

# *Philosophy and Politics* – *An Odd Couple*

*Filosofía y política: una pareja dispareja*

FRANK RUDA

Chair of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy at the at  
the University of Dundee, Professor for Philosophy at the  
European Graduate School, and Adjunct Professor of School of  
Marxism at Capital Normal University in Beijing, China.  
Orcid: 0000-0002-4376-281X

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15366/bp2023.32.003>  
Bajo Palabra. II Época. N°32. Pgs: 57-76



*Recibido: 18/11/2021*  
*Aprobado: 20/06/2022*

## **Abstract**

The article addresses the strange relationship between politics and philosophy, a relationship that is determined by peculiar asymmetries, by critically discussing the work of French anthropologist, Sylvan Lazarus. It demonstrates from a Hegelian perspective that philosophy is able to think that and what “politics thinks” in a historically singular way and thereby does not fall prey to the criticisms raised against it from the “thinking of politics in its interiority” (Lazarus).

*Keywords: Diagonal, G.W.F. Hegel, Sylvain Lazarus, Coupling, Impossibility.*

## **Resumen**

El artículo aborda la extraña relación entre la política y la filosofía, una relación que está determinada por asimetrías peculiares, discutiendo críticamente la obra del antropólogo francés Sylvan Lazarus. Demuestra, desde una perspectiva hegeliana, que la filosofía es capaz de pensar que y lo que “la política piensa” de una manera históricamente singular y, por tanto, no es presa de las críticas que se le hacen desde el “pensamiento de la política en su interioridad” (Lazarus).

*Palabras clave: Diagonal, G.W.F. Hegel, Sylvain Lazarus, Acoplamiento, Imposibilidad.*

“I grief different.”  
(Kendrick Lamar, “United in Grief”)

“It is in names that we think.”  
(G.W.F. Hegel)

### *Philosophical Complaining*

This text is an exercise in philosophical complaining. But it is more than just a complaint. For philosophical complaining is different from – and this is not to say better than – usual complaining. It not complaining about a thing or feature, it is not even a form of moaning about a condition. It is rather a complaint addressed at what one can call an impossible – but unavoidable and therefore necessary – relationship. A philosophical complaint is thus a complaint at what is necessary for philosophy, but what is impossible for philosophy to manage appropriately, sovereignly, or adequately. When in the following, the present article will mainly address the work that Sylvain Lazarus has articulated in his book *Anthropology of the Name*, the philosophical complaint is not simply a way of complaining about the book. The complaint will rather coincide with a praise of the book and its insistence on conceiving of politics from a position of radical immanence, to conceive of politics on its own terms, that is to conceive of “politics in interiority.”<sup>1</sup> This way of conceiving of politics is fundamentally different from what he calls thinking “politics in exteriority”<sup>2</sup>, the latter operating in such a broad manner that it is able to identify a feature common to the contemporary parliamentary and democratic system as well as to the failed communist projects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Any “politics in exteriority” defines politics in relation to a particular object, empirical or otherwise, which is external to the self-organization of a political collective. In this sense, for Lazarus, even if one refers, as in the Marxist tradition, to the structure of class antagonism, we do formulate a “politics in exteriority”, at least if one understands political action then as action within the framework of the structure of a struggle, as an action directed against an external enemy, as an action

---

<sup>1</sup> Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropology of the Name* (New York: Seagull 2015), p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

being determined by a struggle the agent of the action did not determine. In this sense, the proletariat that emancipates itself by acting against the bourgeoisie – or more precisely against the bourgeois word in which there is a proletariat – remains incapable in its action, according to Lazarus, of proper self-organization.<sup>3</sup> But the distinction here gets more complicated, since there is not only a politics in interiority and a politics in exteriority, there are also two forms or types of subjectivization. The forms of subjectivization that were examined by Michel Foucault<sup>4</sup>, for example, rather belong to thinking politics in exteriority – since he examined what happens to people who are subjectivized in and through an institution like the panopticon; subjectivization in any politics in interiority must look constitutively different.

What follows is an attempt to take up what Lazarus calls the first proposition of the *Anthropology of the Name* – and note that proposition 1 is different from what he calls statement 1 (which is “the people think”). The first proposition is that “we have to assume the task of establishing in utterly new terms the expected outcomes and methods of thought and knowledge, if the interlocution is done with [the] people.”<sup>5</sup> So, if one speaks with the people and takes seriously what they are saying and thinks by taking what they are saying as one’s starting point, this may lead to and even necessitate a total transformation of everything we think about thinking. It may transform what we conceive to be our method or what conceive to be knowledge. A brief parenthesis: might this very ‘transformation’ not already have been – even though in a distorted way – been co-opted or even ex-adapted, as one could say with Stephen J. Gould, quite successfully by contemporary and reactionary forms of “politics”? Since they also proclaim that they basically listen to the people, especially because the people have not been listened to appropriately before. But this might ultimately only prove that there is nothing that cannot be appropriated – in inverted ways – by reactionary and obscurantist modes of practice.

