular problem were to be treated as a paradox worthy of philosophical enquiry.

For Badiou, the role of the philosopher sits outside this situation in that the subject who philosophises "is someone who decides on his own account what the important problems are, is someone who proposes new problems for everyone. Philosophy is first and foremost this: the invention of new problems" (Badiou, 2009, p. 2). To ascribe Badiou's concept of the role of philosophy as one that might have a role in the education of secondary school students supposes the student's potential capacity to invent and propose new problems for everyone. The challenge for philosophy of education should be to understand the situation in which the invention of such new problems takes place; that is to say, to understand how the nature of the intervention that would be required for the event of learning to be the substance of such new problems. The next section

of this paper will be devoted to an exploration of what this challenge might entail in terms of thinking the role of philosophy from both the student's and the teacher's perspective; the crux of which will involve the identification of the situation that relates to a problem what requires the subject to think philosophically.

3.

In 'Thinking the event' (2009), Badiou describes three philosophical situations, each chosen for its incommensurable nature and the philosophical tasks that identify the role of philosopher². These philosophical situations are only important in the manner in which they allude to the presence of a problem that supposes, in each case, the existence of a philosophical task. It is not my intention to summarise Badiou's exposition of these situations in their entirety; I will speak directly to the problem the situation described and how the corresponding task might shed light on the role of thinking philosophically in the learning event. The discussion is developed in an elliptical manner; the intention being to show how the first two situations are implicit in the third; that while each philosophical situation needs to be examined separately in order that we appreciate the nature of the tasks they imply, the tasks themselves must be embraced in an organic manner; that is, in the manner that the situation in class elucidates the problem that should be acted upon.

The first philosophical situation describes a discussion between Socrates and Callicles (Badiou, 2009); a discussion which quickly disintegrates into a confrontation for reason that one or other of the interlocutors is unable to convince the other of the merits of his argument. In this situation, each subject is forced to recognise that there can only be winners and losers; that to survive is a matter of choosing to live by the means that the end will require. Such a situation supposes that a choice is immanent, that the subject must choose between two kinds of thinking; it is already passed the point original intentions can appeal to a common interest, irrespective of the original pretence that their motivation on entering into the discussion

It is not difficult to associate the above situation with what often takes place in the classroom; the defining feature of the interaction being the incommensurability between the thinking of the teacher and the thinking of the student; each elucidating for the other the determinant fact that their thinking is different such that each is forced to defend himself via whatever means will effect a victory. In the classroom, different kinds of thinking can emerge as a consequence of an array of circumstances such as, but not limited, any combination of the following: a different understanding of a fact, a poor articulation of a problem by one party or the other, a question that does not appear to relate to the subject, a difference in focus or orientation within the discussion, a different means via which either party is seeking to verify the truth and so on. In all the above circumstances, while each subject might presume that the merits of their reasoning should give them cause to believe that they will be able to convince the other of their point-of-view, sooner or later one or other will have to argue via whatever means will deliver the only conceivable end: control of the outcome. This incommensurability is what Badiou calls *a relation that is not a relation* (Badiou, 2009). This is to say, the relation that is not a relation exists where what was supposed to proceed via means of a discussion (the relation), based upon the idea that both subjects have compatible thinking on what the happy man is, while at the same time revealing that to one or other or both that this compatible thinking does not exist (is not a relation), that in fact, no discussion is possible.

In the classroom, such an encounter can be a brutal one, but to paraphrase Badiou (2009), there is no common measure when the kind of thinking of each is totally foreign to the other. In such a situation, "[t]he sole task of philosophy is to show that we must choose" (p. 5), to think a decision. While students and teachers are constantly making decisions to move onto to the next thing, to accept to be shut-up or to shut the other up, to not comment or to prohibit the other from commenting, to deal with an impasse by changing the subject, this exercise in agency is political rather than philosophical. The philosophical situation for the student and/or the teacher "consists in the moment when the [need for a] choice is elucidated", the philosophical task being "to show that we must choose" (p. 5). Badiou calls this task "a choice of existence or a choice of thought" (p. 5).

