Language as a bridge to knowledge?

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When we last spoke here on the subject of encyclopedias and the transfer of knowledge, we concluded with a kind of aporia. We said that only the encyclopedia could meet the imperative of conveying knowledge. In other words, if knowledge were to take the form of modern science, it would be written in literal form and could be stored in the encyclopedia - an encyclopedia defined as the place where knowledge would ultimately be stored, from a nominalistic and constructivist perspective. This was a way of saying that truth was disjointed from knowledge - that it inexorably made a hole in it.

We concluded that the encyclopedia had to be axiomatic, in order to avoid the trap of equivocality inherent in the purely definitional and lexical form of the dictionary. And so we wondered about a hypothetical possible form, yet to be invented, that would then be capable of conveying a very particular type of knowledge, a "form that would be neither relational and clutched, nor inscribable in the form of small, collected letters", we said.

In our previous work, we attempted to articulate the two main ways of transferring and disseminating knowledge: the lexical way for the dictionary, and the axiomatic way for the encyclopedia. When it comes to the actual transfer of knowledge, we have tended to prefer the axiomatic route, as it is more economical and enables complete transfer (without residue and in an unambiguous manner), but here we would like to go back over the reasons for this choice.

In fact, our interrogative title, "Language as a conduit for knowledge", soon struck us as aporetic. Either we were identifying language with knowledge, which meant that all knowledge is expressed, or better still, written in a language, or in a symbolic system, which would have stopped the questioning we wanted to initiate dead in its tracks. Or else we'd be forced to turn to the "mystical element" alone, to use an expression dear to Wittgenstein, that is, to repeat what everyone already knows, that there is something unspeakable, and a knowledge that cannot be taught - at least not through language, in the form of a science, a knowledge that is therefore not entirely transmissible but which passes through the obscure chicanery of a master/disciple relationship, or guru/disciple to use a term from the Indian tradition.

Didn't Cicero say "I will teach you, O my disciples, what I have never

learned", and didn't Lacan spend his life trying to teach what precisely can't be taught - psychoanalysis, but without going through the experience of a psychoanalysis, i.e., through the intermediary of a psychoanalyst who is always singular, which for him referred to an ancient form of transmission of knowledge, master/disciple. We'll come back to this tortuous question in the final part of this work, showing that it's more a question of the transmission of know-how - of an art, in short - than of knowledge as we understand it here. That is to say, knowledge understood as "the proper production, always nominalistic, of the constructivist orientation of thought", to use Alain Badiou's definition - at least that of L'être et l'événement. Its operations are, he says, "discernment (this multiple has such and such a property) and classification (these multiples have the same property). The result is an encyclopedia". And "a judgment classified in the encyclopedia is said to be true". In other words, as we have already seen, once a truth has passed its eventual emergence - no longer in its nascent status - and has reshaped existing knowledge as such, it can only be lodged in the encyclopedia, which is then its ultimate destiny.

So, as we thought about it, the question changed, and we decided that it should be formulated as follows: given that there is knowledge - mainly know-how - that escapes capture by language, by the symbolic, that escapes any Aufhebung, any signifying succession as such, can we not nevertheless consider that there is a possible science of language, a knowledge about language itself? In other words, what, if anything, is the object of linguistics as a science? If we can get to the bottom of this question, we may be able to see how the encyclopedia, understood as the ultimate place where knowledge, once constituted, is stored, can in turn be an object for a science. Or we might consider the possibility of thinking in terms of a meta-encyclopedia, understood as a structure that gives reason to all constituted or future knowledge, providing the most abstract matrix possible - i.e., woven from the void alone - and housing data, empirical elements already discerned or still indiscernible. In this way, we'll have to deal with the question of metalanguage, which we can already say "doesn't exist", which is to say that we can never say "the truth about the truth", and that there is no "Other of the Other", to use Lacanian terms.

This is because language has at least two sides, one where it refers to something (this is the intentional aspect, language insofar as it is addressed to, i.e. it carries meaning), and a syntactic (grammatical or calculatory) side. And if, as Vincent Descombes puts it, "the mind is an outside, that it is public, in institutions, in culture", then we cannot even envisage an experience of thought without culture; a fortiori, this even leads us to think that there can be no question of knowledge without language - since we understand "language" here as the field of the symbolic, in Lacan's sense. In the extreme, this implies that language is not a means - a vehicle for knowledge - but a medium. In other words, it's not so much something we have at our disposal, something we use, but something in which we live. We speak of a "language bath", we "bathe in languages" - and an infant becomes a speaker,

although we don't yet know exactly how (here again, theories clash, between innate learning and learning, or even between those who think there's a bit of both - remember, for example, the famous debate between Piaget and Chomsky, which remained aporetic), simply by being immersed in a world of language. We'd like to rethink the question of the relationship between language and knowledge by discussing this thesis in a different way.

