

## **Education in Noise**

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*‘An altogether immanent aspect of education [is] that it is fundamentally about change itself’*

(A. J. Bartlett)<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

In this article I intend to use the category of noise to open up possible connecting routes between philosophy and education. My overarching hypothesis is that the category of noise introduces a critical connector that mutually activates Alain Badiou’s ontology and Paulo Freire’s pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> Noise, postulated here as the phenomenological temporalization of Badiou’s ontological void, becomes the condition of possibility both of the emergence of a subject and of its fidelity to a truth procedure. I posit therein a generic *Subject* of education as the *temporal* emanation of the *place* opened up by the philosophical category of *Truth*. I propose, in sum, that such “education in noise” is merely the praxial, temporal and immanently Freirean side of Badiou’s purely philosophical notion of an ‘education by truths’.<sup>3</sup>

1 A. J. Bartlett, ‘The Cold Dead Hands: Real Change’, *Forcings* (2021), <https://ajbartlett.substack.com> [accessed 5 Aug. 2021].

2 I am fully aware of the negative overtones with which the word “pedagogy” resonates within the Badiouian speech community (see for example A. J. Bartlett, ‘Refuse become subject: The educational ethic of Saint Paul’, *Badiou Studies* 3:1 (2014), pp. 193-216), I will nevertheless keep the term on the understanding that I am using it in its Freirean emancipatory sense, and never in the Badiouian, oppressive, one. As for the reference to Badiou’s “ontology”, see footnote 10, below.

3 Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 14.

## Philosophy as Practice, Practice as Biography

As is often the case, the following discursive elaboration merely reflects on a particular mode of *making* and *doing*. For my part, this happens to be that of a composer, performer and teacher. So although the present text is flagrantly theoretical, the trace of my practice will somehow remain ever-present as a leftover radiation murmuring throughout the theoretical enquiries. I have been for the past fifteen years directing an experimental music group I founded in 2003, the *cardboard citizens new music ensemble* (ccnme), members of which are all homeless people, asylum seekers and refugees. After years of practice, an evolving repertoire of music-making techniques, devised for collective group improvisation, finally individuated in an artistic, pedagogical and militant framework which I named the *Noise of the Oppressed* (NO).<sup>4</sup>

It was purely through the praxis of NO that the subject-constructing capabilities of noise appeared to me as unquestionable. There was never the need for any aesthetic normativity prescribing the *ccnme* how to make noise. Of course, there were starting points, axiomatic (i.e. *ethical*) prescriptions, doubling as *scores*—for instance: “start listening from the inside” or “mind the weakest voice”. Thus the *ccnme* played, delicately plucking sounds from the threshold of noise, in a collective musical dialogue always followed by critical reflection.

Hence, when encountering Badiou’s philosophy, one that openly admits its immanent *emptiness* and explicitly demands of itself to *shut up and listen*,<sup>5</sup> the *theoretical* side of my project felt at home. Here was, finally, a philosophical voice not interfering with the practice: “keep

<sup>4</sup> If the choice of such a slightly grandiose name, with its conspicuous pointer to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (PO) and Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO), seems to pretentiously claim descent from one of the greatest pedagogico-artistic genealogies of the twentieth century, the naming merely illustrates something I like to call “the banal contingency of work”: NO naturally emerged in the rough and tumble of workshops, rehearsals and performances with the *Cardboard Citizens*, a theatre company which just happens to be the chief practitioner of TO techniques in the UK.

<sup>5</sup> See editors’ introduction in: Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed & trans. by Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 33.

doing” was its sole injunction, *keep investigating the truths of noise, there’ll be time to theorize about them later (at dusk, maybe...)*

All of this in fact describes nothing more than what Badiou refers to as the ‘conditioning’ of philosophy. For Badiou, philosophical thought cannot exist in a state of self-enclosure: thought needs to open up and let itself be affected—or even violated—from the outside. Philosophy, Badiou claims, needs to allow its thinking to be conditioned from without. These conditions are nothing less than those endeavors able to produce, in praxis, the universal *truths* of their time. Specifically, there are four (and only four) domains of human activity wherein these praxes, which Badiou terms *generic truth procedures*, might emerge: science, art, politics and love.<sup>6</sup> Noticeable in this list is the absence of philosophy itself: as it happens, philosophy does not *produce* any truths of its own: it is *at the service* of the generic truth procedures, facilitating the ‘compossibility’ of the truths that only the generic procedures can produce.<sup>7</sup> Philosophy is empty, or rather: philosophy needs to keep an always-empty place that the truths produced outside of it will have occupied. Philosophy itself is ‘essentially *subtractive*’.<sup>8</sup> This subtractive aspect of philosophy resonates with the Freirean notion of praxis as the dialectics of reflection and action.<sup>9</sup> I will take this correspondence as a basis to claim that philosophy’s empty core resonates with any noise whatsoever *as long as it is a truth-seeking noise*.

All in all, Freire here names both a praxis and a heritage, Badiou represents both an encounter with a philosophical system and the decision to incorporate the conceptual tools

6 According to Badiou, something which Plato himself implied. See Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. & ed. by Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 35-35.

7 See Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London & New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 11, 23, 35; c.f. Badiou, *Manifesto*, pp. 34, 37-8, 123, 135.

8 Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 13 (emphasis in original). One should add that, for Badiou, not only philosophy does not coincide with its conditions: such conditions are themselves inherently plural (the truths of politics are structurally unlike those of art, which are unlike those of science, etc.); there are four (and only four) truth procedures, and their truths are, formally speaking, not interchangeable. However, even if ‘every fidelity is particular it is still necessary to philosophically think the universal form of [them]’ (*Being and Event*, p. 233). I will address this point further in the final part of this essay, when commenting on the (possible) political aspects of the (essentially) artistic praxis of the *Noise of the Oppressed*.