To fully take up, as Hegel would have said, Lazarus at his word and engage in a serious attempt to enter into an interlocution with him and his thought of politics in interiority, the following reflections will not shy away from risking to transform our concept of philosophy. This is an intricate attempt, because Lazarus understands his project as something that methodically necessitates a distancing not only

---

<sup>3</sup> In some sense, the brings back the old Foucauldian claim that in the Marxist tradition too much emphasis was put on the concept of “class” and too little emphasis was put on the concept of “struggle.” Cf. Michael Foucault, “The End of the Monarchy of Sex”, in: *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*, ed. by Silvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), p. 224f

<sup>4</sup> Cf. for example Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin 2020) and Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: *The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Lazarus, *Anthropology*, p. xi.

from the social sciences (he refers to sociology<sup>6</sup> and history), but also and importantly from philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Because they are inoperable, or more directly put: useless when it comes to “the realm of politics and the thought of the people.”<sup>8</sup> One could here hear an echo of the Marx, even though, certainly, not intended.

In what follows, the present text will elaborate a complaint, but one that takes the absence of anything to complain about as an excellent reason to complain. Obviously, something not being there, something not existing can be a very good reason to complain, since complaining about what is missing makes us think that which does not exist. For example, if there is no revolution in the form of thought, in the ways in which we think (politics), to slightly alter Kant’s famous formulation here, this can be a highly regrettable lack and it is an absence that needs explanation and proper conceptual working through. But in this specific case, the argument to complain about is one that directly concerns the absence of philosophy. Notably, the argument that philosophy is useless, helpless, uninformative or inoperative when it comes to conceiving politics in and from its interiority. Why this is a reason to complain is because if one starts from the position of the early Marx – articulated in the famous 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach –, this thesis seems to be not applicable to and valid for most philosophical positions, since philosophy frequently if not almost always came with normative suggestions of what the world, the commonwealth, the state, a political organization or rational political action ought to be (this is true from Aristotle to Habermas, at the very least). But there are exceptions, even though only a few. One of them is without a doubt, even though surprisingly given the context of the 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach, Hegel. Since undoubtedly, Hegel is – as for example Mladen Dolar has pointed out – one of the very few thinkers who does not conceive of philosophy as a form of instructing or changing the world. “No philosopher has ever entertained the idea of doing something as innocuous as merely interpreting the world – except for one, who spelled it out in all letters.... Marx’s adage is not against the rule... but against the exception; it has only one addressee.”<sup>9</sup>

Hegel did not evaluate, judge, or interpret the world in categories, terms or concepts coming from its outside. Rather he ventured to grasp it in its own terms (when it has exhausted what it could do). He sought to articulate and conceive of

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. xvii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>9</sup> Mladen Dolar, “What’s the Time? On Being Too Early or Too Late in Hegel’s Philosophy”, *Problemi International*, vol. 4, 2020, p. 37; Mladen Dolar, “The Owl of Minerva from Dusk till Dawn, or Two Shades of Gray”, in: *Filozofia I drustvo*, 26:4, pp. 875-890.

its immanent rationality in its own terms, or as Hegel has famously argued in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, the aim of philosophy is to grasp and understand what is. What is, is not simply what exists, but what is in and of the real, since what is real (actual) is what was and is what is rational.<sup>10</sup> Why should that be? Because only that which is rational is – what just is just is and is not anything (really) – because only what is rational has an immanent relation to thought. This is not to say that everything that is is rational, but it means only what is rational is. But this puts pressure on what is called “rational”. To cut a long(er) story short: what is rational is what can be thought by thought as that which is (rationally conceivable and) thinkable. To add another turn of the screw here: this can mean (for Hegel) that sometimes nothing of any real – universal rational, or thinking-political – significance happens in history, even if there seem to be happening a lot of things empirically. Hegel’s concept of the rational, or that which is is what thought must think<sup>11</sup>, holds what Lazarus claims about politics conceived of in its interiority, namely that it “is sequential and rare.”<sup>12</sup>

Even though, philosophy is unable to do what a purely immanent thought of politics must do, it is difficult not to see the close link between Hegel’s dialectical-rational and Lazarus’s interior approach to politics. The following will explore this proximity and thus from this point of view deal with and address the peculiar relationship, or non-relationship between philosophy and politics. My starting point is thus Hegel’s own affirmation and assertion of philosophy’s “inoperability”<sup>13</sup> vis-à-vis politics that is implied in assigning to philosophy the perspective of the owl of Minerva. What does happen to the critique of philosophy that is articulated from the perspective of thinking politics in interiority when this critique becomes the very starting point of conceiving of philosophy (thinking politics)?