We shall proceed as follows. Firstly, we will define what we mean here by the terms knowledge, science and language, and not without first giving some considerations on the "mystical element" as conceived by Wittgenstein.

Secondly, we shall see what the object of linguistics can be, if it exists and is unitary, i.e. whether or not linguistics can take the form of a science.

Thirdly, we'll see how an "event truth", in Badiou's sense, forcing constituted knowledges into languages, is what can displace, remodel and reconfigure existing knowledges, allowing what we've called the encyclopedia to remain absolutely open through a new nomination.

So let's start with a little preamble, on what Wittgenstein called "the mystical element", so that we can quickly get rid of it.

Avoiding the "mystical element" (that which cannot be said, the unspeakable and unnameable as such) is for us a way of disregarding the conceptions of the anti-philosopher Wittgenstein. In other words, it's a way of avoiding the notion that philosophical propositions are nothing more than "false problems", absurd as they are, and at the same time devoid of meaning, so that we can't say whether they are true or false. In this way, we avoid what we concluded with in our first workshop: simply saying that what we couldn't talk about, we had to keep quiet about, and show. It's a question of avoiding this path of monstration (and language games) as the only possible way out of the question of the transmission of knowledge, and thus of the question of the form that a true encyclopedia should take, a question which in this case would not even have a *raison d'être* for Wittgenstein. Indeed, as François Wahl says in his preface to Alain Badiou's book *Conditions* :

> Le sophiste (aujourd'hui, Wittgenstein) réduit la pensée à des effets de discours régis par des conventions plurielles : le divers irréductible des jeux de langage ; à partir de quoi le concept de vérité ne peut être qu'illusoire, le langage seul réglant ce qui, dans chaque occurrence de sa « grammaire », se laisse énoncer. Le philosophe – dont s'éclaire ici une première fois la défiance envers le « langagier » – prend acte, au contraire, de ce que l'amour, la science, le poème ou la politique produisent, chacun dans son ordre, des vérités surnuméraires au regard de ce qui, de chacun, s'énonce dans la langue du savoir ; et entreprend – c'est sa tâche propre – de construire dans leur intervalle ce qu'il en est de la Vérité.

So, as you will have gathered, it's not a question of reducing philosophy (or here, knowledge) to language, understood as grammar, nor of giving in to the temptation of monstration, as the only possible way of resolving the necessary aporias of philosophy. With this in mind, let's briefly define what we mean here by the terms knowledge, science and language.

At first glance, these three terms - knowledge, science and language - could be seen as equivalent. Language would be thought of as the symbolic, and thus in a sense as the form of knowledge. And if we think only of modern knowledge - mathematized, literalized at least - this would be none other than science. The encyclopedia would then be the most abstract form there is, a matrix, always open, in which to house what can - or may one day - be written down from reality, or at least "gathered" from it in the form of small letters.

Let's just say that we won't be distinguishing knowledge from science here, since we'll only be talking about modern Galilean knowledge. What is at stake here, however, is seeing how, if there is a science - or knowledge - of language, it is quite distinct from science. In other words, there is a science of language, and this is what we need to discuss. To do so, we'll need to define what linguistics is all about. Once again, Jean-Claude Milner will be our guide, in particular with what he articulates on this subject in his book, Introduction à une science du langage (Introduction to a Science of Language).

Milner defines science, in a condensed and useful shorthand: "a discursive configuration that took shape with Galileo and has not ceased to function since. Since Alexandre Koyré, it has been characterized by the combination of two features: (I) the mathematization of the empirical (mathematical physics should rather be called mathematized physics); (II) the constitution of a relationship with technique, such that technique is defined as the practical application of science (hence the theme of applied science) and science is defined as the theory of technique (hence the theme of fundamental science)...".