9 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (1970), 63rd edn (Rio de Janeiro & São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2017), p. 70.

obtained therein; my conceptualization (of a praxis of) noise will have been the result of using those tools in the construction of a bridge between a Freirean praxis and a Badiouian mode of thought. And, like every bridge, the Badiou-Freire bridge needs to be *itself* immanently noisy, if it is to be structurally sound.

### **Noise as a temporal(ized) void**

I contend that the concept of noise emerges as a necessary link in the speculative bridge laid between the notions of philosophy and education. My opening gambit is to posit *the material equivalence between philosophy and education* (more specifically, the biconditionality *philosophy <=> education*), whereby noise, indexing a minimal difference between these terms, emerges on the side of education as the *phenomenological* translation of Badiou's *ontological* notion of 'the void':

(biconditionality):	<i>philosophy</i>	<=>	<i>education</i>
(translation):	<i>the void</i>	—>	<i>noise</i>

The void is a fundamental category in Badiou's thinking of being *qua* being. Following from his inaugural metaontological decision that *ontology = mathematics*,<sup>10</sup> Badiou somehow contributes his own highly formalized version to a tradition in thought ascribing a central place to the idea that every situation is structured around an inextricable void of structure. This position foregrounds an immanent gap between that which can be symbolized and made consistent and a kernel of unsymbolizable inconsistency that subsists, persists and

<sup>10</sup>Insofar as Badiou delegates all discourse on *being* to mathematics (in particular to axiomatic set theory), strictly speaking there is no ontology in his philosophy. For Badiou, ontology=mathematics—period: therefore, all philosophical elaboration issuing from this decision will have been, necessarily, *meta-ontological*. See: Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 13.

paradoxically enables the presentation of consistency itself. Sartre's *nothingness*, Lacan's *excess of the Real*, Miller's *utopic point*, Žižek's *symptom*, Karatani's *hole*: what all these notions have in common is the positing of a constitutive void that holds everything that is possible in a situation together, insofar as it itself remains impossible within it.

The passage from the void to noise, then, involves a movement out of the (idealized or frictionless) isentropic, atemporal site of mathematical ontology into the entropic, temporal world of physico-phenomenological appearance: the void-as-noise, as I propose to think it here, is still a nothingness, except now thought from a perspective involving temporality.

This temporalization of the Badiouian void constitutes the key conjecture of my argument. If, for Badiou, philosophy is the opening of a *space* for the *compossible thinking* of political, artistic, scientific and erotic *truths*,<sup>11</sup> then I propose that education is the care provided for the *time* of praxis, that is to say, for the investigations of such truths and for the emergence of subjects from this praxis. For Badiou, a *subject* is induced by declaring that an “impossible” event has occurred in a situation: unpredictable, random and ultimately inevitable, the event can be seen as translating the fleeting irruption of the ontological (i.e. mathematical) void within a phenomeno-logical (i.e. physico-temporal) realm. By following its uncertain consequences the subject improvises and forces a logic alien to the situation wherein the event occurred: thus a new *truth* is constituted. Such a ‘trajectory of a truth’<sup>12</sup> implies an itinerary which, I claim here, is *necessarily steeped in noise*. This route comprises four stages which—combining Badiouian elements with the concept of noise—could be summarized as follows:

11 The notion of ‘compossibility’, which Badiou borrows from Leibniz, describes an operation taking place *within* a locus that *philosophy alone* opens up and maintains—viz. Truth (singular, with capital *T*); this space is cleared and made available to the truths produced *outside* of philosophy, and this happens through a declaration of the form “there are *truths*” (plural, lower case); See: Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, in particular ‘The Return of Philosophy Itself’, pp. 113-38.

12 Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 121.

(1) something improbable happens in a situation—namely, the event; upon haphazardly encountering it (or, rather, its *trace*: events are fleeting occurrences, disappearing as soon as they appear), the subject-to-be decides on declaring its occurrence (the event will either be ignored or denied by the situation: from the point of view of the latter’s established logic, the event is devoid of value, ‘undecidable’). *Always emerging as a sense-shattering, irreversible disruption, the void can be argued to appear in the world as noise.*

(2) following the decision to affirm the event, the subject then commits to the investigation of its ‘indiscernible’ consequences in a succession of random enquiries. *If such a trajectory is random—insofar as there is no possible prior knowledge guiding the course of the investigation—then the subject’s trajectory can be said to inevitably draw a noisy path.*

(3) next, the subject militates in order to force the situation to change its logic, so that it accommodates the set of results of the enquiries related to the event: the old logic collapses and a new truth is brought into the world (the truth is local and finite in its subjective presentation, universal and infinite in its ‘generic’ implications). *As the logical consequences of subjective work, truths thus first appear as lawless noise from the situation’s perspective.*

(4) thus truth passes into knowledge, remaining completely incommensurable with it; insofar as the reconfigured knowledge must always reserve a place for the unforeseen arrival of the next truth, this place must be kept empty, ‘unnamed’—*presented phenomenologically as a remnant noise with no name.*

These four stages, or modalities, of a subjective itinerary (the *undecidable*, the *indiscernible*, the

*generic*, the *unnameable*), which Badiou subsumes under the term ‘subtraction’,<sup>13</sup> are precisely what, from my perspective, overdetermines that the investigation of a truth be a praxis immersed in noise, as the dimension of its temporality.

### **The temporal unfolding of a truth, or, subjective (neg)entropy**

The notion of subjective praxis is inseparable from subtraction, as Frank Ruda observes: ‘as truths are procedures, so subtraction has also to be immanently related to practice’.<sup>14</sup> This is where we can draw a connection with a key tenet of the Freirean approach, namely that (i) education cannot be separated from the idea of praxis; as a consequence, it can be argued that (ii) education is the praxial side of philosophy, which means that (iii) education is bound by the operations involved in subtraction.