### *On(e) Oddity*

Is there a relationship between philosophy and politics? Philosophy and politics, from the former’s beginning at least, form a kind of couple. But it is an odd one, since it seems that the mutual exclusivity of the philosophy-politics couple does not

<sup>10</sup> A longer elaboration of the position that therefore philosophy is in, cf. Frank Ruda, “The Purlieu Letter: Toward a Hegelian Theory of Conditioning”, in: *Problemi International*, vol. 4, 2020, pp. 179-199.

<sup>11</sup> Hegel’s point is that if thinking does not think what has been and is thought, thought does not think (what has been) thought and thus does not properly think what it(self) is.

<sup>12</sup> Lazarus, *Anthropology*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

mean that there are no other partners involved. Rather the couple itself, internally struggles with an immanent form of exclusion. On the one side, therefore, one can claim that philosophy and politics form a couple, but that, on the other, it forms a unique couple, a couple that is different from all other couples. It is a couple and thus shares some things with the other couples: Georg Simmel once referred to this insight, when reflecting on the structure of love – the insight that almost everyone was in love at least once in their lives and love thus appears to be a universal thing, yet all love relationships are different and entirely unique, so that they appear to be absolutely singular, too – in terms of liquid universality.<sup>14</sup> There is something fluidly universal in the specific, concrete and singular odd coupling of philosophy and politics. Elucidating the fluid universality of this oddity will make intelligible why in this couple, philosophy is in the position of being the – unavoidable – complain-er. But why should philosophy and politics be an odd couple and why can this be taken as one of the philosophical lessons of Lazarus' *Anthropology of the Name*, even though the latter does explicitly want to engage with philosophy in its project at all?

Odd couples are obviously – philosophically – interesting entities. They bring together things that do not add up, or are not one of a kind, yet that are strangely bound and tied together. These are entities that can appear inseparable, but are at the same time of a very different and sometimes even mutually repulsive nature. But such couples are maybe the only ones of any real philosophical interest. This is – once again –, and herein I am following Brecht, one of the main lessons of Hegel that is articulated in his *Science of Logic*. Since Brecht once claimed that Hegel is the greatest comedian in the history of philosophy because he tells us how two things cannot leave each other alone, even though they are constantly trying to get rid of each other. It is a book about “how they fight each other...and... enter so to say in pairs, each is married to its opposite... They can live neither with nor without each other.”<sup>15</sup> Philosophy thrives on thinking in and through odd couples. But does the same hold for politics? Are things that are bound together and absolutely and appear in a singularly different manner to be paired together also of political interest?

The immediate answer might be “yes”, since is this not what is at stake with the concept of equality? But this kind of answer would be one that, for Lazarus, would appear to be given from an external position vis-à-vis politics, because it assigns an object or category to politics that then is proclaimed as the latter's conceptual substance (such that all politics cannot but be about equality). But is it the case that politics is all the time in a situation where it must be interested in questions

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Georg Simmel, „Über die Liebe (Fragment)“, in: *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlass und Veröffentlichungen der letzten Jahre* (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag 1923), pp. 47-125,

<sup>15</sup> Bertolt Brecht, “On Hegelian Dialectic“, at: <http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/hegel-brecht.html>.

related to odd couplings, questions of equality and how would one generally know? Put differently, the thesis that all politics has an interest in organizing odd couples in such a way that one cannot avoid introducing the concept of equality seems rather to be philosophical and not political claim. It appears to assign a transhistorical conceptual destiny or framework to politics. In this sense, one could even be tempted – even though one really should not – to be talking about “the political.”<sup>16</sup> One can therefore raise the question if equality is a constant concept, principle, or axiom of collective political action or only sometimes. Is it possible to know this in advance or does one have to inquire into what is even meant by it in a concrete situation? Since is it always clear if the same concepts always name the same thing?

