

Seminario

DE LA
INEXISTENCIA
DEL ARTE

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{extra}

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The inexistence of Art

THE INEXISTENCE OF ART¹

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1. During a conference in 2013, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek made some remarks about Badiou's notion of event and its reception: "Usually people misinterpret his notion of event as some big spectacular thing... I don't know... shattering event, somehow oppose to small daily life, while, I think, more and more, today, a true political event would be something that happens at our apparently most common and vulgar everyday level"².

1.1 An event 'is precisely "that which is not being as being"³. Exceeding the situation within which it appears, the event happens as an inexistence to that situation. Evental, which is the form of the event, the event inexists because of its anomaly towards the place where it happens. As something that wasn't there before, nothing in the situation can explain its *new* radically unbound existence. This is what defines the event. Conditional to itself only, to its appearing being-there, the event doesn't belong to the situation. The event defines itself by being-there. In this way, the event breaks with what is already knowable in *that* particular world. Without the noticing, or awareness born from the situation, the event occurs as "an invisible". This is why the event, as that which has happened without being noticed, inexistent to the situation, where it bursts, doesn't wait for any form of recognition.

(event a.)

What if I tell you my friend, that I am certain that I am not. I am right now saying it, whispering to you. That the here-being here, this multiple shape that you can hardly smell, whatever traces you want to add to it, that,

¹ I presented a first version of this text in the form of an action-lecture: I read the text before a group of people at the Litteraturhuset in Bergen. The action took place as part of the Imaginary Seminar, organized by Brandon Labelle and Marie Norland (<http://www.v-o-l-t.no/index.php?/upcoming/the-imaginary-seminar/>). The first version had the name of *The work that inexists*. I have decided to change its name because the present text enlarges some of the notions, transforming it into a more *theoretical* work than one produced for a performative act. Nevertheless, the present text bases its own performativity in that text now inexistent, as an invisible shadow whispering through this skeleton.

² This conference, called The Event: Politics, Art and Ontology, was held at Birkbeck University of London by Žižek before the publication of his book *Event* by Penguin.

³ Hallward, P. Chapter 5 Subject and Event, in *Badiou A Subject to Truth*, 107.

which is here-being here, (and please read aloud the blank space left between the last here and the former here-being, read it as long as you can hold your breath, even to the point of exhaustion, until that particular sound emerges from your lungs, that sound produced by the pressure of speaking), withit, yes withit, without separating with of it, withit, read it, withit, here-being here I am, certain, posited around you, there, around you there, I am certain, that that here-being here is not. And I am telling you, this is not a tricky game, this is not any kind of naughty fiction within the abominable history of perception, that history of philosophical reception, that reflecting paradox of uncanny multiplications, like the mirrors before themselves, but on the contrary, it is really a part of an anarchistory of act, by its own morphogenetical being-there in the here of an out-of-place. There is no fictional content. There is only praxis.

1.2 Unconditioned to the place from which it emerges, the evental isn't "dormant" as Bosteels has posited⁴. Rather, here, the event interrupts the conformity of the potential. Such condition locates the event as a disruptive force-form, even without it being recognized as such from within the moment of its appearing. This is its *weak* capacity of being, its being-here as an invisible. The intensity of the event thus appears untouchable by any mechanism of measurement already at work in the world. I use the term *weak*⁵ here as a way to name the correlation which the situation operates which the situation operates upon the event. In itself, its weakness is a whole intensity that allows the event to circumvent the situation and the systemic forces that attempt to inscribe it. Unaware of its relation to the situation, the evental occurs anyway, by its own intrinsic logic. This is its insurrectional capacity: the forcefulness of inexistence. I propose then, that the only art possible is found in this insurrectional fact, within which the event, morphogenetically, arises. Its sheer exceptionality though, which is born through confrontation with, but not necessarily as the negative to the situation, doesn't suspend anything of that situation. Its exceptionality is not that of a sovereign

