

The concept - thought of as a Borromean knot

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“Something surprises me, it is that there are not three dimensions in language. Language is always flattened, and this is precisely why I introduced my knot of three, which is a chain, and which is surprising that could be flattened. With regards of the Real, some want to identify it with matter - I would rather propose to write it as the soul-as-three (l'âme-a-tiers), homogenous to the other two. A certain Sanders Peirce was surprised by the fact that language does not express, properly speaking, this relation, that does not allow an annotation such as xRy , for that would not call for a nonbinary but rather a ternary logic. This is what authorizes me to speak of “the soul-as-three” as that which needs certain type of logical relation.” Jacques Lacan, Seminar XXIV, “L'insú..., version critica”, 1976-1977, p.23

My point of departure is the following hypothesis: the concept is a Borromean knot. We will see what unfolds from such affirmation.

The Borromean knot is a very simple topological structure the only property of which is the mutual implication (connection/linkage) of its terms in nonsmaller number than three. That the property depends on the number and not of an imaginary quality gives account of the *real* at stake. The most interesting point of this articulation is that it allows us to think about what a minimum consistency can *consist of*; that is to say, it is enough that one of the terms of the knot is not sustained so that the whole inbricated set up (whih could be made of infinite terms) disperses itself. There is no hierarchic structure here, there is no *one* more important tan the *rest*, each of the terms is *necessary* in order to sustain the whole set. In addition, it provides us with another way of understanding the inter-position (the middle term, the in-between-two) in an alternate and nonrigid way: the Imaginary passes (it crosses)

between the Symbolic and the Real, the Symbolic between the Imaginary and the Real, and the Real between the Symbolic and the Imaginary. We thus notice that consistency does not depend on anyone term in particular to operate as a connector or a mediator, but that each one acts in relation to the other two. Likewise each one is interrupted by the other in their circular tautological closure. We can thus say that the terms are mutually 'solidary'.

I will now present these three registers (RSI) together with the terms Alain Badiou uses: pure multiplicity (being), count-as-one (structure) and count of the parts (meta-structure).

The Real (R) accounts for the primary fact of its capacity to establish what "there is" before anything. The Real is logically anterior to all qualification through properties or to discernment by naming. It is the Real as the impossible: Impossibility of counting and therefore of thinking something that, being an inconsistent multiplicity, *will only have been in* the suspension of a count-as-one (structure) and the retroactivity of a supernumerary nomination (ultra-one). Such inconsistent multiplicity can only be regulated by means of axioms which "do not cease to write it" (it is their *necessity*), hence as mathematics deal with pure multiplicity and work on the impasse being called "the science of the real" (Lacan) or "the science of being *qua* being" (Badiou)

The Symbolic (S) implies the passage to "there is one". It already denotes the signifying register, that is to say, the effect of the structure that introduces the count-as-one. The Symbolic allows the discernment of - and by- the names prior to the qualification into properties and the classification of the multiplicities. It determines the pre-predicative belonging of the elements to the set; it specifies the logic of the signifying chain" by means of which the terms present one another without end.

The Imaginary (I) is the "there is one-one" which conceptualizes the second operator of the count, and registers the parts of the multiple-situation or subsets. The Imaginary refers to the state of the situation or meta-structure, to the register of meaning/signification and representations, since it separates the elements/parts into classes according to the properties of similarity and difference and in so doing it operates inclusions and exclusions. We can understand here the "logic of the stock exchange (*bolsa* in Spanish = bag)" as interplay between container and contained.

Accordingly, this is not only about speaking "analogically" of knots or semantic networks - metaphors that usually abound in the field of the social sciences, but of the effective articulation of three registers: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. We follow here a process of complex articulation which is, simultaneously, historical and structural: (1) of the Aristotelian idea of concept / substance as a simple grid or square, radically taxonomic and imaginary; (2) to the idea of functional concept, made explicit by Cassirer and rather symbolic, where what is privileged is the operation of allocation of certain terms to a place

(the function continues to be more important than the terms, there is a hierarchy); (3) up to the idea of the concept as *pure relation* or knot, where the terms and their very connective operations are equivalent. For this reason, a concept does not depend only on historical definitions but on a singular loop that in addition to (1) the dimension of meaning/signification as one of its parts (the imaginary register) also includes (2) the (signifying) symbolic function that corresponds to the synchronic or structural dimension of the concept proper as well as to (3) the *real* register of the same concept, which refers to the indiscernible dimension of the multiple under study and implies the present understood as (an) open problematic multiplicity.

In other words, forming the concept is not about following only one pure logical *necessity* Hegelian style, nor is it about the postmodernist logic of pure *contingency*; but it is rather about displaying how *necessity* becomes *contingency* and viceversa. This movement of temporary pulsation (and inversion) can be thought of through the Borromean knot, through the logic of its knotting (which marks a necessity) and un-knotting (which marks the contingency). An effective concept, then, is an articulated Borromean knot and imposes, therefore, an *overdetermined* necessity to the distribution of the terms that conform it. But, at the same time, this necessity is not eternal, it is not fixed once and for all since it can be unknotted and (re)-articulated otherwise, modifying and recombining the terms at stake. It is here where the crossing becomes apparent between the historical (imaginary representations and meanings/significations), the structural (symbolic presentations and orderings) and the present (events and real problematics).

From this perspective it is obvious that different traditions of thought have placed emphasis on different aspects of the concept-knot. This does not mean that they have simply ignored the other registers, but rather that they have subsumed them under, or explained them by means of *one* predominant register. The concept-knot attempts to reestablish the equivalence between the terms and their registers. For example, the tradition of conceptual History, whose greater exponent has perhaps been Koselleck, has centered around the study of meaning (its partial or total modifications, or neo-meaning) [1]; the task of deconstructionism has consisted of disassembling the linguistic structures of the concept from its meaning understood as essentially contingent and showing its necessary incompleteness (the constituent outside of all discursive formation); finally, certain traditions of thought oriented towards the act (clinical or political) have located the *real* as *lack/gap* that dislocates the symbolic (the indiscernible) as an orientative factor of an intervention; and the same could be said of the artistic, scientific or loving act: the intrinsic incompleteness of the symbolic system and the contingency of its meanings do not inhibit the invention of names (works, formulas, experiences), of new knottings/loops of the registers.

