



FROM PLATONIC GESTURE TO THE THEORY OF DISCOURSES. ON SOME UNPUBLISHED NOTES BY BADIOU ON PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

Giacomo Clemente¹

Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca

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ABSTRACT

This article will examine some theses that Badiou developed in the first period of his philosophy, when he was close to the theoretical horizon of Althusserianism. The article traces a route back from the *Manifesto for Philosophy* to some yet unpublished notes, dating from the late Sixties, on an aborted collective project on materialist philosophy. While, according to the later Badiou – who is also the most well-known – contemporary philosophical discourse should recover the Platonic gesture after Heidegger, it will be shown that the early Badiou, by debating the nature of the Platonic gesture with Macherey, seems to conceptualise philosophical discourse and its function under the inseparable link of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. The article ends with some open questions for a possible theory of discourse that would build on Badiou's theoretical insights.

Keywords: Epistemological Break; Philosophical Discourse; Ideology; Plato; Dialectical/Historical materialism.

¹ giacomo.clemente@unimib.it

1. A PREAMBLE ON THE *MANIFESTO FOR PHILOSOPHY*

The 1989 *Manifesto for Philosophy*, released one year after *Being and Event*, is Badiou's first manifesto of philosophy. Philosophical self-legitimation is a procedure of authorisation that, regularly carried out according to a form that could be named synecdoche (one looks at *de jure* philosophy through the frame of a *de facto* philosophical theory: one's own), is a theoretical gesture that dates back to the Plato's foundation of philosophy. We will return to this in a while.

For Badiou, it is primarily a matter of showing how the philosophical discourse is a conditioned discourse. This is a thesis that describes a specific fact: what conditions philosophical discourse, i.e., the "generic procedures", are autonomous and determinate procedures (science, art, politics and love). But it relates, at the same time, to Badiou's ontology, in which every determinate truth (science, art, politics and love) is inscribed in being but proceeds from an event. In short, every truth is a multiple result of a singular procedure. The result is multiple because if being is multiple and truth must necessarily be, then it is necessary for truth to be a part of the situation of which it is the truth; the procedure, on the other hand, is singular because it is generic, and it is generic because it cannot be dictated in advance by the significations circulating in the space of the presentation in which it is produced ("This supplement can neither be named nor represented by referring to the resources of the situation [...]. It is inscribed by a singular naming, the bringing into play of an *additional signifier*", Badiou 1999, 36).

Already in *Theory of the Subject*,² published in 1982 and based on a seminar work started in 1975, Badiou cites, among others, the example of a scientific procedure. For Pythagorean mathematics, the domain of the numerable is composed of integers or ratios between integers. Now, this determines a crisis: the ratio of the diagonal to the side of a square is measurable neither by an integer nor by a rational number. If the order of the law is that of integers or ratios between integers, then the crisis forces this law and demands, as the *impossible* of that order, to be legalised by virtue of a forced destruction and a new recomposition. This is what happened with Eudoxus' theory of proportions. That theory made it clear that the innumerable, as excluded from the domain of integers, emerges in that same domain, and regularly gives rise to new orders and configurations.

² Badiou (2013).

Quite clearly, Badiou is not talking about truth as correspondence: every generic procedure determines the truth of a situation because it shows its inconsistency. As Badiou writes in the *Manifesto*, “inasmuch as the unfathomable depths of what is present is inconsistency, a truth will be that which, from inside the presented, as *part* of this presented, makes the inconsistency – which buttresses in the last instance the consistency of presentation – come into the light of the day” (Badiou 1999, 106).

To argue that the philosophical discourse is a conditioned discourse, therefore, means that philosophy must determine that which is *not* being as being, that is, that which aleatorily supplements a given situation. Or, more precisely: philosophy does not produce truth but is the topological space in which generic procedures are inscribed in a regime of *compossibility*. If it is true that an event is unrepresentable, that is, not nameable through the signifying tools of presentation (a way of saying that truth is not of the order of knowledge), then the philosophical discourse is the space in which names-of-truths *take their place*. Badiou writes that “the specific role of philosophy is to propose a unified conceptual space in which naming *takes place* of events that serve as the point of departure for truth procedures. Philosophy seeks to *gather together all the additional-names*” (Badiou 1999, 37).

From this point, two conclusions can be drawn:

1. truth procedures, when taken as a whole, stand in an *internal* relation to philosophical discourse. The philosophical discourse is possible if and only if it conceptualises truths in a regime of compossibility. Without the compossibility of truths, there is no philosophical discourse. It is in this sense that the former stands in an internal relation to the latter: “Its operations, whatever they may be, always aim to think ‘together’, to configurate within an unique exercise of thought the epochal disposition of the matheme, poem, political invention and love” (Badiou 1999, 37); or again, “philosophy does not pronounce truth but its *conjuncture*, that is, the thinkable conjunction of truths” (Badiou 1999, 38). But to claim that philosophy does not produce truth is not to say that it is passive. If procedures require recognising that they supplement the being of presentation, then philosophy “wrests truths from the grid of meaning, separates them from the law of the world” (Badiou 2008, 21). Philosophy, in other words, does not produce truths but thinks truths as truths: as Badiou writes, “it is the act of Truth with respect to truths” (Badiou 1999, 142).

2. And yet, philosophical discourse does not stand in an internal relation to truth procedures if these are taken individually. Precisely because philosophical discourse does not produce truth, the truth of any procedure does not cease to be truth if it is not in a space of compossibility. This could also be phrased thus: if a procedure is taken out of the order of compossibility, the relationship between

philosophy and procedures is at the expense of the former. This is, as is well-known, the case of the “sutures”: a suture occurs when “philosophy *delegates* its functions to one or other of its conditions, handing over the whole of thought to *one* generic procedure” (Badiou 1999, 61). If philosophy is possible on the condition of the co-presence of its conditions, then the suture is what determines *its* suspension, and not the suspension of the delegated procedure, which, although it stands outside the conjuncture of compossibility, as a procedure, remains a procedure of truth.

