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Only the country of the blind will have a king. On Žižek's non-lucid reading of Saramago's *Essay on Lucidity* [Seeing]

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Introduction

As is well known, Slavoj Žižek does not think philosophy is a dialogue. In fact, in the lecture that goes under the title 'Philosophy is not a dialogue' he states: "[P]hilosophy is not a dialogue. [...] Aristotle didn't understand Plato correctly; Hegel – who might have been pleased by the fact – of course didn't understand Kant. And Heidegger fundamentally didn't understand anyone at all." (Badiou & Žižek 2009: 50) Besides the *boutade-ness* of philosophy's non-dialogue-ness [the fortune of which will more than probably depend on the (philosophical) color of the readers] at least two interesting points can be learned from this peculiar short summary of the history of philosophy.

A first point regards the fact that one should not be surprised nor shocked to [regularly] find or discover mis- or non-understandings in philosophy. They seem to be pretty common and, for us lesser 'gods', it seems that even the greater ones in history are not immune to it (at least the Continental great ones). The second point, probably the less evident one, regards the fact that some mis- or non-understandings, although they remain mis- or non-understandings, are not without meaning. Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger are not the only ones who respectively didn't understand or misunderstood Plato, Kant, or anyone at all. A whole lot of people don't understand Plato, Kant, and definitely anyone. What makes the difference between these 'a lot of people' and Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger (and why Žižek mentions them – although other philosophers could have been mentioned) is that their mis- or non-understanding has led them to create pretty darn dense and meaningful new philosophical theories.¹

One could go so far as to claim that the creation of these new dense and meaningful theories is because of, is caused by, these mis- or non-understandings. Only through mis- or non-understandings of philosophy, one could claim, can new 'true philosophy' be written. That would, however, bring us, on the one hand, too close to Heidegger's concept of the 'unthought', *das Ungedachte*, and, on the other hand, lead us away from the main scope of this writing: namely investigating an interesting mis- or non-understanding by the hand of Slavoj Žižek himself.

In fact, if our understanding of Žižek's lines regarding the non-dialogical nature of philosophy (the above mentioned two points) is correct (to use a hypothetical question), then it can be said that there is something interesting in Žižek's referring to José Saramago's novel *Seeing*. In fact, Žižek has, in the past years, referred to Saramago's novel three times. He has done this in two different books, respectively, in *Violence: Six Sideway Reflections* and in *In Defense of Lost Causes*. However, Žižek's understanding of the story told in *Seeing* is simply and plainly wrong – Žižek offers one reading of *Seeing* in *Violence* and two different ones in *In Defense of Lost Causes*. The overthrowing of the government by means of *valid blank ballots*, as Saramago's story goes, is never truly acknowledged for what it is by Žižek.

What makes the 'wrong-ness' of Žižek's understandings of the story told by Saramago in *Seeing* so interesting is that, besides it being so obvious, it, above all, tells us a lot about Žižek's 'new/true philosophy' [and about its limits]. In fact, Žižek's mis- or non-understanding of *Seeing* is not a mere blind spot but an acute case of what G. K. Chesterton's uniquely precise and precious character Father Brown, with whom Žižek is very familiar, calls in *The Duel of Dr Hirsch* being too "accurately inaccurate". (Chesterton 1986: 201) It is very difficult, as Father Brown rather convincingly argues, to be utterly wrong all the time or about everything.

Sometimes it is, in fact, pretty difficult to be so wrong without having known the 'facts'. And, in fact, this is what is so 'suspicious' in Žižek's understandings of *Seeing*. It is pretty darn difficult to not center a single time the correct 'reading' of Saramago's novel after having read it and especially when giving three different readings. Žižek's readings are too wrong for him not have known the correct reading. He could not have gotten it so wrong without knowing about the right version. He is, in the end and, as Father Brown would have said, too accurately inaccurate.