⁴ "But we can't say either that the truth of an event is simply the immanent fulfillment of the thinking of the Being. There must be a break or a discontinuity. The new -the unheard truth that arises- is not present in a dormant state as a potential which is hidden inside the formerly- within the already existing situation. The task consists rather to articulate the *evental* emergence upon a separation or split at the heart of the normal representation of the Being." Bosteels, Bruno "Du potentiel à l'inexistant", page 28-29, on *Faibles* No. 3, *Inexistence/Existence*, NOUS MMXIV, Université Paris 8 – Laboratoire d'études et de recherche sur les logiques contemporaines de la philosophie (LLCP), Paris, 2014.

⁵ What is *weak* naming here? I am using the notion of *weak* that American Anthropologist James C. Scott, developed in his book *Weapons of the Weak, Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*, 1985. It is here that Scott presents a notion of weakness that can't be interpreted as sublation to the regime in power. Against the grain, Scott's notion of weakness appears more next to the condition of in-existent. *Weak* here means something that seems irrelevant to the power. In fact, a form of political resistance which, being conscious of its own in-capacity to turn down the rules of the rulers, it composes its own appearing as dissemination and vanishing.

word or form of saying. It is not the exceptionality of a *new* law. This exceptionality of the event occurs already as a renounce of being inscribed.

(event b.)

Inexistent, constantly disappearing, being-dissemination: the event. Like the untold story of Poe's Raven speaking to the deaf Odradek, Kafka's evental character that never stops laughing since the last encounter with the Family Man (a man who insisted on moving his geometrical mouth and spelling non-sensical fluid-reverberances. Odradek's form being an expression of a dislocated ambivalence, disturbing and interrupting the friendly artificial light of some places. Inexistent, as the words of the Raven spoken to Odradek, both flying/running force-forms embodying what is not quite there.

1.3 The event can't be bound or joint to anything existing already in that situation at the moment of its occurrence. The event, which is at the same time the occurring of what has appeared and the appearing of itself, occurs in that inexistent form. It is this inexistent form, unrecognizable by any law in place within the world, where the event occurs, that identifies the event as such, in its being-at-the-least-moment-there. Unable of measuring something that doesn't belong to its settings, the Laws in place proclaim the effective inexistence of which is in anyway occurring. The intensity of the event could be recognizable at the moment of its appearing only by the force-form of its capacity for rupturing the status quo. Its intensity is always maximal, although unmeasurable from the world. Maximal because it splits the world by its appearing, even though its capacity of doing so can be differed from the time of its appearing. This is why, as lighting, its compossibility is local, although its aim will be a *universal* truth.

(event c.)

I will tell you now the story of that encounter as officially has been trespassed to me. Here comes the shadow of Poe's raven, flapping wings like two hanged carbon bags. Heavy flight indeed, that of the Raven, I will say. Its eyes like two pinky-yellow holes. Its tongue: imperceptible as such. Here comes, the raven, the shadow of the Raven too, saying its "Never More", of course. Not only one, but twice and beyond. "Never more", "Never more", basically, has always been interpreted as a poem about the inexistence of something. The kind of inexistence pertaining to what will never exist anymore. Extinction as such, I will add. Below the shadow of the shadow, Odradek, Kafka's inexistent character, at the light of the day, for the first time, answering as always: by endless Laughs (please, say this in German).

2. The event is exceptional but not because of cancellation or suspension of the situation as such. Its nature is not related with a sublation or commodification of the place where it appears. On the contrary, it unleashes emancipatory procedures, creating a *metanoia*, a difference that wasn't possible until its happening.