For us, then, knowledge is modern knowledge defined as science, and we'll keep the term language as a synonym for the symbolic - as Lacan understood it, i.e. as opposed to both the imaginary and the real. So if knowledge (understood here, once again, as Galilean) is always written in a language (via the Symbolic), then it seems to us that if there is a science of language, then we have a science of (Galilean) science, as it were. A meta-science, the form of which we cannot yet give (necessarily post-Galilean), an ultimately abstract form that would in any case provide a matrix for the housing of knowledge (already constituted or to come). In short, this particular form would be the encyclopedia of all possible encyclopedias. That's why we need to turn our attention to what we now consider a fundamental question: is there such a thing as the science of language?

The only reason for choosing to work on the basis of a theoretical approach to language is to establish - if we succeed in doing so - what this theory can teach us about thought, or more modestly, about knowledge(s), and thus indirectly about encyclopedias as such.

If there is a possible science of language, this means that there is a science which, a priori, could give us the ultimate form of any encyclopaedia - the latter always being, in the last instance, an aggregate of terms, and never totally escaping lexical form, which was the aporia where we left off in our last presentation, even if we had specified that it took an axiomatic form, and thus avoided the traps of equivocation proper to language.

So, of course, we have to bear in mind that the encyclopedia is seen here as both the ultimate place where knowledge once constituted is housed, and also as a potentially, but also really, open - or infinite - set, where new terms will be subsumed that were not previously in the language of knowledge(s).

Now let's see how we can or cannot speak of a science of language. For Aristotle, a theory, a science, will be validated exclusively by its intrinsic properties: specificity of the object, evidence of the axioms (which are indemonstrable), immediate intelligibility of the primitive terms (which are indefinable), formal rigor of the deduction.

Science is thus to be understood rigorously as consisting in the combination of two characteristics: literalization on the one hand, empiricality on the other. The science of language can only be called a Galilean science if its object is language, and not language itself. If linguistics, in fact, does not have language as its object, at least for a certain current (which only we will follow here, i.e. the current that tends to want to unify linguistics, beyond the hard science/human science dichotomy), it's simply because it takes it as its axiom (there is language simply because there are speaking beings). So, whatever the science of linguistics may be, it cannot be called a "science of language". To conclude that language exists, it's enough to note that beings speak, but the linguist's question begins when he realizes that "speaking beings" speak... languages.

On the other hand, every Galilean science is a science of nature, and this implies that for linguistics to be one of these sciences, it must consider that language belongs to nature. This is what we were talking about when we quoted Vincent Descombes in the introduction, who considers language to be a medium - at least for the speaking being.

So, as a direct consequence, if we don't consider language to belong to nature, then linguistics is not a science (Galilean, literalized), and the question is settled.

A true science of language would thus have no other path than to "literalize" the

natural languages, if it at least intends to exist as a Galilean science. If it does so, it cannot avoid the question of its relationship to the other Galilean sciences. Generally speaking, these are all part of the same gesture: that which determines science in general as possible, and defines the modern as such; from this point of view, all the sciences appear to be articulable with one another. In short, everything that presents itself as science explicitly or implicitly poses the question of science articulated as encyclopedia. As Jean-Claude Milner puts it, "whether the encyclopedia is an ideal point, or whether it should be positively constituted, matters very little indeed".

As you can see, linguistics is a controversial field, and far from unified as such. A quick perusal of the various theories of linguists also reveals that the term "language" is far from unambiguous, which means we run the risk of "not knowing what we're saying" when we refer to it.

But let's now return, as announced, to the dichotomy that linguists have established between the generative conception (set of rules) and the vision of language as an aggregate of terms. This will show us the impasses of the conception of language as a set of rules, which will not, strictly speaking, invalidate what we said about the axiomatic path as the only one capable of being a receptacle of knowledge (at least when it comes to being able to transmit knowledge in its entirety), but at least qualify what we said last year.

The constructivist approach involves positing axioms and deducing from them a system encompassing knowledge in its modern (scientific, since Galileo) form, and it can be put into perspective, in parallel, with the generative conception of language (innateist conception), initiated by Chomsky. Let's just say that it's a vision of language as something that can be generated by means of rules and modules, and thus overlaps with the notion of constructivism in philosophy or mathematics (a current of thought to which we'll return at length in our final section). For Chomsky, and the Cambridge School, the object of linguistics is grammar (whereas for Saussure, as we know, the object of linguistic science is not language but language).