In what follows we will hold still with this too accurate mis- or non-understanding of Žižek with reference to José Saramago's novel *Seeing*. We will start by giving a short summary of *Seeing* after which we will give Žižek's three different interpretations. Afterwards we will offer an accurate understanding of the blank ballot vote that is at stake in *Seeing* and this will be followed by our reasoning of why Žižek cannot 'accept' this tale for what it is. We will conclude with an attempt to defend the blank ballot vote and why², if there ever will be a next time for Žižek to refer to Saramago's novel, he could be accurate without being inaccurate too. Because, as we will attempt to demonstrate, what is at stake is not just the mis- or non-understanding of Saramago's *Seeing*, but the essential potentiality of the (political) power of resisting by means of the blank ballot without the need of an immediate or direct revolution as seems to be wished for by Žižek.³

Saramago's view on lucidity

Before we begin to discuss Žižek's different readings of *Seeing*, let us hold still for a while with Saramago's novel *Seeing*. It should, first of all, be noted that *Seeing* [literarily translated from the Portuguese as *Essay on Lucidity*] is the sequel to *Blindness* [literarily translated as *Essay on Blindness*] from almost a decade earlier.⁴ That these novels (essays according to Saramago!) are respectively on being blind and being lucid (seeing) is not of little importance. In fact, *Blindness* actually treats the fictitious case of a temporary mass blindness in the unknown capital of an unnamed nation (and the attempts, just to tell the plot of this novel in two words, of the ruling political class to deal with what seems to be an irredeemable epidemic of blindness), and *Seeing*, although not literarily treating the issue of vision (although it enters the tale, but only as a kind of *ersatz* for those in command), does treat, at least from the point of Saramago's political views, lucidity. In fact, as most readers will have discovered, what is at stake for Saramago in both novels, that is, what these novels are all about, is politics; they are about the use and abuse of power in and of politics. *Blindness*, in the context of the political, treats the blind violence, the cruelty, the atrocities that are (can be) committed (legally) during an epoch of

utter excess of law (in order to prevent the fictitious blindness from spreading to the whole population – attempts that are obviously destined to fail – the government turns to a legalization of everything which, as contemporary history has taught us harshly enough, turns the society into one big concentration camp⁵), while *Seeing* (as we will describe in a short while) regards the complete lack of violence in a political-less and rule-less (law-less) epoch. One could say that what is at stake here is Walter Benjamin's difference between the state of exception and the real state of exception, as expressed in his eighth thesis on the philosophy of history. (Cf. Benjamin 2003: 392) However, without entering in the discussion on the state(s) of exception, a discussion that would lead us too far away from our argument, let us give a brief description of Saramago's novel.

On Election Day, as the story goes, a tremendous storm hits the capital of an unnamed, but democratic, country. Almost not a single voter has been seen casting a vote in the first hours of the day. However, with the storm fading, also the prospect of abstention of almost apocalyptic proportions starts to crumble. In fact, at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon, people start to turn up en masse at the voting booths. Relief is so high that even the prospect of an all-nighter for the officials at the polling stations is regarded as part of the democratic celebration as seen during the second half of the day. The outcome of the election is, however, somewhat surprising: party votes reached 25 per cent, blank votes: more than 70%.

After having overcome the initial shock, the government turns to the constitution, and new elections are pronounced for the following Sunday allowing the citizens of the capital to reclaim their civic duty with the dignity it had temporarily lost. Under a promising clear sky, voting takes place in a much more regular way. When the results are finally known, the verdict is, however, more surprising than the week before; there are no abstentions and no spoiled votes, the regular parties divide only 17% this time over, while the blank votes have reached 83%. The prime minister, who has read the final results of the elections on TV, after having accused the blank voters of having struck "a brutal blow against the democratic normality" (Saramago 2007: 27) decides that the government must leave as a result the capital and a state of emergency is declared.

What follows, and we will conclude the résumé of *Seeing* with these final brief descriptions as we do not want to give the whole story away, is the actualization of a chain of sinister plots fabricated by the dethroned politicians attempting to make the surrounded former capital surrender. Whilst the former president had predicted looting, rape, murder, terror, and the uprising of some kind of totalitarian regime – none of which actually takes place – the capital suffers government-imposed strikes, bombings, terror-attacks, (kgb/stasi type) espionage and

finally murder (some sacrificial lambs had to be slaughtered). It is up to those interested to read how the story will further deploy.