3. For Badiou the concept of appearing has two features: a system of degrees and a structure, which permits the comparison between these degrees. This organization of the degrees of identification is named the transcendental.
4. How then can we relate this with the condition of art, and more specifically, within the context of our Seminar, right here, in this *world*? My argument is the following: the act of art, and most particularly, the kind of actions “without fixed abode”⁶, unnamable constitutions of appearing, composes an effective “set” of inexistent force-forms that, despite their apparent “negativity” and the fact that they are considered possible and potentials “anti-art” examples, as cumulative intensities, do not declare the potentiality of another world, but rather its effective existence.
5. The inexistent multiplies, without needing the State’s dogmatic effectiveness to account its inexistence. As such, these actions already emerge without exercising authoritative conditions. These actions are not utopian islands but, on the contrary, they should be seen as effective counter-spaces where spaces of anomie can be built. Political anomie.
6. Political action consists in to make existent what is inexistent in any given order. It consists in occupying the empty place and also transforming the fixed laws of a given place, instituting others. If we consider the notion of infrapolitics, as the cumulative set of invisible actions, procedures and strategies that work resisting, emancipating, eroding and countering the situation as it is, it is evident, at least for me, that the act of art, the activity of art as such, composes spaces of anomie, from

⁶ “without fixed abode” is Odradek’s answer to the Family Man. In another text I have tried of taking care of this phrase. Without fixed abode claims a non-permanent space, a vanishing occurring which, despite its nominative indeterminacy, references a locality moving. This homelessness, defined by the answer itself, by its appearing in declaring a circumstance of existence, (a non-stable state of ‘living’) I have been argue, operates a deregulatory capacity of building. Like the clinamen, without fixed abode is “aspecific, beyond necessity, absolutely out of place [hors-lieu], unplaceable [inesplaçable], unfigurable: chance [le hasard]” (Badiou, Alain (1982) *Théorie du Sujet*, Éditions du Seuil, 77.

Erratic force-form the declaration of being without fixed abode. It is an excess, which “cannot be located in its assigned place”. Forcing-forming an out-of-place that subtractively produces.

where it is not only possible but effectively existent what inexists. This is a notion of change, which inaugurates a new time within the periodization of changing. Referring to Theatre and its relations with Politics, Badiou has said: “the political rupture is not a question of virulence in words, nor is it a matter of causing a superficial *furor*. It is patient and thorough process, which builds its own figures and its immanent places, which sets its own dates, and which never lets the choice of space or time be dictated to it.”⁷ It is indeed a patient and thorough process of creating spaces and times, forces and forms.

7. Alain Badiou has used as an example of inexistence the situation within which the *sans-papiers* live in France. The *sans-papiers* live within the French society. That is their locality, their place. In fact, many of them are bound to France by a history of colonialism, and through it, a relation determined by language, history and culture. But they are not fully recognized as citizens of France. They are there without the proper acknowledgment delivered by the State. They are there, but not fully present, at least enough for the State’s machinery, and certainly not for the whole society. The illegal condition of the immigrant body, determined by State laws, restricts her or his existence within a specific world. A world that we can’t see, a world that cannot exist, at least, not as a full existence within the frames of the transcendental. They (We), illegal immigrants, exist within a delayed existence that can never be fully present, that cannot become an absolute presentation. They can survive in a conditional and potential presence, but not through the force or assurance of a full presentation. In this regard, their appearing occurs as an inexistence, which is to say an existence of a very low intensity.

(event d.)

Then suddenly, out of no-where (as it is always within the realm of fictional parallax view) Dürer’s rabbit appears! (Almost in levitation)

⁷ Badiou, Alain (2013) “The Political Destiny of Theatre” in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, trans. Bruno Bosteels, page 118, Verso Books.

8. In an earlier text I mentioned a basic concept of inexistence, a basic form of dissemination, which could be immediately an example of a Derridian trace as the only measurable possibility of inscribing my own existence into the flow of the world. In fact, to write, to trace, to scratch the stones, would be the main force-form of representing to ourselves the slight evidence of our presence here and now. I am on the earth. I am in a place. I trace the place, I am traceable. I urinate in the streets, in the woods, into the sea, as a way of communicating the existence that I am. Like a wolf, like a pack of them. The color of my skin, like the blackbird, echoing Manuel de Landa talking about Deleuzian territories of expression, beyond the notions of human activity, art as something beyond human minds, and before human presence. The blackbird singing, sounding, scratching the air but also as an *anarchitect* for itself. Bees and wolves, shadows and clouds, organs without bodies, deserts, Dune...