If philosophy finds odd couples interesting, it could be the case that ultimately (or sometimes) politics just does not. But there is no doubt that it makes an odd couple if one of its members thinks that odd couples are interesting and the other, at least potentially, does not care about them. It also seems to indicate that philosophy needs politics, but politics does not necessarily need philosophy. It is a odd relationship of one-sided dependence. If philosophy and politics are a couple, then one of the partners is clearly more autonomous than the other. But, of course, everything depends on what we mean when we say politics. Since if politics – and this is not the case for Lazarus – were to be identified with the actions or the constitution of a state – which was and is a rather common assumption –, this would explain it all, because the state does neither need philosophy nor is it a particular fan of fans of oddities. The state may tolerate them, but not much more. But if politics is understood, and this is Lazarus’ direction of thought, as something that originates always in distance from the state, because the state is identified by him as a “machine of corruption”<sup>17</sup>, and if politics always concerns the specific historical mode of the organization of collective action, things do look different. If politics is always the organization of thought, simply because – this is the decision that becomes manifest in Lazarus’ statement that “*People think*”<sup>18</sup> –, politics is about thinking what is thought. And this means that thinking (what is thought) does not for Lazarus mean to think *that* it / someone thinks, but it is rather unavoidable concerned with thinking what thought thinks, i.e. with something specific and concrete. From this perspective and therefore one cannot know in advance and in general – only specifically and singularly – if political thought in this sense is and can be indifferent to philosophy.

<sup>16</sup> An instructive problematization of the category of “the political” can be found in: Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London: Verso 2005), pp. 10-25.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Sylvain Lazarus, “Des conférences de Belgrade”, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HpZHt2ulsU>.

<sup>18</sup> Lazarus, *Anthropology*, p. ix.



State politics – if this were politics and not simple administration – is and maybe must be indifferent to philosophy. Since the state does not think, as one can modify Heidegger’s wrongful motto about science in this context. Because it does not think, it is a machine of corruption, of corrupting thinking for Lazarus. But the thought of the people does not per se – as there is no per se when it comes to the thought of the people – exclude any relationship to or need for philosophy, to use an expression of the early Hegel. One would be substantializing, state-ifying- politics, would inscribe the state into politics as being one of its substantial determinations otherwise. It cannot be said in overly generalizing terms if there will always and forever be a machine of corruption that politics must deal with or how it does have to deal with it. But if one seeks to avoid problematic generalizations, this cannot but also mean that it is not always and generally true– pace Lazarus’ own claim – that politics does not need, miss, or desire philosophy. Think here for example of the well-known anecdote about Lenin who exiled himself to Switzerland, after the Social Democratic Parties of Europe, except for the Russian one, voted for war credits. In Switzerland, he extensively read Hegel (and inter alia also Aristotle, Feuerbach or Deborin<sup>19</sup>), especially his *Science of Logic*, which depicts God’s thought before the creation of nature and finite mind – and this might have actually (and historically) proved to be a helpful perspective for revolutionizing Russia.

Even though the specific historical mode of politics that was determining for Lenin is over and “obsolete”<sup>20</sup>, as Lazarus argues, another lesson one can draw from this obsolescence is that one should never over-generalize a specific historical situation in such a way that it conditions our understanding of the constitution of politics in general. It is politically crucial to be specific about the singular situation of politics and this has also important repercussions for its relationship to philosophy. It is thus possible to see why philosophy does here find a reason to complain. Because it can never be certain if politics needs it or not, if it is desired by it or not. The philosopher might ask a version of the famous Freudian question, namely: what does politics want? But she will not get a clear answer. Politics is clearly autonomous and self-serving, yet it leaves it structurally and perpetually undecided if there is or will be a need for philosophy or not. This fundamental uncertainty is what philosophy might, justifiably, complain about. But is this not always the case with philosophy in its relation to other forms of practice? Is it not notoriously unclear if anyone needs it at all? But if this were generally true, then there would be no specific and

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in: *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House 1961).

<sup>20</sup> Lazarus, *Anthropology*, p. xxiii.

singular oddity to the philosophy-politics couple. It would just be a case of a more general feature of philosophy's discourse.

### *Singularly Twosome*

To grasp how and in what way there exists a *specific* oddness of the couple of philosophy-politics, it is instructive to turn to another strange partner philosophy is often involved with. This other relationship has often been found or declared even more fundamental and long-lasting and it has been perceived as being more intense than any other. There exist thus different forms of oddities, different odd relationships, and various forms of otherness in which philosophy is involved. Therein it will certainly remain unclear if some are essentially odder than others or all of them are just singularly odd. Yet, it is important to note that these forms of otherness are not all particular instantiations of the same general structure. Otherwise, there would not be a real difference between them, no otherness and hence no oddity. If there is an odd couple, there must be a specificity to the oddness. So, what makes the relationship between philosophy and politics specific and particular and singularly odd is a question that can be best answered by inspecting what other odd relations are involved in the daily life of philosophy. Philosophy obviously, and pace the cliché often raised against it, stands in more than one strange relationship with practices outside of it. This certainly implies a certain definition of philosophy.