Nevertheless, the aporias involved in following this Chomskyan conception are great, and linguists are tending to abandon it. We are no longer in the air of the cosmos and the closed world, but of the infinite universe, to use Koyré's expression. And, what's more, with "the Other being barred" and knowledge always liable to be punctured by a new event-driven truth, it seems that a more lexical path is the only acceptable one. In other words, rather than seeing knowledge or language as a set of rules, we need to think of them as aggregates of terms, and this is a new way for linguists to think about language, for want of being able to give its structures or theory (a way that we won't be able to develop in detail here, not only because we're not specialists, but also because of the limited time allotted to this presentation).

Let's just say, in conclusion to these linguistic considerations regarding its relationship to knowledge, that the question is less whether or not language is a

science, than the mystery that persists in surrounding it with its aura. Indeed, it would seem that one cannot be purely empiricist when taking language as an object. This is because we can't cut out the phonemes in the flow of discourse in an objective way (but only subjectively, without knowing precisely how) - and it then eludes science according to Aristotle's criteria that we set out earlier. Language, then, is neither what enables us to calculate, in the sense that "to think would be to calculate", nor a vehicle which, in a purely semantic sense, enables us to communicate. Rather, for us as speaking beings, language is a medium, and it flows through us far more than we control it.

Let's say, then, that one way out for contemporary cognitive linguistics is to think of language - and with its help, and this is the paradox - as a means of perception. We can't go into this here, for lack of time.

But let's simply remember, for our purposes here, that a modern knowledge of language seems to be impossible, even if, once again, it's the languages of knowledge that constitute our sciences and theories. Here we return to Canguilhem's critique of psychology as a science: a subject cannot take itself as an object, just as a set cannot belong to itself in set theory - except as an event, in Badiou's sense, to which we shall return.

Above all, all this means that an encyclopedia - the place where knowledge is ultimately stored - will always remain a provisional, ever-open "structure", and that we are condemned to think of knowledge from a nominalist point of view, as disjoint from truth, as such always in the process of becoming, thus escaping any system or any irremediably closed structure. In other words, this is tantamount to saying that "nothing is Everything", as Lacan put it, or that there is only infinity, and even an infinity of infinities, as Cantor showed.

What remains to be seen is that, while language is unquestionably the conduit of knowledge, even if there is no knowledge or science of language, the fact remains that language, through the new nominations it enables, always allows for a possible shift in the field of knowledge, and thus a fortiori for a mutation of the encyclopedia that is still to come.

The question then becomes: how can we transform language and bring about a shift in the field of knowledge? As Alain Badiou put it in one of his seminars:

> Dire « il y a des langues » peut désormais avoir deux sens. Le premier sens consiste à dire qu'il y des protocoles de règles de communication, de transmission, et ainsi de suite. Le second sens, quant à lui, conserve le premier mais lui ajoute quelque chose – à savoir qu'il y a aussi un langage-sujet lié à l'émergence subjective comme telle : quelque chose surgit dans le langage communicationnel qui est en coupure (et non pas en continuité) avec lui. Mallarmé, déjà, opposait le langage qu'il nommait « commercial » – puisque destiné au « commerce » entre les hommes – qu'il comparait

> avec la monnaie que l'on se passe de main en main, au langage de fondation qui, lui, se lève sur fond d'absence.

It's to this foundational language that we'd now like to turn our attention, since it seems to us that, rather than looking at how to transmit knowledge (which is what we tried to sketch out in our last presentation), it might be useful to look at the conditions of possibility for its upheaval - the conditions for a change of episteme, to use Foucault's famous concept, about which we'll say a few words first.

Indeed, it seems impossible not to evoke Michel Foucault's great "structuralist" book, Les mots et les choses 10. His major concept, episteme, is not, paradoxically, an object for epistemology; it is above all, and in its very development, what a status for discourse is sought throughout Words and Things. The object is what the speaker says about it. For Foucault, it's a question of trying to take "a step to the side", of risking his thinking by introducing meaning into the very gap we can perceive with our own thinking.

Foucault defined "work" as "that which is capable of introducing a significant difference into the field of knowledge, at the cost of a certain pain for the author and the reader, and with the possible reward of a certain pleasure, i.e. access to another figure of truth".

