

Radical: Some Thoughts

“Radical” is an idea that is obviously crucial for the entire conference and is also used in the title as formulated by the organiser. As it seems to be symptomatic of our time, I will try to express a few thoughts about it myself. What a long time ago Pierre Francastel wrote about space in his *Études de sociologie de l’art* (Studies on the sociology of art) also holds true for words. Words are born and they die like human societies. Moreover they not only emerge in and disappear from the world, but their meaning and context of emergence also changes.

I always become worried when a word becomes too popular. Thirty years ago, when I studied architecture, the expression “genius loci” was popular. It is interesting that today almost nobody uses this expression, but back then one could not find not a single article about architecture that didn’t include it. Slowly the expression disappeared and today it is rare to find it in texts. Somehow this is fitting because we have to reshape or reconsider the meaning and the usage of the expression. Whenever a word becomes so popular, it is always in danger of becoming empty, void of any true content or is then misunderstood.

Some time ago in Berlin, I noticed bicycles that are currently very popular among young people. Last but not least, it was my son, an enthusiastic cyclist, who drew my attention to them. These bicycles consist of only the most necessary components enabling them to be ridden and nothing else. They do not have any [hand-operated?] brakes or gears. We could say that they are on some radical edge of NON-equipment that facilitates a ride but not safety. This is also the reason why in both Berlin and in Germany in general these bicycles are prohibited, but this does not prevent vendors from selling them. It is interesting that these bicycles cannot be found in bicycle shops but in shops with prestigious design items. The opposite of bicycles without any additional equipment is bicycles with above average equipment, with all manner of shock absorbers, twenty-seven gears, special brakes, meters etc. We could say that this is a radical saying- YES to all accessories. What am I trying to say? What are my doubts? In short, what is my problem? Is the word “radical” a vehicle of meaning that is operative in the striving for the deconstruction of social injustice and inequality? Of course I believe there are situations where the need for the radical is more than welcome, but I wish to draw attention to another aspect of the radical. I would like to know where and how the radical is manifested. If I return to bicycles, I am less interested in the radical stands of the two extremes than in that proper, perfectly operable bicycle with neither too many nor too few accessories, which ensures a safe ride – a bicycle that works correctly under normal circumstances. Here I do not intend to dwell on whether correctness is a point or a territory and whether the point of correctness still needs to be re-articulated.

The radical is therefore not just a strategy of the ignored in the struggle against social injustice, but can only be understood the other way around. The proposal that, due to the shortage of time I will only point to, is as follows: The forms of injustice or regimes of oppression are radical and struggle takes place in the territory of the defence of justice, which does not make it any easier, largely due to the fact that if the radical is understood as a place and not as a territory, this place is more readily legally formalised. Allow me to illustrate this with another example, which is also used by Badiou. The uprising of slaves against the Roman state under the leadership of Spartacus is a simple fact which is radical in the context of time and space, and which states: “We, the slaves, want to return home.” During the realisation of the uprising, this statement turns into: “We are going home”, which is an action that can be easily rejected and shifted into the sphere of the non-radical, of some completely legitimate and correct/just demand. My point is that the logic of the radical can be reversed, so that the society that has invented slavery is the radical actor, whereas the demand for freedom is the

true and correct demand that is difficult to move to the point of the radical. In other words, the demands and formalisations of the demands of those in power are radical and as such they are excessive. What is important to us is justice/regularity that does not belong to the field of the radical. On the contrary, many of these rights were already secured and lost in the past, or in the words of Alberto Toscano: "The political subject moves from success to failure and further to another success and another failure via connected, although discontinued conjunctures, every one of which is relative in relationship to the relevant sequence, so that no horizon of the final victory is permitted to the subject. By enacting some kind of Beckett-like communism, if I may use this expression, Badiou declares: 'Every victory is a beginning of a new defeat.' Struggles can be final, but only in relationship with sequences, so that this finality is an inner way of historisation or temporalisation that is connected with a certain sequence." A problem emerges out of the a near meeting of two completely mutually exclusive worlds: a society that practices slavery and those who want to return home. But the problem arises only if the desire to fulfil the wish attempts to stay within the framework of its beginnings. Time is of outmost importance here.

But given its fluidity and in its loss of the present, is time not also its own future? If the present is constantly sliding into the past, the place of the present is taken over by the nearest future. This transformation of time seems very important. What do I wish to say? That we create [the?] future by acting in the present – in the present that is disappearing and is continuously replaced by the nearest future. As if in the present we already live for the future. Naturally, something has to be done with this opportunity. In short and without much explanation, Agamben defines this time of opportunity as operational time. This is not so much a segment of chronological time, but a time in which we understand and do something. We influence the time: in the case of art, through a work of art that has an impact on its time, as well as a certain potential for the future. The power of a work depends on the duration of this effect. It is kronos that we have adopted, inscribed ourselves in it and expanded with our gesture. It is an active role of a thinker/maker who continuously re-articulates and operationalises historical events, makes them part of the present and thereby creates the future. Naturally, this does not entail the forecasting of the future – far from it – but attention to what is symptomatic today and apparently manifests itself as a problem, the "solution" of which could generate the future. I am aware of the pathos or ridiculousness of the passion behind the wish to create future, but this bothers me much less than cynicism and the contemporary posture of inability or the acceptance of the world and its order as they are.

If I sum up, it is a reaction "in accordance with" the time; athletes and others would say timing. Maybe we could use the notion of temporalisation, although it is a more complex expression, but here I use it as an action of the entering of time. This is what Agamben defines as operational time. But in addition to the content of this entry, the point of entry is very important: the place in the chronology of time, although at the expense of unconvincing formalisation. What do I mean by unconvincing formalisation? In the face of excessive repetitions I am in favour of novelties. If I quote Badiou, "Every correctness (justesse) and justice is as a rule a novelty, whereas everything that repeats itself is, by itself, unjust and incorrect." After all, the former is always a novelty, the first formalisation, and as such it is redesigned unlike all its repetitions. In the case that a new sequence is created with its emergence, this new sequence establishes a demand for recognition, reconsideration and consequently reformalisation. The struggle won in the previous sequence is now lost and has to be won again. A problem is also simultaneously a new opportunity.

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