Following Heidegger's hermeneutic tradition, Koselleck approaches the problematic

of the concept from the point of view of meaning. The question of meaning/sense is central (the quest for the meaning of being). The problem with this obsession with meaning is that at its extreme limit it ends up, at best, in mystical silence (*à la* Wittgenstein), or in existential anguish (*à la* Sartre), while, at worst, sophism and “language games” allow for indefinite semantic variations which give the *real* no room whatsoever. Philosophy, as Althusser said, does not have an object and recurrently leans thus towards some of its conditions: the poem, science, politics, love. Therefore, it is necessary to think of another function and another *real* for philosophy. As Badiou points out, it could be then in the com-possibilizing and simultaneous articulation of the generic truth procedures where the real is indeed played out. If we tie these four (truth procedures) up, in themselves infinite, we may find the way of this *other real* we are talking of.

We follow here Lacan’s insight referring to the knot as a form of writing which is distinct from the logic of the signifying difference (proposed, for instance, by Derrida):

The saying resulting from what is called philosophy goes together with a certain lack which I try to fill in by resorting to what can only be written, the Bo[rromean] knot, to obtain full advantage from it. In any case, what there is here of *philia* in the *philo* with which the word philosophy begins may acquire some weight [...] The writing, I allow myself to advance it, changes the sense, the mode of what is at stake, that is, the *philia* of knowledge. It is not easy sustaining knowledge should it not be with writing, that [writing] of the Bo knot – hence, to summarize- forgive my infatuation for with the Bo knot I do not intend anything else but eliciting the first philosophy that seems to me sustains itself. (Lacan, [1975-1976] 2006: 143)

This is how we notice that Lacan, after having talked about “anti-philosophy” he still thinks in the possibility of a philosophy that truly sustains itself on a strict equivalence of registers – and not of some Master signifier.

When thinking some concepts in terms of mathematical functions, Badiou follows Cassirer closely and could also be said he follows that orientation privileging the symbolic over the other registers. Badiou even expresses this in terms of “the ontological correlates of the concepts”, which is quite significant if we consider that for Badiou ontology is mathematics. However, his position is more complex: There is an implicit knot/loop in the thought of Badiou in which the different registers are intertwined and which we must unravel.

Concept-function

The concept of representation that Badiou presents is functional in the sense of Cassirer: It is an operator of counting that establishes correspondences between the multiples counted-as-one and its sub-multiples (i.e. the correspondence between the natural numbers and the even numbers, that in spite of the latter being a subset of the former have an equal number nevertheless: \square_0). This is the operation that separately counts the

subsets of a set, and which Badiou also calls meta-structure or State of the situation. Here we have already a first rupture with the intuition (inherited from the Euclidean tradition) establishing that the whole must be greater than its parts. We know that in any infinitely numerable set, that is to say, a set that can be put in correspondence with the natural numbers, their parts can be standardized by means of the same functional operation. These are the normal multiples, which coincide maximally in presentation and representation. But on the other hand we know also that there are non-numerable infinite sets (demonstrated in Cantor's diagonal method) such as the points of a segment, that is to say, the real numbers. Badiou calls abnormal multiples (singularities and excrescences) those in which presentation and representation do not coincide, and he shows how these kind of multiples are separated from the idea of representation as related to a psychological (or transcendental) subject that an object represents.

To sum up, therefore, we have two count operators (structure and meta-structure) which we can link to the Symbolic and Imaginary registers respectively. To these we add two modalities to the ontologic structure of being: singularity and excrescence, which allow us to think of the dislocation or the gap of the structure: the Real in Lacanian terms. With these philosophical (meta-ontological) operators we will circulate around different discursive domains and evaluate their singular consistency which is not dependent on the language of the situation. The only thing that prevents the whole exercise to become a formal metalanguage is the extreme minimalism of the terms in question and their essential emptiness, which in turn entails finding the knotted concepts in each domain and under their own terms.

The mathematical or ontological concept of representation is expressed in at least three axioms of set theory: the axiom of the parts of a set, the axiom of separation and the axiom of choice. The first allows us to think the state of the situation (the idea of normalization), the second the precedence of the existence of multiples with respect to the propositional language that defines them or distinguishes/particularizes them, and the third allows us to think the intervention. Perhaps the most interesting term to be considered in this presentation is the axiom of choice, which Badiou phrases as the "ontological scheme of intervention" and allows us to think the very being of intervention that constitutes a subject. This is also how we can understand the concept of subject/intervention as 'function' in as much, precisely, as the axiom of choice postulates the necessity of the existence of a "function of choice" allowing to form the set-selection that reunites each of the representable infinities of the subsets of an infinite set. When we move from the ontologic to the ontic domain, this operation is translated as a kind of 'illegal representation'. In any given situation it is the very law of the situation which prescribes how to carry out the choice by means of preexisting concepts whereas a subject, as

function, operates by establishing unthought of (illegal) correspondences between the multiples of the situation by avoiding the encyclopedic determinants of knowledge (this point is to be clarified later). This is why, moreover, Badiou places the subject on the side of the Ultra-one (forcing of the law of count-as-one) which displays and sustains the original disjunction (the Two). The first logical connection or correspondence from the side of a generic procedure is the nomination of the event, which does not belong to the order of knowledge. The Ultra-one is more than the One, it is an in-counted supplement that at the same time names other in-counted multiples of the site (multiple singular of the situation). This is the reason why Ultra-one is also the Two: the supernumerary name (French revolution) and the non-counted multiples of the site (the farmers of the Great Fear, etc.). With the figure of the Two or the radical disjunction we find the irruption of the Real into the Symbolic.

Choice without concept

Disjunction, however, is not sustainable as pure moment, the heterogenous Two precipitates a nomination that constitutes a subject and inaugurates a generic procedure of fidelity. Here we have thus the 'three' thought of not as a dialectic synthesis but, to take an expression from Deleuze, as disjunctive synthesis.

Badiou clearly explains the status of a "decision of thought" which entails the election, opaque in its foundation, of the theory of sets as ontology. This he does when showing the difference in regards, for instance, of the mathematical elaboration of logic made by Frege according to the linguistic protocol. Logics (the theory of categories) describes the possible mathematical universes but do not decide on any. It is in this problematic site where the uselessness of objecting the last foundation of the "decision of thought" takes relevance for such process implies a theoretical system (in principle because there are no last foundations), and takes us rather to direct our attention towards the multiple conceptual connections that such theoretical system habitates. In addition, such meta-ontologic decision is pronounced on the base of the irreducible opacity (impasse) of the field of mathematics: the numerical discontinuity between an infinite set and the set of its parts.

