



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HERMES: THE MEANING OF HERMENEUTICS AND SYMBOLISM

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INTRODUCTION

The meaning of hermeneutics is not something exclusive to hermeneutics; it is not something the hermeneutical enterprise dominates, masters, or even manages. Rather, hermeneutics must understand itself as an activity at the behest of meaning, which it is incapable to exhaust or contain. The meaning of hermeneutics therefore does not belong to hermeneutics, but, on the contrary, hermeneutics belongs to meaning. Its meaning is that which, in one way or another, always pursues and persecutes human beings, who, as *interpreting or symbolic animals*, generate a multiplicity of cultural languages, wherein meaning is configured and articulated. Hermeneutics is thus limited to a realization of what humans already do—whether explicitly or implicitly; actively or passively—in their individual and collective lives: a search for meaning.¹

Now, philo-sophers love and pursue a forever-elusive wisdom, even though, according to Plato, just by the fact of pursuing it, we are guided by it, at least with Socrates and Nicolas of Cusa, to the point of *docta ignorantia*. In parallel with this and likewise in the search for meaning, be it existential or hermeneutical, what we really find is meaninglessness—otherwise it would have been not a search but possession. Akin to the love of wisdom, the search for meaning is endless; it is an infinite adventure. It does not culminate in meaning. Rather, its evident result is meaninglessness, since, without the felt disquietude of the latter there would not have been any search whatsoever. This search may even lead us to the understanding that human meaning consists in assuming and accepting onto-logical, effective, patent meaninglessness, so as to thrust it open to ontologico-symbolic, affective, latent meaning. Resignation appears here as the possibility of re-signation [*re-signación*] (Vattimo) and of as-signment [*a-signación*], given that the resigned acceptance of the absence of absolute, powerful, and explicit meaning makes possible the acknowledgement of the humanness of our interpretations as such and the assignment to life and the universe of a plurality of linguistic, symbolic, relative or relational, meanings. The acceptance of this plurality implies that neither multiple meanings nor

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oft-demonized meaninglessness [*sinsentido*] should be excluded but, rather, should be respected and accepted [*consentido*], taken up into democratic and civil coexistence.

The meaning distilled in hermeneutics, which we view as one of such “distillation strategies” generated by human beings, is not, like the humans themselves—who are “defective animals” (Nietzsche) or “lacking” beings, “non-adapted to their environment” (*Gehlen*)—a powerful and absolute meaning; on the contrary, it is weak and injured, unstable and requiring assistance. Meaning is not exactly real, but symbolic. It does not reveal itself immediately but is relational and needs hermeneutics. Meaning [*sentido*] is in need of being protected and accepted [*consentido*] by the human psyche, which includes both consciousness and the unconscious.²

We are, thus, in front of the “hermeneutical circle,” amplified as a “cosmic circle.” Psyche, as Aristotle knew full well, is a part of *physis*, insofar as it is subject to movement. And the unconscious, as Jung reminds us, has its roots in the biological-instinctive and its archetypes, even though it is capable of generating consciousness, which, initially relying on a web of mythico-symbolic images, gradually distances itself from this matrix and, affirming itself, detaches itself from its origins to the point of opposing the universe and opening in this tension and in this new relation the possibility for the event of meaning.

There is no being without meaning, and, similarly, there would also be no meaning without hermeneutics, that is to say, without a more or less conscious interpretation. In fact, meaning conditions being, while hermeneutics conditions meaning itself, since the question of meaning is a human hermeneutical question. With this, we pass from the ontological question of being to the hermeneutical question of meaning and, finally, to the question of the meaning of hermeneutics. Such meaning would be, precisely, a hermeneutical meaning and hence one not given in a merely substantial mode but interpreted by human beings as hermeneutico-linguistic (or symbolic, *pace* Cassirer) animals. Language is the key of meaning, insofar as it is human meaning, constituted in the process of interpretation, of interchange, and of cultural communication.

To sum up, the meaning of hermeneutics is a human, humanistic, or anthropological meaning. Hermeneutics is, to resort to a Heideggerian analogy, the *shepherd* of relational meaning. And the figure that presides over this meaning is the transitive and elusive, human or humanized, Hermes, whose projection is democratic and who conducts the mediation between a good life and a good death. It is not by accident that he is the phallic god of life and psychopomp, the god of death, symbolizing, therefore, a *complexio oppositorum* that mediates between the tragic and the comic, good and evil, meaning and meaninglessness, mania and melancholia, negativity and positivity, as well as in the sphere of physics, the particle and the wave, in keeping with the slogan *contraria sunt complementaria*, which inspired the physicist Niels Bohr. Both this slogan and this mythical figure of Hermes may serve as our guides for the purpose of relating—as we will in this text—hermeneutical philosophy, which since Heidegger and Gadamer has been concerned with the problematic of language as interpretation, and the psycho-anthropology of Carl Jung, following a rich tradition that has insisted on the importance of symbolism for individual and collective human life. But we will start by situating the emergence of philosophical hermeneutics in the context of Western philosophy.

I. PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

Classically, Western philosophical tradition has been interested in the search for truth and in science (*episteme*), to which it has attributed a universal value, and has been only mildly preoccupied with the phenomenon of interpretation. It tended to relegate interpretation to a marginal and irrelevant case of knowledge, to which it appealed in the problematic cases of doubt, indefiniteness, absence of crucial elements of judgment, transcription errors, and so forth. One would have to wait until the twentieth century to discover the philosophical and anthropological importance of interpretation, with its entire gamut of signification, including: a) expression, exposition, or explanation of a text’s meaning; b) translation from one language to another, rendering understandable what was initially unintelligible (*hermeneutes* was one who understood the language of the barbarians and was able to say the same in Greek); and c) performance (of a musical piece) or staging (in the

case of theatre), where the work of art was effectively realized, happened or took its place, thereby assuming an existence, which would otherwise be lacking.

And so, hermeneutics developed throughout the twentieth century as a philosophical movement organized around the problem of interpretation, reflection on language, and discovery of symbolism as the “foundation” of both. Interpretation and language thus became the point of departure for the hermeneutical promise for a renewal of philosophical thinking. German philosophers Martin Heidegger and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer undertook to retrieve from the philosophical “closet” the old “art of interpretation,” which lay there, semi-forgotten. Their goal was to elaborate a theory capable of accounting for what actually happens when we interpret and to transform the problem of interpretation into a *sine qua non* for the rethinking of the philosophical problematic in its entirety. In the aftermath of Husserl’s failure to establish phenomenology as the basis for all knowing, in keeping with the traditional project of metaphysics, Heidegger proposed to abandon the project of “founding,” characteristic of the entire history of Western metaphysics, and to assume this failure as something unsurpassable. We would have to accept the impossibility of reaching an absolutely solid foundation, guaranteeing the validity of our science and our consciousness. The consequence of this acceptance is not just a drowning in the dark waters of relativism, of skepticism, and of arbitrariness, as the defenders of metaphysics forewarned, but, instead, the appearance of a new consciousness we propose to call “hermeneutical consciousness.” This new consciousness keeps close to existence, accepting its contingent nature, and recognizes the necessity of interpretation not as a defect to be overcome thanks to the conquest of pure knowledge but as the constitutive characteristic of human existence and of the reality given in it.³

In hermeneutics, the problem of interpretation appears in connection with language and is presented as a universal problem, affecting our experience as a whole, our awareness of the world, and our self-knowledge and relation to the other. This problem may, therefore, provide us with a guiding thread to the universe of human discourse in its totality and as a guide for our reflections on the human and its world. It could be said that the human cultural universe is a fabric of words, models, concepts, theories, hypotheses, and so on, that is to say, of interpretations, mediating between human beings and reality—interpretations, within which both (humans and reality) acquire their specific configuration and determination. Hermeneutics studies, precisely, this interpretative *relation* between the human and the real, and it treats this relation as a starting point for the rethinking of philosophy as a whole.

Philosophical hermeneutics is presented as a “general theory of interpretation.”⁴ “Interpretation,” in turn, means not a mode of knowing, a particular type of knowledge that exists alongside other kinds of knowledge, but the “mode of being” proper to humans, who live in (with, on, of, against...) their own interpretations of the world and, indeed, themselves. We should not understand hermeneutics as a reflection on method, nor as a suggestion for specifically “adequate” or “correct” method of interpretation. What it implies is the exact opposite: to put in question, with the degree of radicality no other philosophy of the last century managed to attain, the primacy modern thinking has attributed to method or to knowledge and, by the same token, to reclaim the validity, legitimacy, and even priority of the experience of meaning that takes place outside these narrow formal-methodological limits. To this end, Gadamer formulates and elaborates, in all its varieties, the philosophical question: What exactly happens (to us) when we interpret?

The question concerning interpretation has proven to be extraordinarily fecund, in that it has become the focal point or the guiding thread that allowed us to reformulate the philosophical problematic in its totality and to find a substitute to the ancient question of being and the modern question of the subject. Interpretation is not a special procedure, to which one resorts, which it is impossible to understand or to know something directly. Nor is it a mode of knowing specific to the human sciences, as Dilthey suggested. In this sense, hermeneutics exceeds the partiality of the methodical question in the human sciences. Beyond the scope of epistemology, interpretation and its corollary understanding are, as we have already indicated, the constitutive elements of the human as human, the originary factors in our peculiar mode of being. Hence, the human being appears as a hermeneutical or linguistic animal (not one that is exclusively rational) that, instead of being adapted to a fixed

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and determined *environment*, lives in and, in light of the most recent biological discourse, is *ex-apted* and not just *ad-apted* to the *world*, which is in large part the product of its own interpretation, whether theoretical and linguistic or practical and work-related.

It is, therefore, the very human existence that has a hermeneutical character. While this existence is finite, interpretation becomes an infinite task with a circular structure, inside which there is neither a neutral observer nor pure objectivity. This does not imply, however, a fall into subjectivism: now the observer and the observed belong to a third horizon that envelops them both, and interpretation effects a “fusion of horizons,” which happens at the heart of language. Language thus presents itself as a process, through which one can put oneself forth “as someone,” thematize something “as something,” and so give oneself both as such.

In this way language acquires a gnoseological as much as an epistemological dignity. On the one hand, what is questioned here—following the humanists of the Renaissance, Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt—is the classical instrumental conception that reduces language to a mere external object in the service of the transmitting thought or of providing information about a reality, supposedly already previously given or attained independently of language itself. Instead, it would be more accurate to view language as an “organ” of consciousness and of thought that, even though it may be criticized, revised, and under certain conditions abandoned, is neither neutral nor transparent inasmuch as it assents to a “worldview” (see, for instance, the notion of *Weltansicht* in Humboldt). On the other hand, albeit relatedly, stands the affirmation that, far from being a mere representation (*Vorstellung*), a copy, or a reflection of reality from which it is independent, language is an originary and original “exposition” (*Darstellung*) of the real. Such an exposition is understood as the realization of the real, based on the model cases of theatrical “staging” and “musical execution” (wherein the work of art happens and with which, for better or for worse, it “is” identical), as well as of the game and the carnival. All of these notions refer to a dynamic reality, whose mode of being is the same realization, to a reality that only is in its interpretations. We might say that if our thinking and knowing are constituted linguistically and interpretatively, this is because being itself is already language.

It is thus that Gadamer reincorporates into the current philosophical discourse the word “hermeneutics,” renewing its sense and taking it out of its seclusion in the specialized spheres of philology and exegesis. Whereas this word is a part of the Romanticist inheritance, its origin is traceable through the humanist tradition back to the mythic figure of Hermes, the Greek god of language and of communication among opposites. Classically, hermeneutics revolved around the problem of interpretation of the expressed through language and, in particular, of what was immutable in a text, whether it was sacred or literary. Here, to interpret meant to understand the meaning of a text, to apprehend it, to assimilate it, or, metaphorically speaking, to “feed oneself” (*alimentarse*) with it, that is, “to eat it up” (*comerlo*). The text in its materiality referred to something other than its very materiality, to a *meaning* that does not lie “beyond” the text, but rather “over here”; indeed, meaning is not what is beyond but what *happens* over here, *between* the text and the interpreter, in a language, in an interpretation, which will now be seen in terms of a “fusion of horizons.” Meaning, which actually is-not, happens in interpretation, re-creating or re-generating itself between the text and the interpreter, exceeding all external fixing, be it dogmatic or methodical. It has an ontological status similar to that of a true conversation, a game, or a carnival, that only exist when they are held (*se celebran*) and in their taking-place (*celebraciones*).

Upon dismissing the possibility of an immediate and direct grasp of reality that would serve as the ultimate foundation of our knowledge, Gadamer puts in question, at the same time, the assertion that the primary function of language is communicative. Language is not exactly an instrument, a sign that serves to express or communicate information or knowledge previously secured outside of it, through reason, experience, or revelation—it does not produce more or less imperfect “copies” of the *original*. Language should be seen as an *organ* and an *organism* that mediates between the subject and the object from the standpoint of an *intermediary world* (*Zwischenwelt*: Humboldt).

II. BEING, LANGUAGE, AND MEANING

Interpretation is thus neither a mere copy, a reflection of the given, nor a pure creation of subjectivity. Rather, it is a translation or a transposition of the said, the seen, the sensed into the language of the interpreter, a “stained copy of subjectivity” (A. Schaff), a fusion of horizons, a play of combinations (*un juego a con-jugar*, literally: a play of playing-with), and, more concretely, a process which none of the parties involved dominates completely, insofar as it unfolds precisely in-between them, in its “putting in relation.” In this way, *mimesis* and *poiesis* are correlated as two aspects of the same hermeneutical process, in which being is *worded* (apalabrado), that is to say, gains the right of admission into language in its representation and concrete realization. Consequently, being cannot be defined as something static or immutable, but as something “in relation” to the other, something constitutively open to new representations or interpretations, in which alone it is.

Language rises to an ontological rank: linguisticity does not only pervade our consciousness but also traverses and substantiates being itself. As a result, being is freed from the classical absolutist interpretation and is ready to be reinterpreted as language. If being itself is language, then we are dealing with a dynamic conception of the real, and of the human being itself, not as a pure essence but, resorting to a musical analogy, as a score to be performed, or a text to be interpreted. And, consequently, truth also cannot be conceived as a methodologically grasped and discovered “state” but as a process immanent to discourse itself, in which interlocutors attempt to reach an agreement about the thing.

When it comes to Gadamer’s thinking, it is worth emphasizing certain ruptures characteristic of postmodernity, especially the lightening of the old notion of “being” by its redefinition as language. The affirmation that being is from the outset impregnated with the word, or with interpretation, precludes the idea of being as a solid and immovable foundation and thus initiates the process of dispersion or dissemination. This rejection of the classical concept of being, in the sense of substance, does not imply for Gadamer that behind interpretation, behind the “realm of representation,” lies absolute nothingness. Hermeneutics does not operate with meaning in the substantial sense, but neither does it entail a version of sense as a mere “surface effect.” Hermeneutically, meaning is something infrastructural, radical, subterranean, insofar as it emerges in a preconscious mode from lived experience. Even though everything is interpretation, we should not forget that for Gadamer explicit interpretation demands and presupposes a previous implicit comprehension (pre-judgment) immanent to language itself (or, as Dilthey thought, to *lived experience*).

This, then, is how Gadamer avoids a possible relapse into fictionalism: for him, writing is always already a reading, and interpretation is a re-interpretation of a previous source, that is, an explicit articulation of a web of implicit relations, a “cultivation” of virtual affinities, and a configuration of accepted and pre-sensed meaning (*un sentido pre-sentido y consentido*). This Gadamerian affirmation would be misinterpreted as a statement of facts or of empirical truth, in which case it would be transformed into a mere legitimation of the really given, of the state of things. Instead, his thesis would pertain to hermeneutical truth that would express a fundamental attitude for our coming face-to-face with reality and with life, a desire and a demand that make critique and a transgression of the given possible. In the name of what could this “revision” take place? Not in the name of something merely present and existent in a thingly mode, but of something absent, latent, and deferred (which is the case with meaning in Gadamer). There would be no “direct” access to meaning, the re-creation of which only endures through its interpretations. This lack of directedness does not disingenuously negate existence in this world of superficial interpretations. On the contrary, it is affirmed here that there are better and worse interpretations, but the criterion cannot be either purely subjective nor dependent upon the classical notion of truth as adequation. The hermeneutical idea of meaning therefore exceeds subjectivity and objectivity, and points toward an intersubjectivity attained within a communally shared and lived language.

This hermeneutical conception implies a subversion or a reversion of Platonism. In contrast to the Platonic hypothesis of meaning as a luminous celestial supra-world—populated by static rational essences, independent in their absolute and immutable existence, impassive in the face of the imperfect copies they sustain in the

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world of becoming—we now discover that traces of meaning lead us to an obscure *bottom without bottom* of latent, germinating models, endowed with a quasi-real or surreal existence, since they only exist in their realizations of interpretative appearances.

To say that language, which pervades all our interpretations, lacks a rational, i.e., a solid, foundation does not mean that it is something absolutely unfounded, chaotic, released to chance, or purely conventional and arbitrary. For Gadamer, quite on the contrary, language has a “foundation,” even if it is not one that is “solid” but “liquid.” This is what Gadamer terms “fundamental metaphorism.”

Philosophical reflection opens itself to language and to the discovering, as Nietzsche noted, that behind language one finds a (symbolic) image or, as Gadamer said, that language, the *medium* of our comprehension, has a metaphorical foundation. And so, neo-hermeneutics flows toward the “seashore” of symbolism. Let us recall, in this respect, that Kant, following a dominant tendency in the history of philosophy, conceived of the sphere of knowing, “the land of truth,” in contraposition to the realm of illusion, superstition, and ignorance, and that this land was symbolized for him by the famous image of an island in an ocean of meaninglessness.

Against the closure of philosophy, classically constituted through the exclusion of symbolism (just as the Church established itself by means of a negation of gnostic heresies and modern science parenthesized feeling and imagination), hermeneutics finally discovers its symbolic foundation, initiating, albeit in a very prudent and limited way, the exploration of this “unknown” “ocean”—unknown at least to classical philosophy but, from time immemorial, crisscrossed by poets, mystics, dreamers, visionaries, madmen, and adventurers.