Žižek's three versions

As we already mentioned, Slavoj Žižek refers to Saramago's novel *Seeing* in two of his books. A first reference is found in *Violence: Six Sideway Reflections* (once) and then we find Saramago's novel again (twice this time) in *In Defense of Lost Causes*. Žižek's reference to *Seeing* in *Violence* is a somewhat longer reflection on it while both references to it in *In Defense of Lost Causes* are rather short and concise [which does not mean that they are less important or revealing]. We will first briefly describe Žižek's two shorter references to *Seeing* from *In Defense* after which we will turn to the one offered in *Violence*. For the moment we will abstain from giving extensive comments.

The first reference to *Seeing* consists of an imagined (whished for) transfer of the political acts of the characters in *Seeing* into the domain of finance. "[...]: people refusing," Žižek writes, "to participate in the financial virtual game. Perhaps, such a refusal would be today the ultimate political act." (Žižek 2009b: 303) As can be deduced from this passage, Žižek claims that *Seeing* is a story about a refusal – it is a refusal to participate in the virtual game of finance. In fact, Žižek claims here that *Seeing* is a story "in which a people all of a sudden refuses to participate in voting" (Žižek 2009b: 303) and what he thus 'desires', with this whished for transfer, is that a similar refusal is thrown on the financial game.

The second time Žižek refers to *Seeing* in *In Defense*, and although similar to the one proposed some hundred pages before, contains a new element. In fact, Žižek adds a particular twist to the plot. "Recall the plot of Saramago's *Seeing*," Žižek starts, "in which voters massively refuse to vote and cast invalid ballots." (Žižek 2009b: 410) The twist of the invalid ballots is not the only thing that is noteworthy in this second reference. Žižek, in fact, continues: "[S]uch an act is subtraction at its purest: a mere gesture of withdrawing from participation in a legitimizing ritual makes state power appear as if suspended in the air above the precipice". (Žižek 2009b: 410) *Seeing* has thus, in this second interpretation, become a question about legitimating for Žižek.

In *Violence*, and now we thus turn to the third reference, Žižek starts by offering his readers a rather long description of the intriguing plot of *Seeing*. Only after this description [a description, by the way, that includes the fact that people went voting *en masse* (cf. Žižek 2009a: 181)] Žižek turns to his own interpretation and concludes: "What happens is that by

abstaining from voting, people effectively dissolve the government – [...]. Why is the government thrown into such a panic by the voters' abstention?" (Žižek 2009a: 182)

As can be seen, we have three different stories, or better, three different interpretations of the same story. True, they are very similar, but their similarity is also related to their being all three wrong. We have a refusal to vote (a refusal to participate in voting), a massive refusal to vote by casting invalid votes (which is obviously different than simply refusing to participate in voting), and, finally, in *Violence* Žižek claims that *Seeing* is about abstaining from voting – it should be noted that abstaining from voting is, although similar, not the same as refusing to vote. What is shared, if we were to give a first but minor comment, is that in all three these interpretations that what is at stake for Žižek in *Seeing* is the negativity. In all three of his interpretations the voters in Saramago's unnamed capital express a purely negative act – either by refusing to, or abstaining from, voting, or simply by casting invalid ballots. The question that has to be asked now if this is actually the case is, is *Seeing* truly about a negativity as Žižek wants to convince us over and over again?

Blank Ballots

As our brief resume of *Seeing* and the just mentioned three different versions of Žižek's interpretation will have shown, there is a clear incongruence between Žižek's interpretations and Saramago's novel. Let it be immediately clear, however, our 'problem' with Žižek's interpretations of *Seeing* does not relate to Žižek's conclusions. We do not have an issue with the fact that for Žižek refusing to participate in voting could be the ultimate political act today (Cf. Žižek 2009b: 303), nor that a massive refusal to participate in voting would be a subtraction, leaving state power appear as if dangling above the void (cf. Žižek 2009b: 410), and, finally, our point is not to question the fact that for Žižek abstaining from voting could dissolve governments (cf. Žižek 2009a: 182). One could agree or disagree, but that is not the issue at hand. The fact (our issue/problem) is that these interpretations, correct/wrong/sustainable whatever they are, are not about the plot of *Seeing*. *Seeing* is about something different, and something that Žižek cannot (does not want to) accept.