The formation of the concept would therefore bring about a heterogenous product with a double face: on the one hand, an ontologic closure indicated by the opacity of an unfounded, axiomatic decision, on the other hand, the (onto-) logical opening to infinite connections with other possible terms.

In addition, a generic truth procedure also keeps a certain opacity in its foundation, in the eventual process of continuous rupture that it initiates in relation to the knowledge inherent to the procedure. This is so in principle given that it occurs in a non-place or minimal

edge (evental site), in the interval suspended between two signifiers, in the gap or dislocation of the modes of count (presentation / representation). But this gap is based under the terms of a language-subject, it is not something ambiguous but the *one* that names what confers a differential consistency to the in-between-two (interval).. The key point to be thought of here is how one operates outside knowledge if the issue is no longer one of discerning or deducing but neither of finding an easy shelter in ignorance. To operate the non-knowing implies a *determined* negation (inventing) which requires having found the insufficiency of such knowledge, its intrinsic limits and internal inconsistencies.

From knowledge we operate with encyclopedic determinants that discern and classify the multiple terms of a situation, whereas from the perspective of the event and a true generic procedure / process these encyclopedic determinants (un)discern themselves, or to say it in positive way, the multiples of a given situation x are generated by means of an operator of a connection of fidelity. I will try to circumscribe this difference.

Badiou asks himself how does the event prescribe (and if so is indeed the case) how the event prescribes the operator of a connection of fidelity that will then construct the truth in situation. This is a logical question if we consider that the event as multiple supernumerary does not exist in the situation, i.e., it is undecidable as such, hence it could not authorize anything, not even a minimal difference. As a consequence, when he examines the generic procedure conceptually, Badiou shows how this procedure is being constituted by avoiding at least one encyclopedic determinant, including the finite component of the investigation, as the two multiples belong / pertain to contradictory encyclopedic determinants (Badiou, 1999: 373). What Badiou does not say (or what he is not aware of in asking the question) is that this is indeed the initial condition of the event and of its paradoxical nomination: the original Two that puts in evidence the gap / lack, the noncoincidence of the two modalities of count (structure and meta-structure) and count the same thing twice: the forming-into-one of the name (*singleton*) extracted from the site of the event and the multiple singular which conforms that very site.

The difference between the situation and its State becomes now obvious. In this way, it would be possible to think of the prescription that orders the multiples under study as “the capacity to support the original radical disjunction”, the capacity to name the Two (the gap of the count) once and again by reformulating names and forcing statements. Thus, the truth takes place, paradoxically, as a series of continuous ruptures with the level of knowledge. Badiou writes:

A truth is the infinitely positive total - the harvesting of the x s (+) - of a procedure of fidelity that, for every determinant of the encyclopedia, contains at least one investigation that avoids it. (Badiou, 1999: 375)

Elsewhere (1999: 376) Badiou indicates that the truth is that part included in the situation the multiples of which do not possess any property. In a peculiar way, this redirects us towards the presentation: multiples only present themselves together, that is to say, “they belong” and that is all their quality. We were accustomed to consider the truth as the un-counted of a situation, whereas what “belongs” was the counted. Nevertheless we abruptly understand why this investment takes place: it so happens that in normal situations the meta-structure recovers and obliterates the first count by means of the predicating or attribution of properties: “it belongs because it has such-and-such feature”. What is thus ignored is the simple pre-predicative belonging, that is, the generic being of the truth of a situation. On the contrary, “All nameable part, discerned and classified by knowledge does not refer to the being-in-situation as such, but to the localizable particularities that language cuts across it” (Badiou, 1999: 376)

Although *forcing* connects a present term of the situation with a name, its effective connection (veridical) is held on condition that the truth is totalized (‘will have been veridical’), which is impossible given its infinity, hence the innumerable in act persists (present infinite). That is to say, the present connective term / name depends essentially on the innumerable (the inventive function of nomination) unlike what occurs in the regime of knowledge where the names relate to the terms without any suspension (without mediation). The only difference between knowledge and truth is minimal, almost imperceptible, and depends on the function of the innumerable (in psychoanalysis: *object a*). This occurs in very much the same way as when in logical time [2] one takes a risk on the anticipation of a name for a term (i.e. “I am white”) before the structural indecidability of the situation. However, this hasty decision is not closed on itself (solipsistically) but rather suspended in order to see what the others do: if the others also stop there is no absolute knowledge, they all find themselves in the same *forced* situation by the precipitation of the pass / step, and then the name is verified.

These conceptual formulations certainly find a connection with the Hegelian dialectic, although they break away from its rather static idea of the absolute. Following the reading of Lefebvre we can appreciate this difference expressed around dialectical materialism:

For Hegel, the third term (the synthesis) leans rigidly on the two first terms. They are the three sides of a triangle. The set is hierarchic and special. The inferior moments coexist with the superior moments in the eternity of the Idea and the system. Time, history, freedom become unreal again. The elements of the totality are let to be arranged in an immovable frame in which, specially, society and the bourgeois State appear. For dialectical materialism the Third term is the solution, a *practical solution*, an action that creates and destroys. The dynamic character of the overcoming is perceived in greater depth and the negativity is demystified and deepened. The Third term captures again the content of the contradiction and elevates it but transforms it deeply. Only in such a way there is a dramatic history; action, unity and development.

The static representation is replaced by a live notion of succession. [3]

The problem still persisting in Lefebvre's conception of dialectical materialism is the notion of totality that orients the process. The idea of totality is inconsistent [4]

The difference knowledge/truth in the Borromean knot

In order to capture clearly the difference between the way to operate from the encyclopedic knowledge and its determinants (absolute knowledge), on the one hand, and the generic truth procedure and its investigations, on the other, we can appeal to the logic of the Borromean knot. As we said, the main logical property of this knot is the mutual implication of the terms that conform it: If one term is not maintained the set disperses. In this way we enrich the concept of connection or disconnection of the multiples under study - as raised by Badiou- (too dualist) by a complex conception of the articulations in which traversals and overlaps take place between the structure (symbolic), the meta-structure (imaginary) and the event (real). The knot / loop thus constituted conforms the Real itself; it is another modality of consistency, neither logical (classic) nor dialectic but nodal.