This overview of the most significant outlines of Gadamerian hermeneutics should suffice for our present attempt to point out certain parallels and even complementarities between this philosophical current and the approaches that arise from the investigations of symbolism.⁵

III. SYMBOLISM

In the Western world, the twentieth century was a culmination of the apparently unshakeable confidence in the power of science and technology to resolve every problem and to respond to any challenge facing humanity. Even Marxism, which has proclaimed itself the representative of the revolutionary Left, considered itself scientific and, in the name of science, discredited as infantile the concrete utopias of “romantic” socialisms and anarchisms. Everything that did not suit the “official” perspective of scientific progress remained disqualified as illusory, regressive, decadent, or reactionary. In this context, symbolic thinking was evaluated in comparison to the model of scientific thought, elaborated on the basis of classical physics. As a result, it appeared to be a byproduct of the human mind; a chaotic and arbitrary fruit engendered by imagination whenever it was not steered and controlled by methodic reasoning; or an atavistic remainder or an islet within civilization, wherein, despite everything, “primitive mentality” persisted.

Seen as something irrational, gratuitous, superfluous, or, in the best of cases, merely decorative, the symbolism of myth, of art, of religion, and of language was juxtaposed to the prestige of the concept, the official mouthpiece of truth, conquered by science in its sober and objective, methodic and rigorous, investigations. The prophets of progress believed that they finally stripped from reality veils woven of ignorance, fear, and superstition and that reality, then, could be contemplated directly through the objective glance of science, freed from any mythic, metaphysical, religious, and even ethical prejudice. Symbolism would be thus condemned to extinction or to being reduced to a “reserve” of the purely decorative.

Nonetheless, the development of the sciences and of philosophies over the past one hundred years signaled a departure from the dominant positivist conception of the century before that. One of the keys for understanding this phenomena lies in a reconsideration of symbolism that took place in various cultural spheres, wherein it came to be seen as something worthy of study insofar as it was seen, at least, psycho-socially effective, that is

to say, “real” in some sense. We may briefly sum up this revalorization of symbolism at the basis of the “new scientific spirit” (G. Bachelard), considering it from the standpoint of four fields of knowledge: ethnology, psychology, physics, and philosophy.⁶

In order to begin its investigation of the symbolism of “primitive people,” ethnology had to overcome a powerful prejudice doubly activated in Christianity and in the onset of modernity. It had to do with the prejudice concerning the superiority and the universal validity of the Western conception of the world. This ethnocentrism, affecting such important authors as Levy-Bruhl and Frazer, prevented them from paying attention to the meaning inherent in the manifestations of the “primitive soul” and forced them to consider such manifestations as pseudo-phenomena, with a diminished gnoseological and ontological reach. “Primitive mentality” was deemed equivalent to the products of infantile imagination, which likewise was devalued as an obscure and foggy pre-history of adult maturity, representing rationality and authentic reality (in other words, the reality sanctioned by the dominant social consensus).

Psychology, which, in turn, began with the studies of pathology, came across grave obstacles when it attempted to reduce the phenomenology of mental illness to purely physiological causes. The failure of this reductive endeavor inspired by positivist methodology, which had such notable success within the sphere of natural sciences—and, particularly, in mechanics—forced us to recognize the autonomy of the psyche, at least to the extent that it generates pathological symptoms or symbols, as well as postulate the existence of a zone of personality distinct from consciousness and irreducible to the latter.

When symbolism emerges from this dual scientific experience, it is reinforced in its standing as a “psycho-anthropological reality,” which is acknowledged as a peculiar kind of reality: although not easily detectable through conventional empirical methods, it is that which we most immediately apprehend and that in which human beings actually live. Humans are, hence, uprooted from external reality—be it cosmic, natural, or social—and come to be seen as beings planted in a world that is culturally configured, linguistically mediated, and symbolically interpreted.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the past century physics managed to penetrate subatomic levels, where it became impossible, for instance, to decide on the nature of light as a wave or a particle. With this, physics itself inched closer to the understanding that its knowledge of the real was not as absolute as it had been considered before but that it relies on the hypotheses or models cast over the unknown. The descriptions of the subatomic world are only models of something we can neither see nor touch, and we do not know anything about this world, except on the terms of these very models.⁷ The theories of physics cease to be seen as neutral copies that reflect reality as it is in itself, i.e., in a neutral mode, “neither touching nor soiling it.” In their capacity as models, these theories are instruments with heuristic values and a certain degree of creativity. A peculiar relation to a peculiar reality they themselves configure is established, so that the discipline is able to operate on its object and to predict its behavior in a clearly probabilistic way. Physics thus recognizes that its knowledge is symbolic.

Henceforth, the vanguard of natural science breaks with the influence of its previous tendency, rooted in the human being in general and in the nineteenth-century attitude in particular, to believe that our experience of the world—whether scientific, everyday, or religious—possesses a value of authentic and absolute knowledge. As a result of this prejudice, human beings identify the psycho-mental content that experience provides them with—and, in the last instance, that it co-generates—with reality itself. Here, one conflates in a disingenuously realist way, one’s own images and ideas with the real as it is in itself, something that happens, for instance, when myth is interpreted literally, as though it were a “history” recounting real facts that took place in historical time. Be this as it may, theory of relativity shatters the positivist illusion that physics, as a simple prolongation and elaboration of the data accumulated in direct observation, can provide a total explanation of cosmos as a whole.

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In the field of philosophy, we can refer to Nietzsche as one of the intuitive precursors to the formulation of the gnoseological, ontological, ethical, and cultural problematic that emanates from the consideration of the role of symbolism in human life.⁸ In the twentieth century, having compiled the outcomes of the latest scientific investigations of the time, the neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer succeeded in putting forth, more formally, the entire problematic of symbolism in the core of the official tradition of philosophy.⁹ For Cassirer, the Kantian doctrine, which sees in the spontaneous activity of the mind an essential factor in theoretical knowledge, ethical action, and aesthetic judgment, serves as a focal point and a bridge. The scientific work of theoretical elaboration, uncoupled from the primary experience of the real by means of the concept and elevated to the status of universality, now presents itself as a process of symbolization.

Henceforth, it would be impossible to consider the scientific vision of the world as a more or less perfect copy of absolute reality, as opposed to an apparatus of capturing, assimilating, and elaboration empirical material through a logico-theoretical symbolism. For Cassirer, this is not the only modality of symbolism, for he accentuates its linguistic and mythical varieties. Myth, language, and science constitute three fundamental symbolic forms, through which human beings enter into contact with reality. Science departs from empirical material not immediately given to the senses; it is, rather, something that has been “put forth” by the mind in its spontaneous activity, as result of the more or less conscious work accomplished by means of linguistic and mythical symbols. I will not contemplate now the relations between science, language, and myth. It is enough to retain the fundamental thesis concerning what sustains Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, namely that human beings enter into a relation with the real and modulate this relationality by projecting an intermediate world of symbols that, entwined amongst themselves, make up the intricacies of experience and effectuate this projection in various forms, autonomous and irreducible amongst themselves.

As these brief indications demonstrate, the twentieth century was destined for a re-discovery of the symbol, which in our Greco-Christian culture has been abandoned and subjected to a progressive forgetting, which proceeded in several waves, from the Aristotelian conceptualization of substance to the legalist and dogmatic Christian literalism and the nominalism of modern subjectivism. The psycho-social consequences of this re-discovery have already started to manifest themselves, even though their scope may be determined only in the future.

IV. THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE¹⁰

A systematic study and categorization of what populates the so-called “jungle of symbols” allows us to discover a certain internal articulation in this apparent chaos. Symbols tend to cluster around dynamic schemata, forming “constellations” and, in their turn, these “constellations” converge into three meta-structures: the heroic (or schizomorphic), the mystical (or antiphrastic) and the synthetic (or dramatic). It should be noted that the latter two belong to the same “region” of the nocturnal, in contrast to the region of the diurnal, to which the first meta-structure pertains.

In the diurnal or heroic region, the capacity for abstraction and distinction predominates alongside the principle of non-contradiction: imagination functions polemically, relying upon the accentuation or exaggeration of the difference between contrary images—between the opposites (a hyperbolic antithesis)—that make possible a dualist vision. Crucially, here, temporality separates the positive from the negative aspects. The former are projected onto something or someone extra-temporal, while the latter remain associated with the domain of becoming and of destiny, irrevocably linked to death. Time is therefore configured, in the first instance, under the symbolic order of the animal-natural, of darkness, or of abyss, not to mention that it carries the unmistakably feminine connotations. The Hero, armed with a Sword and ready to fight to death, stands up against this all-devouring Monster. The symbols of luminosity are opposed to darkness, while the terror of falling into the abyss of the nocturnal is compensated by the impulse for an ascent that guides the battle against time itself. We witness here a “flight from this world” propelled by a desire for eternity. But, despite a polemical and antithetical framing of the struggle, the mere fact of figuring what is evil (of representing the

danger, of symbolizing one's anxiety) is already a mode of domesticating or conjuring it. The danger of the fall, symbolized by the flesh (*la carne*)—whether sexual or alimentary—and threatening every impulse for an ascent, harbors at the same time an attractive and seductive dimension, thanks to which the terror of the abyss is charged, also, with the sense of fascination or “temptation”.

To this diurnal region belong those philosophies where a radically dualistic and formalist thinking predominates and where such thinking takes the shape of a spiritual rationalism, as it happens in the East in the cases of *samkia* or *Vedanta* and in the West in Parmenides, Plato, or Descartes and, in general, in all objective and scientific systems of knowledge. Of course, with the exception of a few pathological cases, this predominant tendency is not absolute, to the extent that it is counterbalanced with the more or less latent enactment of the nocturnal.

This persecution of transcendence nevertheless carries with itself a fundamental paradox, expressed in the figure of Icarus. This hero wishes to fly so high that finally his wings of wax melt in the heat of the Sun. The monopoly of the diurnal region culminates in a kind of schizophrenia. Plato himself knew that the traction for elevation depended on the obscurity of the Cave, that is to say, that it was due to the very temporal and material condition it opposed.

And so, side-by-side with the polemical attitude of the heroic structure, or, in some cases, against it, emerges another imaginative attitude, which does not search for an antidote against time in what lies beyond. Now it is nature itself that takes the shape of a warm refuge that protects us from the inclemency of time. Darkness is euphemized as a serene night; imagination does not flee from time, but endeavors to organize and configure it. We are thus approaching another grand region of the symbolic universe where the nocturnal receives a positive valorization and is subdivided, in its turn, into two further structures—the mystical and the synthetic. The former is constituted through the strategies of euphemization, escalated to the level of antiphrasis, which inverts the affective value of images so that we can expect to encounter light in the very heart of dark night. The latter finds the extra-temporal in the very fluidity of time, in an attempt to reconcile the desire for eternity with the intuitions of becoming.

In mystical symbolism, value (the symbolic Treasure) does not lie in the upper region to which one would ascend, but, rather, in the depths one would have to “penetrate.” The abyss receives a euphemistic interpretation of a cavity, to which one would descend smoothly and pleasurably. The Hero—or, better: the anti-Hero—is disarmed, does not fight, and complacently allows himself to be carried by the Dragon in a sort of immersion to a narcissistic state or a regression to the maternal breast, only to be spat out later (cf. Jonah, Pulgarcito, etc.). Here, there are no unequivocal distinctions: the contours of the image become hazy, to the point that everything gets confounded with everything else in a sort of primordial chaos. Death loses its terrifying connotations it used to have in a diurnal region and becomes euphemized as a “homecoming,” as an end of a journey that signals the beginning of a new one. The valorizations of the diurnal region are thus inverted: in place of the principle of non-contradiction, we come across the coincidence of opposites.

The synthetic structures, on the other hand, are characterized by the tendency to compose images in a complex whole, where the opposites are neither excluded nor conflated. Rather, they alternate, succeed and complement one another, integrated into a single plot as phases in a cyclical process (“the eternal return”) as well as stages of development (progress). The contrast between the dualist and the monist conceptions is harmonized in a “smooth dualism” or in a concentric arrangement by means of a third element, which establishes and guarantees the inclusion of opposites in a dynamic totality that thrives on tension and constantly equilibrates itself.

V. PSYCHIC SYMBOLISM: CARL JUNG

Although the work of Jung is motivated, mainly, by a psychotherapeutic interest, so much so that everything stated in it remains oriented in this practical direction, Jungian reflections are not only anchored in his

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professional experience but also exhibit an inspiration and a series of philosophical consequences that are not always explicit.¹¹ In this sense, there is a certain convergence between his thought and Gadamer's hermeneutics, where the key parallel is between the Gadamerian conception of being as *language* and the Jungian consideration of reality as a *symbol*.

Jung obviously shies away from the posing of ontological questions, since they are irrelevant to his therapeutic intention. A methodological stratagem that recurs throughout his work is that, as a psychologist, he is not preoccupied with reality "in itself," but in relation to the individual who pursues not a pure but a psychic truth. It is sufficient to cite, in this respect, as an extreme example his attitude to God. When a psychologist speaks of God, he does not aspire to doing theology and does not investigate the nature of God, but is referring to a symbol and to the influence it has on the psyche.

On the margins of what is, for all intents and purposes, a methodological resource, a similar proposal is to be found in the typically hermeneutical attitude, which Gadamer elaborates starting from the field of ontological research. In hermeneutical terminology, we may say that language always interjects itself between reality and human being, such that being itself is language; in Jungian terms, we may observe that between the Real and the subject, there is a "third world," a complex web of symbols, a *psychic reality* which is neither objective nor merely subjective and through which we actually enter into contact with the world.

One must keep this in mind so as to understand Jung when he affirms that this "reality" may refer to the fright before a phantasm, such as the fear of fire. Regardless of its origin, what affects us is a psychic image, a symbolic transcription of objective or subjective processes.¹² Reality, our reality, the reality in which we live—concludes the psychologist—is always charged with a human significance and with imaginary undertones, drawn from the symbolic world.

Now, it would be wrong straightforwardly to identify the symbol with the sign, as, unlike the latter, the former is not simply conventional or arbitrary. Nor is it a mere copy or a reflection of objectivity, in that it already includes a distortion we could qualify as subjective, only if this distortion would respond, in the last instance, to a transcendental subjectivity. It is not surprising that, in this context, we operate with a term derived from the philosophy of Kant, given that Jung frequently resorts to Kantian terminologies and schemata, to which he attributes an anthropological sense. Thus, following a Jungian interpretation, Kantian transcendental subjectivity is anchored in the depths of human psychism, where the individual is entwined with the collective. As opposed to a "naked" and "pure" reality, the symbol will come to denote a humanly contaminated reality, one that is configured in keeping with human imperatives. These imperatives will not be, on their part, merely subjective or individual; instead, in the final instance, they will appear as transindividual insofar as they are rooted in the collective unconscious. The interpretation or the configuration of reality is a re-creation that takes place through *a priori* factors inscribed in our common human nature.

For Jung, the symbol is an assemblage of objective and subjective elements. The image becomes congruent with the unconscious content projected upon it and thus gets charged with psychic energy and invested with meaning, albeit not explicitly thematized. While, as we have already noted, for Gadamer meaning happens in the circular interweaving of the text with the prejudices of the hermeneutic thinker through language, for Jung, this happening takes place in the symbol (*Sinnbild*: the image of meaning), so that meaning emerges by means of a mediation of the image and the place where consciousness and the unconscious intersect, in acts of living. At bottom, there seems to be the same intuition at the background of these two ways of thinking: that, for good or ill, the reality of a human being is, in the last instance, a text and that, moreover, through interpretation the meaning that latently animates this text would come to light.

The question of meaning, which in Gadamer's work was posed at the philosophical level, appears in Jung's *corpus* in its concrete application to human life, that is to say, as a question of great importance for the very survival of human being (such that psychic disorders would signal a loss of meaning or *asymbolia*). Relatedly,

the reversal of Platonism, which we extracted from the Gadamerian thesis also reappears here: the bottom without bottom where meaning hid before interpretation is now transformed into an obscure unconscious region, populated by archetypes that are but condensations of psychic energy. In this way, Plato's transcendent Ideas descend to the lowest depths of humanity, where the spiritual and the instinctive merge, while their rational-static existence is replaced with the material energetic-relational insistence. Jungian archetypes do not enjoy a separate existence akin to that of Plato's Ideas; nevertheless, they stubbornly weigh upon humanity, not from the outside but from within, that is to say, immanently.

It follows that Jungian psychology can serve as the point where the abstract hermeneutical philosophy of Gadamer would "come down to earth" and would get invested with a concrete anthropology. The Jungian image of the human being is, actually, wholly hermeneutical: the human as a living being who interprets herself interpreting the world. The process of humanization, to which every one of us is indebted, presents itself as a hermeneutical process: *individuation as hermeneusis*. For Jung, the human is not a static reality but an ongoing becoming-one-self. The central place modernity has allotted to the I and to consciousness is emptied out in the name of the forever-deferred self (*Selbst*). A correlation similar to the one Gadamer discovered in the mediation between the text and its meaning will come to mediate between the I and the self.

CONCLUSION

This displacement of the psychic center of gravity from the I as an immobile central point to the self as a decentered center may be put in dialogue with Gadamer's proposal to transfer preponderance from technico-instrumental, methodical reason of modernity to language. Gadamer presents abstract reason and its methodical attitude as secondary phenomena that are erected on the grounds constituted by previous interpretations and valorizations, condensed in the so-called *natural* or *maternal language*.

In this sense, Jung and Gadamer coincide in their diagnosis of a unilateral exaltation, by Western culture, of a model of excessively restrictive rationality, mostly foreclosed to, for example, the human sciences. As a counterpoint to the undeniable material progress in the short term, this exaltation leads to a repression, disqualification, forgetting, or exclusion of other factors or modalities of rationality, charged with the task of responding to the most elementary cultural and symbolic necessities of human beings, such as those of meaning.

The success modernity achieved in its Promethean effort of rationalization, following the routes opened by mechanical physics, have come, according to both authors, at a high price. Its obverse is the sacrifice of other forms of life and of experience, relegated to the background, when they were not altogether forgotten or confounded with the irrational. It would be necessary, therefore, to retrieve the repressed, to establish a dialogue between the rational and the irrational, between consciousness and the unconscious, between spirit and life, between *animus* and *anima*, and between *logos* and *mythos*. That this encounter entails high risks is something quite obvious, but it is equally obvious that to prevent it from happening is even more risky. It is not suggested that we uncritically immerse ourselves in the "stormy ocean" of irrationalism but that we tease out an ampler, more open and integrated rationality and personality from the encounter, one that would be capable of interpretatively articulating—translating, configuring—the irrational in a non-repressive fashion. Such would be a new rationality that would be represented by language (the symbolic) as an intermediary instance that, traversing opposites, would non-dialectically interrelate them, conserving their differences.