In fact, our point/problem is that, first of all, *Seeing* is not about refusing to participate in voting, nor is it about casting invalid ballots, and, finally, neither is it about abstaining from voting. Saramago's novel is actually about the exact opposite. And, secondly, Žižek's continuous misinterpreting of *Seeing* is an acute case of, what we have already mentioned in precedence, what Chesterton's interesting character Father Brown would call 'accurate

inaccurateness'. Žižek is, as we will attempt to demonstrate, perfectly 'aware' of his misunderstanding but he is also 'aware' of [t]his necessity to mis-understand Saramago's novel. But let us start with the first point.

As we have already shown when briefly describing Saramago's novel, *Seeing* is, first of all, not about refusing to participate but about refusing to refuse to participate. It is, in fact, about a refusal to abstain from voting. True, at first, mention was made in the novel about the fear of massive abstention, but the voters, wittily described (by a politician character in the novel) as "the supreme defenders of democracy, and without whom tyranny, any of the many tyrannies that exist in the world, would long ago have overwhelmed the nation that bore us" (Saramago 2007: 6-7), did not disprove this glorious definition. In fact, as Saramago writes, after the storm had withered, people turned up at the polling booths en masse, exactly avoiding "the specter of an abstention on a scale unparalleled in the history of our democracy". (Saramago 2007: 15) At the second round of the elections, as we already emphasized in precedence, there is even not a single vote of abstention.

However, it is not just because people actually went voting in the story that *Seeing* is not about abstaining from voting. Saramago, in fact, brilliantly observes how abstaining from voting is actually desired by the political class. It would, as Saramago cleverly points out, allow the vote to be delegitimized!

The question that most worries them all [the political players] is what the abstention rate will be this time [during the second round of voting], [...]. A reasonable high abstention rate," as Saramago writes, "or even above the maximum recorded in the previous elections, as long as it wasn't too high, would signify a return to normality, to the known routine [that is the routine before the blank votes did appear] of those voters who had never seen the point of voting and are noticeable by virtue of their persistent absence, or those who preferred to make the most of the good weather and go and spend the day at the beach or in the country with their family, or those who [...] stayed home.⁶ (Saramago 2007: 24-25)

Abstention allows, as Saramago clearly understood, for the realization of the desired political status quo.

For as much as *Seeing* is thus not about abstaining from voting, it is equally not about casting an 'un-valid' vote. What Saramago is describing in his novel is a peculiar type of voting that, in Spain, is, in fact, exactly called the blank ballot – Saramago lived in Spain for such a long time that it seems rather improbable that he was not aware of this particular type of voting. As Christine Jacobson writes: "France, Spain, Colombia, and Greece have a tradition of 'blank voting,' where one submits a ballot without having chosen a candidate. In Spain, blank votes are

formally counted and accepted as votes separate from those considered 'spoiled.'" (Jacobson 2012: unpaginated) In fact, as we already noted above, Saramago does not align the blank ballots with the spoiled ballots or with the number of actual abstentions – they are valid but blank ballots. (Cf. Saramago 2007: 16)

So what is at stake in *Seeing* is the actual act of casting a valid non-vote. Similar types of valid 'non-votes', as one could call them, are the Russian vote 'against all' (cf. McAllister&White 2008: 67-87), at least until Putin abolished them (this probably says already something about the possible 'subversive' nature of this type of voting). This type of voting, however, is still present in some of the former USSR states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgystan, for example). Also the so-called 'NOTA-vote', the 'None Of The Above vote', as present in the American states of Nevada and Massachusetts can be considered as similar to the blank ballot vote Saramago is talking about, just like the possibility to officially refuse-to-vote as it exists in Italy – this Italian vote of refusal is, as the blank ballot or the 'against all' vote, also officially counted as a 'regular' vote⁷.