Consequently, we can now argue that praxis involves a subtraction that requires a transition from Badiou’s atemporal, isentropic mathematical ontology to a phenomenological, temporal and therefore irreversible or entropic dimension. Constituting a *trajectory*, the truth procedure involves the activation of a temporality—in fact, as Olivia Lucca Fraser points out, ‘[t]he subjective project is, itself, conceived as *the temporal unfolding of a “truth”*’.<sup>15</sup> Such a temporality is activated by a transition from *ontology* to *phenomenology*:<sup>16</sup> ‘[o]riginating in an event and *unfolding in time*, the subject cannot, for Badiou, be adequately understood in strictly ontological, i.e. set-theoretical, terms, insofar as *neither the event nor time have any place in classical*

13 Ibid, pp. 113-28.

14 Frank Ruda, ‘Subtraction–Undecidable, Indiscernible, Generic, Unnameable’, *The Badiou Dictionary*, ed. by Steve Corcoran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 329-37 (p. 330).

15 Olivia Lucca Fraser, ‘The Law of The Subject: Alain Badiou, Luitzen Brouwer and The Kripkean Analyses of Forcing and The Heyting Calculus’, *Cosmos and History* 2:1-2 (2006), pp. 94-133 (p. 94, my emphasis).

16 Badiou, in a methodological approach which he describes as a ‘*calculated phenomenology*’, conceives the phenomenological realm as a ‘logic of appearing’ or ‘onto-logy’; see: Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London & New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 38.

*set theory*'.<sup>17</sup> From this perspective the meaning of Badiou's assertion that '[t]he production of a truth is the same thing as the subjective production of a present'<sup>18</sup> becomes somewhat clearer. Likewise, the notion of subjective *fidelity* as 'a *discipline* of time, which controls from beginning to end the consequences of [the event]'<sup>19</sup> also comes into focus.

It is with respect to the 'temporal unfolding of a truth' that entropy and irreversibility start filtering through and whereupon the ontological void appears, in the emergence of temporality, as a phenomenological *noise*. Furthermore, time itself is produced as a result of the *work* of the subject, which we can consequently theorize as the investigation of the consequences of the entropic event. In this respect, however, one might need to be more specific: what the event produces is irreversible, hence entropic, temporality; what the subject's investigation and fidelity to the event produces is both entropy *and* negentropy, or rather, *the dialectic* between *entropy* | *negentropy* which I notate here as *(neg)entropy*.

Indeed, insofar as the subject of truth engages in a process which involves structuration, normativity and information, there is a negation of entropy at play. Crucially though, I hold that the aspect of praxis that is negentropic, whilst certainly sustaining the emergence of structure and form, *is still a producer of noise*. Furthermore, it produces noise *because* it produces form—or, to put it in Badiouian terms: whatever hitherto unexpected *form* emerges on the side of the subject, *corresponds to what is perceived as noise* on the side of the state. In fact, the (neg)entropic dialectic proposed here relates to Badiou's 'affirmative dialectics', wherein 'a creation or a novelty must be defined paradoxically as an affirmative part of negation.'<sup>20</sup> Hence my denotation of the trajectory of a truth procedure—and of subtraction—as a (neg)entropic process. It is in this sense, then, that one can consider the event as an irreversible bifurcation, marking a decision, or nomination, which forces a temporal

17 Fraser, *ibid* (my emphasis).

18 Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 569.

19 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 211.

20 Alain Badiou, 'Destruction, Negation, Subtraction: on Pier Paolo Pasolini', *Lecture at the Art Center College of Design* (Pasadena, 6 Feb. 2007), <https://www.lacan.com/badpas.htm> [access. 20th Jul. 2014].



beginning thereupon to be filled with the (neg)entropic work of the subject, viz., the ‘subjective production of a present’.

In summary, we can now argue that (i) the void surges as an *entropic event*, (ii) the *phenomenological noise* of which triggers the (neg)entropic work of the subject, (iii) the *logical noise* of which rumbles throughout the investigation and forcing of a new *truth*, (iv) its reverberation irreversibly (entropically) transforms the *knowledge* of the situation wherein the event happened.

Consequently, if an education is to be effectively ‘*by truths*’, then, it must be thought through the bias of a *temporality*, which takes the form of a ‘retroactive’ activation of the (temporalized) traces of the (non-temporal) inconsistency of being irrupting in the situation as an event.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as I will discuss in more detail below, Freire himself was aware of the fact that education required the courage to accept the ‘risks of temporality’: education, in Freire’s conception, is a process that ‘permanently “bathes itself” in temporality’, in an always-unfinished *becoming human* that—true to its sworn Bergsonism—*temporalizes* space.<sup>22</sup>

If every truth procedure must necessarily proceed from ‘the bias of the void’,<sup>23</sup> then this would mean that education must consequently proceed from the combined bias of *the void* + *temporality*—a dyad which calls for the signifier “noise”:

*the void + temporality -> noise*

Noise thus becomes the phenomenal appearance—inside-time—of the void, which in its

<sup>21</sup> In this respect, see: Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 109-10.

<sup>22</sup> Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, p. 114.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London & New York: Verso, 2001, p. 73.

original mathematical purity (as the empty- or null-set of mathematical set theory, marked  $\emptyset$  and axiomatically posited) remains, always already, outside-time.

