

On Thinking What Cannot be Thought: Evental Thinking After the Pandemic

Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong

University of the Philippines, Cebu City

Abstract: This paper will develop the two categories of ontology of completeness and epistemology of pictorial form from the resources of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. The paper will argue that the ontology of completeness denies in advance the possibility of the new in the world while the epistemology of the pictorial form of thinking conservatively ties thought to the configurations permitted by the logical form of the world: thinking cannot think what cannot be thought. This consequently results to a conservatism that contains—i.e., preserves or limits—the world's state of affairs to the given. Nothing new could even be allowed to be thought of. As this conservatism challenges the terrain of an emancipatory politics informed primarily by the thinking of that which cannot be thought, the paper will contend how evental thinking as a thinking that ruptures allows for the thinking of what cannot be thought, using Alain Badiou's ontology and emancipatory politics. The consequences of the arguments will then be extended to a critique of neoliberalism, particularly in how it currently contains the possibilities of the world's health care system.

Keywords: eventual thinking, ontology of completeness, pandemic, pictorial form of thinking

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein explained that

the book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.¹

These statements imply three important points. These points, I argue, ultimately pose a serious challenge to the terrain of emancipatory politics.

First, it is implicative of what Badiou described as an ontology of the virtual having at its core the distinction between substance and the world. In this ontology, thought, if it must possess some form of sense, should conform to the logical form of the world. Second, this ontology develops what can be called a pictorial form of thinking that permits thinking only as a “logical picture” of the world.² In this pictorial form of thinking, thought, according to Wittgenstein, “contains the possibility of the state of affairs which it thinks.”³ Third, the pictorial form of thinking is a thinking that contains (*enthält*). This form of thinking denies in advance that which is the harbinger of the impossible and the unthinkable: the event. Nothing new ever is permitted to happen.

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C. K. Ogden and F. P. Ramsey (London: Kegan Paul, 1922). Subsequent citation of the same will indicate the exact section or subsection of the statement as it is numbered by Wittgenstein.

² Christopher Gilbert, “The Role of Thoughts in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” in *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 21:4 (1998), 341.

³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.02.

With these points presented, the paper shall raise two arguments. First, the pictorial form of thinking, that which also mirrors a certain form of ontology, is conservative. It denies the coming to be of an unthinkable event in favor of the containment of the world's state of affairs. Second, emancipatory politics, as already highlighted by Badiou, and contrary to the pictorial form of thinking, must think of the impossible.⁴ With its subject, emancipatory politics has to assume what is called evental thinking, a thinking that does not contain and conserve but rather ruptures.

This paper will be divided into four parts. After the introduction, the second section will develop the notion of a pictorial form of thinking—i.e., a thinking that contains or limits—in relation to the ontology of completeness. The third section will briefly explain Badiou's ontology and advance the concept of an evental thinking. Evental thinking allows the thinking of that which is impossible and unthinkable. The last section will deal on the challenge of thinking the impossible in the intersection of the pandemic and the neoliberal world (dis)order. It must be noted that the arguments developed in this paper, specifically in the second section, concern only the political implications of the *Tractatus* (although Wittgenstein obviously was not thinking under a political register at all) and that these do not touch the later works of Wittgenstein. Further, the arguments that will be raised here are very close to Badiou's philosophical reading of the early Wittgenstein. The paper will simply extend the philosophical reading of Badiou to touch on the political and advance a claim in favor of Badiou's emancipatory politics.

⁴ Ronjaanee Chatterjee, "Alain Badiou in Southern California: A Politics of the Impossible," in *Los Angeles Review of Books* (6 February 2014), <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/alain-badiou-southern-california-politics-impossible/>>.

COMPLETENESS AS THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD AND THE LIMITING OF THOUGHT IN THE PICTORIAL FORM OF THINKING

The succeeding discussions of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* do not claim to present an exhaustive account of the book. Rather, the discussion is limited to two concepts deemed as relevant to the problem of thinking. These concepts are the ontology of completeness and the epistemology of the pictorial form of thinking. In what will be elaborated subsequently, it will be shown that both concepts promote a kind of conservatism that contains rather than ruptures the possibilities permitted by the world's logical form. In this case, the two concepts pose as obstacles to emancipatory politics since the latter works more on rupturing rather than on conserving.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* begins by describing what the world is: "the world is everything that is the case."⁵ This is followed by an explication that "the world is the totality of facts, not of things."⁶ Wittgenstein purposefully made this clarification to secure two complementary points. First, he wished to prohibit an atomism of things or objects, in favor of an atomism of facts.⁷ Wittgenstein proposed to depart from the crude materialism of the early atomists to give room for a thoroughgoing materialism of facts where language is given a significant role in meaning-making. Second, Wittgenstein saw to it that things could only derive their intelligibility from within the structure of atomic facts. An object in itself does not have any sense (in the world). An object can only be named but not thought.⁸ Wittgenstein explained that "only facts can express a sense"⁹ so that apart from the configuration or the chain

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.1.

⁷ Gilbert, "The Role of Thoughts in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," 341.

⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.221.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.142.

joined together by an atomic fact,¹⁰ the object is rendered unintelligible. Talking about how objects could be thought in relation to the possibility of atomic facts, Wittgenstein reflected that “if I can think of an object in the context of an atomic fact, I cannot think of it apart from the *possibility* of this context.”¹¹

For Wittgenstein, “all *possible* atomic facts [are] also given.”¹² Their givenness does not only imply their presence in “a space of possible atomic facts,”¹³ but also their and the world’s completeness. For Wittgenstein, the “totality of existent atomic facts is the world.”¹⁴ Nothing that is outside of the configurations of the atomic facts exist in the world. The world as complete denies in advance whatever possibility that is outside of the known and accepted possibilities of the atomic facts. Completeness denies in advance the impossible. Hence, Wittgenstein explained that “a new possibility cannot subsequently be found.”¹⁵ Completeness is the ontological structure of the world. In the realm of the given and the complete, nothing happens that is outside of the already known and established logical possibilities of existence: *there is nothing new under the sun*.¹⁶ Anything accidental is prohibited because “in logic, nothing is accidental.”¹⁷ Alien to the happening of accidental localized events, for Wittgenstein, the world is a completed totality. Having achieved this degree of completeness, the world, being the totality of

¹⁰ Wittgenstein explains that “in the atomic fact objects hang one in another, like the links of a chain.” He continued that “[t]he way in which objects hang together in the atomic fact is the structure of the atomic fact.” *Ibid.*, 2.03 and 2.032.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.0121.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.0124.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.013.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.04.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.0123.

¹⁶ The sun, the symbol of the Divine’s greatness, is a proof of omniscience. In this regard, nothing of a sort of coincidence can happen from an omniscient being, for this reveals an inherent contradiction within the Divine. Alain Badiou frequently quotes this line from Ecclesiastes 1:9 in many of his works.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.012.

existing atomic facts, “determines which atomic facts do not exist.”¹⁸ The world, as a completed totality, is the real, or *in fact*, the only real.

Facts are rendered intelligible through a thought. Wittgenstein illustrated that “the logical picture of the facts is the thought.”¹⁹ This is what was earlier mentioned as the pictorial form of thinking. Thought, for Wittgenstein, is linked with reality in such a way that the objects of the latter correspond to the objects of the picture.²⁰ The picture, being a definite combination of elements, is a representation of how things in reality “are so combined with one another.”²¹ That which in the picture establishes a connection of its elements is called as its structure.²² The possibility of this structure, Wittgenstein explained, is the “form of representation of the picture” and the latter shows that objects “are combined with one another as are the elements of the picture,” i.e., thought.²³ Again, the picture is linked with reality, analogously as “a scale applied to reality.”²⁴ The structural properties of thought must reflect the structural properties of the world.²⁵ In the Introduction to the *Tractatus*, Bertrand Russell explained that “we speak of a logical picture of reality when we wish to imply only so much resemblance as is essential to its being a picture in any sense, that is to say, when we wish to imply no more than identity of logical form.”²⁶ In other words, the logical picture mirrors what in the world is its logical form. The logical form shows itself or is mirrored in the logical picture of thought.²⁷

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.05.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.13 and 2.1511.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.15.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.151.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.1511.

²⁵ Here, I borrow from Jaakko Hintikka and Merrill Hintikka, “Some Remarks on (Wittgensteinian) Logical Form,” in *Synthese*, 56:2 (1983), 157.

²⁶ Bertrand Russell, “Introduction,” in Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

²⁷ The notion of mirroring is taken from the analogy of Peter Michael Hacker, in Peter Michael Hacker, “Naming, Thinking, and Meaning in the Tractatus,” in *Philosophical Investigations*, 22:2 (1999), 120.

Furthermore, thought, being a logical picture, “contains the possibility of the state of affairs which it thinks.”²⁸ The original German for this statement is *Der Gedanke enthält die Möglichkeit der Sachlage, die er denkt*. Both Ogden and Pears/McGuinness translate the term *enthält* as “contains.” A synonym of the term *enthält* is *einschliessen*, which means to surround or enclose. Another synonym of the term is *umschliessen*, which could mean to border something. To surround, enclose, or border something also means to limit. Pictorial form of thinking is a thinking that limits. This is why Wittgenstein wanted to “draw a limit to thinking.”²⁹ But the notion of limit in this case is a limit that comes from outside rather than from the inside. Thinking limits or contains, or more precisely, is limited or contained, to prevent it from getting out or going beyond.³⁰ The epistemological character of the pictorial form of thinking is a knowledge limited to existing facts. Being the faithful mirror of the world’s logical form, thought is, from the outset, limited into thinking the permitted configurations of the world’s logical form.