We may finally observe a convergence between Gadamer and Jung in the notion of language-symbol. In contrast to the strict formality of the concept, language-symbol presents certain informality or spontaneity that permits it to access what conceptuality excludes and, consequently, leaves opaque, namely life-world with its necessities and desires, fears and hopes, paradoxes and absurdities. Language-symbol originates in this vital or experiential context, where, according to Dilthey and the late Husserl, the events are not at all dissociated from their significations. Through it, one can attend to life, give it the word, represent it and interpret it. In contrast

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to abstract reason that understands nothing of values, loves, or affections, hermeneutical (linguistico-symbolic) reason knows that it is born of them. It neither forgets nor denegates its past, from which it still distances itself, so as to reinterpret the past from the present in an opening of the forever-uncertain future.

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NOTES

1. In this respect, three very different hermeneutical accounts of the search for meaning are V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Beacon Press, 2006; J. Grondin, *Du sens de la vie*. Paris: Ballarmin, 2003; A. Ortiz-Osés, *Amor y sentido*. Barcelona: Anthropos, 2003.
2. Cazenave, M., *La science et l'âme du monde*. Paris : Albin Michel, 1996, 51
3. The most important work for all of contemporary hermeneutics is Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. New York: Crossroad, 2004, as well as the studies of P. Ricoeur, including *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974; G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, Polity Press, 1991; and of J. Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. For the context of hermeneutics and its reception in the Spanish-American context, consult *Diccionario de Hermenéutica* edited by A. Ortiz-Osés and P. Lanceros, Bilbao, Universidad Deusto, 1997 (4^a Ed. Ampliada y revisada 2004) as well as L. Garagalza, *Introducción a la hermenéutica contemporánea*. Barcelona, Anthropos, 2002 and M. Beuchot & F. Arenas-Dolz, *Hermenéutica en la encrucijada. Analogía, retórica y filosofía*. Anthropos, Barcelona, 2008.
4. M. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
5. The combination of hermeneutical philosophy and symbolism presented here has been developed especially in the Spanish context and applied to the interpretation of philosophy and culture by A. Ortiz-Osés. The most noteworthy work in this regard is *Amor y sentido. Una hermenéutica simbólica*. Anthropos, Barcelona, 2003. In English translation, one may consult his *The Sense of the World*. Davis, Colorado, 2007.
6. Bachelard, G., *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*. Paris, PUF, 1991.
7. Cf. B. D'Espagnat, *À la recherche du réel—Le regard d'un physicien*. Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1979.
8. Cf. F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. W. Kaufman. New York: Penguin Books, 1976, 42-6.
9. Cf. E. Cassirer, *The philosophy of symbolic forms*. Yale University Press, 1958.
10. This presentation of what I have called "The Morphology of the Symbolic Universe" is based on a model elaborated by the anthropologist and symbologist Gilbert Durand. See his *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*. Paris, P.U.F., 1963.
11. G. Durand has proposed a bridging of the Jungian universe and philosophy, even though unrelated to the thinking of Gadamer (consult in this respect, L. Garagalza. *La interpretación de los símbolos*. Barcelona :Anthropos, 1991). For a hermeneutical consideration of Jung's work, see A. Ortiz-Osés, *C.G. Jung. Arquetipos y sentido*. University of Deusto, Bilbao, 1988.
12. In this, we would be following the line of thinking opened by Epictetus, who concluded that "what disturbs and alarms man are not the things but his opinion about the things."

CROSSING WAYS OF THINKING: ON GRAHAM HARMAN'S SYSTEM AND MY OWN

Tristan Garcia, translated by Mark Allan Ohm

While writing most of *Form and Object*,¹ I was unfamiliar with Graham Harman's work. After I discovered it thanks to Quentin Meillassoux's recommendation, my initial reading revealed that he was concerned with the same questions as me and that his model was similar in some ways to the one I was trying to develop in response to them. I was happy to feel less alone.

Here I will examine the connections and differences between his work, which already consists of several separate works, and my own, especially the treatise *Form and Object*. I do not believe that they conflict anywhere, but I also do not think that they merely replicate each other. They provide a rare example of ways of thinking that intersect and meet at certain places and concepts, even though they derive from different horizons and traditions and aim at very distinct goals. I think that ways of thinking which have the same orientation always end in antagonism, and that those beginning in the same place never fail to differentiate. In our case, since we do not come from the same place and do not go in the same direction, we meet.

I have much admiration for Harman's way of thinking. Trying to compare it with mine is quite strange for me, first, since it is undoubtedly more mature, and, second, since any comparison is colored by the fact that I am the one making it. Anyone would be more qualified than he or I, I believe, at evaluating the possible parallels and gaps between our respective notions.

But I will nonetheless attempt to do justice to both of our systems.

GAPS

There is an agreement in principle between Harman's project and mine as presented in *Form and Object*.

In his recent book on Lovecraft and philosophy (*Weird Realism*²), Harman begins by mentioning that one of the main activities of philosophy consists in first producing and then filling in cosmic gaps. The primary motivation of Graham Harman's work, as well as *Form and Object*, I believe derives from the refusal to begin by supposing an ontological gap between consciousness and world, subject and object, human beings and other animal species, or animate and inanimate.

Harman is a "continuist" insofar as he sees no reason to suppose an ontological difference between thought and life, organic and inorganic. But if he is a continuist here, it is because he *already* posited an ontological difference between real objects and sensual objects, between each object and its qualities, situating it at the core of his system. In other words, since for him an ontological difference exists between the real object, withdrawn into itself, and the sensual object, internal to perception, there is no need to assume that there is an underlying difference between material or immaterial objects, sensory or non-sensory objects, conscious or unconscious objects. An ontological difference exists for him not between objects and non-objects, nor between object and consciousness, but within the category of object, between real objects and sensual objects.

Thus, he and Meillassoux disagree about the problem of dividing matter, life, and thought. Meillassoux is a strong discontinuist. His entire system derives from the critique of correlationism, a critique shared in large part with Harman. Meillassoux permits the speculative thinking of rupture and advent, differentiating the "realms" of matter, life, thought, and justice. In short, Meillassoux connects thought to the in-itself, and separates objects into successive realms, none of which are inferred from the previous realm. On the other hand, Harman separates the object in-itself from the immanent perceptual object and connects objects without positing any natural difference.

Although I share the critique of correlationism and a certain dialectical tradition with Harman and Meillassoux, unlike them I make room for neither an accessible nor inaccessible in-itself. However, I share Harman's idea that no natural ontological difference or hierarchy exists between different domains of animate or inanimate, thinkable or unthinkable, objects. And I share with Meillassoux philosophical traditions that have influenced my work, which lead me to an ideal which he also has (to confront the tragedy of thinking, "to visit death" and return, "to traverse the Acheron two (or three) times."³) Nonetheless, I think my project is closer to Harman's.

The principle of this project is to not posit any gap between several different objective domains (whether this be the emergence of life or zooanthropological difference) and not to assign the obligation of examining them to thought.

EQUAL

For Harman and me, thought should have the task of proving equality, that is, it should account for what all things, including human beings, have in common. In this way, we can differentiate them as distinct objects, but objects nonetheless, and exorcize the spell of an original rupture in being.

Form and Object and Harman's object-oriented ontology are thought-experiments on the "equality" of all things. Both see philosophy as having an imperative to combine knowledge and morality so that they cannot be separated. The role of philosophy is to understand what composes the world and the way to divide and order its elements on an equal plane by refusing to attribute any ontological privilege to anything in particular. It is therefore a question of grasping the equal ontological chance that every thing has, whether it is material, immaterial, possible, necessary, true, or false.

Nonetheless, it is not a question of an absolute ontological egalitarianism, aiming to necessitate every thing's equivalence to everything else in every respect. On the contrary, Harman writes: "My point is not that all objects are equally real, but that they are equally *objects*."⁴ Likewise, the first book of *Form and Object* considers why and how "no-matter-what" is something, neither more nor less than another thing, by constructing an

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ontological plane of equality. However, the aim of the second book is to order objects in relation to other objects, by redefining classificatory categories (species, gender, class) and value differences.

Our common idea is that the task of every ontology is to strive to be as open as possible to distinguishing and ordering either what Harman calls the distinct “regions” of objects in his “ontography,” or what appears in *Form and Object* as the classificatory or intensive differences between objects.

It is still necessary that one identify all objects as objects in order to be able to differentiate them. And “[a]ll such objects must be accounted for by ontology, not merely denounced or reduced to despicable nullities.”⁵

NEITHER... NOR...

Our common theoretical opponent is every kind of thinking that denies objecthood to some objects (for example, on the grounds that they are fictional or impossible), and philosophical traditions that reduce objects to the lower level of what they are composed of or dissolve them into the higher level in and by which they are comprehended.

The primary antagonism hinges around the claim that all entities, including imaginary or contradictory ones, have the status of objects. Of course, the claim is not specific to our projects. It derives from the early twentieth-century claims and arguments concerning existence, subsistence, and “absistence,”⁶ in the work of Kazimierz Twardowski, Alexius Meinong, Edmund Husserl, and Bertrand Russell.

On the other hand, the defense of the object as the “protagonist of philosophy”—an object attacked from above and below—is a more original idea. It appears, and receives comparable treatment, in both Harman’s and my own system. Both systems deny the reduction of an object to the smallest object and dissolution of an object in the biggest object.

Harman dismisses both the overmining and undermining of objects.⁷ I talk about a reduction of things either to “less-than-things” or to “more-than-things.”⁸ By “overmining,” Harman means a strategy that approximates what I mean by the reduction to “more-than-things.” In this approach, objects do not exist except by what they are in and by what comprehends them. Consciousness, society, history, or nature—though Harman does not discuss the latter three—can be “more-than-things” whenever they become all-encompassing totalities without anything external to them. This strategy includes Émile Durkheim’s sociological holism, which led him to say that society is to “its members [...] like a god is to the faithful,”⁹ historicism,¹⁰ and contemporary naturalism in its more extreme reductionist form. All of them admit that objects exist, but that these objects only exist as social, historical, or natural objects. Thus, they are “overmined” (in Harman’s words) by a “more-than-thing” (in my own words): consciousness (Husserl’s “residuum after the annihilation of the world”¹¹), society, history, or nature. Everything is then in “more-than-things,” which are in nothing other than themselves.

On the other hand, Harman’s definition of “undermining” corresponds to what I define as the reduction to “less-than-things.” Here we take aim at the intellectual strategy—for example, among certain pre-Socratics (Thales, Empedocles) or in the materialist tradition (from Democritus to the Churchlands)—that consists in reducing the level of the division of the world into objects to the level of components of objects, such that “what seems at first like an autonomous object is really just a motley aggregate built of smaller pieces. Only what is basic can be real.”¹² Even more profoundly, the reduction may lead to the discovery of a monist reality beneath what appear to be several different objects: the One, Being, *apeiron*, *il y a*. Harman also talks about how theories of pre-individuation “undermine” objects by populating the world with flux and processes in which objects are only secondary or transient effects, like foam at the wave’s surface. In these cases, “talk of *objects* merely crystallizes becoming in an abstract state.”¹³ But “the same problem arises here as before. [...] [W]e still need to ask whether the world is one flux or many. If only one, then we are back with monism. But if many, then each has some sort of specific and integral character, and this already makes it an object.”¹⁴

In *Form and Object*, I resort to a comparable argument:¹⁵ all ways of thinking that call objects into question (often confounding them with substance), in favor of a becoming-unity or becoming-manifold object, can only transform its “flux” into objects. If several lines of becoming, several processes of reality exist, then flux, lines, and processes are differentiated from each other, and thus are several different objects. The argument can only bring back what it was meant to dismiss. Harman and I share the idea that what one calls an “object” (or “thing,” in my case) is primarily what every operation of the division of the world, of the real, of the cosmos, and of that which is, rests on. One may divide the world into events, but one will end up attributing to these events the same properties attributed to objects. Talk about “objects” and “things” is talk about the division of everything. And if one decides to divide everything into something other than objects, one will be compelled to talk about objects without knowing it. Our common move is to try to remain as close to objects as possible, and to address the problem of the division of the world without any misunderstanding: an object is what derives from a division of the world, whether or not one calls it “flux.”

We certainly agree not to make “flux” the negative of objects, identified with immutable material entities, but objects like others.

NEGATIVE

We both refuse to begin with the problem of an ontological gap. Instead, we start with the problem of ontological division, since we do not think that thought gains anything by presupposing that existence is separated in general from consciousness, world, language, things, thought, and being. Rather, we claim that existence is separate from *all things*, whether they think, do not think, live, sense, are true or false.

On this view, thought is the comparison of several different possible divisions of the universe.

Our general picture of the universe appears *prima facie* more or less the same. Harman explains his idea of the universe with a downward infinite regress, a “turbulence” of decomposable objects. However, there is no upward infinite regress—for example, in his description of the “empty sky.”¹⁶ I define objects as accumulating in each other, such that smaller objects can always exist. But a maximal object also exists, which I call the universe. This object ceaselessly expands, since something new always exists. But I distinguish the universe, which is the biggest possible thing, full of objects that comprehend other objects, from the world, which is filled only with one thing at a time and is “formal.” While the universe is always the biggest possible thing, the world is not a thing, but the form of each thing, its opposite or its negative. The world exists at each level; this dust particle is in the world, neither more nor less than our galaxy is in the world. Therefore, the world short-circuits the terracing of things, while the universe is simply the higher, maximal state of the accumulation of things. The universe is the sum of objects. The world is the opposite of each thing.

Harman has no equivalent to this world, which is the negative of each thing at each level. Why? Because Harman does not conceive of “form.” My definition of form partially comes from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and from Hegel: form is the condition, container, and outside of objects.

Our two projects are similar in many ways: a joint rejection of the reduction of objects to a lower or higher level, a desire to think equally about objects, and a refusal to presuppose an ontological difference between two kinds of objects (humans and non-humans, for example), which would eliminate what objects have in common.

But like all ways of thinking which intersect, our two ways of thinking stem from very different traditions.

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ORIGINS

Harman's thought is anchored in Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology. He revives Brentano's central idea of intentionality, which his followers often modified. Harman understands intentionality as the fact that the object consciousness is directed at exists not merely outside of consciousness, but also *within* consciousness.

For reasons stemming from a contradictory Hegelian and Wittgensteinian tradition, *Form and Object* proposes to interpret being as the opposite sense of comprehension: to be a thing is to be *in* this thing, that is, to be comprehended by this thing.

But while I attribute to "being in" a kind of transcendental topology, where each thing is determined by what the thing is in, Harman conceives of the fact of "being in" as an expression of the immanence of the intentional object. Thus, for him, an object that is comprehended in and by another object is called a "sensual object." Harman, then, attributes a wider sense to perception, which is what makes his system interesting: objects perceive whenever they enter into relation.

I prefer to say that an object that contains another object "comprehends" it, using the set-theoretical sense of the term: a set "comprehends" this or that element.

Harman and I understand relations between objects only in a very particular form: one object *in* another. A relation is not primarily the contact or intersection of two entities situated on the same plane (which provides Harman with the argument of "indirect causation"), but the relation between a thing that comprehends and a comprehended thing. Harman considers this relation through the model of intentionality, extended to perception, whereas I consider it as a part-whole relation.

This is why the extension of the sense of perception leads Harman to his defense of "polypsychism"¹⁷ (rather than panpsychism): an object can *perceive* another object. On the other hand, the extension of the sense of comprehension (the opposite of the sense of being) leads me to interpret each relation between objects as a part-whole relation: two objects never *equally* come into relation; one is always a part of the other.

Harman's position derives from his generalization of a phenomenological principle just as my position is the result of analytic and dialectical training:¹⁸ the Hegelian process of being consists in the assimilation and internalization of the object, and the Tractarian thing is what enters into "the possibility of all states of affairs."¹⁹

We both consider an object less as "what is one" than as "what is in." Harman's real object is in-itself, and his sensual object is in what perceives it. For me, a thing is outside itself, in the world, and an object is in another thing. But a kind of tonal difference remains in both cases: a phenomenological color in Harman, which leads him to talk of sensual objects and to defend "polypsychism," and an analytic and dialectical hue in my work, which leads me to define comprehension as the relation between element and set, and then to hold that what is comprehended is exceeded by what comprehends it.

In our two projects, intentionality is generalized in some way and not a property of consciousness. Directly influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, Harman defines his "sensual object" as an hyperbolic intentional object-form. Brentano's immanent objectivity is pushed to its limit: the fact that an object exists for and in consciousness becomes the fact that a sensual object exists for and in another object.²⁰

However, I generalize intentionality from the other side. What interests Harman is that the sensual object exists for and in another object (which perceives it). What I hold is that the object does not exist for- and in-itself. This is the central claim of *Form and Object*: that no thing is in-itself, that any thing is outside itself, in the way that Jean-Paul Sartre's²¹ intentionality of consciousness was projected outside itself. In *Form and Object*, any thing is thus outside itself.²²

The primary difference between Harman's way of thinking and my own therefore derives perhaps from our different interpretations of the in-itself.

IN-ITSELF

A noteworthy characteristic of Harman's work is his reevaluation of the thing-in-itself.

According to him, the real object always withdraws, inaccessible and in-itself. We know that this analysis is drawn from his rereading of Heidegger's tool-analysis.²³ Harman inherits the opposition between the in-itself and the for-us from Immanuel Kant and the phenomenological tradition. In the speculative realist domain, Quentin Meillassoux does likewise with very different results.

Yet the model I propose is different. For me, the in-itself, which is the foil of *Form and Object*, is a reaction against two ideas: the *in-another-thing* (for example, in us) and the *outside-itself*. Positing the in-itself thus leads to two contradictions: first, the "in" is contradicted by the "outside," and, second, the "itself" is contradicted by "another thing."

Harman contrasts the sensual object, which is in something other than itself (in the object that perceives it, to be precise), with the real object (which is in-itself). I contrast the thing, which is outside-itself (in something-other-than-a-thing), with the object (which is outside-itself as a thing, and in another thing as an object), and I deny the possibility of the in-itself.

For Harman, an object is either in-itself or in another thing. But the idea that a thing could be in something other than a thing is meaningless for him. In my model, a thing is always outside-itself, and is either in something other than a thing, or in another thing. But a thing in-itself is meaningless for me. More precisely, the in-itself is the figure of nonsense, what I call "compact."²⁴

For Harman, only two possibilities corresponding to two poles exist: the real object withdraws in itself, or the sensual object exists in and for another object, which perceives it. For Harman, there is no "negative." Hegelian dialectical thinking is not a major influence for him. Therefore, the idea that a thing could be in its negative (in a non-thing) is mostly foreign to his system.

It is quite different in my system, which rests on this alternative: every thing is either *formally* in its negative (in something other than a thing, in a non-thing), or *objectively* in another thing (in which case the comprehended thing becomes an object). My dialectical tradition is clearly expressed in the existence of this "formal" system.

Every thing is twofold: either in other things that positively exist and that determine the thing, or in its negative, which alone constitutes it as a thing.

