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editors' introduction

Arne De Boever, Jason E. Smith,
Jessica Whyte, and Ashley Woodward

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Parrhesia remains as committed as ever to publishing what we consider to be important work in contemporary critical philosophy, and we welcome submissions for all sections of the journal.

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"March 18, 1986," from Alain Badiou, *Malebranche: The Seminar of Alain Badiou (Being 2—The Theological Figure, 1986)*

alain badiou,

translated by jason e. smith

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

*The text we have the pleasure of presenting here is the translation of a chapter of Alain Badiou's recently published *Le Séminaire. Malebranche: L'être 2. Figure théologique, 1986* (The Seminar. Malebranche: Being 2. Theological figure, 1986). As this title should make clear, the volume in question represents the corrected transcript of a seminar Alain Badiou gave on the subject of Nicolas Malebranche's philosophy in the first half of 1986. The seminar consisted of six sessions that met over the course of roughly two and half months, from March 11 to May 27; translated here is the third of those meetings. This session, like much of the rest of the seminar, is devoted to what is perhaps Malebranche's signature philosophical work, the *Treatise on Nature and Grace* (1680).*

*Le Séminaire. Malebranche: L'être 2. Figure théologique, 1986 was originally published in 2013 by Librairie Arthème Fayard, as the second installment of what will eventually be a complete edition of Badiou's seminars published under the title *Le Séminaire*. The series opens with his 1983-84 seminar on the philosophical category of the "One" and its development in the thought of Plato, Descartes, and Kant; it will continue up to the present. The seminar on Malebranche is therefore the second volume to appear within the series that will constitute *The Seminar*, though it was in fact published simultaneously with the volume Badiou chose to initiate the series with: his 1994-95 seminar on Jacques Lacan (*Le Séminaire. Lacan: l'antiphilosophie 3, 1994-95*). The pages that*

follow are the first of Badiou's Seminar to be appear in English.

As the subtitle of this seminar on Malebranche also indicates, the trimester spent examining Treatise on Nature and Grace forms a part of one cycle within the seminar series, dedicated to the thought of Being. This cycle would examine three moments or "figures" of Being: an inaugural, "ontological" figure (Parmenides, 1985), a second, "theological," figure (Malebranche), and a final variation, the modern "withdrawal" of Being (Heidegger, 1986-87). This cycle can be seen, in turn, as part of a larger group of seminars, conducted between 1983 and 1987, consecrated to the "history of the thinking of being." This grouping includes, in addition to the cycle on Being and the seminar on the One, still another seminar dedicated to the category of the Infinite as it is articulated in the thought of Aristotle, Spinoza and Hegel (1984-85).

*Readers of Badiou will note that the five years during which these seminars on Being, the One, and the Infinite were conducted coincide with the years, following the publication of *Théorie du sujet* in 1982, during which he was also composing his 1988 philosophical masterpiece, *Being and Event*. These readers will also note that the One and the Infinite are central themes in the radical transformation of ontology undertaken in the first three parts of that same book. All of the proper names evoked in these seminars will warrant considerable analyses in that same book, often entire chapters. All except one: the name Malebranche does not appear once in its hundreds of pages.*

*In his preface to the seminar on Malebranche, Badiou writes that this "seminar is the only one in my entire career which, from the point of view of the construction of my own system, has been of no use to me."² Nevertheless, within the economy of Badiou's philosophical archaeology, the "theological figure of being" plays a crucial, mediating role: it sutures the power of the Infinite to the category of the One. The ontotheological synthesis of the One and the Infinite is, in this sense, the exemplary figure of what Badiou calls in the opening pages of *Being and Event* "the ontology of presence." If the examination of Malebranche's particular variation on this synthesis was of no use to Badiou from the perspective of the elaboration of his own philosophical work, the disintrication of these two categories is nevertheless a pivotal achievement of his system. It is the foundation on which the doctrine of the event and the theory of the subject are built.*

The choice of Malebranche—an author largely unknown outside of France—is a curious one. Badiou indicates in the preface to this seminar that he initially considered Leibniz's ontotheological ambitions to have been the self-evident choice, and that the decision to devote the seminar to Malebranche was a more or less contingent one. Leibniz, we should remember, was the subject of a seminar given by Gilles Deleuze just a year later, in the

first half of 1987; he would publish a book on Leibniz as a “baroque” thinker of the “fold” in 1988. Badiou, in his turn, similarly characterized Malebranche throughout his seminar as a philosopher of the baroque; in this volume, both Malebranche and Leibniz are grouped with Spinoza to form a network of paths taken in the wake of the Cartesian rupture in philosophy.

It is arguably Pascal, however, who plays the role of foil to Malebranche in this seminar. Pascal, we should recall, occupies a fundamental if often overlooked position in Badiou’s thought: in his status as one of four French “dialectical” thinkers (alongside Rousseau, Mallarmé, and Lacan) in whose lineage Badiou situates himself, and in the place his thought assumes in the “construction” of Badiou’s philosophical conceptuality in Being and Event. It is Pascal’s thought that provides the matrix for developing the two crucial subjective “operators” in his thought which provide the first mediations between the category of the event and the theory of the subject: intervention, and fidelity. Time and again, Pascal’s name appears in this seminar on Malebranche’s theory of grace. In turn, certain passages from the excerpt published here are closely echoed in the chapter in Being and Event on Pascal. The use to be made of this beautiful reconstruction of Malebranche’s theory of grace is therefore the portrait it draws of a thought that shares with Pascal the conditions of modern philosophy: the Galilean revolution in the natural sciences. Pascal and Malebranche share equally an ambition to think what a subject, a modern Christian subject, might be in a world that is “infinite and senseless.”³ In his response to this question, Malebranche is opposed to Pascal at every turn. It is this path said to lead nowhere—for contemporary thought—that Badiou wanders down, and explores, on the way to building one of the most powerful philosophical apparatuses of our time.

Alain Badiou’s Malebranche: The Seminar of Alain Badiou (Being 2—The Theological Figure, 1986) will be published by Columbia University Press in 2016.

—Jason E. Smith

MARCH 18, 1986

I ended our seminar last time by giving you the outline of the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*. I will return to this matter now in greater detail.

We have seen that Malebranche's architectonic construction involved three very clear and well-organized parts. Initially, he establishes the necessity and possibility of a mathematization of the problem, that is, a treatment of the question of grace homogeneous with the treatment of the question of nature. He will show that there are indeed two different orders—those of nature and of grace—but also that these two different orders do not derive from two different rationalities. We note here a point-by-point opposition to Pascal, for whom the difference between these orders is fundamentally a difference between the very principles of thought. We cannot think the order of charity in the same terms we think the order of reason. So for Pascal there is a break between principles of intelligibility, whereas for Malebranche there is none. The orders are distinct, but the principles that allow us to understand and articulate them are the same.

Second, Malebranche conducts a sort of study—which I called a “topological” study—of the question of grace, which leads him to distinguish between its “local” and “global” aspects. These are my own terms. Malebranche himself speaks of a “grace of feeling” and a “grace of enlightenment.” The structure is double, and we must think its articulation, an articulation that must be seen as referring in the last instance to the distinction among persons in God: the grace of feeling is assignable to Christ, to the Son, and the grace of enlightenment to the Father, the Creator. The topology of grace is founded on the distinction among persons in God, and therefore on a rationalized aspect of Trinitarian theology.

Third, Malebranche deals with the subjective effect of this double structure, that is, how grace acts in us, how it operates as a factor of subjective determination. This will take the form of the problem: what is the exact interaction, in a decision, between grace and freedom?

We are dealing here with a very recognizable procedure, one we can reformulate in modern terms as follows. First, we are dealing with the logic of the matheme, which means that grace and divine action are not exceptions to this logic; second, the examination of the particular mathemes involved in this matter, namely, the structures of grace; and third, the subjective determination. We therefore go from the symbolic to the subject, with the third movement being the real, that is, the

actualization of things. Only this third movement is actually real, since it is only there that we encounter grace *qua* grace, grasped in its actual occurrence and not just in its principle. This general movement organizes the layout of the work. Let me remind you that the first part, the First Discourse, is “On the Necessity of the General Laws of Nature and Grace,” a perfectly explicit title, and a part that is itself divided in two: “On the Necessity of the General Laws of Nature” and “On the Necessity of the General Laws of Grace.”

Before entering into the heart of the matter, I would like to emphasize once more Malebranche’s paradoxical radicalism. For, in the parallelism between nature and grace, between the general laws of nature and the general laws of grace, we might imagine that we will be dealing with a kind of naturalization of grace, that is, ultimately with a kind of absorption of the logic of grace into the general logic of nature. But in many respects it is the opposite. In Malebranche, the intelligibility of nature requires from the start parameters that are usually only brought into play when it is a matter of grace. But it is not a question of extending grace to the understanding of nature. It is rather that, starting with the comprehension of nature, we encounter concepts, parameters, and criteria that ordinarily come into play only when one is dealing with problems of grace, religion and salvation. In a way, the unification, the homogeneous mathematization, occurs on the basis of the Christian categories, including where nature is concerned. Rather than with a naturalization of grace, we are confronted with a Christianization of nature. The categories of Christianity have become concepts, necessary concepts, even for the intelligibility of the world. It should be understood that this thesis of homogeneity is, in comparison with our current thinking, a partly regressive movement, since it occurs not through the rational extension of the universe of nature to the universe of grace, but rather through a sort retroaction of the Christian categories on the understanding of the world itself. That’s what makes for Malebranche’s paradoxical singularity. But didn’t a certain Marxism assert that class struggle—the domain of politics—directly affects our comprehension of nature, that there was a proletarian science? And that the categories of politics—which is revolutionary grace—retroactively clarified the intelligibility of nature? Malebranchism can be found there where you least expect it....

We are now going to enter a bit into the architecture of all of this. As I have already had occasion to tell you, in a sense Malebranche’s whole philosophy is derived from a single axiom, the axiom that is precisely article 1 of the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*. It is the first statement in it. Moreover, in later editions, Malebranche would write: “I have been able to begin the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*

with these words . . .”⁴ (“I have been able” meaning that it’s after the fact.) What follows is precisely the axiom I am speaking about, that is, article 1, which I will give you again, because you should constantly bear it in mind: “God, being able to act only for his own glory, and being able to find it only in himself, cannot have had any other plan in the creation of the world than the establishment of his Church.”⁵ Personally, I never tire of this statement. It is truly admirable in every way. It is perfectly audacious; it is truly radical. It should be examined in detail on its own terms

Right from the start, this axiom sets in motion the conceptual rationalization of the Christian categories. The enterprise gets underway with this statement, insofar as the necessity of Christ can immediately be deduced from it, thanks to a very simple reasoning used many times by Malebranche. The central mystery of Christianity, namely the incarnation of God on earth, and therefore the becoming finite of the infinite, is for him the first truth, the first clear principle. What is just as typical of Malebranche is that the famous mysteries of religion, run through his austere filter of conceptual rationalization, become the first principles of reason. The articles of faith that refer to an unfathomable mystery are for Malebranche the most luminous, clear, and necessary principles of reason in general.

Let’s ask ourselves first of all whom this axiom is formulated against, either implicitly or explicitly. Malebranche declares that God has created the world only in view of establishing his Church. As usual, this statement is directed at once against an opportunist and an extremist thesis. In our previous sessions we traced the militant context of this whole affair enough to understand what is at issue here. The opportunist thesis is that the world as it is, that is, the world as a natural, created, finite world, the world without the Church and without Christ, would already be quite enough to glorify God. This thesis maintains that the world is, after all, not so bad, that it contains enough marvels to bear witness to the glory of God, without having to go looking for the wonder of wonders that is God himself in the person of Christ.

There’s no need of that in order for the world to sing the glory of the heavens, and there is no shortage of preachers, Jesuit ones in particular, who say as much. In the eighteenth century you could hear it said that if you looked at the wing of an insect under a microscope, it was already so complicated, so subtle, so amazing, so marvelous, that it was clear that it was singing the glory of the Lord! This is what was called the apologetic of wonders, one of the great specialists of which was abbé Pluche, who put together entire books explaining how insects’ wings,

fossils, and everything that could be seen through a microscope and a telescope, all of this alone proved that God was required and celebrated by this accumulation of natural wonders. This is an opportunist thesis, to the extent that it obviously resembles the thesis that merely being a good inhabitant of this world suffices to sing the glory of God since, after all, the world already proclaims it. Therefore, if you inhabit this world properly, without committing any outrageous crimes, if you are in the natural order, if for example you are neither a deviant, nor a hardened criminal—someone who does harm to the world—in short, if you are a reasonable inhabitant of this world, you participate in the glory of the Lord. After all, if the wing of an insect sings the glory of God, I, a reasonable inhabitant of this natural universe, certainly sing it as well. This way offers many compromises, since all in all there's not much you have to do to honor God; it is enough to be of the world, to be truly and naturally of the world. Whence a whole doctrine that will consist in saying that, if you are naturally in agreement with the world, you are in good stead when it comes to salvation, and that you'd really have to commit anti-natural acts, acts that violate the laws of the world, to truly offend God and be damned. You can easily recognize the thesis, the broad liberal thesis, that amounts to saying that there are certainly many elect, since that's the norm. The elect are those people who do more or less what everyone else does.

Malebranche is against this thesis. He doesn't think that the world, the world as such, sings the glory of God, and this is so for one fundamental reason: this world, however you look at it, is finite compared with God, and—this is a thinking typical of the age—to the extent that the finite and the infinite are incommensurable, the finite in no way glorifies God. That God was able to create a finite world is the least of things; it doesn't bear witness to his greatness. It is important to understand that it is this absence of relationship, this dis-relationship, that precludes any glorification. The world does not glorify God because, if it did, this would mean that there would still be a relationship between God and his creation. But since creation as such is finite, there isn't any.

This touches on a very important point, namely that the world was created *ex nihilo*, from nothing. This is a dogmatic point, a creationist dogma, and an argument in favor of the opportunist thesis, which often comes down to saying that there is one thing that nevertheless attests to the glory of God, namely, the fact that he was capable of making something with nothing, which bears witness to his power. For Malebranche, this is not a convincing argument. That God can make something from nothing, that creation is *ex nihilo*, in no way bridges the vast gulf between the finite and the infinite. There is a very profound idea that plays an

implicit but fundamental role in Malebranche's thought, namely that, compared with the infinite, the nothing and the finite amount more or less to the same thing. The nothing, the *nihil* from which the world was made, from which God made the world, is not so different from the finite world itself. So there is little reason to be amazed that an infinite God created something *ex nihilo*, because what he brought out of nothingness, the world, is almost nothing. This shift from the nothing to the almost nothing is in no way miraculous enough to celebrate the greatness of God.

Two lessons can be learned from this. First, that Malebranche is acutely aware of the gulf between the finite and the infinite. His concept of the infinite is neither continuist, nor limited, and for that reason it is modern, meaning post-Galilean. The infinity of God is being taken in a radical sense. The second remark is that Malebranche is well aware that if you take the infinite in this radical sense, the finite is practically a category of the nothing. Consequently, creation *ex nihilo* is in no way a figure of invention adequate to the power of the infinite. In Malebranche's eyes, the pure creationist thesis might even mean, if you push it far enough, that God was perfectly content with creating this almost nothing that is the finite world, like a child playing at putting together simple, useless things. Far from testifying to his greatness, this thesis even undermines his glory. Indeed to the extent that God is, as we know, self-sufficient, such game-playing is not worthy of him, and does not do justice to the being of which he is the name.

This is where Malebranche would turn against the other clique, the clique of those who, defending the extremist thesis, maintain that the creation of the world is unintelligible for man. They of course agree that the finite world does not do justice to God and does not sing his glory, but they conclude from this that the creation of the world refers to the inscrutable nature of God's plans, which is a completely different thesis. In other words, for man, the existence of the world and thus his own existence refer ultimately to the arbitrariness of the divine will, which is not an intrinsic arbitrariness, but appears as such to the eyes of men. For men, the world is contingent, and it is impossible for them to recognize within it any necessity whatsoever. This is obviously Pascal's thesis. We are abandoned and thrown into a universe deprived of sense, and so we cannot put ourselves in the place of God. We haven't the slightest idea about his calculations and we can't account for the world. There is no doubt a reason for it from the point of view of divine wisdom and will, but it is inaccessible to us. Consequently, the vision I am calling extremist here is essentially a tragic vision, whereas the other one was a relatively comic one. It is tragic because, finally, the world and our belonging to the world

can only be navigated as fates, fates whose source, whose root, is uninterpretable and within which one must hope for salvation in conditions of abandonment, absurdity, and nonsense. The apologetics, to the mind of the Pascalians, the Jansenists, or the Calvinists, was no longer in any way an apologetics of wonder. On the contrary, the apologetics would begin with absolute contingency, with the fateful tragedy of our existence, in order to show that it is only by assuming an incomprehensible will, an absolute and incalculable transcendence, that effect of sense can be drawn from it. Or to show that non-sense part of sense. But there is something irreducible about non-sense—it can be displaced, but it is always part of sense. The world has no sense, it is God who gives it one. But God himself has no sense. What I mean by this is a sense that we could master, a sense that we might exhibit or bring to light. Consequently, this type of apologetic is always dialectical, insofar as it includes non-sense in the movement of sense.

Malebranche can therefore not agree with this thesis either, an irrationalist thesis that does not satisfy the requirements of modern rationalism. We thereby see the extent to which the debate between Pascal and Malebranche became fundamental, starting in the seventeenth century. It in fact bore on the question of what was modern, that is, on the intellectual essence of the new times. It was a question that all of their contemporaries were acutely aware of. In the case of Pascal and Malebranche, the question was more precise: it was a matter of what, for Christians, was the intellectual essence of the new times. There were obviously those who would think that it consisted in getting rid of Christianity, a tendency that would be largely dominant during the eighteenth century among the intelligentsia. But, in a certain sense, this vision was a bit limited, for it would eventually be content with a combination of materialism and deism. From the point of view of the future of thought and philosophy, the more profound responses would be the ones given by those who asked what the essence of this new era was for a Christian. For, being confronted with a more radical intellectual challenge, they would have to forge and invent concepts and categories whose impact would be felt only later, even for those who would consider Christianity to be outmoded. They would invent categories of the dialectic, of tragic thought, and of subjectivity. This would entail an extremely intense conceptual and philosophical effort, because there was no short answer to the question of what it meant to remain a Christian in the conditions of modern scientific rationalism.

The debate between Pascal and Malebranche dealt at bottom with just this. It is clear that Pascal's response was: modernity, for a Christian, meant tracing the limits of rationalism. It was not a matter of dragging one's feet, as the backwards

Scholastics were doing, of continuing to oppose Galileo with Aristotle, and so on; it was a matter of immediately undertaking the work of limiting scientific rationalism. And that was the theory of orders. As a mathematician, as a physicist, an accomplished scholar, Pascal was nothing like a backward Scholastic and he felt justified in expressing his thoughts on the matter of the limits of rationality. He would find these limits in the concept of the subject, and he would bring to light how it was torn between different orders, the split that separated the order of reason from that of the heart. It was in the exploration of this split that he deployed the inventions of modern Christianity. Pascal and his supporters were at the root of a subjectivo-dialectical filiation, whose formal matrices went well beyond Christianity, and therefore well beyond what for them was its key issue.

Malebranche's response was diametrically opposed. It consisted in rationalizing Christianity rather than undertaking, from the perspective of Christianity, the work of drawing out the limits of modern scientific rationalism. His aim, let me repeat, was to show that modern scientific rationalism was homogeneous with Christianity. And since Christianity had anticipated this rationality, when it emerged it was seen as being homogeneous with Christianity, it was possible to maintain that Christianity as such was a blind anticipation of modern rationalism. This was of course why Malebranche, ultimately, could only be hostile to the extremist solution, to the tragic solution: unbearable transcendence, nonsense an integral part of sense In other words, he absolutely rejected the thesis of the contingency of the world. His deepest conviction was that if you do not contend that the world must have a reason, the modern rationalists will be quick to say that all of it, the miracles, the Incarnation and so forth are nothing but mysteries and nonsense, old wives' tales. This already anticipated Voltaire's polemic that none of it held up. So it was necessary to take the lead and show that the world, from the point of view of Christianity, had a reason, and that it was even only from the perspective of Christianity that it had a reason. This moreover allowed you to turn the question of contingency back on the atheists and libertines. Malebranche's strong position consisted in saying: I have a doctrine of the reason of the world, whereas you claim scientific rationalism. That's all very well, but do you know how to respond to the question of why the world is the way it is and not otherwise, why it exists, etc.? Absolutely not. Therefore, the one who is limiting rationality is not me, the Christian, but you. With regard to the trial of rationalism, Malebranche reversed the burden of proof. In the end, he summoned the atheist, the libertine, the nascent materialist, to sort out the questions of contingency and the absurd. Whereas he, for his part, showed, that Christianity deployed a coher-

ent doctrine of the reason of the world.

There you have in broad strokes the polemical site of Malebranche's thesis, opposed as it is both to laxist opportunism, for which the world alone suffices to celebrate the glory of God, and to the tragic extremist thesis, which maintains that there is a radical contingency. He would use all of this in arguing that the world should have a sense commensurable with God, which was precisely to situate himself beyond the two preceding theses. In fact, the opportunistic thesis said that there was a sense but it was not commensurable, whereas the extremist thesis said that there was no sense. The problem was that the natural and finite world did not have a sense commensurable with God, and this was so for the reason already indicated, namely, the enormous disproportion between the finite and the infinite. To arrive at a sense commensurable with God the gap between the finite and the infinite had to be bridged. Now, you can add the finite to the finite, but it will always remain the finite. The gap between the finite and the infinite can only be bridged by the infinite. Consequently, the world plus God was necessary, the world needed to be such that God was in the world, in the strict sense: not that God should remain God outside of the world, but that God should be in the world. There was a modality of the finite existence of the infinite; hence the Incarnation was necessary.

We need to look closely, beyond the apparent theology, at this ontological feature of Malebranche's thought. Indeed, there are two completely fascinating characteristics involved here. First, it is an immanentist ontology. And, secondly, it ontology of the subject: in other words, being is subject.

An immanentist ontology. How should this be understood? Let's ontologize, if you will, the proposition and agree that "God" is the name of being. Malebranche's fundamental thesis is that, since being is infinite—to be understood, I repeat, not as your average theological thesis, but as a modern thesis—every effect of sense it supports, every effect of sense that might hypothetically be attributed to it, can only relate to itself. This is what I call immanentism. The radical infinity of being means that it has sense only with regard to itself. Consequently, the finite, the created, which is almost nothing—and we will see that this almost nothing is the whole question of the other—is fundamentally a mediation of the infinite. To the extent that the finite pertains to any sense, it is as a mediation of the infinite. That is to say, in terms of its destination, through the mediation of the finite, through the mediation of the created, the infinite is directed toward itself. No effect of sense can relate the infinite to the finite as such; every effect of sense only ever

relates the infinite to itself.

Now this mediation, the fact that the finite is a mediation of the infinite, is called “glory” by Malebranche. A strange name for designating the way the finite is the mediation of the infinite! And a good deal of Malebranche’s explanation consists in exploring this word. It is certainly a classical word of religious adoration. But what does it mean for the mediating relation of the finite and the infinite to be called “glory”? It is as if we were dealing with the God of a Corneille tragedy, who acts for his own glory, and in particular who thus does “almost nothing” for his own glory. It is clear that, in order for this truly to be glory, God must put himself into this almost nothing, or it won’t be glorious. Consequently, the infinite creates the finite, being creates its other, but this other must include the same, because if not, the act will have no sense. If the act is not comparable to the same of being, it is deprived of sense, that is, impossible. We can therefore speak of immanentism, in the precise sense in which there is an other only insofar as the same is of this other. By the way, what we encounter here is a Hegelian theme, which is that there is no pure disjunction, and that the alterity of the world with relation to God cannot be thought as disjunctive. The same must introject itself into the other. That is what the incarnation of God is. This immanentism is pre-Hegelian, and this is not the only time we will see affinities between Malebranche and Hegel.

Let’s turn now to what I have called “subjective” ontology. The categories of decision, sense or calculation are adequate for God. And so being qua being, subsumable under the name of God, is essentially a calculating subject. This is what Malebranche calls wisdom or order: the wisdom of God, or the submission of God to order. God is therefore a calculating subject. And since God is the name of being, we can say that, for Malebranche, being calculates. This is why he was repeatedly accused of inserting himself into God’s plans, of almost taking himself for God, of constantly saying: “God calculated this, he did this, he did not do this in such and such a way, he did the best thing, etc.” Malebranche was unruffled by these sorts of objections, since, for him, we actually see in God, in the strictest sense. There is therefore no mystery about how God calculates. But this nevertheless refers to something quite profound, that would affect everything that followed, namely that his ontology was “in a subjective mode.” We have to accept the principle of this. Being is subject, in this case a calculating subject, at a first level to be sure but, as we will see, it is also subject in every sense of the term. Only, what God calculates is, in fact, himself; he calculates nothing other than himself, he is the great calculator of himself. Even when he calculates with regard to grace or the world, ultimately he reckons only with himself. Therefore, God is a subject that is, in the

strongest sense, an autonomous subject. And there is implicitly in Malebranche's thought—this is obviously not how he expresses it—an extraordinary project of thinking being in this way, as autonomous subject.

This, too, is pre-Hegelian, but perhaps in a more radical sense than in Hegel, because the word “subject” is less substantializable, less circular. And of course, as for every subject, God's desire is referable to a law. Malebranche will not hesitate to write: “Order is the inviolable law of God.” You can see how far we are from the tragically capricious, incalculable, and transcendent God. We have this to reassure us: order is the inviolable law of God, God has laws. But what is profound is that he has laws because he is desire, because he is subject. And Malebranche, who is a very refined analyst of the subject—at the time, or a little before, they would have said a “refined psychologist,” refined psychologist of God—knows very well that to speak of desire without speaking of the law is a joke. In his own terms, there is no thought, no true comprehension, of the question of desire, even of God's desire, that does not have to refer it to a law. Lacan, for his part, says that desire is the correlate of the law. And, consequently, for Malebranche there is a deep unity between the fact that his ontology is in a subjective mode — which means he speaks of God's will, God's desires, God's calculations etc., as if he was right there with him – and the fact that God is subject to the law of order, that order is the inviolable law of God. These are not distinct terms; on the contrary, they are woven together.

All of this will allow us to understand creative action. It becomes clear if we take up the dialectic of desire and the law from the perspective of being. Faced with God's creation, it will be necessary to consider both what is at stake in God's desire and the law that must be postulated in order to think that desire. As usual, Malebranche's analysis of this issue will be balanced and impartial. Armed with this vision of things, he will conclude that, as a divine work, the creation of the world, under the action of God who acts for his own glory, should be considered perfect. “Perfect” is another way of saying “commensurable with the infinite.” Perfection is the possible commensurability with the infinite. But since all of this is “in the subjective mode,” we cannot be content with considering the result, *i.e.*, the world; we must consider the action qua action, the working action, the creative action. The subjective nature of the divine being is no doubt decipherable in terms of what it creates, but it can perhaps be even more deeply and intimately known in the creative action as such. Malebranche will therefore distinguish between two perfections with regard to the creation of the world: the perfection of the work and the perfection of making the work. Both are subject to the law, the

law of order. But the second is more important than the first. The perfection of the work is subordinate to the perfection of the working action, for the work is not God himself, whereas the working action is God himself, which makes it more essential to the divine nature. Malebranche here uses, and this is significant, the metaphor of the workman, the metaphor of fabrication. Here's what he writes:

An excellent workman should proportion his action to his work; he does not accomplish by quite complex means that which he can execute by simpler ones, he does not act without an end, and never makes useless efforts. From this one must conclude that God, discovering in the infinite treasures of his wisdom an infinity of possible worlds (as the necessary consequences of the laws of motion which he can establish), determines himself to create that world which could have been produced and preserved by the simplest laws, and which ought to be the most perfect, with respect to the simplicity of the ways necessary to its production or to its conservation (First Discourse, XIII).⁶

Two comments to begin with. First of all, the image of the workman is intended to establish that the excellence of being, its perfection, is ultimately decipherable in the principles of action and not in its object. After all, after fifty thousand attempts and six months, anyone can manage to build a table that stands upright, but that would not mean that he is a good workman. If someone else is capable of doing it in three hours, it's better, even if the object is ultimately identical. Therefore, in order to know in what sense God is perfect, it is not enough to consider the world; what matters is comparing the world to the principles, rules, and ways of its creation and maintenance. In reality, the created world, that is to say this material, finite almost nothing, will fundamentally obey the principle of the maximal simplicity of ways. This means that, for an overall comparable result, God will choose whatever requires the least work. And since, roughly speaking, worlds are more or less comparable insofar as finite worlds are all almost nothing, the principle of the simplicity of ways necessarily prevails. The results are more or less of the same order, that is, from God's perspective—in any case on the edge of the nothing. So if we compare these various products on edge of the nothing—what Malebranche calls the multiplicity of possible worlds —, the world God creates is the one obeying the maximal subjective principle, the one that testifies to his abilities as to the simplicity of ways.

This provides us with a first example of a balancing concept, one that concerns the thorny question of evil, the eternal theological question of evil. As usual when

he tackles a problem, Malebranche starts out by exacerbating it, and we have to give him credit for that. The problem of evil is absolutely typical. What is for theologians the traditional method of dealing with this question in the most “economical” fashion, so to speak? It is to claim that there is nothing positive in evil and that evil is pure negation. Examined in its being, evil is nothingness, it is disobedience, adulteration, privation of being, etc. According to the great Platonic tradition, it is also ignorance. No one is willingly wicked. Already for Plato, someone who does evil does it only because he does not know the good; if he knew the good, he would necessarily act accordingly. For all Platonist theologies, evil is traditionally understood as a privation of being. God is therefore not responsible for it, because, being responsible for being, he cannot be responsible for nothingness. If evil is nothingness, it cannot be imputed to the always affirmative movement of God, since God is the plenitude of being, including in his creation. In the old debate concerning the question of how to clear God of all responsibility for evil, this is the economical way of treating it. Starting from the intrinsic analysis of the essence of evil, you show that it is non-being, and for this very reason, God is absolved of all responsibility for it. What I am calling Malebranche’s exacerbation of a problem stems from the fact that he is never satisfied with this type of reduction. For him, evil is positive, and an evil action is an action that exists just as much as a good one. He refuses the convenience of the detour via non-being. There really are, in actual fact, things that are bad for man. There is evil, and this “there is” is a real “there is,” it is not a privation, a negation, a partial nothingness. As a result, he has to find what I have been calling “balancing” mediations on this issue. For we are on the verge of a total breakdown here. If evil is real, God is necessarily responsible for it; but how can he be responsible for evil without forfeiting his perfection? Malebranche’s answer is that the creation of the world has its founding perfection in the creative gesture, and not in its result. He recognizes very well that there is evil and that nothing is easier than identifying an objective imperfection in the world, but what must be understood is that the world contains only the evil made necessary by the perfection of creation. The creative gesture, which must obey the simplest possible laws, entails imperfections in the result, imperfections that God could of course make up for, but it would be at the price of an imperfection in his action.

Note that what underlies this, broadly speaking, is an aesthetic metaphor. Malebranche’s ontology is an aesthetics of being. Let’s read what he writes in one of the innumerable texts he devotes to the question: “God could, no doubt, make a world more perfect than the one in which we live.” That’s the exacerbation of

the problem: God could have made a more perfect world. He does not say: God made a perfect world, and all the evil in that world is a form of non-being. Let me continue:

God could, no doubt, make a world more perfect than the one in which we live. He could, for example, make it such that rain, which serves to make the earth fruitful, fall more regularly on cultivated ground than in the sea, where it is unnecessary. But in order to make this more perfect world, it would have been necessary that he have changed the simplicity of his ways, and that he have multiplied the laws of the communication of motion, through which our world exists: and then there would no longer be that proportion between the action of God and his work, which is necessary in order to determine an infinitely wise being to act; or at least there would not have been the same proportion between the activity of God and this so-perfect world, as between the laws of nature and the world in which we live; for our world, however imperfect one wishes to imagine it, is based on laws of motion which are so simple and so natural that it is perfectly worthy of the infinite wisdom of its author (First Discourse, XIV).⁸

In this aesthetic ontology, the balancing mediation consists in compensating for the particular objectivity of evil with the general value of the act. Subjective and practical perfection prevails over the particularities of the result. I'd like to point out in passing that the image of rain is absolutely essential and recurs constantly in Malebranche, especially in the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, where we find two great images, that of rain and that of the temple. The rain will represent everything that can be characterized as particular phenomena in the world. It is the image, the metaphor of the distribution of things in the world, and it will also be the metaphor of the distribution of grace. And there we have a strict parallelism, for the natural problem of "Where does the rain fall?" there will be the supernatural problem of "Where does grace fall?" And just as rain falls on the sea and not only over cultivated ground, so too a vile person might receive sufficient grace while a good man might receive nothing at all. The metaphor of rain is generally the metaphor of apparent disorder, that is, in reality, of the appearance of contingency in this world that is, itself, not contingent. Malebranche's adherence to the mass line can be recognized here. That the weather, meteorology, is the figure of contingency is something any ordinary conversation teaches us, and choosing this metaphor in an overwhelmingly peasant culture, as France was at the time, is an undeniable element of communication with popular consciousness. It is completely in keeping with Malebranche's particular genius.

The other metaphor is the temple, and it's the opposite of the rain metaphor. The temple, with its ornaments, is architectonic perfection. It is the baroque church, the church in the sense of a religious building. It represents the other aspect of things, the ecclesial aspect, the necessary and glorious aspect. Just as there is a dialectic of the rain, the dialectic of the place where it falls, so too there is a dialectic of the temple, of the simplicity of its architecture and its ornamental profusion. The apparent disorder is an effect of the law of order to which the creative gesture is subject. It is a particular disorder, not an intrinsic one, and it cannot be attributed to divine wisdom. As wisdom, divine wisdom has to accept the predominance of the gesture over the work, for the gesture is this wisdom itself. Here, too, we have an application of the maxim to the effect that God acts only with regard to himself: his creative gesture is predominant over the work. Therefore order properly speaking, i.e., the infinite order, is inherent in the creative gesture. The particular disorder in the work, as a result of the order of the gesture, is only a disorder for us. We encounter once again the aesthetic metaphor. At bottom, what Malebranche says is this: when we look at the world, we are ignorant spectators. And if we are led to say: there's something off there, there's something ugly there, there's something sullied there, it is only because we do not understand the ultimate unifying principle of it all. If we understood that this fault is only the particular result of a general equilibrium, which is related to the essence of the gesture, then we could only admire it, including the evil. We would then become cultured people who are no longer taken aback by dissonance. We would know that this dissonance is merely the particular price to be paid for general perfection, not the perfection of the finished product, but of the principles that give rise to it, that is, by which it is and subsists.

So, there is ultimately only one unconditioned principle, one inviolable law of God. This unconditioned principle is the simplicity of ways. Anyone who produces effects by ways that are too complicated, that is, without thinkable proportions between the effect and these laws, is imperfect in his own order. In the case of God, his own order is the creation of the world. There are not many competitors, there is only one who, in Malebranche's eyes, is a very harsh judge of himself and constantly judges the aesthetic perfection of the gesture by the criterion of the simplicity of ways. We could also express this in the following way: the being-subject acts in accordance with general wills, that is, in accordance with a practical universalism. It limits as much as possible particular wills, because they are only adjustments, imperfect and irrational things. As a result, even the apparent particular imperfections lend support to this practical universalism. It could

be said about creation what Mao said about the revolution: “The creation of the world is not a dinner party.” The most important thing is that the creation of the world be commensurable with divine infinity. So we won’t object to this that there are some unfortunate people who do not receive their salvation or that the rain falls on the sea. If the general principle of the simplicity of ways, that is, of the perfection of the gesture, is predominant, and if the realization of this principle necessarily entails negative particularities, these negative particularities will pose no objection to practical universalism. They are its actualization and, as even Malebranche says, they contribute to its beauty. Here is the passage:

If then it is true that the general cause ought not to produce his work by particular wills, and that God had to establish certain laws of the communication of motion which are constant and invariable, through whose efficacy he foresaw that the world could subsist such as we see it, one can say in a very true sense that God wishes that all his creatures be perfect; that he wills not at all that children perish in the womb of their mothers; that he does not love monsters; that he did not make the laws of nature to engender them; and that if he had been able (by equally simple ways) to make and to preserve a more perfect world, he would never have established any laws, of which so great a number of monsters are necessary consequences; but that it would have been unworthy of his wisdom to multiply his wills in order to stop certain particular disorders, which even constitute a kind of beauty in the universe (First Discourse, XXII).⁹

The root of all of this is that, if the infinite is a subject, in this case a creative subject, it is not possible for its maxim to be a particular will, because a particular will would mean constantly correcting the bad particularities of the world, and that would tie the infinite once again to the finite. That’s an argument directed against the extremist theses, the theses on contingency and the irrational and constant intervention of God. Therefore, for an autonomous subject—and an infinite subject can only be thought by Malebranche as an autonomous subject—the maxim is to act in accordance with universal wills. Incidentally, note the proximity to the Kantian categorical imperative here. The Kantian categorical imperative orders us always to act as if the maxims of action were universal laws of nature. The principle of practical universalism is a crucial principle of Kantian ethics. We could therefore say that Malebranche’s God is also a moral God in Kant’s terms, namely, a God who acts in accordance with universal maxims. And this practical universalism is compossible with particular disorders.

We can therefore know that the world is as perfect as it can be, given that God acts in accordance with laws, that is, given that God desires the world. Don't think the world is imperfect because God doesn't care about it. We might be tempted to say: God is indifferent, he acts in accordance with general wills, and he could not care less what happens afterward. That would be the common-sense objection. But, as usual, this objection is inverted by Malebranche, who says that the exact opposite is true. What's needed is to take seriously the fact that the world has no sense unless such is God's desire and that, to the extent that creation is not a whim, inexplicable contingency, sheer nonsense, it is because it can be linked to God as subject. Now if God desires the world, we can make sense of this only if there are laws, and since these are laws for the infinite, they are general laws, universal laws. Malebranche understood perfectly well this strange but true point: to think that God acts by particular will, and therefore that he constantly meddles in everything, is actually to suppress him as a subject, whereas to think him profoundly as a subject is necessarily to think him in relation to a law. Not the law that he promulgates, but the law that he, in a certain sense, obeys: the law of his desire.

What Malebranche will undertake, now that the general framework has been constructed, is to show that these principles can be extended to the questions of salvation and grace. Before we get to that, I would like to give you two additional examples of what I call the balancing resolution of problems. We will begin today with his methodology that is characterized by exacerbation, followed by a balancing out.

The first important problem, which follows from what I just said, can be formulated like this: let's assume that the Incarnation, Christ, is the sense of the world, which amounts to changing Christ into a concept and Christianity into philosophy. If Christ embodies God's plan in creating the world, God therefore created the world solely so that Christ could be incarnated in it, for that alone was commensurate with his glory. How can we understand, then, that Christ as Redeemer, as the one who saves mankind from original sin, is abandoned to the Fall, that is, to human sinfulness, to Adam's sin? How can we do so without thinking that God wanted or willed the Fall, that he willed original sin? Remember that in Christian theology the Redeemer comes in order to raise mankind from its original lapse. Therefore, if God's plan is redemption, hence Christ, then God's plan is also the Fall. The problem has to do with God's plans, for the crime is humanity's as a whole, and original sin, permanently transmissible, represents the corruption of the world whose heart is man. Could God have willed the world to be corrupt, in

order to then redeem it from this corruption? This would be, at the very least, a cynical calculation, making humanity in a certain sense a victim in the service of God's glory. Malebranche does not completely shrink from this vision of things. That is the first problem.