Wittgenstein drew an inseparable line between facts and thought. The faithful union of the factual to thought limits the latter from thinking or going beyond that which is other than the factual. Epistemology is the faithful mirroring of the ontology of completeness. Plainly said, thought must only think the thinkable lest it suffer to disdainful illogicality. Thought cannot represent or mirror “that which is logically impossible.”³¹ As Wittgenstein insisted, “we cannot think anything unlogical for otherwise we should have to think unlogically.”³² The pictorial form of thinking implies that, first, since thought only thinks that which is both actual and possible, then thought is limited to that which is factual.

²⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.02.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, preface.

³⁰ I am thankful to Ramon Guillermo for the help in the translation of the German language.

³¹ Gilbert, “The Role of Thoughts in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” 343.

³² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.03.

Second, since that which is factual is that which is the case, then thought is limited to that which is the case. Lastly, since all that is the case is the world, then thought is limited to the world and its existing state of affairs. Outside of the factual, the case, and the world's state of affairs, thought is impossible. The ontology of completeness, which denies in advance the new in the world, and the epistemology of the pictorial form of thinking, which ties thought to the configurations permitted by the logical form of the world, cement a conservatism that contains—i.e., preserves—the world's existing state of affairs. Nothing that is outside of or is new in the world could ever be and could be thought. The world and the thinking that renders it intelligible works along the containment and preservation of its existing atomic facts and denies in advance a rupturing both in the world and in thought.

The pictorial form of thinking—i.e., a thinking that limits—could only think that which is permitted according to or mirrors the logical form of today's world. It can be said that today's world is arranged according to the configurations of neoliberalism. Wittgenstein insisted that the “form is the possibility of the structure,”³³ it is from which the structure of the atomic facts are configured and are configurable. Neoliberalism means a world configured according to the facticity of privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and denationalization. In such a facticity, “objects hang one in another”³⁴ and are “combined in a definite way”³⁵ effecting what is called the “structure of the atomic fact.”³⁶ Whatever is not according to such a configuration is inexistent or illegitimate. This is because the “totality of existent atomic facts” determines in advance “which atomic facts do not exist.”³⁷ Consequently, that which is inexistent or illegitimate is also not only impossible but also unthinkable.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.033.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.03.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.031.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.032.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.05.

The concepts of the ontology of completeness and the epistemology of the pictorial form of thinking are not as abstract as they seem to be, for they are shared, although implicitly, by even contemporary thinkers, lobbyists, and administrations. For example, what Francis Fukuyama proclaimed then as liberal democracy being the end of history³⁸ is actually the expression of an ontology that renders the structural configuration of the world as already complete. Also, what Robert Pearl argued as a government-run, single-payer healthcare approach being something that will not work³⁹ or impossible to work expresses the epistemology of the pictorial form of thinking that limits thought to the facticity of privatized healthcare services. Such a form of thought is also shared by how the previous administration of Rodrigo Duterte contained the thought of healthcare: universal but only in the sense that an insurance corporation purchases health goods and services. And given the disadvantageous position of the public health sector in the country, this means purchasing health goods and services from the private health sector. In both Pearl's assertion and the Duterte administration's thinking, free healthcare as paid for by the government is something unthinkable.

What the pictorial form of thinking proposes today is a thinking that does not go *beyond* but prevents from getting out of the possibilities of neoliberalism. With the pictorial form of thinking, thought is simply limited to what is considered as the worsening oppressive and exploitative configurations offered by neoliberalism.⁴⁰ If this has to be accepted, then

³⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

³⁹ Robert Pearl, "Why a Government-run, Single-Payer Healthcare Approach is Doomed to Fail," in *Forbes* (16 March 2017), <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertpearl/2017/03/16/why-a-government-run-single-payer-healthcare-approach-is-doomed-to-fail/>>.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the disorder caused by neoliberalism, see Arthur Macewan, "The Neoliberal Disorder: The Inconsistencies of Trade Policy," in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 35:3 (2001), 27-33. Also, for a discussion of the relation between neoliberalism

there is no other choice than to consequently accept, with a defeatist attitude, the notion that today's neoliberalism is the end and completion of history. In a word, limiting thought to the given possibilities of the world amounts to thinking for the conservation of the very possibilities of this world. And while the pandemic ruptured the fabric of the socio-political order, revealing the pathos of neoliberalism, a pathos that has exacerbated the crisis of the pandemic itself, the thinking consistent with the pictorial form of thinking forecloses in advance both the rupture of this order and the social organization that goes beyond the logic of neoliberalism. The conservatism of the pictorial form of thought could effectively support neoliberalism and deny the rupturing of a world according to communist goals.

EVENTAL THINKING AS A THINKING THAT RUPTURES

In *Being and Event*, Badiou laboriously demonstrated a well-founded ontology of whose theorems are well-supported by Cantorian set theory mathematics. This paper does not illusion to capture the complexity of a system developed by Badiou in such a voluminous work. However, on the basis of the arduous task set by the mathematician-philosopher, categories such as being, event, truth, and subject shall be employed to develop what will be called as evental thinking. In evental thinking, the unthinkable can be thought and the conservatism of the pictorial form of thinking be countered. On the basis of what will be elaborated subsequently, it will be possible and even necessary to think of the impossible: communism.