Each thing—whether it is my finger or my hand or a table—is a "thing" insofar as it is alone, that is, a *solitary* thing existing only in its negative. The table is only something, in the widest and least determinate sense, when it is comprehended in *everything that is not the table*. On the other hand, comprehended in the set of other tables, or in this room, or in my perception, the table becomes an object: a piece of furniture, a particular table, endowed with a color, a weight, and all that, for Harman, would emanate from its number of qualities.

But the table, neither as a thing nor as an object, is not in-itself. As a thing the table is in the world, and as an object the table is in other objects that give it all its determinations and qualities.

For me, the in-itself is not merely inaccessible. It is "compact." This means that it only functions at a stage of analysis on the condition of failing at the next stage. And if there were a thing-in-itself, it could only be in-itself in the world, that is, in something other than itself. Therefore, no in-itself exists *in itself*.

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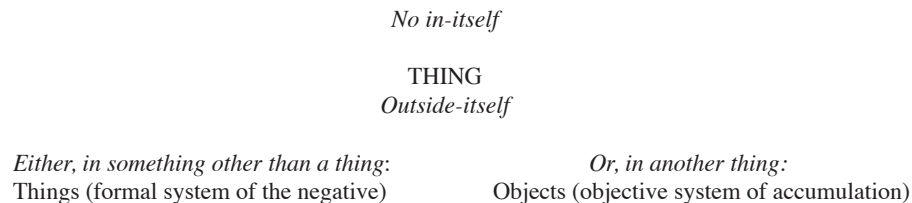
The principle of compactness is that the condition of possibility of a thing is its impossibility; to be able to be, it is necessary that the thing not be.

Since nothing can be in-itself unless it is compact, a thing is necessarily outside-itself. But being in another thing, it can be either in something other than a thing (what is formal), or in another thing (what is objective).

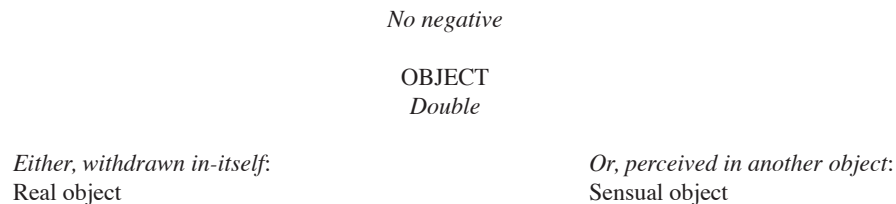
SCHEME

Let us summarize our two ways of distinguishing two types of objects:

(a) In *Form and Object*:



(b) In *The Quadruple Object*:



Now the second parts of our two major works are devoted to the reconstruction of an order of objects in relation to other objects. In *The Quadruple Object*, it is through fusion or fission, including the determination of a system of ten permutations, classified into families. In *Form and Object*, it is through a series of studies devoted to classificatory categories (species, class, gender) and to the variation of intensities (time, values).

However, their first parts differ. In *The Quadruple Object*, the real and sensual object are given. The real object is withdrawn into its inaccessibility. The sensual object appears phenomenologically in its presentation to the mind. In contrast, in *Form and Object*, things are never obtained except through a process that always betrays its vaguely dialectical origin. It is a process of de-determination, which allows me to explain every difference between the given object in Harman's model and the obtained thing in my own.

PROCESS

I try to remove the determinations that make any object enter into relation with other objects.

To de-determine this tree is to remove this tree from my perception. But when it is no longer for me, it is nonetheless not in-itself. The tree enters into a complex series of relations—it is in an ecosystem, the set of all trees, and the series of past and present instances of this tree. The challenge of *Form and Object* is to treat essence, space, and time as determinations like others. Removing the tree from the forest, or more generally from

nature, evolution, its bundle of tree-qualities, it loses everything that made it a tree. Then it is extracted from the series of everything that it had been until now, or shall be later. It becomes an increasingly indeterminate something, but not *absolutely* indeterminate. At the end of this process the tree is always something—neither localizable, nor enduring, nor definable. As such, the tree is a thing, neither more nor less than one of its branches, the earth, the word “tree,” what it was two hours or two minutes ago. De-determination is an equality operator, allowing us to reach a point where no-matter-what is something as much as another thing. The tree is *only* something when it has sufficiently lost its determinations, no longer being a plant, a tree, this tree, or this tree at a certain time of the year, but is not yet purely indeterminate. Instead, it is *the least possible determinate*. And this minimal determination is the fact of being in the world, of being outside itself, in “everything except itself,” in its negative. This something is therefore formal.

The formal thing that I obtain is very different from Harman’s sensual or real object.

In his system, a set of constraints, represented by its fourfold division, always articulates and structures objects in such a way that no-matter-what cannot be an object for Harman. For him, space and time are not determinations like others, which could be cast aside to reach the formal concept of thing. Harman defines time as the fundamental tension between a sensual object and its sensual qualities. The relation between the springtime tree that appears to me in full bloom and the autumnal tree that loses its leaves is not the same relation between the tree and an African rhinoceros or Greece’s debt. In other words, the characterization of time as a tension yields a privileged relation between an object six months ago and the same object today, which is not the same relation as that between this object and a completely different object. Harman considers that an object does not relate to its different temporal occurrences in the way that any object relates to any other object. Time is a privileged relation between certain objects—to be precise, the manifestations of the same sensual object.

This means that to define the support of identity, one must presuppose this identity: I assume that this tree is the same tree in the spring and in the autumn to be able to construct this tree as an object in time. What warrant do I have to assume this?

TIME AS TRIBUNAL

Harman is much closer to the common sense of time than I am.

He chooses to not consider time as a relation like other relations. For me, he is objectively correct. But formally (which is not a category that would make sense for him), I consider that it is necessary to think of time as a relation or a determination like other relations or determinations. In other words, to consider the possibility that there could be the same type of relation between the springtime tree and the autumnal tree, and between the springtime tree and a cat, or a word, or an event. The formal domain inherited from dialectics, I believe has as its role to push contradictions to their maximal state by claiming that the same thing is several things and that the tree at each moment is a different thing, differing from itself as much as from every other thing.

Why? Because to be able to account for time, one must be able to advance the hypothesis of doing without it. Otherwise, for me, one produces a temporal constraint on an object without managing to identify it. Why claim that this tree is an object, and that an imaginary tree is also equally an object, but that this tree a year ago and this tree today are not two objects, and make but one object? I think that nothing in the concept of object allows us to justify the spatio-temporal constraint. An object does not carry with itself the necessity of being identifiable or reidentifiable in time. (1) Either, it is necessary to decide to create new sub-objects, objects either illusory or secondary. In this case, the tree last winter is not completely an object, of course, but then what is it? A part of a higher object, which would be this tree, from its birth to its death? It is then necessary to espouse a perdurantist theory of time, which claims that objects are at each moment the spatial parts of their entire temporal existence. (2) Or, it is necessary to return to concepts such as those of “occurrence,” “manifestation,”

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or “exemplary,” which are other ways of talking about secondary “sub-things.”

Time is a tribunal deciding between a theory that treats everything as equal objects, but transforms these objects into purely formal things, and a theory that treats its objects as objects, but excludes some things and transforms them into secondary objects.

If one wants to treat everything equally as an object, I believe that it is necessary to be formal. Thus, one must gradually disembodify the object and consider time and space²⁵ as determinations that can be disregarded in order to consider this or that, this ten minutes and that ten seconds, as equal things.

The consequence is that to consider everything equally as objects, it is necessary to take this line of argument to its limit, and to agree to formalize objects step-by-step. The minimal object that one obtains, which has no other determination than being something, being outside itself, in the world, is what I call a thing. We have seen that this thing is not inaccessible, for it is not in-itself nor absolutely indeterminate, it is determined *a minima* (which means that it is always the result of a process) and outside itself.

On this view, a thing is contrasted with Harman’s real object, which is in-itself and absolutely withdrawn, and therefore outside of access.

EITHER ONE OR THE OTHER

For this reason, I think that my project and Harman’s are faithful in different ways to the same imperative: that of being equal with objects.

I choose a path that leads me to treat no-matter-what as a thing and to explode the spatio-temporal constraints in order to define a formal system, which necessitates having recourse to the “negative” of a thing and which is therefore dialectical in some way. But there is a price to pay. My thing hardly has anything to do with objects of common sense or at least the objects that “object-oriented ontologies” would like to account for. No-matter-what being something, my thing is too formal: each instance of something, each event, and each part of each thing are so many things. And in a way, my thing slips through my fingers. My world is populated not only with football teams, words, ghosts, falsities, golden mountains, and square circles, but also and above all parts of ghost fingers, and parts of parts, and parts of these parts at time *t*, and in the following moment, and the hundred moments before, and ten seconds before that... Therefore, my world hardly resembles a collection of objects, but rather a generalized decomposition of this world—certainly a nightmare.

On the other hand, Harman chooses to remain at the level of objects and not to break with the common sense notion of objects, that is, spatio-temporal identifiable and reidentifiable entities. In this way, his objects are more concrete, more easily discernible. The price to pay for his ontology is that it presupposes time and space as specific constraints, internal to the object (to be precise, two of the four tensions that he identifies, along with essence and *eidos*). But what is his theory of time? Is he a presentist or an eternalist?²⁶ Permanentist or endurantist?²⁷ For me, he considers that each instance of this tree (and not only its qualities) as seconds, hours, and seasons pass, is a different sensual object, and thus that the tree throughout time is a secondary object that is constructed from the series of all successive trees. Or he considers that the tree as time passes is one and the same sensual object, in which case the tree at this instant is only a part, an instance, or sub-product of this tree.

What the classical metaphysical dilemmas on time teach us is that it is impossible to consider temporal objects as equal if one wants to carefully consider their identity. Either one sacrifices the object that endures in favor of its manifestations at each moment, or one sacrifices the manifestations in favor of the enduring object.

Yet the very principle of our two projects was to demonstrate the equality of objects, and to endeavor to produce neither “less-than-things” nor “more-than-things.” I think that the only solution consists in treating the tree

at each moment and the enduring tree equally by claiming that both are equally *distinct* things. But in doing so, one sacrifices the identifiable and reidentifiable character of the object, and one necessarily formalizes the thing—one loses the “common sense” of the object.

The support of identity is for Harman a solidly structured object, between the real object and the sensual object, between an object and its qualities. He borrows from the classical model of substantiality and endows it with an innovative meaning. Internally, his model is strengthened by space and time. But in this way, he gives up considering many things like full-fledged objects.

Faced with this dilemma, I think that Harman chooses to safeguard the “sense of the object,” its identity, especially since the tradition of thought he comes from is not dialectical and does not seek to consider the relations between a thing and its opposite. My project, on the other hand, sacrifices substantiality, gives up the in-itself, and therefore produces a more formal picture, less obvious and less close to the sense of the object. But it attempts to produce the weakest possible ontological constraint and to consider no-matter-what as a thing. Of course, it sacrifices the possibility of immediately identifying and reidentifying the same temporal object. It does so, however, in order to reconstruct this possibility, which is not presupposed but obtained by thought, by conceiving time as an intensive classification of objective presence.

VARIABLE INTENSITIES

Harman’s view is a much better way of thinking about objects than mine. I sacrifice objects to a more dialectical demand: requiring a formal determination of an object, being nothing but a thing, broad enough to embrace no-matter-what; putting things back in each other, reconstructing classificatory categories, and returning to intensities.

Like me, Harman appears suspicious of philosophies of intensity. He does not think that the world is composed and traversed only by variable intensities—a view he criticizes, for example, in Manuel DeLanda’s work. However, the aim of my project is not to presuppose that the world is constituted by intensities, but to rediscover these intensities in a world of objects. Unlike Harman, I am therefore led to redefine intensity in objects. I cannot do without intensities—otherwise I would no longer have time or any possibility of identifying or reidentifying my tree—which are dispersed in as many things as there are temporal instances.

I think that extension is the relation between an object and the object that comprehends it (my finger and my hand, a plot of the prairie and the prairie, or the number one and the number five), whereas intensity is the relation of an object to itself. Insofar as no in-itself exists, where nothing is in-itself in the model that I advance, an object related to itself cannot be itself. But as this object is not absolutely otherwise, as it cannot relate or be related to itself as to *any other* object, it is not capable of being either itself or another. In fact, it relates to itself as to *either more or less* itself, but never *equally* itself. Equality is formal and only belongs to things, not to objects. In this way, I relate to myself, I am always either *a little more* or *a little less* than myself. I am not myself, but I am not completely other either.

On this view, I advance a theory of time as the classification of intensities of presence:²⁸ the present is the maximal intensity of presence. The present I is myself such that no I is more myself than the present I. A past I is an I less myself. But this is valid for every object: the tree of a year ago is a little less intensely present than the tree two days ago. Time is nothing other than the classificatory order of variable intensities of presence.

Form and Object is therefore, if not a dialectical work, at least a *twofold* work. First, it deprives objects of their qualities and determinations in order to have at one’s disposal a minimal concept of things. Second, it orders objects in each other through classificatory categories (gender, class, species) and intensities (time, values).

In contrast, Harman’s work is marked by uniqueness; it is a genuine theory of objects.

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I arrive at things by depriving objects of their determinations, and then order them again into categories and intensities. Harman never betrays the level of objective reality. He isn't as formal as I am. The spatio-temporal constraints that he integrates into two of the four tensions of his fourfold guarantee that he will never dissolve his objects, whether they are physical, imaginary, or contradictory, into mere "somethings." He also never goes so far as to discuss, as I attempt to do, definitions of the human species, speciesism and antispeciesism, social classes, gender, or racialism—all kinds of discussions that concern less the "objects" than the objective classification applied to living things or to society.

On this view, *Form and Object* may disappoint those who strictly adhere to "object-oriented ontology." It is a book that, from objects, discusses beneath formal things and above classification and intensities.

In that way, I deviate from the principle that I thought to have had in common with Harman, which consists in avoiding the overmining and undermining of objects, or, in my own words, in not producing "less-than-things" nor "more-than-things." I do not exactly contravene this principle, since I do not reduce objects to less or to more than objects, but I do not really think at the level of what we call objects. Common sense objects populate the pages of Harman's work: cotton, diamond, unicorns, apples, hammers, Japanese ghosts, or the European community. I plunge deeper towards formal things, or I rise higher towards classes and intensities.

But I think I remain faithful to the other imperative posited in the early pages of this article: to prove equality and to consider everything equally as objects, including parts of objects or temporal moments.

My tropism towards a dialectics without overcoming, which is expressed in *Form and Object* through the concepts of chance and price, pushes me to see in our two projects a kind of betrayal and fidelity to the same principle, which balances out. Equality exists between myself and all objects, but not at the objective level. Harman's objects are at the objective level, but they are not exactly equal to all other objects.

CHANCE AND PRICE

My project was born from a personal tension between the analytical and dialectical ways of thinking. Harman's project derives in large part from the conflict within phenomenology between Husserl and Heidegger. I think that I seek to be equal with all things, to the point of losing the common sense of things. I think that Harman seeks to account for common sense objects, to the point of not considering everything equally as objects. We meet at the precise point where our ways of thinking enjoin us both, for different reasons, to consider objects equally. In my own terms, the price that his way of thinking pays is the chance of my own, and the chance of his is the price that my way of thinking pays.

And since I have obtained through my past discussions with Harman the means to better understand our two projects, I am certain that I will read his response, sooner or later, in order to better understand our two ways of thinking and what brings us together and separates us.

TRISTAN GARCIA is a novelist, the author most recently *Les cordelettes de Browser* (Denoël, 2012) and philosopher. His *Forme et objet. Un traité des choses* (PUF, 2011), will shortly appear in English in a translation by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn.

NOTES

1. Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet. Un traité des choses*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011. The forthcoming English translation, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, will appear in the Graham Harman's "Speculative Realism" series at Edinburgh University Press, translated by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn. All page numbers below refer to the original French pagination. The translator of the article above sincerely expresses his gratitude for the genuine kindness, encouragement, assistance, and professionalism of Jon Cogburn, Tristan Garcia, Graham Harman, and Jon Roffe.
2. Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2012.
3. Quentin Meillassoux, "Subtraction and Contraction" *Collapse III* (2007, 107). *Form and Object* concludes with a chapter on death.
4. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2011, 5.
5. Ibid.
6. J. N. Findlay sought to categorize in the work of Meinong the fact of "being given" without necessarily existing nor even being possible.
7. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 7-19.
8. Garcia, *Forme et objet*, 47-50.
9. Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. Carol Cosman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 154.
10. In Karl Mannheim's intensified version, for example, one could not determine history "from the outside."
11. See paragraph 49 of the *Ideas*, according to which consciousness does not require things to exist. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. F. Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982, 109.
12. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 8.
13. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 9.
14. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 9-10.
15. In the Introduction, I talk of the "vectorial channel of being" to describe ontologies that, for Harman, populate the world with flux. This model of being takes root in Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gilles Deleuze.
16. "If we imagine the universe as an ocean, it would be an ocean without a floor, but with a turbulent surface of objects and nothing but empty sky above." Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 113.
17. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 122.
18. In addition to the influence of Alain Badiou and Quentin Meillassoux and their use of set-theoretical concepts in ontology.
19. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. Trans. C. K. Ogden. London: Taylor & Francis, [1922] 1990, 2.014.
20. The mistake, for Harman, would be "to identify the sensual with human and perhaps animal experience." Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 110.
21. "If, impossible though it may be, you could enter 'into' a consciousness, you would be seized by a whirlwind and thrown back outside." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Ideal of Husserl's Phenomenology" Trans. J. P. Fell. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1:2 (1970, 4-5). *Form and Object* generalizes this idea to all things: if, impossible though it may be, you could enter into a thing, you are outside it, since a thing is not in-itself, but outside-itself, in the world.
22. Garcia, *Forme et objet*, 68-72.
23. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
24. Garcia, *Forme et objet*, 72-74.
25. I treat space as a determination that one can neutralize by considering that, formally speaking, a part is not less than the whole. Each branch of the tree must be something as much as the tree that comprehends all its branches.
26. The eternalist thinks that "objects existing in past times and objects existing in future times are just as real as objects existing at the present." Trenton Merricks, "Goodbye Growing Block" *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 2 (2006, 103). The presentist does not only think that only present objects exist, but also that objects that exist all exist in the present—in other words, that a past object is only past *today*.
27. The perdurantist believes that objects have temporal parts. The endurantist believes that an object is entirely present at each moment of its temporal existence. David Lewis makes the distinction between the two positions.
28. Tristan Garcia, "Un autre ordre du temps. Pour une intensité variable du maintenant" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (October 2011, 469-486).