Here lies, for Badiou, the meaning of the recovery of the Platonic gesture, after the Heideggerian philosophical suspension (poetical suture). Suffice it to quote these lines from the *Manifesto*: “The first philosophical configuration that proposes to dispose these procedures – the set of these procedures –, in a unique conceptual space, thus showing that *in thought* they are compossible, is the one that bears the name of Plato” (Badiou 1999, 34). In this sense, then, “the philosophical gesture I propose is a Platonic one. The century, till now, has been anti-Platonic” (Badiou 1999, 98).

It is well-known that, between 1966 and 1968, Althusser and his students drafted a series of preparatory notes – the *Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse*, written by Althusser in October 1966, is perhaps the best known and theoretically dense document – to what was to be a work, later aborted, devoted to dialectical materialism. Among his students were Étienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, Alain Badiou, Yves Duroux and Michel Tort. It may be useful to further detail Badiou’s investigations of the philosophical discourse from some still unpublished documents related to that exchange,³ precisely with reference to the Platonic gesture.

2. THE SIXTH BOOK OF THE *REPUBLIC*

Let’s consider the sixth book of the *Republic*⁴ with a view to the Macherey-Badiou discussion.

The sixth book offers the first topography of Western thought. In establishing a necessary relationship between dialectical thought and authorisation to rule, Plato draws a distinction between true philosophers, inept philosophers, and false philosophers, and establishes qualitative ruptures in the order of knowledge.

The contemplation of the Idea of Good – that which is beyond being and truth (509b) – is the only condition that legitimises the occupation of the position

³ The notes I will refer to are preserved, along with many others, in the Althusser collection at IMEC (*Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine*). I would like to thank the library staff for their availability during the time of my stay at the Institute. The notes are translated by me.

⁴ I draw quotations from Plato (2007).

of command (488a-489a): since philosophers “have the capacity to grasp the eternal and immutable” (484b), they are the only men “able to guard the laws and customs of society”. Indeed, is not a sentinel with keen eyesight better to stand guard than a blind one (484c)? At the beginning of the book, Socrates praises dialecticians. It is a portrait of a system of life that appears to be that of a saint. But if this is true, why is it said that philosophers are “useless members of society” (487e), or that they are even “very odd birds, not to say thoroughly vicious” (487d)? However odd this seems, Socrates shares Adeimantus’ objection. Here, Plato envisions philosophy as a field. In the background there is the division between natures predisposed to philosophise and those who are not (495b). In the present State it seems to be a custom that predisposed natures are degenerated because of bad education (491e). The reference is of course to the training of the Sophists, which is why “the very constituent elements of the philosophic nature were in a way responsible, when it is badly brought up, for its fall from its proper calling, to which riches and all other so-called goods of the same kind also contribute” (495a). In this sense, the field of philosophy is traversed by a dynamic of displacement and occupation: on the one hand, most of the natural holders practicing it abandon that field to follow a false knowledge; on the other hand, natures not predisposed to philosophise occupy the places vacated by those who would have been the legitimate holders.

In short, Plato draws a first distinction between natures that are predisposed to philosophise and natures that are not: the former, being captured by Sophistic training, leave places vacant (495d) that are immediately occupied by the latter. What is at stake for Plato is then, precisely, to reinstate the legitimate holders into empty places, so that, freed from the false educators, they will be recognised as legitimate rulers. Plato’s operation, in other words, is played in the order of acceptance and recognition (by others) of philosophical versus sophistic discourse (thus removing the unprepared natures from the legitimate positions of the philosophical field).

It is precisely here that the first distinction is crossed by a second deeper and more important one: *that between true and false knowledge*. If it is true that empty positions are generated from the degeneration of predisposed natures, then it is necessary *to neutralise the kind of knowledge held by false educators at its roots*. Briefly, *the position of true philosophy is already placed in the order of the conflict between philosophical knowledge and sophistic knowledge*. All this can be clarified through two simple considerations:

1. in the book of the *Republic* devoted to the position of the philosopher and philosophy, Plato speaks of sophistic knowledge. Philosophical knowledge, for Plato, is *already* politically invested, that is, it is political before any expressly political declination of its discourse. Indeed, philosophy – *as such* – is placed in

the framework of the State according to a regime of necessary implication: without State, no philosophy. This plays out along two dimensions: along the “horizontal” dimension, so to speak, both philosophical and sophistic discourse acquire their positive character from their mutual opposition; along the related “vertical” dimension, the philosophical discourse stands in an essential relation to the government of the State insofar as it is functional, like the sophistic discourse, to the reproduction of the ruling class. An enunciation such as “our Guardians, in the fullest sense, must be philosophers” (503b), therefore, does not mean that the government of the State stands in a contingent relation to the dialectical practice, as if that practice could apply to that government as well as not. The signifier “must” indicates just that the government of the State is a necessary function of the dialectical practice. Without philosophy, no State (according to Plato’s understanding of it).

2. We mentioned that philosophy is already placed in the order of the conflict with sophistic knowledge. At the end of the sixth book, Plato presents a topography which, from the same theoretical point of view that it is tasked to prove (the aforementioned synecdoche effect), is functional to its own authorisation. There is true knowledge and there is false knowledge. *It is thus their opposition (itself produced from true knowledge) that runs through and defines the kind of conflict between sophists and philosophers within the State.* The relationship between two factions aiming at the reproduction of the ruling class lies in the theoretical relationship between two kinds of knowledge. And if, as we have seen, it is necessary to neutralise sophistic knowledge (which is false knowledge only by the standards of true knowledge, as seen in the previous point), then for Plato it is a matter of demonstrating the superiority of dialectical thinking.