But there is another problem, one that concerns the question of being and the event. There is eventness in Christianity, for if redemption, *i.e.*, Christ's incarnation, stems from mankind's fall and Adam's sin, and if Adam freely sinned—we relieve God of responsibility by saying: Adam sinned, but he could have not sinned—the result is that the Redemption was not calculable. It depends on the Fall's singular uniqueness. The strict orthodox doctrine says that God's benevolence consisted in sending a Messiah, a Redeemer, to relieve and raise up mankind from its fall, a fall that mankind went through by turning away from God, hence freely. In a way, an intervening event, a temporal inscription, then took place in the heart of Christianity: the Redemption, the coming of Christ, was the eventual sense given by God to another event, mankind's fall. As a result, one has the impression that Christianity is also a historicity, a divine intervention, a will to save man at the point of his fall and his abandonment. But if Christ is the ultimate sense of the world, this eventness is dissolved; there is longer that act by which God relieves and lifts up mankind by sacrificing himself. There is instead a general calculation, in which the Fall is only one element, one moment, itself calculable. In summary, there are two problems. 1) Is God responsible for the Fall? Did he will original sin and mankind's corruption? 2) Should Christianity be totally de-eventalized, dehistoricized?

With regard to these problems, Malebranche proceeds as he always does. Rejecting every mediating or intermediary solution, he begins by exacerbating the problem, and does so in two ways. First, he expressly posits that Jesus Christ is the first-born of creatures, and therefore that he precedes humanity. In the process, he clearly materializes the strategic function of Christ. For example, he writes: "Jesus Christ ...is the first-born of created beings, it is he who is their exemplar in the eternal plan of his Father,"¹⁰ or, elsewhere and more radically: "Jesus Christ ... is the beginning of the ways of the Lord."¹¹ He therefore totally assumes that Christ is the inaugural term. The de-eventalization and the anticipatory character of Christ, including of Christ as a creature, are affirmed. Indeed, it is not a matter of Christ as a project or a concept, but of Christ insofar as he was created before mankind. This goes to show the extent to which he is not dependent on the eventness of the Fall.

And then Malebranche exacerbates the problem even more by emphasizing that Christ derives from a different type of causality than the world vis-à-vis God. This point is related to the distinction between external and internal cause. He thus writes: “God, by the creation of the world, takes leave of himself so to speak.”¹² Therefore, even if it is ultimately a mediation, the world is in a position of external creation, whereas, concerning Christ, Malebranche speaks of the “immanent operations by which the Son is constantly engendered.”¹³ Christ not only anticipates the world but, in addition, the causality that engenders him is heterogeneous to the world’s causality, insofar as, for God, the world involves a taking leave of self, whereas Christ involves an immanent operation. And yet Christ is also God incarnate, therefore Christ is of the world. Here, we are caught up in an utterly extraordinary tension.

How does Malebranche balance all of this out, after having stretched the problem to its limit? Here again, in two different ways. We know that, in creating the world, being takes leave of itself in the finite—to borrow Malebranche’s formulation—exclusively for its own glory. We should never forget this fundamental axiom. The finite must be, if I can put it this way, as radically finite as possible, as mediocre as possible, if we want its infinite redemption to be glorious, the incorporation into that finite of the divine infinity to attest to the glory of God. In other words, the larger the gap to be bridged between finite and infinite, the more the infinite attests to its own glory in the finite, that is, in the other. Consequently, the world must be on the edge of nothingness, on the extreme edge of the nothing, and even as finite, within its very finitude, it must reveal its quasi-nothingness, in order for the Redemption by way of the Incarnation to be worthy of the glory of God. God’s plan cannot be a finite perfection, *i.e.*, a world ... We come back to the idea that, ultimately, the work matters little in comparison with the gesture. Finite perfection is an opportunistic thesis. In fact, God’s plan is all the more admirable if the world is a quasi-nothingness. It should be understood that the problem, which will attest to God’s glory, lies in the fact that God will incarnate himself in this quasi-nothingness. What counts is to manage to ensure that it is in this quasi-nothingness, in this absolute “on the edge of the nothing” that the world is, that God reveals and incarnates himself. It is, moreover for this reason that the symbol will be the cross, the humiliated God, the suffering God, subjected to the horror of the world. The glory of God will be all the more obvious to the extent that God will descend not into a world that works relatively well, but into a horrible world, where he will be subjected to horror and mediocrity, to the nothingness of this world. God observes the Fall impassively, although the Fall is partly freely chosen

and not entirely the result of calculation. But he has no reason to intervene to inhibit, interrupt, or limit the disaster, Adam's sin, the reign of injustice, because all of that is humanity's and the world's race to nothingness. Adam decided that the world was to be unjust, bloody, and terrible. But this is in no way incompatible with God's plan; on the contrary, it reinforces it. The farther the race into the nothing goes, the more the world will be on the edge of the void, and the more the Incarnation will testify to divine greatness and the glory of God. And Malebranche says so admirably. Speaking of God, he writes: "Remaining unmoved even as his Work is about to perish, he upholds with dignity the nature of the divinity in this way, and declares by his conduct that he is infinite and that the future Church sanctified in Jesus Christ is his true plan."¹⁴ If God, by a particular will, had attempted to interrupt the fatal consequences of the Fall and of Adam's sin—which of course he could have—he would have purely and simply deviated from his plan and therefore from his essence. It is in this race to the nothing of this world that the conditions of maximal possibility of divine glorification, self-glorification, are inscribed. That's the first point.

The second point concerns, this time, the immanent, eternal operation, that produces the Son as God, that produces Christ, an operator of God. The constant engendering of the Son is the engendering by God of his capacity to join with the finite, to incarnate himself. This is a relatively subtle point, grafted onto differences of causality. The engendering of the Son by the Father is not the creation of the finite itself, even though the Son is finite; it is the engendering of God's capacity to join with the finite. This is what I call an operator of God, a particular operator that makes him capable of joining with the finite. This capacity requires the nothingness of the world in order to function, because if the world were just, this operator would be devoid of sense and ultimately the sense of this operator is God's capacity for nothingness, a capacity that will be symbolized in Christianity by his death on the cross. The finite is nothingness. Christ is therefore this operator internal to being owing to which being becomes capable of nothingness. And it is the nothingness of the world, not its plenitude or relative perfection, that calls forth its use. Concerning the fact that God has impassively left the world in sin and let the Fall happen, Malebranche writes: "God did this so that his Son should have the glory of forming his Church from the nothingness of holiness and justice."¹⁵ The Church is: to be formed by Christ, the operator of God, out of the nothingness of justice and holiness, which fashions its glory. Therefore, in fact, what is at stake in this affair, and through which Malebranche corrects the perspectives after having radicalized them, is that the Christ-operator, as the

ontological operator, has essentially nothing to do with sin and salvation; it has to do with being and nothingness. It is an ontological operator before being an eschatological one. In other words, the nothing is the maximal mediation of being in terms of taking leave of itself.

Next time we shall see, as we continue with this issue, that what we have here is an elucidation of the word “glory.” Glory is what being derives from the Other, with a capital O. “Glory” connotes what, in being, derives from the nothing, because the Other of being, the place of the Other for being, is the nothing. Glory is therefore what being derives from the nothing. This is a very fitting definition of glory, and, to tell the truth, still very Cornelian. I will show that beneath its seemingly “noble” psychology, the concept of glory, too, is an ontological concept. We will study the consequences of all this for the fall/redemption couple as an operator of glory. And we will turn next to the question of the law, of the paradoxes of the law.

NOTES

1. Alain Badiou, *Le Séminaire. Malebranche: L'être 2. Figure théologique*, 1986 (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 8. [All notes are those of the translator.]
2. *Le Séminaire. Malebranche: L'être 2. Figure théologique*, 1986, 9.
3. *Le Séminaire. Malebranche: L'être 2. Figure théologique*, 1986, 22.
4. Nicolas Malebranche, *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome Second* (Paris : Sapia, 1837), p. 297. These lines are drawn from an “addition” to Malebranche’s *Treatise* that is not reproduced in Patrick Riley’s English translation.
5. Nicolas Malebranche, *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, tr. Patrick Riley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 112.
6. *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, 116.
7. *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, 116
8. *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, 116.
9. *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, 119-20.
10. *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, 112.
11. *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome Second*, 38. This line is drawn from an “addition” to *Treatise on Nature and Grace* that is not reproduced in Patrick Riley’s English translation.
12. *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome Second*, 38
13. Ibid. In the 1837 edition of Malebranche’s *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome Second*, “immanent” is italicized.
14. *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome Second*, 299.
15. *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome Second*, 299.

freud according to cézanne

jean-françois lyotard, translated by
ashley woodward and jon roffe¹

PAINTING AND ILLUSION

With regard to the relationship between psychoanalysis and art, there are many approaches which claim to be authorised by Freud. Rather than once again undertaking an assessment of this area, better made by others², we prefer here to propose a somewhat different problematic, by departing from an apparently minor remark: even if it's not a question of properly applying a supposed psychoanalytic knowledge to a work and of providing a diagnostic of this work or of its author; even if one tries to develop one by one all the lines by which it is linked to the desire of the writer or the painter; and moreover, even if one situates an emotional space opened by the originary lack in response to the demand of the subject at the heart of creative activity³—it remains that the epistemological relation of psychoanalysis to the artwork is constituted in all cases in a *unilateral* manner, the first being the method applied to the second, conceived as its object. Thus the dimension of transference would be reintroduced into the conception of artistic production that nonetheless remains irreducible to the inventive scope and critique of the *form* of the work as such.⁴ The resistance of aestheticians, historians of art and artists to such a distribution of roles doubtless proceeds from the placement of the work in the position of passive object: they know, for various reasons, of the active power [*pouvoir*] to produce new meanings that these objects, supposed to be passive, bear. It is interesting to *reverse the*

relation, to examine whether this inaugural, critical activity might not be applied in turn to the object “psychoanalysis,” conceived of as a work. By questioning in this manner, one soon discovers, at the core of the Freudian conception of art, a striking disparity of status between the two arts that form its poles of reference, tragedy and painting. If the force of production of objects (which not only fulfill desire, but in which desire finds itself reflected or reversed)—the libidinal critical force—is tacitly ascribed to the first, it is explicitly refused to the second.

Jean Starobinski⁵ has shown how the tragic figures of Oedipus and Hamlet, the privileged *objects* of the Freudian reflection, are valuable also and above all as *operators* for the elaboration of the theory. If there isn't a book or even an article by Freud on Oedipus or *a fortiori* on Hamlet, it is because, in Freud's unconscious, the figure of the dead king's brother plays (at least epistemologically) the role of a kind of screen or grille which, applied to the discourse of psychoanalysis, allows him to hear what he does not say, to bring together the disparate fragments of sense scattered throughout the material. The tragic scene is the place [*lieu*] to which the psychoanalytic scene is related at the end of interpretation and of construction. Art is here that from which psychoanalysis draws its resources for work and understanding. It is clear that such a relation was not possible and had no chance of being fruitful unless art, tragedy, offers, if not an analysis already, at least a *privileged representation* of what is in question in analysis, the desire of the subject in its relation with castration.⁶ Such is, in effect, the case of tragedy, Greek or Shakespearian; or again, of a plastic work like the *Moses* of Michelangelo. Jacques Lacan makes a similar use of Edgar Allen Poe's novel *The Purloined Letter* in order to construct his thesis of an unconscious analogous to language.

If we turn to painting, we will observe that it occupies quite a different position in the thought of Freud and in psychoanalytic theory in general. The references to the pictorial object are very numerous in Freud's writings, from the beginning to the end of his work (an entire essay is devoted to it⁷). Above all, though, the theory of dream and fantasy, the central mode of access to the theory of desire, is constructed around a latent “aesthetic” of the plastic object. The central intuition of this aesthetic is that the picture, in the same fashion as the oneiric “scene,” *represents* an object, an absent situation. It opens a scenic space in which, in the absence of the things themselves, at least their representatives can be shown, and which has the capacity to receive and to accommodate the products of fulfilled desire. Like the dream, the pictorial object is thought according to the function of hallucinatory representation and lure. To grasp this object with words which describe it and which will serve to understand its sense will be, for Freud, to *dispel*

it. In order to convert the oneiric image or the hysterical phantasm into discourse, the signification is led towards its natural habitat, that of words and of reason, and the veil of representations, of alibis, behind which it is hidden, cast off.⁸

This assignment of the plastic work, as *mute* and *visible*, to reside in the region of the imaginary fulfillment of desire, can also be found at the heart of the Freudian analysis of the function of art. In effect, Freud distinguishes two components of aesthetic pleasure: a properly libidinal pleasure which comes from the content of the work itself, insofar as we allow it, by identification with a character, to fulfill *our* desire in fulfilling *his* destiny; but also, to speak in a preliminary fashion, a pleasure derived from the form or the position of the work presented to perception—not as a real object, but as a kind of plaything, an intermediary object, in relation to which acts and thoughts that the subject has not accounted for are authorized. Freud entitles this function of misappropriation in relation to reality and to the censorship “primary seduction”⁹: in the “aesthetic” situation, as in sleep, a proportion of the energy of counter-investment, employed to repress the libido, is freed and returned to the unconscious in the form of free energy, which will produce the figures of the dream or of art. In both cases, it is the rejection of every realistic criterion which allows the energy to discharge itself in a regressive way, in the form of hallucinatory scenes. The work therefore presents us with a primary seduction in that it promises, by its artistic status alone, the withdrawal of the barriers of repression.¹⁰ One sees that such an analysis of the aesthetic effect tends to indentify it with a narcotic effect. Here, what is essential is the *realization of the unreality* [*déréalité*] that is the phantasm. From a properly formal point of view, this hypothesis implies two attitudes. First, it leads to the privileging of the “subject” (the motif) in the painting: the plastic screen will be thought in accordance with the representative function, as a transparent support behind which an inaccessible scene unfolds. On the other hand, it invites us to find, hidden under the represented object—like the group of the Virgin, of its mother and of its brothers¹¹ - a form (the silhouette of a vulture) supposedly determined in the phantasmatic of the painter. With the same stroke all non-representative painting is eliminated from the ambit of psychoanalysis, as is every “reading” of the work which is not primarily concerned with locating the “discourse” of the unconscious of the painting which would make phantasmatic silhouettes. On the basis of the categories of this aesthetic alone, it would *a fortiori* be necessary to abandon any grasp on a work of painting in which Freud’s “aesthetic position,” according to which the narcotic value of the work would be censured, is criticized (precisely by plastic means). And yet it is not excessive to think that everything which is important in painting from Cézanne onwards, far from favouring the

sleep of consciousness and the accomplishment of the unconscious desire of the art-lover [*amateur*], aims on the contrary to produce on the support some sort of *analoga* of the space of the unconscious itself, which could only arouse anxiety and revolt. And how, from the same perspective, to account for attempts made on all sides today by painters, but also by people in theatre or by musicians, to take the work from the *neutralized place* (the cultural edifice: museum, theatre, concert hall, conservatorium), where the institution consigns them? Are they not aimed at the destruction of the privilege of unreality which, according to Freud, would confer on the work and its position the power of seduction? It is clear that what is going on today is a situation of the artwork which hardly appears anymore to satisfy the conditions noted by the explicit aesthetic of Freud: the work fundamentally *derealisises reality* more than aiming to realize, in an imaginary space, the unrealities of the phantasm.¹²

One could draw from these few remarks the conclusion that if Freud's analyses on the subject of plastic art appear inapplicable today, it is ultimately because painting has profoundly changed. After all, it could be said, the mission of those who inaugurated the psychoanalytic revolution was not to anticipate the pictorial revolution. This is to forget that the latter began under Freud's eyes and that during the first half of the century, between his first writings (1895) and his last (1938), not only did painting change its subject, manner, and problem, but the *pictorial space* "mounted" by the men of the Quattrocento fell to ruin, and with it the *function* of painting as *representation* which was at, and remained at, the centre of the Freudian conception. That Freud didn't have the eyes for this "critical" reversal of the pictorial activity, for this veritable displacement of the desire of painting, that he was so stuck to an exclusive position of desire—that of the Italian scenography of the 15th Century—cannot but surprise. The critical work began by Cézanne, continued or reengaged in all directions by Delaunay and Klee, by the cubists, by Malevitch and Kandinsky, attested that it was no longer at all a question of producing a phantasmatic illusion of depth on a screen treated like a window, but on the contrary of making visible plastic properties (lines, points, surfaces, values, colours) which representation only serves *to efface*; that it was therefore no longer a question of fulfilling desire through its delusion, but of capturing it and of methodically disappointing it by exposing its machinery. Freud's ignorance is all the more surprising because this reversal of the pictorial function is in many respects akin to the reversal of the function of consciousness by Freudian analysis itself, inscribing as surface effects a vast subterranean upheaval which affected (and continues to affect) the supporting substrata of the Western social and cultural establishment. What has been in question since the 1880s, years which have seen

intermittent upheavals in the nature of the field concerned, is the *position* itself *of desire* in the modern West, the way in which the objects, words, images, goods, thoughts, works, women and men, births and deaths, illnesses and wars enter into circulation and are exchanged in society. If that transposition of anonymous desire which supports the institution in general and renders it acceptable must be put into words, one could say *grosso modo* that while this desire previously fulfilled itself in a regime of exchanges which imposes on the object a *symbolic* value—just as the unconscious of a neurotic produces and relates representatives of the repressed object according to a symbolic organization of Oedipal origin—since the transformation of which we speak (and whose effect was best studied by Marx in the economic field), the production and circulation of objects has ceased to be regulated by reference to symbolic values, imputed to some mysterious Donator, but obeys the sole “logic” internal to the system. This is somewhat like how the formations of *schizophrenia* appear to escape from the regulation that neurosis obtains from the Oedipal structure, insofar as they are no longer subordinate to anything but the “free” effervescence of psychic energy. It is an accepted hypothesis that the Freud-event gives rise to a similar mutation in the order of discursive representation, and whose analogue in the order of plastic—and in particular pictorial—representation is the Cézanne-event. What would remain to be understood would be the motifs or modalities of the ignorance of the second by the first. In order to do so, it would be necessary first to show in what way the work of Cézanne attests to the presence of a similar displacement in the position of desire (here the desire of painting) and consequently in the function of painting itself. We will briefly examine the path that this work traces, and the element in which it is inscribed, from this point of view.

PAINTING AND POWERLESSNESS

Since Venturi’s monumental inventory,¹³ it is customary to distinguish four periods in Cézanne’s oeuvre: dark, impressionist, constructive, synthetic. Liliane Brion-Guerry draws from this account, while dramatizing it on two counts. First of all she shows that what motivates this plastic odyssey is the search for a solution to a problem which is also plastic: the unification of the spatial content, the represented object, and what contains it, the atmospheric envelope. In the second place, she suggests that this desire for plastic unity, in fulfilling itself in the aforementioned four broad approaches, repeats or at least revives the principal conceptions of space that appeared in the history of painting: space moving to several vanishing points, comparable to the painting of antiquity, in the first period (1860-1872); in the second, impressionist period (1872-1887), space of the

Italo-Hellenistic type where the planes of light do not succeed in being integrated into a coherent system; space on the contrary too well structured, too “tight,” of the third period (1878-1892), which suggests a comparison with that of certain Roman “primitives”; finally at the time of the last period, from 1892 to his death in 1906, the rediscovery, if not of the classical perspective of the Quattrocento, then at least of an expression of depth analogous to that of some Baroques, or, better still, some water-colourists of the Far East.

The trajectory of Cézanne’s oeuvre would thus condense almost the entire history of painting, at least the history of perspective, or, better still, *the history of painted space*. In this regard, however, two things must be noted. First, if this is the case, it would be attributed to an originary inability, to a lack which would continually reinitiate the plastic investigation at each stage: the incapacity of Cézanne to see and to render the represented object and its place according to the “classical” perspective, that is to say according to the rules of the geometric optic and the techniques of scalar enlargement [*mise au carreau*] established by the “perspectivalists” between the 15th and the 17th centuries. This incapacity already illuminates a first enigma: why Cézanne could not remain an impressionist. As P. Francastel has shown,¹⁴ while impressionist light may well decompose the object by substituting the aerial tone for the local tone, the space in which the object is suspended remains in principle that of the Quattrocento, which is to say, that of representation. When a landscape of Cézanne’s¹⁵ is compared with one of Pissaro’s of the same view, one senses how much the first is racked by uncertainty, by what Merleau-Ponty called Cézanne’s *doubt*.¹⁶ Even with this period (the second in Venturi’s taxonomy), painting, instead of responding to the question ‘what unitary law does the production of the pictorial object obey?’, seems to hesitate, suspending its response. In fact the picture does respond: *there is no such unitary law*; the question of the unity of the sensible remains open, or this unity is lacking.

Second, it must be emphasised that this deficiency contains potentially the entire critique of representation. If one is not satisfied by the unification of the place [*lieu*] that perspectivalist composition offers, the study of procedures such as the complete review of “primitive” space (third period) may follow, or, on the contrary (fourth period) the suppression of all structure or drawn outline, and the free play of what Cézanne called “colouring sensations.” In each case, these procedures all oppose their status as representations, sharing in common the fact that, far from erasing themselves and slipping away from the opacity of the support in the illusion of a transparent window as is done in the perspectivalist technique, they reveal and recognize the picture as in fact an object whose principle is not beyond

itself (in the represented), but internal, in the arrangement of colours. There is in this modest technical difference a veritable transformation of the relation with the object in general, a veritable transformation of desire.

This transformation is not an achievement but something given; or rather, suffered. Cézanne's pictorial journey moves in the originary element of an uncertainty, of a suspicion in relation to what is presented as "natural law" in the schools of painting, just as Freud's journey supposes the initial rejection of the principle of the unification of psychic phenomena by consciousness and the hypothesis of an irrepressible *principle of dispersion* (sexuality, primary process, death drive). In both cases, this suspicion, this deficiency, is given first and everywhere underlies this work of displacement, whether theoretical or plastic, that it undertakes. This means that it is vain to search in the failure of the composition, plastic for Cézanne, for the (dialectical) reason for the subsequent invention. Every composition is a failure and a success; they only *succeed* each other in a surface history, and are *contemporaries* in the substratum where Cézanne's desire, immobile, generates disconnected figures, divided spaces, contrary points of view.

Through a close analysis of works undertaken in the four periods, it would not be difficult to show the degree to which the principle of dispersion is constantly active. Here we will make do with some rapid remarks on certain of the still lifes. In *La pendule noir* [*The Black Clock*] (1869-1871; Venturi catalogue no. 70), three properties, alone and in combination, open a space of non-locality that is also obtained by other means in the *Vase de fleurs* [*Vase of Flowers*] (1873-75; Venturi 183) in the Louvre, and which appears in what is called the impressionist period. The uncertainty of the scale due to the presence of the glass, the coexistence of two vanishing points which orders two simultaneous systems of linear perspective—incompatible according to the rules of the school—and finally the use of a regime of values by violent contrasts (black/white) which tips the black background towards the front and the first plane bristles with active lines as if to defend itself. In the latter work, in addition to the action of manifest deformations—such as that of the edge of the table or the shadow or the dissymmetry of the sides of the vase—the uncertainty of the place results above all and on the one hand in the desynthesization of surfaces, provoked not only by the (properly impressionist) encroachment on their locales, but the traces ostentatiously left by a violent touch. On the other hand, there is a predilection with delocalization which would render the painted image analogous to the virtual image that a myopic eye forms of real flowers. All of these operations, and others bearing on the ground, lead to the dissipation of all representative illusion. The search is oriented towards what

may be called an *economics* of the psychic system, that is to say an organization not of representatives or signifiers subject to a semiology, but quantities of energy, of pulsional origin in Freud but taken in the Cézannean sense of plastic character (lines, values, and the chromatic energies taught by Pissarro) which induces in the spectator circulations, not of significations, even less of information, but of affects.

If you now take certain versions of the *Nature morte au compotier* [*Still Life with Compotier*], for example that of 1879-1882 (Venturi 341), you will again notice some deformations of a purely plastic character. You will see the famous strict, short, oblique, almost ‘written’ touch intrude, which forbids the eye from losing itself in the vision of the object, and returns it to its own synthetic activity; you will note there a number of paradoxes in the usage of values of which the result is the flattening of the “represented” on the bi-dimensional support. It is true that in this work, which appears in the period called “constructive,” such a flattening goes hand in hand with a rigorous organization of the surface which leaves little of the play of hesitations, so that the delocalization relative to classical space is compensated by an over-localization in an almost abstract space (this is L. Brion-Guerry’s term). But in the final period, the principle of dispersion will once more loosen the grip of constructivism. One observes, for example in the *Nature morte au pichet, aux pommes et aux oranges* [*Still Life with Pitcher, Apples, and Oranges*] in the Louvre (1895-1900; Venturi 732)—in addition to the instability of profiles which recalls that of the first two periods, and the tendency to eliminate the opposition of planes by deformation, as in the preceding period—an organization of colour (here a dominant red polarized between purple/blue and orange/yellow) which, like in the landscapes of this period, suggest only space in the midst of flux and chromatic stases (to the exclusion of line and value).

Rather than denying that *something* went on between the first works and the last, it is a question of refusing the somewhat pedagogical reading which, by putting the accent on the dialectical articulation of periods in the diachrony of surface, leaves in the dark the subterranean principle of *derepresentation* which permanently operates in Cézanne’s approach to the object. Merleau-Ponty¹⁷ was entirely correct to make this principle the core of the work in its entirety, but his analysis remained subordinate to a philosophy of perception that allowed him to rediscover the true order of the sensible in Cézannean disorder, and to lift the veil that Cartesian and Galilean rationalism had thrown over the world of experience. We have no reason to believe that the *curvature* of Cézannean space, its intrinsic disequilibrium, the passion that the painter felt for the baroque organisation of

plastic place, for the Venetians, for El Greco, his equal hatred of Gauguin, Van Gogh and Ingres; that his desire, constantly expressed in his conversations and correspondence, the desire that “works,” this same desire that allowed him, when he wanted to make it understood that for him the curvature is in no way exclusive to a geometric “order,” to choose the example of volumes on a *curved* surface (“treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone”) to the exclusion of cubes and of all polyhedrons on a plane surface (which one appears not to have noticed when one pretends to make of this formula the anticipated programme of *cubism*)—we have no reason to believe that this passion for the spherical is more free from marks of desire and more fit to restore to us in person the phenomenality of the sensible than were Uccello’s passion for perspective, Leonardo’s for the model or Klee’s for plastic possibility. If the psychoanalytic approach to the work has a virtue, it is most certainly that of convincing us that, even if the painter is persuaded that all marking is imitation, “reality,” “nature,” and “motif” will never be something more than an object beyond reach (becoming a picture in its turn, “the picture of nature,” writes Cézanne) for which the activity of painting comes to substitute the object that fashions his reworked desire.

Reworked, in order that the *oeuvre* not be reduced to a symptom lacking in any critical bearing. It is this reworking which motivates Cézanne’s journey in the element of formal uncertainty. If it were necessary to psychoanalyse the work, it would first be necessary to attempt to account for the deficiency of which we previously spoke and to which the penchant for curvature correlates. It would be necessary to again assemble all of the features in the history of the life of the painter which form his psychic portrait, his “destiny”: the father, enamoured of social success, a pawnbroker capable of going to settle in the house of his debtor in order to keep accounts of their household and to be repaid with the savings thus extracted, and in much the same way the holder of his son’s purse strings until his death; Paul himself an illegitimate child, acknowledged, then legitimated by the later marriage of his father and mother, living in turn with Hortense, with whom he had a son three years later in 1872, but hiding his household from his father until 1886 (the painter was then 47 years old) in order to be able to keep the benefit of the pension he received and which allowed him to devote himself to painting; the secret project of a will in favour of his mother instigated and realised in 1883; the episode in 1885, a liaison so well-concealed that we know nothing but what is said on the back of a study in pencil and in some letters to his friend Zola, who was charged with acting as a mailbox; Zola with whom Cézanne breaks in 1886, the same month in which he married (in the presence of his parents), after which the father dies; the life of the painter always apart from his wife and his son. And some

traits less evident, without doubt more interesting: the passion of the young man for Latin and Alexandrine verse, a poem of youth relating “a terrible story” where “the woman in my arms, the woman with rosy complexion / disappears suddenly and transforms / into a pale cadaver with angular contours,” the reiteration in the conversations and letters, up until the end, of the theme “they won’t get their *hooks into me*”; the motif of the apples¹⁸; the bellicose immobility, the impatient reserve, the silences which made Zola fulminate, the incessant moving, the game of continual coming and going between Paris and Aix ...

All this together would still not be enough to make the *oeuvre* known in its double dimension: of lack or originary abandonment, and of the continual displacement of figures and plastic devices. We could certainly venture to draw some correlations in this material from his life. Thus, before the works of the first period, we are justified in thinking that painting fulfills a properly phantasmatic function, and that for the young Cézanne, the act of representation accomplishes the desire to see the woman (the object) which is refused to him (by the father?). Thus, their so-called generic subjects and strong erotic and sadistic content, their theatrical *mises en scène* (curtains, spectators, veils raised by servants revealing female nudes), but also with the unilateral aggressivity of the touch which inscribes itself on the material as if to penetrate it, the mixing up of perspective according to several simultaneous points of view which position the scene in an imaginary non-place, and above all the “brash brushwork [*facture couillardre*]” with tar-like heaviness, operating without chromaticism in black and white, which floods the works with the light of insomnia. It is no more adventurous, though nearly as pointless, to show that if Pissaro “was a father” for Cézanne, “a man to consult and something like the good Lord,” it is most certainly that the *speech* [*parole*] refused him by his father the banker, from 1872, is given back to him by the impressionist painter, and that the appearance of colour on Cézanne’s palette coincides, as with Klee or Van Gogh, with a sort of *redemption* (the word is from Klee’s *Journal*) of the blind, nocturnal virility of the preceding period, by a passivity capable of welcoming its other: light. At the same time, the generic scenes become less numerous, the theme of male and female bathers expands rapidly, attesting that in the place of voyeurism trained on female flesh, the act of painting disperses the body, male as well as female, in atmospheric volumes. A veritable reversal commutes the roles: the object ceases to be intensely libidinal, and is neutralised; the still lifes, where the space is charged with desexualised, chromatic energy, gains increasing importance.

As for the third period, called constructive or abstract, its libidinal “reason” would offer more resistance to analysis if we did not know that in its middle, during the course of the years 1882-1887, the symptoms of a profound disruption accumulate in Cézanne’s life: the will, the liaison carried out in secret, the rupture with Zola, the marriage, and the death of the father. In the work, the weight of the anguish of binding, of constructing becomes apparent, and extends far enough to distort the object and space such that they take part in the “logic” in which Cézanne then seeks to place and bind them. He, who loves that “it turns,” paints landscapes like “playing cards,” where space is flattened and blocks the circulation of the chromatic flux. Above all, it is a system closely tied to a victory over mobility, of parallels over perpendiculars, and therefore, following the word of Cézanne himself, the point of view of *Pater omnipotens aeterne Deus* [God the omnipotent and eternal Father] over that of human beings. In order to throw light on a displacement so contrary to the penchant for the baroque and the search for curvature, and to confront it with the effects of the perceptible tremor in his life, would it not be necessary to advance the hypothesis, this time highly perilous, of a sort of regression in the pulsional play, which would in turn have provoked the tightening of the social and plastic systems of defence, leading Cézanne to occupy, in his family, and metaphorically in his painting, the place of the father?

The final period, with its highs and lows, is marked by the loosening of the constructive grip, the relaxation of volumes, the free play between objects, and even between the dashes, as in the *Saint Victoire* of the time, in the *Baigneuses* [Bathers] in the National Gallery in London, or in the watercolours. The compulsion to control fades away, the construction becomes almost drifting, the space freed, the compartmentalizing pattern disappearing, the picture itself becoming a libidinal object, pure colour, pure “femininity,” a substance at the same time soluble and opaque. To assure oneself of the fact that Cézanne, in his own way, “knew” this, one must merely understand how he poses the problem of “points of contact” between tones, while forbidding himself any recourse to the black line in order to define contours. But even here there remains something that feeds the hypothesis of a correlation with his life, an extreme tension that continues to inflect the 1890s, and only shows signs of diminution around 1903: his consolidation in the position of the master at the centre of a growing/developing circle of young disciples (É. Bernard, Languier, Camoin) or of amateurs like A. Vollard. He compares himself to the “grand leader of the Hebrews”; he “glimpses the Promised Land,” writing to J. Gasquet: “Perhaps I came too soon. I was the painter of your generation more than of mine.” He occupies his paternal position openly, aging with pleasure, dead already at the age of sixty-five, engendering

transference by alleging powerlessness: “You don’t see what a sad state I’ve been reduced to. Out of control, a man who does not exist ...” But this is no longer, as in the constructive period, the object-woman lost and reconstituted by logic, or, in the dark period, by *mise en scène*. On the contrary, it is now the object-woman, the colour, the flesh of the world, received and returned (“fulfilled,” says Cézanne) in the guise of the painting, like a body, in its evanescence, in its fluidity. A living, but fragmented body, a unity always deferred: the erotic body *par excellence*. A secret libidinal involvement must be implicated between the position of the *old master* and the capacity to render, on the canvas, this long-standing *incapacity* (the powerlessness to *bind*). Cézanne “knew” this relation—he writes to Camoin in 1903¹⁹: “I have nothing to hide *in art*,” and to his son eight days before his death: “I believe the sensation which composes the basis of my work to be impenetrable.” (15 Oct. 1906).

A LIBIDINAL “ECONOMIC” AESTHETIC

One can therefore entertain oneself by producing these correlations between *oeuvre* and life, but it is certain that they always end up failing, for at least two reasons. The first is that such a “psychoanalysis” is impossible in the absence of the subject (the painter); the second, that even if he was alive, it will run up against the enigma of an *exploited powerlessness*, of a capacity to bear this abandonment and passivity, to welcome without mastering, to “arrange the void, to prepare the space in which the creative forces can be given free rein.”²⁰ For the flux of energy, this void is the possibility of circulating in the psychic apparatus without encountering the highly structured systems that Freud called bound, systems which can only discharge the energy by channeling it through its invariant—“rational” or imaginary—forms. Cézanne’s immobility before the model is the putting-in-suspense of the action of already known forms or already revealed phantasms. In turn, the work could be conceived as an energetic *analogue* of the psychic apparatus: the pictorial object can also find itself blocked by formal, immutable figures which sometimes appeal to the rules of rationalism and realism (like the perspective of the Quattrocento), and sometimes to the expression of the depths of the soul. This is to say that the energy of lines, of values, of colours, finds itself *bound* in a code and in a syntax, those of a school or those of an unconscious, and can no longer circulate on the support unless it conforms with this matrix.²¹ It is because the paintings of Gauguin or Van Gogh are to Cézanne’s eyes examples of such a blockage, of clenching unconscious forms that have “gotten their hooks in,” that he did not want to hear about them.

Such an hypothesis, should it be formulated, would provide the outlines of an “economic aesthetic” in the sense that Freud speaks of a libidinal economy (concerned with the theory of the drives [*pulsions*] and the affects). It would without a doubt release the “applied psychoanalysis” (of art) from the weight of a theory of representation, without speaking of the burden of an even more dissatisfying [*frustré*] account—of libido, sexuality, Oedipus, castration and the other products on sale in the open market of modern aesthetics—that it continues to impose. It would allow one to show that the semiological or semiotic approach, *a fortiori* scenographic, rests on a major mistake concerning the nature of the act of painting itself: since, in the end, one does not paint in order to speak, but in order to keep silent. It is not true that the last *Sainte Victoires* speak nor even signify—they *are there*, like a critical libidinal body, absolutely mute, truly *impenetrable* because they hide nothing. Since, that is to say, their principle of organisation and of action does not rest *outside* of themselves (in a model to imitate, in a system of rules to respect). They are impenetrable because they have no depth; they are without signifiante, without underside.

If Freud did not elaborate such an aesthetic, if he remained insensible to the Cézannean and post-Cézannean revolution, if he persisted in treating the work like an object concealing a secret, in discovering in it bound forms like the phantasm of the vulture, it is because for him the *image* has the status of a deposed, obscured *signification*, which represents in its absence. Images, and therefore works, are for him screens which must be rent—as he does to those in the book on Saint-John Perse that Jakob Freud, his father, gave to him when he was four years old - *zur Vernichtung*, reducing them to nothing. To make Freud’s theory of resistance the lynchpin of a theory critical of the prevailing modern passion for making everything speak would be one of the tasks, and not the least, of an aesthetics based on a libidinal economics. It would show that this prevalence proceeds from the prevalence accorded by Freud to the figure of the Father in the interpretation of the artwork, as in that of the dream or the symptom—not of the “real” father, but of the Father-function (Oedipus and castration) which is constitutive of desire insofar as, on its terms, demand runs up against a lack of response and against prohibition. Such a prevalence leads the psychoanalytic aesthetic to grasp the artistic object as holding the place of an offering, a gift, in a transference relation, and pays no attention to the formal properties of the object, other than insofar as it symbolically signals its unconscious purpose.

Such was Freud's approach to Michelangelo's *Moses*²²: in analysing the play of the fingers in the beard and the position of the Tablets beneath the arm, Freud extracts that which constitutes the potential force of the work, the Mosaic drama of mastered fury. As this dramatic theme is absent from *Exodus*, he attributes responsibility for it to the transferential relation of the artist with Pope Julius II, whose tomb the statue would adorn. According to Freud, this anger of Moses reflects the violent temperament of the Pope and of the artist himself, and attests in both to the presence of the desire to have done with the law of the Father, to refuse castration; but that it can be overcome, that Moses recovers himself, that he lowers his hand, is itself evidence of the ultimate acceptance of this law. The work of Michelangelo is therefore understood as a *message* addressed by the artist to Julius II. It is this message, assumed to be latent in the marble, that takes hold of Freud's desire in turn, in order to restore the content clearly, that is to say, in words. This desire is articulated therefore according to at least two dimensions: the identification with Moses, and the verbalisation in a discourse of knowledge. One sees that such an aesthetic not only privileges the art of representation—it also arranges its interpretation along the axes of the transferential relation; it aims to refer the work back to Oedipus and castration; it lodges the object in the space of the imaginary and understands it by applying a reading guided by the code of a symbolic.

We could not say that this is false. But we also see that it can blind itself to essential mutations in the position of the aesthetic object. Shouldn't we connect the element of plastic uncertainty that we notice in the painting of Cézanne to a *refusal* (regardless of whether or not it is conscious) to *instantiate* the work, a refusal to place it in a space of donation or of exchange, a desire *not* to put it into circulation in the network governed in the final instance by the Oedipal structure and the law of castration? This *refusal* itself would be what prevents Cézanne from being satisfied with any plastic formula, whether it be, as in the first period, the imaginary and literary restitution of fulfilled desire, or in the third the reference to a strict and transcendent law of the prescribed form of objects on the support. In painting the emergence of a strange desire becomes visible: that the painting *itself be an object*, no longer valued as a message, threat, supplication, prohibition, exorcism, morality, or allusion - no longer engaged in a symbolic relation—but be valued as an *absolute* object, relieved of the transferential relation, indifferent to the relational order, active only in the energetic order and in the silence of the body. This desire makes room for the emergence of a *new position* of the object to paint. The *denial* of the transferential function, of the place that it is supposed to occupy in the drama of castration, its position outside of the circuit in which symbolic

exchange takes place, constitutes an important mutation. We have suggested that it makes the pictorial object slide from a position of the neurotic type to a position of the psychotic or perverse type—if it is true that an object occupying the latter is detached from the symbolic law in general, that it escapes from the rule of sexual difference and of castration, that it is the site of masochistic and sadistic manipulation, that desire is denied and the look fascinated at the same time. The fetish object gathers these features in itself, features that one could justifiably claim to recognize in Cézanne's last pieces. And, inevitably, they will be found in the works of cubism, of Klee, of Kandinsky, of the American abstracts ...

In this way, it would become possible to understand the subsequent success of Cézanne, his importance, and, generally speaking, the reverberation with which the displacement of the object in painting since 1900 has met. That is, if the painted object was submitted to the mutation we have described, ceasing to be a referential and represented object in order to become the place of libidinal operations that engender an inexhaustible polymorphy, we should perhaps advance the hypothesis that the same goes for other objects: objects of production and consumption, objects to sing of and to listen to, objects to love.

