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Mutmaßung, or: For a Return to The Courage to Use One's Own Understanding

“We are always in peril, always in a bad plight, just on the edge of destruction and only saved by invention and courage.”

(Emerson 1950, p. 508)

Introduction: The Concept of Courage

I will present in the following three distinct reflections that are all linked to a fundamentally Kantian diagnosis of a problem, notably that there is a lack of courage in the present world. The first part of the present article addresses (versions of) this historical diagnosis. The second part addresses the ideological and critical consequence of the historical diagnosis, and the third part presents a systematic rethinking of what is at stake with both the historical and the ideological components. The first part will reconstruct a diagnosis of the contemporary historical moment of decay. This is a diagnosis that claims we are living in the end times because there is a lack, or a suspension, of courage. This will not allow us to say what precisely courage is. Nevertheless, it will allow us to point out that, whatever it might be, we need it. The second part will allow us to say what courage cannot and should not be. And this will necessitate an elaboration of

the link between the concept of freedom and that of courage. Finally, the systematic and conceptual part will describe what kind of courage might confirm Kantian requirements.

Solzhenitsyn: Universal Cowardice

On 8 June 1978, Alexander Solzhenitsyn delivered a lecture – eight years after he won the Nobel prize¹ – at the invitation of Harvard University. It was broadcast throughout the USA and led to quite divided reactions. For some, it demonstrated that Solzhenitsyn was nothing short of a “fanatic,” an “orthodox mystic,” a “herald of the Cold War,” a “reactionary,” a ferociously doctrinal thinker and a “nostalgic of the Tsar”; for others it proved that he was “our Isaiah,” who “resuscitated the tradition of apocalyptic prophetism” and was a “direct heir to the homiletic tradition of New England” (cited in Duran 2022, p. 10f.). The lecture that produced such antagonistic reception was entitled “The Decline of Courage” / “A World Split Apart.” Speaking about courage and its decline seems to heat things up. Maybe this is especially the case when it comes from someone who was once – if rightly so or not – called “the most courageous writer in the whole history of Russia” for having “fought alone against the Soviet Empire” and for having won against it in the end (Yerofeyev 2008). For he had, at this time, converted from being a member of the Russian Orthodox Church to being a fighting atheist with Marxist-Leninist leanings, had been arrested and sent to the Moscow Gulag for criticizing Stalin, been stripped of his citizenship, whereupon he ended up in the US and ultimately reconverted to the Orthodox Church (he even met Putin).² Solzhenitsyn’s biography is up to this point – 1978 – riddled with punishments for acts that could be seen as being the embodiment of what Michel Foucault later described as those that display the courage of truth (Foucault 2011). It was certainly

¹ “Gulag Archipelago” appeared in 1973.

² At the heart of his position is “the spirituality of Russia, whose suffering is worth redeeming for all of humanity” since Russia has been chosen “for the painful edification of the century” (cf. Badiou 2018, p. 45).

this apparent courage to confront the Stalinist regime that made Solzhenitsyn, in Cold War times, an ideal ideological fit for delivering the commencement address at Harvard University – that is, at a university whose motto is “Veritas.”

Solzhenitsyn saw the truth of his contemporary world embodied in an increasing disappearance of worldly consistency that manifests itself in the violent assertion of Western supremacy over the rest of the planet. The West represents itself, in the present, as the future of the world as such. However, it is thereby blinding itself to the truth of a global situation that affects the East as well as the West. The Soviet Union pretended to bring about historical justice but did not have an impartial juridical system – and was hence structurally unjust –, whereas the West has no other idea of justice than that of having an impartial juridical system, by means of which it reinforces all the structural injustice that exists on a social, political and economic level. The West and the East are all the same. Yet, the West is also affected by another detrimental development. More specifically, Solzhenitsyn considers that “the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the West in our days” is “the decline in courage” (Solzhenitsyn 1978). Even more so, “the Western world has lost its civil courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, each government, each political party, and, of course, in the United Nations” (ibid.). The West in general, with its particularities, is the site of the disappearance of courage and it is structurally determined by this disappearance.