Accurate inaccurateness

We have now finished the first part of our paper, in which we have shown how Slavoj Žižek has misread the main issue at hand in José Saramago's novel *Seeing*. It is now time to turn to the second part of our contention with Žižek's (mis-)interpretation of Saramago's *Seeing*, namely that he is 'aware' of his mis-reading of Saramago's novel. We are obviously conscious of the fact that this is the most tricky and controversial (to use o heavily loaded word in a light fashion) part of our paper. We will have to be very careful not to belong to the same category of those so [justly] despised readers-readings of Žižek that

[F]irst, [...] impute to me [Žižek] a ridiculously caricaturized position, then, when they are forced to admit that many passages in my work directly contradict the described position, they do not read this discrepancy as what, *prima facie*, it is, a sign of the inadequacy of *their* reading, but as *my own* inconsistency. (Žižek 2007: 201)

A first reason why we believe Žižek is (should be) aware of his mis-reading regards the simple fact that the novel itself is pretty darn clear about the nature of the votes expressed. Nowhere are they called invalid ballots (as we already reported, the exact contrary is, in fact, the case), and the concept of abstention, of abstaining from voting, is only used in the very beginning, as a fear that does not fulfill itself.

This reason obviously does not suffice. Žižek could simply have read the book too quickly, or he could also not have read it at all. Or maybe he just simply read a résumé of the story or some review that had made this mistake, this mis-reading, causing him to repeat the mis-reading (as seems to be the case with Saul Newman's mis-reading of Saramago's *Seeing* as we already mentioned in note 2). Although this could be what happened, we do not believe it to be the case – and even if it were the case, our point would, however, remain valid. There is, in fact, something in *Seeing* that Žižek in no way could accept (at least, as far as we are aware, he hasn't done so in his writings). What Saramago's *Seeing* tells is, in fact, something that Žižek truly dislikes and what he could never approve of.

Žižek, in fact, cannot not mis-read or mis-interpret *Seeing* because it reminds him too much of what Robespierre would have called “a revolution without a revolution” and this is not what Žižek wants. Žižek wants a true revolution, he wants to go “from defeat to defeat”, as Mao's slogan went, or, to use another motto mentioned by Žižek, he wants to follow Samuel Beckett and “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” (One can agree or disagree with Žižek, but agreeing or disagreeing is not an issue here.) Saramago's novel, on the contrary is telling the tale, not of a failure or a defeat, but of a victory, and a victory that comes pretty near to the aberration mentioned by Kautsky, namely “the only acceptable revolution would be one that took place after a referendum in which at least 51 percent of voters approved it” (Žižek 2009b: 310) which, for Žižek, is not even a little bit near a revolution.⁸

But there is even more at hand, or better, the reason why Žižek cannot not mis-read Saramago is much more profound, and relates directly to the concept of the time of and before the/a revolution. The focal point of why Žižek, we believe, cannot not mis-interpret *Seeing* is to be found in his discussion on Rosa Luxemburg's critique of reformism. (Cf. Žižek 2009b: 361) The time for a revolution is, as Žižek agrees with Luxemburg, always premature. There is never a ‘right moment’ for a revolution. But where Luxemburg seems to allow the possibility of, albeit premature, tentative creations that will possibly, through their failure, lead to the ‘right moment’, for Žižek, who agrees with Lenin here, there is only some sort of Derridian condition of *impossibility* that makes for a revolution to become possible. Whereas for Luxemburg there seem to be three moments – the useless waiting, the premature attempts and the ‘correct’ moment – for Žižek there seem to be just two and this exactly because of his referring to Derrida's reasoning [to his own particular understanding of Derrida's condition of impossibility]. The tentative premature creative attempts of Luxemburg seem to have become also the ‘correct’ moment of the revolution – this is why Beckett's and Mao's mottos make so much sense to Žižek, the pedagogy of the revolution is, as he admits, to fail.

To make our point clear with a religiously colored example, what seems to suffice for Žižek is John the Baptist and his death. No Jesus is desired nor needed for Žižek. What is needed is another Baptist⁹ and his head has to be delivered again and again on a plate to Herodias as a gift by Herod (her husband and cousin). Only this time his hair has to be combed, and the next time, even better, one eye has to be closed as if he was winking, failing again and again but much better every time.

Considering all this, it is not hard to understand why there is in Žižek's reasoning no possibility for a creative non-necessarily-failing pre-revolutionary moment that is not identical to any form of revolution whatsoever. That is why *Seeing*, a novel that pleased and inspired Žižek in order for him to cite it three times, had to be freely re-interpreted, or as we said before: necessarily mis-read, mis-interpreted.