We are justified in suggesting that the veritable transformation which capitalism performs on the objects that circulate in society—above all, in the most recent forms, say for Western Europe over the last 15 years—will involve, sooner or later, *all objects*, and not economic objects alone (as an economism a little too confident of the impermeability of its boundaries believes). At issue is not this “belief,” or the “development” of societies, but the annihilation of objects qua bearers of symbolic values underwritten by desire and culture, and their reconstitution in the indifferent terms of a system which no longer has anything *outside of itself* on which the objects that circulate within it can be anchored: neither God, nor nature, nor need, nor even the desire of the alleged “subjects” of exchange. The pictorial object of Cézanne and his successors, insofar as it carries the traits of psychosis or perversion, is much more than a simple analogue of the economic object analysed by Marx in *Capital* or, yet again, of the linguistic object constructed by structural linguistics. By extending in this way the scope of an aesthetic centred on a libidinal economics, one finds oneself in a position to at once put the Cézannean object in its right place, to give a possible reason for the aesthetic blindness of a Freud too attached to identifying a position for the neurotic object, and to take account of this *event* in which we have been submerged since the start of the century: the dislocation of the very position of diverse social objects, the mutation of desire underlying our institutions.

NOTES

1. Translator's Note: This essay was first published as "Psychanalyse et peinture" in *Encyclopædia Universalis*, vol. 13. Paris: 1971, then as "Freud selon Cézanne" in Jean-François Lyotard, *Des Dispositifs pulsionnels*, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973, and in a 1994 reissue of this book from Éditions Galilée. This translation is published with the permission of Dolores Lyotard. Repeated efforts, including the offer of financial remuneration, were made to gain permission from Galilée. Thanks are due to Amélie Berger Soraruff for comments on the translation.
2. See Pierre Kaufmann, "Psychanalyse" in *Encyclopædia Universalis*, Paris: 1971; Sarah Kofman, *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics*. Trans. Winifred Woodhull. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; Jean-François Lyotard, "The Psychoanalytic Approach to Artistic and Literary Expression" in *Towards the Postmodern*. Trans. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts. New Jersey: Humanity Books, 1998.
3. Pierre Kaufmann, *L'expérience émotionnelle de l'espace*. Paris: Vrin, 1967.
4. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing*, 2nd ed. New York: George Braziller, 1965.
5. Jean Starobinsky, "Hamlet and Oedipus" in *The Living Eye*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1989.
6. André Green, *Un œil en trop*. Paris: Minuit, 1969. Partial translation: "Prologue: The Psychoanalytic Reading of Tragedy" in *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
7. Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood" in *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*. Ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 11. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.
8. Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*. Ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 2. London: Hogarth Press, 1953; Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volumes 4 and 5. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.
9. Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." Trans. I.F. Grant Duff. In *Gensen's "Gradiva" and Other Works*. Ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 9. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.
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11. Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood" in *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 11. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.
12. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 8. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.
13. Lionello Venturi, *Cézanne, son art, son oeuvre*. Paris: P. Rosenberg, 1936.
14. Pierre Francastel, *Peinture et Société: naissance et destruction d'un espace plastique de la Renaissance au cubisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1965 [1952].
15. Liliane Brion-Guerry, *Cézanne et l'Expression de l'espace*, 2nd ed. Paris: Albin Michel, 1966; Bernard Dorival, *Cezanne*, trans. H.H.A. Thackwaite. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger, 1997 [1948].
16. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Michael B. Smith. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
17. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Ed. Michael B. Smith. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
18. Meyer Shapiro, "Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life," *Art News Annual*

34 (1968): 35-53.

19. Paul Cézanne, *Paul Cezanne: Letters*. Ed. John Rewald. Trans. Marguerite Kay. London: Cassirer, 1941.

20. Joanna Field (Marion Milner), *On Not Being Able to Paint*, 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1983.

21. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

22. Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo" in *Totem and Taboo and Other Works*. Ed. James Strachey. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 13. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.

**the uncanniness of thought
and the metaphysics of
penelope¹**

bernard stiegler, translated by arne de
boever, with greg flanders and alicia
harrison

*For François Laruelle, who introduced me
to the work of Gilbert Simondon*

Since Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most widely discussed issues in political debates (and one about which the right and the left traditionally differ) has been whether the human being is naturally good or evil. Yet such a question is philosophically meaningless; when one attributes to the thinker of the social contract the proposition that the human being is fundamentally good, one changes his thought precisely *where it is philosophical*.

There is no doubt that for Rousseau, if the purely natural human being were to exist, it would necessarily be fundamentally good. But *it does not exist*. However, we need its *fiction* in order to *think* the human being, for Rousseau reveals to us that *the human being is a process*, and thus *becoming*. The human being is driven in this becoming by a motive of which Rousseau states as a rule that, because it

tends towards the equilibrium of law through the disequilibrium of facts, and thereby towards unity through its differences, it affirms an equality of all human beings, thus affirming, correlatively, their equal goodness.

What is at stake in the famous *Discourse* is thinking the human being *de jure*, that is to say the human being to come. The human being becomes and this becoming is not a blind mechanism: it is the exercise of a freedom, the human being's freedom to be good or not. In other words, the human being is neither good nor evil, because it is good *de jure* and evil *de facto*. The human being exists *between* these two *tendencies*: the tendency of actual reality and the tendency of the imaginary to come, founded on the fiction of an absolute past, namely the past of the "purely natural human being." And the fiction of this purely natural human being is projected into the future towards the infinity of a *process of individuation* that is essentially never-ending. "Towards infinity" also means that the state of equality and goodness that defines the purely natural human being "perhaps never existed [and] probably never will exist"²: Rousseau never claimed to realize a paradise on earth, nor that one ever existed.³ In this respect, even the "good savage" is evil *de facto*, however little this may be.

In the end, to ask whether the human being is good *or* evil is to misunderstand the nature of a philosophical question: it is to misunderstand the necessity of distinguishing what is *de facto* from what is *de jure*, and to misunderstand that freedom depends on this distinction, while philosophy depends on this freedom. If philosophy can make the distinction, and *without opposing* the terms that are formed in the process, it is because the philosopher posits—at the very origin of philosophy and as the *foundational* question of all philosophy—that the human being is *neither* good *nor* evil but irreducibly both. It is both good *and* evil.⁴



This *and* opens up what Simondon calls a *field*,⁵ a term he borrows from Gestalt theory, which took it in turn from electromagnetic physics. The coordinating conjunction *and* in the expression "good and evil" is a conjunction that is obviously also a disjunction; it is therefore the knot of a constitutive contradiction that ties together a dynamic principle. This disjunctive conjunction maintains itself between terms that form a transductive relation; here, it is the relation that constitutes its terms, and where one term—for example, good—*does not exist* without the other—evil.

A transductive relation, such as the one that exists between good and evil (and that is a field), is itself inscribed into a transductive relation of a particular kind (and which opens up another field), one that Simondon calls a dyad,⁶ a term he borrows from Plato. A dyad is not a simple transductive relation because its “terms” are themselves indefinite and thus interminable (and indeterminable). They tend towards infinity.

Simondon states that the field in which the *and* articulates good and evil—in a certain sense constituting them by distinguishing them—is traversed by tendencies that only become actual and concrete in this *and*. It is in such a field that an individual is formed and transformed as a process of psychic individuation (paired with a collective individuation while remaining distinct from it) in which the individual individuates itself psychically both *de jure* and *de facto*. In this way, the individual becomes the *center* and thereby the *middle* of this relation, precisely as its disjunctive conjunction. It is from Simondon that Gilles Deleuze borrows, as one of the most recurrent features of his work, this way of thinking the individual: starting from a disjunctive conjunction and inscribing the problems of individuation into the middle of a relation in which, in order to think this relation, one must begin not from its extremities but from its middle.

Such a dynamic relation is a tension. This relation can only exist as tension within a process of individuation that surpasses and traverses the individual like the indefinite terms of the dyad for which this individual is the theater of individuation. To say that the individual is such a theater and that the individuation that plays itself out like a piece of theater is always already at the same time psychic *and* collective, to say, in other words, that this individuation surpasses the opposition between interior and exterior and that, in this surpassing, tendencies are at play that correspond to what is called, in moral expressions of judgment, “being good” or “being evil” (or “being bad”)—to say all this means that what is played out on the scene of such an individual individuating itself can either be favorable or unfavorable to collective individuation through its psychic individuation. However, when the psychic individuation is unfavorable to collective individuation, it is more like a psychic *disindividuation*: a loss of psychic individuation.

This explains why Simondon devotes a brief but vigorous analysis to the question of temptation⁷, while at the same time rethinking the question of good and evil⁸ from the ground up, not leaving it to gather dust in the storehouse of metaphysical and moral antiques. This also explains why he turns here to Socrates, for to be unfavorable to collective individuation always means, in the end, to be unfavorable

to one's own psychic individuation; being unfavorable to collective individuation can only mean to disindividuate oneself.

This is also the meaning behind the *and* that is both conjunctive and disjunctive, not only in the relation of good *and* evil but also in the process of psychic *and* collective individuation. Simondon posits as a principle that psychic individuation can only occur through the participation in collective individuation, and that every evolution of collective individuation in turn influences the conditions of psychic individuation.

This is why for Socrates being unfavorable to collective individuation—or, in his terms, being unjust—inevitably means wronging oneself⁹: indeed, this is one of the key issues at stake in *Gorgias*.



Poised as never before between good and evil, the question of the future of humanity stands vertiginously before us today: this question, which is first a moral question, becomes (as is evident in Rousseau) politics itself: it is the question of *philia*.

Simondon allows us to consider these politically charged questions in new terms, reinterpreting and reactivating the foundational questions of philosophical thought through an absolutely original conceptual framework. This framework describes processes of vital, physical, and psychosocial individuation, making use of findings from both contemporary physics and the human sciences. Its explicit aim: the foundation of a reunified human science, precisely through the overcoming of the opposition between the psychic and the social. This opposition is artificial, produced by the division of intellectual labor that gave birth to psychology and sociology at the moment when philosophy, as the power of synthesis, gave up its regional analytic capacities to the positive sciences.

The analytical becoming of different branches of knowledge stems from the methodological separation of intellectual objects into disciplines of thought, and from the industrial division of labor (manual, then intellectual).¹⁰

Psychology and morality became separated in philosophy (a distinction that had no meaning for the Greeks) the moment when categorizations and distinctions entered into intellectual labor, categories that ultimately produced a division between metaphysics (or the critique of metaphysics) and epistemology on one

hand, and between the human sciences on the other, the latter resulting from an analytical division of human and social objects according to methods of observation and quantification creating new domains of intellectual labor.

This division of labor, which led to the explosion of different branches of knowledge (such that philosophy also separated at the same moment from the natural sciences), occurred simultaneously with the discretization of operations of human labor (through a process of grammatization¹¹) and with their exteriorization under industrial capitalism in the form of machines.

However, the process that led to extraordinary progress in the different branches of knowledge also produced a sort of enucleation of thought, perhaps even its disindividuation, a state of affairs that various interdisciplinary aggregations are now trying to overcome—for example, in the so-called “cognitive” sciences. In spite of these ambitions, we are for the most part lacking the faculty to synthetically link together branches of knowledge that were constructed analytically: Simondon’s oeuvre is the thought of just such a faculty; it is an expression of its necessity as well as a reflection on that which blocks the path to it, not only temporarily, but also structurally. For this very reason, Simondon’s work is that which provokes us to think, and, more precisely, to think of a new critique of thought in the form of an individuating reason.



As Jacques Garelli has underlined,¹² Simondon revives the questions of the Presocratics: the thought of psychic and collective individuation is a magnificent reopening of the inaugural question of the One and the Multiple, and of the *hypokeimenon proton*—the question at the origin of Greek thought that emerges with, and for, the nascent *polis* (whose dynamic principle is also, as the tension between the One and the Multiple, the principle of that which puts the polis into danger—a danger of the disindividuation the Greeks called *stasis*).

By taking up once again the knot of the One and the Multiple, Simondon is attempting to reconstitute a synthetic era of philosophy after several centuries dominated by analytical thought, from the period that began with Descartes and his new conception of method. This project becomes particularly evident in *Psychic and Collective Individuation* where, beyond its many and powerful reflections on the relation as the first question of philosophy (a question taken up from every possible angle), the work makes explicit its ambition to found a different axiomatic of the human sciences using this new concept of relation¹³ (and thus of synthesis),

a new axiomatic that is capable of founding *the* human science.

This ambition, this mission to *synthesize*,¹⁴ once it has been given back to philosophy as that which represents the reunification of *one* human science (which Simondon compares to the surpassing of the opposition between physics and chemistry in the natural sciences¹⁵), does not do away with analysis. Much the contrary: rarely has a work of philosophy so scrupulously taken into account the different branches of knowledge of its time, in every domain, and in their most analytical manner (physics, biology, technology, sociology, psychology, social sciences, and management sciences—running each time through the entire history of philosophy for each discipline).

Simondon therefore does not at all propose to abandon analytical considerations of objects of thought, nor the methods that allow for their production; his purpose is not to oppose the sciences, nor to contest their objects, it is to study these objects as closely as possible. Simondon's approach is also the reinscription of analytical results into a synthetic trajectory, which is to say into a method that is the relation itself, as *sun-thesis*.

Such a method rests on the primacy accorded to the relation that constitutes its terms and that is called, for this reason, transductive. This primacy is given relative to the *a priori* deductive relation and to the *a posteriori* inductive relation: it is a new relation to experience, one which is now thought as being irreducibly inscribed into a dynamic system. Philosophy itself, and the philosophy put forward by Simondon in particular, is a specific case of such an experience and such an inscription. Simondon's new thought (which does away with the opposition between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*) is that of transduction, as the dynamic relation in a system, in a set of systems that are themselves in transductive relations, and for which we must develop the concept of preindividuality: more precisely of the preindividual environment.



Psychic and Collective Individuation is the work in which Simondon establishes the conditions of possibility and the limits to the knowledge of individuation in all its forms: physical, vital, and psychosocial. It is a critique of knowledge in the Kantian sense.

The conditions of possibility of the knowledge of individuation are *relative* in Simondon; they are also the conditions of impossibility, or more precisely, they

are the conditions of a limited possibility that is always being raised. They are the conditions of a knowledge that is, for this reason, essentially conceived of as the process of an incompletion [*inachèvement*] that is also characteristic of individuation as such.

This new critique consists of a new conceptual framework in which the categories that were at the basis of all philosophy, and through which philosophy tried to understand the individual (as *tode ti* and *sunolon*, or as *subjectum* and as subject), become a region of thought in the same way that Newton's principles or Euclid's axiomatic are regions of contemporary physics and geometry.

The preindividual must now be thought of as being the environment in which a process occurs whose result is the individual, and for which the categories that allowed us to discern the individual are inoperative. In such an understanding of process, the psychic individual is no longer privileged in any way: social individuals are no more or less individual than physical persons.

The relative conditions of possibility of the knowledge of individuation are thus conditions of impossibility, because it is impossible to know individuation without individuating it, and without individuating oneself: without individuating oneself and *at the same time* individuating individuation, which is thereby known and becomes for the same reason unknown again, that is to say inadequate. To know means to individuate, and to individuate means to trans-form the known object, to render it unknown, something to be known, to be known anew. This is the case because *gnoseological* individuation is an instance of *psychic and social* individuation that leads to transindividuation. It is even the case *par excellence* in which the individuation of the knowing subject, as a psychic individual, is immediately the individuation of knowledge, insofar as the latter is inextricably both a social reality and a psychic reality.

Psychic and Collective Individuation is this critique, to the extent that it describes the *operation* of transindividuation through which categorization in general occurs in the process that is individuation, such that the coincidence in the act of knowing between the psychic and the social produces, paradoxically, an irreducible inadequacy between this act of knowing and the result of this knowledge, which is to say, its object. As with Kant, the knowledge of an object is a production of the object; but what emerges through this act of knowledge as a "quantum leap" in the individuation leads to a metastabilization of the knowledge, to a potential instability of this knowledge, and therefore of the object thereby constituted.

This means that knowledge is a never-ending process of participation in a larger collective individuation where the preindividual—the carrier of potentials that are actualized by psychic and social individuals—only individuates itself through the stages of a process of individuation in which one metastable state follows another, always at the edge of a disequilibrium.

It is in this sense that this critique of individuating reason proceeds from the questions that were opened by thermodynamics and quantum mechanics; and this is why it continues on the path of *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which the environment of individuation was Newtonian physics. This continuation, like the surpassing of the opposition between matter and form (the main achievement of *The Individual and Its Physico-Biological Genesis*), suspends at the same time the opposition between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, and individuating reason can no longer be thought outside the couple knowing-individual/known-environment.

As a consequence, knowledge becomes performative: the individual that knows alters the environment through this knowledge, or, in other words, by individuating it. This requires a reform of human understanding such that, like with the opposition between form and matter or between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, the opposition between psychology and sociology must also be surpassed (including all the oppositions that follow in the entirety of the human sciences). It is in this sense that the project of this *critique of individuating reason* that is *Psychic and Collective Individuation* is to lay a new foundation for a human science, that is to say, a knowledge of the psychosocial individuation of which knowledge itself is but one instance.



Such a human science must restore a full and even primordial dignity to spiritual, moral, and ethical questions. The impossibility of knowing individuation without individuating oneself and without, at the same time individuating individuation—which signifies that the opposition of the subject and the object no longer allows us to think knowledge, and which inscribes an irreducible inadequacy in the very heart of the act of knowing—is an example of the *lack* [défaut] that generally constitutes subjectivation as individuation, and which the individuating individual experiences above all as something that is *moral* rather than gnoseological.

It is only from the thought of the individual's inadequacy to itself, which stems from the fact that the individual always already interiorizes its exterior

environment, and from the preindividual potentials that the individual contains for an individuation to come (such that the individual finds itself always already surpassed by the individuation that traverses and supports it), that the conjunction *and*, in the process of psychic *and* collective individuation, being also a *disjunction*, *makes* and *unmakes* at the same time the psychosocial a process of individuation.

Only from this disjunctive conjunction, as a spiritual, moral or ethical schize, is it possible to think the general conditions of individuation as knowledge in a gnoseological schize in which knowledge, insofar as it is always already a psychosocial individuation, and in that sense practical, is also—and irreducibly—political.

How, then, are we to understand the suicide of George Eastmann?¹⁶ This kind of question is a typical example of an individual's conflict with itself, a conflict that is always individuation. This question is also an example of what is explored by Simondonian human science and of the manner in which this exploration takes place by individuating its object. For Simondon's goal is to found *one* human science; a unified science of the human being and human society can only be brought about by reintroducing *the high and the low* into the *psyche* and into the social body, that is to say, by turning what it unifies into a dynamic process founded upon dyads that contain multiplicities and divisions, the terms of which are in an originary relation (transduction), but which are irreducible to one another. As a consequence of the intrinsically unfinished [*inachevé*] character of the process of individuation, the transductive relations are also dynamic couples in which the inadequacy of the individual to itself crystallizes.

As the indefiniteness of the terms between which dynamic fields are formed, dyads engender multiplicities that metastabilize during the collective individuation, such that this collective individuation produces transindividuation, or a "second individuation." With the term transindividuation, Simondon characterizes the *spiritual* in the preindividual, a term that is the very experience of the incompleteness of the individual and not merely of the species: the individual's experience of its inadequacy to itself, which never ceases to divide itself into past and future, or into memory and imagination. (The doctrine of the immortality of the soul finds its meaning here. Generally speaking, one of the greatest strengths of this book is that it shows the necessity, *and thus the actuality*, of earlier eras of thought, in other words, of earlier stages of collective individuation.)

Thus in Simondon's work, there exist the superior and the inferior, the high and the low: individuation constantly oscillates between these two terms. *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* [On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects] describes the experience of the exceptional conditions that provide access to the superior, an experience that is at once first (original) and quotidian. The experience is an attraction to what are called, in this book, "key points", that is, the exceptional moments and places, the summit meetings and the days of celebration (for example, rituals).¹⁷ For these extremes, psychology is inseparable from morality and ethics, because we are dealing with the psychology of a spiritual being, which is to say a social and a transindividual being.



Simondon's psychology, which is an individuation that is always already social and thus also a sociology, is shaped like a cross: on the one hand, it is structured horizontally by relations of perception and affection¹⁸; and on the other, it is structured vertically by the relations of high and low.¹⁹ *Psychic and Collective Individuation* is the experience of a permanent horizontal movement that rises and falls, exploring the vertical, and it is in this way that the question of temptation is redefined, *on the basis of which Simondon thinks time*.²⁰ The trajectory of the process is no longer determined by the *opposition* of good and evil, good and bad, superior and inferior, but by their *composition*.

From this point forward, two fundamental concepts articulate themselves in relation to one other in Simondon's oeuvre without, however, being explicitly designated as such: the concept of *circuit*, and the concept of *levels* of elevation. It is through the combination of these concepts that Simondon develops his synthetic philosophy of human science as a process of individuation constituted by transductive relations.

These transductive relations are processes of growth; they develop morphogeneses "from one point to the next," and the dynamic principle of these transductive relations, the tension that creates them, is the circuit that makes an action respond to a perception and an emotion to an affection.²¹ It is in circuits like these that transductive relations concretize themselves, and it is through this growth and this structuration that these relations produce information and signification. They psychic individual is in turn linked to the collective individual through information and signification, thereby overcoming their difference. The signification that is *traced out* on this circuit is both interior and exterior to the

psychic individual and the social individual²²; in other words, this signification is unlimited and moves in the indefiniteness of the dyad, as the very indetermination that opens up the possibility of freedom.

In general, all of what Simondon writes is made up of the polarities between which relations appear. These polarities articulate themselves in relation to one another, playing with one another, and in this way, they constitute the process of individuation as a transindividuation that produces the transindividual.²³ Dramas (actions) occur between these polarities, for example, the difficult experience of temptation, which clearly shows that between good and evil, the inferior and the superior cannot be at the same level.²⁴ The philosophy of psychic and collective individuation that is presented in this book is a philosophy of levels, and of the immanence that constitutes itself, both horizontally and vertically in the course of this process. This immanence is not flat; it is on the contrary amply voluminous. It is this immanence alone that allows us to once again pose the problem of “belief in the world,”²⁵ and the question of a “new belief,”²⁶ in a new manner.

This new approach must be articulated through what Simondon has to say on the splitting of personalities: the *psyche*, through both memory and imagination, continually splits, and as such, temporalizes itself.²⁷ These splits produce the symbolization of the ego and constitute the possibility of changing levels: it is in this way that Simondon thinks time, starting from the experience of temptation.

It is because we always think in terms of polarities, always *between* two poles, either horizontally or vertically, one pole incapable of functioning without the other, and therefore incapable of being opposed to the other, that Simondon writes that we must think things starting from their middle. Deleuze took this idea and made it the basis for his perhaps overly famous problematic of the rhizome: overly famous in the sense that it all too often obscures the fact that if there is cardinality in this polarity (east, west, north, and south), there is also verticality. There is no cardinality without a horizon and no horizon without a top and a bottom. It is here that time passes and *pierces the horizon* with the trajectory of the stars, as the cosmic process affecting the psychic individual, becoming thereby social—this is what Kant calls moral law.

Without this problematic of key points—which are eminent points, summits and exceptional moments—it is impossible to understand the question of the division through which Simondon claims (and this may be one of his weaknesses) to be able to bring together the question of psychoanalysis, or the thought of the

unconscious, with that of Pierre Janet.



The Simondonian theory of psychosocial individuation is to the human sciences and to philosophy what quantum mechanics is to physics.

Simondon's theory maintains this position not only in relation to philosophy, whose fundamental categories it overturns, but also in relation to the human sciences. It is a critique of the latter in the same sense in which Kant proposed a critique of reason through a critique of metaphysics—even if Simondon's critique does not consist in limiting the knowledge of the human and the social sciences, but rather in confronting it with the question of the unlimited, such that this critique calls into question the analytical division of labor in the human and social sciences. As a result, ethical and spiritual questions regain their urgency.

For Simondon then, the human and social sciences are not avatars of philosophy; they are not considered a degenerative specialization of philosophy, as was the case for French philosophers after the waning of structuralism, but a new regime not only for philosophy, but for thought in general. If, since Kant, philosophy became separated from mathematical formalisms and science, which itself divided into physics, chemistry, and biology, each specialized in domains of knowledge defining their own ontologies, and then turning the human being and society into objects of scientific studies, thereby separating themselves from philosophy by becoming experimental, positive and methodical, establishing themselves before all else as methods that allow us to ensure that facts can be taken into consideration by thought, the philosophy of Simondon articulates itself closely with the science of its time in its entirety. Simondon's thought revisits Gestalt theory from its inception in crystallography; it reconceptualizes the categories of the in-group and the out-group that were taken from American psychology: for Simondon, thought begins at the basis of that which science brings to philosophy, and not the other way around; philosophy's task is to re-synthesize, and thus to re-individuate, what science provides it.

From then on, entering into Simondon's philosophy is somewhat similar to having a spiritual dream: it is to experience a defamiliarization of the familiar, to encounter the uncanniness of thought where everything is already known, where everything has already been seen, and where everything nevertheless appears suddenly in a radically new light.

In this philosophy, Simondon addresses all of the problems encountered by the human spirit in the course of its history, from religion to suicide. Here, the world is an object of consideration only to the extent that it is a process that describes the very activity of the thought of the person attempting to think it (which is already a kind of dynamic transcendental affinity²⁸). This situation describes our mental and individuating (and therefore also social) activity at the very moment in which we read Simondon, who only thinks individuation to the extent that he individuates himself in the very process of thinking this individuation, and who, through this gesture, individuates us as well. Here, as with quantum physics, phenomena no longer appear as we experience them on a daily basis: they necessitate a new type of seeing and, if I may be allowed to use Husserlian phenomenological categories here, a new type of *epokhè*.

NOTES

1. This text was originally published as the introduction to Simondon, Gilbert. *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 2007). *Parrhesia* would like to thank Bernard Stiegler and Drew S. Burk for permission to publish this English translation.
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 34.
3. "It didn't even occur to most of our philosophers to doubt that the state of nature has existed, even though it is evident from reading the Holy Scriptures that the first man, having received enlightenment and precepts immediately from God, was not himself in that state; and if we give the writings of Moses the credence that every Christian owes them we must deny that, even before the flood, men were ever in the pure state of nature, unless they had fallen back into it because of some extraordinary event: a paradox that is quite awkward to defend and utterly impossible to prove." in Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, 38.
4. I comment on these analyses of Rousseau in detail in *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 107-110.
5. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 2007), 36, 44, 46.
6. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 21, 22, 40, 52, 117.
7. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 162-163.
8. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 159, 163, 244, 256.
9. Simondon writes that "Socrates' reasoning *oudeis exon anartanei*, according to which no one does evil voluntarily, is remarkably revelatory in respect to the true moral conscience of the individual and of a society of individuals; indeed, since moral conscience is auto-normative and auto-constitutive, it is essentially placed before the alternative of either not existing or not doing evil voluntarily." cf. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 259.
10. The analytical distinction of objects of thought was both a precondition for, and a repercussion of, the *industrial division of intellectual labor*. This distinction led to the destruction of the Great Psychosocial Synthesis that represented the unity of the object of faith: an Object/Subject (God) produced by monotheism as the result of, and the condition for, the process of psychic and collective individuation known as the West. The Great Psychosocial Synthesis contained, on one hand, knowledge as theoretical reason and, on the other, practical reason as a subjective principle of differentiation between good and evil, good and bad, better and worse, high and low. The death of God was the explosion of this Great Psychosocial Synthesis, as the metastabilization of the contradictions inherent to the psychic and collective individuations inherited from the Greeks and the Hebrews. This resulted in a division of intellectual labor—in the context of the industrial division of labor—at whose boundaries Simondon is working by proposing a critique, in the most philosophical sense, of this division: a critique that both stands firmly in the Kantian trajectory, and yet also breaks from it.
11. I have developed this concept in *De la misère symbolique 1. L'époque hyperindustrielle*, (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 103 and 112 sq.; *Mécréance et discredit 1. La décadence des démocraties industrielles*, (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 65-67; and *Réenchâter le monde. La valeur esprit contre le populisme industriel*. (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 74 sq. and 124 sq.
12. In his Preface to *L'Individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*. (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2005).
13. The impressive work that Jean-Hugues Barthélémy has dedicated to the Simondonian question of philosophical relativity must be emphasized here: *Penser l'individuation. Simondon et la philosophie de la nature*, and *Penser la connaissance et la technique après Simondon*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).
14. Of course, such a synthesis is not dialectical; it calls for a new concept of the conditions of synthesis itself. By "synthesis" we do not merely mean that which unifies, that which produces the One, but also that which relaunches multiplicity by in-dividuating it: as something that is dynamic and more than unitary, what Simondon calls a "resolving transduction," cf. *L'individuation*

psychique et collective, 27.

15. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 34-35.

16. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 172, note 3.

17. *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, (Paris: Aubier, 2002), 166-168.

18. This thematic is explored in the first two chapters of the first part of *Psychic and Collective Individuation*.

19. *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*. and also *infra*, 159, 161, 163 and 140.

20. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 168.

21. On perception and affection, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 46, 76-79, 88-93; on emotion cf. *infra*, 98-100, 106-109, 114-123, 184, 211-213.

22. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 125, 197, 199, 207.

23. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 104, 153-158, 193, 195, 214.

24. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 159, 161-163, 240.

25. Gilles Deleuze. *The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 170-173.

26. To use Nietzsche's expression. Cf. Marc Crépon. *Nietzsche, l'art et la politique de l'avenir*, (Paris: PUF, 2003).

27. Cf. *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 164-165, 194.

28. In the sense of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but by going beyond the static character of Kant's approach, insofar as he remains caught up in an ontology. On this question, cf. *La technique et le temps 3. Le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être*, (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 78 and 106-107.

veracity and pragmatism in nietzsche's *on truth and lies*

roberto brigati

1. BIOLOGY AND THE DISCIPLINE OF VERACITY

Truth and lies are not on a par. They belong to different categories. Truth is one of two or more truth-values, lying is a speech act, hence not to be equated with mere falsehood, the latter being the logical reverse of truth. Thus, lying, being intentionally uttered, is stronger than falsehood. By the same token, what one may call “veracity” or “truthfulness” is stronger than truth. Besides, their accomplishment as communicative practices is in both cases a function not only of intention but also of information—one may be sincere while saying false things, and tell the truth while purporting to lie. Any treatment of the lie, since Augustine at least, makes this very point: “Not everyone who speaks falsely is lying, if he believes or supposes that what he says is true.”¹ Most traditional accounts, then, settle the issue by distinguishing the proposition’s truth-value from the speaker’s state of mind (consisting of intention plus belief). You are truthful if and only if you mean what you say, and you believe what you say is true. If you are truthful, and what you say happens to be true, then you contribute some amount of knowledge or information.

This, approximately, is the truth-epistemology Nietzsche attacked in his (posthumously published) 1872-73 essay *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (WL). In a nutshell, Nietzsche’s thesis is that we can tell the truth only because

we have learnt to speak falsely; or, more exactly, that veracity, far from being a native will to truth, is formed through a long schooling, both individual and social, during which one learns *not* to look for what is strictly speaking true. Training in the use of metaphor—the main device of linguistic production in Nietzsche’s view—is the key instrument in such a schooling. Yet metaphor is itself a process of selective inattentiveness and distortion. Besides, the dividing line between metaphor and literalness is far from sharp, and is itself subject to social control and changes, based on historical epoch and cultural constraints.² Thus, what is constructed through language—what we call the “true” world—is at most one rendering, not the faithful depiction, of reality. Nietzsche dramatized this social process to the point of turning it into a calculated repression of veracity. What governs ordinary true discourse is a pedagogy, a *discipline* of veracity: we are drilled to call “true” what is really a linguistic manipulation of things as well as of ourselves. Nietzsche’s description, often fiercely expressed,³ is unmistakably meant as a radical criticism of human society.

In this essay I will argue that, without betraying Nietzsche’s spirit, one might construe the discipline of veracity, in an anthropological vein, as one out of a number of cultural ways by which humans have tackled certain basic life problems. A full understanding of this life framework will only be reached by Nietzsche, as Barbara Stiegler has shown, when he will read the biological works of Wilhelm Roux, a few years later; but Roux’s key notion of *assimilation* is already there in 1873 (WL, 86).⁴ Assimilation is literally *ad-similare*, *Gleich-setzen*, i.e. to reduce diversity to identity;⁵ yet, it is the fundamental function of living organisms. I will try to show that essentially the same pattern is at work in the discipline of veracity. Truth is “anthropomorphic,” Nietzsche says, as long as man “strives to understand the world as something analogous to man, and at best he achieves by his struggles the feeling of assimilation” (WL, 85-86). Eventually, however, just as biological assimilation will not simply stop without life ending as well, so linguistic assimilation will go on, and the course it will take is not determined.

On the reading I am proposing, the discipline of veracity is part of what one might call a political anthropology of truth. More precisely, it is the peculiarly Western form of the cultural manipulation which goes with *any* enculturation process. This process is based on the redundancy which characterizes language games. So, just as we learn to disregard much of what is going on during a game of chess, or the performing of a ritual,⁶ provided some rules are respected, we also learn how to discard particular, idiosyncratic traits of the object, thus making it such as to be known and talked about, i.e. “objective.” The key critical issue raised by

Nietzsche's work is: which rules? Since a reduction of redundancy (an assimilation) is inevitable, is it going to be based on a life-affirming or an ultimately life-denying discipline? Here, what is at stake is the same as what Nietzsche, in his *Fragments* from that period, was calling a *eudaemonistic principle*.⁷ From the start, Nietzsche's fundamental concern was with "the question of what was necessary for an *affirmable* or *sustainable* life," coupled with "his claim that traditional philosophy, religion and the moral point of view had turned out to be inadequate answers to such a question."⁸ From a Nietzschean standpoint, Christian views of the sacred value of life, as well as related views of human beings as God-appointed stewards of creation, were cultural misrepresentations, rules that came to be superimposed on basic human life-functioning. But this is because, in Nietzsche's eyes, such rules are ultimately doomed and will lead to the destruction of life—not because biological, embodied life does not lie at the core of Nietzsche's concern.

A crucial aspect of such a superimposition is certainly the "peace treaty" the individual is willing to make with "the herd" (WL, 81). Thus, in accounting for the origin of veracity, Nietzsche goes so far as to evoke the central tradition of modern political thought, i.e. the social contract theory of politics. His phrasing, however, cast as it is in a Hobbesian language, might be misleading, for it suggests some sort of *event*, moral or spiritual if not historical in nature, which would mark the beginning of such politics. Rather, the non-moral level is precisely the one Nietzsche will later refer to as biological. This, in turn, might invite a reading of Nietzsche as proposing some kind of "selfish gene" scenario as the factual hardware, the determining ground of our truth-discourse. But a purely biological explanation does not seem to be something Nietzsche could be satisfied with either, since this would leave entirely unanswered the crucial question of *which* discipline could better serve the eudaemonistic principle. The herd morals, whether contractarian or biologically determined, had failed, turning themselves against their very grounds. Besides unmasking life-denying morals, then, a non-moral or extra-moral response was called for.

2. WHAT TRUTH IS ALL ABOUT

Seen in this light, veracity is the product of a multifaceted process including the inheritance of a form of life, the shaping of a public mind, the negotiation of a civility pattern, and the enforcement of a behaviour model. Such enforcement, or peace treaty, at its basic level, is essentially ordinary linguistic training itself, much as Wittgenstein's analysis of language-games was later to make clear.⁹ We learn how to use *belief* expressions, speech constraints that mark our allegiance to

a community through utterances we cannot surreptitiously take back. We learn, e.g., that “if there were a verb meaning to believe falsely it would not have a first person indicative.”¹⁰ While this basic training is quite ordinary, its renegotiation is possible only at the cost of a personal effort. Nietzsche himself, in *On Truth and Lies*, insists on art and creativity as paradigms of this kind of effort. Alternatively, or perhaps subsidiarily, one might point to the practice of *parrhesia* in antiquity as an example of renegotiating the social practice of truthfulness. The Greek word, usually rendered as “free speech,” may be better described as candid-blunt outspokenness. The idea can be applied to some well-known traits of ancient cynicism—unsociability, impudence, the overturning of values, etc. It is a *politics* or rather counter-politics of truth, in that it quite consciously breaks with received social wisdom, hence always entails a certain amount of effort and jeopardy for the speaker, as Foucault has indicated. Curiously enough, Foucault himself fails to include Nietzsche in his revitalization of *parrhesia*.¹¹ I think, however, that the character of Zarathustra provides an excellent personification of the alternative truth-teller or *parrhesiastes*. There is of course a pedagogy behind *parrhesia* as well, but it contributes precisely toward reconsidering the discipline of veracity.

We cannot here dwell further on *parrhesia*. However, the very existence of a (counter-)politics of truth is enough to make the lie worth studying, at least in an anthropological mind set: for, as a matter of fact, people do lie, *despite* their training. The practice of *parrhesia* precisely unmasks this “despite” as really being a “because of,” while advocating a different, transvalued training. Thus, the traditional psychological assumption that a person telling a lie and one telling the truth are in different states of mind needs to be qualified. Philosophical anthropology posits no moral, evaluative hierarchy between truth and lie: if there is an anthropology of lying, there must be one of truth-telling. In other words, if truth is to be a major concern in philosophical anthropology, there must be a study of the social production of both truth *and* lie simultaneously. Or, to put it in Nietzsche’s words, “according to the eudaemonistic principle, truth *and* lie should find application [*angewendet werden*]¹¹—as is the case.”¹¹

There is a metaphor haunting every account of language: the one which conceptualizes discourse as a box, i.e. as consisting of form and content. Discourse is then split into two parts: a package, the rhetorical apparatus which does the persuasive job, creating the look of truth; and a logical core, bearing the properly epistemic weight of the discourse. Clearly this metaphor, as soon as it is enunciated, reinstates the key problem of the lie, since there seems to be no necessary—i.e. veracity-preserving—connection between both aspects of

language, wrapping and core.

The point is that, while there is of course a semantic difference, there seems to be no essential pragmatic difference between truth and lie. A long series of thinkers, including the Sophists and Wittgenstein, has defended some form of communicative pragmatism to the effect that any utterance has in view the obtaining of some effect on hearer(s).¹² Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lies* is certainly one major link in this philosophical chain. Within communication, a truthful and a mendacious sentence are used in exactly the same *kind* of way: they make, as Derrida would say, a "promise of truth" to obtain an "effect of belief."¹³ This need not be a moral abomination, since a lie may be told for morally sound reasons, at least on a consequentialist view of ethics. Besides, there were time-honoured traditions of theorizing lying and dissimulation as compatible with or even required for prudential wisdom.¹⁴ Some of them were probably not the kind of thinking Nietzsche could approve of (say, the Roman Catholic theory of mental reservation), some other were part of his own background (the rhetorical tradition, of course, or the French moralists' disenchanting attitude toward social order and rules). At any rate, despite WL's rare references, there *was* a heritage of "extra-moral" philosophical discourse on lying which Nietzsche's essay was falling in line with (extra-moral, that is, if self-interested, eudaemonistic prudence is considered to be outside the realm of ethics, as Kant thought).

Within such a pragmatist view of communication, then, what distinguishes truthfulness from lying is not the kind of semantic content nor the moral status, but the kind of behaviour a sentence is meant to elicit in either case: fact-adequate or fact-syntonic, as one might say, in the first case, fact-dystonic in the second. And in both cases it is irrelevant whether the goal is attained; again, lying is in the intention, not in the efficacy. Thus, it is right that "the existence of an act of lying does not depend upon the production of a particular response or state in the addressee," as James Mahon puts it, although it can be misleading to say that "an act of lying is not a perlocutionary act."¹⁵ Simply, not every lie reaches its goal—nor does every truthful speech act. But they both try to do things with words, just as any communicative act proper.

Indeed, the mainstream of post-Sophistic discourse epistemology consists of attempts to cope with such communicative pragmatism—or to sweep it under the carpet. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had gathered such attempts under the heading of *Socratism*, which may be described as the assumption of the intimacy of knowledge and veracity. Socratism assumes, on the one hand, that "no one

can know the truth without feeling the need to tell it,”¹⁵ and, on the other, that truth has a natural tendency to force itself on linguistic exchange. Truth tends to produce persuasion—and real knowledge makes the wrapping transparent for truth to appear.