Let us observe the process: In the case of any multiple, in its connection or disconnection with respect to **ax** (name of the event), the operator of the connection displays and sustains the essence of the Ultra-one, that is to say, the originary Two. There (i) the supernumerary name, (ii) the count-as-one by the state of the situation (forming-into-one), and (iii) the event, the unnamed aleatory excess in the situation, appear in suspension. This *hiatusness* is maintained by the operator of the connection in such a way that an interval-like space / gap is opened between both terms in order to double-check the *fit in* (or coupling) of the investigated multiple. Thus, in opposition to how it happens with the repetitive classification that operates (in) knowledge and its determinants, there is no coercivity related to the discernible that links to the language of the situation. That is to say, in order to be considered it "must be" a being, counted-as-one in the situation. This is the logic of classes, which positively prescribes the positions of the terms when delimiting a space inside and another outside: hence x belongs or does not belong. On the contrary, in the generic truth procedure, instead of a (logical) dual copula between the evaluated term and the evaluator, the capacity (or availability) of the multiple is put at try to sustain itself in-between-two as a third (term). This is the logic of the Borromean knot in which the third position is *relative*, it is occupied by each one of the terms with respect to the other two, but simultaneously it is *necessary* since to conform the knot three are needed at least. As a consequence this is the main / strong difference lies between both processes: from the side of knowledge the connections are dual (one-to-one like in an Olympic chain), whereas on the side of a generic

truth procedure the connections are ternary (one-to-three like in the Borromean knot).

The count-as-one and its reduplicación conform a geometric, solid and proportional structure (and meta-structure) that distributes the terms homogeneously. It cannot therefore admit the indiscernibles or the generic existence of multiples. The illegal process of nomination of the event shows instead that this logic of the One (count-as-one) excludes the rest arbitrarily (the multiplicity as such), and, thus, when locating them together gives existence to the Two (which by definition a count only supports as one-one); but it is the operator of the (topological) conexión which sustains without reduction this radical heterogeneity between two terms. Many authors have reached up to this point. However, when asked: how is what sustains sustained, the only possible answer, without entering into sterile circularities, stems from the Borromean articulation of the concept.

The conceptual complex event-intervention-subject-truth presupposes a mode of implicative articulation in which each term refers to the others in order to sustain themselves mutually without fixed structural hierarchies (such as those of the Hegelian triangle). The point to be evaluated is if the circularity, which can be observed between certain concepts (i.e. event-intervention), is tautologic and sterile or, on the contrary, if it is interrupted and opens up when crossing itself with other circularities, conforming in this way a Borromean structure that allows us to circulate around - and articulate- infinite circles: concepts and terms.

The concept of event may seem to circulate if referred to specularly to the concept of intervention[5]. What this circular biunivocal referral opens and renders complex, without obviously eliminating it, are the concepts of the structure (count-as-one), on the one hand, and the truth (generic multiplicity), on the other. This is how the event, evanescent and undecidable in the structure of the situation, receive its *existenciary* status (to speak like Heidegger) of an interventive nomination that fixes it, at least partially, and makes it circulate. But this is only possible because it presupposes the existence of a structure or count-as-one, that is to say, a concrete location (evental site) in which the gap shows in a recurrent way and the same is counted twice (like a *déjà vu*): The site and the name. At the same time, this gap / lack is ignored from the point of view of the state of the situation (meta-structure) and becomes obvious only with the nomination of the event due to its additional insistence on the structure.

The structure at its edge, which is the site of the event, does not count a generic multiplicity (truth), but the intervention - authorized by the occurrence of the event- forces the count-as-one to do so. Here we follow, therefore, a linking that is not deduced *necessarily* according to simple logics: antecedent-consequent. It depends instead on the contingency of the couplings where each one of the instances is interrupted and referred to another one, which in its turn refers to a third one (and this one to the first). In other words, they are only

necessary if what is desired is to sustain the consistency of the set, but with no *a priori*.

There is no hierarchic order: The event does not come first (or the motive of the delay it provokes), neither does the intervention (or the motive of the will / ability it provokes), nor the structure (or the motive of submission / subjection provoked), or the truth (with all the motive of the revelation). In order to be able to describe the process one resorts to sequency, but these multiple concepts concur simultaneously in a singular logical time. Each of the components of the conceptual complex presupposes the others, not in an indeterminate way as “other signifiers” do (the opposite and differential definition), nor in a clearly determined way like the Hegelian negation, but from its own opening and interruption, which allows the coupling to take place with the others and offers the consistency of the set in the mode of a Borromean knot.

In this way, for example, the concept of truth opens up towards other concepts such as the “operator of the connection of fidelity” or “inquiry” while these referring back, in turn, to the other concepts. As in a knot, each instance, each component is interrupted in its mere tautological circularity (closed) by others, which is in turn interrupted as well, and although they presuppose one another mutually, this differential consistency is not merely circular and tautological but keeps conforming a nodal framework the structure of which becomes more complex and rich with the new connections.

The difference between knowledge and truth, therefore, is not only temporary: (1) The cut or scission that marks the logical time against the automatic succession of knowledge; but it also refers to the identitary modality: (2) The multiples connected to the event (investigated) admit their constituent split, they are not complete if they are identified with a positive feature or a fixed symbolic position; their identity is relational and depends on – at least- two elements. This takes us to the third differential feature: (3) The (ensuing) mode of ternary articulation is not arbitrary but follows, the logical articulation of a Borromean knot where each term is necessary. The event as non-counted multiple transfers to any investigated/enquired upon multiple with the possibility of admitting (of affirming) in the new connection its non-counted (submultiple) parts in the situation on its own account and by its own law. The opening towards the multiplicity as such – the multiples of multiples- removes any notion of fixed place and (its) naturalized identity.