Before going into the detail of what constitutes an evental thinking, a brief explanation of Badiou's ontology is required. Badiou

and the pandemic, see Alfredo Saad-Filho, "From COVID-19 to the End of Neoliberalism," in *Critical Sociology*, 46:4-5 (2020), 477-485.

argued that being is a situation.⁴¹ The situation allows for a particular structure that counts-as-one the elements of the situation. Situation and structure are technical terminologies in Badiou's ontology. The situation, for Badiou, is any presented multiplicity.⁴² It is the appearance of a one-thing organized as to be intelligible and identifiable. It is the place where being takes place or appears, in the sense that, through the operation of counting, it presents itself as a one-multiple.

Structuring entails counting, the operation that secures the unity of being. According to Badiou, there are two different operators of counting: belonging, or the counting of the structure of a set, and inclusion, or the counting of the set of all the subsets of the set in question.⁴³ In belonging $\in$, the members of the original set or presentation are counted through a structure. Structure allows for the counting of all that belongs to a situation. Given a property γ , $\{\alpha \in \beta \text{ such that } \gamma\}$ if γ is a property of α , and β counts all and every multiple with the property γ , then $\alpha \in \beta$. In inclusion $\subset$, presentative structure is represented through a second counting of all the subsets of the set in question. Say for example the multiple β , with the elements α and χ . Representative structure counts not the elements themselves but, through the axiom of the subset, organizes and counts new subsets included in β . These subsets, $\{\alpha\}$, $\{\chi\}$, and $\{\alpha \chi\}$, are included in the power-set $\{\emptyset, \{\alpha\}, \{\chi\}, \{\alpha \chi\}\}$. There is a second count, a sort of metastructure which reduplicates the count.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 27. It is a wager because it is an effect of a choice, i.e., the choice to abandon the "Great Temptation" of denying that ontology is a situation. See *Ibid.*, 26. In making this wager, Badiou set out as his task the overcoming of the contradiction between the presentation of being (as multiple) and the count-as-one.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

The metastructure is necessary since all multiples are incapable “of forming-a-one of everything it includes.”⁴⁵ The original multiple presentation cannot count itself and so must posit a second count “in order to verify itself.”⁴⁶ Without this second count, the foundational point of being, the void, or the nothing, resurges as an uncounted specter.⁴⁷ The metastructure is the state of the situation. When Badiou uses the term state, he refers both to the term’s ontological and political senses simultaneously, at least in the context of the discussion on the state of the historical-social situation.⁴⁸ The state is ever wary of the void’s eruption which only comes upon through the happening of an event. It must be noted that, since the void is both the unrepresented and the unrepresented, the void’s occurrence in an event is something which goes undetected both of the immediate society’s and of the State’s radar.⁴⁹ The category of the event is the happening of the foundational void or the nothing. According to Badiou, an event is a rare and undecidable moment which opens a new possibility within a given situation.⁵⁰ As a rare moment, an event happens in a highly exceptional manner when disruptions to the normal order of being suddenly take place and a novelty is pursued in the event’s name. As an undecidable moment, an event is subtracted from the logical structure of a particular world or situation.⁵¹ The established

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁷ Set theory was plagued by the question, “how much bigger is this power set, the set of the points on a continuum, than [the original set] itself?” This problem is what is called the continuum hypothesis, and from the standard of ZF system, “the continuum hypothesis is neither *provable* nor *refutable*.” See Paul Livingston, “Review of Being and Event,” in *Inquiry*, 51:2 (2008), 229.

⁴⁸ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: Subject to Truth* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 96.

⁴⁹ As Badiou explains, “the event is not actually internal to the analytic of the multiple.” Badiou, *Being and Event*, 178.

⁵⁰ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2008), 24.

⁵¹ Regletto Aldrich Imbong and Jerry Imbong, “Emancipatory Faith: Reflection on Alain Badiou and the Christians for National Liberation,” in *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, 21:1 (2017), 53.

structure cannot decide its happening as it signals something outside of the old and existent structure: the new. The event is an opening that conditions novelties in either science, art, politics, or love which, far from being a normal continuity of their logical structures and established traditions, disturbs them thus creating a new creative possibility.⁵² An event is a moment which both defies the normal and the stable, since every event is abnormal, and that there is no natural or neutral event.⁵³ An event proposes a new way of being that escapes the comprehension of the old structure. Hence, anything evental is initially incomprehensible, absurd, and even illogical. In this regard, all events are singular in the sense that, against normality, events instead open a novelty whose happening is not an effect of a situation's logic or a consequence of its law.⁵⁴

The matheme of the event inscribes that it is both the presentation of the evental site and the event itself. Say N is the evental site (a multiple which, while presented, is unrepresented) where the event e happens, then the "event of the site N " e_n is $\{n \in N, e_n\}$. The event represents both all the elements n that belong to the site N and the event e_N itself.⁵⁵ It both makes an inventory of all the unrepresented elements of the evental site N but without being trapped to an infinite recording of these same elements that co-existed with it as it also, through itself, makes a halting point for this counting.⁵⁶ In other words, while it counts all the other elements of the evental site, it also counts or presents itself as an element of itself.⁵⁷

The event breaks away with the axiom of foundation. Briefly, the axiom of foundation requires a set to be decomposable and thus prohibits

⁵² Alain Badiou, "From Logic to Anthropology: Affirmative Dialectics," in *The International Journal of Badiou Studies*, 2:1 (2013), 3.