It was once, and to my mind legitimately and instructively, defined as “the violence done by thought to impossible relationships.”<sup>21</sup> It is violent because it transforms what seems foreign to its own inventory of thought into the advent of a new possibility for philosophical thinking. It is violent because it does not stop at stating the incomparability and fundamental heterogeneity of two forms of practices or thoughts, but works through and with it. One can venture to say that Hegel called this violence *Aufhebung*, sublation. Philosophy does thereby and necessarily produce a realm that singular oddities possibly inhabit together, a realm where one feels *gut aufgehoben*, that one is in good hands, as it were. It thus creates a common space where everything and everyone is odd, a space of compossibility of that which by definition subverts any definition and is thus impossible. Philosophy is in all its operations concerned with oddities, with *Schrägheiten*. It is therefore neither straight nor non-straight, but *schräg*: weird, freakish, oblique, skewed, slant, or

---

<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou, “On Cinema as Democratic Emblem”, in: *Cinema* (London: Polity 2013), p. 233.

more trivially, diagonal, a “diagonal’ reasoning.”<sup>22</sup> Odd couplings are what appears to be, maybe at first, maybe always, impossible couplings, couplings of the impossible. They are impossible relationships and hence point out the fact that philosophy cannot do without what it can impossibly do with. Philosophy brings together what appears as if you impossibly bring it together.<sup>23</sup> It is thus clear that there is no in-advance measure or standard by means of which philosophy would be able to judge what is an impossible relationship. It seems impossible to generally say what is impossible. It would not be impossible otherwise or one would essentialize the impossible (which one ought not to).

Violence in a relationship does rarely sound good – yet, a thinker like Slavoj Žižek insists, and rightly so, that “love” – and this must also hold for the love that is specific to the love of wisdom – “is an extremely violent act.”<sup>24</sup> If philosophy’s practice practically manifests in the violence done to impossible relationships this violence is the creation of a new peace: it implies to create new possibilities, “the possibility of the impossible”<sup>25</sup> relationships, liveable relationships. If philosophy’s practice consists in such creation, then impossibility is not a neutral modal category, but rather always already in actu when identified as such. It is not transhistorical, but immensely practical and historically specific and singular. Philosophy can then be defined also as the practice that makes it possible to identify something singularly impossible. This is not making the impossible practically possible. Since philosophy does not generate a new possibility in the world, but it makes it possible to see something impossible that potentially can or could become possible. It is like a positing of presuppositions of an “impossible possibility.”<sup>26</sup> The violence done to impossible relationships that is philosophy thus implies that

1. philosophy brings together what seems impossible to bring together.
2. it brings itself together with something it can impossibly be brought together with.
3. it identifies what is impossible in what philosophy can impossibly relate to.
4. it therefore diversifies the concept of the impossible and takes it at its basis.

---

<sup>22</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum 2006), p. 274.

<sup>23</sup> Recall how after the publication of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* its readers complained that he had brought together such unrelated topics as the French Revolution, the birth and end of religion, comedy, Kant, terror, Diderot, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the well-known lines in “Zizek!” (2005).

<sup>25</sup> Alain Badiou, *Can Politics be Thought?* (Durham: Duke University Press 2018), p. 79

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Philosophy is not only involved in one but in more than one impossible relationship. It is a love of wisdom that is conceptually and notoriously polyamorous. But the way in which philosophy thinks its own involvement in more than one odd couple, is that philosophy thinks its own embeddedness in impossible relationships. Philosophy does so by thinking twosomeness, singularly impossible relationships. To think an odd couple or coupling does not mean to think *Zweideutigkeit* (ambiguity or equivocation), but *Zweiheit* (twoness or twosomeness) and by thinking it in more than one way – how else could one really think it? –, philosophy is driven forced to think four-foldly. To think one odd couple, to think one-two, one is led not only to think the twosomeness of this singular two, but thereby forced to think the concept of one-two-someness, of coupledness or odd-coupling. This means conceptually, that if there is one odd coupling of philosophy with something else, there must be more. Not simply two, but two to the power of two – this is twosomeness –, and this is what makes four. There must be, according to this account, at least four different singular one-two-someness relationships. Philosophy-politics being one of them. But if there are more than one, namely at least a couple of couples of impossible relationships in which philosophy stands and which it brings together, it is important to elaborate if there are domains of impossibility that can be discriminated (not only historically, but structurally). How can one differentiate between different impossible relations? And what is the specificity of this or that impossible relation? If it seems impossible to do so, this may just be an index that the task is to think what one cannot already think, so that one invents anew what we conceive of thinking. Hegel has thought this was thinking in the first place.<sup>27</sup> If philosophy has a history, it is obvious that it must spring from the and be determined by the relation to its partners. Philosophy is determined by the history of its impossible *liaisons*, of its liaisons not always *dangereuses*, but *impossibles*. And because it is polyamorous there is hardly one history, hardly one concept of history, but different temporalities, different couple-stories and histories without any unification.