Let us follow a basic thread to understand the logic of the process: Everything we count in situation are Ones [i] (count-as-one, law or structure); when One divides into Two [ii] this is the cause of a supernumerary event, fleeting, evanescent. At that brief moment of time (smaller than the minimum and greater than the conceivable maximum, Deleuze would say) [iii] the intervention / nomination sustains the *hiatusness* between two counts (before the reduction to discernible Two-ones). In other words, the intervention conforms the Three and allows counting, by means of a forcing of the law, the im-presented generic multiplicities

that constitute the truth of the situation [iv]. With this fourth term in the operation we have then a quaternary macrostructure that allows us to follow the complex process of the nomination of an event and the generic unfolding of a truth. Although it is presented in a sequential and linear way, we have seen that we can invert it or begin by anyone of the other components of the conceptual complex, since they are ordered in a time of their own which is nonlinear but retroactive and they mutually presuppose one another.

Therefore, the concept will form through a leap or passage at the limit in the site where the language of the situation fails recurrently. But a leap from where to where? It would not be from a system of knowledge or an established discursive regime towards a wild and chaotic outside (which is always an imaginary projection of the established “good order”). It could not be either from one knowledge to another for this would be a simple reductionism of language. We are dealing therefore with an inter-position between the structure (empty signifier, proper name) and the dispers(iv)e multiplicity (multiples of multiples). Between consistency and pure inconsistency a non-place of the place, a delocalized site will be marked by forcing (or torsion or unfolding). A change in discourse will thus take place, a radical transformation that gives account of the non-counted because it supports the paradox. This allows to sustain only the operative structure of the previous system (separated of its representational meta-structure) in order to count the impossible. And this is the event proper: To carry out a torsion of the structure (or law) that interposes itself between the empty inconsistency of the multiple and the null identity of a proper name. The invention of concepts implies going beyond the discussion on the contingency on which all discursive order is based; it entails a know-how in order to make (or to force) the empty signifiers naming what is out of sync (in time and in space) in regards of the situation, that is to say, its own truth. This mobilizes the structure not any longer to count the same but to invent new nominations of the Real.

The problem of sense/meaning in the discursive order

At this point it is worth giving an explanation on the status of sense / meaning in the different discursive devices/dispositives with which Badiou operates. The mathematical ontology clearly presents the working of the Symbolic (axioms and rules) and of the Real (pure multiplicities and impasses) while therefore doing without the Imaginary and meaning. The generic truth procedures, as much as the events from which they unfold, belong to the order of the Real, the act of intervention. Therefore the ‘effects of sense / meaning’ work retroactively and only for those who participate in such processes (the implicated subjects). In the last instance, it is the conceptual work of philosophy which offers the generic categories to think the conjunctions, and to do so it introduces certain stabilizations of

meaning. It is true that such imaginary stabilizations are contingent and that they depend as much on Real as on Symbolic procedures. The central point of Badiou's originality resides perhaps in the re-semanticization he operates on conceptual terms and their complex relations. This operation is possible through the proposed ontological correlations that the semantic filter produces, i.e., the mathematical axioms. Thus, the proper name of being is the empty set; the event is a multiple which belongs to itself; the being of truth is a generic multiple; forcing is the law of the subject, etc. Although, as Wahl points out, both thought and truths are separated from the "language of the situation" and of the prevalence of meaning *"It is [nevertheless] obvious that we cannot but pass through sense; the singular force of Badiou is that of "restoring it" with the matema, of always "forcing it" to the saying of being"* (Wahl, 2002: 41). However, what is not explicitly thematized in Badiou is how these different registers articulate themselves. The proposal I am developing is that, following Lacan, these devices / dispositives are sustained in a Borromean manner and that, hence, the philosophical concept arises from the effective crossing of different discourses. The concept is not a product arising from a private language developed in solitude by the wise philosopher, nor is it a simple effect of the current discourse; it is rather a complex weave/netting whose threads come from different discursive extracts.

In the same sense, thinking the heterogeneity and intersection of different discursive regimes as stemming from the knot also allows clarifying the idea of local discursive stratification as circumscribed to a crossing point. It is from the points of impasse, the sites opened by the problematic where the recurrent gap, the interruption, etc manifest themselves and that the contribution of another discourse must be admitted which, without solving or closing the problem at once, allows nevertheless to affirm a (meta-discursive) thesis which displaces the problematic point towards another ambit and renders it more complex by producing new concepts. In the structure of the knot these local points would be the cords / threads that cross over and under one another. What is interesting here is that these crossings are alternate and hence the 'meta' relation is reversed / inverted; thus, for example, although the (philosophical) meta-ontological thesis on the ontological status of mathematics pronounces itself from the ontological impasse of the magnitude between an infinite set and the set of their parts (Cantor's problem of the continuous), simultaneously it is mathematics as ontology which organizes the formation of fundamental philosophical concepts such as those referring to the being of the subject, truth or intervention.

To conclude, the effective materiality of this knot comes from actual events, which are artistic, political, scientific or loving. One must give an account, therefore, of these local investments of the discursive orders from the *synthomal* points present in each discourse in order to be able to articulate a complex plot which, without unknowing the specificity of the problems, makes that the global articulations of the set travers / pass through them.

Paradoxicallally, it is starting from the weakest point of a discourse that the affirmation on other discourses authorizes itself by multiplying the problematización instead of trying to normalize it or close it. This depends on a *decision without concept*, which shoots out (projects) in this way the complex conceptualización in a knotted and alternate manner. We are dealing here with a discursive materialism which assumes the lack of last (or first) foundations without renouncing to the idea of responsibility in regards of the theses and *thought decisions* pronounced from the weakest points of the undecidable and the impasse. In other words, we are dealing with how a complex and strong discursive articulation understood in the sense of its consequences (conective and linking rather than based on its principles) can be constructed not from strong certainties but from weak, problematic, open positions,

The double status of the Real

So in those cases in which the language of the situation is too pregnant (meaningful) and does not allow itself to be broken by the ontological thought of belonging to the pure multiple of the axiomatic of the sets, this is where the intervening subject requires of other logical and discursive instruments to name the event.

But when and why is the intervening subject important? It is precisely at that key moment, presented by Badiou, in which a count-as-one (structure) fails and counts as two as it cannot reduce the terms, at that moment in which the singular multiple of the site and the name of the event appear in apparent disjunction (the factory and a strike, for instance, what are the connections they have in regards of the State), that a subject is necessary (individual or collective) who can carry out a interpretive intervention that binds the site and the name in an unprecedented way and with a new reason (a discursive turn). This is indeed of the order of what Lacan denominated as “knowing how to do it with” (*savoir y faire avec*) what is presented, with what is re-presented and with the excess of the un-presented, where somebody becomes, in a contingent way, a support of this disjunction and resolves it in an unprecedented way. An (anti-hermeneutical) cut with the language of the situation takes thus place by means of which it is neither a new language nor a metalanguage that arises but what Badiou calls the “language-subject”, that is to say, the old terms receive other values, other meanings away from the common ones, after the interpretative cut (a posteriori).