It “is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of loss of courage by the entire society” (ibid.). The entire West has turned into a cowardly economic and socio-political organization, especially because its policies only follow someone else’s directive (that of the economy). This is why “political and intellectual bureaucrats show depression, passivity, and perplexity in their actions and in their statements, and even more so in theoretical reflections” (ibid.), for depression, passivity, and perplexity are what one gets when their courage is lacking. The decline of courage thus affects not only the modality of political action but also the domain of thought. This is one way of saying that, at least in the West, the state and its representatives

do not think (anymore). Thought and action are replaced by “state policies [based] on weakness and cowardice” (ibid.). Here, the diagnosis is that of a general paralysis of political life: “Should one point out that from ancient times declining courage has been considered the beginning of the end?” (ibid.). Courage declines: this is the beginning of the end. From a Kantian perspective, a historical sign in the negative sense could be identified here, a symptom of the end of a specific civilization or of civilization *tout court*.³ What Solzhenitsyn thus expresses is that courage is needed to see the truth of the situation, notably that not only courage is lacking, but that the Western world has entered into a mode of life that precisely avoids courageously seeing that which is obvious, namely its own end, and thus blindly persists in continuing as if this were still possible.

Kant: Courage and Historicity

One can recognize in this diagnosis a belated echo of Kant’s 1784 “What is Enlightenment?” (Kant 1991) that he famously begins by defining enlightenment as an *Ausgang*, an exit – a trope reminiscent of Plato’s cave, which also highlights a link between exiting a system that encloses itself upon itself, and thereby cuts itself off from the possibility of courage. Such an exit is from a self-incurred, self-inflicted immaturity. However problematic it might be to judge Kant’s claim vis-à-vis the actually existing enlightenment movement – and Hegel had brutal things to say about it –,⁴ his inaugural point is that the Enlightenment aims at exiting the ways of

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- ³ This is a critique that resembles what one could call a critique of the Roman nature of the West. Rehearsing and updating the critique of the crumbling Roman Empire as the epitome of civilization instructs critiques of Western decline in a wide range of thinkers, from Spengler to Negri and Hardt.
- ⁴ Hegel *inter alia* points out that Kant’s Enlightenment endorsing the critique of pure reason ended up rationally justifying an irrational belief in God as a demand of reason that therefore was worse than previously dogmatic forms of religion, because it now naturalizes a concept of reason, which could not not be irrational and religious. Kant thus subverted reason by means of reason (cf. Hegel 1977, p. 79ff).

thinking that had become so engrained that they appeared natural, evident, and unavoidable to us. Enlightenment in this abbreviated sense is an attempt at denaturalizing what imprisons those who do not even recognize the prison anymore. For such a naturalizing imprisonment materializes when there is not only a “lack of understanding, but [a] lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another” (ibid., p. 54). Thinking for oneself requires courage. Otherwise, what we get instead is dogmatism and a lack of thought. A lack of courage is not only what we encounter at the beginning of the end times. A lack of courage is also how one experiences the midst of a self-incurred immaturity that could very well be the midst of those very times. This is why Kant translates Horace’s *sapere aude*, which could also be translated as “dare to know,” as “have the courage to use your own understanding!”

Without it, we get “laziness and cowardice [that] are the reasons why such a large proportion of men [...] gladly remains immature for life [...]. It is so convenient to be immature! If I have a [...] spiritual advisor to have conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on, I need not to make any efforts at all. I need not to think as long as I can pay” (ibid.). Without the courage to use one’s own understanding, one establishes an entire economy of those prosthetic extensions of humans (as Marshal McLuhan called all media) that take away our sovereignty and ultimately translate into an economy of experts – with an emphasis on both economy and experts – that takes over the administration of all determinations of our lives.