In the discussion between Socrates and Callicles, there was, up to the point in which the philosophical situation presented itself, the possibility (although not the probability) that Socrates could have persuaded Callicles that the happy man is someone other than Callicles presumed him to be: “that might was right, that the happy man is a tyrant” (Badiou, 2009, p. 4). However, in the second philosophical situation, the confrontation between Archimedes and General Marcellus’ soldier, as a relation that is not a relation, is of another character. This time, it is not a question of he who is the quickest to understand the nature of the choice he must make: that he must choose over and above the false possibility that there are real grounds for the discussion to be continued. This time, each subject begins by claiming the right to defend the importance of his distinctive kinds of thinking as being ontologically exclusive to the other. In this situation, Archimedes defends his right to think creatively (about a mathematical problem), while the soldier defends the right of the state to demand Archimedes attention and his compliance with an order from his general; an incommensurability that results in Archimedes being murdered by General Marcellus’ soldier. Here, as before, *the relation that is not a relation* exists on account of there being no common measure. In the first situation, the interests of both subjects could not be measured according to a common understanding of what a happy man is; Callicles opposing Socrates’ *just man* with his *tyrant*. In the second situation, there is possibility of a discussion taking place from the beginning, for reason that an interest discussion with the other does not define the nature of their interests; thinking creatively (Archimedes) and duty (the soldier). As Badiou puts it, Archimedes’ thought always exists beyond the action that defines the interests of power: creative thinking only recognises its own rules, as “there is no common chronology between the power of one side and the truths of the other” (p. 8).

So what allegorical significance could Archimedes brutal fate have in a classroom discussion between teacher and student? The allegorical vale of what leads to Archimedes’ murder must be extrapolated from the problem of how the administration of power (which in the classroom lies with the teacher) annihilates the unrelated activity of creative thinking, whether this creative thinking be that of the teacher himself or that of the student. The teacher is not a soldier and is not bound by military rules. His situation presupposes a responsibility to think creatively and the possibility that he should need to assert his political subjectivity in the power relations that govern his relations with his superiors. Furthermore, we are not speaking about the annihilation of the subject himself, although the annihilation of the subject’s creative thinking could, over time, turn this thinking against the subject himself and, in effect, render the result about which we cannot speak: that philosophical suicide inevitably leads to physical suicide (see Camus, 1991).

In a less dramatic terms, this perception of the relationship between student and teacher, as one involving the annihilation of a different kind of thinking, is perhaps better understood if we consider the governance of education in the context of the problem the student faces when he refers to the relationship he has with the self and the world when accepting to be governed by the teacher. The student, in this moment, might discover that he not only thinks differently about the question at hand, but that there is no common measure that could make his acceptance to be governed one that could be realised in the form of a discussion. This realisation (a common experience for secondary school students) is one that involves understanding that the incompatibility between the kind of thinking of the teacher and student is merely a problem that elucidates the need for a choice, but one that must acknowledge that their thinking is ontologically incommensurable. In this instance, Badiou (2009) posits that the philosophical task is to “clarify the distance between power and truths” (p. 9). In these circumstances, the distance between teacher and student cannot be crossed, not because he can’t or doesn’t want to but because he has decided that the student’s kind of thinking (creative thinking) is not relevant to what he (the teacher) must do now. In this moment, the student’s capacity to retain his political subjectivity depends on his capacity to “reflect and think the distance [between power and truth as being] without measure” (p. 8) or, put in others words, to invent a measure for where there is no measure.