Conclusion

When asked why he was against the vote against all Igor' Bunin, the director of a Moscow think tank (his view was obviously shared by OSCE members), responded that if people were dissatisfied with candidates they could "express their dissatisfaction [...] the same way that Europeans and Americans did – by staying home, [...]". (McAllister & White 2008: 74) There are two reasons why this remark (and it being shared by the OSCE) is extremely alarming.¹⁰ The first reason regards the fact to which we already alluded and argued for in the company of Saramago, namely that politicians 'like' abstention. Political players do not fear voters who abstain from voting because it can still be 'used' in their own favor. The second reason Bunin's comment is very worrisome regards its symptomatic-ness. Although Bunin is not a politician (OSCE is, however, a political player), the growing presence of political actors telling people what to do is rather disquieting. This is, as Giorgio Agamben claims, the obscure playing field of the power that is ironically defined as 'democratic'. (cf. Agamben 2011: 44) Also Alain Badiou has in one of his latest books, on the recent uprisings in the Arabian world, rang the alarm bell on this aspect of contemporary 'democratic' politics. He, in fact, states that "[I]n general, and especially in recent decades, the state has arrogated to itself the right to say what is possible in the political order and what is not". (Badiou 2012: 94)

As can/should have been understood/guessed, what is at stake here is indeed the so-called 'representative democracy', of which, as is very clear from Bunin's recommendation, the majority of political players are very 'afraid' and refuse to take leave from. But, what has to be

understood (and what is unfortunately rarely actually done) is, as Giorgio Agamben recently wrote, that:

when the legitimizing principle of the sovereignty of the people has been reduced to the electoral moment and it has been resolved in juridical and prefixed procedural rules [as has happened in modern democracies], then legitimacy tends to disappear in legality and the political machine gets paralyzed.” (Agamben 2013: 8, my translation)

As such, Alain Badiou is absolutely correct when he observes that “elections are a con”. (Badiou 2012: 98) What is the ‘enemy’ today is not “Empire or Capital. It is called Democracy” (Badiou 2005: note 24, xxviii-xxix) – at least, this type of election and democracy are a con.

However, Saramago’s blank ballot vote – the valid non-votes, or, as Derek S. Hutcheson calls them, the positive negative votes¹¹ (cf. Hutcheson 2004: 98) – actually offers an effective way of countering the possible abuse that is connected with abstention and suggests a very forceful and potent way to contrast and rebel against this growing dangerous invasiveness of contemporary representative con-like, or even sham, democratic politics. True, it is not an immediate call for revolution – as Žižek would prefer – but it does, we believe, something far more powerful – something Žižek has referred to in the past, but seemed to have forgotten (?) on this occasion. In fact, the blank ballot is the purest form of ‘fulfillment’ of democracy. It is the ‘fulfillment’ of democracy in the same sense as Christ’s message was the fulfillment of the Jewish law.¹² So maybe, just maybe, it might be interesting for Žižek to take this powerful aspect of the blank ballot in consideration the next time he refers to *Seeing* or voting – if he were to do so.

¹ It should, in fact, not be forgotten that Žižek is trying to demonstrate that philosophy is not a dialogue. It is not essential to understand (dialogically) other philosophers in order to be able to write ‘true philosophy’ and/or be a ‘true philosopher’. (Cf. Badiou & Žižek 2009: 49)

² We deem it necessary to stress that this text is not intended as an attack on, but as a friendly attempt to convince Žižek of the political potentiality of the blank ballot. We are, obviously, aware of the fact that hoping for some form of conviction when in discussion with somebody who clearly and bluntly proclaims the non-dialogue-ness of philosophy is probably asking for too much. However, dialogue is not the only possible form of communication possible or remaining in philosophy.

³ Saul Newman, although similarly mis-reading Saramago’s novel *Seeing* (but this was, more than probably, actually caused by Žižek’s mis-reading – Newman, in fact, refers to Žižek’s [mis-]reading of *Seeing* in *Violence*), seems to hint at the non-necessarily-revolutionary dimension of blank votes when he writes that “[I]n this sense, the complete withdrawal from state democratic procedures – the mass refusal to vote for instance – might be *the ultimate democratic act.*” (Newman 2010: 180-181, emphasis added) And Newman interestingly continues by referring to La Boétie. In fact, La Boétie’s treatise *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, where he wisely claims

that “[Y]et this lone tyrant [democratic/democracy – we could add] does not have to be fought, there is no need to defeat him: he is defeated by himself if the country does not accept its servitude” (La Boétie 2012: 287), can easily be seen as a theoretical anticipation of Saramago’s fictional realization which *Seeing* is.