In 1873, Nietzsche had already declared his war on Socratism, and in *WL* he apparently challenges his opponent on both points. First, he insists that persuasion does not depend on the actual truth-content of the discourse. The latter can convey truth or lie, and its persuasive force is not in its truth; rather, it is a formal property pertaining to the communicative structure of the relevant speech. Briefly, a speech act will be successful or not irrespective of either its truth or falsehood—we will come back to this in connection with Nietzsche’s own “pragmatism.” Second, in *On Truth and Lies* Nietzsche comes to terms with a ubiquitous, if mostly tacit, anthropology of language, according to which human beings carry a fundamental impulse toward truth, in which the very need to communicate is grounded.

What differentiates, then, the social practice of truth-telling from that of lying? *On Truth and Lies* suggested a contractual-conventional origin of veracity, achieved through systematic neglect of certain traits of reality and the emphasizing of others. This does not mean, I will argue, any sheer, simplistic denial of the correspondence account of truth-value. Rather, Nietzsche is trying to show that correspondence to facts is not the main reason, if it is one at all, why we declare the truthfulness of a statement. However, one should not expect to find, either in this text or elsewhere, anything like a Nietzschean *definition*, let alone a theory, of truth.¹⁶ Plainly, *On Truth and Lies* is about what Nietzsche elsewhere calls the “pathos of truth.”¹⁷ The social worship of truth is a literal hypocrisy, since truth is assembled and merchandised by society itself through language. Within such a framework, Nietzsche does engage in an analysis of the *concept* of truth, or more precisely of the use of such a concept, but he undertakes no *theory* of truth as a property of what is said, i.e. he does not try to establish the conditions under which an assertion is true.¹⁸ Indeed, his disclosing the artificiality of language presupposes some kind of distinction between true and false along the lines of traditional correspondence theory.¹⁹

3. WHO’S IN CHARGE OF LYING

Nietzsche’s text opens with a tiny cosmological *conte moral*, in the style of his beloved 17th/18th-century French moralists:²⁰

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history,' but nevertheless, it was only a minute. (WL, 79)

Yet Nietzsche immediately oversteps the epistemological boundaries of that literary genre:

There were eternities during which [human intellect] did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no additional mission which would lead it beyond human life. (WL, 79)

There is no use for intelligence outside life. This is not merely a bitter, pessimistic remark about how small is the reach of human mind. It is a resolution to place knowledge within the framework of life practices and natural functioning. In accordance with—sometimes in advance of—some of his era's psychological theories, particularly functionalism and evolutionism, Nietzsche rejects any view of intelligence as either a faculty of the mind or an impulse toward truth which is divested of any practical meaning:

there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among [men]. (WL, 80)

I tend to think Nietzsche had no particular philosophical adversary in mind, yet neither was he just referring to a general *idolon theatri*, say, social hypocrisy about truth and science (this was at most a partial target). Rather, Nietzsche's *Posthumous Fragments* of this period show he was keen on the "particular pleasure" of telling the truth, and that he did not mean this in any simply hedonistic sense. We take pleasure in telling the truth, but this is no hypocrisy designed to conceal our crooked (whilst egoistically useful) real purposes. Otherwise, Nietzsche would not insist that such a pleasure may bring destruction with it.²¹ Pleasurable veracity,²² hence, has to be regarded as potentially counter-adaptive. It follows that this pleasure is by no means to be seen as a healthy, life-preserving drive to truth. It is rather an error of evolution, so to speak: by looking at it, we can witness how a behaviour which was to serve certain biological purposes is hypostatized and used outside its original communicative context. (If this is so, one might see here a further reason why Nietzsche later came to reject his era's optimistic, Spencerian

evolutionism, which certainly loathed any idea of errors in evolution.²³)

We are thus in a position to establish two points as regards Nietzsche's views. First, there is no truthfulness for truthfulness' sake. Contrary to appearances, even supposedly disinterested acts of truth-telling are driven by a motive, i.e. pleasure, however pathological this may turn out to be (and the same holds, it is plausible to add, for unreasonable lies, when they are potentially dangerous to the speaker). Second, Nietzsche, perhaps following suggestions from Schopenhauer, appears to be focussing on what we would call the adaptive meaning of intellectual activity. Intelligence is a "means for the preserving of the individual" (WL, 80). The political anthropology which encompasses both the practice of veracity and of lying is functionally subordinate to such preserving. Once set against the background of the "battle for existence" (WL, 80), the two practices are no longer distinguishable except for their more or less advantageous consequences. Besides, while the lie is not more "natural" than veracity, it is likely to be more frequently observed than the latter in human beings. In these "clever animals" (*kluge Thiere*), the "art of dissimulation reaches its peak": thus, "wearing a mask" and "playing a role" (WL, 80) are not parasitic on any original veracity. On the contrary they are but different ways to satisfy the same need of preservation.

A drive for truth (i.e. an impulse to elicit fact-syntonic effects on hearers) cannot be straightforwardly posited as a constitutive part of human nature, nor of linguistic behaviour. But a non-moral establishment of something we may conventionally agree to call truth, and of ways to make its attribution reasonably regular, *does* represent a way of solving vital ("eudaemonistic") problems. In other words, if veracity is not a natural drive, it can very well be explained as a behavioural code, required by society "in order to exist: to be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors" (WL, 84). Establishing one particular use of language as the "true" language is, according to Nietzsche, instrumental to the peace treaty which allegedly put an end to the *bellum omnium contra omnes* (WL, 81). Does he mean that the adequacy of discourse to matters of fact depends on some convention between speakers? One has to be careful not to understand such a dependence, if at all, as a logical one. Language and reality may match up or not by virtue of formal characteristics, that have nothing to do with our motivations for choosing to say what we believe to correspond to reality. Nietzsche will later have some criticisms to make about those formal characteristics as well, but at this stage he is only insisting that pursuing truth in communication is functional to a political necessity.

Drawing his inspiration from Hobbes' political anthropology, Nietzsche envisages, so to speak, a pre-Apollonian human condition, i.e. a phase in which power relationships have not yet crystallized into any form of government or any normative proportionality. If there has been a time, abstractly speaking, in which there were neither norms nor morals, then neither was there veracity. In such a condition, language was simply and impenitently used to elicit effects on hearers: which is precisely what I earlier referred to as communicative pragmatism. However, this communicative situation does not vanish into thin air when power relationships come to historically manifest themselves through normative systems. It simply becomes the standard way of communication (non-standard, e.g. artistic, ways of expression are but more advanced forms of this basic use). Practices of veracity have been constructed *via* the displacement of lie by truth, precisely in the sense that "truth" has absorbed the practical function of *both* truth and lie. Here, of course, is where Nietzsche's account departs from standard, Tarskian ways of defining truth, and comes much closer to pragmatist views. The Tarskian disquotational formula is simply no longer expedient. To the Tarskian convention, that "*P*" is true if and only if *P*, one would have to reply that "*P*" is true if and only if either *P* or not-*P*, provided *P* guides us toward better solutions of vital problems—which is at the very least an awkward way to put things.

However, classical Hobbesian political anthropology appears here to be transvalued, as one might say, anticipating Nietzsche's central stance in later works. Whereas, from a Hobbesian point of view, the *bellum* condition is so intolerable as to require the establishment of the Leviathan's power, Nietzsche is here paving the way for a critique of society's power on, and through, language. The power of *using* language at all coincides, in the light of what we have said, with the power of lying, which the individuals will surrender to "the herd" as a whole by refraining from wearing a mask of their own and turning to the "usual metaphors." Society will thus become the only subject entitled to lie. This monopoly, yet, as ensured by the linguistic social contract, will only be exerted within a scaffolding of rules capable of transforming lie into truth. This does not mean that society can make the false come true, lest we attribute some sort of magical power to society. But neither is it just some futile hoax that society sets up against the individual. The herd has a point.

What men avoid by excluding the liar is not so much being defrauded as it is being harmed by means of fraud. Thus, even at this stage, what they hate is basically not deception itself, but rather the unpleasant, hated consequences of certain sorts of deception. (WL, 81)

Literally taken, this implies that the liar *does* harm society, not by saying words which do not correspond to facts (remember that falsehood does not imply lie), but insofar as he or she refuses to cooperate by using the usual metaphors. Nietzsche's view is thus complex: it certainly includes the idea that language functions through abstraction, devices and metaphorical displacements, but there is more to it than the mere exposure of social manipulation and selection of reality. There is the idea that full correspondence to experiential facts would baffle, and in the long run destroy, society's functioning (if not humankind itself, as Nietzsche relentlessly underscores). By no means is Nietzsche saying we can as light-heartedly make true as false statements. Quite the opposite; he is signalling how the deceptive use of propositions is apt to be socially sanctioned. Language lacks the *right* kind of correspondence to reality not insofar as it does not depict it (an *Unding*, a preposterous task anyway; WL, 86), but inasmuch as it blurs the traces of its inability to depict it, by hiding them behind the "usual metaphors."

4. A WEB OF ARGUMENTS

Let us review the key assumptions we have so far highlighted in Nietzsche's early thoughts on language: the political ("eudaemonistic," "biological") origin of veracity; the linguistic construction, or at least reinforcement, of social stability; the metaphorical character of language; and, finally, the mendacious quality of language use, to be attributed not to any particularly vicious nature of human beings, but rather to the intrinsic impossibility of metaphor capturing the fullness of reality. Metaphors can be either larger than life or dried up, but never just-so stories, hence never adequate epistemic instruments, "adequate expressions of all realities" (WL, 81). It should by now be clearer why Nietzsche is justified in calling his interpretation "extra-moral". Non-Apollonian communication is neither motivated by pure intellectual contemplative knowledge, nor drive to truth, nor moral impulse. Truth is constructed by rhetorical means and morals arise from the peace treaty which rhetoric allows us to sign.

We cannot examine in any detail the arguments Nietzsche mobilizes to support his complex view, but let us try at least to arrange them under some broad headings. Some of them have been more or less deeply delved into by Nietzschean literature, some have been hinted at in the previous sections, some, finally, I will only be able to evoke and briefly sketch. I will couch these headings in today's vocabulary, not Nietzsche's.

4.1. “*Pragmatism.*” In the social employment of language, what remains constant, i.e. the intended purpose, is not truth in itself nor “pure knowledge which has no consequences,” but the efficacy and the “pleasant, life-preserving consequences of truth” (WL, 81). Interestingly enough, Nietzsche points to dreaming as a paradigmatic instance: in dreams people allow themselves to be “deceived” (WL, 80). We may thus complete Nietzsche’s argument: if people fear nightmares it is not because they are deceptive, but because of their unpleasant character. It is just the same with lies in wakefulness, and, by parity of reasoning, with truth. (This, of course, is an insistent motif throughout Nietzsche’s writings; e.g. FW, sect. 344, etc.)

4.2. “*Critique of concepts-formation.*” The issue of *Begriffsbildung* is a standard problem in post-Kantian epistemology—Nietzsche was probably inheriting it from Schopenhauer²⁴ and Friedrich Albert Lange.²⁵ In his still valuable work on this topic, Ernst Cassirer emphasized that the formation of a concept is a selective-reductive process, and “through this sort of reduction what is merely a part has taken the place of the original sensuous *whole*. This part, however, claims to characterize and explain the whole.”²⁶ Nietzsche, however, might have something to add to such considerations, precisely in the “pragmatist” vein we have repeatedly evoked. Psychologically speaking, concepts are the outcomes of what one might aptly call “inattentive selection”: i.e. they are adjustments intended to damp “unpleasant consequences” and to foster favourable ones. If this is so, the phrase “*arbitrarily* discard individual differences” (my italics), as employed by Nietzsche, is not completely consistent with his own premises. Concept-formation may be arbitrary if seen from a standard epistemology, centred on the adequateness of representation. In that case its limitations are plain to see. “Every word instantly becomes a concept,” yet “[e]very concept arises from the equation of unequal things. [...] the concept ... is formed by arbitrarily discarding ... individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects” (WL, 83). There is, in other words, a certain tautological character to concepts, since they cannot restore the “whole” of real experience (see point 4.6 below). But then again, such an impossible mission is not the purpose of conceptual knowledge. Rather, its purpose is to make communicative life possible. Its selective action, then, is far from arbitrary. Concepts are lies, but there is method in their madness. After what Nietzsche taught us about the role lie plays in communication, we cannot be talked back into old representational epistemology.

4.3. “*Grammaticalism.*” By this I mean the tendency to advertise as knowledge what are in fact “thoroughly anthropomorphic truth[s]” (WL, 85), i.e. derive

from the construction of the concept system alone. “If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare ‘look, a mammal,’ I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value” (WL, 85). Had Nietzsche been familiar with Wittgensteinian vocabulary, he might have said that such a truth is a merely grammatical one.

4.4. “*Nominalism.*” While being connected to 4.3, this is distinct from that kind of critique, and takes a further step. The former was addressed to pseudo-discoveries, so to speak, i.e. the discovery that an item belonging to a class (camels) defined so as to be included in another one (mammals), belongs to the latter too. “Nominalism” is, rather, the critique of a Platonic way to deal with concepts. Obtaining a concept via selection and abstraction, as we have just seen, is not misguided *per se*. Yet, making a substance out of an abstraction can lead to pseudo-explanations, i.e. beliefs that make no difference to life. “We know nothing whatsoever about an essential quality called ‘honesty’; but we do know of countless individualized and consequently unequal actions which we equate” (WL, 83). The example chosen by Nietzsche is particularly telling as it anticipates later epistemological criticisms to trait-psychology: “We call a person ‘honest’, and then we ask ‘why has he behaved so honestly today?’ Our usual answer is, ‘on account of his honesty’” (WL, 83). A critique of such *vis-dormitiva*-types of explanation is part of the long-standing lessons of, for instance, behavioural psychology.²⁷ Briefly stated, the point is that, as far as a personal quality is *observed* in behaviour, it cannot be used to explain observation itself. Or, to put it differently, hypostatized qualities are not part of experience and cannot then advance practical knowledge.

4.5. “*Language pluralism.*” “The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression; otherwise, there would not be so many languages” (WL, 82). That the signifier bears an external relation to the signified is of course a classical linguistic doctrine. Nietzsche’s literature has emphasized his inevitably being aware of the issue *via* Plato’s *Cratylus*.²⁸ He may also have been familiar with some of the formulations to be found in modern thought, such as Locke’s views (*Essay on Human Understanding*, III.2.i), and particularly Johann Heinrich Lambert’s distinction of *natürliche* and *willkürliche Zeichen*.²⁹ I find it reductive, however, to couch it all in terms of Nietzsche’s intuition of the *arbitraire du signe*, in Saussure’s words. The plurality of expressions for the same things only proves the commonplace that there is no Fido–“Fido” relation between object and name (no Millian theory turned backward, that is to say). Yet this would hardly have to do with (propositional) truth, which is obviously not a naming relation. Nietzsche’s text seems to refer

to languages as *wholes*, stating they are incapable of standing as duplicates of reality, or, better, that such is not their job. In view of the metaphorical nature of language Nietzsche is going to describe in the subsequent paragraphs, what he seems to have had an inkling of is rather something like Humboldt's notion of *innere Sprachform* ("every people has a [...] mathematically divided conceptual heaven above themselves," WL, 85). Each language has its own way of gesturing toward reality. There is a fairly wide range of creativity in this gesturing (i.e. in the choice of the characteristic metaphors), but the key implication is that languages express how people come to terms with their vital tasks, i.e. describe "relations of things to men" (WL, 82), not of words to things.

4.6. "*Conventional character of general terms.*" "We separate things according to gender, designating the tree as masculine and the plant as feminine. What arbitrary assignments!" (WL, 82) Likewise arbitrary is the genus/species distinction, as long as "nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species" (WL, 83). Broadly speaking, this is a consequence of the arbitrariness of concept-formation, but this time it is focussed on the alleged structure of nature itself. Nietzsche is critic of the Aristotelian ontology of "natural kinds," chiefly because of its undisclosed "anthropomorphism." It should be clear by now that the point of attack is precisely the non-disclosure, not the fact of using a human metric as the "measure of all things" (WL, 84). Nietzsche is not pleading for a different ontology (which "would be just as indemonstrable as its opposite," WL, 84), but for the recognition of ontology as a tool (a language-conditioned tool, as it appears from point 4.5 above).

4.7. "*Phenomenalism and system-building.*" This is one of the most emphasized aspects in critical literature. "The 'thing in itself' [...] is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for" (WL, 82). Nietzsche's epistemology at this stage (and, on some interpreters' view, even later),³⁰ is a Kantian one, phenomenally interpreted; again, Lange's influence has been pointed to.³¹ Deep reality being "inaccessible" (WL, 83), it would seem that human knowledge is confined to surface. Thus, the language of truth is really a language of systematic ignorance (or lie). Yet, such a way of reading Nietzsche does not seem to take sufficient account precisely of this *systematic* character. To build a life-sustainable politics of truth requires being able to steer our course of action clear of both the impossible depiction of reality itself and the risk of believing in our own self-produced categorizing. This is unmistakably Nietzsche's orientation, once we realize that the quite telling bee-and-spider simile comes from the later so much despised Bacon (see WL, 85-

87).³² Spiders produce their web from themselves, much as the “‘rational’ being [...] places his behaviour under the control of abstractions” (WL, 84). Bees, on the contrary, build their artefacts by putting together what they “gather from nature” without further processing. Behaving like spiders, and believing in its own abstractions, humankind can “live with [...] repose, security, and consistency” (WL, 86): which, it seems, would be barred were we to follow the bees’ example.³³ Yet Nietzsche’s (and Bacon’s) suggestion is not to stop behaving like spiders, i.e. stop producing rational categories and building systems, but rather to stop self-deceiving, i.e. stop believing in the objectivity of such categories and recognize them as our original product.

4.8. “*Surface thinking and deep intuitions.*” Some interpreters maintain that Nietzsche, in WL, still believes there is a deep reality and that what he criticizes is the delusion of there being a privileged window on that reality.³⁴ On this view, the “forgetfulness” which is a necessary condition for man coming to “fanc[y] himself to possess a ‘truth’” (WL, 81) by way of conceptual thought would strictly speaking be amnesia of some original experience. This experience is promptly identified with art (musical poetry, tragedy), so that Dionysian reality would be the real one. At this stage, then, Nietzsche would still believe in a deep yet accessible reality, which conceptual language fails to reach on account of its shallowness. However natural it may look, I do not think this reading stands a closer examination. On such a view, it would be inexplicable why humankind has broken with the original Dionysian acquaintance with reality. Human beings have traded the “powerful present intuition” (WL, 90) for—exactly what? The delusion of possessing noumenal knowledge is not useful *per se*, as we have seen. In the long run, it can be useful only if recognized for what it is, i.e. delusion. That is to say, in the long run the Socratic project is bound to fail, precisely because of its anthropological unsoundness: because there is no “drive to truth” to support it.

Robert Pippin, on the contrary, denies “that Nietzsche is essentializing Dionysian reality.”³⁵ In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Pippin argues, there is no “invocation of an ‘original’, chaotic ‘real life’.”³⁶ And, while Nietzsche does talk of the thing-in-itself being “incomprehensible” (WL, 82), his target is really “the sort of truths which ‘the man of truth, the scientist, the philosopher’ want to establish.”³⁷ So (if am getting Pippin’s interpretation right) *On Truth and Lies* does not stand out from the rest of Nietzsche’s production in this period. On Pippin’s view, Nietzsche is debunking the attempt at comprehending reality by linguistic means, but there is no affirmation of the existence of any essential reality to comprehend in the first place. What Nietzsche is after, in his entire early period, is something which

would fulfil the same role as Socrates' self-styled truths, i.e. "make life worth living."³⁸ This is "tragic knowledge," i.e. a knowledge which is "honest," rather than Socratically truthful, in recognizing precisely that it "has proven impossible to build a culture upon knowledge."³⁹

Fascinating as it is, I think Pippin's version leaves the tragic philosopher in a motionless, inactive position. It is unclear, in other words, what the philosopher's next move would be, after realizing knowledge won't save us. Simply giving him/herself to art does not seem to be the answer, since, it should be noted, Pippin himself conceives of this realization as *knowledge*, albeit tragic. Tragic philosophy is still philosophy, not art straightaway. Thus, if Pippin is right, Nietzsche's project, taken as a *philosophical* one, would ultimately be self-paralyzing—not self-destroying like Socrates', agreed, but the outcome wouldn't anyway meet with Nietzsche's approval.

I do not possess a solution which would save both Nietzsche's vitalism and his tragic sense of life, but I would plead for a further elaboration of some threads that are evoked and not pursued in *On Truth and Lies*: first and foremost, what I have been calling the adaptive character of metaphor-construction, or of lie, the power it can make available to humans, its activating (vs contemplative) quality. One brief passage toward the end of *On Truth and Lies* makes that clearer than ever, as Nietzsche emphasizes "mastery over life" as the proper role of art itself (WL, 90). This preserves the gist of Pippin's intuition (the key is not Dionysian life, but our mastery over it), while bringing to the fore what we can *make* with life. Whether or not life is a Dionysian frenzy of sorts, Nietzsche is not suggesting that we simply yield to it, that we come back home to the pre-Apollonian state. Moreover, I think this is fitting with Nietzsche's later anthropology, which famously defined human being as *das noch nicht festgestellte Tier* (the unachieved, the "still undetermined animal").⁴⁰ The pre-Apollonian state is energetically unstable, so to speak: it needs to be complemented by intentional purposes, and cultural attitudes. If there is a life-enhancing role for metaphoric "lying," then this has to be found in whatever strength it may allow us to have over the world and over ourselves.

If I am right in assuming that, in Nietzsche's eyes, metaphorical manipulation of language serves *purposes*, both social and individual, then his alleged "pragmatism" is worth a closer look. Before this, however, we need to briefly examine what kind of tools Nietzsche puts to work in this effort, i.e. his theory of metaphor itself. This not only in order to complete the picture of *On Truth and Lies*'s main themes, but also to see why Pippin was far from unjustified in stressing the tragic import

of the early Nietzschean view of philosophy's tasks. My conclusion, in short, will be that Nietzsche's tools did not befit his purpose, or at least that, as regards their creative power, they were by far inferior to their *pars destruens*.

5. THE ROLE OF METAPHORS

“[W]e believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities” (WL, 83). As hinted above, I side with Pippin in not taking this as assuming there *are* original entities, not, at least, in any essentialist sense (Nietzsche's own word here, *Wesenheiten*, does not settle the case). Now, precisely because metaphors are not there *faute de mieux*, one would want to know what they are up to, how they function, precisely in what way they replace their literal meaning. It is all too clear, then, why Nietzsche's metaphorology is probably the aspect which drew most attention from *On Truth and Lies*'s interpreters. However, Nietzsche's treatment of the topic is far from clear: in fact, it is arguably the essay's weak spot.

For one thing, it is not strictly speaking a theory of metaphor. Nietzsche equivocally calls “metaphors” a sequence of passages which obtain, in his opinion, in every linguistic manifestation of experience, or more precisely, in every conceptual one. This class of manifestations will exclude, understandably enough, interjections, screams, outbursts of admiration and whatever is immediately *caused* by the quality of our experiences. But it will include, for not entirely clear reasons, mediated manifestations which, while using symbolic means, are of a more expressive than conceptual nature. These are, first and foremost, artistic expression and poetry, and even the production of metaphors itself, which is “the fundamental human drive” (WL, 88). Thus, metaphorical activity apparently comprises, on Nietzsche's view, both his main polemic target, the Socratic construction of conceptual *logoi*, and what he himself regards as the main way out of the Socratic tautology, i.e. the creative production of fresh language expression.

Furthermore, these passages are not all of the same kind, and particularly they are not all linguistic phenomena. Not all of Nietzsche's “metaphors,” then, are cases of what one would plausibly call a metaphor, i.e. cases of saying something in order to say something else. What links them, apparently, is the mere fact of being “passages.” Here Nietzsche probably plays on the fact that the words *Metapher* and *Übertragung* (transference) are semantically built up after the same pattern, as it has often been remarked.⁴¹ But the transfer vehicle seems to mysteriously

change its load during the journey, and the final shift obtains between things that are different in kind.

To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated [*nachgeformt*] in a sound: second metaphor. (WL, 82) The third passage is the formation of a concept, as discussed above. Incidentally, we may note that Nietzsche fails to add a further part of the process, a zero level, as it were: the passage from “the mysterious X of the thing in itself” to the nerve stimulus (WL, 83).⁴² On the whole, it appears Nietzsche is making some of the mistakes for which he takes Socratism to task: he calls different things by the same name. The passage from *Bild* (image as perceived) to sound seems to be a symbolic, i.e. a conventional, not a metaphoric, relation. It certainly is not an imitation, unless by accident and within specific contexts.⁴³ As regards the stimulus/image passage, a few pages later Nietzsche is explicit in denying that it may be a causal relation (WL, 87), since what will result from this passage is not uniquely determined but, it seems, dependent on the particular human receptive structure.⁴⁴ If this is what Nietzsche means, it is confused, since such a dependence does not rule out the fact that the relation may be causal. Anyway, the only actual example Nietzsche offers here is that of the so-called Chladni figures, which *is* a case of causal relation.

What seems to me of foremost importance is that Nietzsche appears to regard metaphorical transferences according to a sort of law of diminishing returns. In every passage something goes missing or becomes lesser than it was, and, still worse, this is apparently the way Nietzsche looks at the entire functionality of language, as we saw in all of the topics highlighted in the previous section. Every linguistic move seems to be a loss. Indeed, he never gives any example in which a metaphor features, if not as a heuristic tool, at least as capable of bringing along some unintended consequence. (While, of course, literature of all times is teeming with suitable examples. Take, for instance, *Iliad* Bk. 3, 8-11, where the Achaean army is compared to a mist on a hill, which is an enemy to the shepherd, but a friend to thieves. The connection of the Greeks with a host of thieves can of course ring a bell in the reader’s mind, and make her see things differently.)

This being so, it is all too easy to read Nietzsche as positing a full reality at the beginning, which becomes weaker and weaker throughout language—even if, as we saw when examining Pippin’s arguments, there are good reasons not to interpret Nietzsche that way. Moreover, it is hard to see how this mechanism might possibly engender those “artistic,” ground-breaking metaphors which, according

to Nietzsche, should “make life worth living.” Thus, Nietzsche gives us an acute sense of how metaphors can be used to silence socio-linguistic innovation, but he fails to show how they can serve the will to power. The only hint he gives is by pointing out how they fight and compete for settling down as the dominant linguistic usage.⁴⁵ To obtain some enduring lesson from this, one has to couple it with the programme of anti-historicism Nietzsche will later avow in the second of the *Untimely Meditations*. One should beware of the “idolatry of the fact,” Nietzsche will then say. Applied to metaphorology, this entails that it is illusory to *deduce* from historical premises which metaphors will be the winners. This would only be meaningful if metaphors were a product of Hegelian objective *Geist*. But they are, on the contrary, quite contingent upon the actual will to communicative action. A metaphorology is thus not a phenomenology of how experience comes to linguistic expression, but of how language is politically used.

6. A PRAGMATIST NIETZSCHE?

After so many intimations that Nietzsche views language as a tool for action, it is time to examine the scope of his alleged pragmatism. The modern controversy about this is marked, however, by a few misconceptions. The first one is due to understanding Nietzsche’s analysis as a theory of truth. Arthur Danto, for instance, simply wrote: “Nietzsche [...] advanced a pragmatic criterion of truth: *p* is true and *q* is false if *p* works and *q* does not.”⁴⁶ Richard Rorty apparently agrees with Danto, even if his use of Nietzsche is largely a free re-invention for his own philosophical purposes. More recently, the Danto-Rorty version of Nietzsche’s pragmatism with respect to truth has been challenged by refusing to grant the pragmatist (more precisely, the Jamesian) origin of any thesis to the effect that “true is what works.”⁴⁷ Such a thesis is certainly an unacceptably simplified version of James’ view.⁴⁸ But, irrespective of how much it fits Rorty, it should be noted that it cannot be attributed to Nietzsche either.

Denying truth as a sufficient condition for a discourse to be persuasive does not imply that discourse is true because it persuades or satisfies the hearer, nor because it serves a purpose. It is, of course, correct to say that, to Nietzsche, true discourse is *by and large* functional to life preservation and daily vital needs. But this, as we have seen, holds of the lie as well, without the true ceasing to be true and the false to be false. Nietzsche’s choice of words, even in this period’s fragments, is quite cautious:

If all depends on the *value* of knowledge, but a beautiful delusion [*Wahn*], if it is believed, has exactly the same value as knowledge, then it is plain that life needs illusions [*Illusionen*], i.e. falsehoods considered as truths. Life needs faith in truth, but illusion is enough, which means that “truths” are proven by their effects, not by logical demonstrations.⁴⁹

The very talk of “falsehood considered as truth” shows that, in Nietzsche’s eyes, the true/false distinction is obvious and, borrowing Rorty’s phrase, can take care of itself. What Nietzsche is emphasizing is, rather, that the distinction is, on the one hand, irrelevant, and, on the other, insufficient. For a discourse to be useful it is neither required nor sufficient that it be true. It might be added that the simple equation of truth and utility is at odds with everything Nietzsche says about the necessity to get rid of self-deception.⁵⁰ Nietzsche will later more and more clearly recognize that the “errors” of language, insurmountable as they are, are precisely what leaves us free to use it for our vital purposes. To stop self-deceiving means to recognize our deception.

Morally speaking, the world is false. Yet, as long as morality is a part of this world, it is false. The will to truth is a *making* firm, *making* true-and-durable, clearing up that *false* character, and re-interpreting it into *being*.⁵¹

So, whatever is “pragmatist” in Nietzsche’s view is far from coming down to “an identification of the true and, say, the useful.”⁵² It is a matter of *making* truth useful, and this requires a sort of double negation: the departure from the negation of “being” which is implicit in conceptual abstraction. Nietzsche’s very determination to start from the (life-)value of truth, rather than from truth-value, bears witness to his ideal affinity with pragmatism.⁵³ On the other hand, even selective oblivion of reality can be part of the affirmation of reality as long as it is voluntary: our mastery over our own communicative practices knowingly prevails, then, over knowledge of the correspondence of words to facts. But this is because nothing is a value in itself: value implies evaluation, which in turn implies criteria. What might be called truth-accountability, or the capacity of bearing closer examination, is one of the (most useful) criteria employed for sifting statements in view of their usefulness.

However—and this is the second misconception in the debate about Nietzsche’s pragmatism—that discourse admits means for its validation has nothing to do with any plain correspondence of discourse to facts—if nothing else, because it is society and “biology” that determine both which aspects of reality will be

selected as true, and what methods will be employed for checking them against the background of experience. On a pragmatist view, true facts are experimental facts; which entails that they have already gone through a process of social negotiation, and will continue to undergo changes and adjustments as they are checked against their intended and unintended consequences.

Facts may be facts, and yet not be the facts *of* the inquiry in hand. In all scientific inquiry, however, to call them facts or data or truths of fact signifies that they are taken as the *relevant* facts of the inference to be made. *If* [...] they are then implicated however indirectly in a proposition about what is to be done, they are themselves theoretical in logical quality.⁵⁴

Knowledge is selection (in view of life-purposes), it is a creative process in which subjects are involved and interconnected. Not surprisingly, this view has elicited charges of subjectivism against pragmatist epistemological theories since their inception.⁵⁵ Here, rather than in any alleged rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, lies the mutual enrichment of pragmatism and the views proposed in WL. We have seen how Nietzsche's essay, for all its controversial sides, is capable of providing us with an array of tools for understanding the details of such a politics of truth.

A politics of truth is the construction of a shared way to compare and deal with partial and arbitrary points of view. It is a matter of everyone playing the same game, a game in which the speaker tries to establish as "true" that move which (she believes) will produce the desired effect in the hearer. But this effect is never secured, never conclusive. This is why Nietzsche's political anthropology deserves to be called Hobbesian: because no power, not even the *Übermensch's*, is ever warranted. Conversely, even the weak can stand back from the received truth and affirm her own. To avert *bellum omnium*, then, it is necessary to find rules for the game, such as to satisfy, in principle, all stakeholders. Admittedly, enforcement of this "principle" depends on political balance. An aristocratic society will have rules which are far from symmetrical, which, by the way, might be just as well to Nietzsche. But the same general idea holds for those who share a different view of political justice. One might say, in a somewhat Deweyan mind set, that you must have democracy first, in order to be able to tell the (democratic) truth. Still, there being contractual rules of the truth-game is itself a condition for political growth toward democratic communication. It is up to us to prove that democracy is a more adaptive way to solve problems. Nietzsche, insensitive though he is to such political answers, has brought *politics* to bear on the issue of truth. His use

of evolutionary language and pragmatist attitudes in *On Truth and Lies* shows his central concern was with the growth and the very possibility of life. Politics was not the origin of the *lie*, as a hasty reading of *On Truth and Lies* could suggest, but rather a framework which encompassed both truth and lie in view of human adaptation. It is open to debate, of course, whether Nietzsche's choice of super-human aristocracy over democracy will be a surreptitious reinstatement of pre-political truth or rather an overcoming of both politics and truth as no longer needed for adaptation. Yet, even this eventual outcome shows how strongly adaptation and truth were connected in his view.

Thus, confining *On Truth and Lies* to Nietzsche's "juvenilia"⁵⁶ is oversimplified. On the contrary, the essay is important not only because it anticipates ideas on the metaphorical nature of language, which will become common sense in linguistics some decades later, e.g. in Michel Bréal's theories, but above all because, within the context of *On Truth and Lies*, it helps to make clear the essentially political nature of linguistic exchange, such as will be emphasized only much later by Gramsci.⁵⁷ Precisely because language contains metaphorical indeterminacy, it is subject to a continual process of adjustment and negotiation among speakers, by such means as requests for clarifications, rephrasing, exemplifications, and so on.⁵⁸ No transmission which cannot be unsuccessful is a linguistic communication, and no linguistic success is achieved except either through negotiation or by being rooted in some previous one. Nietzsche's main insight, in the end, consists of the distinction between a language use which draws on "usual metaphors," having negotiation behind its back, and one which explores new metaphorical possibilities, the language of art and poetry. His distinction, however, is too sharp: the two ways of using metaphors in language are more intertwined than he admits. First, negotiation is properly never behind our back, even in the usual language practice. Here, once again, communicative pragmatism has to be taken into account. By using old metaphors we nevertheless want to achieve pragmatic effects on hearers, and *these* effects may be politically renegotiated. The novelty is provided not by newness of metaphors *per se*, but by the interaction between such metaphors and the changing adaptive purposes for which speakers employ them—pouring old wine in new bottles may be a humbler activity, but it can be as effective as producing new wine altogether. Second, and connected to this, Nietzsche underestimates the negotiation which is inherent even in poetical language. *Poiesis* is not entirely separated from ordinary language in supposedly lacking any practical purpose at all. Nietzsche himself catches art's fundamental orientation to truth; however, he is still misled by a purely contemplative conception of truth itself, which he consequently tends to reject rather than

reinvent. *Poiesis*, however, as production of new metaphors, is a form of speech activity, hence it tries to bring about effects, to make differences, just like ordinary linguistic usage.

It is not within our scope to elaborate here on this issue. I will conclude by simply pointing out that what distinguishes art and science is not, as Nietzsche holds (WL, 88),⁵⁹ the newness of art's metaphors as opposed to the rigidity of scientific ones. Rather, the difference between the *practices* of art interpretation and scientific understanding is, in turn, a difference of language games. Both art and science can, in varying degrees, produce effects on individual users (hearers, readers, etc.) and the public mind as well. Both can be creative and *fröhlich*. Both can trigger debate in expert communities. Processes of clarification and mutual control within the scientific community are an essential part of scientific activity, and art can raise hectic dispute among commentators and connoisseurs, although the ways in which disputes are settled, if at all, are basically different in the two cases. Yet, art's peculiarity lies not only in the means it employs (its "new wine" in terms of linguistic production), but also in its creating a special relationship between consumers (whether professional or not) and the text. This kind of negotiation is usually of a reflective nature and goes on within the beholder's mind, or, in momentous cases, the beholder's life: it is what we usually refer to as interpretation.⁶⁰ Interpretation *is* a negotiation insofar as the user will normally have made some initial choice about what she wants to use the artwork for (say, pleasure, escape, abreaction, etc.). That is to say, she will have chosen which game to play with it, while being at the same time willing to be surprised by the text—yet she may ultimately face unexpected consequences, undergo unpredictable changes during her encounter with the artwork, and end up playing quite a different game from what she initially thought she would. In this sense, after all, art is a case of the useful lie.

NOTES

1. Augustine, *De mendacio*, III.3.
2. Paul Cantor, "F. Nietzsche: The Use and Abuse of Metaphor." *Metaphor: Problems and Perspectives*. Ed. D.S. Miall. Sussex-New Jersey: Harvester Press-Humanities Press, 1982.
3. As J. Hillis Miller ("Dismembering and Disremembering in Nietzsche's 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense'." *boundary 2* 9:3, 1981, 44) has noted, his text is itself teeming with "metaphors of violence and mutilation."
4. This and all references indicated as "WL" are taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, in *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*. Transl. Daniel Breazeale. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979 (orig. *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn*. 1872-1873).
5. Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la biologie*. Paris: PUF, 2001, 30. On Nietzsche's biology see also Alfred Tauber, "A Typology of Nietzsche's Biology." (*Biology and Philosophy* 9, 1994, 24-44); for an extended discussion of the "biological" in *The Will to Power* see Rossella Fabbrichesi, "Nietzsche and James. A Pragmatist Hermeneutics." (*European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 1:1, 2009).
6. For instance, Veena Das has pointed to "the kinds of mundane activities that may be carried on during a ritual but are nevertheless not seen as constitutive of the ritual and hence can be ignored in judgments about 'rightness' of a ritual act" ("Wittgenstein and Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27, 1998, 178).
7. *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1873, 29[8]. All posthumous fragments are quoted from the Colli-Montinari edition reproduced as Digital Critical Edition, at <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB>. Translations are mine.
8. Robert Pippin, "Truth and Lies in Early Nietzsche." (*Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 11, 1996/1998), repr. in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*. Ed. Daniel N. Conway. Vol. II, 286-303. London-New York: Routledge, 1998, 288. My italics.
9. M.J. Bowles, "The Practice of Meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein." (*Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 26, 2003, 19).
10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Transl. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953/1986, II, 190.
11. *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1873, 29[8].
12. Things that are done with words are more than this, of course, but pragmatics in Charles Morris's sense is focussed on the speaker/hearer relationship.
13. Jacques Derrida, *Histoire du mensonge. Prolégomènes*. Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2005, 29. He seems to be referring to lie alone, but I take it he would have wanted to include truthfulness as well.
14. See, among recent literature, Dallas G. Denery II, *The Devil Wins. A History of Lying from the Garden of Eden to the Enlightenment*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2015.
15. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Du mensonge*. Paris: Flammarion, 1998, 13.
16. Cp. Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche's Critique of Truth." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52: 1 (March 1992, 47-65).
17. "On the Pathos of Truth." *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books* (1872). Transl. Daniel Breazeale in *Philosophy and Truth*; cp. *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1872-1874, 19 [218, 219, 221].
18. For the definition of a *theory* of truth see Giorgio Volpe, *Teorie della verità*. Milano: Guerini, 2005, 47. Maudemarie Clark (*Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) does not sufficiently distinguish these two things, so that her relocating Nietzsche's view among theories of truth is somehow unhelpful. Steven Crowell ("Nietzsche's View of Truth." *International Studies in Philosophy* 19:2, 1987, 3-18) sees Nietzsche as trying to replace traditional views of truth with some new, more authentic one, whose nature he regards as "existential". Yet

Philip Hugly, in his reply (“Crowell on Nietzsche on Truth.” *International Studies in Philosophy* 19:2, 1987, 19-28), is essentially right in asking whether Nietzsche isn’t rather trying to get rid of the need for a substantive theory of truth.