Insofar as noise can be said to persist in its undefinability,<sup>24</sup> constantly escaping its conceptualization according to a fixed sense,<sup>25</sup> noise is an appropriate candidate to carry the translated name of the void into the phenomenological and empirical worlds: accepting such a translation allows for the thinking of a temporalized void, or rather, a temporalized thinking of the void: in this sense, noise remains empty of sense, still a nothingness, still void, albeit now thought from an outlook subjected to temporality, entropy and irreversibility.<sup>26</sup>

Noise then, insofar as it can be said to operate a translation of the void—which is that which fleetingly manifests itself as an event—thereby becomes a notion inseparable from subjectivity and immanently related to the concept of truth. Furthermore, the void is translated into the ever-present, background noise constantly permeating both the subjective inside (in the form of anxiety) and the phenomenal outside (in the form of epistemological noise).

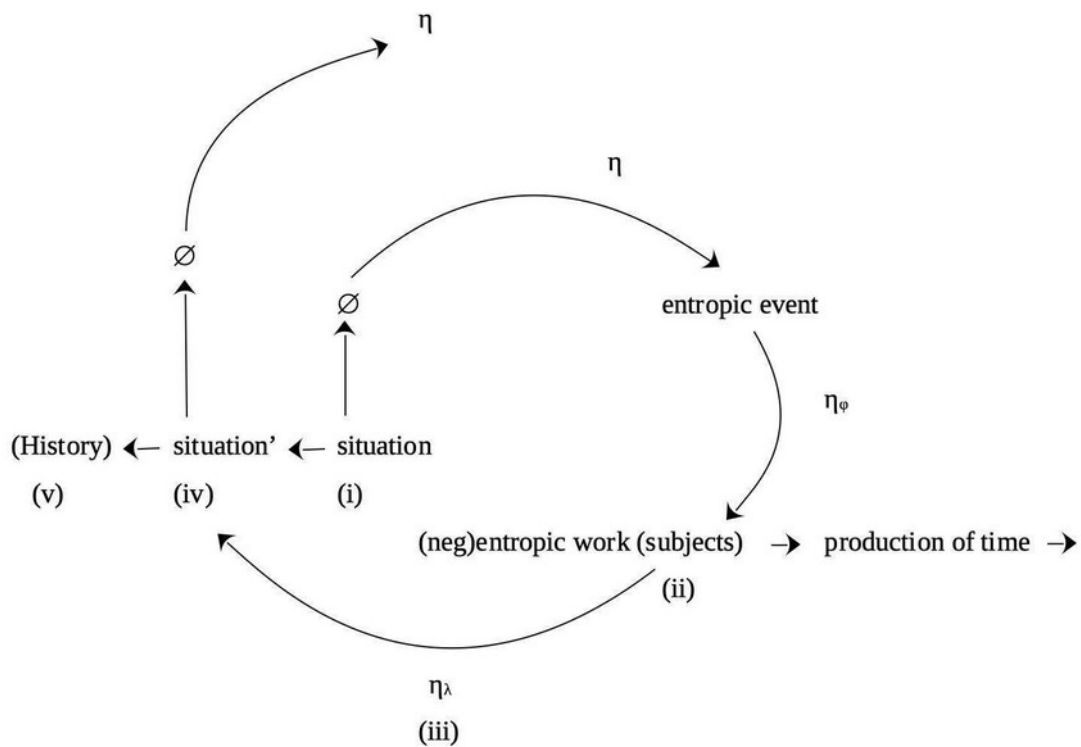
This background noise ( $\eta$ ) however, may be diversely indexed according to the

24 ‘A shared formal definition of noise is lacking. This lack opens a space for metaphorical reverberation within scientific discourse, and even more so in the straits between the natural and the human sciences, technology and the arts’ (Cécile Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise: From Information Entropy to Normative Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 7). I will underscore here Malaspina’s use of the word ‘shared’: there are of course abundant definitions of the word “noise”, albeit each specific to the particular field, or community of practice, wherein it appears—information theory, statistical thermodynamics, quantum mechanics, signal processing, probability theory, statistics, bio-genetics, cognitive psychology, economics, acoustics, psychoacoustics, music theory, and so on; nonetheless, the fact remains that the signifier “noise” seems to always exceed, or escape, its assigned domain of applicability.

25 ‘Noise persists’, according to Greg Hainge, ‘because it cannot be reconfigured or recontained [...] but remains indelibly noise’ (Greg Hainge, *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 23).

26 It is worth noting that Badiou’s own account of the passage from the ontological to the phenomenological (or, in Badiouian lingo, the ‘onto-logical’) realm is not lacking in concepts that one could associate with noise. His ‘postulate of materialism’ (viz. ‘every atom of appearing is real’, see *Logic of Worlds*, pp. 218-19) in conjunction with the fact that every such atom contains a ‘proper inexistent element’, imply its occurrence. Indeed, such ‘inexistent’ is the form that the ontological void takes when appearing in a phenomenological world (an object which, by the postulate of materialism, must be real); the inexistent is ‘a being who happens “there” as nothingness’ (and hence, I would add, cannot be anything but onto-logically noisy); furthermore, when such inexistent is contingently ‘sublated’, i.e. when this nothingness (this noisy object) is tipped-over from minimal to maximal intensity of existence, the result is the very occurrence of an event (see Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, pp. 342-43).

different stages of the time-producing (neg)entropic truth process: (i) there is firstly the hazardous, entropic upsurge of the immanent void of a situation: the event per se, which (ii) phenomenologically appearing as noise ( $\eta\phi$ ) triggers the subject into its (neg)entropic, time-producing work, which itself (iii) is an emitter of logical noise ( $\eta\lambda$ ) as it randomly investigates the consequences of the event, the truth of which is eventually (iv) forced into the situation as new knowledge, whereby (v) a new situation is configured, spiraling out the narrative of History:



On this note a clarification is in order: the intention here is not to elaborate an *apologia* of noise, in other words, *noise itself is not the truth of the event*: noise is perfectly neutral, indifferent. Just as the void is ontologically included in every situation, noise is an ever-present, phantasmatic background hum: there still needs to be, not only an event, but—more importantly—a subject brought about and transformed by such an event.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Neither should this concept of noise be considered as a short-cut between the different, heterogenous praxes: as already noted above, the truth procedures are inherently plural. And so is noise. Just like the void is local and immanent to every situation (as indeed are events and truths) so is the appearance of noise: political noise needs to be phenomenologically (or even *logically*) distinguished from artistic noise, and so on. This distinction should

In other words, (1) something anomalous needs to happen disturbing the bell-curve of the normal statistical distribution of randomness, a ‘voltage spike’, a non-normal vibration breaking the mean<sup>28</sup> (2) there needs to be a subjective intervention pointing out such an anomalous spike and declaring that its occurrence, its causes and its consequences are worth pursuing.<sup>29</sup>

### **Freirean dialogue and the temporalization of space**

As mentioned above, for Freire *temporality is immanent to education*. As such, it largely appears associated with Bergson’s notion of ‘duration’: ‘[e]ducation is constantly re-made in praxis. In order for it to be, it needs to become. Its “duration”—in the Bergsonian sense of the term—as a process, resides in the interplay of the opposites permanence-change’.<sup>30</sup> But crucially, duration in Freire also involves a socio-political dimension: ‘in order for it to be, the social structure needs to become; in other words: becoming is the mode that a social structure obtains in order to acquire a “duration”, in the Bergsonian understanding of the term.’<sup>31</sup>

How then does Freire operate this Bergsonian becoming in order to render it

remain an imperative of subjective discipline.

28 See: Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise*, p. 99; c.f. Badiou: ‘a jolt affecting an object of the world [...] is in effect the signature of what we call an event.’ (*Logic of Worlds*, p. 343).

29 Once again, this configuration is not inconsistent with the formal underpinnings of Badiou’s philosophical engine: ‘it is through the existence of the inexistent that the subversion of appearing by being [...] unfolds within appearing itself. This is the logical indication of a paradox of being: an onto-logical chimera’ (Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, p. 378); such ‘subversion of appearing’ is what eventually induces the logic of destruction which I describe here as *the logical noise produced by the negentropic work of the subject*: ‘if what was worth nothing comes, in the guise of an eventual consequence, to be worth everything, then an established given of appearing is destroyed’ (ibid pp. 379-80). In my terms then, one could say that noise is the turmoil produced in a world by the ‘onto-logical chimera’ that emerges when an inexistent element is sublated, i.e. when it is jolted from minimal to maximal existence.

30 Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, p. 101.

31 [*E*]star sendo é o modo que tem a estrutura social de “durar”, na acepção bergsoniana do termo], *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, p. 245; c.f.: “Duration” is a Bergsonian concept synonymous with real time: Bergson opposes it to the artificial or quantitative time of mathematicians and physicians [...]. He considers duration-as-process the most important aspect of human life.’ Paulo Freire, *Educación y cambio*, (Buenos Aires: Búsqueda-Celadec, 1976) p. 15 n. 7.

subjective and, hence, *political*? How can the ‘pure heterogeneity’<sup>32</sup> of Bergson’s *durée* become pedagogic, critical, emancipatory? In other words, how is one to avoid the risk that Bergson’s *élan vital* becomes, as Ernst Bloch put it scathingly, an empty process ‘in and for itself’ producing ‘nothing but process [...] for its own sake’?<sup>33</sup> Freire’s answer is to subjectivize pure duration through the praxis of *dialogue*.

Dialogue—‘the fundamental condition of humanization’—is one of the main operators in Freire’s configuration. However—and this is a crucial caveat—‘[t]here is no true dialogue if there is no true thought’.<sup>34</sup> Now, in Freire’s conception, true thought is one that ‘perceives reality as a process, as a continual becoming and not as something static [and] it permanently “bathes itself” in temporality, the risks of which it does not fear’.<sup>35</sup> As such, it stands in opposition to ‘ingenuous thought’ [*pensar ingênuo*, innocent and unsuspecting, not to be confused with ingenious or resourceful], which, on the contrary, collapses under the weight of ‘historical time’, and as a result its subjective temporality is normalized into the static place of a ‘well behaved present’. As Freire himself puts it, ‘[f]or ingenuous thought, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized today. For critical thought, it is the permanent transformation of reality, on behalf of the permanent humanization of men and women.’<sup>36</sup>

Freire presents here a key notion: the idea that the development of consciousness—from naïve to critical—involves embracing ‘the risks of temporality’. It is an idea borrowed from Pierre Furter, whom Freire extensively references throughout his early work: for Furter, the goal of consciousness-raising education should no longer be ‘to eliminate the risks of temporality, by holding on to a guaranteed space, but rather to temporalize space [*temporalisar*

32 See: Henri Bergson, *Time And Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. by Frank Lubecki Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910) p. 104.

33 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume I* (1954), trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice & Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 201-2.

34 Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, p. 114.

35 [“[B]anha-se” permanentemente de temporalidade cujos riscos não teme], *ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

*o espaço*]; in this way, Furter continues, ‘the universe does not reveal itself to me as space, imposing itself as a massive presence to which I can only adapt, but as a field, as a domain which takes its form according to my action’.<sup>37</sup> The goal of ingenuous thought, Freire claims, is precisely to hold on to that ‘guaranteed space’, whereby ‘adjusting to it, and negating temporality, it negates itself.’<sup>38</sup>

Not to fear the ‘risks of temporality’: there is here a clear summons to something like a *subjective courage*, required to confront whatever temporality bears: unpredictability, uncertainty, entropy, *noise*. Exercising this courage through dialogue requires the letting-go of a ‘guaranteed space’ of knowledge, and experimenting with/in the subjective, (neg)entropic time of the truth procedure.