It is also clear that Foucault sees episteme as a structure, the elements of which are the various discourses. Nevertheless, the descriptive methodology employed is more reminiscent of a systematics that might be described as static structuralism. This approach avoids the thorny question of the origin of structure (i.e., the problem has shifted from the conditions of emergence of discourse to the conditions of emergence of structure). But Foucault's episteme lacks a concept fundamental to structuralism: transformation or operation, and its corollary, an invariant. The different epistemes he identifies are juxtaposed according to "enigmatic discontinuities". As he himself puts it, "discontinuities as enigmatic in their principle, in their primitive tearing apart, as that which separates the circles of Paracelsus from Cartesian order".

Or "to what event or law do these mutations obey, so that suddenly things are no longer perceived, described, enunciated, characterized, classified and known in the same way, and that in the interstice of words or beneath their transparency, it is no longer riches, living beings, discourse, that offer themselves to knowledge, but radically different beings?".

Foucault's epistemes are thus neither predetermined nor constructed, which perhaps explains their "enigmatic discontinuity". But it is Badiou's notion of the event that probably best responds to Foucault's notion of "enigmatic discontinuity". Badiou considers it, admittedly in his own terms, but in its very emergence. Badiou

thus criticizes what he calls Foucault's "logical empiricism", linking it to the constructivist current of thought. At least, that's what we'd now like to show.

Before turning to Badiou's text itself, we need to reiterate the plurality of conceptions that subsume what is known as the "constructivist orientation of thought", or at least to briefly trace its origins in the history of thought.

Philosophically speaking, constructivism is a theory of knowledge that has developed within a cognitivist framework and, in some respects, in opposition to other theories, such as behaviorist ones. It is underpinned by contributions of thought from various fields (from perception studies to neuroscience, artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, etc.) and has found different, more or less partial and sometimes critical formulations from a number of authors.

From a historical point of view, we can trace the origins of constructivist thinking back to 17th-century empiricism: in particular, to the philosophical thought of Vico, summed up in his famous formula, dear to Baldine Saint Girons: "verum ipso factum" (the true is the fact itself). From Vico's point of view, man can only recognize what he himself has done, the products of his own operations: knowledge and rational experience are therefore only the product of cognitive constructs, and there is no way of knowing whether they correspond to a truthful reality. "Human science consists of nothing other than the proportion and correspondence it introduces into things", Vico tells us. So, only God can know how the real world is made, since he built it and knows both its elements and the way they were constructed. The world of lived experience, then, has no claim to coincide with ontological reality, but it is so, and it must be so, because that's how everyone constructs it. And, for Vico, the constructive process is determined by the very history of what is constructed, because each operation performed conditions and limits what can be virtually known later.

Berkeley, a contemporary of Vico, similarly asserts that it is impossible to know the objective reality of things that have no "subsistence" outside the mind, and whose being is determined solely by the fact that they are perceived.

We could also argue that Kant helped to define modern constructivism. For him, every mental content, every intermediate and final product of cognitive processes, is always a construction made possible by the automatic operation of a priori categories and intuitions.

If such are the distant origins of constructivist thinking, its most modern elaborations are linked to the epistemological reflections of Piaget and Bateson, to mention but a few. Piaget, for example, speaks of "a subject who constructs his knowledge" as an epistemic subject, whose cognitive products are the general structures of thought.

Despite certain differences, constructivists nevertheless share the idea that human knowledge is the result of the cognitive operations of an active subject.

In other words, within the organism as a whole, knowledge is constructed, and then organizes its world of experience, guided by criteria of functionality. In this sense, constructivism shifts the focus from the mind's receptive faculties to the productive faculties that must necessarily accompany them. The underlying model is biological: knowledge is interpreted as the activity of the living organism, and is determined by the characteristics of the organic system itself, which in turn is part of a system of structured social interactions. In short, the relationship between constructed knowledge and reality is similar to that between organisms and their environment.

For our purposes here, let's simply note that constructivism no longer views knowledge as "the search for an ontological truth" that corresponds to the true nature of facts, but as "the search for adequate attitudes and ways of thinking" that match the elements of a given situation.

The constructivist vision is thus intuitively appealing, and is confirmed in practice, but theoretically it poses serious problems.

It cannot be defined as a model, because to have the heuristic value of a model, it would not only have to schematize the way in which the cognitive process unfolds, but also define its limits of validity and the conditions under which it can be applied.