19. Richard Schacht (*Nietzsche*. London-New York: Routledge, 1983/1992, ch. 2) convincingly argued that there is no reason to deny that Nietzsche conceives of “first level” truth according to the standard correspondence model.

20. See e.g. *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, § 35 (orig. 1879-80); *The Gay Science*. Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Adrian Del Caro, ed. Bernard Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, § 95 (orig. 1887).

21. *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1873, 29[1].

22. *Wahrhaftigkeit*: see *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1873, 29[8].

23. For Nietzsche’s judgment on evolutionary theory see e.g. *The Gay Science*, § 4, § 373.

24. Carlo Gentili, *Nietzsche*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001, 191-192.

25. Claudia Crawford, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche’s Theory of Language*. Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1988, 206-209. According to Crawford, practically all of the key points in *On Truth and Lies* were to be found in Lange (*The Beginnings*, 84). Both Crawford and Gentili also underscore the likely influence of Gustav Gerber’s work, *Die Sprache als Kunst* (1871).

26. Ernst Cassirer, “Substance and Function.” In *Substance and Function – Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*. Transl. William Swabey, Mary Swabey. Chicago: Open Court, 1923, 6 (orig. 1910).

27. E.g. B.F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953 (paperback ed. 1965, 31).

28. See e.g. Breazeale’s footnote 13 in his translation of *On Truth and Lies*.

29. Johann Heinrich Lambert, *Neues Organon oder Gedanken über die Erforschung und Bezeichnung des Wahren und dessen Unterscheidung vom Irrthum und Schein*. Leipzig, 1764, Bd. 2. Facsimile ed. at <http://www.kuttaka.org/~JHL/L1764a-II.pdf>, § 3 ff.

30. See Stephen Houlgate, “Kant, Nietzsche and the ‘Thing in Itself’.” *Nietzsche-Studien* 22 (1993, 115-57).

31. Crawford, *The Beginnings*; Gentili, *Nietzsche*.

32. Bacon wrote “Rationales, aranearum more, tela ex se conficiunt” (*Novum Organum: Aphorismi de interpretatione naturae et regno hominis*, I, XCV). He probably took the simile from Stobaeus, who might have been Nietzsche’s source as well. That Nietzsche had a source, and an ancient one at that, is obvious if we think of what he says about bees: Nietzsche had a fairly good knowledge of science, and no 19th-century zoologist would have considered bees as mere assemblers of raw materials.

33. Admittedly, Nietzsche offers no reasons why we should not take the bees’ course. He just says man is “far above” them. We might speculatively take it he regards sheer empiricalness as an ineffectual way of handling changing situations.

34. See Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness. An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 16-17.

35. Pippin, “Truth and Lies,” 295.

36. Pippin, “Truth and Lies”, 295.

37. Pippin, “Truth and Lies”, 297.

38. Pippin, “Truth and Lies”, 298.

39. Pippin (“Truth and Lies”, 299) quotes these words from Nietzsche’s 1872 “Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge,” as translated by Breazeale in *Philosophy and Truth* (11, 29).

40. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Transl. Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 56 (orig. 1886, III.62).

41. Among the authors I have mentioned, by Breazeale, Pippin, Miller, etc.

42. See Crawford, *The Beginnings*, 209.

43. It should be noted, however, that “imitate” is a stronger verb than the German *nachformen*, which doesn’t necessarily imply *nachahmen* in the meaning of “aping” or “trying to resemble.”
44. “...if we could only perceive things now as a bird, now as a worm, now as a plant [...] then no one would speak of such a regularity of nature” (WL, 87).
45. Cantor, “The Use and Abuse”, 76.
46. Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. New York: Macmillan, 1965, 72.
47. See Jason M. Boffetti, “Rorty’s Nietzschean Pragmatism: A Jamesian Response.” *The Review of Politics* 66:4 (2004, 605-631).
48. See Hilary Putnam, “James’ Theory of Truth.” *The Cambridge Companion to W. James*. Ed. Ruth A. Putnam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 166-85.
49. *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1872, 19[43].
50. See R. Lanier Anderson, “Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption.” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13:2, (2005, 3, and fn. 9).
51. *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, 1887, 9[91].
52. Alexander Nehamas, “Nietzsche, Modernity, Aestheticism.” *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. Eds. Bernd Magnus, Kathleen Higgins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 248.
53. See Robert C. Solomon, *Living With Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach Us*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 41.
54. John Dewey, “The Logic of Judgments of Practice.” *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 8. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979, 22-23 (orig. 1915).
55. See Dewey, “Does Reality Possess Practical Character?” *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 4. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983, 125-126 (orig. 1908).
56. As Clark attempts to do, *Nietzsche on Truth*, 65.
57. For the references to Bréal and Gramsci, I am here largely drawing on Stefano Selenu, “Elaborando le tracce della storia. Linguaggio, metafora e alterità in Antonio Gramsci.” *Discipline Filosofiche* 18:1, 2008, 115-133.
58. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*. Ed. Valentino Gerratana. Torino: Einaudi, 1975, Q 29, § 2, 2342.
59. See Miller, “Dismembering and Disremembering”, 45.
60. This is why, I take it, Fabbrichesi (“Nietzsche and James”) speaks of “pragmatist hermeneutics.”

transformations: malabou on heidegger and change

tracy colony

*... being is revealed to be
nothing—but its mutability.¹*

Catherine Malabou is unquestionably one of the most important French philosophers of this generation. Her work has opened new perspectives on the history of philosophy, the relation between philosophy and science and the meaning of philosophy itself. The novel concept which brought about these seminal shifts is her thought of “plasticity.” This concept was first articulated in her doctoral thesis *L’Avenir de Hegel* which was published in 1996 and translated into English in 2005 as *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*.² While the concept of plasticity [*Plastizität*] has a specific and delimited role in Hegel’s philosophy, the significance of Malabou’s reading is that she transforms this term into a concept which is able to reinterpret the whole of Hegel’s thought. Departing from the prosaic sense of plasticity as the moulding and retention of form, Malabou rethinks the meaning of plasticity as a transformative power immanent

within form itself. Beyond the metaphysical understanding of form as the mere contour of matter, Malabou envisions form itself as a site of self-dissolution and re-generation: “Between the emergence and the annihilation of form, plasticity carries, as its own possibility, self-engendering and self-destruction.”³ It is this sense of transformation that provides the basis for Malabou’s original re-reading of Hegel in which plasticity is uncovered as a metabolic alterity that structures the formation of time and futurity in Hegel’s philosophy. However, already in this first work, the regenerative thought of plasticity also announced the promise of a different future for the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

In *The Future of Hegel*, Heidegger’s reading of Hegel in terms of prosaic temporality is presented as the traditional account which the articulation of a Hegelian temporal plasticity is able to pass beyond. However, plasticity not only provided a resource for challenging the Heideggerian reading, it already announced itself as a thought which overflowed this initial confrontation and could be deployed and discovered at the heart of Heidegger’s own thought of being: “Heidegger never [...] invested [the notion of plasticity] with ontological significance. Thus it is as if Hegel retrospectively has offered to him an instrument indispensable to the intelligibility of his ideas.”⁴ Although the concept of plasticity was first discovered in Hegel it does not remain simply a Hegelian notion, but rather, can be seen to operate both within the Hegelian system and also outside of it as a wider and autonomous hermeneutic instrument. Malabou is explicit that the applicability of plasticity beyond Hegel assumes a semantic and critical enlargement of the concept of plasticity. Just as the discovery of plasticity had opened an unthought alterity within the Hegelian dialectic, its wider application was able to articulate an unforeseen metabolic structure within the thought of ontological difference: “Plasticity inscribes the motive of metamorphosis right at the heart of the dialectic, and metamorphosis inscribes the motive of plasticity right at the heart of the thought of being. This intersection pointed the way for *Le Change Heidegger*.”⁵ The original French version *Le Change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie* was published in 2004 and was first translated into English in 2011 as *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*. Although the English language reception of this work is just beginning, it is clear that Malabou’s reading of Heidegger is original, compelling, and in terms of its implications for understanding Heidegger as a whole, perhaps, unprecedented.⁶

Malabou’s reading of change in Heidegger articulates a theme that is at once pervasive in Heidegger’s *oeuvre*, and yet, has no reception in the secondary literature. The reason for this curious absence is that the traditional ordering

of Heidegger's texts around the ontological difference has always marginalized the philosophical significance of Heidegger's numerous descriptions of change. However, her reading is not simply the exegetical recovery of an overlooked theme. In an account that is both meticulously documented and passing beyond the explicit level of Heidegger's text, Malabou reads Heidegger's thought of being itself as structured by an originary sense of mutation. Focusing on Heidegger's conception of the Platonic origin of metaphysics as a "change [*Wandel*] of the essence of truth" (HC 31) she articulates a general economy of this mutability which governs the emergence and history of metaphysics. From the perspective of this overlooked sense of change she then reinterprets the meaning of being, the human, the gods and the possibility of a second beginning. At stake in her reading is the prospect of a wholly new understanding of the composition and resources of Heidegger's thought.

My argument in this essay is structured in three sections. In the first section, I present Malabou's indeed seminal interpretation of ontological plasticity in Heidegger. In the second section, I then draw out the implications of an important limitation in Malabou's reading. While her interpretation of change brings to light new aspects of Heidegger's thought, when contextualized against the background of Heidegger's overtly genetic account of the anteriority of being to metaphysics, it can be seen to also obfuscate important aspects of this relation. Most importantly, by disallowing any anteriority to the inaugural event of change, Malabou's reading erases Heidegger's crucial distinction between the first beginning [*Anfang*] of the history of being and the start [*Beginn*] of metaphysics as such. In the final section, I make a suggestion for a further application of the concept of plasticity to Heidegger's thought. While Malabou's treatment ranges from *Being and Time* to Heidegger's later works, I argue that plasticity can also be seen to articulate Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology as a form of life in his early Freiburg period. This earlier instance of plasticity in Heidegger does not rely upon the concept of an inaugural change, but rather, locates the emergence and dissolution of form in the plasticity of life itself. From this perspective, Malabou's concept of plasticity can be seen as an even more apposite medium for the articulation of Heidegger's thought.

I.

Malabou's reading of ontological plasticity in Heidegger is based upon his consistent use of three related terms: *Wandel* (change), *Wandlung* (transformation) and *Verwandlung* (metamorphosis) which she abbreviates as "W, W, & V." These

terms are shown to structure Heidegger's account of the origin of metaphysics, its history and its possible transformation: "From the one change [*change*] and regime of exchange [*échange*] to the other, a metabolic circulation takes place between man and *Dasein*, God⁷ and god, being (*Sein*) and be-ing (*Seyn*)." (HC 24) Although Heidegger never explicitly accorded these figures of change any philosophical import, her reading reveals that these terms, which he first employed around 1929, consistently structure and support his thought: "W, W, & V could be the *secret agent* of Heidegger's philosophy, what *sustains and clandestinely guides* the destiny of the essential." (HC 7) While the concept of change might seem to be a generic construct externally imposed upon Heidegger's thought, it is in fact directly derived from Heidegger's own remarkably consistent deployment of these terms in the most crucial passages of his work. The triad of change which Malabou articulates is at once an interpretive decision but also a synthesis that directly emanates from and brings to light an overlooked dimension which is wholly specific to Heidegger's thought. Most significantly, by drawing together these three words for change Malabou articulates an originary metabolic instance which can be seen to structure the difference between the truth of being and metaphysics. However, this plastic coupling of being and metaphysical being is not to be understood as if being itself was simply given as a substrate behind the changing dispensation of epochs in the history of metaphysics. More radically, change is seen to be an event of schematization that concurrently gives form to both the withdrawal of being and the emergence of its visibility as the history of metaphysics: "a rupture and suture between metaphysics and its other." (HC 13) Malabou's reading begins by articulating this originary change which grants metaphysics its form and trajectory.

Through a close reading of Heidegger's 1940 essay "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" a text based on the 1930/31 lecture course "On the Essence of Truth" Malabou demonstrates how Heidegger consistently employs instances of change to describe the emergence of metaphysics: "It all starts with a change. The foundational event of metaphysics is, indeed, a *mutation*. A 'change of the essence of truth' comes to pass. Plato, that is, brings about 'a transformation in the essence of truth.'" (HC 31) In Plato, the original essence of truth as ἀλήθεια is transformed into truth understood as correctness. Simultaneously, a reciprocal ontological substitution takes place with the exchange of being as φύσις for the mere beingness [*Seiendheit*] of the Platonic ἰδέα. Traditionally, commentators have passed over Heidegger's depictions of change and framed this original interface as the obfuscation of a prior term. Moving beyond this conventional account, Malabou reads the sense of transformation opened by this original change as a constitutive alterity which

governs and defines the visibility of being as such. The emergence of metaphysics via a transformation defines metaphysics as both always already changed and changing. Heidegger further relies upon the triad of change to describe not only this capacity of transformation animating the history of metaphysics but also its resources for opening upon a different thinking of being. Malabou articulates this auto-schematizing character of metaphysics and its resources for another beginning by tracing Heidegger's employment of change along metamorphic and migratory axes that together constitute the metabolic regime of ontology.

For Heidegger, change is always the amalgamation of a change in form and a change in pathway. This constellation of change articulates the plasticity linking, and simultaneously differentiating, the various epochs within the history of metaphysics and the possibility of a transformed relation to being: "Heidegger characterizes metaphysics as a 'form [*Form*]' that changes form from epoch to epoch by being re-formed, even as he just as much promises 'the other thinking' to be a *transformation* in the literal sense—a *passage* or *transition* to another form." (HC 21) On Malabou's account, metaphysics and the change that would announce another thinking are wholly enclosed within an ontological mutability that is defined by both a change in form and a change in pathway. Metaphysics is plastic in that, although trans-forming, it remains the same, and charts a history that, while also changing directions, remains continuous. Accordingly, the proper sense of change in Heidegger is not located in any specific process or alteration, but rather, must be understood in terms of the emergence into visibility of being itself. Malabou's term for this new condition of phenomena when thought from out of the alterity of change is: the fantastic.

On Malabou's account, the fantastic designates the mode of appearance of beings after metaphysics. As instances of the schematization of being their phenomenality is divided and dissociated. Across this internal margin beings now bear within themselves the simultaneity of the uncanny and the familiar. This sense of the uncanny is not the incursion of the phantasm into the real or the irruption of a transcendent other from beyond the horizon of being. For Malabou, there is no outside of being and the fantastic describes the uncanny as located exactly within the essential, within the alterity of ontological determinations to themselves: "alterity is first of all the strangeness within, the most intimate unexplored mystery of essential self-identity."⁸ The fantastic is a strangeness that arises from within the immanence of the already there. This sense of fantastic is not a mere genre or category of discourse, but rather, articulates the pre-conceptual status of the image as the site for the original emergence of being:

The fantastic: the locus of originary (ex)change can only be invested with images. The concept falls forever short of it. Because on the one hand, the commencement of metaphysics—the setting into form and on its way of the first (ex)change—coincides with the vesting of the image as the inaugural event of being (exchanged): idea, essence, face, picture. (HC 71)

Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger articulates a sense of the fantastic that is not restricted to the Heideggerian text, but rather, comes to define a condition and limit of philosophy itself.

What Heidegger is the first to articulate is that the becoming visible of being is always the operation of a moment of schematization opened through the metabolism of change. Accordingly, the proper issue of change in Heidegger is located in the emergence of form understood as the original figuration of being itself: "As an imaginary production without referent and pure ontological creation, the fantastic characterizes the apprehension *and* the regime of existence of *what cannot be presented, of, that is, what can only ever change*. [...] *This point is the phantasm of our philosophical reality*." (HC 13) For Malabou, what comes to presence is not the representation or expression of a receded origin, but rather, an original imaging and schematization which takes form through the alterity of change. This metabolic exchange structuring the original substitution of being for itself defines all beings as split figurations. They are at once present, but forever bearing the trace of the abysmal operation of displacement at their origins. This condition of ubiquitous ontological-auto-schematization constitutes the proper locus of change in Heidegger and is the basis for the affinity with Malabou's own articulation of form as both plastic and the inexorable medium of thought:

The original site of the issue of change in Heidegger is not that of movement, becoming, (vulgar) time, or flux but rather the *image* understood as a *scheme*. Any entry into presence, birth, or growth is an originary imaging. This is the first *metabolè*. Anything *enters change* by showing, imaging, or schematizing itself. [...] Here we come upon the *fantastic intersection*. Everything that comes into presence arrives changed, substituting itself for itself. This is the original ontological phantasm.⁹

One of the most important implications of this originary sense of change is that it breaks with the traditional metaphysical understanding of change as the mere alteration of attributes upon an unchanging substrate.

Malabou's understanding of change displaces any reference to an origin or anteriority which would transcend the operation of change. Rather than a merely regional modification upon an underlying base, the sense of change that guides her reading of Heidegger is so originary that, strictly speaking, nothing precedes it: "Prior to exchange, nothing. Everything goes at the outset into the convertor. And so it begins: difference." (HC 76) The event of change determines its own anteriority so completely that: "The change invents what it changes [*Le changement invente ce qu'il change*]." (HC 63; CH, 85) Not even the apparent primordially of ἀλήθεια, being or ontological difference is seen to precede the operation of change:

In considering with me these consequences of the first (ex)change, you are at the same time beginning to understand that *neither being nor beings, neither man nor god and not even ἀλήθεια exist prior to their change. The enigma of change stems from its originarity, from the fact that nothing precedes it, above all not (ex)change.* (HC 63)

This alterity within the event of change can be seen to re-articulate not only the sense of origin in Heidegger's thought but also the dimension of futurity which would open upon a second beginning and a different relation to being.

In addition to interpreting the Platonic origin of metaphysics as an operation of change, Malabou reads Heidegger's account of the end of metaphysics in Nietzsche¹⁰ and Heidegger's own preparations for a second beginning as equally determined by the triad of change. Just as Heidegger consistently employed W,W, & V to depict the origin of metaphysics these same terms are given the role of forming the transition from metaphysics to an ultra-metaphysical possibility of thought. As Malabou notes, Heidegger's employment of W,W, & V in this capacity is particularly pronounced in his *Contributions to Philosophy* where: "the triad is constantly resorted to, since it characterizes, all at once, the change leading from metaphysics to the other thinking, the mobility specific to *Ereignis*, and the new exchangeability over which these preside." (HC 102) The transition to the other thinking, is not made possible by the transcendence of a term exterior to ontology. Rather, the alterity from out of which the ultra-metaphysical future of thought is opened remains within the metamorphic resources of the plastic coupling of being and metaphysical being. On this point, Malabou's reading of ontological plasticity in Heidegger can be seen to offer a new perspective on one of the most pervasive critiques of Heideggerian thought.

Since the mid 20th century, the charge has consistently been made that Heidegger is fundamentally a thinker of the identical and represents merely a supplementary version of metaphysics. Although Heidegger is explicitly concerned with ontological difference, this sense of difference has been seen as merely an interval within the more original identity and totality of being. Thus sealed under the absolute horizon of being, it would seem that Heidegger's philosophy is without radical alterity or otherness. In various ways this has been the verdict of Levinas, Derrida and Marion. On Malabou's reading, there is indeed nothing outside, nothing beyond, the mutability of being, however, this does not preclude the possibility of articulating a *different* alterity in Heidegger's thought. Rather than deducing the unity of Heidegger's thought from the perspective of what would be absolutely otherwise to being, Malabou articulates an *other* alterity operative *within* the horizon of being. This overlooked alterity in Heidegger is an alterity thought without the aid of transcendence, within being, and yet, irreducible to the totality of the same or an invariable element.

In contrast to the charges that Heidegger's thought supposedly lacks alterity and the other, Malabou shows that:

[...] a question concerning the other is very much in evidence in it—an other irreducible to the same but irreducible as well to absolute alterity, the Other so fecund in Levinas's thinking. If there is something other in Heidegger, it is something other than the Other. The phenomenon of this other alterity should be sought in the tight articulation uniting change and difference. (HC 27)

In much the same way that Malabou's discovery of plasticity in Hegel was able to retrieve him from the Heideggerian reading, her articulation of ontological mutability in Heidegger can be seen to retrieve his thought from those readings which would claim that it was sealed, without a future, in its own self-coincidence. One of the most significant implications of Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger is that it brings to light a constitutive alterity which allows Heidegger's thought to be reinterpreted from out of the inexhaustible mutability of ontological imagination. Malabou's reading has awoken a dormant resource within Heideggerian philosophy that convincingly transforms it into a thought of transformation. However, while the operation and radical implications of change in Heidegger are undeniable, this plastic reading can also be seen to erase some aspects of the explicitly genetic sense of origination in Heidegger's thought.

On Malabou's account, the site of the first change is temporally undecidable in that it is itself the condition for any chronology which would attempt to historically date the instant of change. Strictly speaking, the event of change is an immemorial instant which was never simply present within any of the historical thematizations of time which it opens and defines. However, this event is still located in Heidegger's text as the transformation of the essence of truth in the thought of Plato which articulates the subsequent history of metaphysics as plastic and defines all that is antecedent to Plato as "pure ontological creation [*création ontologique pure*]." (HC 13; CH, 24) For Malabou, there is no element prior to change which could antedate the constitutive dynamics of change. There is no anteriority to the operation of change which would constitute a given and unchanging substrate to the condition of change. Every projection of a time, dynamic or ground as prior to the moment of original change remains itself indissolubly constituted by this first change. While this absolute originality of change opens new futures for the interpretation of Heidegger's work, it must also be seen to generate a tension with Heidegger's own descriptions of a time before change.

II.

For Malabou, the event of change which transpires in the essence of truth is so original that it actually creates what, on a chronological account, would seem to antedate it. The fantastic intersection of change does not extend between an anterior and transformed element, but rather, is itself more original than both terms and any genetic construal of their relation. On this point Malabou is wholly consistent in thinking the implications of the radical originality of the event of change in that it is not a mere passage between a prior and resultant element. As she clearly states, the proper enigma of change is that *nothing* precedes it. Everything that comes to presence arrives changed. However, there is no pre-metamorphic completeness which would be lost in the event of change, nor does change supervene upon an identity which would maintain itself across "its" changes. Instead of the alteration of a more original presence, Malabou thinks change as the co-original arising of what changes with the instant of change. Strictly speaking, the first change which initiated the history of metaphysics with Plato was a creation preceded by nothing. However, the price to be paid for understanding this change as "pure" ontological creation and the most primordial instant of origination in Heidegger is that it draws down into itself aspects of Heidegger's genealogical account of the history of being that were understood to be given prior to the start of metaphysics.

Change is at once constitutive of the entire history of being, and yet, only arising after one inaugural change. Being itself first becomes plastic only through this initial event of change. One of the results of Malabou's reading of this first change is that it creates a structural duplicity in that change is both historical, in that it occurs as a specific instance in Plato, and simultaneously, is an event which reinscribes all chronologies as emerging from the event of change itself. In contrast to the role which plasticity played in Malabou's reading of Hegel as the figuration of temporality itself, plasticity in Heidegger is tied to one specific historical point of initiation. Rather than temporality itself being articulated as plastic, in Malabou's reading of Heidegger, plasticity is bound to an inaugural instant with the implication that prior to this privileged event there was no change. She is explicit on this point and claims that change does not articulate the time that was given before the initial change in Plato. In other words, change in Heidegger is not a ubiquitous condition in that it is not given prior to Plato and does not originally condition beings and truth on both "sides" of the inaugural metamorphic event.

The bifurcation that is created when Malabou reads plasticity in Heidegger as arising from a specific historical commencement is not present in her reading of Hegel where plasticity is seen as: "what is most essential and primal in life itself."¹¹ This wider sense of plasticity in Malabou's reading of Hegel is stressed by Derrida in his introduction to her book which he describes as: "devoted to the plasticity of the living in general."¹² As Derrida states, the question of the origin of plasticity in Hegel is not a mere historical instance but is understood as co-original with life itself: "this movement of plastic *subjectivation* would not or should not be considered simply as an anthropological or even theological stance. It would begin with life itself [...] with the very apparition of life."¹³ On this point Derrida can be seen to accord Malabou's thought of plasticity an aporetic sense of origination in life itself which, like Derrida's thought of *différance*, is more primordial than any historical thematization of temporal differentiation. In contrast, the way in which Malabou reads plasticity in Heidegger can be seen to introduce a doubling in her account of the originality of change as both an historical event, and simultaneously, an imaginary, indeed fantastic, origin. While the terms of Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger do not allow her to conceptualize a time before change, this anteriority to the origin of metaphysics is a crucial dimension of Heidegger's thought. As I will now argue, perhaps the most important element of Heidegger's thought that is structurally precluded in Malabou's reading is his distinction between the first beginning and the start of metaphysics.

Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger unquestionably relaunches his philosophy beyond many reductive assessments of its resources and scope. However, as Malabou also makes explicit, hers is an engagement that both follows and departs from Heidegger's texts. One aspect of Heidegger's thought which Malabou's reading inherently silences is the anteriority which Heidegger accorded the interpretation of being and truth prior to the Platonic origin of metaphysics. This anteriority explicitly figures Heidegger's account of the genetic relation between what he described as the beginning [*Anfang*] of the history of being and the start [*Beginn*] of metaphysics as such. This distinction is one of the most important elements of Heidegger's philosophy and one which he rigorously maintained: "The start is certainly not the beginning."¹⁴ On Malabou's reading, the location of the original event of change is the transformation in the essence of truth in Plato which at once opened the difference between metaphysical being and the truth of being. For Heidegger, this transformation constituted what he terminologically and consistently referred to as the start of the metaphysical tradition. This sense of starting was formulated as the contraction and obfuscation of the earlier more original sense of being as φύσις and truth as ἀλήθεια that he articulated as the first beginning.

In Malabou's account there is no mention of the difference between the first beginning and the start of metaphysics, instead the transformation of the essence of truth that stands as the origin of metaphysics is described as absolute and even conflated with the first beginning itself: "the commencement [*le commencement*] of the metaphysical tradition" (HC 29; CH, 43), "the inaugural exchange [*l'échange inaugural*] of being for beingness" (HC 44; CH, 62), "the inaugural event—the first beginning [*premier commencement*]." (HC 68; CH, 91) Nor is there any engagement with Heidegger's account of the pre-Platonic understanding of being as φύσις. In the whole of Malabou's text there are only two passing and insubstantial references to ἀλήθεια. One of the most important implications of Malabou's reading is that the change which occurs at the start of metaphysics in Plato would be more primordial than the earlier inceptual origin that Heidegger articulated as the first beginning. In other words, the first beginning is displaced into, and thought wholly from out of, the change which Heidegger identified as simply the start of metaphysics.

In Heidegger's being-historical texts of the mid 1930's and early 1940's he consistently articulated the start of metaphysics in Platonic thought as a contraction within the more original dynamics of φύσις and ἀλήθεια. This givenness of the first beginning with respect to the start of metaphysics is described in terms of

the difference between the original emergence [*Aufgang*] of the first beginning and the veiling of this origin in the mere advancement [*Fortgang*] which opened the history of metaphysics. For Heidegger, the start of metaphysics represented a covering over of the more original dynamic of truth granted in the first beginning: “The first beginning is emergence (unconcealment). [...] The emergence abandons itself to the advancement (start ‘of’ metaphysics). [...] Meanwhile, undisturbed by the mere advancement, the first beginning persists in itself as transition.”¹⁵ The originality of the first beginning remains intact behind the start of metaphysics. In other words, the start and end of metaphysics is wholly internal to the emergence of the first beginning. While Malabou’s account demands that the first beginning be thought only through the fantastic interface of change, Heidegger can be seen to grant this earlier beginning a fullness and priority which is necessarily erased in Malabou’s reading.

On Heidegger’s understanding of the first beginning the essence of truth as ἀλήθεια was a dynamic of concealment and unconcealment. This was the essence of truth which in Plato’s thought was transformed into a relation of mere correctness and which Malabou understands to be the imaginary site of the original change. However, Heidegger also described the essence of truth as unconcealment as a foreground and merely regional sense of truth. The earlier ground of ἀλήθεια as unconcealment was articulated at two levels. Firstly, the essence of truth as unconcealment was itself still an instance of a more original dynamic of sheltering [*Bergung*] and disconcealment [*Entbergung*]. And secondly, this earlier essence of truth as sheltering only received its proper articulation when grounded in the thought of *Sein* opened by the second beginning. For Heidegger, the mere start of metaphysics was more essentially an inceptual *ending*. However, this earlier dimension of inceptuality in which *Sein* itself is seen as the singular origin of both the first and second beginnings is a dimension of Heidegger’s thought which Malabou’s reading is unable to express. The first instant of change, as itself a fantastic image, does not admit of any anteriority to the absolute originarity of its own auto-inception.

Throughout the period of his being-historical texts, Heidegger is unequivocal that the essence of truth as unconcealment was merely a foreground instance of the more original essence of truth as sheltering: “Unconcealedness is then *one* mode of the disconcealment of sheltering [*Entbergung der Bergung*].”¹⁶ Rather than unconcealment, it was the dimension of sheltering that was the more primordial essence of truth and the earliest instance of the history of being: “Sheltering is the enshrouding (protection) that preserves the emergence: the most proper

essence of the beginning, its indestructible act of beginning [...] its pure self-donation.”¹⁷ From this perspective, the essence of truth as unconcealment which undergoes change is actually a foreground configuration of the more original sheltering of being in the first beginning. If the essence of truth as unconcealment, strictly speaking, is not given prior to its transformation, but only arrives co-stantaneously with this transformation, what is the status of the relation between the earlier essence of truth as sheltering and the essence of truth as unconcealment? Heidegger clearly understood the essence of truth as sheltering to be given prior to truth as unconcealment. Equally, Heidegger understood being as φύσις to be given prior to the construal of being as ἰδέα in Platonic thought. This genealogical ordering is displaced on Malabou’s reading and reconceived from out of the immemorial instant of change in Plato’s thought. However, while Malabou’s reading of Heidegger passes over the anteriority of the first beginning in favour of the metabolic inauguration of metaphysics, this in no way forfeits the importance of her discovery of change in Heidegger or the relevance of plasticity as an instrument for the intelligibility of his ideas.

Malabou has consistently stressed that the concept of plasticity as a heuristic tool is not fixed, but rather, is itself plastic and mutually articulated through the material it interprets. Just as the thought of plasticity was transformed in its exportation from Hegel to Heidegger, it can also be seen to overflow the borders of Malabou’s reading of change within Heidegger. This different instance of plasticity in Heidegger can be read in his seminal 1919-20 lecture course “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” where phenomenology is transposed beyond its original Husserlian version and rethought on the basis of what Heidegger described as: “The tendency of life to give shape to itself.”¹⁸ Although he would later retract this initial privileging of life and relegate it to a merely ontic region within the more original openness of Dasein, its central role in this early period has often been overlooked. Prior to Heidegger’s thought of ontological difference and his interpretation of the ultimate vocation of phenomenology as the questioning of being, he first conceived phenomenological philosophy as: “the absolute original science of life in and for itself.” (BP, 131) This understanding of phenomenology was not simply a redesignation of the appropriate subject matter for phenomenological investigation. More radically, phenomenology as such was rethought on the basis of the structural ability of life to maintain itself in meaning: “From out of factual life, we want to understand the form [*die Form*] of apprehending life itself: How does life experience itself?” (BP, 188; GP, 250) As the earliest interface and medium through which life becomes intelligible to itself, Heidegger employed a new sense of form which was not reducible to traditional

philosophical definitions of this term.

The sense of form which consistently guided Heidegger's initial reinterpretation of Husserlian phenomenology was neither a version of the transcendental meaning of the formal, nor a variant of *Lebensphilosophie* in which form was the expression of a merely ontic thematization of life. Heidegger's early deployment of form was explicitly conceived without reference to any point of origination, transcendence beyond life or absolute ground within life. This sense of form was the "dynamic structure" (BP, 134) of the original emergence, stabilization and dissolution of meaningfulness within life. The forms through which life articulated itself were not the expression of any transcendent or original form, but rather, always came into relief as a "deformation [*Deformation*] of life." (BP, 113; GP, 147) This sense of originary deformation was inextricably entwined with the emergence of the intelligibility of life to itself. The dynamic configuration of life as always already deformed and transforming was the condition from out of which Heidegger first rethought the meaning of phenomenological philosophy. As I will now argue, this self-engendering-transforming figuration of life as the inner dynamic of philosophy itself can be seen as another aspect of Heidegger's thought that can be articulated through the medium of plasticity.

III.

At the very opening of "Basic Problems of Phenomenology" Heidegger announces: "The most burning, most original, and ultimate basic problem of phenomenology, one which is never to be effaced, is *it itself* for itself." (BP, 2) The rest of the ensuing lecture course can be seen as an attempt to rethink the meaning and possibilities of phenomenological philosophy as articulated through this dynamic of self-differentiation. For Heidegger, the unquestioned postulates of Husserlian phenomenology had covered over the ability of phenomenology to turn the radicality of its questioning back upon its own presuppositions regarding methodology, transcendental subjectivity and its definition of philosophy: "The radicalism of phenomenology needs to operate in the most radical way *against phenomenology itself and against everything* that speaks out as phenomenological cognition." (BP, 5) This sense of radicality is not that of a subject reflecting upon itself or merely methodological reflexivity. For Heidegger, the proper radicality of phenomenological questioning overflowed Husserl's theoretical-epistemic thematization of subjectivity and displaced it upon the deeper constitutive dynamic of life itself: "subjectivity—only the formation [*Ausformung*] of *life*." (BP, 105; GP, 136) Rather than assuming a given structure of subjectivity and

employing a fixed methodology, phenomenology was to be rethought from out of the ability of life to vitally apprehend and renew itself: “A life led astray, in all of its forms of manifestation, even in philosophy and science, can only be renewed again through *genuine* life and its radical, stalwart actualization, not through programs and systems.” (BP, 17) This regeneration of philosophy beyond the will to systematization is based upon the inner capacity of philosophy as a form of life to transfigure itself.¹⁹

The sense of life which guided Heidegger’s inaugural rethinking of phenomenology is explicitly presented in terms of the emergence and shaping of life into forms: “Life is not a chaotic confusion of dark floodings, it is not a dull principle of power, it is not a terrible monster [*Unwesen*], unlimited and devouring everything. Rather, *it is what it is, only as concrete, meaningful form.*” (BP, 114) Accordingly, “Philosophical research is: a researching-understanding guiding into the forms of life itself.” (BP, 115) This sense of form is unequivocally differentiated from the transcendental category of the formal. Heidegger explicitly rejected this merely abstract formalism and the “danger of the conceptual pair ‘form-content’” (BP, 188) which he described as having dominated philosophy since Kant. Instead, he clearly states: “We dispense with formal and transcendental considerations and start out from factual life.” (BP, 188) However, this rejection of the transcendental sense of form is not at all a rejection of the concept of form as such, on the contrary, it is exactly a new sense of form that is employed in this appeal to return to the immediacy of life. To this end Heidegger can be seen to redefine the meaning of form and also create a new terminology based upon its dynamic sense of emergence: “*formation*” (BP, 93), “*relief-like formations of life*” (BP, 31), “*form-giving stabilization.*” (BP, 93) This sense of form as the dynamic medium for the emergence of meaning in life surpasses the traditionally aesthetic and idealistic definitions of form and is employed by Heidegger both explicitly and continually.²⁰

Heidegger’s early reappropriation of form can be seen as a strategy for articulating the sheer immanence of meaning within life itself: “What is decisive is that life [...] gives form to the lived life from out of itself.” (BP, 93) Rather than a site of expression for a meaning beyond the flow of life, Heidegger rethought form to instead designate the structural self-sufficiency of life to itself. This novel redeployment of form is conceived as an articulation which is wholly internal to life in the sense that life: “actualizes itself from *out of its own forms*, that life always addresses itself and answers itself in its own language, that structurally life does not need to untwist itself out of itself in order to maintain itself in its own meaning.” (BP, 34) While this sense of form is wholly removed from connection

to anything beyond life, it is also not simply enclosed within the totality of a pre-given definition of the living. For Heidegger, life is not reducible to objectivity nor grounded in subjectivity: “Life is *not an object*, but it is also not philosophically apprehended through anchoring in the *subject*.” (BP, 111) Nor is the emergence of form to be seen as the expression of a: “primal force [*Urkraft*] of life” (BP, 24; GP, 29) or Bergsonian *élan vital* which Heidegger chided as “mystically confused.” (BP, 17) Heidegger’s figuration of life in the medium of form is not structured as if life were something already present behind a foreground of forms. This traditional ordering of form is not simply reenacted within a vitalistic thematization of the living which is then posited as a substrate behind the manifestations of its expressive forms.

On Heidegger’s account, the manifestation of life as form is determined in every case by a constitutive distortion. Every articulation of life in the medium of form is also, as such, a deformation of life: “factual life gives itself in a particular *deformation*” (BP, 181), and further, “life in all its forms somehow [...] succumbs to a deformation.” (BP, 114) This sense of deformation is not the distortion of a previously pure state of life, but rather originally co-determines the living in its giving and taking form. This articulation of an originary and constitutive deformation at work in the manifestation of forms can be seen to redetermine the meanings of both subjectivity and objectivity. In contrast to Husserl’s definition of these terms as ultimately pre-given static structures, Heidegger explicitly recontextualized them as modes of life’s originary deformation: “an objectivizing or subjectivizing deformation of life.” (BP, 113) By displacing the meaning of these terms back upon the dynamic of life as an originary nexus of deformation and formation, Heidegger can be seen to rethink subjectivity and objectivity as figurations of a structural plasticity in life itself.

Heidegger’s novel sense of form was described as a dynamic of emergence which did not emanate from an ultimate foundation nor progress teleologically, but instead reposed upon the ability of life to both give and receive its own formations. It is perhaps here, in terms of this co-originality of life and form, that Malabou’s concept of plasticity can be seen to articulate Heidegger’s descriptions of the chiasmic figuration of life as form. At once enclosed within the complete immanence of life to itself, Heidegger’s sense of form still retained a capacity for radical transformation. Form is not simply a medium for the incarnation or expression of life. Although life appears nowhere else than in form, life is also never wholly saturated in any of its specific formations. Form is at once the site of life’s stabilization, yet simultaneously, it is also the site of life’s departure from

itself in its transition to different configurations of form. This trans-formation does not supervene upon any more original substrate of life, nor is this transition to be understood as if form were merely a contingent or extraneous medium. Rather, the immanent motility of phenomenological philosophy was structured upon a figuration of life as co-originally giving and receiving its own forms. This radical sense of transformation within life can be seen as an instance where the concept of plasticity can both articulate Heidegger's thought and perhaps grant it, yet another, possible future.

NOTES

1. Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, trans. Peter Skafish (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 54. My references to this text will be given parenthetically with page number and indicated by: “HC”. My references to the original French version *Le Change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie* (Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2004) will be indicated by: “CH”.
2. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth Durning (London: Routledge, 2005).
3. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 193.
4. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 192.
5. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 28.
6. For examples of this early reception see: Jean-Paul Martinon, *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 83-109.
7. While Malabou is correct to include the relation between the god of metaphysics and the last god as a transformation determined by ontological plasticity, it must be pointed out that this particular instance of change in Heidegger is different than the others. The last god is not only predicated upon an ontological transformation but additionally determined by what Heidegger explicitly described as the essence of the last god itself which, although it manifests itself in being, remains wholly other to its ontological medium.
8. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 42.
9. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 30.
10. The degree to which Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche is also structured by W,W, & V has been obscured by Heidegger’s later editing. Whereas Malabou quotes from the 1961 *Neske* version: “Self-assertion is original assertion of essence” (HC 88) the original lecture course manuscript has in complete concurrence with Malabou’s reading: “Self-assertion is original transformation of essence [Wesensverwandlung].” Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985), 70 (my translation) In a further omitted passage Heidegger describes Nietzsche’s thought as enacting a “transformation of being [Wandlung des Seins]” *Ibid.*, 160 (my translation).
11. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 193.
12. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, xxiii.
13. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, xxvii.
14. Martin Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2012), 156 (my translation).
15. Martin Heidegger, *The Event*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2013), 263.
16. *Ibid.* p. 47 (translation altered).
17. *Ibid.* p. 47.
18. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Scott M. Campbell (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 33. References to this text will be given as: “BP”. References to the original German edition: *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2010) will be given as: “GP”.
19. On this point, Heidegger explicitly announced a convergence between his understanding of phenomenology as a form of life and the way in which Nietzsche also thought philosophy from

out of the ultimate sympathy of life with itself. (BP, 17) See my: “Bringing Philosophy Back to Life: Nietzsche and Heidegger’s Early Phenomenology.” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 14 (2014): 349-369. If, as Malabou concedes in the final section of *The Heidegger Change*, Nietzsche was the first thinker of ontological mutability (HC 287) then the concept of plasticity can be seen as also a medium for uncovering an earlier and even more direct proximity of Heidegger to the metabolic resources of Nietzsche’s thought. Heidegger’s first articulation of destruction [*Destruction*] in this lecture course (BP, 107) is perhaps the index of this proximity.