The metaphor of the line introduced at the end of the book (509d-511e) describes the degrees of knowledge – the four states of mind – in a rather complex way. It is a line divided into two segments, each of which is itself divided into two further segments. The first segment stands for knowledge of the “visible order” (510a) and is divided into images – such as shadows and reflections – and sources of these images – such as animals, plants, and man-made products. While knowledge of images corresponds to illusions, that of its sources corresponds to beliefs (511e). The second section corresponds to knowledge “of the intelligible” (510b) and is divided into scientific knowledge – such as mathematics and geometry – and dialectical knowledge – philosophy. While scientific knowledge is *dianoetical* knowledge (it scrutinises Forms by transforming postulates into principles), dialectical knowledge is purely *noetical* (it proceeds from postulates to arrive at the Principle of everything, moving in the synoptic direction – by progressive syntheses – and in the diairetic direction – by successive divisions). This is why “that part of the real and the intelligible which is studied by science of dialectic [has] greater clarity than that studied by what are called ‘sciences’”

(511c). In short, while the first segment corresponds to *doxastic* knowledge – the sophists place themselves in this part of the taxonomy of knowledge – the second segment corresponds to truly epistemic knowledge. Not philosophers alone grasp Forms, the Intelligible realm, by means of reason “and not sense-perception” (511c).

Is the line not actually a broken line? What is interesting to note is that the kind of knowledge that qualitatively discards *doxastic* knowledge and cuts it off from the domain of true knowledge (*epistēmē*) is scientific knowledge (it is the first segment of knowledge that grasps Forms). What then is the relationship between dialectics and science, between *noēsis* and *dianoia* in their common opposition to false knowledge (*pistis* and *eikasias*)?

3. MACHEREY ON THE PLATONIC GESTURE: THE FUNCTION OF SCIENCE FOR THE PHILOSOPHIES OF COMMENCEMENT

This question lies at the core of a 1967 unpublished note by Macherey titled *Sur la nature de la philosophie*. To come to terms with this question is to pose the problem of the commencement of philosophical discourse, and to pose such a problem means, once again, to refer to the Platonic gesture: “the commencement of philosophy is the Platonic system” (Macherey 1967, 1). Here, the word to be emphasised is “system”. Far from being a mere empirical statement, Macherey’s is in fact a real philosophical thesis on philosophy (it will be seen in a moment from which theoretical standpoint it can be pronounced so as not to fall into self-predication). Indeed, the systematic form that Plato impresses on his discourse *pertains to the very nature of philosophy* (as it developed up to Hegel): “Plato turns philosophy into a system, otherwise there is no philosophy at all”. This is a radical thesis – Macherey seems to be approaching Heideggerian arguments – that has nothing to do with the usual adage that everything said in philosophy is nothing more than a footnote to Plato. Philosophical discourse (up to Hegel), insofar as it is produced in systematic form, is in fact already taken in the order of commencement, *regardless of its conceptual content*: “the commencement, in so far as it has the form of the Platonic system, determines the general form of all doctrinal constitution in philosophy” (Macherey 1967, 2). A first conclusion to be drawn is that the problem of identifying the systematic form as the general form of the philosophical discourse makes the entire history of philosophy (up to Hegel) the history of Platonism (“everything, in this story that unfolds from Platonism, in fact plays out within Platonism”). The Platonic commencement is the very framework of philosophical discourse (up to Hegel).

The question then becomes one of identifying the systematic invariant already contained in the commencement. Macherey refers precisely to the topography (false knowledge, mathematics and dialectics) contained in the sixth book

of *Republic* that we briefly commented on in the previous section (“in this work [...] points are made on the nature and place of philosophy”, Macherey 1967, 4). Macherey’s argument is brilliant. The Platonic tripartition between opinion, mathematics, and dialectics can be translated into the (Althusserian) tripartition between ideology, science, and philosophy. From here, three simple premises can be drawn. (1) In the Platonic taxonomy of knowledge, philosophical knowledge is knowledge determined with respect to other forms of knowledge (mathematical) and non-knowledge (*doxastic*) (“it is a theory about something that is its own object”, Macherey 1967, 5). (2) In the Platonic taxonomy of knowledge, philosophical knowledge occupies the dominant place over other forms of knowing and non-knowing (“philosophy is true knowledge: everything else is therefore, in relation to it, ignorance”). (3) Philosophical knowledge breaks with scientific knowledge in the same way as scientific knowledge breaks with ideological non-knowledge (“the field of the theoretical is divided [*partagé*] by a break [*coupure*] that determines (liberates) the place of philosophy”). Based on these premises, Macherey sets out to show that *philosophy’s break with scientific knowledge is different from science’s break with ideological non-knowledge*. In short, the break of philosophical knowledge “is a false break [*fausse coupure*]” (Macherey 1967, 6). It is a topological fact. If it is true, as we have already suggested, that the scientific *coupure* is produced “outside” of *doxastic* knowledge because “science does not settle on the field occupied by ideology, but elsewhere”, the philosophical *coupure*, on the contrary, *is produced within the very theoretical knowledge originated by the scientific one*, “therefore on (the best) part of the field claimed by science: at its expense”. Here is the result: “philosophy as ‘true knowledge’ feeds on the vestiges of science; but, by the fiction of the ‘break’, it affirms its will not to know it: this true knowledge ignores itself”.

The point here is not that the supposed philosophical break, the very fact that it is a false *coupure*, is false because of some kind of conceptual insufficiency; on the contrary, what needs to be emphasised lies in the fact that the falsity of the philosophical break is located within a precise theoretical strategy. Indeed, the false *coupure* has a “theoretical effect” (Macherey 1967, 7). Macherey writes:

As far as it is not simply an effect of the ideological revolution, it must be a theoretical rupture [*rupture théorique*]: it must allow the establishment of a certain form of theoretical order. This theoretical order, that is not the product of a break [*coupure*], must be distinguished from the theoretical order of science. But whatever this difference is, it must leave

at least one common feature: there is a theoretical order only in relation to an ideological order from which it is separate (Macherey 1967, 10).⁵

Far from causing a *coupure* with science (of the same nature as the scientific break with ideology), philosophy actually produces an ideological *rupture* which, however, is theoretical with respect to “an ideological order from which it is separate”.⁶ Philosophy is placed, precisely, *in the differential gap between science and ideology*: it is theoretical because it is not simply ideological – it has a “theoretical effect” – and it is ideological because it produces no scientific knowledge. In other words, according to Macherey, the philosophical discourse as it is conceptualised in the order of Platonic commencement, is (up to Hegel) *a form of ideological discourse whose peculiarity lies in appropriating and overcoming* (falsely and in a merely supposed way) *the stakes of the scientific discourse* (its real break effect), *in order to self-legitimise itself in the struggle with the doxastic discourse* (embodied by the sophists): “In the place that philosophy explicitly occupies, there is in fact an ideology, which, through this displacement, asserts its superiority over another ideology: thus it appears that the place of intervention of philosophy is the ideological struggle” (Macherey 1967, 12). This is precisely why philosophy was not invented by the sophists.