For Kant, it is the end times when lifestyle experts, spiritual advisors, and doctors start to rule. In such end times, those very experts have “first infatuated their domestic animals and carefully prevent the docile creatures from daring to take a single step without the leading strings to which they are tied, they next show them the danger which threatens them if they try to walk unaided [...] an example of this kind [...] usually frightens them off from further attempts” (ibid.). The end times come with an economy, with a production and management of fear that puerilizes. Therefore, everyone “is really incapable for the time being of using his own understanding” (ibid.). Getting used to not having the courage to

think for oneself ultimately leads to fearful incapacitation such that “they would still be uncertain in jumping over even the narrowest of trenches” (ibid., p. 55, transl. modified). Within the end times of experts, even the most modest leap of faith appears to be a jump over the Mariana Trench. This is what makes thinking for oneself quite difficult. Thinking cannot operate but by leading one through and over some trenches. One finds a similar diagnosis with a manifold series of thinkers – a very recent one was expressed in 2010 by Alain Badiou, who diagnosed a profound disorientation in the contemporary world, in the North as well as in the South, and that what therefore is needed more than ever is courage (Badiou 2010). The overall diagnostic point that thinkers as diverse as Kierkegaard, Kant, Hegel, or Badiou have in common is that, without courage, there is no leap of faith. And faith’s leaping is precisely that which thinking ultimately amounts to – which is one of the reasons why it has been said to have an inner connection to freedom.

One can also risk the claim that, in this regard, Kant’s 1786 text on the conjectural beginning of human history adds another dimension to the concept of courage (Kant 2007). Kant’s title reads in German *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*. *Mutmaßung*, conjecture, has in German literally *Mut* – courage – in it. Here, one can venture the claim that there is, at least for Kant, only proper history in the strong sense of the term, that is only an adequate form of historicity as the result of a leap of faith. This is to say that there is only historicity proper as a result of an act of courage – even though its leap is never a leap that would entirely lead out of the very nature that historicity seeks to liberate itself from. An act of liberation from nature is courageous *precisely* because it is an act against nature. Put differently, one can argue that for Kant human beings began to be human beings when, in their history, a courageous deed occurred. Courage makes history or history is made of courage. The reason for this is that such acts provide an adequate metric (*Maß*) by which to distinguish between what can count as history and what can count as nature. Human history begins with *Muth-maßung*, with courage proposing a measure of historical action, with an act of courageous *Maßnahme* und *Maß-Gabe* that did not previously exist. It makes and proposes an end – to nature – by

generating a possible measurement. This is why the lack of courage indicates the end of times, or of historicity as such.

The Ideological Critique of Freedom

These diagnoses are conceptually interesting today because they can be linked to a problem pertaining to the very notion and concept of freedom. Elsewhere (cf. Ruda 2016), I have argued that one can identify the repeated modern philosophical problematization of an ideology of naturalized freedom as an appropriation of freedom for the purpose of domination. In line with Lenin's harsh 1919 claim that, as long as we are living in any form of capitalist society, we should never use the signifier freedom, insofar as it is this very signifier that is crucial for organizing democratic forms of capitalist domination (cf. Lenin 1972), and in line with Angela Davis's 2008 remark that, after the official abolition of slavery in the US, "slavery was translated into the terms of freedom" (Davis 2012, p. 65), I maintained that freedom can become a signifier of political disorientation (Ruda 2024). This happens when it is taken for granted or as a natural given. The problem with it is that it makes us believe that freedom is real before it is realized. The way in which such mythical givenness presents freedom, at least in modernity, is in the form of a natural capacity that we are endowed with. That freedom is not a natural given and therefore not a possession does not only mean that freedom ought to be thought of as not simply individual but rather collective, even though this is undoubtedly true – in the sense argued for by Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, and many others. Nevertheless, if freedom becomes problematic when we take it to be a given, then thinking from the side of its collective actuality formally also means to rather think it systematically, in terms of its historical practice. There is no given freedom, but only practices of freedom, or, as Christoph Menke has argued, practices of liberation or emancipation (Menke 2024). Freedom thus takes shape concretely, even though it is universal, and such practices of freedom, emancipation, and liberation can elucidate how something can come about that we do not have, at least

not by nature. With regard to the concept of freedom, it is best to avoid being a naturalist.