The singularity of the impossible philosophy-politics relationship might come to the fore more easily if one accounts for another impossible relationship and remains aware of their respective difference. It thus helps to look at the relationship that philosophy entertains with art. This is not totally arbitrary reference, but has been invited by Lazarus himself, who once himself referred to the arts to elaborate

---

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Frank Ruda, “Hegel on the Rocks of Nature”, in: Agon Hamza / Frank Ruda / Slavoj Žižek, *Reading Hegel* (London: Polity 2022).

a point about his conception of politics.<sup>28</sup> So, it seems justified to turn to the arts to see how its impossible relation to philosophy differs from that of politics. The relationship between philosophy and art – if it is one at all – in general has, as some say, been “affected by a symptom – that of an oscillation or a pulse.”<sup>29</sup> It is not only that philosophy oscillates, but the relationship between the two pulsates. Because it is vibrating, oscillating, it can be compared to another type of relationship: “Historically, philosophy and art are paired up like Lacan’s Master and Hysteric.”<sup>30</sup> Why is the philosophy-art relationship similar to the one of the master and the hysteric? Because in it the hysteric – that is art in this case – constantly emphasizes that truth speaks through her but will also continually flee from any attempt of the master to provide a however subtle answer as to what this truth actually is. The hysteric will repeatedly emphasize that he or she escapes the master’s grasp. But at the same time, art addresses philosophy, this is the crucial point. “Likewise, art is always already there, addressing the thinker with the mute and scintillating question of its identity while through constant invention and metamorphosis it declares its disappointment about everything that the philosopher may have to say.”<sup>31</sup> Art has or looks for a constant reason to complain. The mere presence of art thus becomes an address to philosophy. But art is also constitutively disappointed, and it might be made worse through the fact that it cannot escape to be driven to this very disappointment. This is the diagnosis, however convincing (art wants philosophy to say something about it, or at least philosophy thinks that art wants philosophy to say something about it; but when philosophy does – define it, tell it what is all about – art thinks philosophy’s claims are insufficient and disappointing).

In this image, the reason for art’s disappointment is simple. The supposed to be master, the subject supposed to be one to know – philosophy – had historically only a limited number of options at hand of what to tell what art is. Either philosophy identifies only philosophy with the position of articulating truth, or it is, at least, the position from which one is able to evaluate and see what the essence of art is, or, finally, the philosopher is the one who understands that she has to give up any claim to either truth or evaluation and submit to the brilliant opacity of the hysteric’s discourse. This is the basic decision. There are thus three options. Either philosophy is the bearer of truth and art is pretending to literally be truth-ful, a

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sylvain Lazarus, “Des conférences de Belgrade”, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HpZHt2ulsU>.

<sup>29</sup> Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2005), p. 1

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. And to mention this in passing, Badiou claims that Lazarus did for politics what Lacan did for love. So, he is the anti-philosophical (I leave this term in a state of allusion here) thinker of politics. Cf. Badiou, *Meta-politics*, p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> Badiou, *Handbook*, p. 1.

mimesis and semblance of truth (and then philosophy can sometimes even suggest using it in a way that is appropriate; Plato therefore thought there should be military music played during gymnastic training). But art is potentially problematic because it can disorient people through its powers. Art can effectively pretend to have access to something true. Or art does not have this capacity, and this is not even a problem, because art ultimately remains without real consequence, without consequence in the real. So, different from the first assumption where art is potentially dangerous (disorienting people), the second reading does not have this problem, because art is just entertainment. The third philosophical option is that only art has access to that which philosophy would love to have access to. The name of this gem is obviously truth. How the odd relationship then was supposed to work was quite determined by the very model or schema one assumed. If philosophy assumed the master position, this meant to administer and sometimes even censor or prohibit it, by “giving her a good beating”<sup>32</sup> – a beating because in art it is all about semblance of truth, fakery, masquerade, and deception. When the philosophical truth is expressed about the truth of art, the truth of art is taken into philosophical hands. Or, art was identified with a kind of therapy. Or, finally, the philosopher bowed the knee before the inexplicable and almost inexpressible wisdom of the arts and assigns the only place of truth-articulation to it. The poets and painters, musicians and sculptors must show us the way.