Let us reconsider the two considerations proposed in the second section: if the opposition between true and false knowledge characterises the conflict between sophists and philosophers within the State, then the double qualitative break that Plato exposes in the metaphor of the line of hierarchy of knowledge (that between *dianoia* and *doxa* and that between dialectics and *dianoia*) *actually conceals a third, more fundamental one*: that between “reactive ideology [*idéologie réactive*]” (which is the ideological content of Platonic discourse) and “dominant ideology [*idéologie dominante*]” (the ideology of the sophists). In short, according to Macherey, the real Platonic stakes lie in the implicit definition of a *two-term ideological field*, *one* of which – philosophy – needs the forced entry of a *third term* – science – to authorise its superiority over the dominant term – sophistry: “philosophy can only intervene in the ideological field (which can be represented by a two-term diagram: dominant ideology/reactive ideology) through the transposition that produces the three-term diagram” (Macherey 1967, 11-12). It follows, then, that a relationship exists between the scientific and philosophical discourse which is not only one of *exteriority* (the ideological struggle

⁵ [Dans la mesure où elle n’est pas seulement un effet de la révolution idéologique, elle doit être une rupture théorique: elle doit permettre l’institution d’une certaine forme du théorique. Ce théorique, qui n’est pas le produit d’une coupure, doit se distinguer du théorique de la science. Mais, quelle que soit cette différence, elle doit laisser subsister au moins un trait commun: il n’y a de théorique que par rapport à un idéologique dont il est séparé.]

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the distinction between *coupure* and *rupture* see Regnault’s lecture (Regnault 1968) at Althusser’s seminar on the spontaneous philosophy of scientists, entitled *Qu’est-ce qu’une coupure épistémologique?*

“can only be represented through mediation of a foreign instance”, Macherey 1967, 12): it *neutralises* the scientific *coupure* by thinking of it as overcome (in the taxonomy of knowledge, *dianoetic* knowledge is overcome by dialectical knowledge, precisely because the latter is placed in an ideological field).⁷

It is precisely this foreignness of the scientific discourse that, among other things, would be reconceptualised by dialectical materialism (DM). *Marxist philosophy cuts ties with the systematic philosophies of the commencement* (that is, with all philosophy up to Hegel): “this moment is, after that of the commencement, the most important in its history. It coincides with the institution of a new break [*coupure*]: that which institutes historical materialism. Then philosophy becomes Marxist philosophy” (Macherey 1967, 15).

The separation between Marxist philosophy, i.e., DM, and earlier systematic philosophies, can be indicated according to a double movement:

1. on the one hand, DM *already* places itself in the ideological field without the necessity of the forced introduction of the scientific element (Macherey refers to the Leninist topography that considers only two terms, materialism and idealism): “philosophy intervenes directly in the ideological field, without needing to disguise itself as a scientific theory, as a completed system” (Macherey 1967, 18). This means that materialist philosophy does not occupy the place that philosophy does in the Platonic taxonomy. It is not a theoretical formation that has assimilated the place of science. In the two-term topography, DM “is represented by one of them as an ideological point of view” (Macherey 1967, 17).

2. On the other hand, while historical scientific breaks have always been necessarily integrated – i.e., neutralised – into philosophical systems – i.e., peculiarly ideological – within a regime of enforced externality, historical materialism

⁷ The neutralisation of science by philosophy is a thesis well present in Althusser’s *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*. This work is influenced by many theses circulating in the exchange of notes which we are considering. I quote the entire Althusserian version: “What did Plato do? He came up with the ‘unheard-of’ project of restoring the unity of the dominant ideas undermined by the advent of mathematics – not by combating mathematics in the name of religion, nor by contesting its methods or results, but, quite the contrary, by acknowledging their existence and validity, and *borrowing* from them the novelty they had introduced: *the idea of pure objects to which pure reasoning can be applied*. That is why he had this famous sentence engraved on the lintel of his school of philosophy: ‘Let none who is not a geometer enter here’. Yet the same Plato, who had apparently gone to school to mathematics, conducted this whole operation for the sole purpose of making mathematics go to school to his philosophy. He put mathematics not in first place, but in second in his philosophy... after philosophy itself. He thereby managed, by subordinating mathematics to his philosophy, to gain control over it, or, in other words, *to put it back in its place* in the established order – the order, that is, of the moral and political values that mathematics had momentarily threatened or might threaten. Thus he beat back the threat that the discovery of mathematics represented for the dominant ideas of his day” (Althusser 2017, 41). The question of the neutralisation of the scientific break in the Freudian case is analysed by Michel Tort in note from October 1967 titled *L’idéologisation philosophique* (Tort 1967).

(HM) “institutes a new scientific discipline” that changes the form of philosophical achievement because it produces “a modification of the relationship between philosophy and theory” (Macherey 1967, 19). More precisely, while it is true that, for example, mathematics is entirely devoid of ideological interests (although Platonic philosophy uses it to intervene in the ideological field), HM “has an interest in this intervention”. Why? Because the theoretical object of HM is precisely that posited by DM through the line of demarcation [*ligne de demarcation*] between idealism and materialism: “it is therefore for a reason that has to do with the constitution of its object that HM requires the line of demarcation that only Marxist philosophy can draw: this is something completely new in the history of science” (Macherey 1967, 20).