This entails thinking of freedom historically, that is to say from the formal perspective of the *constitution* of freedom. Therefore, one must begin by losing what one never had – the fantasy of a freedom that is just given. Freedom is not, but it *happens*, it takes place, and it is enacted. Freedom manifests itself concretely, that is locally and always situationally, even though it is something that exceeds or is in excess of the situation. If freedom is not something that is just a given feature of our being, of our life form, and something that we therefore can never really lose – an assumption through which some parts of contemporary (critical) theory show not only their Aristotelian but also their therapeutic face, with the effect that all misunderstandings with regard to what freedom is can ultimately be corrected on the basis of its natural givenness –, then freedom is something that has to be created, maintained, and struggled for. Similarly to what Rimbaud said about love once, namely that “love must be reinvented” (Rimbaud 2001, p. 229), we can now claim that freedom must also (and maybe always) be reinvented. This is an inference that must be drawn, at least, when aiming to begin talking about the constitution, or shall we venture to say the beginning, of freedom. Such an approach does not only but can certainly also imply examining freedom’s material conditions. For if it depends on something that is not itself – as it is not a natural given –, the examination of its constitution will have to lead to an account of what it is that it is constituted by.⁵ It must depend on something that formally hetero-determines it. This is itself not a new thought, for already Rousseau claimed that we are forced to be free, or, as Deleuze has it, forced to think, that free practice is grounded in what Adorno called the addendum, a strange form of – almost Lutheran – compulsion; a moment

⁵ Hegel, for example, argued that, as long as people constantly have to worry about their own survival – for example in times of upheaval or war –, it is difficult to conceive of collective forms of social freedom emerging, like proper political self-determination or art (cf. Hegel 1986), even though it is certainly conceivable that even in times of great distress there can be other practices of freedom (people can still fall in love, for example).

of “*Here I stand, I can do no other!*” At the very origin of free practices, or practices of liberation, we experience a compulsion that leaves no choice. This is an insight that certainly also brings psychoanalysis to the table.

Some of our most intimate practices, ones that we identify as free, are certainly not constituted by our free will. Think of falling in love or of political, scientific, or artistic revolutions. In this regard, is not one of the crucial insights of psychoanalysis since its beginnings that the German folk song “Thoughts are free / Die Gedanken sind frei” (“Die Gedanken,” 2025) is not entirely true? One just has to recall their dreams from the previous night in order to prove this point. This obviously does not simply mean that we are merely and entirely determined, but rather that moments of freedom emerge when forms of determination, compulsion, or force emerge and when these forms of determination produce a gap, a hole in what otherwise determines and orients us. There is therefore, unavoidably, a transformative side to practices of freedom, even though these practices do not originate in freedom itself or in a free decision. Taking on such a hetero-determination as the ground of one’s being, of one’s freedom, means to conceive of one’s being historically, but also as being grounded in action and practice.

One consequence of such a view is elaborated by Frantz Fanon in *A Dying Colonialism* (Fanon 1965), in which he, at one point, argues that the very meaning of the signifier “Algerian” has changed due to the struggle against colonial French occupation, since Algeria had in this way become a signifier of the liberation of the world as such, even though this new meaning came with a loss and a certain reinvention of previously existing Algerian culture.⁶ “Algerian” now became the epitomization of a culture involved in the struggle against colonialism and thereby it redetermined, reinvented, and recreated itself. In this sense, wearing a veil was no longer simply an indication of a culture that was oppressive to women – even though “the behavior of the Algerian was very firmly denounced and described as medieval and barbaric” (Fanon 1965, p. 38) – but rather it

⁶ “The thesis that men change at the same time that they change the world has never been so manifest as it is now in Algeria” (Fanon 1965, p. 30).

became a form of resistance that Fanon calls “counter-assimilation” (ibid., p. 42). Freedom, or acts of liberation, in this case spring from a practice of counter-assimilation. Such a practice is also constituted by taking up a moment of hetero-determination as determination of a thereby transformed self. This is then the self that is, in Fanon’s case, transformed by a newly identified necessity for a struggle for emancipation. Such an act of identification of a necessity that is historically new is ultimately an identification of courage. It is an identification of something that is not negotiable and that forces one to persist. Courage is needed to do, to maintain, or unfold what derives from something that emerges as a new compulsion, a novel element in a historical situation – this is why courage appears when a situation is historical in the strong sense of the term. Such courage cannot be grounded in any already existing forms of knowledge or capacities.