⁵³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 175 and 178.

⁵⁴ Imbong and Imbong, "Emancipatory Faith," 54.

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 179.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

sets to be members of themselves.⁵⁸ But as Paul Livingston pointed out, the self-membership of the event is not a rejection of ontology or set theory, but “an index of the event’s capability to go *beyond* ontology in introducing happening into the intrinsically non-evental order of being.”⁵⁹ For Badiou, ontology is silent about the event, and it “demonstrates that the event is not.”⁶⁰ But it is also precisely of the event’s inconsistency relative to the structure of any (re)presentation that Badiou establishes “the potentiality of the event to produce novelty.”⁶¹ The resources of ontology merely iterate that being is complete. Only the exception, the event, allows a going beyond such a completeness in order to add or supplement something incomprehensible or unthinkable relative to the established situation. This notion of addition or supplementation will be elaborated in more detail subsequently.

In order for an event not to disintegrate into the fleeting appearances of a situation thereby losing the chance of organizing a novelty, it has to be affirmed in its immanence. To affirm here means that the event’s consequences, which again are prohibited by the initial situation and its state, be made as part of the situation, i.e., to affirm their belonging to or presentation in the situation.⁶² Without this affirmation, no event will have taken place and routine rather than rupture or break will mark the order of a situation. To inscribe the event’s consequences into the situation, a decision for its affirmation has to be made. Their belonging to a situation can only be solely supported by an act of wager, a decision.⁶³ This does not mean that the event itself is decided by an

⁵⁸ Livingston, “Review of Being and Event,” 225.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 190.

⁶¹ Livingston, “Review of Being and Event,” 225.

⁶² For Badiou, the event either does belong or does not belong to the situation. If it does not belong to it, “then, given that the terms of its event-site are not presented, nothing will have taken place.” However, “if it does belong, then it will interpose itself between itself and the void, and thus be determined as ultra-one.” See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 201.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

established structure. Again, the structure could in no way necessitate an event as the latter is undecidable.⁶⁴ An event's happening is retroactively affirmed and instituted by a decision.⁶⁵ The decision by retroaction gives meaning to what could have been something other than an event. The decision is an intervention made in relation to the event. An intervention recognizes both that there is an event and that such an event belongs to the situation.⁶⁶ It is in this regard that the intervention follows an illegal procedure, as "it cannot conform to any *law* of representation."⁶⁷ By being illegal, the intervention disrupts the law by extracting from the edges or borders of the site—the inexistent or unrepresented elements that escape the count—the name of the event. The event's name, therefore, is "a representative without representation, the event remains anonymous and uncertain."⁶⁸ Being *both* on the edge of the void *and* the name of an unrepresentable of a site, the event is an ultra-one, a name that overcomes the state's count-as-one. This is why for Badiou the event is, in essence, the Two: already in its matheme, it is the representation both of all the elements of its site $\{n \in N\}$ and itself $\{e_n\}$.⁶⁹ The event, in its "belonging" to a situation, is not a term, but an *interval*: "it establishes itself, in the interventional retroaction, between the empty anonymity bordered on by the site, and the addition of a name."⁷⁰

Furthermore, the intervention is a reminder that there is a name that which in the order of being is indiscernible, that only through the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* The intervention is illegal relative to its being an eventual procedure that challenges the law of representation because of the novelty it organizes. In science, for example, the Copernican revolution was an illegal intervention which challenged the legality, in the field of science, of the geocentric model. In politics, radical alternatives, like liberation of the slaves, the election of the sovereign leaders, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, were once illegal relative to the order that they challenge (i.e., slavery, feudalism and monarchy, and capitalism, respectively).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

event and the intervention of its consequences is it made discernible and added or supplemented into the order of being. This addition or supplementation reveals that there is outside of the situation which the latter cannot name or discern. This is the indiscernible, ♀.⁷¹ Positively designated, the indiscernible ♀ is the generic, since it is in its real sense the situation's general truth, the truth of its being.⁷² Since the situation only allows the nameable in its accepted knowledge, the act of addition or supplementation is an act of forcing the indiscernible, the truth, in the situation. That which realizes the intervention and decides the immanence of the event's consequences is a subject.

A subject makes immanent the truth of an event and in the process, advances a new organization of being and thought along the procedure of this truth. A subject is in fidelity to the event and incorporates along the procedure of the truth. Fidelity, in this regard, is in the order of legitimizing and including within the situation a wholly new constellation resulting from the discerning and grouping together those that proceed from the evental rupture.⁷³ Granting that there is a faithful deployment of an event's consequences, there is in the situation "a kind of other situation" whose legitimacy springs out from both the event and the truth of its procedure.⁷⁴ What supposedly is a truth that is beyond the normality of being is indexed, through an intervention of a subject, to a particular situation itself. For Livingston, a subject forces a truth into the situation, making it a situation supplemented $S(\text{♀})$ by the generic procedure, or by the truth.⁷⁵ The addition into the situation of the generic procedure, for Livingston, is the generation of a truth.⁷⁶ Hence, the intervention which adds into the situation the generic procedure is also a

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 238.