DM thus changes the relationship between philosophy and science by contravening the order of Platonic commencement:

This relationship is no longer extrinsic (philosophy makes room for itself by taking the place of science, giving itself, by the miracle and mimicry of the system, all the attributes of scientificity, and sometimes using science as a mediating term), but intrinsic. Marxist philosophy has no need to appear as a theory, because the science that sustains it takes the place of a theory, it is its entire theory. Or again: the whole truth of Marxist philosophy does not need any other demonstration than that provided by historical materialism: it does not need to put forward an independent demonstration (Macherey 1967, 20-21).⁸

In other words, the fact that philosophy is internally articulated to science (the line of demarcation of DM is the very object of HM) means that philosophy itself does not have to seek any external guarantees. This is why philosophy can be directly represented in a two-place topography without needing a third element which, as in the philosophies of the commencement, is neutralised in the very act of its position.

4. BADIOU’S REPLY

Let us return to Badiou. A short note from November 21, 1967 is explicitly devoted to Macherey’s. It is divided into three points.

⁸ [Ce rapport n’est plus un rapport extrinsèque (la philosophie se faisant une place en prenant sur celle de la science, se donnant, par le miracle et le mimétisme du système tous les attributs de la scientificité, et se servant de la science à l’occasion comme terme médiateur), mais un rapport intrinsèque. La philosophie marxiste n’a pas besoin d’avoir l’air d’être une théorie parce que la science qui la supporte lui tient lieu de théorie, est toute sa théorie. Ou encore: toute la vérité de la philosophie marxiste n’a pas besoin d’autres démonstration que celles que lui fournit le matérialisme historique: elle n’a pas à proposer de démonstration autonomes.]

First, Macherey's thesis on the Platonic system can be understood in two senses. In the first, the qualitative difference introduced by DM makes it possible to retrospectively construct a general theory of the philosophy-effect. In this version, Macherey's thesis seems (to Badiou) acceptable. That is, on the condition that we specify "that the concept of philosophy is the concept of the modes of production of an effect (and not the concept of a 'configuration' given to the empirical state in the 'works' of philosophers)" (Badiou 1967b, 1), and that "this effect must be defined in terms of *instances* of the social whole [*Tout social*]".

In the second sense, Macherey's thesis means that the specific object of a theory of philosophy is the "system", which Plato established as historically invariant. In this version, Macherey's thesis is (to Badiou) incorrect. To say that philosophical discourse is a repository of modes of producing an effect is to say, in fact, that philosophical theory about philosophy (made possible by the emergence of DM) is a theory of the "process of *reabsorption of the break [coupure] through engagement in the ideological change*". But to refer to such a process of reabsorption is to identify the "*closing operators [opérateurs de fermeture]*" (Badiou 1967b, 2) at work in the Works of empirical history (Badiou speaks of deconstruction). In other words, Macherey's error would lie in the confusion between the philosophical effect ("the unifying dissimulation of the break") and the productive realisation of this effect (the Platonic system) which, for its part, "is never apparent, and is the result of the complex (and most often discordant, shifted, in the empirical object that is the work) play of multiple operators".

Secondly, Badiou voices a concern about "the 'unity' of philosophy". There is nothing to object about the unity of effect (every philosophical process, qua process, is the ideological erasure of *coupure*). But if the theory of philosophy is, as seen in the first point, the theory of the modes of production of the philosophy-effect, then it can be argued that "the theory of philosophy studies revolution, and forms of transition, in the productive modes of the erasure effect". It is therefore necessary to place philosophy "within a conjuncture where ideological revolution and scientific break are intertwined, so that, from the point of view of philosophical production, the break is the deciding element" (Badiou 1967b, 3). In other words, if it is true that the *coupure* is the deciding element of the philosophical process, then it follows that every opening of a *new* continent of science necessarily implies a *mutation* in philosophy itself, which therefore cannot simply be placed under the logic of system reversals (as Macherey puts it). To phrase it differently, the historical difference between scientific breaks implies the historical difference of philosophical procedures of ideological enclosures (through the operators defining a mode of production). As Badiou says, "this mutation is the only relevant object of a theory of philosophy".

Finally, Macherey has perfectly shown how Plato's work recognises the difference between opinion and science (as a condition of possibility of the superiority of the philosophical discourse over the sophistic discourse). Every philosophy "places this recognition in its own movement" (Badiou 1967b, 4). It thus places within itself the recognition of a difference, and "the operators of this placement will be included in the combined elements that define a mode of production". Badiou's contention – unfortunately not elaborated on at length – is that the identification of the difference (in the Platonic example: that between opinion and science) is still insufficient to understand the functioning of the philosophical process. This is what Macherey seems to have already done by emphasising Plato's articulation of the three-term topography and the two-term ideological field. Using the concepts of *placement* and *dis-placement*, Badiou argues that the philosophical effect begins "when noting the dis-placement" of the placement of the difference between opinion and science. One could put it this way: *the philosophy-effect always articulates the separation between two differences*, one between science and ideology (in the case of Plato, between mathematics and opinion) and one between philosophy and ideology (between dialectics and opinion), where the former is the precondition for the self-neutralisation of latter. In Plato's example, the philosophical effect is thus made possible only by the "discrepancy [*décalage*] between the ideology/science pair and the ideology/dialectic pair. Only this discrepancy produces an effect (and therefore it alone is the object of a theoretical investigation, of the discovery of a law)" (Badiou 1967b, 4).

5. ON THE RELATION BETWEEN HM AND DM (I): THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL NOTION OF *APPLICATION CRÉATRICE*

Detailing the relationship between HM and DM, marking their difference from pre-Marxist articulations between science and philosophy, means, for Badiou, coming to terms with the relationship between *theory* and *practice*. Although, as is well-known, the relationship between HM and DM is first analysed by Badiou in his review of Althusser's *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, titled *Le (re)commencement du matérialisme historique*,⁹ here we shall refer instead to a very interesting note from October 1967, titled *À propos du concept d'application créatrice*.