### **The place of Truth, the time of the Subject**

One must infer from the biconditionality mentioned earlier (*viz.*, *philosophy*  $\Leftrightarrow$  *education*) that *education does not itself produce truths*. This is the first and cardinal corollary of placing education on the side of philosophy and not on the side of the subjective praxes. Something which, of course, immediately begs an urgent question: if education does not produce truths, what does, then, education *do*? (i.e.: what does education do as *different* from philosophy?) My working answer to this question involves *thinking separately* the categories of Truth and Subject—a philosophical fission which could be described along the following lines: if philosophy’s

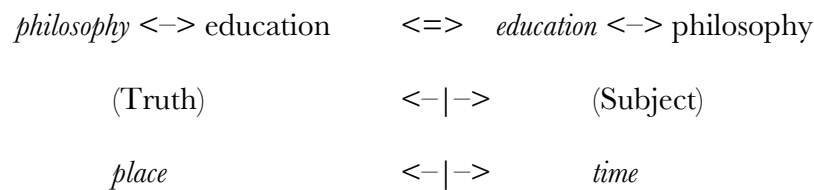
37 Pierre Furter, *Educação e Vida* (Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1966), pp. 26-7. The importance of Pierre Furter’s influence is oddly overlooked within Freire studies. And not only with respect to the utopian aspects of Freire’s system: few scholars seem to mention that the (by now seminal Freirean) concept of ‘banking education’, was, likewise, borrowed from Furter. See Julio Barreiro’s introduction to the Spanish edition of *Educação Como Prática da Liberdade*: Julio Barreiro, ‘Educación y concienciación’, in *La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad* by Paulo Freire, trans. by Lilién Ronzoni (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1969) pp. 7-19 (p. 16).

38 Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, p. 115.

concern is focused towards the *place* of *Truth*, education's concern is focused towards the *time* of the *Subject*.

The second implication of the nexus between Badiou and Freire, bridged by the concept of *noise-as-temporalized-void*, is that the trajectory of a truth procedure outlined above should become the philosophical charter for the praxis of education.

All of this means that education *inholds* the *time* produced within the *place* opened up by the philosophical notion of Truth. Which is to say that the Subject of education becomes a praxial correlate of the philosophical *thinking* of the truths of its time: or, differently put, that an educational *Subject* is the *temporal* emanation of the *place* opened up by the philosophical category of *Truth*.<sup>39</sup>



This schema is authorized within both the Freirean and the Badiouian philosophical configurations: on Freire's side, we have the courageous temporalization of space required by dialogic education; on Badiou's, the fact that all subjective constitution requires that fidelity to a truth be an 'organized control of time'.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, if philosophy organizes a 'space of compossibility' for the truths of its time, education organizes a *time of compossibility* for these truths. Differently put, if philosophy is the

39 I am here merely extending Badiou's notation: if, for Badiou, there are (political, scientific, artistic, libidinal) *truths* (plural, lower case) and there is a *philosophical* category *Truth* (singular, upper case) and if, moreover, there are (political, scientific, artistic, libidinal) *subjects* (plural, lower case) then, from my standpoint there is, additionally, an *educational* category *Subject* (singular, upper case) which, just like the notion of Truth, must remain generic and empty. See footnote 11, above.

40 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 211.

‘go-between’ of the truth procedures,<sup>41</sup> education is the caretaker of the praxial time produced by the *subjects* induced by these truths. As such, education attends to *the fidelity to fidelity*.

Education therefore cares for the time produced through praxis by the subjects of truth: it is for this reason alone that the void (insofar as it is the ontological source of the event which galvanized the subject in the first place) needs to be thought of as *temporalized within educational praxis*. And this temporalized void is what appears in the phenomenal world as noise:

<i>philosophy</i> <-> education	<=>	<i>education</i> <-> philosophy
<i>place</i> of Truth	<- ->	<i>time</i> of the Subject
the void ( $\emptyset$ )	—>	noise ( $\eta$ )

From this perspective, then, education becomes the carer of the temporal process undergone by an empty category: that of *the most generic Subject possible*. Neither a subject of science, nor of art, nor of politics, nor of love, but one that shares at least one element with each one of them. In other words, if philosophy prepares an always empty placeholder for Truth, education, then, prepares an always-empty *timeholder* for the Subject. And exactly as with Truth, the Subject of education remains strictly subtractive.

Let us briefly reprise here the figures of the subtractive in relation to our educational Subject:

(1) everything starts with an *undecidable* event: education here wagers alongside the subjects in their decision to declare, without any (statistical) guarantees whatsoever, that the event has indeed happened;

<sup>41</sup> ‘Philosophy is the go-between in our encounters with truths, the procurer of truth’, Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 10.



(2) the *indiscernible*, related to the subjects' evaluation of the event; the decision to declare the event is not guided by any law, it is unsupported by any norm of evaluation and 'principle of objectivity.'<sup>42</sup> Education can neither provide a law, nor present itself as a proxy for the law: what it can do is contain and support the *lack* of a law: it here becomes a reassuring (and corrupting) voice, an illegal injunction to the subjects to "keep going";

(3) the generic, related to the subjects' investigation of the immanently infinite consequences of the event; education, unlike training, has no predicate: it is related to this unfinishable process;

(4) unnameable, related to ethics: truth remains unnameable, and noise must be allowed to *be noise*: education is a reminder that any truth, even when becoming information and knowledge, will always have hailed from the noisy side of epistemology (and, therefore, that there is a side of epistemology, an outside of its knowledge-defined border, that needs to always already remain noisy, uncertain, unpredictable).

	<b>subtraction</b>		<b>education</b>
		<i>(translation)</i>	
<i>event</i>	undecidable	—>	wager on a wager
<i>subject</i>	indiscernible	—>	education is illegal
<i>truths</i>	generic	—>	un-finishedness
<i>Truth</i>	unnameable	—>	<i>noisy</i> epistemology

<sup>42</sup>Badiou, *Conditions*, p. 123.