20. Heidegger’s ubiquitous employment of form extends to the lecture course itself: “The preceding considerations would be completely misunderstood and would not at all have reached a philosophically understandable stance if they were to be taken as propositions of cognition, so-called truths, from which something would follow, or result with logical necessity. They are much more *a form, a shape* for the preparation of the situation of philosophical understanding.” (BP, 105) (Heidegger’s italics) Moreover, the self as such is presented as mediated by a relation to form: “I dawn upon myself [*ich dämmere mir selbst auf*] in a particular *form*.” (HC 122) (Heidegger’s italics).

algorithmic catastrophe—the revenge of contingency

yuk hui

The magic of automation [is] literal-minded...A goal-seeking mechanism will not necessarily seek our goals unless we design it for that purpose, and in that designing we must foresee all steps of the process for which it is designed...The penalties for errors of foresight, great as they are now, will be enormously increased as automatization comes into its full use.²

—Norbert Wiener

CATASTROPHE AND ACCIDENT

All catastrophes are algorithmic, even the natural ones, when we consider the universe to be governed by regular and automated laws of motion and principles of emergence. A catastrophe first takes the form of an accidental disturbance generated by the internal dynamics of the universe. We can understand the term “accident” in two ways: firstly, as a non-essential property of a substance (such as the colour red predicated of an apple), as outlined by Aristotle in the *Categories*, meaning that its arrival and disappearance doesn’t lead to the destruction of the

substance (e.g. when the apple has not yet turned red it is still an apple); secondly, as something arriving in a contingent way, which is what we more commonly understand by the term.³ I will show later that the algorithmic catastrophe—which I define as any catastrophe that is the product of *automated* algorithms—results from the convergence of these two types or meanings of accident. We have witnessed many technological catastrophes besides those caused by human ignorance or technical immaturity—metal fatigue and brittle fracture, for example. But these material, technological catastrophes are not examples of what I am proposing here to call algorithmic catastrophes. Algorithmic catastrophe doesn't refer to material failure, but rather to the failure of reason.

In November 2002, the French philosopher Paul Virilio curated an exhibition at the Foundation Cartier in Paris entitled *Ce qui arrive*. In this exhibition Virilio wanted to analyse the arrival of a new kind of catastrophe—the kind due to technological developments—in recent decades; he also claimed that a reversal of Aristotle's distinction between substance and accident had taken place. In light of the anticipation of the normalization of catastrophes in the twenty-first century, Virilio hopes to go back to the question of responsibility and reflect on the problem of industrialization, which becomes destructive to both corporeal and spiritual beings. Virilio points out that for Aristotle accidents serve to reveal substance. For Virilio himself, on the other hand, substance is always accidental. What follows from accidents are new inventions to overcome them. Hence catastrophes are structurally necessary, since without them technological development would not be effectively motivated. He writes: “The shipwreck is consequently the ‘futurist’ invention of the ship, and the air crash the invention of the supersonic airliner, just as the Chernobyl meltdown is the invention of the nuclear power station.”⁴ Virilio further observed that accidents have also bypassed this relation to substance; indeed he writes, if we could talk about the “accidents in substance,” now the “accidents in knowledge,” of which “computer science could well be a sign, due to the very nature of its indisputable ‘advances’ but also, by the same token, due to the nature of the incommensurable damage it does.”⁵ The new form of accident that Virilio refers to—“accidents in knowledge”—is dominated by the second sense of the word accident, meaning the constant arrival of catastrophes accompanied by the “progress” of civilisation. We understand further the accident of knowledge as the accident of reason, or more precisely of exteriorised reason, which we call “algorithm.” The dialectics of accident and invention lead to a systematization of exteriorized reason, which obtains its own mode of contingency.

The emergence of algorithmic catastrophe, as this article will argue, marks on the one hand the presence of a global technological system that is open to the repetitive arrivals of catastrophe *without* apocalypse. Hence the catastrophe I want to describe is different from the understanding of it in *tragedy* and *apocalypse*. Firstly, we are no longer talking about laws of nature but a global technological system, which displaces catastrophe from its tragic origin. Let's recall that the Greek word *κατάστρέφω* has two parts, *κατά* ("down") and *στρέφω* ("turn"), where each designates a movement in a chorus. Secondly, the apocalypse as understood by Christian culture is unable to fully explain the global situation. Apocalypse as a hope for a new beginning appears more and more deceptive. Hence the algorithmic catastrophe has to be articulated and understood beyond the association with ancient tragedy or post-industrial eschatology. On the other hand, it marks the completion of speculative reason in relation to the revelation of the concept of contingency in Occidental philosophy, first systematically explored by Plato and Aristotle, then in theology and medieval philosophy in relation to God's creation, then in the work of Émile Boutroux (1845–1921), and now fully exposed in the work of the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux.

In a concise dictionary entry, the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg points out that contingency is one of those few concepts that are specifically of Christian origin. In Aristotelian philosophy there is no opposition between possibility and necessity, but rather between possibility and actuality; it is only when it is bound to logic that such an opposition is established. The ontologization of "possible contingency" is completed in the thirteenth century: "the world is contingent as an actuality, which, because of its indifference to its existence, does not carry the reason and law of its being in itself."⁶ Through the voluntarism of the Franciscan scholastics, necessity no longer justifies contingency, which becomes accident (*Zufälligkeit*).⁷ If accidents as predicates dominated the inquiry into being for the ancients, now we start to witness the domination of the other meaning of accident, i.e. contingency. Contingency is always there in the laws of nature and challenges all forms of necessity, as Emile Boutroux shows in *De la contingence des lois de la nature*.⁸ The contingency of the algorithmic catastrophe is no longer the same as the natural one, but rather operates within technics as the "second nature."⁹ This is the background of what I term the "algorithmic catastrophe," which describes our technological situation. An objection may be posed, since here we indirectly affirm the distinction between nature and culture (if we also count technology as part of it). It is true that such a categorization is to a certain extent cultural. However, we are not affirming that nature and technics are distinct and isolated realities, but rather that the traditional concept of nature, which ignores and

undermines technics, should be called into question.¹⁰ Hence it is necessary to put forward a second nature, which contains such a distinction but at the same time sublates it.

The algorithm that we talk about today is the latest development of reason, totally detached from the thinking brain, and becoming more and more significant in our everyday life due to recent rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI). Algorithmic catastrophe is expressed in the perception of technical development—from 2010 on, we have twice witnessed the so-called “flash crash,” which paralysed the financial market in seconds due to the use of algorithmic trading. On the other hand, this anticipation of catastrophe becomes a design principle: “Design for failure, since everything fails” is a well-known slogan of Amazon’s cloud computing. One should not miss the dialectics of accidents as predicates and contingency, luck (both as τύχη) and automaticity (αυτοματων), in the development of their meaning in laws of nature to their meaning in the laws of technics—the second nature. We have entered the global age of catastrophe, and a global post-industrial eschatology, as proposed by Virilio, seems in vain since it ignores the global technical system that is essentially the convergence between different subsystems and different cultures. In order to unfold the concept of algorithmic catastrophe, we must reconsider the historical relation between technics and contingency in Occidental culture. The history here presented, as the development of reason and its exteriorization in machines, significantly leads to a self-negation from the late twentieth century until now.¹¹

NATURE, CONTINGENCY AND TECHNĒ

It may be worth noting that the ancients, in times of catastrophes such as drought or flood, placed their hope in the restoration of the cosmic order, an order that would triumph over all contingencies. Due to a lack of technical and scientific knowledge, contingency constituted the mythical and catastrophic moment of tragic time, as presented in the tragedies of Hellenic culture. This contingency is in itself not only accidental, but also a necessity for the understanding of the relation between the human and the cosmos. Oedipus, the intelligent man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx, failed to escape destiny, which is at the same time *contingent* and *necessary*. The birth of science or reason is a way to overcome the unforeseeable and uncontrollable nature of contingency. Hence Plato, the biographer of Socrates, has provided us with an anti-tragic theater, in which Socrates uses his reason to penetrate into things with the “Apollonian measurement.”

In *Protagoras*, Socrates proposes to develop a *technē* as the ultimate measurement of good and bad, and as a response to the sophists' proposal of multiple ends. Martha Nussbaum, in her book *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, has shown that the ultimate aim of Plato is to handle the fragility of luck (τυχή). Luck is contingent, since if luck is always there, it will lose its semantic meaning, and hence not be desirable. The resort to science is one way to overcome the fragility of τυχή. Science here, meaning also τέχνη or its plural form τέχναι, allows a method of measurement and calculation that renders all ends into commensurable terms. Nussbaum also turns to Aristotle's definition of technics, highlighting four elements: (1) universality; (2) teachability; (3) precision; (4) concern with explanation.¹² *Technē*, claims Nussbaum, did not have a significantly different meaning from *epistēmē* during this period of Hellenic culture. *Epistēmē* is concerned with the objectivities of the *technē*, which can overcome the contingency and the ακρασία, the incontinence. Nussbaum didn't notice the tension of the two objects to overcome: τυχή as contingency, and ακρασία as incontinence, or the weakness of will. Technics is not only an overcoming of τυχή, but also the overcoming of ακρασία, that consequently opens a new situation in contrast to the *habitus*.

This technics is not a specific skill; it is the technics of all *technai*, that is to say, rational thinking. This rational thinking, here in the name of *technē* and *epistēmē*, has an anti-tragic gesture, since tragedy is always the sufferance of the τύχη, which goes beyond the governance of rules. The tragic spirit, which flourished in the Hellenic culture of 700 BCE, is condemned by Socrates's wisdom, as it is described by Plato. The rational thinking, which Socrates proposed to Protagoras as an absolute measurement based on pleasure, defeated Protagoras's own proposal of technics, namely the teaching of justice. The great sophist was challenged not because of his technics, but rather his inability to comprehend the technics that governs all the *technai*. This science based on pleasure is not the pursuit of Dionysian desire and inspiration, but rather of Apollonian order and measurement. This scepticism of bodily desire by rational thought was announced at the very beginning of Plato's dialogue. Let us recall: an anonymous friend made fun of Socrates's pursuit of Alcibiades, implicitly likening it to a dog hunting down its prey.¹³ Socrates, however, admitted his desire for Alcibiades, and at the same time showed that there is something more important than this seduction: "I wish, however, to tell you something that is [strangely] out of place: you see, though he was present, I didn't have my mind [on him], and I forgot him quickly."¹⁴ For Protagoras and his wisdom, Socrates was able to keep Alcibiades out of his mind. The science of pleasure is a science of planning and of foresight.

It refuses immediate pleasure in view of the long-term sufferance; it accepts immediate pain in favour of future beneficial consequences. The good is the long-term pleasure; the bad is the long term suffering. The science of measurement will be able to avoid the error caused by the weakness of the will and ignorance. As Nussbaum writes:

The author of *On Medicine in the Old Days* recognized ... that the absence of a quantitative measure in his art doomed it to deficient precision and therefore to error. He was still able to claim *technē* status for it. But some years later it will be forcefully argued that any *technē* at all, to be *technē*, must deal in numbering and measuring. The common concern of all *technē* and *epistēmē* whatever, insofar as it is *technē*, is ‘to find out the one and the two and the three—I mean, to sum up, number and calculation. Or isn’t it this way with these things, that every *technē* and *epistēmē* must of necessity participate in these?’ The author is, of course, Plato; the text is the seventh book of the *Republic*.¹⁵

The measurement that carries the tendency towards absoluteness constitutes a new form of *τύχη*, of which reason wants to be rid. This is the confrontation between technics and nature: to control in order to become better, like the science of medicine. Howard Caygill has shown that artists are not the only ones who were expelled from the city, but also physicians, who have the *technē* to cheat, as in the myths of Asclepius. The god of healing was struck by lightning on the point of breaking the necessity of nature to heal a dead man.¹⁶ The physicians were allowed to come back to the city as guardians, however, precisely because of their capacity of intervening into necessity and contingency, or in Caygill’s words, the “task of legislation.”¹⁷ This is clearer in the *Laws*, where Plato juxtaposes *technē* with contingency and necessity:

we are told, you know, that whatever comes, has come, or will come into existence is a product either of nature [*phusei*], or of chance [*tuchē*], or of art [*technē*].¹⁸

This separation between the laws of nature, the contingency that escapes them, and the technics which legislates them, opens up a differentiation between the contingent and the accidental in nature and in technics. Technics, which aims to overcome contingency, also generates accidents. The progress of technical contingency is driven by its own advancement. This is best demonstrated by fire, according to a story told by Protagoras in the dialogue. The fire that is given

to man by Prometheus has already opened up the twofold nature of technics in relation to contingency. Fire, which provides warmth as well as the essential element for cooking, stabilizes the household in resisting the sudden change of weather and the attacks of animals. Fire is the compensation for the accident caused by Epimetheus, since the giant famous for his hindsight distributed skills to all animals except humans, who found themselves “naked and shoeless and without bedding and without weapons.”¹⁹ Fire results, as a consequence of what Bernard Stiegler calls a default, and hence becomes the necessity of being, the “*défaul* *qu’il faut*” or the default of the origin.²⁰ The accident is the origin—and it is also the possibility of necessities—transformed and stabilized by culture.

However, fire is also the source of accidents. It can easily burn down a well-established settlement and turn everything into ashes. It is not evident in this dialogue of Plato, since for him, its ultimate aim is to show the superiority of Socrates over Protagoras, challenging the latter’s confusion of the former’s teachings regarding justice, and Socrates’s own conviction of the means of valuing and measuring the end of the justice. Socrates, in this respect, is loyal to Prometheus, for his abilities of foresight and planning:

And so [it’s evident] that Prometheus pleased me more than Epimetheus in your story; you see, using him [as an example] and foreseeing [with Promethean foresight], I’m arranging all my life’s business, and, if you’d be willing, as I said at the beginning, I’d thoroughly examine these things with you with the greatest pleasure.²¹

The resistance to contingency marks the beginning of the history of Occidental philosophy. It is also here that we understand Bernard Stiegler’s interpretation of European philosophy as *by accident* instead of *by essence*.²² He writes, “*for the European necessity of philosophy is techno-logical*. Which is to say, hypomnesic. And accidental *precisely* in this respect.”²³ Let us unpack this sentence and unfold its relevance to our investigation here. The word “accidental” here contains several meanings. Firstly, it is accidental since Epimetheus has forgotten human beings; it is an accident, which constitutes the origin, a lack. Secondly, for Stiegler *technē* is not *part* of European philosophy but rather a *founding question* of European philosophy. This is Stiegler’s own ambitious project to reformulate the history of European philosophy based on “hypomnesis”—that is, the insufficiency of memory, i.e. forgetting. And if anamnesis is central to Plato’s philosophy of the truth, it demands a material support, which is also a technics of hypomnesis, as when Plato shows in the *Meno* how Socrates instructs the slave boy to solve

geometrical problems by *drawing in the sand* and *tracing the lines*. Since *technē* is a means to exteriorize memories, by exteriorizing it in the form of a *technical object* (geometry in the case of the *Meno* as well as Husserl), *anamnesis* is freed from its total dependence on the human mind, and hence is also the source of *hypomnesis*.

In this reading of Bernard Stiegler, the history of European philosophy is one that renders the *techno-logical accident necessary*. This resonates with the two senses of accident that we have explained above: on one hand, the revelation of substance through accidents, meaning the accidents become necessary; on the other hand, the overcoming of the irrational through reason. We need to establish a link between Nussbaum's treatment of accident and that of Stiegler. Although they come from different traditions, it is clear that they refer to something in common. For Nussbaum, reason's role is to eliminate the fragility caused by contingent events. This is not possible without technique, which is also reason; and this technics is not possible without a material support, as in the example we just given from the *Meno*. A connection between reason and geometry is introduced in this episode, reason and *technē* find their common object in geometry. For Stiegler, geometry is an apodictic science (or idealization), and it is because of geometry's apodictic nature that reason achieves its absoluteness. Stiegler also sees at issue the *technological* globalization of European philosophy, which for him is the only future: "Europe is called to a global becoming (to exist on a global scale) *with* its philosophy—*failing which it will die*—and can become so only by 'de-Europeanizing' itself."²⁴ Stiegler sounds rather close to Heidegger here, in the sense that he sees a "system" on the verge of closing down, just as the latter sees the completion of Occidental metaphysics in the epoch of cybernetics. However, it must be stated that whereas Heidegger proposes a return to the origin, Stiegler proposes a "de-Europeanization."

FROM CONTINGENT TO AUTOMATIC

Aristotle has furthered his inquiry into the nature of the contingency, and affirms the distinction between two types of chance or cause: *τύχη* (*tuchē*) and *τὸ αὐτόματον* (*to automaton*). *τύχη*, as we know, refers to both contingency and to luck; *Τὸ αὐτόματον* is often translated as "spontaneity." *Τὸ αὐτόματον*, however, refers not only to spontaneity, but also to the automatic: the automatic in the sense that it is already within the possibility of being itself; for example, when throwing a die there are always six possibilities. In other words, *Τὸ αὐτόματον* is something that can be thought—or, more precisely, that can be determined by thought. On the other hand, *τύχη* cannot be determined; it is necessarily

undetermined. Aristotle gives the example of a man who went to a place where he found that his debtor was collecting money from others, and then got his money back, even though he didn't come for this purpose. This for-something or for-something-else is always already automatic. Hence, Aristotle says:

Everything which is the outcome of luck is an automatic outcome, but not everything which is the latter is the outcome of luck.²⁵

Luck, here, demands a choice; it is subjective and has to do with reason. In Book II Chapter 6 of the *Physics*, Aristotle states that “nothing done by an inanimate object, beast, or child is the outcome of luck, since such things are not capable of choosing,” and continues: “the automatic, on the other hand, extends to the animals other than man and to many inanimate objects.”²⁶ Aristotle gives another example, in which a horse luckily walked out of danger and saved itself. The chance that the horse had for saving its life was not really luck, but automatic. So accident has more to do with reason than with nature. There is an automatic causality, which follows the possible cases, e.g. the definition of horse and a tripod. Luck is never the outcome of one case over another, like throwing a dice. Throwing dice is not about luck; it is spontaneous and automatic.

The contingent and the automatic are conflated today, since the automatic produces accidents, by which we assume contingency. In fact, we may be able to say that luck moves in the direction of the automatic. This automatic is at the same time spontaneous, meaning real-time, thanks to the effect of automation. The automatic of the second nature produces a new form of contingency, which doesn't oppose that of nature but rather contains it, as we can see in the example of Fukushima in 2011. The tsunami is not really the cause of the catastrophe, but rather part of the cause. That is to say, the contingency of natural law (which includes natural disaster or material failure) cannot alone explain the catastrophe, since nature (the sea) is integrated into the technological system as a cooling agent of the nuclear plant.²⁷ This could be further grasped as a techno-logical history of metaphysics. The completion of metaphysics according to Heidegger means that there is no longer a beyond; rather, all is present. What is present is considered to be analysable and controllable, and there one finds the beginning of cybernetics. We shall go back to this later and explain that contingency in cybernetics is no longer the one that Aristotle was referring to, nor is it that of traditional metaphysics. Cybernetics's premise of “control” is fully expressed in the title of Norbert Wiener's book—*Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*—and by other authors writing on him. The control paradigm

of early cybernetics was characterised by the mathematization of different mechanisms: mechanical, biological, social, economic, and organizational. We can trace this effort from Leibniz's *characteristica universalis* to Charles Babbage's analytic machine, and on to the Turing machine, a story with which we are familiar. Mathematization took its most materialized form in algorithms. The algorithm understood as a process or an operation only expresses abstract thinking, and gains a quasi-autonomy when it is realized in machines. This is one of the modes of existence of the algorithm in its most "objectified" form. An algorithm is fully expressed in its functionalities in operation. How different is the algorithmic contingency and the contingency of the laws of nature?

There are two aspects that we can observe. Firstly, the contingency of the laws of nature always comes from outside, meaning that the system cannot be totalized. Emile Boutroux has shown in his book *De la contingence des lois de la nature* the limit of the concept of necessity. Boutroux reproached the two necessities of right (namely, analytic and synthetic) and the necessity of fact by showing that these necessities are actually open to contingency. The analytic necessity always needs to reinvent a new postulate. For example, Boutroux shows that passing from logic to mathematics, from the notion of classes and genre to those of quantity and space, a new postulate of continuity is demanded to bridge what is not continuous. The synthetic necessity, though, pretends to be *a priori* and always demands empirical experience; the necessity of fact, as already shown by Hume, is only maintained by habits. This scepticism can be extended to well-formalized physical laws. For example, according to the rule of Mariotte, considering a container of gas, the product of the pressure and its volume is a constant: $PV=C$, but this constant is only derived from experience and hence can be contingent. Boutroux tried to show that any necessity is always open to something outside it, or even demands something outside for its law to be completed; while for a technical system, a certain case of contingency is always already presumed, and understood as necessary. Like Leibniz's best-of-all-worlds hypothesis—the world created by God as the technical system created by its designer—is implemented in the way that it anticipates contingency, meaning that they are only *relatively contingent*.

These accidents are expected and integrated into the evolution of the technical system. In other words, there is no law that governs the necessity of the causation between the algorithmic thinking and its actualization in machine operations; there is no necessary causation between the will of human agencies as intervention and the automation of machines. Failures and errors are accepted not only as

a necessity for technological progress, but also have become immanent to its operation and maintenance. Algorithmic catastrophe becomes quotidian. This is exemplified in the design of Amazon cloud computing, known as “design for failure.” An Amazon engineer has fully explained this in a research paper:

In particular, assume that your hardware will fail. Assume that outages will occur. Assume that some disaster will strike your application. Assume that you will be slammed with more than the expected number of requests per second some day. Assume that with time your application software will fail too. By being a pessimist, you end up thinking about recovery strategies during design time, which helps in designing an overall system better.²⁸

This technical realization involves the redefinition of the responsibility of the application component and infrastructure (which is allowed to be less reliable than the traditional model), and the use of NoSQL data stores and the cloud management tool, although it is not our intention to examine these technical details here.²⁹ In this perception, what is contingent is no longer contingent as with the natural disaster as traditionally conceived, but is necessary in the second nature constituted by “accidents.” As an engineer and designer, one has to be assured that it is *normal* to have a catastrophe. If catastrophe is thus anticipated and becomes a principle of operation, it no longer plays the role it did with the laws of nature. This use of anticipation to overcome catastrophes can never be completed, however, and indeed accident expresses itself in a second level of contingency generated by the machines’ own operations. Herein also lies the second difference between the algorithmic contingency and the contingency of laws of nature, which we would like to approach in the next section. It doesn’t mean that the algorithm itself is not perfect, but rather that the complexity it produces overwhelms the simplicity and clarity of algorithmic thinking. This necessity of contingency takes a different form from the necessity in tragedy and in nature, which presupposes an outside of the empirical realm, or the supreme gods.

ALGORITHMIC CATASTROPHE

If we look at the early mathematical history of the algorithm, we see that it mostly concerned the problem of developing mathematical proofs in a systematic and logical way. Speaking from a purely mathematical point of view, an algorithm always confronts the question of incomputability; indeed, as the mathematician Gregory Chaitin proposed, it appears that way in most cases.³⁰ The outside, or the

supplement, shares a similar logic with deconstruction. But when an algorithm becomes detached from the mind of the mathematician, in the passage from Gödel to Turing, we observe that the question of incomputability is no longer the major question concerning the algorithm, which is rather that of efficiency and reliability.³¹ The Turing machine has to be distinguished from Gödel's concept of general recursivity or Church's Lambda Calculus, though in the end they are doing more or less the same thing mathematically. The Turing machine went beyond the conceptual recursivity through the exteriorization of reason in concrete and material terms. After the Turing machine and the proliferation of personal computers, mathematical proofs are still one important stream of computer science, but practical studies in computer science don't pay much attention to mathematical proofs and focus rather on the functionality and performance of algorithms. Hence an algorithm is open to contingency, which occupies another order of magnitude.

If we want to further speak of the algorithm in terms of automation, then we can probably distinguish two types of automatization: the automatization of instructions (or pure repetition) and automatization through recursions. What is recursivity? To put it in its simplest terms, it is the function, which calls itself and stops at a certain point when the constraint is met. This abstract thinking, however, has to be understood mathematically; we can probably put it like this: it is how a number could be computed in terms of a function, which calls itself until a halting state is reached. Let's consider the example of computing the fibonacci number (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21...): in the recursive step, the function calls itself, and enters a "spiral" operation until it arrives at its halting status, e.g. when the value of the variable number becomes 0.

```
long fibonacci(long number) {
    if ((number == 0) || (number == 1))
        return number;
    else
        // recursion step
        return fibonacci(number - 1) + fibonacci(number - 2);
}
```

The common comparison between an algorithm and a recipe is almost wrong since it ignores this difference. To be sure, instructions are a sort of algorithm with the lowest perfection, that is to say, with the lowest intelligence. Instructions like recipes are fundamentally instrumental and non-reflexive; they allow for simple automation through repetition. If we define instructions as sequential step-by-step schematizations, and understand them as one pole of the algorithm, then the other pole of the algorithmic spectrum would be recursive and non-linear operations. This spectrum contains different notions of algorithm according to different specific functionalities. The evolution of machine intelligence is a progress from linear functionality to recursive functionality, taken from its mathematical foundation. We can go further by saying that even a sequential procedure is also recursive since the Turing machine itself is recursive; however, there is another type of recursion, which is based on the programmability of the Turing machine. If the recursivity of the computer (e.g. low level) is correlated with the incomputable or the contingency of the first nature, then the recursivity of the programs on the higher level has to do with the contingency of the second nature. Algorithm is understood in our context as automation through recursion. Recursion here means that the object to be computed can be understood in terms of repetitions of a function conditioned by a halting value. For example, a natural number could be understood as the operation of a function.³² For *technē* to overcome τύχη in nature, it produces a contingency of the second nature. Algorithmic culture is the culmination of this contingency, through the standardization and globalization of the exteriorized reasons.

To elucidate this argument, I will present two cases, and analyze the algorithmic catastrophes in three temporal dimensions: 1) acceleration; 2) delay; and 3) immanence. We remember the famous newspaper article in the *Financial Times* after the financial crisis entitled “Market: Rage Against the Machine,” which blamed the machines for causing the financial crisis.³³ This blame of machines continued in the financial industry following the “flash crash” of the New York Stock Exchange in 2010, and then of the Singapore Stock Exchange in 2013, both caused by algorithmic trading. Algorithmic trading can be defined simply as the use of algorithms to automatically execute purchasing commands. By profiting from short term buying and selling, known as high-frequency trading, the market can explode due to the “black box” effect—in which we see the evaporation in the aforementioned cases of \$4.1 billion and \$6.9 billion USD in seconds.

The speed of algorithmic automation also creates a delay, which limits the intervention of human agents. In 2012 a midsize financial firm, Knight Capital,

took 45 minutes to find out that one of the programs, which was supposed to have been shut down, was actually running. Every minute cost nearly 10 million USD. The market works on speed, which depends on the automatic speculative reasoning of the software. When the input to the software becomes random, and multiple softwares participate in speculation, unexpected results are yielded. The operation of an algorithm, temporally structured according to logical statements, may 1) fail to digest the input or 2) fail to guarantee the output; hence one can observe a 10 euro book suddenly become worth thousands of euros on Amazon when the algorithm looks for the highest possible price instead of considering it absurd. As the financial journalist Nick Baumann has noted, during the 2010 flash crash the share of the consulting firm Accenture traded at both \$0.01 and \$30 in the same second.³⁴ The mutual speculations of machines, which value each other according to the limits of their own data, failed to know their own follies.

The late Norbert Wiener had already anticipated this scene. In his article entitled “Some Moral and Technical Consequences of Automation,” published in May 1960,³⁵ Wiener criticized the layman’s understanding of automation, in particular “the assumption that machines cannot possess any degree of originality” and the belief that “its operation is at any time open to human interference and to a change in policy.” The automation of machines will be much faster than human intelligence, and hence will lead to a temporal gap in terms of operation. The gap can produce disastrous effects since the human is always too late, and machines won’t stop on their own. In face of our inability to fully understand the causality, Wiener warns us that “if we adhere simply to the creed of the scientist, that an incomplete knowledge of the world and of ourselves is better than no knowledge, we can still by no means always justify the naive assumption that the faster we rush ahead to employ the new powers for action which are opened up to us, the better it will be.”³⁶

CATASTROPHE AND SPECULATIVE AESTHETICS

Heidegger was very clear when he claimed that cybernetics is the end of Western metaphysics.³⁷ The end means that reason’s ability to overcome contingency created a total transformation, in which thinking can no longer be detached from the accidents (predicates) of the techno-logos. The techno-logos occupies itself with beings, and no longer with the question of Being. Hence the techno-logos defines the end of metaphysics, meaning that it cannot go beyond beings towards Being. If Being is present in tragic thinking, as Heidegger reads Nietzsche as saying, then this Being is a whole held together by contingency. Contingency delimits

the knowledge of beings, and reveals the profundity of what is not yet present and what cannot be present. This “outside” serves as a new strategy to reorient; as Blumenberg states, “with the beginning of the modern period [*Neuzeit*], man looks for an exit out of the conquest through the world consciousness and self-consciousness of contingency.”³⁸ Socrates’s reason, projected in Plato’s anti-tragic theater, is the beginning of the end of the ancient Greek tragedy. In the age of mathematization, contingency is equivalent to a causality, which can be logically and technically deduced. The introduction of the algorithmic contingency through the re-reading of Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Boutroux, Blumenberg, which shows the existence of a superior order through the *causa finalis*, cannot be fully captured by the law of nature. Jean de La Harpe writes:

It [contingency] marks the limits of our knowledge, the necessity where we are able to demonstrate the real by examining the parts of it; we will probably—and here the probability is practically equivalent to the certitude—never be capable of demonstrating this clock of infinite gearwheels, of superposing worlds of common sense full of contradiction with a scientific universe at the same time real and intelligible; also the contingency endures long beyond science itself and humanity, and relies on reality in order to be assimilated and to be understood, but this is a limit which moves back infinitively and tends toward the ideal for a necessary determinism.³⁹

In contrast to what Jean de La Harpe says, Quentin Meillassoux beautifully draws an end to the role of contingency in traditional metaphysics. I would like to engage with Meillassoux’s work here, firstly because his speculation on absolute contingency characterises the *aesthetics* of the algorithmic catastrophe, meaning that contingency shouldn’t be taken as exceptional, but rather unavoidable, and hence acquires certain *normativity*; and secondly because his analysis of contingency through mathematics shatters any rationalist justification of the necessity of the laws of nature. Because of this relation to nature instead of technical systems, Meillassoux’s contingency cannot be squared with the algorithmic contingency that we are dealing with here. However, certain questions and formulations of Meillassoux’s arguments resonate with and provide the opportunity for further reflection on the algorithmic contingency. In the following passages, I will sketch several key concepts of Meillassoux’s argument, at the same time situating them within our own inquiry.

Meillassoux starts with a critique of correlationism, which according to him creates the deabsolutization of metaphysics. The project of returning to the question of the absolute, or the infinite, wants to free reason from the structures to which it has shackled itself, and move towards a new terrain which no longer submits causalities to myths and superstition, but rather provides a new foundation for science. How far can reason reach? Can reason reach a temporality where it itself ceases to be, for example in the ancestrality where humanity was yet to appear? Meillassoux wants to understand ancestrality as the limit of correlationism and its product—modern science; namely: how can one think about the ancestrality where there was not yet anything human? In other words, if there were no human, we would be able to derive that the experience of objects didn't exist; however according to correlationism, then we wouldn't be able to make sense of objects. A similar argument can be applied to the algorithms—exteriorized reasons, where we find more and more that human reason is becoming less and less capable of understanding the system that it has succeeded in constructing.

The deabsolutization of metaphysics has to grant something (for example, the unknown) that reason cannot include but nonetheless becomes reason's protection. It is exactly around the question of the *archi-fact* (e.g. facticity of the correlation) that Meillassoux distinguishes different variants of correlationism, for example those of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and down to Husserl. The subjectivists (Meillassoux chooses to use the word subjectivists instead of idealists) wanted to approach the *archi-fact* through enforcing the power of thought; that is how thought can penetrate into the realm of the unknown. For Meillassoux the absolute has to be posited outside thoughts, outside the reach of the mind, outside all causalities. In contrast to what he calls the “facticity of correlation” of the correlationist tradition, Meillassoux wants to propose what he calls the “principle of factuality,” meaning to identify a reality or material that is independent from thought. For example, we cannot say if God exists or not, since he may exist or may not; he may appear in front of you tomorrow morning when you wake up; or you may not see him at all within the finitude of your life. I quote Meillassoux: “We will call ‘contingent’ any entity, thing, or event which I know could be, or could have been, other than it is. I know that this vase could have not existed, or could have existed otherwise—I know that the falling of the vase could have not happened.”⁴⁰ Distancing from correlationism is a way to open up a new inquiry into the existence of the possible.

The mission of speculative reason could be understood in terms of Meillassoux's new treatment of facticity, which proposes "we propose to make facticity no longer the index of a limit of thought—of thought's incapacity to discover the ultimate reason of things—but the index of thought's capacity to discover the *absolute* irreason of all things."⁴¹ Meillassoux wants to produce a new ontology, in which one can find a new category or entity called "over-chaos" (*surchaos*), which he wants to distinguish from chaos theory in mathematics. The over-chaos is "an absolute" that "escapes the desabsolutization of correlationism." This over-chaos is not purely chaos, meaning without any possibility of deriving order or law. Since within an absolute inconsistent being, there is hardly any contingency, as he writes "an inconsistent—universally contradictory—being is impossible, because this being could no longer be contingent. For the one thing that an inconsistent being cannot do is to *change*, to *become other*, since, being contradictory, it already is what it is not."⁴² The necessity of contingency is not a proposal for a return to chaos (as in some mistaken impression of the postmodern), but rather to affirm the absoluteness of contingency.

In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux goes back to Hume's questioning of the existence of the necessity of causality, and turns it against Kant's attempt to solve the Humean problem, meaning that Kant uses the faculty of representation against the contingency of the laws of nature.⁴³ Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, didn't really address pure speculative reason; instead, pure reason can be established only because it bypasses the *Schwärmerei* of speculation. The return to Hume's question that the necessity of causality is only habitual, and hence vulnerable to contingency, is also a return to the speculative reason. However, the introduction of absolute contingency also needs to address the question *why is there stability instead of total chaos?* Meillassoux attempts to find the answer in Cantor's concept of the transfinite, which according to him distinguishes contingency from chance. The transfinite is the concept that mediates the infinite and its beyond (which is also itself infinite), meaning that it is larger than any finite number, but less than an absolute infinite number. Expressed in philosophical language, we can understand Cantor's transfinite as: "the (quantifiable) totality of the thinkable is unthinkable."⁴⁴ This doesn't mean, according to Meillassoux, that either the non-totalizing axiomatic is the only possible one, or that the possible is always untotalizable; however, there is always more than one axiomatic.⁴⁵ In a retrospective manner, the transfinite is only graspable when it is given the symbols like omega and aleph, meaning that a certain technicity and systematicity has to be assumed, which distances from the mere concern of the laws of nature towards a technical

system. And from this point, the question of algorithmic contingency comes in.

If we follow Heidegger's understanding of the term metaphysics and his announcement of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician, metaphysics was completed since Being is no longer comprehended as a whole. In the digital age, accidents in both senses come to the fore and beyond, as indicated by the contingency, the unknown, which also comes to the front. The necessity of contingency in the thought of Meillassoux goes beyond the effort of Boutroux, and has lowered contingency as the signifier of the supreme order (which bears the name of Being or God) to immanence. This reference to Heidegger doesn't mean that we are longing to construct a new metaphysics, but in view of overturning of ground and form, it is rather, as he says, "raising questions on, or about metaphysics."⁴⁶ The limit of human knowledge or reason is no longer something which can be improved through scientific research based on causality; one has to accept that some knowledge outside correlationism exists or is possible. If I am allowed to follow Heidegger that Nietzsche was the last metaphysician, and cybernetics has drawn an end to Western philosophy, we may also be able to conclude that Meillassoux has completed speculative reason, in the sense that the arrival of catastrophes has become a perpetual movement: what arrives is no longer an "accident," but rather it just happens; the catastrophes are accompanied and *normalized* by speculative aesthetics.

To summarise without concluding, the aim of this article was to introduce the notion of the algorithmic catastrophe as related to the history of the metaphysical concept of contingency. Τέχνη, as Nussbaum has shown, is reason's attempt to overcome contingency. It has nevertheless created a contingency of the second nature. Along with the exteriorization of reason passing through the mechanical and thermodynamic ages, and now the digital age, we have witnessed the emergence of the algorithmic catastrophe that must be distinguished from industrial or military accidents. The causality of an industrial accident could be traced and avoided, but the control of algorithmic catastrophe is increasingly beyond the capacity of human beings; however, it is also self-evident that industrialization has a great tendency towards the implementation of algorithmic automatization. The distinction between *tuché* and *automaton* raised by Aristotle has been transformed due to the automatization of reason. The twofold nature of technics (to both overcome and generate contingency) in its relation to contingency can be understood as *pharmakon*, both a remedy and a poison.⁴⁷ One would be able to take the algorithmic catastrophe further than computational algorithm, for example in

the research of genetic engineering, military development, nanotechnologies, etc. However, this article can only focus on the mathematization and actualization of algorithms in machines. The algorithmic catastrophe also resonates with current research on speculative reason, especially what Meillasoux proposes as the absolutization of contingency, which reinvents the metaphysical concept of contingency as necessity while it renounces the subjectivist approach towards knowledge. The celebration of speculative reason seems to be an appropriation of the catastrophic aesthetics of our time, where the unknown and black box become the sole explanations.