No model is valid in absolute terms, and today there are no effective models capable of describing how the processes of knowledge, understanding and learning unfold. Nor, for the moment, does constructivism allow us to make predictions or infer rules about how cognitive processes unfold. At most, to use Lakatos's expression, we can "envisage constructivism as a research program" and try to discern and specify its defining characteristics.

The fundamental axiom is that the individual is the active protagonist of the knowledge process, and that the various mental constructs are the product of his or her activity. The theory, however, offers no arguments to avoid the implications leading to absolute subjectivism, confusion between real object and subjective experience of the object, and incommunicability. For these critics, radical constructivism is, from a philosophical point of view, a confused theory, devoid of arguments in favor of its positions. It does not satisfactorily address the problem of intersubjectivity and, in the final analysis, is for them no more than a primitive version of traditional subjectivist empiricism.

What's more, the fundamental axiom of constructivism is diametrically opposed to innateist positions in the cognitive field, and has come in for considerable criticism. It is difficult, in fact, to explain how the individual can derive new conceptual organizations and complex cognitive procedures from simple levels, or even from a tabula rasa.

A second axiom of constructivism (implicit in the definition itself) concerns the structure of mental representations. In contrast to Piaget, who was interested in the construction of thought structures as logical structures, research on representations has focused on specific areas of knowledge. Based on the structuralist position, psycholinguistics and information processing studies became the main sources of reference, at least in the English-speaking world. Constructivism thus emphasized the associative and relational nature of knowledge organized in memory, and highlighted how each new piece of information is "recognized" by the subject as soon as it finds anchor points in a pre-existing structure to which it must not simply be added, but into which it must be integrated. The analogy between the "structure of mental representations" and "semantic networks" has, however, become increasingly strong, to the point of reification (i.e., the commodification of the subject).

As we can see, the constructivist way of thinking, and therefore the generative conception of language, is far from being without aporia, and will not allow us to say in what way language is or is not a transmitter of knowledge (if it alone can generate as a structure knowledge about language or knowledge at all), or even if we can really speak of a knowledge of language. Constructivism in linguistics, as we have already mentioned, is therefore tending to be abandoned.

But now that we've reconstructed what constructivist thought was - its main axioms - let's see how Alain Badiou attempts to rethink the problem from there. It is in meditation twenty-eight of L'être et l'événement that Badiou considers the articulation of constructivist thought and what can be said about it in terms of knowledge (the knowledge of being, admittedly, but knowledge nonetheless, as we shall see). It is from this that we would now like to draw inspiration before concluding. In this "meditation", Badiou tells us that "in its essence, constructivist thought is a logical grammar". In other words, it is "a radical nominalism". Indeed, he points out that "it is [...] in the essence of constructivism - that is, its total immanence to the situation - to conceive neither self-appearance nor the supernumerary, and thus to keep out of thought the whole dialectic of event and intervention".

As Badiou says of nominalism: "it's what, from the Greek sophists to the Anglo-Saxon logical empiricists, and even to Foucault, has invariably made it the critical - or anti-philosophical - philosophy par excellence. To refute the notion that a part of the situation only exists if it is constructed from discernible properties and terms in language, wouldn't it be necessary to indicate an absolutely indistinguishable, anonymous, arbitrary part? But how can this be indicated, if not by constructing this very indication? The nominalist is always justified in saying that this counter-example, having been isolated and described, is in fact an example. All water goes to its mill,

if it allows itself to be shown in the procedure that draws its inclusion from belonging and language. The indiscernible is not.

This is the thesis on which nominalism fortifies itself, and on which it can at leisure restrict any claim to deploy excess in the world of in-differences."

As Fabien Tarby tells us, "it's clear that constructibility is a possibility. Some multiples are constructible, others are not. But at the same time, constructivist thinking shows what ambition its empire deploys as soon as we settle into it. If, indeed, it appears from set theory in general that constructible sets are only species of multiples, once placed in the constructible hierarchy it will be impossible to demonstrate that non-constructible sets exist. To do so, you'd have to exhibit it, i.e. construct it, which would immediately affirm its constructibility. This, incidentally, is the perversity of all nominalism: if you want to show that something other than the nameable exists, you'll have to name this exceptional being, which is therefore nameable. The hypothesis that every whole is constructible is certainly a theorem, but one that is immanent to the already constructible universe.

This is Badiou's critique of the nominalistic path of constructivism.