TRISTAN GARCIA AND THE THING-IN-ITSELF

Graham Harman

It is a rare pleasure to have this exchange with Tristan Garcia, whose intriguing book *Forme et objet* will soon appear in English translation.¹ Garcia has now written an amiable and insightful account of the similarities and differences between our philosophies, which in his words “provide a rare example of ways of thinking that intersect and meet at certain places and concepts, even though they derive from very different traditions and aim at very distinct goals.” I find little to disagree with in his presentation of my ideas— or of his own, for that matter. We still have ample disagreement when it comes to philosophical principles. Among other things, Garcia is right to note that my thinking is less dialectical than his. But my resistance to dialectic in ontology does not extend to its powerful presence in biography. We express our ideas best by contrast with those of neighboring thinkers, who force us to articulate what was previously left unsaid in our work. This can be a lengthy process, one that unfolds not just in conceptual space but also in biographical time: through personal meetings, series of ripostes, and even intervals of tension. I still learn much from disagreement after fourteen years of acquaintance with Bruno Latour and half as many with Quentin Meillassoux, and expect to learn no less during what I hope will be decades of communication with Garcia. The present response is merely the opening scene of a play whose end date remains unknown.

Midway through his article, Garcia expresses perhaps the central point of disagreement between our respective positions:

A noteworthy characteristic of Harman’s work is his reevaluation of the thing-in-itself. According to him, the real object always withdraws, inaccessible and in-itself. We know that this analysis is drawn from his reading of Heidegger’s tool-analysis... Yet the model I propose is different. For me, the in-itself is... the foil of *Form and Object*... In my model, a thing is always outside-itself, and is either in something other than a thing, or in another thing. But a thing-in-itself is meaningless for me. More precisely, the thing-in-itself is the figure of nonsense, what I call “compact.”

Hence the title of my response: “Tristan Garcia and the Thing-in-Itself.” Whereas Meillassoux and I simply disagree over who has the right concept of the in-itself (Meillassoux thinks it is that which can be mathematized, while for me this is a philosophical nightmare),² with Garcia there is basic disagreement as to whether the in-itself exists at all. The other differences between us perhaps boil down to this one alone. But to reach the point of seeing why, it may be useful if I briefly present object-oriented philosophy in my own words.

1. OBJECT-ORIENTED PHILOSOPHY: INSPIRATIONS AND NEIGHBORS

Garcia’s philosophy and mine share, in differing ways, the commitment to a “flat ontology” able to speak of all things equally without prematurely reducing some to others. For this reason we have a shared admiration for the Austrian School of the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Triggered by the charismatic teaching of Franz Brentano in Vienna, the Austrian School was long preoccupied with the status of objects. Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology (with Martin Heidegger as its transformative crown prince) emerged in large part through Husserl’s intellectual struggle with Brentano’s brilliant Polish student Kazimierz Twardowski, whom Garcia mentions above.³ Twardowski distinguished, far more clearly than Brentano, between an *object* outside the mind and a *content* inside the mind. After a long struggle with these ideas, Husserl countered by imploding both of these terms into the sphere of consciousness, with “object” becoming an ideal enduring unit and “content” becoming a series of shifting adumbrations of objects (*Abschattungen*). The orange intended by my consciousness is not outside the mind (as it is for Twardowski) but exists as a durable core beneath the various swirling profiles of the orange as it ripens or is turned in my hand. Object vs. content is no longer a struggle between the hidden outer world and the visible world of experience, but becomes a tension within the visible itself. The method of phenomenology is to disentangle these two poles from one another, so as to gain intuition into the essential features of the orange and all other objects: those attributes that an object cannot lose without becoming something else. Heidegger should be read as giving a basically *realist* critique of this method. Though Heidegger never escapes the Kantian correlation between thought and world, both composing half of any situation we can talk about, he would not treat the orange as simply an enduring core within the visible realm. For Heidegger there is always withdrawal (*Entzug*) behind all presence, and the name of what withdraws is Being. Heidegger’s question of being must be seen as a fresh assault on the idealisms of Hegel and Husserl.⁴

Garcia’s philosophical background, unlike mine, does not lie in phenomenology. He speaks of the “analytical and dialectical” origins of his thinking, and by “analytical” I believe he means nothing less than Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which has found numerous enthusiasts among Garcia’s younger generation of French philosophers.⁵ Garcia mentions Hegel and Wittgenstein among his chief influences. Yet there are Austrian roots to Garcia’s thought about objects as well, as can be seen elsewhere in his radical defense of Alexius Meinong’s *Gegenstandstheorie* against its famous dismissal at the hands of analytic heroes Bertrand Russell and Willard van Orman Quine.⁶ In this respect, the debate between me and Garcia might be viewed less as a combat between my strange phenomenology and Garcia’s strange analytic-dialectical standpoint than a delayed civil war within the Austrian School. For whereas Garcia defends an ontology even more inflationary than Meinong’s, he claims that I betray flatness by making enduring commonsense objects more real than their specific incarnations at any given moment, not to mention more real than their own halves and thirds and even smaller portions. Or as Garcia puts it near the close of his essay:

Common sense objects populate the pages of Harman’s work: cotton, diamond, unicorns, apples, hammers, Japanese ghosts, or the European community... I think that I seek to be equal with all things, to the point of losing the common sense of things. I think that Harman seeks to account for common sense objects, to the point of not considering everything equally as objects.

Though I would hardly use the term “common sense” to describe such objects as unicorns, Japanese ghosts, and the European community, the assessment is basically correct. Garcia rightly contrasts his view with my own when he adds: “My world is populated not only with football teams, words, ghosts, falsities, golden mountains,

and square circles, but also and above all parts of ghost fingers, and parts of parts, and parts of these parts at time *t*, and in the following moment, and the hundred moments before, and ten seconds before that.”

Garcia is again correct in saying that “Harman’s project derives in large part from the conflict within phenomenology between Husserl and Heidegger.” Let’s return briefly to that conflict between Husserl and Heidegger, so decisive for object-oriented philosophy.⁷ Recent scientific philosophy gives Husserl a bad press due to the obvious (though oft-denied) idealism of his position. Phenomenology is grounded entirely in how entities *appear*, and this leaves only a subordinate role for the physical sciences, with their ever-increasing roster of things and natural causes outside the mind. I gladly join scientific philosophy in rejecting phenomenological *idealism* completely. Yet it would be mistaken to see Husserl as nothing but an idealist, since he is also an *object-oriented* idealist, however unlikely this combination may sound. Whereas the empiricist tradition treats objects as fictitious bundles that apparently serve as useless and deluded supports for more palpable qualities, Husserl is the first to treat objects as the *primary* ingredients of experience, and qualities as merely *secondary*. All the complaints by critics about Husserl’s idealism, however justified, overlook the tension and drama he uncovered *within* the realm of phenomena, and its internal strife between intentional objects and intentional qualities. For various reasons, I prefer the terms *sensual* objects and *sensual* qualities, and Garcia follows my usage in referring to the “sensual” in his article above. This is one tension explored by object-oriented philosophy: the duel between sensual objects and sensual qualities, and Garcia is right that I identify this tension with *time*. The experience of time is that of sensual objects remaining relatively durable amidst swirling changes in their surface aspects. If such tension did not exist, it would never occur to anyone to speak of something called time.

That brings us to Heidegger. What bothered Heidegger was the priority that phenomenology granted to presence before the mind, or “presence-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*).⁸ In his fateful tool-analysis — first presented to students in 1919, but published only in 1927 — he showed that for the most part entities are silently relied upon or taken for granted rather than present to the mind. The fact that we are not usually conscious of our bodily organs or atmospheric oxygen does not change the fact that they were there all along, providing cryptic support for whatever is explicitly present. Reality tends to become present only when something goes wrong: when it breaks, when it turns up missing. The cosmos is a constant reversal between absence and presence, veiled and unveiled, concealed and revealed, ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. This difference between being and beings is known by the technical name “the ontological difference”; unfortunately, Heidegger uses it for two distinct purposes, leading to widespread confusion. In one sense the ontological difference means the key insight just described: there is always something deeper than phenomenal presence, something hidden that occasionally erupts into presence. But in a second and completely different sense, Heidegger uses “ontological difference” to refer to the distinction between the one and the many. Unlike the visible world with its plethora of individual beings, withdrawn being supposedly harbors no plurality.

For this reason, Heidegger’s contempt for presence often takes the form of a general contempt for individual beings. This remains true even in his later reflections on “the thing,” since one dimension of every thing for Heidegger is “earth,” and he seems to recognize one and the same earth at the basis of all his varying examples of bridges, jugs, temples, and indeed all specific entities.⁹ Without arguing the point in detail here, unified earth and unified being are philosophically untenable. What really withdraws in Heidegger’s tool-analysis is *individual beings* rather than some impossible monolithic being. And here we find another axis of object-oriented philosophy. Whereas Husserl discovered a tension between sensual objects and sensual qualities, Heidegger is concerned with a separate tension between *real* objects and sensual qualities. The real hammer is not the unyielding phenomenal core that Husserl finds lying within experience, but something deeper than any experience at all. If Husserl’s tension was identified with time, then Heidegger’s must be called “space,” since it speaks of the same interplay between relation and non-relation that we mean when speaking of space. For reasons argued in my book *The Quadruple Object*, we must also make room in our model for the other two tensions: real objects vs. real qualities (or *essence*) and sensual objects vs. real qualities (or *eidos*). The research program of object-oriented philosophy is to explore the various tensions or gaps between the two kinds of

objects and two kinds of qualities (yielding *time, space, essence, and eidos*), and to survey the breakdown of these tensions as well (yielding *simulation, allure, causation, and theory*). Let this suffice as a quick summary both of my debt to the phenomenological tradition and my attempt to capitalize on that debt.

But phenomenology was not the first-object oriented tradition in philosophy, nor was it even alone in the twentieth century. The honor of being the first such tradition surely belongs to Aristotle's philosophy of substance, which Garcia rightly links with my own object-oriented stance. The pre-Socratic philosophers, for all their differences, were *underminers* of objects (my term) who reduced objects to that which is *less-than-objects* (Garcia's term). Mid-sized everyday entities such as tables, chairs, and trees were reduced either to basic physical elements (water, air, or atoms) or to some formless primordial lump (the *apeiron*). Plato might be taken instead for an *overminer* of objects (my term), someone who reduced them upward to that which is *more-than-objects* (Garcia's term). Individual entities were replaced by their look or form, their *eidos*, and thus individuals were regarded as more or less corrupt instantiations of a perfect form or idea. Specific horses were earthly rubbish in comparison with the ideal form of the horse. Aristotle's genius lay in countering both of these tendencies, allowing neither a downward reduction of horses to water or atoms, or an upward reduction of horses to a universal *eidos* of all horses. Instead, individual things were given the status of primary substances, while Plato's ideas were consigned to derivative status as "secondary" substances. Indeed, individual entities have enjoyed a resurgence in the history of philosophy whenever Aristotle's influence has been in the ascendant (by no means the case in our own era). The problem with the Aristotelian tradition of substance-philosophy is its tendency to privilege what analytic philosophers call "natural kinds." This can be seen clearly in G.W. Leibniz's distinction between "substance" and "aggregate," according to which a man is a substance but a circle of men holding hands is not, or a tree is a substance but the Dutch East India Company is not. This privilege of the natural over the artificial destroys all flatness in ontology, and hence all universality in philosophy. Entities such as the United Nations, the First Armored Division, and the Vodafone Corporation are not given the same status as such supposed simples as humans, horses, and trees. Another problem is Leibniz's Christianized tendency to hold that substances are immortal and cannot be produced after God's initial act of creation, an assumption obviously foreign to Aristotle himself. My position shares with Garcia's (though in very different form) the general aspiration towards a flat ontology that can account for *all* entities, not just a privileged and ultimately fictitious class of natural, simple, or eternal ones.

Another object-oriented trend in twentieth century philosophy was launched by Alfred North Whitehead, and continues today in the increasingly prominent thought of Latour. The strong point of this trend is its elimination in principle of any special role for *humans* in ontology. For Immanuel Kant, the relation between thought and world was always central: to speak of the collision of two rocks could only mean to speak of the phenomenal accessibility of this collision to a human being whose experience was defined by time, space, and the twelve categories, none of them necessarily applicable beyond phenomena to the things-in-themselves. For Whitehead and Latour this human privilege is nowhere to be found, even if some critics of Latour hold that he never fully abandons it.¹⁰ Instead, Whitehead and Latour pursue a de-humanized cosmos in which all relations between all entities are on equal footing. The human perception of a tree is no different *in kind* from a bird's or raindrop's collision with a tree, even if the human case turns out to be more intricate and fascinating. All entities are on the same plane in relation to each other, or as Whitehead puts it, in "prehending" each other. We should salute this aspect of the emerging Whitehead/Latour relational ontology, and also salute its refusal to valorize one particular type of entity such as the natural, the simple, or the eternal.¹¹ In principle these philosophies allow us to place supposed "aggregates" such as machines and international banks on the same level as plants, animals, and atoms. What object-oriented philosophy rejects in this philosophical current is its tendency to treat entities as purely relational or agential. For Whitehead, entities turn out to be nothing more than their relations; for Latour, they turn out to be nothing more than the sum total of their effects on other entities. As a result, there are no enduring things for these two philosophers, but only perishing instantaneous "actual occasions" (Whitehead) or actors that exist in one time and one place only (Latour). On this point Whitehead and Latour are closer to Garcia than to me, despite his lack of obvious intellectual debt to either. Like both of these authors, Garcia grants reality to the apple at time T_1 even though he denies reality to an apple-in-itself that would endure

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despite wildly shifting features at times $T_1, T_2, T_3, T_4, T_5, \dots$

By now the reader should have a sense of the basic principles of object-oriented philosophy and how it resembles and differs from Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, Aristotelian philosophies of substance, and the relational philosophies of Whitehead and Latour. Thus we can return to the central point of this article: the similarities and differences between my object-oriented philosophy and the neighboring thought of Tristan Garcia. Though Garcia has already summed up the issue skillfully, I will present the topic from a slightly different angle.

2. OBJECTS AND THE COMPACT

Garcia's commitment to flatness is at first glance more radical than mine; this is especially clear from his lecture on Meinong, but is also visible in his article above. Philosophy must account for everything that exists without reducing anything to its causes, its components, its images, its effects, or anything else. Yet for me this anti-reductionism holds not for everything, but for *objects*, by which I mean unified entities irreducible to any of their specific relations, configurations, positions, or instantiations. The apple *per se* is irreducible to the apple as viewed in shadow from a distance of five meters. The reverse does not hold: the apple at five meters in shadow *is reducible* to the apple *per se*. There is a frank asymmetry here. Garcia is right to say that "our common theoretical opponent is every kind of thinking that denies objecthood to some objects," with the sole difference that I am perfectly happy to say that some things exist but still do not count as objects. They too must be included in philosophy, of course, but this does not entail that they cannot be subordinated to the object as their deeper principle. Garcia worries that this betrays the true Meinongian spirit of flatness by retaining a servant class of "sub-objects," and this point lies at the heart of our philosophical difference. After all, Garcia's call for radical flatness entails that there is "no natural ontological difference or hierarchy between different domains of animate or inanimate, thinkable or unthinkable, objects." More than this, for Garcia all *relations* are flat, to such an extent that the relation between an apple at times T_1 and T_2 is no closer than that between apple T_1 and a bulldog, dragon, or square circle. By contrast, "Harman considers that an object does not relate to its different temporal occurrences in the way that any object relates to any other object. Time [for him] is a privileged relation between certain objects— to be precise, the manifestations of the same sensual object." This is true, though I wouldn't use the term "objects" for the specific profiles of an apple. We might add that for me *space* is also a privileged relation between the same real object and its various manifestations in the sensual realm. Which leads Garcia to pose a reasonable question: "This means that [for Harman] to define the support of identity, [he] must presuppose this identity. I assume that this tree is the same tree in the spring and in the autumn to be able to construct this tree as an object in time. What warrant do I have to assume this?"

My response is that the point is demonstrated in my books rather than simply assumed, and the demonstration can easily be performed again right now. We should first distinguish between the identity of real objects and the identity of sensual ones, since the justifications are different in the two cases. Let's begin with sensual objects. Garcia's question hinges on the apparent fact that the springtime tree and the autumnal tree evidently have very different qualities, and therefore any effort to equate the two trees requires a further leap that amounts to a mere assumption. It is not even necessary to rely on a drastic contrast between spring and autumn, since we might already ask by what right I assume that the tree is the same at dawn, noon, and dusk, or when viewed from every angle of the compass or at every feasible distance. This way of looking at things puts Garcia very close to empiricism. The empiricist would say that we encounter bundles of qualities, which of course are quite specific in every case. The tree always shows a specific aspect, at a specific distance and angle, from a specific height depending on my physical size, in a specific mood, and in an exact set of specific relations to all other objects in my field of experience. For the empiricist these utterly concrete appearances are primary, and only derivatively can I infer (or assume) that one and the same apple is responsible for a series of similar appearances which recur so often that the unified "tree" is habitually taken for a familiar durable personage in the world. For Latour (an empiricist in the sense of William James rather than David Hume), the tree is derivative of its *tree-effects* rather than its tree-qualities. But for Latour as for Whitehead, the absolute concreteness of the tree at any instant

comes before any hypothesis of an underlying tree that can shift between numerous different times of year. The same is true of Garcia's position, whose flat ontology makes room for all the various incarnations of trees at different moments, but not for a tree lying deeper than these moments and capable of enduring from one to the next.

Yet the basic philosophical gesture of Husserl is to reverse this situation completely. For Husserl it would be phenomenologically false to say that I see varying tree-apparitions at times $T_1, T_2, T_3, T_4, T_5, \dots$ and then naively posit or assume an underlying object to link them. Instead, I look straight through the details of these appearances and directly grasp the tree as a unit, recognizing it as the same tree regardless of its shifting adumbrations. What is the justification for this privileging of intentional/sensual objects over their shifting adumbrations? The sole justification lies in the fact that this is how experience works; since we are dealing here only with sensual objects, which exist only for me the observer, experience itself is the final court of appeal.¹² In the sensual realm the empiricists are wrong to assume that the world is made up primarily of highly defined situations or phenomena and that the underlying objects in those situations are nothing more than naively posited substrata. We must admit that Garcia's motives are both clear and admirable. Object-oriented philosophy denies that a tree can be reduced either downward to its chemical composition or upward to its current use by landscapers, and Garcia holds in analogous fashion that the anti-reductionism should not stop there: we should not reduce the tree at T_1 to a mere sub-object of the tree *per se*. This position initially seems more consistent and certainly more radical than my own. But this apparent consistency comes at a price, as we will see.