9. I was born in a certain place in the world, a world traced and defined by human beings, I had to be named as a Chilean. Should I separate myself from that community, should I detach myself from the recent history of that community? Certainly nobody should negate reality as such. This is not a statement of forgiveness, on the contrary, it is indeed part of the conditions of that community. I was born as an exiled machine exposed from and by other bodies.”

(event d.)

Then, suddenly again, Dürer's rabbit was killed by Beuys. And Poe's raven continues flying without remorse.

10. In this passage I describe a primary notion of inexistence. *I was not. But I was there.* It is not a matter of being recognizable by the machinery of the State, nor by the soft machinery of Ideology. It is a matter of being faithful.

11. I wrote in the paper, CROWD – MASKS, that I read one night of 2013, at the Tàpies Foundation, “I was born as a machine. When I was born someone sutured to me, to that bodily matter that I was, a series of ideological layers, arms, forms, dispositions. I was born as a *dispositif* for an ideology, I was the field of an

ideological project. I was born as not me. And I was raised as someone else, which had to express his inner conditionality from that ideology sutured to me. I was born as a shadow of what I could be. Even now, when I am reading someone could say: Why? Why is he using another language than that of his own?

12. Inhabited I am, populated by inexistences. Inexistences searching and wandering. I exist for different states, in different manners. They are forms of representing a stable me that deconstruct anything whatsoever I have tried to explicit by “the-I-my-self”. Unrecognizable are for me these marks inscribed upon me. The logics of the State, a schizophrenic capacity of producing potentialities, wasted lands of opportunities never-at-hand. Unrecognizable, I will repeat, are those traces marked on me. I repeat myself again, producing the gap of which inexists not-within-a-within, but a gap that burrows a hole through it. Social Security’s Numbers, numbers of trackable *shadowings*, inducting indeterminacies and paradoxical disintegrations of that designed possible or potential me. This is the destructive power of the State at work. A never ending representative formation of a same that despairs into many. I, inhabited, populated by inexistences, exist, at least in the sense of being another slave in the shipwreck of neoliberalism. Exposed to X-rays at airports or being held hostage by debt, unable to celebrate the uncertainties of breathing-end-of-breathing passing, exist, being an existence possibly named, taxed, archived, sacrificed, marked, instituted. I exist-there, *being-here here*, in an infrapolitical level of existence.

13. It is here that I am relating the notion of event with that of the everyday. An event that is not at the level of the magnificence or the spectacular, which talks only in relation towards an *a priori* designed form of reception. An everyday event, rather, is what occurs within and according to weak means. Not regulated by a goal, subtractive in its modus operandi, the eventual inexistence deploys its force in a form of dismissive withdrawal. Not as a defeat, nor with any resignation.

14. In *Weapons of the Weak*, James C. Scott asks of resistance: "Can individual acts such as theft or the murder of livestock be considered resistance even though they involve no collective action and do not openly challenge the basic structure of property and domination? Can largely symbolic acts such as boycotting feasts or defaming reputations be called resistance, although they appear to make little or no dent in the distribution of resources?"⁸ In the same sense, here, we can ask if it would be possible to affirm that acts like the kind of performances that I am defining as having no fixed abode can be considered as procedures of resistance, even though they do not involve direct collective action.
15. An inexistence exists on a *level of intensity* that cannot be fully recognized as an existence by the rules in place in any given world. What inexists exists, yet it happens to be invisible to those frames of intelligibility in place. Therefore, inexistence is a matter of existence outlined by the norms that validate something, or someone, as a verified and recognized existence. There are more inexistent bodies than those counted by the State. And this is very good news. What is in this sense, in the inexistent condition, a body then? A body here is a copula of two terms, not necessarily indicating two objects connected or in a state of relation, but exposing the point of fuge that immediately composes "a body": force and form.
16. What do I mean then by the sentence that names the text? *The Inexistence of Art* is a declaration of exhaustion. Art is perhaps that vanishing term. Unsolicited existence bursting the air without the noticing of its own disappearing. Disappearance, the sudden or slowly disappearance, the restricted action. Action restricted, the way of disciplining one-self. The negation of doing as the effective doing. Within it, a gap, the apparition of a ghost, which is always an entrance, an entrance to-of the disappearing.