Courage in Modus Addendi

Such courage is the courage to follow the compulsion arising from an addendum. This is why the influential Aristotelian definition of courage no longer applies here. Since, for Aristotle, in my reformulation, courage was the practically skilled and learned adequate situational application of a practical skill in the right moment and for the right reasons. Courage was a practical application of such skill and knowledge to a situation of danger that thereby was rationally apprehended in a skilled and knowledgeable way. We are dealing with courageous acts that accept a form of heterogeneity, a force at the very ground of freedom. It means that such courage comes with a change of coordinates: one accepts that one is supposed to act but one does not know how to. It implies an acceptance of a fundamental disorientation. Such a different form of courage then comes with ending a certain organization of one’s own world, but it enables and is part of the creation of a new one. Courage is creative because it denaturalizes, not only the world but also what seems possible or impossible within it. Thereby it denaturalizes what we think we are, what we think we have, what we think we are able to do, what we assume our situation

to be. Such denaturalization allows us to detect a limit point, something that the present situation hinges on and that seems impossible to tackle or question. It confronts us, therefore, with a question: What is the one thing, the one signifier, that one is not allowed to touch? The one for no one. What is the point that appears impossible to denaturalize (or historicize)?

Practices of collective freedom work with and on such points of impossibility. But how does one identify such practices of freedom? Here, two answers must be avoided: the first one is that they can simply be derived from our given experience (as these given experiences usually reflect the structure of the world as it is and, if practices of freedom are indeed transformative, they cannot simply be grounded in what is). This is the phenomenological or materialist temptation. But they also cannot simply be defined normatively; from a neutral theoretical or philosophical position, for the exercise would then be to find specimens of them, embodiments of their concept in the world. This is the idealist temptation.

Neither on the basis of experience nor through the application of a concept, but rather when they describe themselves as practices of liberation or transformation and actually appear transformative can one identify practices of liberation or transformation. This means that philosophy is also under hetero-determination and thus under the condition of practices in which hetero-determined practices of freedom take place. One must be on the watch and listen, a most important lesson taught by psychoanalysis. This means that philosophy's task is to reshape its concepts under the pressure of what happens outside of it. It has to learn to speak the languages of those outside of it and to listen to what can seem inaudible. As philosophy is attentive to the often invisible and inaudible extraordinary and transformative outside of it, it has to be *extraordinary-language-philosophy*, that is, the philosophy of the languages of extraordinary transformation. This does not imply that all self-declared transformation is transformative. More specifically, protocols of verification are needed to determine whether a practice is actually transformative or not. For there are practices that remain emancipatory and prevent themselves from becoming ossified. Some do this only for a certain time – even if, for example,

the Russian Revolution failed brutally, it was not a criminal experiment all along. Others pretend to be emancipatory and are not. The self-description of the German Nazi party as a transformative orientation was certainly never adequate, despite its own rhetoric (cf. Aly 2016 and Badiou 2005, pp. 10-26). Something similar holds for many contemporary positions on the right side of the political spectrum. The terms provided by those who claim the courage to make history must be contemplated because they affirm their own novelty. One has to think in their terms, thinking from within the immanence of that which orients what they do, but this does not mean blind acceptance of given concepts or categories.

It rather means to take up what is before us – to allude to Hegel's beginning of the *Logic* – and this can then mean to forge concepts by engaging with, for example, the women's liberation struggle in Iran, the Black Panther Party in the US, the October Revolution, and other practices from various fields. One must learn their idioms, think in them. Some of these collective practices might have or will have internally failed at the end. Some might have been externally destroyed, similar to the Paris Commune. But this does not undo their status of constituting courageous practices that reinvented what a form of collective practice – this would be the case in politics – can look like. To show to what degree they transformed the very concept of emancipatory practice, means to elucidate them – employing a term I borrow from Werner Hamacher (cf. Hamacher 1989) – as instantiations of affirmation. Freedom as affirmative and affirmative practice is what necessitates courage. Emancipatory practices force a transformation of the very concept of emancipation in philosophy and in this sense of philosophy itself. This was already Hegel's point: philosophy always comes too late. It does not tell people what to do, but it is a propaganda for what people are able to do, even that which does not lie in their nature. It is propaganda for what people have done and are thus able to do even though their acts are frequently declared to be impossible. But people are able to do the impossible, and philosophy is therefore propaganda, courageously endorsing courageous acts of the impossible. For this, philosophy itself must have the courage to let itself be determined by the courageous acts that happen outside of it.