In the third philosophical situation, Badiou (2009) interprets the subject Of Mizoguchi’s film *The Crucified Lovers*; his objective being to explain what philosophy can do with love’s resistance of death. In

each of the three philosophical situations that Badiou uses for the purpose of identifying the philosophical tasks that he considers to be important to understanding the role of the philosophy, *the relation that is not a relation* is revealed according to the circumstances of the story that he recounts. In the first situation, this incommensurability implies that the role of philosophy is characterised by a capacity to elucidate the nature of a choice: whether a discussion suggests the existence of compatible kinds of thinking or whether the discussion itself must be resolved through confrontation; the elucidation of which requires a decision to employ the most decisive means of winning the argument. In the second situation, the role of philosophy becomes defined by an unwillingness of either party to overcome the distance that separates their distinctive interests: power and truths. While death characterises both of these situations (the spectre of death in the first and the realisation of power's ultimate expression of it in the second) and, as such, conditions our understanding of the role of philosophy (see Camus, 1991), the fate of *these relations that are not relations* lies outside the bounds of the common law; the law of General Marcellus' soldier is the military law of occupied Sicily. In the third philosophical situation, it is the law of the city and the law of marriage that determine the nature of *the relation that is not a relation*: once love takes the form of adultery, the fate of the lovers is already marked; the law that governs sentimental relations is the law of life and death; Japanese law of the classical period did not make exceptions. To reiterate the point, while in the second situation, there was a confrontation between creative thinking and the interests of power, one that could have been resolved peacefully if only General Marcellus's soldier had permitted Archimedes to finish his mathematical demonstration. In the third philosophical situation, there is absolutely no value in thinking creatively once "love falls prey to its own power" (Badiou, 2009, p. 10), it is only a matter of time before the adulterers are captured and hauled away to be slaughtered.

In this instance, the allegorical value of this philosophical situation, which Badiou describes as being one of "a withdrawal into a smile" (2009, p. 10) is not immediately evident; the story is too gruesome. How could a smile be a philosophical situation? Well, the withdrawal into a smile is the symbolic withdrawal into the only place left where genuine love can resist death as the adulterers are led away, tied back-to-back on a mule. It is not the actual story that has allegorical value but the symbolism of the situation. Badiou describes the task in this situation as one of being able to throw light on the value of the event through elucidating the value of the exception; the love that binds the adulterous relationship being that which calls to itself the need for there to be an exception to the only end it can have: death. It is the symbolism of what this love might represent that calls to itself the need for an exception to be made – for the "the ordinary rules of life" (p. 11) to be wavered – that provide the possibility of thinking the learning event as thinking the exception. The event in Mizoguchi's story does not exist for reason that there is a fusion of love and death, and Badiou does not identify the philosophical task in the withdrawal into a smile as an expression of the lovers' acceptance of their fate; they did not want to die. It is in what *the lovers do not want* that creates the event and it is in what *they want* that calls to itself the need for an exception.

Conclusion

Of course, the brutality of Mizoguchi's story is relevant to the event of learning and the secondary school student's education. What could be more brutal than the conflict *in the relation that is not a relation* where the kind of thinking that guides the student's learning is forcefully marginalised in the classroom by an administration of power that has no time for the relevance of that which cannot be anticipated! You think I am exaggerating? It depends on what precisely the *unanticipated* refers to. In the case of both the student and the teacher, we are referring to a non identity. The student is a student but he is also a stranger; that is, if we are to anticipate his philosophical commitment (Badiou, 2009). The presence of new thoughts is clothed in silence. The unanticipated has consequences for all because the focus of these thoughts is the invention of new problems for all. In Badiou's words, "[p]hilosophical commitment is marked by its internal foreignness" (p. 24). The unanticipated refers to the foreignness that has to be anticipated. When the politics that administer education pursues its interests at the exclusion of the need to engage this stranger and his

thoughts of unanticipated relevance, we only add to the paradox as we ourselves are implicated in the fate of the thoughts which occupy this subject.