These three schemas of understanding the odd relationship between philosophy and art strangely explain away its oddity: philosophy is in charge or there is nothing to be in charge of or art is in charge – so strangely the relationship, the twosomeness is lost, because it is only one of the terms determining the other. All three were highly influential models that governed the history of understanding this relationship for a long period of time. Alain Badiou claimed a while ago that these models have been saturated. This is highly relevant because the method of saturation that Lazarus developed, was appropriated within a foreign, notably philosophical context.<sup>33</sup> What is the method of saturation? It is a method to immanently explain the end of a political sequence. It is the systematic consequence of the claim that politics is rare and precarious. It always has an end. And the thing that has a beginning and then an end – everything that exists deserves to perish – constitutes a “historical mode of politics.”<sup>34</sup> There are different modes that Lazarus distinguishes<sup>35</sup>: the

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Lazarus, *Anthropology*, p. 22f.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 29f.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 73ff.

revolutionary one that existed from 1792 to 1794, the classicistic modus whose sequence lasted from 1848 to 1871, the Bolshevist mode that lasted from 1902 to 1917 and the dialectical mode that lasts from 1928 to 1958. Today, we are post-revolutionary, post-classicistic, post-bolshevist and post-dialectical. That these modes can be brought in one line is not because they share a common substance or are all structured alike. “There is no metastructure of modes”<sup>36</sup>, – not even history. It is thus not that they are all historical or part of the same always already existing and encompassing history. Rather such a history must be construed and a distinction between different modes must be created. It can be created by analysing how each of them, each in its own way became saturated, i.e. encountered a problem that it itself created but proved unable and incapable to solve.

### *Endings*

“The end of the sequence is the cessation, the exhaustion [the saturation] of its specific political capacity”<sup>37</sup> There is no metastructure and each mode must be thought and conceived of in its singularity.<sup>38</sup> Through conceiving of something singularly impossible, one may actually detect an impossibility of the previous mode. One can thus understand how one must move from a singular impossibility to the making possible of that very impossibility. And one can do so by prescribing that what appeared impossible must be(come) possible. Where there is the impossible, there shall be the (or another) possible. This is not the Hegelian labour of the concept, but the labour of the prescriptive – since “all thought is prescriptive.”<sup>39</sup> Politics is historical throughout it appears and disappears in historical modes, it disappears when its means are saturated, but there is no history as such. Politics, when it exists, exists in absolutely singular forms, and there is no form of all possible forms, which is why politics always poses the problem of how to identify what can be counted as politics and this demands concrete investigations. But it is also important that any singular mode of politics, politics in its singular historical modes always ends in a singular form. The singularity of politics is there at its beginning, throughout and at its end. These ends are new ends, novelties are novel forms of political endings. In a way, this is close to the fundamentally Hegelian idea that

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. xxx.

something can only be properly thought in its singularity when it came to an end and thus if one started to conceive of its end. This does not endorse a finitizing, a finitude of politics, rather it endorses that the ability to think specific singularity of a historical mode of politics is linked to the singular way in which it ended.

The discussion of the different philosophical schemas for how to conceive of the relations between philosophy and art having become saturated thus allows to also clarify something about the relationship between philosophy and politics (and its other couplings). Since one can learn from what types of philosophical articulation of philosophy's relationship to politics can be saturated and which ones can— in the today — be and remain to be potent and instructive. This means that sometimes a certain philosophical mode of articulating the relationship between philosophy and politics comes to an end and is saturated because it exhausted all its historically specific mode of explanatory potency. It is here important to note that this saturation is not something that can be objectively measured, but rather concerns philosophy's capacity to think what happened in one of its impossible relationships (with art or politics for example). But this cannot but mean that philosophy, certain philosophical models can also be saturated. In this sense, even the existence of philosophy is precarious, because it has to think singular impossible relationships, it can have exhausted its means to do so. If, in Badiou's reconstruction the three ways in which philosophy related to art lost their validity, this exhaustion indicated that philosophy lost the potential to say anything relevant about art at all (when expressing it according to any of these three models). Why? Because they explained away the impossibility of the relationship between philosophy and art: the exhaustion and saturation is one that directly concerns the very status of impossibility. They started treating (the philosophy-)art(relationship) as all too possible. Art for philosophy became all too possible to explain. It became an art-object. In such a situation, art is absolutely right to complain because it received an increasingly poor conceptual treatment. One loses the conceptual impossibility if one makes art into something that can be dealt with in an always stable manner. Strangely, this makes thinking art even more impossible (by seeking to eradicate the impossibility of thinking art).