Garcia's claim that we cannot assume the existence of an identical tree-object lying behind concrete manifestations might also be turned against the existence of real objects no less than sensual ones. For example, by what right can we assume that *one and the same* subterranean hammer was first working flawlessly, then missing, then explicitly broken? Why not treat these as three concretely different entities, rather than superstitiously posit a single hammer-in-itself concealed behind them all, as if in adherence to Western noun-verb grammar? A moment ago I tried to show that the unity of the *sensual* object behind numerous manifestations is experienced directly; the empiricist wish to treat the tree at times $T_1, T_2, T_3, \dots$ as separate entities linked only via assumption is based on an unjustified theoretical decision that the object must change whenever any of its qualities change. But the criterion of direct access does not also hold for *real* objects. By definition, the unity of the real object behind multiple manifestations cannot be experienced directly at any time, and therefore can only be deduced. We can state this deduction in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: if there were no hidden hammer-in-itself, but only a series of determinate hammer-manifestations, then no change could ever occur in the world. For every manifestation would already be all that it is, holding no surplus in reserve that could surge forth in a later moment and be expressed in the world. The fact that there is change in the world shows that something lies behind any manifestation (this is essentially the same argument as Heidegger's against Husserl) and is capable of manifesting differently under different circumstances.

By contrast, Garcia's position entails the denial of any hidden reservoir of the in-itself deeper than any concrete manifestation. The tree at T_1 and the tree at T_2 have no closer relationship than that between the tree at T_1 and ice cream, a black hole, or a unicorn. At first this might sound like a radical commitment to the idea that relations are external to their terms, and might therefore seem to be a celebration of individual objects on a flat and democratic plane, in sheer autonomy from each other. But Garcia's position is less flat than it seems, since it "make[s] room for neither an accessible nor inaccessible in-itself." He treats objects as *the difference* between that-which-is-in-them and that-in-which-they-are, between their internal components and their external contexts. For purposes of comparison, my own model holds that a tree is more than its molecules and less than its current appearance and use. Although Garcia initially seems to agree on this point, by making the object the *difference* between that which is in it and that in which it is, rather than avoiding both undermining and overmining (as I aim to do) he seems to perform both reductive operations simultaneously. For if a tree is the *difference* between its physical components and its current contextual position, then it will be hyper-sensitively dependent on both of these. To remove one needle from the pine tree will obviously change the "difference"

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between the tree's parts and its environment, and the same holds true if another nearby tree is knocked down. The only way to prevent such ontological hypersensitivity is to accept a tree-in-itself midway between the two extremes that is not overly sensitive to all changes in those extremes. But by excluding the thing-in-itself from the outset, Garcia ends up with a blatantly *relational* ontology, since objects will now inevitably shift whenever their inner or outer relations shift. I have argued against relational ontology for other reasons, but Garcia might have been expected to reject it due to his initial commitment to flatness. Despite his apparent celebration of an ontology more inflationary than Meinong's, Garcia excludes an entire class of entities from his world: objects-in-themselves not exhausted by their current relations. Instead of saying that the tree *per se* and the tree at T_1 are equally real, he denies the tree *per se* altogether, thereby showing as much hostility to non-relational objects as either Whitehead or Latour.

Thus it is not entirely accurate when Garcia portrays our respective views on objects and events as if they were the same. As he puts it: "Harman and I share the idea that what one calls 'object' (or 'thing,' in my case) is primarily what every operation of the division of the world, of the real, of the cosmos, and of that which is, rests on. One may divide the world into events, but one will end up attributing to these events the same properties attributed to objects." In *Forme et objet* Garcia treats the relation between objects and events in a subtle manner, so I would not wish to oversimplify his understanding of these terms. But it seems clear that his notion of an object (as the difference between that which exists in it and that in which it exists) is a better match for my conception of an *event*, given the utter concreteness of a tree at any time T_1 . Both kinds of objects recognized by my model, the real and the sensual, are partially indeterminate with respect to their exact properties, and therefore are incommensurable with any concrete event. By contrast, Garcia's objects might better be termed "events," at least in the sense in which I use that term. The price Garcia pays for insisting that events not become sub-objects is that objects as things-in-themselves are banished from the cosmos altogether. Flatness is maintained only on the condition that every *en soi* is extinguished.

I will end this response with one observation and one minor correction to Garcia's otherwise very accurate depiction of my philosophy. Garcia is right that I have no real concept of the negative, given my lack of influence by the dialectical tradition. What is particular to Garcia's conception of the negative is that every thing exists in its opposite: the world. "Each thing—whether it is my finger or my hand or a table—is a 'thing' insofar as it is alone, that is, a *solitary* thing existing only in its negative. The table is only something, in the widest and least determinate sense, when it is comprehended in *everything that is not the table*." Here we find Garcia's vivid contrast between thing and object, around which his entire book is structured according to a twofold split in the table of contents. Thing vs. object is not a taxonomy of two different kinds of entities, but two ways in which every entity can be considered. For Garcia, the thing is solitary, alone in its contrast with everything else—the world. An object is an entity insofar as it is not solitary, but engaged in determinate relations with other objects, either comprehending or comprehended by them. Ultimately, all these objects combine into what Garcia calls the "universe" (and if Garcia is right that we both allow for an infinite downward regress of objects but not an infinite upward progress, he neglects to note the difference that I have no concept of "universe," since I do not agree that all objects combine into a single super-large object). I am not convinced by Garcia's argument that the in-itself is impossible insofar as "if there were a thing-in-itself, it could only be in-itself in the world, that is, in something other than itself. Therefore, no in-itself exists *in itself*." This argument only works if we accept Garcia's notion that the thing must have an active relation to world as its form or other, rather than this other being merely conceptually derived. And here we see further evidence of how I am less dialectical than Garcia, since the dialectic is primarily concerned with the negativity inherent in our *thought* of things, rather than the things in their own right. I see no reason to believe that things in their own right have any contact with a negative. A chair or goose has no need of "world" as its negative form or other in order to be an individual being.

But what really interests me here is the historical novelty of Garcia's idea of world. As he sees it, all things share the same world. World is the uniquely special non-thing to which all things in their solitude are related. In the history of philosophy such appeals to a non-thing or super-thing shared by all entities is usually meant to

allow that non-thing be a bridge shared by all things and letting them enter into relation with each other. This is true for instance in the occasionalist tradition, in which the impossible causal relations between things are saved only the presence of God as a universal causal mediator through which alone things come into contact. But Garcia, for perhaps the first time in the history of philosophy, makes the opposite move. For him unlike for me, objects do not mutually withdraw, and thus they have no problem making direct causal contact. Rather than the universal non-thing being a God that links the unlinked, Garcia's universal non-thing is a world that separates that which is *already* linked, walling off all things in individual solitude for the first time. I am still unsure what this world is supposed to accomplish, but there may be further twists to come in Garcia's future development of the concept.

I will end with one small point of disagreement with Garcia's presentation of my position. He writes that "Harman's real object is in-itself, and his sensual object is in what perceives it. For me, an thing is outside of itself, in the world, and an object is in another thing." Garcia's point here is to show his similarity of outlook with my own, before going on to note correctly "a kind of tonal difference" between our respective positions. However, for me the sensual object is not in the real object that perceives it, but in a larger real object that contains *both* the sensual object and the real object that perceives it. This is my attempt to do justice to Husserl's insight that intentionality is both one and two. My encounter with the sensual tree is not contained in the real object me, but in the compound object formed from both me and the tree as its components, and the real me and the sensual tree are both contained in this larger object. What this means is that Garcia's treatment of all relations as part-whole relations does not differentiate his position from my own, since I too treat the two terms of perception as parts on the interior of a whole that cannot be identified with either of them. It is true, nonetheless, that Garcia's model of part and whole comes from set theory while mine is much closer to the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*, with perhaps a dash of panpsychism added (or "polypsychism," as I prefer).

Garcia states correctly that "[Harman] also never goes so far as to discuss, as I attempt to do, definitions of the human species, speciesism and antispeciesism, social classes, gender, or racialism— all kinds of discussions that concern less the 'objects' than the objective classifications applied to living things or to society." I see this less as a temperamental or intellectual distinction than as a sheer personal achievement by Garcia. Whereas the older Speculative Realists have often procrastinated, treading cautiously towards full-blown systems, the younger Garcia has simply taken the bull by the horns and given us a system in one shot. This boldness will not be the least of the lessons we learn from him.

Another crucial aspect of Garcia's philosophy is his conception of intensity, which feeds directly into his concept of time. But since this is the aspect of philosophy that I understand the least, and since I do not yet see how something can be more or less itself in a philosophy where all adumbrations are created equal, I will leave this theme for another day. Experience has taught me that the first attempts at dialogue with a neighboring philosophy never quite grasp the key differences clearly enough, so that several years are necessary for a dialogue or debate to take shape. This is why I consider the present response nothing more than an early attempt at orientation, not only for the reader, but even for myself.

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NOTES

1. Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet: Un Traité des choses*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2011.) An English translation by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn is set to appear in late 2013 or early 2014 in the Speculative Realism series that I edit at Edinburgh University Press. For a detailed summary of the original French version see Graham Harman, "Object-Oriented France: The Philosophy of Tristan Garcia," *continent*, Vol. 2.1 (2012), pp. 6-21. <http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/view/Article/74>
2. See Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. For Meillassoux's view, see his already classic work Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier. London: Continuum, 2008.
3. See Kasimir Twardowski, *On the Concept and Object of Presentations: A Psychological Investigation*, trans. R. Grossmann. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977.
4. See Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.
5. Perhaps the storm center of this tendency among the philosophical youth of Paris has been Raphaël Millière's ATMOC group (*Atelier de métaphysique et d'ontologie contemporain*) at the École normale supérieure. Indeed, it was while delivering a lecture to this group in January 2012 that I first met Garcia in person. Their amply stocked website can be found at <http://www.atmoc.fr/>
6. Garcia's April 13, 2012 ATMOC lecture on Meinong should appear in English shortly, but in the meantime a French PDF is available online. See Tristan Garcia, "Après Meinong: Une autre théorie de l'objet," listed as Séance 23 at <http://www.atmoc.fr/seances/>
7. For a lengthier account, see the opening chapters of Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011.
8. Please note that Heidegger's critique of presence has nothing to do with Derrida's, despite the misconceptions of Derrida on this point. For Heidegger, presence is countered by a reality *deeper* than its presentation or its context. But for Derrida there is no such thing as "deeper": presence is simply countered by its irreducibility to any *particular* presentation or context. Nothing exists but signifiers without a transcendental signified. Derrida's anti-realist misreading of Heidegger can be witnessed most clearly throughout Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
9. See the remarkable 1949 lecture cycle, Martin Heidegger, "Insight Into That Which Is," in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. A. Mitchell. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012.
10. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. Corrected Edition. New York: Free Press, 1979, and Bruno Latour, "Irreductions," in *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. A. Sheridan & J. Law. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
11. According to most readings Whitehead distinguishes strongly between the "atomic" and the "social." See for example Didier Debaise, *Un empirisme spéculatif: Lecture de Procès et Réalité de Whitehead*. Paris: Vrin, 2006. But I remain in the minority on this point.
12. Scientistic philosophy sometimes criticizes Husserl here on the grounds that inner experience is not infallible. Of course it isn't. I can mis-analyze all phenomena up to and including my own psychic life, which is precisely why the profession of "therapist" exists. But it is nonsense to suggest that the identity of an intentional object can only be determined by "transtemporal identity criteria" such as identical neural patterns activated by the tree over time, since I could be wrong in determining that these patterns are identical as well. No laboratory methodology can escape the problem. Both the perception of a tree over time and the scientific conclusion that two graphs show one and the same neural activation pattern rely on the very same ability to distinguish between an object and its adumbrations. For example, the scientist is unconcerned with the exact angle from which the neural graphs are viewed, but looks straight to the information on the graph without having to provide additional "transtemporal identity criteria" for this second act. Unless we want to demand transtemporal identity criteria for the identification of two graphs, and for ensuring that the transtemporal criteria I have in mind now are the same as those specified in our grant application ten months ago (thereby leading to an infinite regress of suspicious neural monitoring), we gain nothing at the "scientific" stage that was not already present in the initial experience of a tree. The distinction between an object and its accidents infects scientific technique every bit as much as introspection. For a prominent recent version of the scientistic argument against Husserl, see page 626 (among other passages) of Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. For a detailed critique of this book see Graham Harman, "The Problem with Metzinger," *Cosmos and History*, Vol. 7, No 1 (2011), pp. 7-36.

BADIOU AND MALLARMÉ: THE EVENT AND THE PERHAPS

Quentin Meillassoux, translated by Alyosha Edlebi

From the January 5, 1976 seminar of *Theory of the Subject* to *Five Lessons on Wagner*, which appeared in 2010, Mallarmé is mobilized on numerous occasions in the philosophical work of Alain Badiou. There is a continuous presence of a never-renounced master, but also a strategic presence, convoked at the decisive point of the event as such, in Meditation 19 of *Being and Event* (BE). Nevertheless, Alain Badiou's fidelity to Mallarmé, during his publications over thirty years, is not without a recurrent taking-of-distance, at times discreet, at others more pronounced. I want to try to show here that this taking-of-distance is in some sense reciprocal: certain reservations of Badiou towards Mallarmé can be inverted into discrete resistances of Mallarméan poetics vis-à-vis Badiou's philosophy. I would like in particular to sketch out the following thesis: the Mallarméan *perhaps*, as we discover it in *Coup de dés*, is not identical to the Badiouian event. This can be seen from two points of view: from the viewpoint of the Badiouian event, affirming an identity of the Mallarméan perhaps and the event leads to making the first an unsatisfactory approximation of the second; but, on the other hand, I will attempt to show that, from the Mallarméan viewpoint, the perhaps is not so much a Badiouian event as an alternative mode of thinking the undecidable. I want thus to work out a difference of nature, at once tenuous and, I believe, consistent, between the two notions. A difference which, through the ensuing contrast, will illuminate the discrete divergence of the poet and the thinker.

Lastly, I will suggest that this redefinition of the Mallarméan "perhaps", outside the orbit of the event, encounters nevertheless a major question posed by Badiou in his lessons on Wagner: in what must the modern ceremony consist? In sum, I will attempt to construct a Mallarmé other than that of Badiou, but capable in this sense precisely of responding, at least to some extent, to the most recent interrogations of the philosopher.

I. THE EVENTAL DEVALORIZATION OF THE PERHAPS

In order to explain these various points, and launch the examination of what fundamentally separates our two

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authors, it is best to begin with an example of Badiou's explicit "taking-of-distance" with regard to Mallarmé, which seems to me particularly well-defined and significant. It is found in the Preface to *Logics of Worlds* (*LW*). It is interesting in that it conjugates a distancing of the poet and a declaration of fidelity maintained towards him—Badiou installing himself within this narrow space that separates divergence from renunciation.

The mention of Mallarmé, and more specifically of *Coup de dés*, intervenes at the moment when the axiom of "democratic materialism" is dialecticized: "there are only bodies and languages", with the exception of truth. Here is the passage:

There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths. One will recognize here the style of my teacher Mallarmé: nothing has taken place but the place, except, on high, perhaps, a Constellation. I cross out, nevertheless, "on high" and "perhaps". The "there are truths", which serves as an objection to the dualist axiomatic of democratic materialism (the law protects all bodies, arranged under all the compatible languages), is for me the initial empirical evidence. There is no doubt whatsoever concerning the existence of truths, which are not bodies, languages, or combinations of the two. And this evidence is materialist, since it does not require any splitting of worlds, any intelligible place, any "height".²

We see that the statement of *Coup de dés* intervenes at a decisive moment: that of the formulation of the axiom of "dialectical materialism". In a first sense, there is a renewed fidelity to Mallarmé, situated explicitly in the position of "master". But at the same time, the concluding statement of *Coup de dés* is corrected as soon as it is convoked. Two terms of the Mallarméan sentence (already separated from the multiplicity of its interpolated phrases) are crossed out by Badiou: "on high" and "perhaps". Mallarmé's statement becomes in *LW*: "Nothing will have taken place except a Constellation." At first blush, the crossing-out of the "perhaps" is striking, since *Coup de dés* was precisely convoked twenty years earlier, in *BE*, in order to support the analysis of the event, and in particular the analysis of its undecidability. The "perhaps" which affects the final Constellation might thus seem to be at the heart of the Badiouian interest for this Poem of Chance. Just as the event is undecidable from the point of the situation, the toss of the dice remains undecidable on account of the Master's hesitation to open his fist in the face of the raging waves. And we know that the celestial "sublation" of the inadequate toss, sublation of the Master by the ultimate Septentrion, is affected in its turn by a "perhaps"—the "perhaps" that precisely interest us—confirming the impossible determination of the event through the knowledge of the situation. How can we explain such a contrast in the approach to the poem between *BE* and *LW*? How can what may seem emblematic of the 1988 approach be crossed out in the 2006 citation? Has Badiou distanced himself—and even considerably distanced himself—in the meantime from his master Mallarmé?

Such is not the case. The explanation for the correction in *LW* stems from the fact that it is this time a question, not of the event in itself as in *BE*, but of *truths*. In order to grasp this difference of viewpoint, we must recall the definition Badiou gives of *forcing* in Meditation 35 of *BE* (entitled "Theory of the Subject"): "A term [of the situation] forces the statement to be veridical in the new situation (the situation supplemented by an indiscernible truth)."³ Let's make explicit the meaning of this complex statement by drawing our inspiration from an example that Badiou himself calls "caricatural", but which has the merit of being directly accessible: that of the discovery of Neptune by Le Verrier in 1846. The initial situation is that of Newtonian astronomy.

In this situation, the event corresponds to the irregularities of Uranus' trajectory. It is always possible to say that these irregularities in no way constitute a decisive disruption for astronomy, on the grounds that they result, for example, from the faultiness of our measurement apparatuses. We could, on the contrary, miss the scope of this event for astronomy—and it alone—by aiming "too widely", by affirming that this fact goes so far as to refute the theory of universal gravitation, and requires the re-founding of physics in its entirety. In effect, Uranus' irregularities can be interpreted in countless ways, without us being able to grasp the exact situation it is called upon to transform. Le Verrier's originality was to wager on the eventual nature of this irregularity for the astronomy of his time, by formulating a hypothesis in what Badiou calls the subject-language (a language that

surpasses the factual terms of the situation) and which can be summed up thus: “There exists a supplementary planet.” The inquiry for this supplementary term proceeds through a computational production of an unheard-of precision, which enables Le Verrier to connect in the future anterior the statement of the subject-language and a term of the situation now accessible to the knowledge of the situation (that is, to observation by telescope); if such a planet with such an orbital trajectory, still unknown, is observed, then it will have rendered true the statement “There exists a supplementary planet.” The observation of the new planet by Johann Galle, on the very day when Le Verrier communicated his calculations to him, forces thus the “veridicity of the statement of the subject-language” by supplementing the astronomical situation of the epoch of such a statement, henceforth included within a new configuration of knowledge. This veridicity of the statement attests retrospectively to the eventual, and not simply factual or insignificant, nature of Uranus’ irregularities. We see then that the initial capture of the event proceeds from a wager anterior to every knowledge, since it is this wager, precisely, that engenders knowledge: it is because Le Verrier recognized in the irregularities of Uranus the possible presence of an astronomical event (the discovery of a new planet) that he undertook calculations aimed at sparking off new telescopic observations: proof that this wager is not itself the result of a calculation or an observation, but their very source.