In May 2014, the world-renowned professor of physics Stephen Hawking and three other professors—Stuart Russell, Max Tegmark, and Frank Wilczek—published an article in the British newspaper *The Independent* after the launch of the film *Transcendence*, questioning the success of AI and the long-term problems associated with it. The science professors affirmed the benefit of AI for different domains, but also warned that “this would be a mistake, and potentially our worst mistake in history.” The maturation of AI theory and the rapid developments driven by industrial and military investments have left any reflection behind—it always arrives too late. The future of AI development is unknown, but now it has to be questioned:

One can imagine such technology outsmarting financial markets, out-inventing human researchers, out-manipulating human leaders, and developing weapons we cannot even understand. Whereas the short-term impact of AI depends on who controls it, the long-term impact depends on whether it can be controlled at all.⁴⁸

This warning resonates with that of Wiener’s 1960 essay discussed above: it would be ignorant to just dismiss the algorithmic catastrophe as something from science fiction. The words of the physicists also remind us of Book III of Plato’s *Republic*, where the physicians return as guardians of the polis. Should these guardians be scientifically well-trained philosophers or philosophically trained physicians is not a question without importance, since it means a new pedagogical program and a new conception of responsibility. Beyond the reach of this single article, what Virilio proposes as a rethinking of responsibility remains largely undiscussed. If this article serves a critique of the algorithmic catastrophe and speculative reason, this critique is only one in the Kantian sense.⁴⁹

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Katian Witchger and the reviewers for their valuable comments.
2. Norbert Wiener, *God and Golem, Inc. A Comment on Certain Points where Cybernetics Impinges on Religion*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 1966, 63.
3. André Lalanda, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*. 7ème Édition. Paris: PUF, 1956, 13.
4. Paul Virilio, *Original Accident*. Trans. Julie Rose, London : Polity, 2007, 5.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. Hans Blumenberg: “Kontingenz”, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Eds. Kurt Galling. 3. Aufl. Bd. 3. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959, 1793–1794, “Die Ontologisierung des » possible contingens« ist erst im 13.Jh. abgeschlossen: die Welt ist Kontingenz als eine Wirklichkeit, die, weil sie indifferent zu ihrem Dasein ist, Grund und Recht zu ihrem Sein nicht in sich selbst trägt.”
7. *Ibid.*, 1794, “Das Notwendige enthält keine Rechtfertigung der K. mehr; K. wird jetzt Zufälligkeit.” There is still a nuance between contingency and accident, for example, in Emil Angehrn’s “Vernunft und Kontingenz: zur Standortbestimmung der Philosophie,” in *Studia Philosophica*, vol. 51 (1992, 221–240). Angehrn proposes that one can probably say that all accidents are contingent, but not all contingents are accidents. However, this nuance, as I will show later, exemplified by the contingent and automatic of Aristotle’s *Physics*, has slowly converged along the development of *technē*.
8. Émile Boutroux, *De la contingency des lois de la nature*. Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1921.
9. I take this term from Bernard Stiegler: see Bernard Stiegler and Elie During, *Philosopher par accident*. Paris: Galilée, 2004.
10. The distinction between nature and technics is not simply a Western distinction, I believe that in other cultures, at least in the East Asian culture, technics has never been taken into the realm of nature, though technics can behave according to the principle of nature. In this case it no longer concerns technical objects but rather body techniques. A significant example is the butcher PaoDing in the Taoist classic *Zhuangzi*, whose knife loses its importance after he has acquired into the Tao (nature) of the cow, since he knows how to enter into the void instead of confronting the bones and tendons. See, Zhuangzi, *The Complete works of Zhuangzi*. Trans. Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 19–20.
11. This follows Lyotard’s conception of the postmodern as the negation created by technologies—the product of the modern; see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
12. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 95.
13. *Ibid.*, 92.
14. Plato, *Plato’s Protagoras : translation, commentary, and appendices*. Trans and eds James A. Arieti and Roger M. Barrus, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010, 309a.
15. Nussbaum, *The Fragility*, 107–108.
16. Howard Caygill, “Drafts for a Metaphysics of the Gene,” *Tekhnema 3 A Touch of Memory*, Spring 1996. tekhnama.free.fr/3Caygill.html.
17. *ibid.*
18. Caygill, “Drafts,” cited from Plato, *Laws*, Book X, 888e.
19. Plato, *Progoras*, 55, 321c.
20. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, v.1 The Fault of Epimetheus*. Trans. George Collins and Richard Beardsworth, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
21. Plato, *Protagoras*, 108, 361d.

22. Bernard Stiegler, “The Magic Skin; or, The Franco-European Accident of Philosophy after Jacques Derrida,” *Qui Parle* 18: (2009, 97–110).
23. *Ibid.*, 99.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Aristotle, *Physics* Book I and II. Trans. William Charlton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, Book II, Chapter V, 197b.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Gilbert Simondon has explored the concept of a “geo-technological milieu” in *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, Paris: Aubier, 1958, 2012, when he talked about the associated milieu of the Guimbal engine; this point is further made explicit by Bernard Stiegler, “Preface,” in Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
28. Jinesh Varia, “Architecting for the Cloud: Best Practices,” https://media.amazonwebservices.com/AWS_Cloud_Best_Practices.pdf.
29. George Reese, “The AWS Outage: The Cloud’s Shining Moment,” broadcast.oreilly.com/2011/04/the-aws-outage-the-clouds-shining-moment.html.
30. Gregory Chaitin, *The Unknowable*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1999.
31. This is also the limit of deconstruction: see Kojin Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*, Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000. Karatani drew an analogy between deconstruction and the question of the outside in the mathematical proof of Gödel and Wittgenstein’s critique of Russell.
32. It should be noted that it is not only limited to natural number; one can also understand it in political terms, for example the quantification of an object or an individual in terms of recursive function.
33. Michael Mackenzie, Arash Massoudi and Stephen Foley, “Markets: Rage against the machine,” *Financial Times*, October 16, 2012; <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/fd9c4e38-16ee-11e2-b1df-00144feabdco.html>.
34. Nick Baumann, “Too Fast to Fail: Is High-Speed Trading the Next Wall Street Disaster?,” January/February 2013 Issue; www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/high-frequency-trading-danger-risk-wall-street.
35. Norbert Wiener, “Some Moral and Technical Consequences of Automation,” *Science*, New Series, Vol. 131, No. 3410 (May 6, 1960): 355–358.
36. Wiener, *Some Moral and Technical Consequences*, 1358.
37. Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (1969), *On Time and Being*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
38. Blumenberg, “Kontingenz,” 1794.
39. Jean de La Harpe, “L’idée de contingency dans la philosophie d’Émile Boutroux,” in *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*: 43:10 (1922, 121). “elle [contingency] marque les limites de nos connaissances, la nécessité où nous sommes de démonter le réel pour en examiner les rouages ; nous ne serons probablement — et ici la probabilité équivaut pratiquement à la certitude — jamais capables de la remonter cette horloge aux rouages infinis, de superposer au monde du sens-commun plein de contradictions un univers scientifique à la fois réel et intelligible; aussi la contingency durera aussi longtemps que la science elle-même et que l’humanité, penchée sur la réalité pour se l’assimiler et la comprendre ; mais c’est une limite qui recule indéfiniment et tend vers la forme idéale du déterminisme nécessaire.”
40. Quentin Meillassoux, “Métaphysique, spéculation, corrélation,” *Ce peu d’espace autour. Six essais sur la métaphysique et ses limites*. Eds Bernard Mabillet, Paris: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2010; the citation is based on the manuscript instead of the book, I would also like to thank Robin Mackay for assuring the translation. “On dira “contingente” toute entité, chose ou événement, dont je sais qu’elle peut ou qu’elle aurait pu effectivement ne pas être, ou être autre. Je sais que ce vase aurait pu ne pas exister, ou exister autrement- je sais que cette chute du vase aurait pu ne pas se produire.”

41. Ibid. “nous proposons de faire de la facticité non plus l'indice d'une limitation de la pensée- de son incapacité à découvrir la raison ultime des choses- mais l'indice d'une capacité de la pensée à découvrir l'absolue irraison de toute chose.”
42. Ibid., “un être inconsistant- universellement contradictoire- est impossible, parce que cet être cesserait de pouvoir être contingent. En effet, ce qu'un être inconsistant ne pourrait faire, c'est se modifier, devenir autre, puisque ce qu'il n'est pas, étant contradictoire il l'est déjà.”
43. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude, an essay on the necessity of contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier, London: Continuum, 2008, 89
44. Ibid., 104.
45. Ibid., 105.
46. Ibid., 109, “The end of metaphysics is still largely identified with this type of dissolvent approach—it is no longer a matter of asking oneself metaphysical questions, since the latter are mere semblances of questions, or questions that are now irremediably obsolete, but rather of raising questions on, or about metaphysics.”
47. See Jacques Derrida, “La Pharmacie de Platon,” *La Dissémination*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993; and Bernard Stiegler, *Ce qui fait que la vie vaut la peine d'être vécue : De la pharmacologie*, Paris: Flammarion, 2011.
48. Stephen Hawking: “Transcendence looks at the implications of artificial intelligence - but are we taking AI seriously enough?,” *Independent*, May 1, 2014
49. Jean-François Lyotard has attempted to start such a reflection during the period when he developed the concept of the postmodern (in view of the computational power of the Minitel).

the fracture of a kantian antinomy: machiavelli and spinoza

vittorio morfino, translated by dave
mesing

A genealogy of historical consciousness understood as the absolute knowledge of time should show how the equation reality = history is not empirically self-evident but the effect of a long sequence of events that, towards the end of the eighteenth century, led to thinking about history *tout court*, without any genitive. It should show, in other words, historical consciousness as a contingent phenomena. In his reconstruction of the fundamental themes of the first methodological debate on the practice of historiography in France at the end of the sixteenth century, Fabio Merlini emphasizes the three procedural imperatives that constituted the birth certificate of this discipline which just a half-century before was entirely absent from the university setting: 1) writing the facts of the past in an order irreducible to that of the chronological sequences of chroniclers and medieval annals; 2) subtracting this reconstruction from the prescriptions of dogmatic theology; 3) freeing writing from the stylistic rules of rhetoric. This methodological debate comes to a head with the education of memory as a logical reconstruction of the past; in other words, an historical event can be thought as such only as the product of another historical event. In this way a new order of univocal explanation is inaugurated with respect to the orders of traditional explanation:

The method should offer to memory the possibility of choosing the past in the self-sufficiency of its principles in such a way that historical time comes to be reconstructed on the basis of logically necessary causal links,

capable of leading from the past to the present, and from the present to the future.²

The temporality of the world therefore comes to be understood as a linear concatenation of events that retreat towards the past as consciousness and open towards the future as praxis. The course of human experience is a *fil continu*, according to the expression of Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière,³ which leads from the past to the present according to a logical necessity whose soul reveals it to be in reality the teleological attraction of the present toward the past. This idea of a *fil continu* seems to me to be the fundamental element that allows for the identification of experience and history, such as it is configured (to take the example of the German philosophical tradition) from the Enlightenment to romanticism, up through historicism and hermeneutics. If we wanted to identify the fundamental philosophical figures of this multifaceted tradition, it is easy to think of Leibniz, Lessing, Herder, Hegel, Dilthey, and Gadamer. In its maximum expression in Hegel, spirit is the unbroken thread that gives content to time; historicism and hermeneutics arrive after the fact, and find themselves elaborating a notion of history that has the material path of its provenance behind its back. In opposition to this conception of history we can identify, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, other philosophical figures who, whatever their differences, accentuate the *instant* as an interruption of the continuous series of temporality. Here it is sufficient to cite the exemplary names Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Benjamin, and Schmidt.⁴

I would like to propose, then, the following reading of this juxtaposition: contemporary nihilism and antihistoricism can be opposed to historicism according to the schema of the antinomy between necessity and freedom established by Kant in the dialectic of pure reason. This is the third antinomy, which he sets out in these terms:

Thesis. Causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them. *Antithesis.* There is no freedom, but everything happens solely in accordance with the laws of nature.⁵

Against Hegelian historicism and its Marxist offshoots, which hold, with the antithesis, that “a completely coherent experience” is possible only if it is ordered by “the guiding thread of the rules,” Kant’s thesis of “causality through freedom”

(however contrary to Kant's own fundamentally Leibnizian philosophy of history, in which he theorizes the progress and infinite perfectibility of man as a regulative idea of reason) can be used to unhinge the instant from the linear series of worldly events and fill it with a sense that transcends phenomena.

So Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Schmitt (and Jacobi before them) can be read according to this interpretive model: each of them gives a significant difference to the contingent instant, which is freed from the necessary series of events, and from the unbroken thread of tradition. They fill it with sense (namely God), life, purified revolution, decision. But each of them thinks contingency, whether they want to or not, as the effect of a causality through freedom. Of an *eschaton* not prepared by a *telos*, i.e., in the terms of that eschatology without teleology that according to Derrida is Marx's only theoretical legacy (which seems to me to amount to the annulment *tout court* of the specificity of a Marxist theory of history).⁶

In his writings on the freedom of the will, Schopenhauer proposed an extremely lucid analysis of the concept of contingency that is the basis for Kant's causality through freedom. Refusing in fact the definition of necessity as "that of which the contrary is impossible" as too generic, he proposes that it be thought as "that which derives from a given sufficient reason":

Now the contingent is conceived as the opposite of the *necessary*; but the one does not contradict the other. For everything contingent is only *relatively* so. For in the real world, where only the contingent is to be found, every event is necessary in regard to its cause; but in regard to everything else with which it coincides in time and space, it is *contingent*.⁷

The only thinkable contingency for Schopenhauer is therefore a relative contingency, understood as a modal relation between two states belonging to completely heterogeneous causal series. The concept of causality through freedom implies instead an absolute contingency, namely the Kantian idea of an absolute spontaneity of causes—"the power to initiate of itself a series of changes"—that according to Schopenhauer forces us to renounce "the essential form of our whole faculty of cognition," i.e., the principle of sufficient reason.⁸ It is at bottom the same objection that Hegel made regarding Jacobi's *salto mortale*: it is a ultimately *salto mortale* for thought, namely a renunciation of knowledge which, since Aristotle, has been *scire per causas*.

One must therefore attempt to think contingency outside of the alternative the Kantian antinomy imposes on thought: *either* a necessary series (that in Hegelian Marxism culminates in freedom) *or* the insertion of a causality through freedom in the necessary series. And it seems to me that this attempt can be undertaken by using the theoretical instruments of a tradition of thought whose very existence is surprising to many, because it has been erased or misrecognized: the Machiavelli-Spinoza tradition.⁹ The scandalous power of Machiavelli's reflection on history has been erased from the scene of modernity: his thought has been transmitted either in the form of a theory of *raison d'Etat* intended as a bridge linking *kratos* and *ethos* (according Meinecke's celebrated definition¹⁰) or in the form of a radical republicanism, as brought to light recently through the different perspectives of Skinner and Pocock.¹¹

The transmission of Spinoza's thought suffered a similar if opposed fate. The acosmic reading of Spinoza's metaphysics, imposed in Germany through the interpretative line Leibniz-Wolff-Jacobi-Hegel and which through Hegel became dominant in all of Europe, has literally absorbed the Spinozian theory of the finite, thus rendering unthinkable a theory of history by insisting on two premises—the interpretation of the finite as pure vanishing, and the modes as a shadowy reality—which have rendered invisible to the gaze of more than three centuries an extraordinary theory of reading and history, a radical attempt to think reality beyond the metaphor of the book.¹²

I will try to briefly trace the essential contours of the theory of history that Machiavelli and Spinoza contribute through delineating three fundamental points.

THE NECESSITY OF CONTINGENCY

When speaking of the “necessity of contingency,” we must first draw a line of demarcation with respect to the *Notwendigkeit der Zufälligkeit* Hegel speaks of in the chapter of the *Science of Logic* dedicated to “absolute necessity.” Absolute necessity is, in that phase of the discourse, blind and horrified by light,¹³ but soon will find within itself the resources for reaching the clarity of the kingdom of freedom and the concept (that is, of Sense). Affirming the necessity of contingency means affirming the primacy of contingency over necessity, of the encounter over the form to which it gives rise, and of the conjunction over the conjuncture. Contingency produces the necessary encounter of the elements that prior to this encounter are as abstract as the space in which they are immersed. And yet the encounter is exterior to the elements that encounter one another, not in the sense that first there

are terms and then there are relations. Exteriority specifies the quality of the relations, prohibiting the thought of a principle internal to the terms that orders their relations, as in the case of the Leibnizian monad and the theory of pre-established harmony; because in this way, for a rigorous thought, there would be a single term that would include in itself the totality of the real. Exteriority is what guarantees the multiplicity of terms, preventing the whole from being closed up within the interiority of a Subject.

This first condition of the thinkability of reality, then, is represented in Machiavellian thought by the concepts of virtue [*virtù*] and fortune [*fortuna*] and their encounter, which takes the philosophical name “occasion” [*occasione*]:

To come to those that, through their virtue and not through fortune, have become rulers, I say that the most excellent are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and similar.... And examining their actions and lives, it will be seen that they owed nothing to fortune except the *occasion* to shape the material into the form that seemed best to them. If they had lacked the *occasion*, the virtue of their spirit would have been sapped, and if they lacked virtue, the *occasion* would have been wasted.¹⁴

An historical event such as the foundation of a State is not therefore the effect of a mythical first cause or the origin of a linear development of historical time (*ab urbe condita*). It is instead the result of a complex and aleatory encounter between virtue and fortune in the form of the occasion, an encounter that can give birth to a world or bring it to an end. Here we witness the deconstruction of the imaginary first cause¹⁵ which gives way to a relation established between virtue and fortune. Virtue constitutes a part of this complex interweaving and should not be construed as a *pars totalis*, but as an intervention in a conjuncture, i.e., a given field of forces. In the conjuncture, however, the intervention is neither rejected in a fatalistic way nor given into in a teleological way. As Jankélévitch consummately puts it, precisely with regard to the thought of the Florentine secretary, “the occasion is not the instant of a solitary becoming, but the instant complicated by ‘polychronism,’ that is, by the sporadic and plural nature of durations.” And he adds:

If, instead of articulating the measure of different times, the durations were granted among them by an immemorally pre-established harmony, or if, instead of agreeing sometimes, there formed among them an absolutely formless cacophony, there would be no place for the occasion. The miraculous occasion depends on polymetry and polyrhythmy, as well as

on the momentary interference of becomings.¹⁶

In Spinoza's thought, the same condition of thinkability is represented by the concept of immanent causality, provided that this is not understood as the spiritual expression of an essence, but instead as an infinite, acentric, and asystematic productivity that gives rise to always new *connexiones* and conjunctions that sometimes become a conjuncture (that is, conjunctions that last). The radical thought of immanent causality allows Spinoza to take his distance from traditional conceptions of temporality. First, a distance from the double image of time that has dominated the history of the West: Neoplatonism, on the one hand, according to which time becomes identified with the life of a universal soul that precedes movement (which in turn appears only in the successive emanation) and, on the other hand, that of Aristotelianism according to which time is dependent on movement, it being the enumerability according to the before and then the after.¹⁷ The fundamental contrast between the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian models is summarized by Wolfson in these terms: "1) according to Aristotle time is generated from movement, while according to Plotinus time is made manifest by movement; 2) according to Aristotle time is the measure of movement, while according to Plotinus time is measured by movement."¹⁸ Second, Spinoza takes his distance from the double concept of eternity: that which originates with Heraclitus and which speaks of an indefinite duration in time, and that which is first thought by Parmenides as an atemporal present. In the terms rendered canonical by scholasticism, these come to be *sempiternitas* and *tota simul*.

Spinoza's theorization of temporality differentiates itself from both of these conceptions. In articulating time and eternity, Spinoza introduces yet another term, that of duration: far from being subordinated to time as a simple segment of it, duration is in reality the pivot of this new conception of time. Duration has an ontological primacy over time and is the very being of the modes, while time is merely the absolutization in the soul of one predominant rhythm with respect to the others. Time is imaginary, and Augustine's *extensio* and *distensio animi* are merely the mechanism through which the imagination functions. But duration is never the duration of a subject, or the movement of a body displaced within a space, which make possible Aristotelian measurement, Leibniz's harmony among the orders of contemporaneous compossibles, and the Kantian transcendental schematism of succession necessary for applying the category of cause to phenomena. Duration exists only as plurality, as the primacy of movement over the moved subject and over the space in which it is moved. Primacy of movement and the encounter. Space and time understood as Cartesian axes of simultaneity and

succession are in reality not the site of the encounter so much as the effect of the encounter: the Kantian schematism of succession, which translates into transcendental terms Cartesianism's transitive causality of mechanistic ontology (just as the schema of *Zugleichsein* translates the Newtonian universal law of gravitation), reveals itself to be inadequate as the explication of reality. The Spinozian model of immanent causality requires thinking each single spatiotemporal scenario as a singular connection of durations that, in the interweaving of their rhythms, gives rise to a conjunction that lasts (i.e. a conjuncture), but that should never be thought according to the organicist model of the *Zeitgeist*.¹⁹ An interweaving of rhythms that do not follow an eternal arrangement, according to the model of Kepler's cosmology, but that renders possible the score of its factual existence: music, as the twin of mathematics, is not the secret of time, but rather one of its possible effects. If eternity does therefore have an arrangement, it cannot be thought as the eternal logical instant (the *tota simul* of Boethius and the *absolute Zugleich* of Hegel) that contains in itself all of time, the past as well as the future; it cannot be thought as the model according to which time is an image, according to the probable story of the *Timaeus*. If therefore eternity is not *logos*, the steel cage of time, then the interweaving is real and not merely ideal, as it still is in Leibniz's metaphysical panoptic. It is not pre-scribed, and has not always already happened in an eternal essence (Hegel points out the derivation of the substantive *Wesen* from the past participle of the verb to be, *gewesen*) which would cancel the *insecuritas* of contingency and the aleatory. The radical thought of an antihumanistic eternity, one that does not constitute the cage of contingency but only its necessity, allows Spinoza to conceive the temporality of the world as *ordo* and *connexio*, confronting a metaphysical tradition can only think time as a serial order (which the historicist tradition shares with its supposed antagonist).²⁰

The necessity of contingency in both Machiavelli and Spinoza calls for the refusal of a model of serial causality in favor of causality thought as a weave, the warp of being, or, better still, as inextricable tangle (against the idea that there is someone, such as in Gadamer's objective spirit, that spins the weave in view of some finality).

THE LOOMING OF NATURE OVER HISTORY: ALEATORY NECESSITY

In book two, chapter five the *Discourses on Livy*, "That the variation of sects and languages, together with the accident of floods or plague, eliminates the memories of things," Machiavelli presents his conception of history in the form of a reflection on the memories of mankind. Already, chapter fifteen of the *Prince* had

proposed a theory of history as the encounter of virtue and fortune: this theory of history is intended as a history of politico-military relations, while the theory of history proposed in *Discourses* II, 5 has a completely different object. This could appear as a fully-fledged philosophy of the history of humanity if it was not precisely an outright refusal of the totalization of memory.

The opening lines of the chapter are clear, even if seemingly difficult to interpret:

To those philosophers who would have it that the world is eternal, I believe that one could reply that if so much antiquity were true, it would be reasonable that there be memory of more than five thousand years—if it were not seen how the memories of times are eliminated by diverse causes, of which part come from men, part from heaven.²¹

Here Machiavelli affirms, despite a very complex syntactical construction, two very simple philosophical theses:

1. The world is eternal.
2. Some causes exist that cancel the memory of things.

The philosophical power of the first thesis is evident: Machiavelli emphatically takes up again the Averroesian thesis, that starting from the Arabic Enlightenment ran through the late Middle Ages and Christian humanism like an underground river, everywhere resisting the dominant philosophy. It was opposed to both Platonism (the *Timaeus*) and Christianity. The second thesis has the same polemical objectives: it takes aim at both the Platonic theory of memory as anamnesis and the sacred Scriptures as the memory of the history of humanity from its origins (the 5000 years that Machiavelli mentions correspond precisely to the antiquity of the world to which *Genesis* refers).

The combination of these two theses leads to a new conception of historical knowledge; it presents itself not as the conceptual double of the historical totality, but as a fragment spared from the powerful causes of the destruction of human memory. This fragment of human memory is in no way the expression of the totality: no reason (understood as Sense) presides over its survival. This fragment is only what remains from the encounters among the forces of nature and human society and the encounters of different societies amongst themselves. The error of Platonism and Christianity, of which Hegel will accomplish a prodigious synthesis, consists precisely in the projection of the fragment onto totality, an error

that finitizes the world and establishes the powerful alliance between memory and truth, an alliance that in turn founds the grand continent of idealism.

Let's now consider the Machiavellian distribution of the causes of forgetting. Machiavelli begins his exposition of that "which comes from men," that is, social causes:

For when a new sect—that is, a new religion—emerges, its first concern is to extinguish the old to give itself reputation; and when it occurs that the orderers of a new sect are of a different language, they easily eliminate it. This thing is known from considering the modes that the Christian sect took against the Gentile. It suppressed all its orders and all its ceremonies and eliminated every memory of that ancient theology. It is true that they did not succeed in eliminating entirely the knowledge of the things done by its excellent men. This arose from having maintained the Latin language, which they were forced to do since they had to write this new law with it. For if they had been able to write with a new language, considering the other persecutions they made, we would not have any record of things past. Whoever reads of the modes taken by Saint Gregory and by the other heads of the Christian religion will see with how much obstinacy they persecuted all the ancient memories, burning the work of the poets and the historians, ruining images, and spoiling every other thing that might convey some sign of antiquity. So if they had added a new language to this persecution, in a very brief time everything would be seen to be forgotten. It is therefore to be believed that what the Christian sect wished to do against the Gentile sect, the Gentile sect would have done against that which was prior to it. And because these sects vary two or three times in five or six thousand years, the memory of the things done prior to that time is lost; and if, however, some sign of them remains, it is considered as something fabulous and is not lent faith to—as happened to the history of Diodorus Siculus, which, though it renders an account of forty or fifty thousand years, is nonetheless reputed, as I believe it to be, a mendacious thing.²²

The theses enunciated by Machiavelli are of great philosophical importance. They are:

1. The Christian religion is nothing other than one "sect" among others.

2. Religious sects are temporal apparatuses of power that tend by nature to hegemony, and the logic that regulates the relationships between them on the world stage is that of war.

3. The memory of the spiritual culture of an epoch resides entirely within the materiality of the language that expresses it; language does not have the expressive centrality of a subject and, therefore, cannot be subject to absolute control; consequently, a language can be entirely destroyed, but in the case in which it resists destruction, it escapes the attempts of power to control it. Its materiality is the *de facto* guarantee of its acentricity and its asystematic structure.

The combination of these three philosophical propositions sketches the outline of a theory of history in which memory, far from constituting the instrument of a more powerful knowledge, is what is at stake in the struggles between different sects: the winner attempts to destroy the memory of the vanquished and impose its own story of the world as the only truth (an attempt that can succeed only if the vanquished is destroyed right to its material roots, language).

Let's consider now the passage in which Machiavelli presents "the causes that come from the heavens," that is, the natural causes of the destruction of memory:

As to the causes that come from heaven, they are those that eliminate the human race and reduce the inhabitants of part of the world to a few. This comes about either through plague or through famine or through an inundation of waters. The most important is the last, both because it is more universal and because those who are saved are all mountain men and coarse, who, since they do not have knowledge of antiquity, cannot leave it to posterity. And if among them someone is saved who has knowledge of it, to make a reputation and a name for himself he conceals it and perverts it in his mode so that what he has wished to write alone, and nothing else, remains for his successors.²³

Here are the philosophical theses that can be drawn out of this passage:

1. The history of humankind is profoundly rooted in nature, whose power can brutally make entire civilizations disappear; consequently, the continuity of memorial narrative is nothing other than the continuity of a fragment, of an island that emerges above the flood of oblivion.

2. Memory does not uniformly permeate society: there is a stratification of memory within society that excludes the model of expressive causality and the *pars totalis*.²⁴

3. Memory is much more of an instrument of power and therefore the perversion of truth for a political end than it is the adequate consciousness of the past.

Together these three theses constitute a theoretical position that can be read as an *ante litteram* refutation of the great systems of idealism. However, an unexpected source for this passage can be identified in Plato's *Timaeus*. In effect, there is a passage in Plato's cosmological work that Machiavelli's text seems, in many respects, to be modeled on.

Within the dialogue, a story is told about the existence of a city in ancient Greece whose inhabitants are very similar to those Socrates spoke of in the *Republic*. Plato underlines that what is in question in this story is not an invented myth but a true discourse. The reason why the memory of this city is lost is that the Greeks are all "young in spirit," because in the city there is not "any old opinion of traditional antiquity, no white-haired teacher for the age." And this is the reason, according to the narration given by an old Egyptian priest to Solon:

Many destructions of mankind in many ways have come to be and will be—the greatest of these by fire and water, but different and lesser ones by thousands of other means.... And when in turn the gods purify the earth by flooding it with waters, then those who live in the mountains—herdsmen and shepherds—are saved, while those who live in the cities near you are swept into the sea by the rivers.... And if anything beautiful or great or that also has something distinctive about it has come to pass somewhere, either near you or here or even in another region that we know by hearsay—all such things have been written down from olden times and preserved here in our temples. But it happens that at any given time your lands and those of other people have only just been equipped with writing and all the things that cities need; and after the usual span of years, the heavenly stream comes back again like a plague to sweep your people away, and leaves only the illiterate and uneducated among you, so that all over again from the beginning, you become young, as it were, knowing nothing either of things here or whatever was in your own land in olden times. At any rate, Solon, the genealogies you went through just now about the events

in your land aren't much different from children's stories. First of all, you remember only one flooding of the earth, whereas many have come to pass before this; and furthermore, you don't know that the most beautiful and best race among men was born in the place where you live, from whose little bit of seed that was left over, there exists both you and the entire city that is now yours; but you've forgotten all this because for many generations the survivors met their end without giving voice to themselves in writing.²⁵

The essential point of the Platonic narration figures equally in Machiavelli's text: floods destroy the memory of humanity because the only survivors are illiterate. However, as is frequently the case in the history of philosophy, apparently similar arguments are inscribed in opposed theoretical strategies. The flood functions in Plato as an argument in favor of a lost original wisdom (a conception that Nietzsche would define as "Egypticism"), a thesis of the progressive fall of the ages of the world made paradigmatic by Diodorus Siculus, whose history Machiavelli qualifies as a "mendacious thing."²⁶ For Machiavelli there is no lost originary wisdom, but only memory that has disappeared forever, or the political mystification of memory.

Machiavelli outlines a theory of history which eliminates the metaphysical dyad of Origin and End, while ceaselessly affirming the aleatory necessity of encounters—encounters between virtue and fortune—in the form of multiple material forces: the materiality of the apparatuses of religious power, the materiality of languages, hunger, sicknesses, natural disasters, and the cultural stratification of society. The memory of a civilization is therefore a fragile fragment of matter in the face of the immense power of nature, which has nothing teleological about it. It can survive this immense power for some time and imagine itself to be eternal, projecting itself over the totality of time, but its destiny is, despite everything, oblivion.

When Spinoza examines biblical hermeneutics in chapter 7 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he analyzes the Bible as a crucible of materiality intersecting at different levels, whose sense is in part lost forever due to the voracity of time ("*tempus edax*," Spinoza exclaims at the culmination of the argument). At the base of his entire metaphysical construction, Spinoza resumes and strengthens Machiavelli's proposition [*discorso*], which could hardly find a more efficacious synthesis than in this axiom from the fourth part of the *Ethics*:

In nature there exists no singular thing than that which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed.²⁷

History is not legible in the mode of an idealist *Naturphilosophie*, according to a vector that has its origin in nature, but as the *emergence* of a level of complexity different than nature, which has nothing teleological about it with respect to other levels.²⁸ Aleatory necessity is therefore the very necessity of contingency: the latter expresses the absence of the teleology through which regularities are formed (whose invariance compels us to think of them as the effect of a teleonomy), while the former expresses the interference of destructive effects on these regularities. Contingency is thinkable in these terms only under the primacy of this aleatory necessity; otherwise the event might be thought of as the irruption of the divine in nature, that is, as a sign that indicates the existence of a moral order superimposed on the natural order.

THE RUPTURE OF THE ANCIENT ALLIANCE BETWEEN MEMORY AND TRUTH

Analyzing the mythical conceptions of memory in ancient Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant finds that, in a first sense, Mnemosyne, the sister of Kronos, presides over the poetic function:

Memory transports the poet into the midst of ancient events, back into their own time. The organization of time in his account simply reproduces the sequence of events at which he is somehow present, in the order in which they occurred, from the beginning.²⁹

In particular, Hesiod's *Theogony* established the alliance between memory and truth, which allows one to tap into "the primeval reality from which the cosmos arose, and which makes it possible to understand the process of becoming as a whole."³⁰ However, in a second sense, within the doctrine of the reincarnation of souls, memory is no longer that which furnishes mortals with the secret of origins, but the means for reaching the end of time, putting an end to the cycle of generations. The soul, by means of anamnesis, has understood how to connect the end with the beginning and close its cycle, not in order to start over again, but "to escape definitively from it and leave time forever."³¹

Whether therefore memory tells us the secret of time or frees us from it, for myth it is the instrument of truth. Such an alliance between truth and memory, which at the same time constitutes the identity of the subject and the world (as Leibnizian thought demonstrates), implies the possibility of reading the totality of historical development according to a logic of unitary and continuous Sense, which human knowledge traces from its origins through the faculty of memory (anamnesis). This conception constitutes the most powerful affirmation of the theoretical line running through Western philosophy under the name of idealism. It is Plato who inaugurates this powerful form of philosophy with the thought of truth (ἀληθεια) as the absence of forgetting (λήθη)—in other words, remembrance—and it is Hegel that carries it into the very heart of the infinite totality, identifying *Erinnerung* and *absolute Wissen*. “*Omnis scientia nihil aliud est, quam reminiscientia*” (Science is but an image of the truth): breaking the ancient alliance between memory and truth that institutes the originality and primacy of Sense is the challenge accepted by Machiavelli and by Spinoza.

For Machiavelli, as we have seen, memory is not linked to the spiritual transmission of truth, but is traversed by the double materiality of language and power. Spinoza picks up and extends this theory: in the corollary to *Ethics* IIP44S, he searches for the reason why the imagination represents things to itself as contingent. Now, beyond the explanation of the contingency-effect, to which we will return, what is particularly interesting in this passage is the reification of time (that is, the transformation of the measure of a relation among durations to something which sustains itself). Through representation, time becomes one imaginary object among others, which makes it possible to institute a relationship between the abstract instant of perception and its content:

No one doubts that we also imagine time, namely, from the fact that we imagine some bodies to move more slowly than others, or more quickly, or with the same speed. Let us suppose, then, a child, who saw Peter for the first time yesterday, in the morning, but saw Paul at noon, and Simon in the evening, and today again saw Peter in the morning. It is clear from IIP18 that as soon as he sees the morning light, he will immediately imagine the sun taking the same course through the sky as he saw on the preceding day, or he will imagine the whole day, and Peter together with the morning, Paul with noon, and Simon with the evening. That is, he will imagine the existence of Paul and of Simon with a relation to future time. On the other hand, if he sees Simon in the evening, he will relate Paul and Peter to the time past, by imagining them together with past time. And he

will do this more uniformly, the more often he has seen them in this same order.³²

Through the reification of time in the form of an imaginary line traced from the path of the sun, and therefore, in a more abstract way, from the line drawn through the three moments of the day (*tempus matutinum*, *tempus meridianum*, and *tempus vespertinum*), the content of successive aleatory encounters is transformed into a normative model for the future and the past: time becomes the arrangement of events according to a serial order, which memory inscribes into habit, and this fortuitous order is transformed into law. While in fact the real durations, in their intertwining, weave a complex order irreducible to the serial succession of events that run along the rails of a temporal substratum, the representation of this order produces an inadequate image of temporality under the form of a succession of empty instants, filled by perceptual content, the effect of a body's encounter with the surrounding environment.

And it is the way the imagination and memory operate that produces the chain-effect, or, to use Spinoza's terminology, the *concatenatio*. Things are in fact interwoven (*ordo et connexio rerum*), but memory arranges them according to a timeline. In this way, the complexity of the relationship between things—their *connexio*, their order—is perceived as a serial order of events according to the body's affections. This *concatenatio* of ideas reproduces the succession of moments of an individual experience in the form of a mnemonic chain. The entire effort of reason and the intellect consists in attempting to break this simple, linear order so as to re-establish, with a new *concatenatio* at the level of ideas, the complexity of the relations between things. For this reason Spinoza never defines the order of the intellect as order by concatenation, instead reserving it, as knowledge of reality starting from God, that is, from the concept of immanent causality, for the definition of order by connection.

The distinction in Spinoza's text between the terms *connexio* and *concatenatio* becomes very important in the interpretation of *Ethics* IIP18S, which has for its object the way in which memory functions:

Memory ... is nothing other than a certain connection of ideas involving the nature of things which are outside the human body—a connection which is in the mind according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body. I say, *first*, that the connection is only of those ideas which involve the nature of things outside the human body, but not

of the ideas which explain the nature of the same things. For they are really (by IIP16) ideas of affections of the human body which involve both its nature and that of external bodies. I say, *second*, that this connection happens according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body in order to distinguish it from the connection of ideas which happens according to the order of the intellect, by which the mind perceives things through their first causes, and which is the same in all men.³³

Memory is nothing other than a certain *concatenatio* of ideas, which involves the nature of things exterior to the human body. This concatenation takes place in the mind according to the order and concatenation of the affections of the body. This means that history as tradition, as the collective memory of a people, derives from a chronology of the affections of the social body. These chronologies are the bearers of ideas that involve the social body and external bodies at the same time, but not of ideas that explain the nature of them. Consequently, history as inadequate knowledge, the product of the concatenations of memory, arises as the simple linear succession of events, while history of the second order of knowledge is precisely the deconstruction, on the basis of the conception of immanent causality, of this simple order. This second order does not grasp things according to the transitive model of causal series, but departs from the model of the *connexio*, or rather, structural causality. The linear conception of historical time results therefore, according to Spinoza, from the way memory functions by proceeding through serial concatenations of the ideas of the body's affections while remaining unaware of the complex connection of causes that subtend and produce this apparent simplicity.



To conclude, let's return to the question of contingency. In the scholium cited above, Spinoza writes that if one day a child "sees Peter in the morning, then Paul at noon, and Simon in the evening," the day after, when encountering Peter in the morning, the child will imagine meeting Paul at noon and Simon in the evening, or, when encountering Simon in the evening, will imagine Peter and Paul by relating them to the past. But, Spinoza writes,

if it should happen at some time that on some other evening he sees James instead of Simon, then on the following morning he will now imagine Simon, now James, together with the evening time, but not both at once... His imagination, therefore, will vacillate and he will imagine now this one,

now that one, with the future evening time, that is, he will regard neither of them as certainly future, but both of them as contingently future.³⁴

Both the necessity and the contingency of these encounters belong to the imaginary order of memory: the reification of time, and the filling of the instant with the quality of the experience of the subject, produce a necessity of the series whose infringement is called contingency. This necessity and this contingency are the categorial effects of a perception of the world in which the time of the Subject is the only unit for measuring events: the empty line on which it places them is filled with the qualities of the world, but does not explain them. It registers the sequential happening and absolutizes it, losing the interweaving rhythms that constitute it.