By assuming that it is always possible (for philosophy to think art and for there to be art), the thought-capacities of philosophy became saturated, that is to say what was created was the impossibility to conceive of art (and from the analysis of this specific impossibility one can prescribe and detect demands for what philosophy must think). Philosophy exhausted its language(s). This means that philosophy had absolutely nothing new to say about something whose characteristic it is to bring specific forms of singular novelties into the world. When philosophy's models started to miss the production of novelty, it got old, so old, it was on the brink of



dying. But this is to say that only by affirming the impossibility of its relationships, thinking something impossible in this relationship is what it makes philosophy potentially possible. What this means is that there one must not only start from a prescription of possibility<sup>40</sup>, but as the method of saturation itself indicates, there must also be the necessary prescription of specific impossibilities. Affirmations of what is impossible. Already Hegel indicated that after the French Revolution no philosopher was able to effectively talk about freedom, equality, and fraternity in the same way as before. There is thus a mode of saturation that contributes to what one once called a history of philosophy. It is genuinely philosophical and has to do with philosophy's odd relationship with politics. What does this mean for the relationship between philosophy and politics (since nothing forces us to assume that because the singular relationship between philosophy and art is saturated, we would also encounter a saturation in other relationships)?

In a seminar from 1991-1992 – a seminar in which he also praisingly refers to *Anthropology of the Name* –, Alain Badiou gives a similar account of the concrete situation of the odd couple philosophy and politics:<sup>41</sup> Three schemas or models in which philosophy accounted for what is (supposed to be) politics. The three are: political philosophy, philosophy of the political and philosophy of politics. Political philosophy articulates a typology of the form in which it takes politics necessarily to appear, notably the form of sovereignty incorporated in the state. Therefore, it presents a typology of good and bad states. But in this way, it transhistoricizes and substantializes the *form* in which politics must appear and thus cannot account for its true singular historical nature (and thus cannot account for example for actions that takes place in distance from the state or pre-state collective action). The philosophy of the political asserts that politics always becomes manifest in a certain practice, notably the coming together and this coming together does have different way of appearance, some are liberal and democratic. But there is an essence of what is political, namely coming together. Thereby it essentializes the form of practice that is considered to be political. And the philosophy of politics assumes that there is always one goal, one aim and end of all political action, say emancipation or revolution. But thereby it essentialized this very goal. These three forms are saturated because they indicate a trouble in explaining what happens in politics. Here, philosophy is incapable to say anything about anything new happening in politics.

All these ways of thinking politics have come to an end. Now and here one has to think the end, saturation proper. The way to do this is to accept and affirm that

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 168ff.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Alain Badiou, *Le Séminaire – L'essence de la politique* (Paris : Fayard 2018).

philosophy cannot think politics, that it is impossible for philosophy to think politics. This is not simply the admission of a defeat or weakness. But it is the affirmation of something historically specifically impossible. This impossibility is the very possibility to see there something impossible can happen if we prescribe a new (im) possibility. Only by raising philosophy's incapacity to the point of impossibility, politics can be thought. Philosophy can think politics by starting from affirming the impossibility to think politics. Since then, it thinks that it is impossible that there will ever be politics.<sup>42</sup> We should rest assured, there never will be any.

---

<sup>42</sup> This is a point that I develop longer in my: *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, Nebraska UP.

## REFERENCES

- Badiou, A (2005) *Metapolitics*. London: Verso.
- Badiou, A (2006) *Being and Event* London: Continuum.
- Badiou, A (2013) *On cinema as democratic emblem*. London: Polity.
- Brecht, B. *On Hegelian Dialectic*. Available in: <http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/hegel-brecht.html>
- Dolar, M (2020) *What's the Time? On Being Too Early or Too Late in Hegel's Philosophy* "Problemi International", vol. 4,
- Foucault, M (2020) *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin
- Foucault, M (2020) *History of Sexuality. Vol I. The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Lazarus, S (2015) *Anthropology of the name*. New York: Seagull
- Lotringer, S (1996) *Foucault Live. Interviews 1961-1984*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Ruda, F (2020) *The Purlieu Letter: Toward a Hegelian Theory of Conditioning*", in: *Problemi International*, vol. 4
- Ruda, F (2022) *Hegel on the Rocks of Natura*. In Hamza, A, Ruda, F y Zizek, S (2022) London: Polity
- Simmel, G (1923) *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlass und Veröffentlichungen der letzten Jahre*. Munich: Drei Masken Verlag

---

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15366/bp2023.32.003>  
Bajo Palabra. II Época. N°32. Pgs: 57-76