Badiou, with his unprecedented thought of the event (in L'être et l'événement at least) as precisely a forcing, by a supernumerary nomination, of the knowledge in place, proposes another way out of the aporias he identifies in the constructivist way of thinking. For Badiou, truth is always a construction and a process.

This approach is dialectical. Badiou calls truth a certain kind of process and the result of that process - and it's the process that's more important to him. So obviously, if truth, or rather if truths - for the plural is absolutely fundamental - are processes, we're going to have to ask the question of their origin, of what makes them possible, and secondly, of their originality, their singularity in the world. The first question, the question of origin, is Badiou's theory of the event: the idea that every process of truth is rooted in an exception and not in the general laws of the world. As for the second question, it's the question of the construction of truth in a world, and therefore of the compatibility of a truth with the real world. So there's a dimension of exception, on the side of origin, and a dimension of compatibility, on the side of construction, all of which means that truths exist and can, in a certain sense, be attributed eternity, without the need for transcendence.

They are, in short, particular constructions, and yet they are universal, for reasons that have to do with both their origin and their construction.

More precisely, as Fabien Tarby goes on to say in his rendering of Badiou's thought, "in constructible ontology, it is impossible, in fact, for the event to appear. Everything is ordered to a construction that, step by step, presents multiples of which it is incoherent that they are extraordinary, i.e. that they possess the elementary schema of the event (α ε α) 16. The result would be, roughly speaking, an inadmissible failure of hierarchy where we would come to the contradiction that this set appears for the first time at several levels" (p.95). All this, as we can see, enables Badiou to

shift the problem of the constructivist way of thinking, to take a decisive step aside. It is no longer a question of thinking as a prisoner of a logical grammar, in a "radical nominalism", but of being able to think the emergence of an event in dialectic with a choice always assumed as such. This calls into question the constructivist way of thinking in philosophy, and opens the way to a hitherto unheard-of way of thinking about "being as being". Above all, by thinking about the concept of event in a fresh way, we can see how new appointments can take place, reconfiguring existing knowledge in the aftermath.

Nevertheless, as Alain Badiou poetically concludes his meditation, "knowledge calms the passion of being. As a measure of excess, it tames the state, and places the infinity of the situation on the horizon of a constructive procedure underpinned by the already-known. No one wants a permanent adventure in which unlikely names emerge from the void. In fact, it is from the exercise of knowledge that the surprise and subjective motivation of its improbability are drawn. Even for those who wander around event sites, gambling their lives on the occurrence and promptness of intervention, it is appropriate, after all, to be knowledgeable."

And now, it seems to us, it's time to conclude.

To the question "Is language the 'conduit' of knowledge?" we can now answer that, if it inexorably is, knowledge is just as much what enables us to force language - through the event-driven grace of truths arising - by introducing new signifiers, adding new terms to language. A truth always emerges in "a body and a soul", and thus upsets existing knowledge, always through a nomination (or at least a trace), hitherto unheard of (or unnoticed, not yet discriminated in the situation as such).

Basically, we should now be able to account for this result as Cicero said of the art of rhetoric: "I will teach you what I have never learned". This suggests that knowledge, if not in the form of modern knowledge, then remains under the condition of know-how, or savoir-y-faire. Wittgenstein's question of art or arch-aesthetics, for example, could thus enable us to "build" a bridge with the question of the act and ethics. It seems to us that there's a whole lot of work to be done from there.

> If language is always the conduit of knowledge when the latter is constituted in a Galilean form - and no longer as know-how, which is transmitted under transference and through obscure channels - we cannot say that there is a knowledge, a science of language. Linguistics has not yet fully constituted itself as a modern science, and remains a term encompassing a plurality of meanings (but perhaps linguistics will never even be a science, and we recall that Lacan liked to speak of "linguistics" to distance himself from it). Quite simply, there is no single metalanguage that holds together, and so the encyclopedia will forever remain an open-ended collection, in which hitherto unseen knowledge

will find its place in the course of history. This new knowledge is always the fruit of an upheaval induced by the emergence of event-driven truths, about which nothing can yet be said. This is why an "immortal" could spend his "eternity" building the encyclopedia step by step, but will never possess its abstract matrix - even in the form of the purest mathematics.

So, once again, we're a long way from answering our initial question. But in the end, isn't it the nature of philosophical problems to remain open-ended, like an encyclopedia, always to be reconstructed, and sometimes even aporetic?