⁷⁵ As explained by Livingston, in intervention, a subject forces a novel situation which, like Cohen's "generic extension," adds a set of consequences to the original situation. See Livingston, "Review of Being and Event," 232.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

truth procedure as it proceeds from the consequences of an event and institutionalizes these consequences into the situation in question.

Since the event is a happening of the void, the uncountable of both presentation and representation, its consequences are “subtracted” from the nominations or knowledge of the situation in question.⁷⁷ A truth creates “a hole in knowledge.”⁷⁸ Consequently, the subject which proceeds along the truth thinks through this hole and not in knowledge itself. The hole is a rupture in the encyclopedia of knowledge⁷⁹ as much as in the order of being, for through it the new proceeds, from an impossibility or unthinkability to a possibility or thinkability.

The hole, the residual happening of the void in the realm of thought, organizes a new thinking along the direction of that which is new, the supplemented situation S(♀). What specifically characterizes such a new organization of thinking? First, in terms of dimension. While it thinks of the situation and comprehends the supposed completeness of the situation—i.e., the ontology of completeness—it thinks *beyond* the situation’s supposed completeness. This thinking *beyond* is rendered capable by the chance happening of an event. Because of the event, that which was beyond thinkability is now a thinking *beyond*. Pictorial form thinking is incapable of going beyond because it is a faithful mirroring of the world and its logical form. Moreover, pictorial form of thinking rests on an ontology that prohibits in advance the taking place of an event so that nothing is beyond the world as it is already complete.

Second, in terms of legitimacy. Since it is a thinking through the hole punctured in knowledge, and that such a hole is punctured by the void’s eruption in the event, then it is a thinking supported only through the event. Furthermore, since an event presents itself and through its fidelity legitimizes the indiscernible, then such a thinking likewise self-

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁷⁸ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 327.

⁷⁹ The encyclopedia of knowledge is the “fixed state of knowledge” characteristic of the pre-evental situation. See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 327.

legitimizes. Self-legitimization here both means that it legitimizes itself and, more importantly, it legitimizes that which were illegitimate or inexistent. Its going *beyond* self-legitimizes itself. Upon its own legitimacy it determines a new normativity upon which the discipline of thought proceeds. The pictorial form of thinking is not self-legitimizing. It is a thinking legitimized by the established facts. It could only mirror or imitate whatever it is that is factually accepted.⁸⁰

Third, in terms of its agency. Since the event was affirmed and inscribed through a subjective body, such a thinking could only be a subjective thinking. For purposes of this research, the notion of subjectivity is limited to the political subject,⁸¹ the militants in their collectivity. As a new subjective body incorporates along the procedure of the truth, it self-legitimizes and allows thinking to be an activity of the illegitimate and the inexistent, those that were previously in the margins of the void. This self-legitimizing thinking of a collective subject, in their procedure along the truth of the event, consolidates and articulates that which punctured a hole in the encyclopedia of knowledge. Pictorial form of thinking is incapable of anything subjective, for the latter presupposes the procedure of a truth. But for Wittgenstein, truth does not proceed, it only is the mirroring, through language, that which is factually evident. Truth is reduced to the truth-falsity distinction as rendered by language's sensibility, i.e., its isomorphic relation with the world.⁸² Furthermore, the

⁸⁰ As Hacker explained, thought, through the proposition that expresses it, could only describe a given state of affairs by being "isomorphic with the state of affairs it describes." See Hacker, "Naming, Thinking, and Meaning in the Tractatus," 120.

⁸¹ Although Badiou clarified that there are four subjects corresponding to the four conditions of philosophy: the subject in science, arts, politics, and love.

⁸² As Wittgenstein explicates, "to a proposition without a sense corresponds nothing at all, for it signifies no thing (truth-value) whose properties are called 'false' or 'true.'" This is also explained further by Gilbert. He illustrated that the "affirmation of the truth of sentences, the confirmation that a possible state of affairs actually obtains, is achieved by means of a 'comparison' of the sentence to the world." Again, this entails what was stated above as the isomorphic relation of language with the world. He continued that "if the situation described by a sentence *p* exists in the world, then *p* is true and we may be said to *know that p*." See Gilbert, "The Role of Thoughts in Wittgenstein's Tractatus," 347-348.

subject is absent in Wittgenstein's ontology. For example, he asserted that "there is no such thing as a soul—the subject, etc.—as it is conceived in superficial psychology."⁸³ Furthermore, he rejected that there is no such thing as "the thinking, presenting subject."⁸⁴ No subject can act or express a certain agency over the world for "I am my world."⁸⁵

THE PANDEMIC AND THE UNTHINKABLE: BUILDING THE PATH TOWARD COMMUNISM

With the foregoing discussions, some questions could be raised concerning emancipatory politics. Since emancipatory politics works more in the rupturing of order rather than in the ordering or containing of facts, the concepts of the ontology of completeness and the epistemology of the pictorial form of thinking pose as its theoretical obstacles. How ought emancipatory politics think in today's world? Specifically, how ought it think given the circumstances after the pandemic? Should it accept the ontology of completeness or assume the pictorial form of thinking? Or should it rather embody an altogether different form of ontology and epistemology, and along with these, a different form of thinking?