NOTES

1. Vittorio Morfino, "Temporalità e contingenza: Machiavelli e Spinoza o dell'infrazione dell'antinomia kantiana," *IncurSIONI Spinoziste* (Milan: Mimesis, 2002), 85-100. [TN: I would like to thank Vittorio Morfino and Jason E. Smith for their assistance with this translation.]
2. Fabio Merlini, *Incanti della storia e patologie della memoria. Studi sulla trasformazione 1* (Milan: Guerini, 1997), 28.
3. TN: Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière was a Huguenot writer and historian in sixteenth century France. Among his works are the two volume *Histoire de France depuis l'an 1550 jusqu'à ce temps* (1581) and a general theory of history, *Histoire des Histoires* (1599).
4. According to Taubes, we can see "a trajectory between Kierkegaardian exception and Schmitt's definition of sovereignty." Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 65. Naturally, cf. also Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949).
5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Alan W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), A444/B472.
6. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, "Marx *sub specie theatri*: La notte e il lampo in Louis Althusser," *IncurSIONI Spinoziste*, 115-124.
7. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, trans. Eric F.J. Payne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.
8. Schopenhauer, *Prize Essay*, 7-8. It is no coincidence, in my view, that Heidegger, when addressing the principle of reason, proposes the alternative Leibniz or Silesius, that is, metaphysics or ecstatic abandonment, carrying out a drastic reduction of the complexity of modern thought. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, "Spinoza nella storia dell'essere: Il principio di ragione in Spinoza e in Leibniz," *IncurSIONI Spinoziste*, 31-46.
9. TN: Morfino has written a detailed and substantial account of the encounter between Spinoza and Machiavelli. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, *Il tempo e l'occasione: L'incontro Spinoza Machiavelli* (Milan: Il Filarete, 2002).
10. "Raison d'Etat is a principle of conduct of the highest duplicity and duality; it presents one aspect to physical nature and another to reason. And it also has (if one may so express it) a middle aspect, in which what pertains to nature mingles with what pertains to the mind." Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 5. Meinecke traces a linear history of this idea beginning with Machiavelli, passing through jurisnaturalism, and ending with Fichte and Hegel. With respect to this interpretive framework, it is interesting that the work of Senellart tends to show how "under the concept of *raison d'Etat*, we are confronted, from the sixteenth century onwards, with two distinct forms of rationality, one warlike, and the other economic." Michel Senellart, *Machiavélisme et raison d'Etat* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 11.
11. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, eds. Gisela

- Bock, Quentin Skinner, Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
12. On the book as a metaphor of nature and history, cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), but before this, the brilliant observations of Louis Althusser, “From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy,” in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1999), 11-76, and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
13. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 487-488. [TN: Di Giovanni translates *Lichtscheue* as “averse to light,” but a more literal rendition would be photophobia, signifying a hypersensitivity of the eyes to light, and a fear. The phobic element of Hegel’s original text is preserved in Arturo Moni’s Italian translation, which Morfino alludes to here.]
14. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, VI. My emphasis. [TN: I have translated from the Italian original, which resulted in a slight modification to the English translation by Russell Price available from Cambridge University Press.]
15. In this regard, it may be noted that the expression *causa prima* in Machiavelli does not refer to an *Ursache*, that is to an origin (*ursprungliche Sache*), but to a relation of forces, or a *Wechselwirkung*, in Hegelian terms (Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* I, 4). For further clarification regarding the concept of *Wechselwirkung*, cf. Vittorio Morfino, “*Causa Sui* or *Wechselwirkung*: Engels between Hegel and Spinoza,” trans. Peter Thomas. *Plural Temporality: Transindividuality and the Aleatory Between Spinoza and Althusser* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 18-45.
16. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rien 1: La manière et l’occasion*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), 117. I owe Paulo Barone for the retrieval of this splendid passage. [TN: I have utilized Zakiya Hanafi’s translation for part of the present translation of Jankélévitch. Cf Vittorio Morfino, “The Many Times of the Multitude,” *Plural Temporality*, 145.]
17. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* IV.
18. H.A. Wolfson, *The philosophy of Spinoza: unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 335. According to Ricœur, Augustine proposes an alternative position to both Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism: “Augustine alone dares to allow that one might speak of a span of time—a day, an hour—without a cosmological reference. The notion of *distensio animi* will serve, precisely, as a substitute for this cosmological basis for the span of time.” Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLoughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 14-15.
19. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, “Sul sincronico: La teoria del tempo storico in Louis Althusser,” *IncurSIONI Spinoziste*, 101-114.
20. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, “L’evoluzione della categoria di causalità in Spinoza: Da *series* a *connexio*,” *IncurSIONI Spinoziste*, 15-21.
21. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5. [TN: For all quotes from the *Discourses*, I have used Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov’s translation, available from The University of Chicago Press.]
22. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5.
23. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5.
24. Balibar defines this principle as “the social homoeomery” (*l’homéométrie sociale*): this consists in thinking that “within every social (or political, or cultural) whole, the ‘parts’ or ‘cells’ are necessarily similar to the whole itself.” Étienne Balibar, “Foucault and Marx: The question of nominalism,” *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 44.
25. Plato, *Timaeus*, 22d-23c. [TN: I have used Peter Kalkavage’s translation. See Peter Kalkavage, *Plato’s Timaeus* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2001).]

26. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 5.
27. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVP1. [TN: For all Spinoza quotations, I have used Edwin Curley's translation, available in various editions from Princeton University Press.]
28. Cf. Vittorio Morfino, "Ordine delle idee et ordine delle cose in Spinoza e in Hegel," *IncurSIONi Spinoziste*, 47-56.
29. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Mythic Aspects of Memory," *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd with Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 117.
30. Vernant, "Mythic Aspects of Memory," 120.
31. Vernant, "Mythical Aspects of Memory," 132.
32. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP44S.
33. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP18S.
34. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP44S.

**andreas vrahimis, *encounters
between analytic and
continental philosophy*
(palgrave, 2013)**

jack reynolds

In recent times there has been a plethora of writing on the analytic-continental ‘divide’, whether with a view to building bridges, calling forth a plague upon both houses, or transcending this sectarian seen towards a post-analytic and meta-continental horizon. Another trajectory, albeit one that should also accompany any of the above strategies, is those that seek to problematize and critique the very idea of analytic or continental philosophy, and hence any putative contrast between philosophical types; a sort of sceptical project that attempts to cause us to rethink these clichés and stereotypes. Andreas Vrahimis’ *Encounters Between Analytic and Continental Philosophy* is one of the best books in this latter genre, complementing Simon Glendinning’s *The Idea of Continental Philosophy* (2007), and Aaron Preston’s *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (2006).

To give a short précis of the book, Vrahimis re-reads some of the historically important encounters and debates between ostensible analytic and continental philosophers (i.e. those retrospectively claimed as such) with a view to a quasi-debunking of the reception of such debates. I call it a quasi-debunking, since I am not sure we get a sufficiently detailed explanation regarding both the origin and persistence of this ‘divide’ for it to count as a fully-fledged debunking. It is, however, a book that is characterised by some impressively detailed scholarship, and one of Vrahimis’ central claims is that subsequent generations of philosophers have misunderstood what was at stake in the initial famous encounters, say

between Heidegger and Carnap, or Husserl and Frege, and in so doing have hence themselves created the “rotten scene” characteristic of philosophy since the 1960s, albeit with some signs of increasing pluralism today. As Vrahimis says, “... these encounters have often been the subject of misinterpretation and over-inflation, as well as elementary errors in scholarship in some cases. The institution of the divide was, to a great extent founded upon such supposedly failed attempts at communication, which were often mistakenly considered to be precedents of the divide” (2). To gloss, then, for Vrahimis our talk about our failed history has been largely erroneous, and has served to performatively found a ‘divide’ that wasn’t really there prior to those errors or misinterpretations, or at least not in the way that had been assumed. Vrahimis, then, basically offers an error theory about the ‘divide’, in which there is no object, or set of objects, that corresponds to our talk of such objects.

This is certainly part of the story, fitting nicely with the fact that the label ‘continental’ was initially a projection by Anglophone philosophers upon their neighbours the other side of the *chunnel*, and one that was no doubt an over-simplification at best. But if the analytic-continental ‘divide’ talk is a series of mistakes, it seems to me that we are owed an explanation for the pervasiveness and apparent intransigence of such mistakes (just as an error theorist must provide one concerning why we continue to believe in morality, say). Those who think, as I do, that there is a complex and messy philosophical and methodological reality to the idea of a ‘divide’ have an explanations of sorts (albeit one that is not alone sufficient) for key dimensions of the history of philosophy in the twentieth century. Now is not the place for me to consider the array of non-essentialist options one can pursue in this regard, other than to note that some have seen time as central (Reynolds, *Chronopathologies*, 2012), others have seen realism/anti-realism as central (cf. Braver, *A Thing of This World*, 2007), and some argue for the significance of overlapping methodological preferences and “no go” zones that are characteristic of most (but not necessarily all) philosophers associated with either camp (Chase and Reynolds, *Analytic versus Continental*, 2011). But if the ‘divide’ has no real philosophical significance as Vrahimis argues, and if we tend to egregiously misunderstand our own history of philosophy, one needs to account for those mistakes. What, then, is the motivation for this repetition? In the end, I am not sure that Vrahimis fully answers this question, but he does draw our attention to extra-philosophical factors that have too often been ignored. Unlike almost all of the other writing upon the analytic-continental ‘divide’ (including my own), as well as each considered in isolation, Vrahimis gives

some serious historical attention to the impact of the Great War, for example, as well as the dispute about psychologism and the European philosophical profession's attempt to preserve Chairs for philosophers rather than experimental psychologists. In this case, Vrahimis notes that this is *both* a philosophical dispute and also one over-determined by extra-philosophical factors (cf. 30). I think that is right, and that it might also be extended to the idea of the 'divide' more generally. Vrahimis does not, however. In conclusion, Vrahimis simply says: "philosophers have committed these mistakes because they were seeking some justification for this image of itself that philosophy had conjured" (183). This circularity does not look like an explanation to me. It just defers the question that needs an answer, which remains one regarding why and how this image was conjured. Surely some mistakes in scholarship are not sufficient to have caused the hostility and silence (and on his view near univocal misunderstanding) typical of the twentieth century? Perhaps anticipating such remarks, Vrahimis adds, "in the attempts to shout across the gulf, one might have expected to find an explanation for the prevailing silence. But perhaps such efforts precluded looking closely enough in order to see the flawed nature of the object of their inquiry" (183). He also suggests that, "*extra-philosophical factors cause such misinterpretations*" (182, my italics). What extra-philosophical factors exactly? While these are not specified again in the conclusion, some of them have been sketched out in the rest of the book, and they include the world wars, institutional and professional matters to do with the preservation of philosophy's place in the academy, and, borrowing from Glendinning, a desire to immunise one's philosophical methods against the possibility of failure by projecting them on to a continental other. Vrahimis' book suggests that these were all involved, and undoubtedly they all were, but the one-way causal claim here (see above italicised quote) seems to me to be stronger than is warranted. I don't see that his complicated and extra-philosophical account of the genesis of the 'divide' establishes that there might not also be a complicated philosophical reality to that story. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is only if we accept this that we can begin to make sense of why so many philosophers have conceived of themselves and their work within these binary terms.

Spinoza in Paris - The French Evaluation Machine

Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavallès to Deleuze* (Stanford, 2014)

Alison Ross

There are a remarkable variety of functions exercised by the name ‘Spinoza’ in modern intellectual history. Each of them has their own effect on the meaning carried by the name. A sizeable portion of the effort expended on the name Spinoza propagates the image of a phantom; its invocation in intellectual history is often only loosely connected to the ideas of the seventeenth century philosopher. The effects of this name are no less potent for that fact. Perhaps the most famous instance of the energy that illuminates this name is the pantheist dispute that raged between Jacobi and Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century regarding Lessing’s alleged confession to Jacobi of his ‘Spinozism’. The dispute is as well known for the colour of the biographical events around it, as it is for the precise content of the allegation. Mendelssohn was so concerned to expedite the publication of his defence of Lessing that he went on foot with his manuscript to the publisher’s in the New Year’s Eve’s snow. He died of the cold he caught four days later. His friends blamed Jacobi for Mendelssohn’s death; on their account, Jacobi had published, without permission or warning, the correspondence he had had with Mendelssohn on Lessing: *On the Teaching of Spinoza in Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn*. Mendelssohn had felt the need to rush to his friend’s defence as a consequence and publish: *To the Friends of Lessing: an Appendix to Mr. Jacobi’s Correspondence on the Teaching of Spinoza*. It was Jacobi who, on the other hand, felt he had cause to publish the correspondence. On hearing second hand that Mendelssohn was planning to publish against the allegation of Spinozism

in his *Morning Hours* Jacobi had felt slighted and had rushed to publish the correspondence in retaliation.

Leaving the dramatic scene of Mendelssohn's urgent visit to the publisher to one side, the content of the dispute also had an intensely biographical colour to it. In Jacobi's version, if Lessing had confessed his Spinozism to him, then he was likely to have confided his views to others. He sought therefore some constraint from those around Lessing of posthumous public attributions to him of metaphysical theism, in part to avoid the spectacle of dissenting versions of Lessing's late views circulating. The warning he sent to Mendelssohn's circle through Elise Reimarus was rebuffed. His subsequent relating of Lessing's confession that 'There is no philosophy but the philosophy of Spinoza', provoked the ire of Mendelssohn and others who held that the circumstances of the 'confession' only showed that Jacobi was the unwitting butt of Lessing's irony. Other, substantive issues were aired in the ensuing dispute: such as, whether there is any significant distinction to be made between refined pantheism and theism, and whether it is possible to obtain a consistent thesis from Spinoza's writing on the topic of God. The issues of particular sensitivity, however, all related to the status of pantheism vis-à-vis German Idealism: the main question here was the authority of reason in relation to faith, did Spinozist pantheist theses ultimately flow from consistent reflection on the conception of nature in German Idealism? Jacobi's position had been that Spinoza's rationalist philosophy drew out the atheistic implications of German Idealism; thus Spinozism was the underpinning as well as the consequence of Enlightenment thinking. Mendelssohn's defence of Lessing attempted to show that the distinction between refined pantheism and theism was moot and, by extension, the conclusions Jacobi attached to Spinozist 'rationalist' inspired reasoning had no monopoly on the conclusions or issues at stake. The positive reputation of Spinozism as the unsparing pursuit of the conclusions able to be deduced from initial premises is a recurring spur for proclaimed affiliation to Spinoza; it is also the basis for its association with an enthusiasm for reason akin to fanaticism.¹

The very fact that 'Spinozism' was shorthand not just for God-less pantheism, but also for the undeveloped or unacknowledged implications of German Idealism leads us to the inevitable conclusion that 'Spinoza' is not just a name, it also has a history as an instrument that is used in intellectual disputes; a way of signalling intellectual affinities and banishing opponents and pretenders. In the case of the pantheist controversy the allegation of Spinozism reached far into the politically charged atmosphere of the German enlightenment and well beyond philosophy.

In Jacobi's account, Lessing's confession was precipitated by Goethe's poem 'Prometheus'; Goethe later called the poem that instigated these events 'priming powder for an explosion'.² As Hans Blumenberg has argued, the words were carefully chosen, since the controversy uncovered beliefs that were publically disavowed and needed forced disclosure. The role of the poem and even the context of its attribution to Goethe were all highly sensitive matters – hence the poem was not, in Goethe's re-telling, the match that set off the explosion that uncovered heterodox views, but its 'priming powder'.

The history of this controversy, including the scholarship that redraws its contours and engages in disputes over the line dividing its villains and heroes, shows that the breadth of what the name can signal is as indeterminate as the stakes of the various internecine struggles over ideas it gets deployed in. But the fact that it does signal, and that what it signals often draws on non-philosophical registers, including the historical associations it gathers with the fate of particular people and causes, is what is important here.

Some of the functions and effects of the name Spinoza are treated in Knox Peden's masterful history of twentieth century French rationalism.³ Peden is well aware of the cipher like functions of this particular name. But it is also the case that the book stands as an example of the energy that collects around Spinoza's name. In Peden's hands the name 'Spinoza' describes nothing less than the ideal of a meta-philosophical position on philosophy. Two remarks taken respectively from the beginning and the end of the book can be cited in support of this thesis. Early in the book, Peden claims that it is Spinoza who teaches us to scrutinise affective investments (6). To be accurate, the compliment is given to those affiliated to the name: he argues that 'a Spinozist' adheres to the 'principle' that the forces and processes that constitute a subject are 'amenable to a rationalist elucidation' (6). Later, Peden remarks that there is an 'historical effect' in Deleuze's position that "Spinoza teaches the philosopher how to become a non-philosopher": 'It corrodes philosophical efforts to ground morality or justification in principles that philosophy would deem a priori and thus unimpeachable. The result is a healthy scepticism toward the rights philosophy often arrogates for itself' (263). Spinoza thus becomes in the hands of intellectual history a highly specific instrument: the one able to provide critical distance on philosophy. And one might be forgiven for asking whether this means that affective investment in the name Spinoza is uniquely justified and exempt from scrutiny?

The book has seven chapters, each dealing with major figures in twentieth century French philosophy. There is a chapter devoted to the Spinozism of Jean Cavaillès, followed by a chapter that stages the dispute between Martial Gueroult and Ferdinand Alquié in terms of the differences between Spinozist and Cartesian rationalism. A chapter on Jean-Toussaint Desanti subtitled 'between Spinoza and Husserl' precedes two chapters each on the Spinozism of Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's Spinozism is qualified in the title of the final chapter of the book as 'strange'.

Peden's history of French rationalism falls squarely in the field of intellectual history. It is philosophical subtle and literate intellectual history. Its erudition and attention to detail are impressive. The figures he treats are presented in the full regalia of their substantial engagement with important topics in mathematics, science and philosophy. With the critical assessment of philosophical pretension the field of intellectual history licenses, I think one thing that could be drawn from the book is the encouragement of some healthy scepticism about the types of postures unhelpfully taken up in the practice 'philosophy'. Some of the figures and positions treated in the book may be taken as case studies for this thesis.

There have been a number of influential characterisations of the period of twentieth century French thought: each of which positions different figures or trajectories from German philosophy as pivotal. It is true to say that twentieth century French philosophy wrestles with the shadow cast by the colossal figures of modern German philosophy. We can mention Vincent Descombes' classic text *Modern French Philosophy*, which identifies Nietzsche as the key figure for post-war luminaries like Deleuze and Foucault; or Descombes' mention of the significance of Kojève's lectures of the 1930's for the anti-Hegelian impetus that structures the itinerary of many French thinkers and which also go some way to explain the intransigence of the metaphysical reading of Hegel on the continent.⁴ Similarly, the selection of the major figures of German phenomenology as precursors and interlocutors for their French progeny has a wide purchase.⁵ German phenomenology is obviously an unsurpassable point of reference for French phenomenologists, such as Marion, but several important French thinkers, including Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Derrida and Nancy, are also all but unintelligible in the absence of this phenomenological frame.

One of the striking features of all of these intellectual histories is the promiscuous relation to the master German thinkers of many of the French: after all, the study of the history of modern philosophy is enshrined in the French education

system and since the requirements for the publication of theses in philosophy inevitably includes material studied from the curriculum it becomes plausible, but not very helpful, to find forms of ‘influence’ (either positive or negative) that can connect almost any well known French thinker to almost any German philosophy of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It seems fitting therefore that the new map drawn in Peden’s book shakes up the complacent tone in which the requirements of participation in the ‘educational system’ morphs into ‘influence’. Although the texts of Spinoza are included in the French exams and lazy claims to ‘influence’ in this case too are unavoidable, Peden’s choice of Spinoza is not merely one more addition to the pantheon of sprawling historical ‘influences’. It is a deliberate selection of a figure able to divide the landscape of 20th C. French thought. The division it marks is not between the self-conscious affiliation to competing giant historical figures, since in this study Spinoza has no specific counter-figure, and the use of the name is itself, as I will argue below, semantically porous, but between the *movements* of ‘rationalism’ and ‘phenomenology’. Following Canguilhem, Spinoza’s name is the instrument Peden uses to conjure this division between movements. In many respects, the division between movements proposed is by turns more subtle and comprehensive than Descombes’ Hegel-Nietzsche opposition. Although it is precisely on account of its comprehensiveness, that the division is also systematically and frequently breached.

At a basic level we seem to be dealing with *ideas* of ‘phenomenology’ and ‘rationalism’, which over the history of the opposition that Peden charts have become so fixed that it almost counts as an objection against Deleuze that he manages to combine aspects of these movements (248): ‘reading Spinoza “after” Heidegger has meant subjecting Spinoza to Heidegger as a condition, whether Deleuze is cognizant of this fact or not’ (252). With the notable exceptions of Althusser and Deleuze the thinkers who populate Knox’s study of the French ‘rationalist’ landscape are lesser known outside of philosophy than those that feature in the competing histories of the period. Indeed one of the best features of the book is that it restores the complex ecology of French philosophy, not just in the diverse names it covers, but just as importantly in the explanation of how argument and debate play a role in the formation of their positions. This gives the reader an engaging account of the process involved in philosophy that can be obscured by the dominance of celebrated names. Moreover, the nature of the rationalist dispute with phenomenology heightens the central place that grappling with the consequences of scientific research and especially the revolutions in twentieth century science has for twentieth century rationalist French

thought. The twentieth century history of rationalism is at the antipodes of the phenomenological quest for the 'return to the things themselves': it participates in the revolutions in twentieth century physics and mathematics.

Foucault had earlier considered that the sensitivity to the profound changes occurring in science and mathematics in the twentieth century lent to the figures of French rationalism the status of an intellectual parallel to the Frankfurt School's inquiry into the history of forms of modern reason and their potentially despotic effects.⁶ The comparison is suggestive: after all, they each share some antipathy to aspects of phenomenological doctrine and each grapple with the modern sensitivity to the paradox of the historical contingencies of reason. But the French tradition shelters a more diverse set of inquiries into practices of reason than the critique of instrumental rationality on offer in the Frankfurt School and it is also more scientifically literate. In both of these respects it follows an idiosyncratic itinerary that needs to be understood locally. Hence the real core of Peden's study is this peculiar French context. One of the peculiarities of this French context is that as well as its own concerns, histories and figures - it has its own slogan.

Early in the book Peden invokes the oft-cited opposition coined by Foucault between philosophies of 'the concept' and those of 'the subject' (20). It is worth returning to Foucault's initial formulation of this opposition: There is, he wrote, a 'dividing line' that cuts through the cleavages that 'were able to oppose Marxists and non-Marxists, Freudians and non-Freudians, specialists in a single discipline and philosophers, academics and non-academics, theorists and politicians'. This 'other' 'dividing line which cuts through all these oppositions ... is the line that separates a philosophy of experience, of sense and of subject and a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality and of concept'.⁷ The opposition, in its telling received abbreviation to the words 'concept' and 'subject' as well as to a noticeably narrowed intra-philosophical dispute is in danger, I think, of becoming something of an empty slogan, a rallying cry for those who identify with the side of 'the concept', which is the positive pole of the opposition in Foucault's telling. Peden puts the philosophical issue at the core of this slogan in bold terms early in the book: 'Spinozist rationalism [can be distinguished from the Cartesian variety because] it refused the notion of a "subject"' (6). Later in the same paragraph this 'refusal' is qualified as a 'demotion' in which 'anterior processes or forces' that are more fundamental than the subject are brought into view. If such demotion could be said to link such irreconcilable projects as Althusser's Marxism and Levinas' ethics then the issue that divides them is 'whether [the]... anterior processes or forces' that are more fundamental than the subject 'are in principle amenable

to a rationalist elucidation, however abstract or incomplete. A Spinozist thinks they are.' (6). This might be a case of what Freud called the narcissism of minor differences: since amongst philosophers tasks of elucidation are willingly if not always competently assumed – indeed, if we remove the words 'rationalist' and 'Spinozist' we are left with 'abstract' 'incomplete' 'elucidation', which almost perfectly describes Levinas's writing. The work of identification provided by the name 'Spinoza' and the movement of 'rationalism' is itself in need of 'elucidation'.

For instance, the reference to 'the concept', in its use as a slogan, is not just reducible to a philosophical allegiance, it is supposed to convey the ascetic regard for rational elucidation that ends in self-sacrifice. This muscular outline, which is filled out in Peden's Introduction and opening chapter, to my mind credits philosophical elucidation with a status and significance it doesn't always deserve; neither can this position be fully insulated from the tenets of the philosophy of 'the subject' it supposedly opposes, not least because the way it is used by some of the stars of this book and the frequency of its invocation is a way of building up the dense and positive layers of meaning carried by a 'word'. The reference to the 'concept' is one way of establishing an authenticating reference that a speaker might claim. Foucault's initial account of this dividing line, which he specifies is not intra-philosophical and also, as he emphasises, merely one amongst many possible networks of affiliation pertinent in this period of French intellectual history, may be cited in support of this position. I'll return to this point. More crudely, the opposition has evolved in a way that ignores the fact that in the original formulation of this opposition Foucault identifies the phenomenological heritage of both sides. He writes, 'On the one hand, one network is that of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty; and then another is that of Cavailles, Bachelard and Canguilhem. In other words, we are dealing with two modalities according to which phenomenology was taken up in France, when quite late – around 1930 – it finally began to be, if not known, at least recognized'.⁸ A similar problem occurs, as Peden shows, with affiliation to the name 'Spinoza', which evidently supports projects at cross-purposes to one another and occasionally those in dissent from what is now understood as Spinozism. 'Grounded as much of it is in Deleuze's thought, Spinozism today contains elements of the very Heideggerianism that was targeted by the Spinozists of a previous generation.' (10). In this way, the role that Peden gives to Spinoza in his history of French rationalism turns the name 'Spinoza' into an extraordinary machine of evaluation. The book could be described as a study of the meaning functions of Spinozist-filiation. These functions are contradictory. What are the reasons driving the positive meaning that self-describing references to 'the concept', 'rationalism' or 'Spinoza' come to

convey? Can the significance these abbreviated nests of meaning affirm sustain the polemical relation to phenomenology they intend, given the unruly elements they shelter? Does Peden's *historical* treatment of the rationalist current in France shed any light on this issue?

EVALUATION

Near the end of the book when Peden turns to the political implications of Spinozism it becomes clear that the train of positive associations built up from the example of Cavailles' wartime heroism and death set out in the first chapter is also a way of exploring the contention of the French rationalists that phenomenology's attachment to the subjective conditions of meaning *entails* spineless conservatism. Many examples in the book refer to this founding personal event of modern, rationalist significance: Canguilhem portrays Cavailles' fate as the heroic attempt 'to overcome History with Reason' (22). And indeed Peden's account of what can only be described in psychoanalytic terms as Canguilhem's cathexis onto these events show what a powerful generator of meaningful experience this example is. Peden cites Canguilhem: "Jean Cavailles, this is the logic of Resistance lived until death. Let the philosophers of existence and the person do as well next time if they can' (21). What drives Canguilhem's hagiographic attention here: is it rationalism, Spinozism, the concept, or unbridled admiration for the rare heroism of this particular individual?

The historical dimension of Peden's study, rather than its own attachment to Spinozism, is the perspective able to air this over-determined context. In doing so the book raises the need for a critical evaluation of the political value invested in 'philosophical movements' and 'philosophy' per se. The sympathetic treatment of Althusser in the book is intriguing in this context. There is a detailed recounting of self-sacrifice in the personal story of Cavailles. And the meaning attached to such stories is treated with a critical eye. Peden alerts us to the way such stories are used to traffic philosophical positions and to give them political significance. However, less flattering personal stories are seemingly less relevant for philosophy in the case of others. In reference to the 'psychotic episode' that culminated in Althusser's murder of his wife, Peden writes: 'no amount of hand wringing or schadenfreude would suffice to establish a relationship between this event and Althusser's philosophy' (11). The background against which rationalism is praised as the movement that critically assesses the antecedent forces for any 'subject' position, raised the question for this reader as to whether the comforting thought that courage somehow follows from the precepts of allegiance to a philosophical

movement or style of thought should not receive a more consistently critical evaluation. It is not specifically Althusser's 'psychotic episode' that I have in mind, the question could instead be asked about Althusser's conception of knowledge, which as Jacques Rancière has shown posed a block on his capacity to see what was happening around him, premised as it was on the absolute disqualification of certain forms of experience.⁹ My general point is simply the following: wartime acts of heroism and courageous acts of disregard for authority were performed irrespective of whether the agents of such acts brought the founding figure of the subject into question. The flattering association of personal virtue with specific philosophical ideas or schools is not warranted. Foucault's initial way of formulating the concept/subject distinction does mark this more diverse ecology of practices than the use of the name Spinoza or the invocation of the rationalist movement can.

Peden only briefly refers to Jacques Rancière in this book: but to my mind Rancière's scepticism about the pernicious practices that shelter under the discipline of philosophy and the scathing critique he gives in this vein of Althusser's self-aggrandising conception of the privileges of Theory, is relevant for assessing Althusser's comportment towards the events of 1968, which Peden thinks follow rather from 'the deductive logic of its initial premises', hence its Spinozism (127). On the contrary, Althusser was out of step with what was going on: and the reason for this is not easy to disentangle from the posture of how he thought. Let me be more pointed: occasionally there is an assumption in Peden's treatment of rationalism that this movement follows where reason leads and it does so precisely by eschewing the pitfalls of subjective conditions of meaning. Railing against the false limits on reason of the procedures of Kantian critique Spinoza's resurrection is touted as a rejection of Kant's wariness about the way such enthusiasm for reason generates groundless fanaticism.¹⁰ In the way this position is developed in Peden's book the view that philosophical choices are important is apparent, but it is necessary to keep in mind the ways that the attachment to such positions also leads into error. This is because these philosophical views are constellations of meaning that orientate and organise fields for intervention. The stakes of such choices are not merely politically erroneous, as in the case of Althusser. Other figures from this period, such as Gaston Bachelard thought that following the radical innovations of twentieth century mathematical physics required removing the 'epistemological obstacles' that were inevitably brought along by philosophy. He is more assiduous in this task than Canguilhem whose field of science required the use of tactics of 'thick' evaluation such as the language of 'norms'. Crucially, Bachelard saw that the hard sciences opened up regional rationalities; these were

practices whose innovations were not discovered in attention to pre-existing things, but whose knowledge produced new objects in the practices of the laboratory. The idea of 'regional rationality' is crucial here, since the critical force of Spinozism is tied to the universal model of 'reasoning from initial premises'. Bachelard is cited as an epigraph for one chapter and referred to, as is his daughter Suzanne herself a well-known figure in twentieth century French epistemology, in passing in others. It is churlish to harp on about a figure omitted from this impressive and detailed treatment of French rationalism, but I would like to mention Bachelard since his perspective on philosophy is relevant to the clash of movements Peden describes, in part because he absorbs it: he divides his work on the history of science from his poetic phenomenology of experience - and thus cannot be cited as a partisan of either side.¹¹ Furthermore, Foucault - who, as I mentioned, is the source for the slogan of concept versus subject - was following Bachelard's warning about epistemological obstacles when he excised established philosophical terminology - or 'concepts' - like 'legitimacy' from his mid 1970's study of power thus opening up to scrutiny in an entirely new way the features of disciplinary power. Here too the attempt to avoid the error that follows from the attachment to philosophical positions is salutary: we are dealing Foucault said with 'a population of dispersed events', a claim at the antipodes of any 'rationalism' in the way that it emphasises 'chance' over 'reason'.¹²

EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBSTACLES

In the examples he treats Peden's book builds up an alliance between mathematics, science and rationalism, which is tacitly and occasionally explicitly opposed to phenomenology. It is perhaps true that some aspects of the grammar of phenomenology and especially its attention to the 'things themselves' through the transcendental faculties of the subject is less promising as a partner for the revolutions that occurred in twentieth century science, than Spinoza's account of Thought and Extension as attributes of Substance.

However, the reasons that led Bachelard to divide his poetic and phenomenological writings from his treatment of the twentieth century revolutions in mathematics and physics were not limited to the conceptual obstacles posed by phenomenology. It was his view that philosophical ideas per se were a hindrance to what occurred in science and that philosophy brings with it a history of ways of thinking about problems to which its practitioners are attached and which need to be vigilantly guarded against in order to allow the comprehension of the non-phenomenological core of contemporary science.¹³ In this respect Bachelard anticipates by several

decades some of the ideas of the contemporary ‘experimental movement’ in analytic philosophy.¹⁴ It is one of the hallmarks of philosophy that it argues for and defends particular ideas; precisely this needs to be guarded against in the regional practices of new sciences. If we take Bachelard’s view seriously, it is not clear that the commitments of any philosophical movement could be sufficiently neutral in relation to the demands of scientific experimentation. One of the features of modern science that he highlights is that its techniques bring new things into existence; these are ‘constructed’ in laboratories governed by regional rationalities whose procedures do not adhere to a generic practice of reason. Normative ideals of reason are less relevant than the pragmatic consideration of whether something like a transuranian element ‘works’. Obviously, this is not a model that is particularly close to recognisable features of phenomenological doctrine, such as the ‘reduction’. Nonetheless, this problem of rigid attachment to philosophical ideas is also pertinent for the ideas attached to the French rationalist movement. We might mention here the very idea of ‘science’ as a practice for ‘politics’ in Althusser’s thought.

My point here is just that philosophical ideas don’t always deserve the positive meaning they attract by virtue of their association with mathematics or formalisation, or rationalism or Spinoza, or wartime heroism. In this sense, maybe the slogan of the concept versus the subject is unhelpful since the received meanings now attached to it seem to bring along an extensive list of attributes and entrench a division, which is evidently often question begging.

If Peden’s study occasionally implies and sometimes argues that the affiliation with the name Spinoza entails a positive relation to scientific research that distinguishes the French rationalists from phenomenology, the study cannot divide the relation between these movements and the study of different forms of technical knowledge evenly. This is because neither movement has a monopoly on critical inquiry related to technical knowledge, even if the reduction of these respective philosophical movements to slogans

might give the contrary impression. I have in mind here the abbreviated reference to the phenomenological call for the ‘return to the things themselves’, which might be invoked against the importance of conceptualisations of practices of rationality in Canguilhem in which neither the givenness of things nor the continuity between scientific knowledge and the ‘common understanding’ can be assumed. When either of these is assumed they are treated as obstacles, resistances or

prejudices.¹⁵

The impression communicated by such ‘names’ and ‘ideas’ can be quickly corrected by referring to some of the signal works of twentieth century phenomenologists – Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*, for instance, which is the object of study by a diverse field of French thinkers – not least, Derrida. Merleau-Ponty’s significance as a precursor for topics in contemporary science is also worth mentioning. At the same time that the appealing myth of an intimate relation between rationalism and science on one side, and phenomenology and the effete experience of the ‘things themselves’, on the other, is abbreviated in the strategic ways the name ‘Spinoza’ is mentioned, the actual importance of Spinoza for some of the figures discussed in this book as ‘Spinozist’ is contentious.

Often, Spinoza is the name used to convey simple hostility to features of the phenomenological tradition. The intensity of this hostility is partly bred from the institutional dominance of phenomenology, which by contrast today appears largely indifferent to the rationalist current. It can afford to be. The reasons driving the hostility are therefore not only intra-philosophical, but also sociological and institutional. But one of the interesting features of the use of the name Spinoza as shorthand for the affiliation with French rationalism is the ‘local’ colouring of Spinoza with the formalist tendencies of French philosophy, which frequently turns this figure into the unrecognisable consort for doctrinal assertions entirely foreign to Spinozism and possibly anything resembling ‘rationalism’. Peden very carefully shows all the shades of Spinozism that shelter under the name: and how with Deleuze aspects of the phenomenological tradition crept back in. Still, I think the flexibility that is won by the use of the more malleable category of ‘rationalism’ is key to tracking the loose affiliations between Peden’s cast of characters and the name ‘Spinoza’.

PHILOSOPHY AS A PRACTICE OF MEANING

If we stand back from the import of the opposition between philosophies of the concept and those of the subject, with all the subsidiary oppositions it conjures – rationalism versus phenomenology; truth versus meaning; science and revolution versus feeling and the primacy of the things themselves; Spinoza’s substance versus Husserlian solipsism – it can be considered in functional terms as the mode for the expression of meaning. Viewed this way, the opposition can be understood as a way of stamping a complex field of philosophical ideas and practices with meaning. Sometimes the meaning that is conveyed is erroneous: such as the idea that

rationalism may effectively be contrasted with the irreducibly subjective element of phenomenology. The dualism of the latter is not avoided in every formulation of the former, just described differently. Similarly, the competent treatment of technical questions is not the exclusive province of the non-phenomenological thinkers, as the examples of Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty and Husserl each testify. When I mentioned that the opposition between ‘the concept’ and ‘the subject’ had become a slogan, able to be cited as an abbreviated narrative of the way that heroic practices of self-sacrifice are allied to philosophical positions: it is to be understood precisely as a ‘slogan’ that shapes and directs our affective investment in ideas and historical figures. It lets us overlook problems such as the irrational investment it is possible to have in a figure or a style of thought. Some of the rhetorical excesses of Canguilhem’s attachment to Cavallès, show that some ‘rational’ clarity is needed in unpacking the affective investments in this moment of French philosophy. Whether one takes the deflationary attitude of Rancière towards the aggrandised image of philosophy amongst its practitioners – even Spinoza in Deleuze’s telling has some role in stimulating the non-philosopher in the philosopher – or the historical perspective of Peden, the point is that the noble idea of rationalism should be viewed with some scepticism.

The ‘intellectual history’ of French rationalism in Peden’s hands is a practice of teasing out what stands as ‘implicit’ affiliation, airing its reasons and exploring its cogency. This is a practice that conducted rigorously refuses the solipsistic dangers of the phenomenological conception of intentional meaning, but that also calls for caution in the use of the complacent opposition of ‘the subject’ versus ‘the concept’ as well as its affiliation to ‘rationalism’. After all, it is not as if the dominant role given to antecedent forces in subjectivity is somehow ‘in principle’ more reassuring than the pitfalls of a founding subject. At a minimum, philosophy requires a reflective distance to be taken towards an idiom or the authority of a ‘figure’, which might endorse it. Peden shows that history is one way to force such a distance when it cannot fall back – as no philosophy ever could reliably do – on the culture, history or good will of its practitioners. Peden is occasionally ambivalent about the role Spinoza plays in French rationalism. However, he draws on the historical reputation of Spinozism as the fearless practice of the rational deduction of consequences from initial premises. This is not truly a metaphysical position. The history of Spinozism in Germany and France tells us that even a seemingly convincing rational elucidation of a position, might lead to an erroneous view prevailing. This is why Kant, in the immediate aftermath of the pantheist dispute, linked Spinoza with fanaticism. It is why Bachelard defended the regional practices of the sciences against the epistemological obstacles of

traditional philosophy; and why Foucault's innovative conception of power eschewed the concept of 'legitimate' power. Whatever else it is, Spinozism and its ideal of rational intelligibility stands for a particular practice of philosophy, one that champions reason over chance. Even those practices that after Spinoza pursue an unflagging commitment to 'reason' may occasionally bundle together with this commitment a flattering self-identification with muscular precursors from the history of philosophy. Sensitivity to the complex registers that drive philosophical positions gives air and movement to what might otherwise be calcified in a name. Peden's superb study shows the benefits that intellectual history can bring to attaining some clarity about what goes on under the name 'philosophy'.

NOTES

1. See John Zammito's historical account of the dispute in *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chapter 11.
2. See Hans Blumenberg's discussion of the Goethe-Jacobi relationship and the role of Goethe's poem 'Prometheus' in the controversy in his *Work on Myth*, trans., Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press, 1985), chapter 1, part IV: "Priming Powder for an Explosion", 402-429.
3. All references to this book are given in parentheses in the text.
4. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
5. Representative versions of this history packaged for the Anglophone audience are Richard Kearney's *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1987) and his *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers – The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984).
6. Michel Foucault, "Introduction", Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, transl. Carolyn R. Fawcett in collaboration with Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 7-25, 11. The extraordinary diversity of the French context, which Peden's book sets out, perhaps explains the greater recognition the internal coherence the German tradition of critical theory enjoys.
7. Foucault, "Introduction", 8.
8. Foucault, "Introduction", 8.
9. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, transl. Emiliano Battista (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2011) see especially the Preface and chapter one; see also Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
10. Immanuel Kant, 'What is Orientation in Thinking' in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237-250. And see Immanuel Kant, 'Critique of Teleological Judgment', *Critique of Judgment*, transl., Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987) for the allegation that Spinozism is fatalistic 272 and that it is unable to explain the unity of even ideal purposiveness in nature, 275. For a recent treatment of the Kant-Spinoza relationship, see Omri Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).
11. There is a chronological division between Bachelard's major early publications on the philosophy of science and his later work on the phenomenology and poetics of space. The telling conceptual difference is that modern science is defined as the procedures and techniques under which the 'immediate' must give way to the 'constructed'. Science is not a phenomenology; it is a 'phenomeno-technics'. Gaston Bachelard, *The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind*, transl. G.C. Waterson (New York: Orion Press, 1968) 122-3. The works dealing with the poetic imagination like *The Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) are the basis for his reputation in the English-speaking world. He is better known in France, however, for his work in the history and philosophy of science.
12. Michel Foucault, 'On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle' in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol.2, ed James D. Faubion, transl. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1998) 297-333, 301.
13. The establishment of determinate scientific facts is the work of the application of a coherent technique. Gaston Bachelard, *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1934, 176.
14. Jesse Prinz describes experimental philosophy as the 'revolution' able to solve traditional philosophical problems regarding the mind. This movement overturns the credibility of philosophical 'intuitions' established in ordinary language philosophy because it subjects them to the scrutiny of experimental science. The model of a revolution that sees in philosophical practices obstacles to understanding how things really work is one whose rhetorical pivots had been articulated and defended using the reference point of the twentieth century revolutions in science

in France in the 1930's, most notably by Gaston Bachelard. The issues are inflected differently in the problems treated in experimental philosophy, but the precursor of requiring philosophy to respond to science, rather than assuming the compatibility of its frameworks with science was already set in the history of philosophy in France. See Jesse Prinz, 'Experimental Philosophy': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS4DdLkfPk>, accessed February 16, 2015.

15. Foucault, "Introduction", 14.