Enter the teacher! The teacher is a different kind of stranger – never a stranger word was said! By this, I mean, the teacher is not only an unwitting accomplice in the creation of the politics that administers education, but, paradoxically, he is also someone who is present in *the relation that is not a relation* that is the affirmation of this so-called internal foreignness – he is a partisan to these thoughts of unanticipated relevance³. The teacher, as partisan, must “absolutely distinguish philosophy from politics” (p. 22). It is this empathetic affirmation and the love that it requires that makes him the student’s accomplice, because for there to be an exception, for both to think the event of learning in the moment when the student calls to himself the relevance of what is unanticipated, the teacher must refer to the relationship he has with the self and the world with the intention of visibly inventing the distance, in that moment, between the philosophical and the political.

Badiou provides us with a beautiful illustration of how we might understand the relationship between the partisan and the stranger; the teacher and the student. Let’s look more closely at the role of the husband of the adulteress in *The Crucified Lovers*:

All the while, the honest husband tries to protect the runaways. Husbands have the duty to denounce adulterers, they abhor the idea of turning into their accomplices. Nevertheless the husband – and this is proof indeed that he genuinely loves his wife – tries to gain time. He pretends that his wife has left for the provinces, to see some relatives ... A good honest husband – really. A truly admirable character. But all the same, the lovers are denounced, captured, and taken to their torture (Badiou, 2009, p. 10).

The good husband didn’t know that his wife didn’t love him, he didn’t know that she has fallen in love and had to be with the man she loves; at least not until it was too late. While this may be the case, the good husband was an unwitting accomplice in these developments long before he seeks to protect his wife from being denounced and captured. He is implicated in the formation of his wife’s discontent, whether he knew it or not, whether he could do anything about it or not, long before she left him. To elaborate, long before the experience that is *the relation that is not a relation* that reveals itself in a situation that calls for love to oppose death through the only means it has of protecting what makes it what it is (the withdrawal into a smile), *the is a relation that is not a relation* was forming itself on subtler plains of experience. Before the wife left her husband, the event was not the opposition between love and the laws of the city and marriage: as an event, there would have been events marked by much less fatal confrontations, no doubt resulting in discussions that descended into confrontations on account of both husband and wife not sharing the same kind of thinking. Such confrontations, at the time, swept under the carpet, later create imperceptible and fatal distances, distances that could not be measured and that could not be crossed. For *the relation that is not a relation* to exist on some levels, as in that which results in a fatal conflict, it has to, in other moments, be *a relation that is not a relation* on other levels. This is to say, that the situation presents itself in dramatic terms in the historical formation of the incommensurability that develops in that subjects who are participants in that situation. In the situation that frames the learning event, the teacher is already implicated in for historical formation of the incommensurability that constitutes that moment; not because it is a teacher’s job to manage the power relations he has with the student but because he is implicated in the formation of the stranger and this, before, the student ever entered the classroom. Thinking the event does not depend on dialogue between teacher and student but rather the implication of the partisan in the historical constitution of the student as a stranger.

Notes

¹ ‘Thinking the event’ is unedited transcript of Badiou’s contribution to a seminar that he and Žižek gave in 2005 in Vienna, and is published under the title *Philosophy in the present* (2009). Žižek’s text is titled ‘Philosophy is not a dialogue’.

² The three philosophical situations that Badiou refers to are: Plato’s dialogue *Gorgias* and the discussion between Socrates and Calicles that descends into a confrontation (Badiou, 2009, pp. 3-5); the well known confrontation between Archimedes and Roman General Marcellus’s soldier that leads to the death of Archimedes at the hands of the soldier (pp. 5-9); and love’s resistance of death in *The Crucified Lovers*, a film by Mizoguchi (pp. 9-12).

³ The idea of the teacher needing to be a partisan to the student’s stranger has its origins in the line of Saint-Jean Perse’s poem *Anabasis*, from which Badiou quotes when providing a definition of philosophical commitment: “The Stranger, clothed in his new thoughts, acquires still more partisans in the ways of silence” (2009, p. 24).

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