In today's neoliberal phase of monopoly capitalism, the proletariat are not the sole victims of its predatory activities. All people dispossessed of the means of production are virtually victims of neoliberal capitalism.⁸⁶ They are usually lumped up in the category the poor. Their miserable state is worsened by the socially unequal effects of the pandemic. For example, it is said that in the poor countries, the "COVID-19 has been an

⁸³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.5421.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.631.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.63.

⁸⁶ This notion was well developed by Samir Amin in his concept of "accumulation by dispossession." See Samir Amin, *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, trans. by Victoria Bawtree (Nairobi: Pambazuka Press, 2011), 51-77.

economic rather than a health shock.”⁸⁷ An assessment by OXFAM in the Philippines suggested how the “poor people inordinately bear the brunt of economic shocks brought by the pandemic.”⁸⁸ Even the economic prospect of the country is dimmer than ever before and the effects of such a prospect are worse among the poor Filipinos.⁸⁹

One of the many things that the pandemic has revealed is the pathos of the neoliberal (dis)order. In a sense, the happening of the pandemic revealed the cracks of a worsening socio-economic order. Žižek has a more radical assessment of it. He opined that the pandemic is “a kind of ‘Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique’ on the global capitalist system.”⁹⁰ Alluding to the fatal technique of *Kill Bill*’s Beatrix, Žižek illustrated how the pandemic is like a fatal blow to the global capitalist system and how it signals that “we cannot go on the way we have till now, that a radical change is needed.”⁹¹ Citing how the present is characterized by the triple crisis of the medical, economic, and the psychological, Žižek mentioned how the lives of millions today are disintegrating. He insisted that “we have to learn to think outside the coordinates of the stock market and profit,” the very virtues along which the neoliberal (dis)order is configured.

Badiou believed that emancipatory politics today is still the ultimate overcoming of capitalism. He regarded capitalism as containing “neither sense nor truth” and markets “this lack of truth and absenting thought as ‘natural sense.’”⁹² He equated capitalism with barbarism and

⁸⁷ Simon Kuper, “How the Pandemic Deepened the Poverty Pit,” in *Financial Times* (24 September 2020), <<https://www.ft.com/content/f3e7f472-03f8-4368-b287-55886670bcd7>>.

⁸⁸ Camille Adle, “COVID-19 and the Poverty Pandemic,” in *OXFAM* (1 April 2020), <<https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/covid-19-and-poverty-pandemic>>.

⁸⁹ Cliff Venzon, “Philippines Plunges into Recession as Economy Shrinks 16.5% in Q2,” in *Nikkei Asia* (6 August 2020), <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Philippines-plunges-into-recession-as-economy-shrinks-16.5-in-Q2>>.

⁹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World* (London: OR Books, 2020), 40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹² Badiou, *Conditions*, 166.

saw the need to organize various political experiments for its overcoming.⁹³ Badiou insisted the contrast between the wickedness of capitalism with the real of peoples movements and their ideas.⁹⁴ From this contrast, Badiou asserted that the emancipatory theme has not lost its power although communism, the longtime name for this power, needs to be resuscitated “in all its new clarity.”⁹⁵ Badiou echoed Marx how communism will allow “*an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.*”⁹⁶ As Žižek contended, given the destruction that the neoliberal (dis)order has done to the world, and how such a destruction has been revealed by the onslaught of the pandemic, a choice must be made today between communism or barbarism.⁹⁷

Communism is the impossible or that which cannot be thought in relation to the established state of affairs of neoliberal capitalism. Communism is the indiscernible that is signaled by multiple events in the past: the Paris Commune, the October Revolution of 1917, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and Cuba today. An eventual thinking today only has to think through the hole in knowledge which these radical courses of actions have consolidated in various ways. Their wealth of victories in the realm of public healthcare and services could surely enlighten how to build a new social organization that goes beyond the facticity of privatization, the market, and profit. For example, experts have already recognized how Cuba set an example in containing and battling with the coronavirus.⁹⁸ The experience of Cuba and the stories of

⁹³ Alain Badiou and Peter Engelman, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism*, trans. by Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 50 and 53.

⁹⁴ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. by David Macey and Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2010), 100.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Žižek, *Pandemic!*, 95-106.