What is at stake in this note is how *not* to think of the application of theory to political practice in terms of a mechanical exteriority (which would place "the 'theoretician' above the masses", Badiou 1967a, 1). This is an important epistemological indication of the procedures for the formation of scientific and philosophical concepts. What differentiates HM from earlier scientific *coupures* and

⁹ Badiou (2012).

thereby its relation to DM, is the mode of formation of its theoretical operators. This mode of formation consists of three moments.

1. The first moment is *determination*. Here the pre-existence of Marxist theory in the order of political practice as such is firmly defended. The theoretical order exists initially in a practical state. The theoretical order exists in a latent state. It is class-based political practice that is the deciding factor of scientific production. Without political practice, there is no *coupure*. The process of theoretical production is a process of systematic explication of what already exists in the practical state. In this sense HM reveals an unprecedented scientific fact: if class practice contains its own theoretical stakes in a latent state, then the process of theoretical production, which is a process of extraction, can only take place from a class-based point of view. As Badiou says, “*the Marxist theory of history is linked to the masses in the sense that its very ‘theoreticity’ presupposes, in order to appear, that one stands on the class position of the proletariat*” (Badiou 1967a, 3, italics in the original); or, put differently, “HM is indeed a science whose ‘agents of production’ are determined with regard to their class position”.

2. The second moment is *assimilation-application-creation*. The relationship between these terms is rather complex. Assimilation, means first and foremost theoretically *apprehending* the class point of view (which therefore is determinant). Badiou argues that “the knowledge effects of historical materialism, the categorical effects of dialectical materialism, are only admissible for those who stand on the class positions of the proletariat” (Badiou 1967a, 4). On the other hand, the assimilation procedure occurs as a *reception* of theory by the masses (what Badiou, following Mao, calls “study”). Assimilation is thus both an *apprehending* (what is latently present only in the practical state) and a *reception* (what has been produced from the theoretical point of view). The reception of theory by the masses has effects on their *conception of the world* [*conception du monde*]:¹⁰ “the readjustment [*remaniement*] of this conception is the assimilation of the theory, an assimilation of which they alone are structurally *capable of*” (Badiou 1967a, 5). Here Badiou is not suggesting that theoretical reception precedes the readjustment of one’s conception of the world, but that this readjustment comes true in the very act of reception. Yet

¹⁰ The notion of “conception of the world”, already at work, as we know, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists* (Althusser 1990), is analysed by Althusser in two notes from October 1967. The first is titled *Philosophie et conception du monde*, the second, a more extended rewrite of the first, *‘Conception du monde’ et philosophie*. In the fourth thesis of the first note, Althusser defines the conception of the world in these terms: “conceptions of the world are representations which bring together, under the domination of a defined tendency, different elements borrowed from the realities contained in the so-called ‘ideological’ level of a social formation”. After the advent of science and philosophy, Althusser adds in his sixth thesis, “the conceptions of the world add to a greater or lesser extent to the elements borrowed from practical ideologies elements borrowed from science and philosophy (which are located on this level)” (Althusser 1967, 1).

reception, and thus the readjustment of the conception of the world, does not happen mechanically and externally. Rather, reception happens in a kind of immediate translation into action of the assimilated theory. That theory, therefore, is *already modified in the very act of its reception* (practiced). Theoretical modification occurs because the assimilated theory is a practiced theory. The application of theory by the masses is already placed in the order of a practical invention; the proletarian conception of the world can be readjusted from a theoretical application that is already hybridised to a political creation (Badiou's examples: the Commune, the Red Guards, the Soviets); the theoretical assimilation by the masses already detects a creative application of what is assimilated: "when the masses have 'translated into action' the assimilated theory, the latter is yet to be condensed: that is to say, the theory is only in a position to produce effects of knowledge in the readjusted space of the proletarian 'conception of the world'; readjusted precisely through the 'practical inventions' of a political power struggle" (Badiou 1967a, 5). In this sense, the process of creative application, the practical-theoretical nexus that leads to the readjustment of the conception of the world – for the masses, of the masses – may make theorists, who also have configured in a systematic form the theoretical stakes contained in a latent state in the practical state (a state that is therefore determinant), insensitive to the practical modification of previously assimilated theoretical instances: "the determination-application-creation of theory in class-based political practice creates conditions of existence and listening that are *imperative* for theoretical discourse, both scientific (HM) and philosophical (DM), and yet 'unforeseeable' according to the pure internal rule of this discourse" (Badiou 1967a, 6).

3. This leads to the third and final moment, *rectification*. The practical invention by the masses of previously assimilated theoretical stakes "*are part of the theoretical process in the same way as the experimental space*" (Badiou 1967a, 7). This means that practice materialises and rectifies, in the complex process of assimilation-application-creation, the relative autonomy of the theorist as such. Practice is the condition of existence of HM and DM, according to a continuous movement of assimilation that is always-already creation and creation that is always-already rectification of previously systematised theoretical instances. In short, "it is therefore possible, with certain precautions, to submit that *the revolutionary masses are the materialised theory*, if we add that far from constituting the masses as *instruments*, this (materialist) formula only indicates the sole form of effective existence of the Marxist-Leninist theory" (Badiou 1967a, 7).

6. ON THE RELATION BETWEEN HM AND DM (II): OPENING THE “HOLE” IN THE FABRIC OF IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS

Let us fix a couple of points.

1. Determination, assimilation-application-creation, and rectification are the three moments of the process of conceptual production.

2. The relationship between HM and DM, or between science (of history) and philosophy (dialectics), is analysed by Badiou all too cursorily (these notions, in the last analysed note, remain in the background). Macherey, however, adds that the regime of their mutual dependency, unlike that established by the philosophies of the commencement, lies in the fact that “this relationship is no longer extrinsic [...] but intrinsic” (Macherey 1967, 20).