Since emancipatory practices tackle what is deemed impossible, there is always a dimension of disidentification in it (this was part of Fanon's point). This is one way of reading Lacan's claim that psychoanalysis's *modus operandi*, its way of redetermining and reinventing the past, leads to a peculiar situation. As he puts it:

Where could this adjournment come to a stop? Do we have to extend the analytic intervention to the point of becoming one of those fundamental dialogues on justice and courage, in the great dialectical tradition? That is a question. It is not easy to answer, because in truth, modern man has become singularly unused to broaching these grand themes. He prefers to resolve things in terms of conduct, of adaptation, of group morale and other twaddle. (Lacan 1988, pp. 198-9)

This brief reflection could also be read as a methodological guideline for his earlier declared return to Freud. If Freud – the inventor of psychoanalysis – had been taken by some of his American followers as the original master of psychoanalysis who tells us how to practice it and how it works, the Freud we got in this account was one who provided us with guidelines for analytic practice that in themselves need no interpretation. Freud's words were in no need of analysis. This effectively amounted to claiming that he who systematically explored the existence of the unconscious did not have an unconscious, and this assumption, in turn, allowed for believing the further good news that analysts in general were in no need of interpretation, because they also were exempted from having an unconscious. To take Freud seriously means to affirm that his discovery also applies to himself; he had an unconscious and therefore there is no clear or unambiguous guideline for how to be an analyst, for how to analyze in the first place (cf. Lacan 2002). Analysis needed and needs analysis, without their ever being meta-analysis. Lacan courageously attempted to reinvent what seemed to be psychoanalysis, without knowing in advance how to do it, by inventing and discovering analysis in the process of analyzing it. The return to Freud, in line with this reflection, returned to something that the return had to create in the very act of returning to it.

Courage means to invent the means and the very capacity to do what one does not know how to. This is why it is not Aristotelian. And it means inventing the very form of practice that one is engaged with while being engaged with it. Courageous practice can thus be associated with Heinrich von Kleist's famous text about the gradual production of thought while speaking, whose bottom line is 'if you do not know what to say, just start talking, thoughts will come in the process.' This is why a courageous practice is affirmative. Courage is not about having a capacity, but rather about the affirmative assumption of one's own incapacity, of assuming the fact of not having "it." Courage starts from always already having lost it; it is about losing "it" the right (or maybe the left) way. Aspects of this loss bring us back to the distinction between fear and anxiety. For courage has customarily been understood as steel and grit in the face of something that we are scared of. In a distinction established since Kierkegaard and then elaborated and complicated by Heidegger, Lacan, Badiou, and others, fear always has an object that comes with its specific temporality, the future. We fear future objective events. Anxiety, on the other hand, is not at all about the future, instead it rather indicates a profound disorientation in the subjective present. It is about losing all objective grounding, losing the very orientation by means of objects, which produces a form of absolute certainty (of disorientation): I cannot say what it is that makes me anxious, but I am absolutely certain that I am anxious – which is why Lacan will say that anxiety never deceives (cf. Lacan 2014, pp. 55-84). For Heidegger, anxiety comes with a voiding of the world (everything appears nil and meaningless to me), which leads to a complete loss of worldly consistency. In anxiety, I am and feel isolated because I cannot say what caused it; because it does not occur in the form of an object I could refer to. Anxiety is thus not communicable. By contrast, when I fear, I can hope that what I fear will not come about, I can always say it. When I am anxious and I do not know what its cause is, all hope breaks down (that what I am anxious about will not occur), because it is already there. I experience it in the form of an unquestionably certain loss. Heidegger will insinuate that, in an anxious state, I do not feel at home in my home, because I realize that this home was never my home in the first place (Heidegger 2002,

p. 233f.). Fear allows me to economize, but anxiety does not. Therefore, there is an entire “politics of fear” (Badiou 2008) that economizes with the very imagination of the end of the world – brought about by immigrants, by climate change, etc. In this concrete sense, fear is stabilizing, anxiety makes things break down. Because it undoes, potentially, everything one took for granted. Anxiety brings us to the brink of our own collapse, as it makes all stability disappear. But working with it, working with breakdown, with undoing things and stable frameworks can prove quite productive. Working with breakdown, affirmative undoing is a way of understanding what another account of courage amounts to, one that does not start from any ability or capacity. Courage in this sense then means inducing anxiety, or delivering anxiety in the right kind of dosages.