The One Real has a double status in Badiou: on the one hand, it is the ultra-One of the Real as the undecidable and innumerable random excess of the situation, on the other hand, the *singleton* that conforms the forming-into-one of its name and which circulates in situation by the intervention, but without the law [6]:

The event is ultra-One because, other than interposing itself between the void and the event proper, this is where the maxime “There Are Two” is founded. The Two thus alluded is not the reduplicación of the effects of the law. It is an original Two, an interval in suspension, the scinded effect of a decision” (Badiou, 1999: 231) [7]

There is here a kind of juxtaposition somewhat problematic to locate the differential status of the intervention and its coordinates. As a consequence, the critical questions point to determine the following: what occurs first, the event or the intervention? How do we avoid the effect of circularity? It is here where the presentation Lacan makes of the three consistencies (RSI) knotted in a Borromean manner can be articulated - as I have proposed- in continuity with Badiou’s elaboration, and can serve to elucidate the singular temporality of the process. This is a more specific topology - not completely formalized yet- used to contain that irreducible singular and paradoxical multiple that escapes to count-as-one and the language of the situation, and which can be equated with what in the psychoanalytic experience constitutes the impossible encounter with the traumatic *real*: the site of the *urverdrängung* [8] or primordial repression. In this sense, the fact that the subject (operator) orients itself in the structure of the situation by the Borromean knot, and takes into consideration the three knotted registers, may contribute to the effectiveness of the intervention - and of its temporary distinction from the event.

We can state the following proposition: the presentation as count-as-one (Symbolic) which structures every situation, together with the re-presentation (Imaginary) as the count of counts that reduplicates the first structure in order to re-insure it in its closing against the catastrophic emergency of the unrepresentable void (Real), that is, the multiple inconsistency, they all conform a knot - as *it has been* said - but “normally” only the two first registers (Symbolic-Imaginary) hegemonize the meaning of the multiples in excluding the third term (the Real) by its im-presentation. This operation is usual (classic) as much in thought as in language. This is how and why the event is conceptualized as the irruption of the excluded Real which returns in the constitutive gap of the language of the situation which suspends the prevalent Meaning there and then. It is here where the the risk grows of thinking the event as something external to the situation (something transcendent). This is a common mistake made by authors such as, for instance, Laclau and Žižek [9]. With the knot we can think continuity despite the cut of the event from the situation.

The nomination-intervention will thus mark the cut with the previous situation and the substitution by another that “will have been” true only for that which it is getting to be in the suture of a new situation still to come and not yet unfolded, but which (re) begins.

However, the Real in Lacan also has a double status; on the one hand it is usually indicated through words with negative prefixes: impossible, undecidable, innumerable, indiscernible, etc. It is the pure constating of the “There is”, always fleeting, momentary since

immediately some other word comes to say (to suture) what there is, a name which - albeit approximately- says something in that respect. But on the other hand, the Real is the knot of three: RSI, the Borromean articulation of three consistencies, which prevails either as something “impossible to cut without the others dispersing”, or by way of necessity: “each one is *necessary* in order to sustain the set”.

On this face of the Real (the effective knot) the event is thinkable as recurrence, which allows both to outline a possible answer to the *aporía* presenting the conceptual circularity between event and intervention, and to establish a difference - in practice- with the speculative policies of Left [10]: There is no absolute beginning with an event because the intervention requires to locate itself between two events in order to be able to name it (the between-two is topological); therefore the former authorizes the connection with the later, but as both are connected outside knowledge a specific temporality is required in which “it will not have known” what that event was until the subsequent event does not occur.

Let us unfold conceptually the knot of this question: The Real repeats itself, but it does so with neither form nor norm, whereas the connection between the Symbolic and the Imaginary orders the presentation and the re-presentation of the multiple (the Meaning) which thus conforms the repetition of the law, the count-as-one and its state reduplicación. This is why the cut that shows the real gap, impossible to eliminate, between presentation and re-presentation, opens up the possibility of reinscribing the im-presented of a situation in a yet more strict order. When the intervention names the event in an unprecedented manner, it is located in-between-two (in the interval/interstice between the structure and the meta-estructure) and conforms itself as a third term. This is how a Borromean knot is articulated which allows stopping the infinite circularity between event and intervention, because they are three-into-one but are not mixed up in the Borromean knot. Punctually, the intervention meets the implicit knot in all situation. The encounter of the knot with the Real, “normally” foreclosed, allows to capture its contingency (in its foundation) and necessity that imposes to the structure. This opens up the possibility for the subject that intervenes to knot the three consistencies otherwise (in a singular way). When doing so the subject must reformulate necessarily some proper names, which constitutes a language-subject.

The knot also visualizes in the “function of choice” as a pure multiple form of the intervention.. Badiou mentions the debate among the mathematicians of the early twentieth century in which they catalogue this function as “arbitrary”. However, if we follow Lacan’s recommendation with respect to the signifier one should call it “contingent”, in order not to move into another discourse (that of the Master).

Let us say it again: The loop of the knot is made in a contingent manner, after the gap as failure manifests itself imposed by the count of the structure and its duplication. This is so as much in the ontologic situation as in other situations where a decision is required of at

least one subject taking part and taking responsibility. When the hazardous supplement constituted by the event breaks as the innumerable Real into the presentation and some intervention names it illegally, a different knot is thus made. Let us observe the process and its temporality: the Symbolic count-as-one counts the *singleton* or names the event as one (which is itself an excess since it is an element extracted from the void of the site that is already counted as one), then the state count (imaginary) counts two which are loose and juxtaposed. Here is the ensuing ternary structure: the Real without name which dislocates the count in taking an anonymous element as one and the state count that counts a paradoxical multiplied as two, an illegal representation. There, in a contingent manner, the intervention makes a knot of three at the moment when the greater disagreement and disorder exists according to the structured version. An anonymous and illegal knot is made when the state and legal knot is undone and tries to recompose itself.