Now, in the last, dense note that we will briefly examine (3rd December 1967), titled *Pratique, Philosophie*, Badiou, in addition to clearly explicating the relationship between HM and DM (in reference to Macherey), seems to link this relationship to the process of conceptual production.

Let us look at some definitions.

Badiou describes a mode of production as a “combination assigning, for the reproduction of the conditions of the production process, places to occupy [*places à occuper*] and functions to carry [*fonction à porter*]” (Badiou 1967c, 3).

The existence “of a carrier [*porteur*] as such” is called *practice* (and the discourse that sustains it), while the category of occupation is labelled “subjection [*assujettissement*]”. If practices (and the discourses that sustains them) are specific functions (the “functions to carry”) of a carrier, the occupation of a position [*place*] within the social division (the places to occupy) occurs through subjection.

With respect to capitalist social formations Badiou identifies five “generic” practices, using a term we have already seen circulating in the *Manifesto for Philosophy* and which is theoretically justified in *Being and Event* (Badiou 1967c, 3). The generic practices and their discourses are: the economic, the political, the scientific, the aesthetic, and the philosophical.

We can see that ideology is not included among social practices, since, as Badiou (*via* Althusser) says, “the intrinsic form of the ideological is the subjection” (Badiou 1967c, 3-4). This means, then, that the occupation of a position (the places to occupy) by a discourse carrier occurs through ideological subjection. In other words, in order for the conditions of the production process to be reproduced, it is necessary for the carriers of the practices and discourses of a social formation to always be ideologically invested so that they occupy specific places within the social division. As Badiou says: “every carrier is placed as such.

This means: a formation [*une formation*] assigns to the carrying as such a place, which subjects [*assujettit*] the carrier in relation to his or her own practice” (Badiou 1967c, 5). But he adds: “This place, which the carrier occupies, must be carefully distinguished from the function, which he carries”.

The latter is, indeed, an important *caveat*, since it identifies the differential gap between a certain type of philosophical discourse (DM) and the discourses of other practices. The function of philosophical discourse is to de-locate other discourses from their ideological subjection. It is for this reason that the position must be distinguished from the practical-discursive functions of the carriers (although ideological subjection is functional to their conflation). *We can say that philosophy (DM) is the discursive operation which defuses, disarticulates, and dissolves (i.e. unties) the practices of a social formation (and the discourses that sustains them) from the logic of positions.* “The philosophical intervention is therefore directed at the discrepancy [*décalage*] between carrying and placing [...]. It concerns the effect of subjection, which is at the origin of the dominance of an ideology” (Badiou 1967c, 5).

How does this happen? Badiou writes that “philosophy is the process of production of ideal objects, called categories, which are dis-entangling [*désintrincants*]” (Badiou 1967c, 6). Furthermore, the very term “practice”, based on what was said in the previous paragraph regarding the note on creative application, must be taken seriously. Philosophical discourse disarticulates other discursive typologies from the ideological field through a specific process of theoretical production, namely the production process arising *from determination, assimilation-application-creation, and rectification.* The ideological disarticulation of discursive typologies by the philosophical discourse takes place through the conceptualisation of a specific practice (or a specific discourse), insofar as this practice is – as such – the deciding factor in the relevant theory. To the extent that the distinction between position and function (conflated by ideology) is established, the thought of practice, as it is organised by DM, *already* places that practice in the order of its ideological displacement. To say that philosophical discourse is a condition of possibility of ideological disarticulation is to say that specific practices and the discourses that sustain them only meet their conditions of disarticulation if they are accommodated within DM’s categorical space (itself determined by such practices).

Drawing a distinction that closely resembles his future anti-philosophical investigations, Badiou writes that “there *are* philosophical modes of production which, for a given place-carrying configuration, ‘plug’ the process of dis-entangling” (Badiou 1967c, 7). On the one hand, one has DM, i.e., a discourse which, through a movement that is both practical and theoretical, subtracts practices and their corresponding discourses from their ideological subordination; on the other

hand, one finds what Macherey would call philosophies of Platonic commencement, making use, as Badiou puts it, of specific theoretical closing operators. This distinction leads to the second point of this note by Badiou, namely the explanation of the internal relationship between DM and HM.

The elements just presented make its exposition rather easy. “The theory of modes of philosophical production, the corresponding periodisation, the construction of transitional formations etc... in short: the theory of the ‘relatively’ autonomous level of philosophical practice *is a science*. This science *is in HM*”. As a science, HM contains the theory of philosophy establishing the difference between DM and all other philosophy, or between materialist and idealist philosophy. But if the theory of philosophy is a scientific theory contained in HM, then a *speculative* relationship (in the literal sense of reflection on the surface of a mirror) exists between HM and DM. Therein lies the reason for their intrinsic relationship. Namely: if, on the one hand, it is true that the theory of philosophy falls under a scientific discourse, *then DM has for object itself as it is contained by HM*; if, on the other hand, it is true that DM has for object the disarticulation of discursive typologies from the ideological order, *then HM has as object itself as it is categorised by DM*. As Badiou argues:

HM contains [...] a science of philosophical discourse (of its modes of production, of its relatively autonomous periodisation etc.). DM thus operates – in part – on scientific concepts whose “object” *is its own practice*. Results a remarkable particularity [...]: operating on the science of this production, de-placing the concepts of its own practice, it thus appears as an object of knowledge, not *in* its own discourse (which would be circular), but in what it displaces. The intra-philosophical manifestation of this self-displacement *is not* a “consciousness” of the self. It is purely and simply the *intrinsic incompleteness* of DM, its “openness” (which is its main *analogy* with scientific practice). The non-systematicity of DM is thus the intra-philosophical trace of the existence, for DM itself (but not *in it*), of a science of its own process (Badiou 1967c, 8).¹¹

In this sense, one could say that a certain kind of scientific discourse (HM – among the other sciences) and a certain kind of philosophical discourse (DM –