Courage and Event

These reflections are part of a project that goes under the name “Courage and Event.” This puts the project in connection with a series of philosophical books from the 20th century that have an “and” in their middle, beginning with Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, 1927, which was then followed by Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, and I would add to this series Alain Badiou’s 1988 *Being and Event* – which actually has two sequels, *Logics of Worlds* (2006), called *Being and Event 2*, and *Immanence of Truths* (2018), or *Being and Event 3*. In this series, we move from Being’s involvement with time to its involvement with nothingness and then with the event, to just superficially state the obvious. It is precisely the last in the series of books, that is Badiou’s, where there is a silent inversion at play. Badiou does not try to think being as the ground and grounding principle of time or nothingness or even of the event. He further does not think their identity, such that being is time or being is nothingness or being is evental. He rather tries to conceive of the event as a ground of being, as that which allows for any account of being. In Badiou’s parlance, this means that only through an event, say in one concrete case, the invention of formal and demonstrative mathematics with the ancient

Greeks (cf. Badiou 2023, p. 233f.), there is a discourse that speaks so abstractly, so detached from any concrete beings, that it speaks about whatever being at all.

Something must have happened that made it possible for there to exist a discourse in which we can speak or rather write without reference to any object whatsoever and in such a way that it concerns any concrete being whatsoever. This is what mathematical discourse does for Badiou. In this discourse, there can be further events and these events transform and change our account of being – so post-Cantor, the late 19th- and early 20th-century mathematician, for example, we will have to think differently about the relationship between being and infinity because Cantor and the consequences generated by his extremely intriguing theoretical framework demonstrate that it is conceivable that there are different sizes of infinity. This implies that being is internally infinite and can now be (potentially) thought as infinitely infinite. For if there *are* different sizes of infinity, being itself needs to be thought of differently. Post-event, we thereby discover and explore a truth about being. Events are thus generative not only of our accounts of being but also of truths. With Badiou, events come first. They allow us to invent what they also allow us to discover – we invent what we discover to be able to do (in a post-evental collective political action, for example). Such a perspective allows us to understand the unfolding of consequences as practical production of truths, and these even concern and affect our account of being. In my reading, this does not lead to any form of vitalism. Because the event that we are talking about here is, *per se*, plural or manifold and it is not an event of being but an event that enables being, discursively and conceptually, to be “being” in the first place. Heidegger was, in some sense, right: there is no being or being is nothing, or to put it differently: there is no givenness unless something happens. Something therefore must have happened such that there will have been (an account of) being.

Philosophy’s task, for Badiou, is to identify events and events do not happen in philosophy but outside of it. The task of philosophy is to identify an event in a non- or extra-philosophical practice. But philosophy always comes too late; it identifies a form of thought and in this sense is a

thinking of thinking or, in other terms, it is an identification of an identification. Any identification is unavoidably an affirmation. It says: “yes, there is something that happened,” and it had consequences. An identification is thus an identification of what? Of an event and what followed from it. Philosophy is identifying acts of identification of events outside of philosophy (that will then determine the way in which philosophy thinks of thinking). This identification is where there is always a wager. It is not only that philosophy has to wager on what can count as an event. It rather has to wager on the wager that outside of philosophy something has taken place in an evental manner. The courage to identify courageous acts is what it means to use one’s own understanding. Wager that someone, something jumped! Philosophy is therefore – and in line with Kant – the courage to over and again courageously risk the claim that there is a *Mutmaßung* in the world. That there are acts of courage that provide a novel measure for thought. Such courage of *Mutmaßung* is, in the end, the courage of truth. It is a courage to affirm that there is history.

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