Thus, there is indeed—initially—a *decision* of the subject: a wager that is authorized only by itself, at the point of undecidability of the event. Another proof that this wager is not supported by any knowledge is that it could have very much turned out to be false. This is in effect what happened to Le Verrier himself—something mentioned less often—when he analyzed in the same fashion the irregularities of Mercury’s trajectory: he supposed once again the presence of an unknown planet, which he named Vulcan and which was never discovered, since it does not in fact exist. It was necessary to wait for Einstein to extract the veritable eventual nature of this irregularity: not the existence of an unknown planet within the framework of Newtonian astronomy, but the local verification of a new physics—General Relativity—substituted, on the macroscopic scale, for that of Newton.

But if the event is undecidable, truth for its part—which is to say, the new situation produced by the forcing of the statement of the subject-language—proceeds indeed from a knowledge. Here is what Badiou writes on this subject: “Forcing is a relation *verifiable by knowledge*, since it bears on a term of the situation (which is thus presented and named in the language of the situation) and a statement of the subject-language (whose names are ‘cobbled-together’ from multiples of the situation).”⁴ There is no sense in doubting past truths, since all of them proceed from a forcing, and this is why Badiou can say, in the cited passage from *LW*, that the existence of truths proceeds for him from “empirical” evidence.

Let’s return, then, to Mallarmé. We understand now that if *Coup de dés* is examined from the point of the event’s undecidability, the “perhaps” of its final statement is legitimate: if on the other hand, we take up its formulation for truths, the perhaps is no longer suitable and must be crossed out. But are things in reality so simple? Does Mallarmé inscribe himself so clearly in the eventual and veridical construction deployed by Badiou?

In order to examine the question more closely, let’s take up the example of forcing that Badiou, always in Meditation 35 of *BE*, gives this time, no longer from Le Verrier, but from Mallarmé himself. Now the event produces itself in the situation of French poetry after the death of Hugo: it is, parallel to the decline of Parnasse, the crisis opened by free verse. The statement of the subject-language is borrowed from “Crisis of Verse”: “The poetic act consists in suddenly seeing that an idea becomes fractionated in a certain number of motifs with equal value and in grouping them.”⁵ The words “cobbled together” from the situation—“motif” and “idea”—could only have a referent within a new poetic situation, supplemented by the forcing of the Mallarméan statement—they are the equivalent of Le Verrier’s unknown planet. The forcing represents what a knowledge can discern from the relation between the statement of “Crisis of Verse” and such-and-such an effectively existing, singular poem or collection. It is thus that the new poetry, posterior to the crisis of verse, will finally be presented and no longer announced. This poem will play the role of the effective observation of a new planet. But what is then in Mallarmé the name of this poem capable of forcing the veridicity of its statement? There

is, at this point, a certain hesitation on Badiou's part, but a hesitation that is in some sense due to the thing itself. In effect, Badiou first convokes the *Book*—but the latter having remained incomplete continues to be a project, which does not enable one to attest to, but only suspend the veridicity of our statement; Badiou then falls back on *Coup de dés* which, according to him, “forces to be veridical the statement that what is at stake in a modern poem is the motif of an idea (ultimately, the very idea of the event). The relation between forcing is here detained within the analysis of the text.”⁶

Let's understand how these things are articulated: for Badiou, *Coup de dés* makes the event as such a motif. The Idea set in the poem—the idea made motif—is that of the event taken for itself in its pure undecidability. This is why the Hero of the poem, avoiding passive submission to the devastated place just as its opacifying mastery by knowledge, persists in the sole paradoxical action permitted by his fidelity to the indiscernible of the situation: he hesitates—he hesitates to toss the dice, thus he holds firm in his fist the eternally hazardous nature of the event. We said it, that the event took place or not, this cannot be initially the fact of a knowledge, but the fact of a wager: the hesitation to toss the dice is thus the exact symbol of eternal fidelity to this initial uncertainty of non-knowledge. And the final sublation of the Master by the constellatory toss maintains this fidelity to the hazardous toss, by submitting it to a “Perhaps” that attests to its intrinsic hypotheticity.

But, as we have seen, for Badiou, the undecidability of an event is undoubtedly its essence—but certainly not its vocation: the event's end is rather to prolong itself in a finite number of inquiries, those having as their goal a relation of forcing, which this time is of the order of knowledge: forcing between the statement of the subject-language that determined the series of inquiries and a term discernible within the situation. The event can only be apprehended from the point of a statement that thus reverses it originally in the series of inquiries and of the truth to which it initiates us. If I am not already engaged in inquiries by means of a statement of the subject-language, oriented by the series to come and driven to make investigations, I cannot even conceive that an event perhaps took place. This is why Badiou subordinates, in Mallarmé, the motif of the in itself undecidable event to the motif of forcing—that of knowledge—which enables us to access the truth of the statement of “Crisis of Verse”. And he does it twice over: a first time by subordinating the event thematized by *Coup de dés* to the project of the Book, a second time, more insistently, more intrinsically, by subordinating in the midst of *Coup de dés* the motif of the event to the forcing produced by the production of the poem *Un Coup de dés*, a production which demonstrates in action the possibility that is simply announced in “Crisis of verse”: namely, the coming of a poetry constituted as the “motification” of an Idea—that, in this instance, of the event as such.

Nevertheless, this way of articulating Mallarmé's theses with the logic of forcing can only lead, in my view, to devaluing or at least relativizing the interest of his poetry—and this from the very standpoint of a philosophy of the event, that is, from Badiou's own viewpoint.

In the case of *Coup de dés*, what resists the idea that there will have been an articulation of eventality and forcing? Simply the emphatic maintenance of *PERHAPS* in the final sentence: this word, inscribed in capital letters, is in no way posited as provisional, and as awaiting a truth that would come to complete it at the same time as abolish it, replacing its hypotheticity with an effective certitude. In the poem, this adverb is instead pronounced as the attribute of the beyond itself, in other words: the *eternal* attribute of the ultimate constellation. In Meditation 19 of *BE*, Badiou makes this *PERHAPS* the expression of a “promise”: nothing will have taken place except perhaps—in the future—a constellation. A promise whose realization will be the writing of the Poem itself. But nothing of this kind, once again, is expressly indicated in the Poem: the *PERHAPS* is neither realized nor invalidated—it is on the contrary hypostasized, celebrated for itself, erupting in the Heavens as an intrinsic property of the constellation—and that is why it is in capital letters, and in an identical body of characters. There is no hierarchy between the *PERHAPS* and the constellation: as though the latter were the realization of the promise contained in the former. In this sense, the Mallarméan *Perhaps* silently resists its eventalization à la Badiou: because it is not so much a promise as a pure actuality, a *Perhaps* that does not seem destined to disappear and to make place for another thing, because it is itself the sought-after fulfillment. And this holds as well if we identify the constellation with the Poem itself, according to its

splintered typography: the Poem, far from abolishing the *Perhaps* in the certitude of its own reality, exhibits it as an eternal and unsurpassable element of its own effectivity.

Will we thereby say that Mallarmé forced the statement-subject of the poem as motif of the Idea—in this instance of the Idea of event? But this success is then only partial, and deemed insufficient. For this logic of a celebration of the *Perhaps* for itself would come back, in Badiouian logic, to a hypothesis of the event, considered as a conclusion, at the expense of the patient and laborious work—in the noble sense of the term—of inquiries. We would thus have reasons to suspect in it a mysticism of the event, very obscure and devoid of consistency. And above all, we would have reasons to think that, by aiming for the event for itself, for its pure undecidability, Mallarmé lacked in fact its essence, failed to give its rigorous motif, since the veritable essence of the event is to be a promise of something other than itself alone, and not the will to maintain itself in its peculiar and vain autarkic resplendence.

If we move now to the *Book*, as another possibility of forcing of the Mallarméan statement, we have other Badiouian reasons to be dissatisfied with Mallarmé. In the first place, no doubt, because the *Book* is not an existing poem but a simple project, largely incomplete. And a project cannot suffice to produce the forcing of a statement of the subject-language. But also—and perhaps especially—in that the *Book* is a sufficiently precise project for its essential insufficiency with regard to the canons of the events to be expressed within it.

This critique of the project of the *Book* is, in effect, explicitly conducted by Badiou in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. It is produced in the context of a comparison between the apparatus of heteronymy in Pessoa, and the project of the *Book* correlated to the anonymity of its author. And the least we can say is that the comparison does not favor Mallarmé:

Rather than being the author of an oeuvre, Pessoa has laid out an entire literature, a literary configuration wherein all the oppositions and intellectual problems of the century come to inscribe themselves. In this respect, he has greatly surpassed the Mallarméan project of the Book. The weakness of Mallarmé's project lay in retaining the sovereignty of the One, of the author—even if this author made himself absent from the Book to the point of becoming anonymous. Mallarméan anonymity remains prisoner of the author. The heteronyms (Caeiro, Campos, Reis, "Pessoa-in-Person", Soares) are opposed to the anonymous inasmuch as they do not stake a claim upon the One or the All, but instead originally establish the contingency of the multiple.⁷

(I said that Badiou never renounced his fidelity to Mallarmé, but we have the impression here that we are witnessing a scene between philosophy and poetry, where the philosopher finally admits to his old mistress that his heart beats henceforth for a new passion, which is not necessarily recent).

We understand, in reading this passage, that there is in truth a profound reason, from Badiou's point of view, for crossing out in *LW* the words "perhaps" and "on high" of the final statement of *Coup de dés*. A reason that is not reduced to the fact that we cease to aim, in this statement, for the question of the (undecidable) event in order to envisage only that of truths (attested by forcing). These words, in effect, can be crossed out twice over, in two different but convergent senses—if we suppose that Mallarmé's poetry discovers its fulfillment either in *Coup de dés* or in the *Book*. For *Coup de dés*, to begin with: the crossing-out arises from the fact that the emphasis given to the perhaps, its constellatory quasi-hypostasis, risks constituting it on high, in an uncertain beyond, diffuse, intrinsically indeterminate and yet desired for itself. There is a risk of engendering a vague reverie, full of bad effusion and sterile musing: of fascination for a "perhaps, perhaps..." whose indefinite points of suspension leave us powerless—in contrast to the sober and painstaking labor of the inquiry required by the event. As for the *Book*: it is its own idealism, that is, its Hegelian will to totalization, which makes it a beyond doomed in its turn to an eternal perhaps: in other words, to a basically predetermined failure, turning the statement of the subject-language into a statement destined to be eternally suspended. To which Badiou can oppose the empirical evidence *that there have been* truths (including poetic truths) and that this is the decisive

point: more than the undecidability of the event, the evidence of truths in the four procedures that produce them, truths attesting retrospectively to the value of inquiries, and which thereby produce effective, real, evident constellations; not events that remain pure and virginal in the soft veil of their intact eventuality, but events “forced” by the meticulous investigation of the subject, from which the indubitable stars of procedural truths have been born.

II. RECONSTRUCTION OF A NON-EVENTAL PERHAPS

I would like now to propose another way of grasping of the Mallarméan perhaps, other than that of the event. I will attempt, in other words, to take up again the givens of the problem that Badiou posed (the statement of “Crisis of Verse” on one hand, *Coup de dés* and the *Book* on the other) but by articulating them according to a logic distinct from that of the event, of the subject-language and of forcing. This will enable me to put forward a plea for maintaining as is, *without crossing-out*, the “perhaps” and “on high” in the final statement of *Coup de dés*.

Let’s set out again from the statement of “Crisis of Verse” cited by Badiou. He only mentions the middle of the sentence, which I want to quote in its entirety: “Similitude between verses, and old proportions, a regularity will endure because the poetic act consists in suddenly seeing that an idea becomes fractionated in a certain number of motifs with equal value and in grouping them; they rhyme; as external seal, the final words are proof of their common measure.”⁸

This declaration—the beginning of the sentence indicates it clearly—is in effect the affirmation of a fidelity to the fixed meter of regular verse, in the face of the crisis opened by free verse. We know that in the conflict between the vers-libristes and the Parnassians, Mallarmé adopted a singular position that recognized the viewpoints of both parties. For the most radical adepts of free verse, such as Gustave Kahn, traditional meter—that is, metric rules in the strict sense (syllabication, caesura, syllabic division) and rules of rhyme—was merely an obsolete tool, with a conventional, even political origin (heir to monarchic centralism), but devoid of any poetic value. For the adepts of regular verse—such as Leconte de Lisle or Heredia—free verse, in contrast, was in no way poetry, but a prose poem embellished with arbitrary line breaks. Mallarmé, for his part, objects to these two extreme positions: his solution consists in a division of tasks between the two poetics. Against “Parnasse’s rusty sign”, he maintains that free verse is a novel poetic instrument, enabling each poet to forge for himself an individual instrument apt to express his own personality. But against the radical vers-libristes, he reaffirms the importance of regular verse, affirming that it—and in particular the alexandrine—is alone adequate to “ample occasions”, that is, alone capable of producing the song through which the Crowd accesses its own mystery. Mallarmé did not cease to aim, throughout his work, for a sublation of Christian religion and cult through poetry: he sought, and this is the material of the notes he left us in the *Book*, to constitute a ceremony through which the community, delivered from every belief in a transcendence, could contemplate the immanence of its own divinity. Poetry must thus be understood according to a double polarity: metric verse, ceremonial and collective; free verse, individual and personalized. But this polarity, understandably, is hierarchized in favor of metric verse: for it alone manages to constitute the new religion that is ardently sought after by the century, and in particular, it alone exhibits with clarity the source of every poetry. This is precisely what our statement affirms.

The sentence cited by Badiou is, in reality, addressed primarily to the vers-libristes: it affirms that a “regularity will endure”, in other words, that regular verse will never disappear for the benefit of free verse alone, because the Idea consists in a fractionation of equal motifs: in this way Mallarmé, as he indicates afterwards, affirms very concretely a defense of rhyme. For rhyme consists precisely in a separation of two consonant words, initially adjoined in the mind of the poet, which are then separated in order to be distributed in two distinct verses whose rhymed conclusion they constitute. Put differently, our text affirms that the poet is driven by the simple intuition of an Idea that initially consists in two words brought together by their sound and meaning, which the poet fractionates thereafter in order to construct verses that are themselves equal by their syllabic

numbers. The “motifs with equal value” are at once the rhymed words and the isometric verses (of same length), and the poem remains essentially an art of composing these equalities.

It is a point that we do not always have sufficiently in mind: Mallarmé’s singularity lies in being a poet who simultaneously participates in the most audacious modernity and maintains in a strict fashion the essential character of regular meter. The complete or quasi-complete victory of free verse in the 20th century would have meant for him, if he had bore witness to it, a ruinous amputation of poetry. Rhyme, in particular, far from being an obsolete artifice, attested to the superiority of French verse over ancient verse because it compelled verse to be dual. A rhymed verse is two verses (stanza or distich) separated by a white space, a nothingness whose space contains the vibration in which the song is deployed: a truth which the Greeks and the Romans did not attain, their verse being defined individually, by an internal rhythmic structure and not by an external relation to another verse. Rhyme is thus the exhibition of nothingness as constitutive element of poetic beauty; it is essential to the marking of modernity in relation to ancient poetry where verses are unitary totalities and not relational dualities.

A conversation from October 10, 1891 with Valéry, relayed by the latter in stenographic style, enables us to understand whence stems Mallarmé’s interest in rhyme, and why he could have perceived in it a solution to the crisis of free verse: “On free verse. Its predicament. Difficulty of creating verses without partitions. [...] Rhyme – Banville’s brilliant solution.”⁹

Banville is one of Mallarmé’s great admirations, never renounced. In particular, he was a fervent reader of his *Small Treatise of French Poetry* (1872) and did not hesitate to correct certain of his sonnets in order to make them conform to the prescriptions of this treatise. The third chapter of this work developed a singular thesis on rhyme: “RHYM... is the unique harmony of verses and it is the whole verse.”¹⁰ In fact, Banville continues, the “great secret of poetry lies in this end around which and with a view to which the whole verse is constructed.” Banville was very proud of this thesis, which he presents accordingly as the revelation of a secret that poets had never revealed to the layman: namely, that the poem is entirely constructed starting from its rhymes. The true poet, in effect, begins with the intuition of rhymed words—herein resides the source of his genius—and only afterward constructs the verses, which have no other function than to showcase their consonant ends.

Why was Mallarmé fascinated by the Banvillian thesis, to the point of declaring it “brilliant” and rendering it a possible solution to the crisis of free verse? Because this thesis enabled him to point out the danger of a regression of free verse in the direction of ancient verse: for if the verse ceased to be metrical, it would cease to be rhymed, thus dual, encumbered with nothingness, and it would then risk falling back into the totalizing plenitude of individual verse. Meter—and in particular rhyme—becomes the guarantee of a relational nothingness set under the principle of verse, and therefore emerges as a form of modernity, and not of archaism. From this point of view, free verse is potentially reactionary, and alone the preservation on its side of regular meter will enable the poem to conserve the gains of a structurally relational poetics.

Let’s admit then that the Mallarméan statement of the “subject-language”, in Badiou’s lexicon, bears on rhyme: what is thus its relation with the *Book* and *Coup de dés*? Can we conserve Badiou’s intuition according to which these two texts constitute, if not a forcing in the strict sense, at least a putting to the test of the Idea understood as fractionation of equal motifs? And what relation with the Mallarméan “perhaps” in its difference from the event?

Let’s begin with some reminders. The incomplete Notes for the *Book* were probably composed between 1888 and 1895, thus precisely during the years when Mallarmé is caught in the crisis of free verse, and does not cease to seek a path in order to respond to it. If the notes are interrupted in 1895, it is particularly because these pursuits lead him towards *Coup de dés* whose first section—the only known one during his lifetime—appeared in 1897. It is thus probable that *Coup de dés* was conceived as a response to the difficulties encountered in the composition of the Notes for the *Book*, or as a complement to what could be missing from it. My hypothesis is

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that the *PERHAPS* of *Coup de dés* constitutes one of these responses to the insufficiencies of the *Book*. Let's try to demonstrate this.