¹¹ [Le MH contient [...] une science du discours philosophique (de ses modes de production, de sa périodisation relativement autonome etc...). Le MD opère donc – en partie – sur des concepts scientifiques dont “l’objet” est *sa propre pratique*. Il en résulte une particularité remarquable [...]: opérant sur la science de cette production, dé-plaçant les concepts de sa propre pratique, il figure ainsi comme objet de connaissance, non *dans* son propre discours (ce qui serait circulaire), mais dans ce qu’il déplace. La manifestation intra- philosophique de cet auto-déplacement *n’est pas* une “conscience” de soi. Elle est purement et simplement l’*inachèvement intrinsèque* du MD, son “ouverture” (qui est sa principale *analogie* avec la pratique scientifique). La non-systématicité du MD est donc la trace intra-philosophique de l’existence, pour le MD même, (mais non *en lui*), d’une science de son propre procès.]

as opposed to “plugging” philosophies) are discursive typologies irreducible to the others (aesthetic, economic, political). The former, as the holder of a theory of philosophy. The latter, as the disarticulating instance of every discursive typology.

To say that the philosophical discourse dis-places discursive types; to say that philosophical practice is instrumental to dissolving other practices from the logic of positions (i.e., from their ideological subjection); to think of the philosophical procedure of categorical formation as a conditional procedure (by practices) because it is a determined procedure; to make philosophy a discursive typology that, through its activity, represents the space in which the genericness of a specific practice can be shown against its ideological “plugging”; the very introduction of a taxonomy of practices and discourses that sustains these practices: Can all this not represent the theoretical pathways that will be fully developed from *Being and Event* onward (so as to establish a kind of *relative* discontinuity between the two stages of Badiou’s thought)? One is tempted to read Badiou’s second period through the lens of the first. If this were the case, however, would it not be necessary to interrogate the significance of the conceptual paradigm shift of the “post-Althusserian” Badiou with respect to what has been analysed so far? These are entirely tentative and imprecise dichotomies: from the ideological to the ontological order; from Lenin-Mao to Plato; from disarticulation to the Event; from practices to truth-procedures... What is at stake in such a semantic shift?

The brief references we made to the *Manifesto for Philosophy* make it possible to identify three macroscopic divergences from the earlier Badiou. These concern:

1. the status of the Platonic gesture (on the one hand, the Platonic gesture represents a field to be abandoned because the concealment of the break, through its specific closing operator, makes Plato’s philosophy a “plugging” philosophy; on the other, it must be restored after the Heideggerian poetic suture because it has shown the compossibility of truth procedures);

2. the status of suture and compossibility (although, it should be emphasised, in the earlier Badiou HM and DM stand in an essential intrinsic relationship. It remains one of the points to be questioned);

3. a different taxonomy of procedures or practices (which is a significant point. Why are the procedures of truth precisely those that Badiou identifies in the second stage of his thought and not others? This identification seems entirely arbitrary. The very reference to Badiou’s practices in the first stage, that is, the reference to a *conjunctural* determination, makes the characterisation of a taxon-

omy much less dogmatic and problematic. The practices are what they are, because – at present – they are the only practices that can be identified from a *factual* point of view);

4. the status of procedures or practices (while in the later Badiou, as mentioned in the first paragraph, the truth of any procedure does not cease to be truth if it is not located in a space of philosophical compossibility, in the earlier Badiou it is only philosophical thought that disarticulates a discursive typology from the ideological order. Without the philosophical thought, therefore, practice remains subject to the order of positions).

In conclusion, rescuing the theoretical demands from the first stage of Badiou's thought is to (re)think a theory of discourses. In provisional terms, this theory should cast light on:

1. the fact that the ideological order, although it is not a practice but a function of subjection of the practices and the discourses that sustain them, is also sustained by a discourse. In this sense it should be possible to say that the ideological subjection is a discursive one¹² (i.e., a subjection which marks the place that the other discursive types and their carriers have to occupy in the social division);

2. the different ways in which the discursive typologies are de-articulated from the ideological discourse (*coupure*, with regard to the scientific one...)¹³. In this sense, one should be able to say that the discursive typologies, primarily articulated to the ideological discourse, are disarticulated by the philosophical discourse and re-articulated in the categorical domain of the same discourse (according to the movement of creative application). One can name the articulation of a discursive typology to the ideological discourse (which can therefore be called “basic discourse”) “primary articulation”; one should therefore detail, with respect to each discursive typology, the typologies of the “primary articulations”. One can name the re-articulations of discursive typologies in the categorical domain of the philosophical discourse (after the philosophical operation of dis-

¹² Badiou himself, in an unpublished text from February 1967, titled *Diderot: la visibilité du généalogique*, makes ideology a type of discourse: “Ideological discourse reproduces the experience of a social group in a totalising and normative system that legitimises this reproduction by assigning it as the immediate truth of experience” (Badiou 1967d, 11). Along with the ideological, there is an aesthetic, a scientific and a theoretical (or philosophical) discourse. The definition of theoretical (or philosophical) discourse is interesting. Just think of what has been said about “plugging” philosophies (different from DM): “The theoretical itself is the effect induced in ideology by the break; namely, the discourse whose proper function is to represent science itself in ideology. Or: to cover the ‘hole’ opened in the fabric of ideological representations by scientific practice. A task where philosophy is defined” (Badiou 1967d, 11-12).

¹³ With the thesis contained in *The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process*, according to which “Art is not ideology” and “Art is not science” (Badiou 2013, 32), Badiou himself began to think about the specificity of aesthetic discourse.

placement) “secondary articulations”. On this point, unless one wishes to make every discursive practice other than ideological a practice in and of itself non-ideologised, one should finally specify the conditions of possibility of dis-placements (and thus, of “secondary articulations”);

3. the fact that, given the internal relation between HM and DM, it should be possible to show how underneath every operation of “secondary articulation” lies that same internal relation between HM and DM. If DM is a function of de-articulation and HM is the science of this function, then in every philosophical operation of discursive disarticulation the relation between HM and DM is pre-supposed. In other words, any discursive disarticulation is only possible in the scientific order of historical materialism and in the philosophical order of dialectical materialism.

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