According to Lacan, it is the very saying that makes the knot in a pure act of enunciation, in a decision without guarantees in which the subject risks a name for the excess. The state count always tends to normalize itself (such is its function) and resolves the failures. Only the intervention, by tying the multiple terms up in another way, will indicate that the state knot “will have been” exhausted/undone. The temporality is located between the knotting and the un-knotting, and allows it to come out from the conceptual circularity between event and intervention. As Badiou says, the event is recurrent but it does not fix itself, the event will not have taken place without the intervention, since the failure of the count, the imaginary One and the *singleton* of the event, are continuously erased and forgotten in the exercise of the structure. Only if the intervention has managed to tie/knot the multiple terms in an effective way, in a more rigorous order, will the situation (count-as-one) and its state be questioned and will be able to be reconstructed in an unprecedented way.

This is how the name of the event can be thought of as Ultra-one, that is to say, as something that is more than One but is also Two (in the failure/gap of the state count), and even Three, if we take the intervention into account. As it is nothing else than the possible rupture with what is given in situation, the event exposes the radical contingency on which it is based together with its state. The event thus allows us to conceive that there are three heterogeneous elements whereas the count-as-one reduces the multiplicity to this same number (to the One), where at the most a Two is stated as the reduction fails. The name of the event comes to say that there is three-as-one when meeting the Real of the knot. Therefore the subject that intervenes can continue subverting the Symbolic-Imaginary order by taking the count up to three and adding the Real to it. A singular temporality is restored in this way in which the processes of investigation/enquiry, far from being trivial circular reassertions, produce instead continuous reformulations of proper names to designate the future situation to come. This is therefore about finding the “triple nodal points” that organize

the structurings, that is to say, the sites where the overlappings take place between three cords / threads of the Borromean knot, and in discursive terms where the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary converge by alternatively interlacing over and under one another.

It is by understanding the concept in this way that we can think the political space.

Topology of the democratic space

I propose to rethink the democratic space topologically in such a way that its non-proportional, disymmetrical transformations can be followed whilst maintaining, nevertheless, some invariants that orient these movements. Thus, the terms distributed and collect(ive)ed in such space (whichever chosen unit of analysis: demands, groups, classes) will not be restricted to the rigid geometry that counts the parts (State) and establishes the criteria of hierarchic and exclusive ordering in function to positive differential features, that is to say, in function of a predicative attribution (national or territorial identities, identities based on patterns of consumption , etc).

If we think the space of democratic representation topologically, we will find an infinity of non-counted sites, ignored or obliterated by the state's hegemonic count (and the prevalent modalities of consumption) that fix the modes of belonging.

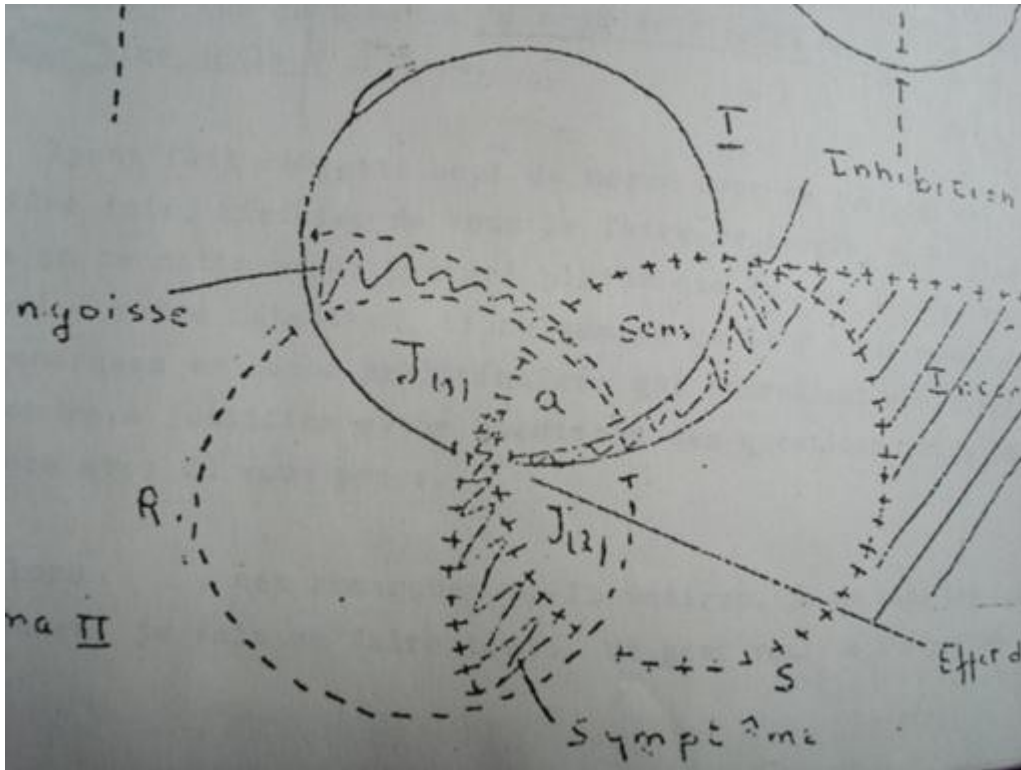
I propose then to think the mode of political articulation as a Borromean knot in such a way that the infinite terms that may be there also find that the possibility of subjectivation is not defined a priori by absolute criteria of exclusion (like classes, ethnic groups, the possibility of consumption, etc.); and its *real* (material) consistency depends on the very way the effective knotting of the set takes place.

In the Borromean knot the parts are not counted from any transcendental outside or abstract regulating norm that needs carrying out exclusions to confirm the functioning of the rule and its systematic consistency (the logic of the exception). The knot articulates itself from the alternate interweaving (overcrossing-undercrossing) of its terms, and it is this very way of "solidary" articulation which secures its consistency whereby if one sets loose the set disperses. This is the basic economy of the knot, it does not depend on an universal abstract (substantial, formal or pragmatic) that regulates the interchanges, positionings and modalities of bonding (transactions and interrelations): Each and every one sustains the whole and it is enough with one not doing so for the all the elements of the whole to disperse. The Borromean knot defines therefore the minimum consistency of any sustainable set.