⁹⁸ Ed Agustin, “Cuba Sets Example with Successful Programme in Containing Coronavirus,” in *The Guardian* (7 June 2020), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/07/cuba-coronavirus-success-contact-tracing-isolation>>.

still many others (the communist State of Kerala in India for example)⁹⁹ of whose common narrative revolve around the non-privatized and anti-neoliberal social organization should enable a thinking of the impossible, i.e., not only a public healthcare infrastructure but also a more socialist socio-economic organization.

Unlike Žižek's notion of communism that "simply is a name for what is already going on,"¹⁰⁰ the communism that has to be thought through an evental thinking is a communism that has to be added or supplemented in the situation. In other words, it is not the name for what is already going on, for what is going on is the various configurations permitted under neoliberalism. And what is going on is a thinking along these configurations and a mirroring of the logic of neoliberalism. Coming from an evental notion of thinking, communism must be understood as a name that has to be incorporated within the situation. It is a going beyond what is in order to arrive at the supplemented situation. It legitimizes the inexistents in the world: the poor but also a social organization working along socialist concepts. It is organized by an incorporated collective subject, in fidelity to the event and proceeding along the course of the truth. This should be an organization that is incorporated by virtue of an evental fidelity. In other words, it is a discipline of the event's truth. As a discipline, it organizes nothing less than equality and justice. Communism, being the unthinkable and the impossible, is also the overcoming of neoliberal capitalism. And the current predicament brought about by the pandemic suggests, ultimately, for the overcoming of neoliberal capitalism. In other words, a world after the pandemic, a post-pandemic scenario must think already the unthinkable and the impossible, legitimize the various victorious concepts already employed in the past, and organize it in its faithful newness.

⁹⁹ "Responding to COVID-19—Learnings from Kerala," in *World Health Organization* (2 July 2020), <<https://www.who.int/india/news/feature-stories/detail/responding-to-covid-19---learnings-from-kerala>>.

¹⁰⁰ Žižek, *Pandemic!*, 103.

REFERENCES

- Adle, Camille, "COVID-19 and the Poverty Pandemic," in *OXFAM* (1 April 2020), <<https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/covid-19-and-poverty-pandemic>>.
- Agustin, Ed, "Cuba Sets Example with Successful Programme in Containing Coronavirus," in *The Guardian* (7 June 2020), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/07/cuba-coronavirus-success-contact-tracing-isolation>>.
- Amin, Samir, *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, trans. by Victoria Bawtree (Nairobi: Pambazuka Press, 2011), 51-77.
- Badiou, Alain and Peter Engelman, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism*, trans. by Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
- Badiou, Alain, "From Logic to Anthropology: Affirmative Dialectics," in *The International Journal of Badiou Studies*, 2:1 (2013).
- _____, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005).
- _____, *Conditions*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2008).
- _____, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. by David Macey and Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2010).
- Chatterjee, Ronjaunee, "Alain Badiou in Southern California: A Politics of the Impossible," in *Los Angeles Review of Books* (6 February 2014), <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/alain-badiou-southern-california-politics-impossible/>>.
- Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).
- Gilbert, Christopher, "The Role of Thoughts in Wittgenstein's Tractatus," in *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 21:4 (1998).

-
- Hacker, Peter Michael, "Naming, Thinking, and Meaning in the Tractatus," in *Philosophical Investigations*, 22:2 (1999).
- Hallward, Peter, *Badiou: Subject to Truth* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 96.
- Hintikka, Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka, "Some Remarks on (Wittgensteinian) Logical Form," in *Synthese*, 56:2 (1983).
- Imbong, Regletto Aldrich and Jerry Imbong, "Emancipatory Faith: Reflection on Alain Badiou and the Christians for National Liberation," in *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, 21:1 (2017).
- Kuper, Simon, "How the Pandemic Deepened the Poverty Pit," in *Financial Times* (24 September 2020), <<https://www.ft.com/content/f3e7f472-03f8-4368-b287-55886670bcd7>>.
- Livingston, Paul, "Review of Being and Event," in *Inquiry*, 51:2 (2008).
- Macewan, Arthur, "The Neoliberal Disorder: The Inconsistencies of Trade Policy," in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 35:3 (2001).
- Pearl, Robert, "Why a Government-run, Single-Payer Healthcare Approach is Doomed to Fail," in *Forbes* (16 March 2017), <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertpearl/2017/03/16/why-a-government-run-single-payer-healthcare-approach-is-doomed-to-fail/>>.
- "Responding to COVID-19 – Learnings from Kerala," in *World Health Organization* (2 July 2020), <<https://www.who.int/india/news/feature-stories/detail/responding-to-covid-19---learnings-from-kerala>>.
- Saad-Filho, Alfredo, "From COVID-19 to the End of Neoliberalism," in *Critical Sociology*, 46:4-5 (2020).
- Venzon, Cliff, "Philippines Plunges into Recession as Economy Shrinks 16.5% in Q2," in *Nikkei Asia* (6 August 2020), <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Philippines-plunges-into-recession-as-economy-shrinks-16.5-in-Q2>>.
-

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C. K. Ogden and F. P. Ramsey (London: Kegan Paul, 1922).

Žižek, Slavoj, *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World* (London: OR Books, 2020).