## **(Musical) education in noise**

But how might this speculative configuration actually work out in the practical materiality of the world? I return now to the practice of NO, reflecting briefly on the musical situation it presents.

There are, in fact, only two subjective paths here: *composition* and *improvisation*. Its subjects (in)form music by plucking sound elements from the threshold of noise, and thereupon set the stage for a *musical event* to happen.

Let us take the particular case of an improvisational situation. An event might therein happen. It is here an illegal, hazardous appearance of the musical void itself. It appears as noise, in a fleeting rupture of musicality, and immediately disappears: an event is *dissipative*. Being dissipative, (de)formative, the noise-event requires some sort of (in)forming: this has to be done by a retroactive act of *nomination*. Now, if for Badiou, the nomination of the event is always *poetical*, in the case of the musical situation, *nomination is articulated in immanence to its aural materiality*: it is affirmed within the horizon of the musical poetics available to the musical language of the situation. *Naming* the event, as far as the subjects of improvisation are concerned, implies then the *musical articulation* of any hazardous crack in musicality. Echoes, or traces left by this singularity, are presented explicitly in the listening loop of musical thoughts circulating within the improvisational situation.<sup>43</sup> Education intervenes at this point by becoming a resonant topology surrounding the subject's (neg)entropic affirmation—which, from the point of view of the situation, cannot, as yet, be symbolized: hailing from outside generic musicality, there is absolutely no musicianship (i.e., no *knowledge*) for it. It is, from the point of view of the musical establishment (here acting as the proxy of the state), noise. This subjective act of nomination involves an inaugural translation of the *ontological* void into

43 Which might, of course, consist of a single performer.

*phenomenological* noise. It is the first torsion of (neg)entropy, the turning-on of temporality, the start of subjective labor. Education here amplifies the subject's a-legal *naming* of a new (possible) musical truth, it bolsters the declaration of the musical *existence* of the noise-event, activating something like a *normativity* which always remains dialectical, dialogical—*Freirean*.

But for a musical truth to *appear*, the sole material articulation of the resonance of an event is not enough: there needs to be a recognition of its *implicative* nature: what are the musical consequences? *If* we include this noise in this particular musical situation: *how* does it bring about a new musicality, and with it, a new law? A musical education by noise will draw all possible consequences (potentially infinite) from such articulation, in the collective thinking of a new law which will musically *form* the (up to now) *formless*. Such *informing* is the negentropic *work* of the musical subjects. The nature of this second intervention is *logical*, inasmuch as its trajectory, though indiscernible, implies that the noise-event, undecidable *for* the situation, has been decided and a new musicality is in place. It is, hence, the production of what I have termed *logical noise* and it implies *a second stage in normativity*.

The third intervention requires education to provide a consistency, an organization, and an ethics of care<sup>44</sup> toward the inevitable anxiety caused by the proximity of the real of noise. Education signals an ethical trajectory that is doubly modulated. On one channel, it is modulated by a register of *courage*, which impels the subject to “keep going” in spite of the paralyzing lack of a law. On the other, it is modulated by a register of *justice*, which oversees the construction of a new law, subtracted from any terrorizing superego, as the truth of the event itself must remain unnameable. Education thus takes, along with the subject, full responsibility for the latter's subtraction from the law (education is a-legal).

Improvisation is never musical communication, but the collective construction of an unfinishable musical truth; it is never self-expression, but the subjective subtraction of the ego

<sup>44</sup> See A. J. Bartlett, 'Refuse become subject: The educational ethic of Saint Paul', *Journal of Badiou Studies* 3:1 (2014), pp. 193-216 (p. 19).

in order to let noise *be noise*. This subtraction, this courageous ‘negative capability’<sup>45</sup> is precisely what becomes *conscientização*, in the Freirean sense.

A question might arise here as to whether the *Noise of the Oppressed* should be seen as a political—rather than an artistic—endeavour: this issue seems to be indirectly, albeit very clearly, answered by Badiou himself in a talk he delivered in 2010 on the subject of militant art: ‘art cannot be the creation of the political event as such, because the political event itself follows its own, proper laws. So the political consequences of an event are not of an artistic nature.’<sup>46</sup> And so, insofar as it is a purely artistic activity, one must resist the temptation to think of NO as a political procedure. Nonetheless, in the same lecture, Badiou laid down ‘four provisional rules concerning the question of a weak militant art’, to wit: (1) to go in the direction of ‘what is intense locally much more than in the direction of what is powerful globally’, following what he calls ‘the imperative of weakness’ (2) to go in ‘the direction of a return to a strong idea, from the weakness itself’ and (3) to go in the ‘direction of presentation’ and process and never towards the ‘representative glorification of the results’<sup>47</sup>. Now, NO, through the musical activities of the *cnme*, (1) locally organises elements of what is arguably *the* contemporary proletariat (homeless people, refugees, undocumented migrants) in a militant body; this body engages in an artistic activity which is (2) mostly articulated through the practice of free improvisation (i.e. focusing on *process* rather than glorifying the result) and which (3) by being faithful subjects of the late 20th and early 21st century musical events (Cage, Brown, Cardew, japonoise), has a firm footing in the ‘strong idea’ of an avant-garde. And so, NO, granted, might not be a political activity per se: it nevertheless effectively (materially) practises Badiou’s four axioms for a contemporary militant art.

45 In Malaspina’s insightful reading, John Keats’ “negative capability” is ‘essentially the courage of allowing the representative structures of one’s own “self” to dissolve’ (Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise*, p.182).

46 Alain Badiou, “Does the Notion of Activist Art still have a Meaning?”, public lecture (13 Oct 2010) <<https://www.lacan.com/thevideos/10132010.html>> [accessd. 14 Oct 2012]).