⁸ Scott, James C. (1985) *Weapons of the Weak, Everyday forms of peasant resistance*, Yale University Press, 290.

(event e.)

But the difference lies here, my friend. The I am not that I am it is not the naughty German fibered professor steering and standing, dying, before the Mediterranean Sea in Venice (before, before the Thou shalt not, before the Trial, before the Dawn), seeing the last sun of the lost paradise-child, the last beauty, the last truth of the old times, which can be only traced between Greece and XIX century Europe. No, here lies the Absolute difference, my friend. I am not is not before an image that can convulsively summarize everything, naming One Absolute God, the God of the Goddesses. I am not, therefore, I am not before, before anything. Almost-nothing, I, which is not, stood at the edge, aware of the difference between the false question of meaning and that of the void.

17. Politics is the art of the impossible. Politics is a procedure. An art is a procedure, a form of multiplicity, a time lapse that endures throughout its own compossibility. A work of art is a subject that activates through its appearing a determinate situation. A work of art is an in-existent, a form of existence at a very low level of existence. The work of art, being an in-existent, in-exists, it activates in-existence as such. To work with the notion of in-existence can open a path to a different consideration of history as a plastic matter. Or rather, to a different consideration of the notion of work as such.

(the ever last event within this text.)

How to produce from the in-existent? The place of in-existence, its site, is evident. The in-existent is appearing locally. Politically the in-existent is a constitutive of the conditions of “our” shared world. So, how to produce from there? Or more than that, what does it mean to produce from in-existence? Perhaps, a possible answer becomes clear if we confront the situation with the mechanisms of presentation. And here we have constantly a dialectic established by the cultural institution in place between what exists and what is not *worthy* of existence. Such dialectic immediately locates us within the terrain of value, or an economy of affects.

Do I mean to build a *culture* of surpassing art? A subtractive strategy or procedure which allows us to renounce the worlds of art as they are present today? An attitude of withdrawal from the world? Are we arguing here for the constitution of frictional surfaces? Are we promoting a permanence of the in-existent condition as a force-form so as to resist the laws of the State institution? A total abandonment? Do I propose a compulsory convulsive composing of a lack, which of course it is to say a multiplying infinite of absences? A jump through the window with Deleuze’s ghost? Renounce... *Oubliez!* As Jean-Louis Deotte⁹ has named his book on Europe, Museum and Ruins. In search of a miracle...

The intensity of the in-existent is not a potential, not a dormant security, which is the remaining romanticism of what doesn’t want to die. The intensity is as an effective cumulative capacity produced by the occupation of multiple in-existents at once. If delay is the time of the

⁹ Deotte, Jean-Louis (1995) *Oubliez!: Les ruines, l'Europe, le musée*, Editions L'Harmattan.

inexistent within the given structured world, a kind of *always waiting* for the moment of its full presentation as existence, that time gap can be surpassed by renouncing the laws of appearing. Perhaps the situation is that of abandoning a place, leaving a place empty. Like the *Seccesio Plebis*, through which the citizens of Rome simply abandoned the city in masses, leaving the Patrician order alone. Renounce. Subtraction. Nomadism? More than that... *awayness*, like Odradek, without route, going to the mountains, away... perhaps, answering with "no fixed abode". Out of shelter, at last.