There is no fixed hierarchy in this ordering. In addition, this real thread presents a unit of analysis: the triskel – the point of crossing between three alternate terms. And the nodality is verified by the cut, which introduces the temporary dimension in this spacial

representation: Cut, un-knotting and new suture. These movements can be carried out from any point-site of the frame/network - there *consists* its *lack* of hierarchy, therefore it generates a maximum responsibility: Each cut suspends all of the identities, for which reason it is necessary to know how to tie/knot again and again [11]. Such knowledge re-commences every time (Freud) because neither does it depend on the domain of meanings / significations nor on the domain of signifiers, only, but rather on the organization of both of these around the void of the real. A temporary logic is formed thus that indicates the fundamental role of invention in the democratic space: New nominations of the parts are necessary, positive nominations that give account of the non-counted (ie.. instead of naming / counting them as the “undocumented people” , the “illegal”, etc.)

We can also think how the local interruption of the terms (in the knot a circle crosses, somewhere, over and/or under one another) does not refer only to the idea of negativity preventing a circular closing (substantial full identity), but to the positive and global articulation of the set, because that same term interrupts another term in its turn in another local point. This is how we can understand how something singular (local) can be as well universal (global) in as much it articulates in a Borromean manner. For that reason, contingent identities (gender, profession, ethnic group, etc.) do not depend exclusively on particular positive features, but on their modality of imbricación with others - on their suspension at some point of their full identity. The exclusions are relative to the levels of analysis and the structural flexibility of the knot, that admits the change of positioning of the terms (always respecting the principle of alternation), allows solving the exclusions by means of rotations and movements, although always finds its *real* in a crossing point. This means that not-everything is possible, but this logic of the not-everything is articulated positively, it is not only a single question of 'prohibitions'.



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Endnotes

[1] For Koselleck it is meaning which constitutes the concept even though he mentions the tension and excess between social history (or reality) and its conceptualización. In addition, it is necessary to consider that other dimensions are present in Koselleck's conceptual analyses. For example, when showing the contingent variations of the meanings that affect concepts, he gives account of the variable signifying structure that underlies these

transformations. In the same way, when indicating that the concept is an index and factor of the political realities it circumscribes (the real in excess), for which the former cannot simply be deduced to the latter.

[2] Briefly: a circle is placed on the backs of three prisoners which cannot therefore see, and they are told that of a total of five circles three are white and two are black. If they guess correctly on their color and if they can argue logically what led them to their conclusions, then they would be released. Obviously, they cannot speak or make signs among them. We (readers) know that a white circle has been placed on each one of the prisoners, whereas for them the temporary question in the logic of the deduction enters into the game: if anyone of them was to see two black circles on his cellmates they would quickly conclude that his was white (for they know that of a total of five circles two are black). Nevertheless when seeing two whites they have two options: either his is black, with which any of the other two would deduce that it cannot be black since the third would have seen it and would have left by them, or it is white and all are in the same situation. Lacan introduces here the value of the suspension to reach the right conclusion, since if all were to leave at the same time having concluded the same thing, nothing would guarantee that the others have opted for concluding in favour of the opposite option, that is to say, that the one who does not see (and each one of them is in that condition in his own turn) is black. For that reason, only the stopping of the movement before leaving insures that in case the others stop we are all white, or if they continue the movement, I am black, which is the right conclusion.

[3] Lefebvre, H. ¿Qué es la dialéctica?, Labyrinth, Buenos Aires, 1964, pp. 56-57.

[4] I have already pointed this out in another article: Farrán, Roque. "Consistencia lógica y formación de conceptos en la filosofía post-estructuralista; la lógica del acontecimiento de Alain Badiou y el tiempo lógico de Jacques Lacan", in *Psikeba. Revista de psicoanálisis y estudios culturales*, n.6
http://www.psykeba.com.ar/articulos/RF_Logica_Acontecimiento_Badiou_y_Tiempo_Logico_en_Lacan.htm

[5] Palti thoroughly examines this problem of conceptual circularity between event and intervention, the central kernel of which resides in the status of the Ultra-one: "The Ultra-One is, in the last instance, only the name given to a problem, an index directed to what Badiou's system presupposes but cannot be thought of from within his framework (in his words, it is an "invention", that is to say, "a paradox turned concept")." Elías Jose Palti, "Verdades y saberes sobre el marxismo. Reacciones de una tradición política ante su crisis." op.cit., p. 190

As Palti says, the ultra-one is not a clear and defined concept, it is rather a paradox (the mixed product of one and the rest), which results, as a consequence, in the definition of the event as a paradoxical multiple, from which not even the very theoretical system that formulates as fundamental in all process of thought can escape

[6] These are the two forms that the Real can take, unnamable as such, in the typology of being Badiou puts forward: the excrescence, that which is re-presented but not presented in the situation, accounts for the excess; whereas the site as singular multiple, is presented but not re-presented by the state of the situation and thus accounts for the the lack (the elements lack in the state count). This dislocation of the state count between something that exceeds and something that lacks, and the impossible connection from their point of view (their logic) gives an idea of the Real (excluded). See, Meditación 8 "El estado o metaestructura y la tipología del ser (normalidad, singularidad, excrescencia)" in *El ser y el acontecimiento*, op.cit., p.111.

[7] Badiou, A. *El ser y el acontecimiento*, op.cit. p.231

[8] The concept of primordial repression is key in psychoanalysis, Lacan works on this notion in its *Escritos 1 y 2*, See pp 670, 688, 796, 846. (Jacques Lacan, *Escritos 1 y 2*, Siglo XXI, Bs. As., 2003)

[9] I carried out a critic of these readings in "Alain Badiou y el platonism de lo multiple"

[10] Badiou writes: "speculative leftism imagines that the intervention is authorized by itself, and breaks with the situation without other support than its own one absolute will. "

Alain Badiou, "El ser y el acontecimiento", op.cit., p.235

[11] Obviously, this form of understanding the constituent logic of social processes by which collective identities are formed bears certain relation to the theory of hegemony by Laclau-Mouffe; the difference resides in the dynamics between continuity and discontinuity. This does not refer only to the rupture with the objective (the tension between equivalence and difference) but on the contrary, it allows reading the knot and allows as well doing without the language of the situation and the predicative logic (In the theory of hegemony it becomes sometimes difficult to escape this subjection of language to the exclusive rhetorical way).