47 Ibid. The fourth rule is ‘a synthesis’ of the first three.

Having said all that, it might still be argued that such a strong Freirean element risks suturing the whole enterprise (including the thinking of education brought about by the praxis) to the political condition. I would counter-argue, however, that Freire's pedagogical intervention, far from being purely political, is, on the contrary, *generic*. Following A. J. Bartlett's illuminating analysis apropos the Platonic figure of Socrates as the name of 'an education by truths', I might venture to suggest here an (educational, philosophical) equivalence: Both Socrates and Freire traverse their respective situations *in full* (i.e. not only *politically*), thus exposing the voids in each corresponding state. And this they accomplish through a double movement: firstly, by embodying a *not-knowing* (an ignorance of the sophist's knowledge in the case of Socrates, an ignorance of banking education in the case of Freire) and, secondly, by revealing a *lack* (lack of non-sophistic education in fifth-century BC Athens, lack of a critical pedagogy in 1950's Brazil). And thus, they both lay down the conditions of possibility of a site wherein the forcing of a new generic set (*viz, an education by truths*) becomes as much a subjective imperative as a threat to their respective states.<sup>48</sup>

## **Final thoughts**

If not necessarily sutured to the political condition, it is undoubtedly the case that education is, for Freire, a praxis inseparable from the emancipatory struggle against the oppression of capitalist domination.<sup>49</sup> My contention is that, today, an education *in noise* institutes a self-defensive fight against the onslaught of late capitalism. And this is simply because true noise,

<sup>48</sup> See A. J. Barlett, *Badiou and Plato: an Education by Truths* p. 7 and chapter 6, "Generic", pp. 196-228.

<sup>49</sup> 'I cannot be a teacher unless I understand that, far from being neutral, my practice demands from me a definition. Taking sides. Decision. Rupture. [...] I am a teacher because I support the ceaseless struggle against any form of discrimination, against the economic dominance of individuals or social classes. I am a teacher against the current capitalist order that invented this aberration: *misery aplenty* [*a miséria na fartura*].' Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes Necessários à Prática Educativa*, 55th edn (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2017) p.70 (original emphasis).

from the capitalist-market's point of view, has no use value whatsoever: the production of noise is immanently subversive, inasmuch as it produces subjects that are indigestible to capitalism.<sup>50</sup> This indigestibility represents the subtractive face of noise (on the side of an ontology woven on the void); but noise, being educational, is also immanently relational (on the side of the subjective production of a new logic).

Noise remains subversive, less by its destructive potential, than by managing to remain ontologically subtractive and logically relational. Such noise is emitted by *the work of the subjects of truth* and their *production of time*: this is the educational time of the Subject, emanating from the philosophical place of Truth: philosophy prepares an always-empty placeholder for Truth; education tends an always-uncertain timeholder for the Subject.

The subjects of an education by truths will need to venture beyond the borders of established knowledge and learn how to navigate the edge of the void, dwell at the threshold of noise and face up to the abject uncertainty and anxiety thereof. Education, as Socrates knew very well, is unlawful, *corruptive* of the established order. It is a hazardous endeavor.

Getting used to the hazard—which is nothing but a cultivation of courage—and keeping going: noise, both internal and external, thus becomes the natural environment of an education by truths.

Bartlett's dictum that education 'is fundamentally about change itself' is an axiomatic position fully consonant with an education by noise. But 'real change', Bartlett insists, must

50 From the subtractive framework I am proposing here, whereby noise originates in the fleeting phenomenological upsurge of an ontological void and is thenceforth produced by the (neg)entropic work of a subject of truth, noise can neither be subsumed by the state, nor commodified by the market, nor substantiated by culture; insofar as 'the generic being of a truth is never presented' (Alain Badiou, 'The Ethics of Truths', *Pli* 12 (2001), pp. 247-55 (p. 252)) and echoing the passage of truth to knowledge, such "commodified noise" has, very simply, *ceased to be noise*. From my perspective, then, a notion such as "noise music" only obtains as a performative contradiction. In this respect, c.f. Ray Brassier, 'Genre is Obsolete', *Noise and Capitalism*, ed. by Antony Iles et. al., (Donostia-San Sebastián: Arteleku Audiolab, 2009) pp. 61-71 and Nick Smith, 'The Splinter in Your Ear: Noise as the Semblance of Critique', *Culture, Theory & Critique* 46:1 (2005), pp. 43-59.

remain simultaneously unknown *and* not impossible.<sup>51</sup> And if noise, as Malaspina maintains, ‘informs on what remains to be known’,<sup>52</sup> then both statements put together result in the thesis that *noise, if immanent to education, informs us on what remains to be known, while being simultaneously unknown and not impossible.*

Education must therefore be the carer of *a noisy idea of noise*—its basic guidance being, *keep doing: let noise be noise and a truth might (neg)entropically emerge therein*—however, education must also remind the subject that, if noise is to remain noise, there will always be a remainder, a noise ‘excluded from having a proper name.’<sup>53</sup>

In other words, education is that voice reassuring the becoming-subjects that when traversing, or being traversed by a truth, there will always linger a noise *after* the eventual noise, a leftover noise delicately echoing throughout the empty chamber of philosophical Truth.<sup>54</sup>

51 Bartlett, ‘The Cold Dead Hands’, (n.p.).

52 Malaspina, *An Epistemology of Noise*, p 74.

53 Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, pp. 65-6.

54 I am immensely grateful to Cécile Malaspina for her patient, insightful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript—it goes without saying that any blunders remaining in it are purely of my own doing and should not tarnish her outstanding reputation. I am also grateful for the comments offered by the anonymous peer reviewers at *Rue Descartes*: their generosity and expertise have improved this essay and saved me from not a few errors (again, those that inevitably remain are entirely my own responsibility).