⁴ *Blindness* (*Ensaio sobre a cegueira – Essay on Blindness*) was first published in 1995 and *Seeing* (*Ensaio sobre a lucidez – Essay on Lucidity*) was published in 2004.

⁵ There is, as those who have a ‘fine nose’ will have discovered already, some similarity between *Blindness* and the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s claim that the political paradigm of our contemporary world is the concentration camp (cf. Agamben 1998: 181) – a statement Agamben repeated, for example, in his *Means without End* claiming that the camp is the paradigm of the new political space, the new *nomos* of the planet. (Cf. Agamben 2000: 41-45) It has to be added that there is a surprising similarity between the work of Saramago and most of what Agamben has been writing about, in political terms, during the past decade. Some of the elements of this similarity we will turn to and clarify in the conclusion. For a more complete view on this similarity, however, see my *forthcoming book chapter*.

⁶ A simple example demonstrates, we believe, how abstention is largely – almost generally – abused by the varied political players. In the latest elections (the first round) for mayor in Rome (26-27 May, 2013), 48% of voters abstained from voting – we expressly intend not to address the national elections as the presence of Berlusconi could, and probably would [should], put a certain bias on the reader. As abstaining is not counted, the candidates could claim that they had received respectively 40% or 30% of the votes, while not telling a lie. They did receive 40% or 30% of the votes, but that would be 40% or 30% of 52% of all those that had the right (or obligation were it not Italy) to vote and actually did – thus, not 40% but rather 20%, and not 30% but 15%. The candidate who won (almost by a clear and neat majority in the first round) is thus completely ignored (or, as in this and other cases, cruelly added to the second best) because he stayed home. This is just one example of a local election held in Italy, but a manifold of similar cases-examples could, we believe, be recounted from all over the world.

⁷ A whole interesting ceremony (a detailed procedure that has to be followed point by point) is related to the refusal to vote in Italy (one should officially declare out loud that one refuses to touch the ballot – and one should in fact not touch it – because no candidate or party is of your choice; one can also make or leave a statement that should be written on the ballot by the officials to underline one’s reasons why one refuses to officially express one’s vote by not voting) that has resulted in the fact that, one, it has hardly ever been used in Italy’s political history, and, two, it seems to be some sort of reminder, of echo or remnant, of the (forgotten) sacred nature of the vote.

⁸ The Badiou-an concept of *contraction* or the saying-conviction, attributed to Margaret Mead, that even a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens could change the world, does, however, prove that the Kautsky-ian aberration is definitely not the only possible way to understand *Seeing*’s plot (in fact, the mere fact that it is not the whole country but only one city – albeit the nation’s capital – that massively expressed the blank ballot vote, is already telling enough).

⁹ Something which would only make sense if Žižek were some heir of that part of the Knight Templars who were supposed to adore the *baphomet*.

¹⁰ Obviously Bunin’s reasoning, supported as it is by OSCE, is only one example of many that could be mentioned. Also the Roman Catholic Church – at least, its Italian political representation as the Italian Bishop Conference obviously is – regressed to this form of reasoning (although, it has to be said, it was a truly ‘reasoned’ reasoning – one, again, could agree or disagree, but that is not an issue here) when, some years ago (2005), it invited the Italian Catholics to go to the seaside instead of going to vote on the referendum on IVF.

¹¹ This 'positive negative-ness' can be related to the way Pierre Rosanvallon describes Albert Camus' rebel's saying no: "the rebel is 'a man who says no,' but a 'no' of intervention rather than renunciation, a 'no' that marks an about-face, *an affirmation of refusal*." (Rosanvallon 2008: 160, emphasis added)

¹² We are referring here to Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute – or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* Žižek, in fact, acknowledges here that when Jesus said that he had come "merely to fulfill the [Jewish] Law", he, according to Žižek, actually "bears witness to how his act effectively cancels [can cancel, we would correct] the law". (Žižek 2001: 148)

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