In the first place, what do the fragments of the *Book* consist of? What is at stake is the description of a ceremony of reading, before an audience of 24 people, by a reader called "the operator". The *Book* is not bound: it is composed of mobile pages, stowed away in two cabinets made up of pigeonholes. The operator then adjoins the pages in multiple ways, producing the "proof" that their junction is each time legitimate. The number of these combinations must be, in Mallarmé's mind, very important, since one needs no less than five years to achieve a complete reading of the *Book*, according to the rules of the ceremonial.

Badiou is right: there is indeed a totalizing design in the *Book*. Although dismembered and never bound together, although enabling a reading with much broader scope than ordinary books, the Mallarméan *Book* functions as a closed totality, eternally recommenced according to a period of five years, that is, as the notes recall, a "lustrum" (whence the ironic presence of the luminary on the ceiling of the reading room). But we also see that the *Book* is conceived as a *non-metric fashion* of "defending" metric number and rhyme. In effect, 12—number of the alexandrine—is omnipresent in the ceremony: the number of assistants (24, the number of syllables of a couplet of alexandrines), but also the price or size of the book should be a multiple of 12 or 6 (number of the hemistich). As to rhyme, it is precisely celebrated by what one could call a "dance of visual rhyme": the dance of the operator who, on the scene, adjoins, under the gaze of everyone, the mobile pages—revealing the fractionation and continual recombination not only of two verses, but of two pages.

Yet, what must now be emphasized is that Mallarmé did not in fact remain at this totalizing project of the *Book*: he was oriented, after *Coup de dés*, towards an *eternally hypothetical realization of this ceremony*. I will try to explain myself on this point. Badiou admits that the subject must necessarily wager on the event on account of its initial undecidability; but this undecidability is provisional or is meant to be so. On the other hand, truths, once obtained through the articulation of inquiries and of forcing, are guaranteed, always locally, always in a situation, by a specific knowledge. There is no sense in doubting that there have been truths; *a fortiori* there is no sense in doubting that there is what Badiou calls "truth procedures": science, art, politics and love in the case of human subjects. Well, Mallarmé nevertheless established the eternal undecidability not only of an event, but of a truth procedure: *that of poetry*. This is to say that he bore to ideality the possibility that poetry does not exist.

How can we maintain such a thesis, and attribute it to Mallarmé? How can we doubt the existence of poetry, and especially that of Mallarmé? In fact, such is indeed, we believe, the meaning of *Coup de dés* and of its evocation of a "Number that cannot be another". This Number is in effect that of the result of the dice tossed perhaps by the Boatswain at the moment of his ship's sinking. It is unclear whether this Master—who is also indeed the poetic Meter at the moment of regular verse's shipwreck—tossed the dice or not: but the result which appears in the Heavens under the forms of a Septentrion is simultaneously posited as celestial—divine—and hypothetical, marked with an indelible *PERHAPS*. Mallarmé thus clearly affirms that the advent of a metrical Number infused with a superior necessity ("which cannot be another"), a Number capable of resisting the "memorable crisis" of free verse, must be purely hypothetical if it aspires to be eternal. The Master does not produce a necessary Meter except on condition of making it the Rule of a Poetry become uncertain in its own existence. But once again, how can poetry doubt itself, its own effectivity; and how could this doubt become the paradoxical bearer of its future salvation?

That poetry can doubt its own existence: it is evident that this hypothesis is absurd if we give to poetry a "positive" definition; that there is a practice of versified and metric language, this is uncontested. The doubt at issue has meaning only from the standpoint of the poetry that, in the heritage of Romanticism, claims to be an absolute and the source of a new religion.

As we have seen, the vocation of Metric verse, according to Mallarmé, is precisely the re-foundation of the community after the collapse of Christianity. If this verse does not survive free verse, poetry will become exclusively an art of individuality, and will have thus failed to become a “great art”, a configurative art: it will have, in sum, failed to rival music which, for its part, and under the form of total Wagnerian art, knew how to set itself up as a new cult.

Nevertheless, Mallarmé considers that it indeed falls to poetry, and not to instrumental music, to constitute a new scene wherein the Crowd is convoked. But he simultaneously affirms the eternally doubtful existence of a poetry thus conceived as “religion to come”. In effect, if poetry is *at once* metric verse and free verse, it will only exist on the condition that its two sides realize their respective destinations: common (regular) poetry addressed to the Crowd for the culture of its own mystery, singular (free) poetry addressed to individualities disseminated by their idiosyncrasies. But if it is impossible to doubt the reality of free verse, since it has known how to express in an ever-new fashion the individuality of poets, it is possible today—quite possible—to consider that the metric side of verse has fallen into nothingness, at the same time as the ceremony of the *Book*. Nevertheless, the inversion of this anxiety consists, in *Coup de dés*, in affirming that the eternity of metric Number consists precisely in its eternal undecidability.

Here is the crux: Mallarmé’s singularity resides, we believe, in his attempt to produce not only an immanent religion (without beyond nor transcendent God), but also one that makes doubt in its own regard the object of its very cult. What is, in effect, a modern? A human whose irony renders him rebellious to every excessive belief, to every univocal ceremonial—the modern balks at the splendor, always pompous for his taste. This is why all the attempts of new religions in the 19th century—from Comte to Wagner by way of Lamartine and Hugo—fell in his eye, that is, in ours, more or less into ridicule. We cannot revive the dimension of cult, be it immanent, without secretly considering that there is here—*perhaps*—something irremediably derisory. No return of the ceremony that is, for the moderns, marked by an intense discomfort experienced in doing something that smacks of the artificial and the vain. I believe that Mallarmé’s originality comes from having realized very early on that his project of the *Book*—what he called his Great Work in 1866—should incorporate this dimension of doubt, of uncertainty, and make it precisely the object of a paradoxical religion.

To make this point crystal-clear, and show in what way it is tied up with Mallarméan pursuits, I will briefly rely on two texts: *Igitur* and *The Afternoon of a Faun*.

Igitur, let’s recall, is depicted descending into the vault of his ancestors, in the process of hesitating, during the crucial instant of Midnight, to toss the dice he holds in his hand. The tossing of the two dice symbolizes the act of producing a verse: imperfect, shaky, when the result is inferior to 12; perfect, when it is equal to the number of the alexandrine. This hesitation to toss the dice, that is, to continue to write poetry like his romantic ancestors once the belief in God disappears, stems more profoundly from the infinite structure of Chance. This structure, no doubt due to the influence of Hegel, possesses a manifestly dialectical structure—albeit of a heterodox dialectic. Chance is infinite in that it always fulfills “its own Idea by affirming or denying itself.” In this way it “enables the Infinite to be.”¹¹ In truth, when chance affirms itself, it lets itself be seen in an evident way in the insignificance of its result, and these are the bad verses, the results other than 12 for the toss of the dice, which symbolize this affirmation of Chance. But it happens nevertheless that a verse comes to light—like a miraculous 12 during a game—a verse with such perfection that it seems to enjoy a destinal necessity, negating through its beauty the Chance which nevertheless gives birth to it. For Chance, in truth, is always fulfilled when it is negated in the appearance of the most ordered results: in the fortunate coincidences that seem illusorily the sign of an intentional will, or in the sublime verses that appear to be produced by a divine inspiration, when they are merely the fragile work of a poet that might not have been born. The 12 that concludes the victorious game is made up of the same aleatory “foam” as any ineffective result whatever. Chance is thus (dialectically) infinite: it is *equally* present in the mediocrity that lets it erupt clearly and in the fulgurating beauty that apparently negates it.

But in this case, once Chance is posited as the new Infinite that takes the place of the old God, how can the poetic act hope to *equal* this Infinite—and thus become absolute, fulfill the Romantic wish for a poetry in symbiosis with the Eternal? *Igitur* initiates the solution that will be deployed by *Coup de dés*: the infinitization of verse must be produced by a *hesitation to toss the dice, a hesitation that is then incorporated into the verse*. In one of the endings of the (incomplete) story, *Igitur* simply shakes the dice in his hand, before joining the ashes of his ancestors: he tosses the dice without tossing them, confining himself to this ambiguous gesture as symbol of the poetic act to come. In the Poem of 1898, this ambiguity is posited in a more radical and clearer fashion: it is thus forever uncertain whether the toss of the Master have taken place, and whether the final constellation has indeed appeared: the perhaps of the poetic gesture is eternalized to ensure that the (metric) Number is infinitized—at once existing and not existing, fulfilling its Idea through the simultaneous affirmation and negation of the toss. In this way is symbolized a splendor that is infinite because it is hesitant. It is equally suggested that the ceremony of the moderns will be a ceremony of hesitation, the sole act capable of comprising in itself the infinite opposites: hesitation to smile with irony, or to believe with sincerity in the possible rebirth of a poetic and political communion.

My second example will be drawn from *The Afternoon of a Faun*. Badiou produces a very beautiful commentary on it in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, by identifying the relation of the Faun to the vanished nymphs with that of the subject in the face of the vanishing event. We know in fact that the argument of the poem consists in the ruminations of a Faun wondering if it dreamed its erotic encounter, some time before, with a couple of nymphs. For Badiou, this uncertainty of the Faun—which is not dispelled in the final version of the poem (1876)—illustrates the undecidable character (for a knowledge) of the authentic event. I believe that there exists, nevertheless, another possible reading than the eventual reading, and which accounts for the remarkable fact that the nymphs are *two*. In effect, we possess many convergent indices (which I cannot mobilize here) that suggest that Mallarmé is thinking, through this erotic duality, of the encounter of the poet with his rhyme (with a duality of verses). The two nymphs are originally entwined together, according to a sapphic duo to which the phallic duo of the Faun's antlers responds. This double couple—the nymphs, the antlers—is reproduced by the usage, in the poem, of rhyming couplets: there is an apposition of two feminine rhymes, which are enlaced with the apposition of two masculine rhymes.

But the passage that unequivocally demonstrates that the nymphs are the rhyme is the following:

Then, instrument of flights, Syrinx malign
At lakes [*lacs*] where you attend me, bloom once more!
Long shall my discourse from the echoing shore
Depict those goddesses: by masquerades,
I'll strip the veils that sanctify their shades;¹²

The important word is “lakes” [*lacs*]. We imagine in the first place that it designates the set of water pools where the encounter with the naiads is perhaps situated. But in the evocation of the Faun, it was a question of a marsh, not a lake, and there was only one and not many. If such is the meaning of the term, we must admit here a certain arbitrariness on Mallarmé's part, in that we do not see what calls for the word to be in the plural. It is thus more probable that the veritable sense, as Gardner Davies saw, is “*le lacs*”—pronounced <la> and not <lak>—a word which can signify, according to Le Littré:¹³

1. Snare used to catch birds, hares and other game.
2. Love knot, cords folded on themselves in order to form a horizontal 8.

Since the Faun aspires to project itself “as high as love modulates itself”, Davies thinks it is “this trap, knot or love knot that the Faun asks the syrinx to reconstitute musically.”¹⁴ Certainly the term, if it is a question of a “lacs”, must support this sense; but it also contains a more precise signification not noted by Davies. This “lacs” designates, first and foremost, the two nymphs that the Faun will manage to capture, and we will discover that

they were entwined at the moment of their seizure, which was perhaps equally that of their rapture:

*I seize them without untangling them*¹⁵

The “lacs” is thus the synecdoche for the duo of nymphs. In *La Musique et les Lettres*, which appears twenty years after the *Faun*, here is what Mallarmé wrote apropos the couple that two verses in a poem make:

The turn of a certain phrase or *the weave* [lacs] *of a diptych*, copied upon our confirmations, aids the hatching, inside us, of observations and correspondences...¹⁶

We therefore grasp that the interrogations of the Faun who wakes up, wondering if the memory of this encounter is real or merely a dream, concern the very heart of poetry: rhyme, already posited as synecdoche of verse in the first version of the *Faun* (1865)—which is anterior, let’s note, to Banville’s *Small Treatise*. But if the (incomplete) version of 1865 maintains the real existence of the naiads, the two ulterior versions (1875, 1876) render the uncertainty perpetual. If Mallarmé appeared preoccupied with the relationship to rhyme before reading Banville’s *Treatise* (1872), it is only after having read it that he theorizes the idea that the poet is destined to be always unaware of the value of his act: did he have the vision of a divine entwinement, an absolute distich—or was all of this merely a dream?

The Faun’s question is thus the following: is rhyme a phantasm, a simple pleasant assonance, a hackneyed rule even, or is it truly the Idea divided into equal motifs? This is what remains unresolved in the final version, just like the toss of *Coup de dés*. And the Faun seems to resign itself to the necessity of this destiny, which makes its dream a phantasm, by concluding its monologue with this declaration: “Couple, farewell; I’ll see the shade that now you are.”¹⁷ Doctrine of rhyme which enables us to understand that the adjoined pages of the *Book*, perceived as visual and danced rhymes, would have no doubt shown, in Mallarmé’s mind, their eternally doubtful and yet admirable character: the Faun’s philosophy, present implicitly in the Notes for the *Book*, and splendidly fulfilled in *Coup de dés*.

CONCLUSION

What should we conclude from this? I have sought to show that there exists in Mallarmé a “perhaps” that does not function according to the register of the event, because it aims for itself, and not as undecidable starting point for a truth process made up of inquiries and forcing. But having said that, I will add that Mallarmé attempts a response in his own way to the question that guides Badiou’s analyses on Wagner, and which make the latter turn once again towards the ceremony of the Book, this time in a kind treatment.

Badiou, in effect, concludes his *Lessons on Wager* with the enigma of *Parisfal* (1882), an enigma formulable in the following question: what is the subject of *Parisfal*? His response is ultimately as follows: the subject of *Parisfal* is identical to the “great question” of the 19th century, that of the possibility of a new ceremony, of a ceremony posterior to Christianity. The opera is punctuated by two ceremonies—in the second scene of Act I, then of Act III: the first is celebrated by Amfortas, the second by Parisfal. These two, Badiou insists, are formally identical (showing the Grail to the knights), the only notable alteration consisting, with the introduction of a woman in the second ceremony, in the change of the officiant. The subject of *Parisfal*, Badiou concludes, thus seems to be the undecidable character of the share of restoration and innovation in the future ceremony. The performed ceremony contains, in effect, a sort of empty repetition, which makes it uncertain to what extent it differs from the old one (novelty) and to what extent it is merely its replica (restoration).

But the ceremony of *Parisfal* contains a second repetition, which once again introduces an uncertainty. Badiou recalls that Wagner wanted *Parisfal* to be performed only in Bayreuth and did not wish the public to applaud at the end. Put differently, the *performance* of the double ceremony—the two quasi-identical ceremonies which take place successively on the stage—is *in its turn* a ceremony: that of Bayreuth; by the absence of applause, by

BADIOU AND MALLARMÉ

the sacralization of the place, Wagner intended to demonstrate that it was not a simple spectacle. There will thus have been a (real) ceremony of the (performed) ceremony. A double splitting in two of the ceremony. And yet, it is not certain (Badiou thinks otherwise) that there will have been here a new ceremony or even a ceremony *tout court*. The performance itself attracts dolled-up bourgeois from the whole world, which, Badiou says, is so pathetic when we think about it. And the fictive ceremonies, for their part, fail at bottom to produce a genuinely novel difference between the old and the new. Well, I believe that this is what could have reconciled—be it partially—Mallarmé with Wagner: this whole uncertainty, oscillating between the ridiculous and the sublime, the new and the repetitive, the real and the fictive—all of this would have represented fairly well I believe, not a failure, not a waiting for another thing, but quite precisely the modern ceremony, according to its intrinsic and, in a certain way, unsurpassable “perhaps”. The ceremony as eternal hesitation between the derisory and the solemn, the constellation and its night.

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NOTES

1. *Translator's note*—We would like to thank Éditions Germina for granting the permission for this translation. The French text appeared originally in the collection *Autour d'Alain Badiou*, 2011, copyright of Les Éditions Germina.
2. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2. Trans. Alberto Toscano. London: Continuum, 2009, 4.
3. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham. London: Continuum, 2005, 403 (translation modified).
4. Badiou, *Being and Event* 403.
5. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations: The 1897 Arrangement by the Author; Together with "Music and Letters"*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007, 206 (translation modified).
6. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 405.
7. Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, 44.
8. Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 206 (translation modified).
9. Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Gallimard, Bibl. De la Pléiade, t. 1, 1957, p. 1723; cited by Michel Murat, *Le Coup de dés de Mallarmé. Un recommencement de la poésie*. Belin, 2005, 24.
10. *Ressouvenances*, 1998 (facsimile of G. Charpentier's edition, 1883), 47.
11. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. B. Marchal, Bibl. de la Pléiade, Gallimard, t. I, 1998, 476.
12. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems: A Bilingual Edition*. Trans. Henry Weinfield. University of California Press, 1994, 39.
13. *Translator's note*—*Le Littré* is a French dictionary published by Hachette.
14. Gardner Davies, *Mallarmé et la "couche suffisante d'intelligibilité"*. Paris, José Corti, 1988, 84. One can also consider Vigny's verses (La colère de Samson, *Les Destinées*):

He will go to the city and there the foolish virgins
Will catch him in their snares [*lacs*] at the first words.

15. Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 40 (translation modified).
16. Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 186. My emphasis. Mallarmé spells "lac" and not "lacs", but there is no doubt that he understands the term in the sense of a weaved network [*lacs*] and not a pool of water—for otherwise the comparison with the distich would have no meaning.
17. Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 41.

DESIRE, ABSENCE AND ART IN DELEUZE AND LYOTARD

Kiff Bamford

In an undated letter, Giles Deleuze writes the following to Jean-François Lyotard:

One thing continues to surprise me, the more it happens that we have shared or close thoughts, the more it happens that an irritating difference comes into sight which even I don't succeed in locating. It is like our relationship: the more I love you, the less I am able to come to grasp it, but what is it?¹

There is a proximity between the work of these two thinkers that remains little considered, it is one that also hides a subtle, but significantly different attitude to desire. The proliferation of interest in Deleuze, particularly since his death, is accompanied by new considerations of desire which echo Lyotard's libidinal writings very strongly—Elizabeth Grosz's 2008 *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* is one example.² Because of the close proximity of Lyotard and Deleuze, it is rewarding to carefully consider the differences among their many similarities (and here I am consciously making no distinction between those writings authored singly by Deleuze and those written collaboratively with Guattari). The manner in which both Lyotard and Deleuze write on art might be described as writing *with* art and artists rather than about them, inasmuch as they give prominence to the ideas, statements and working methods described, and privilege the role of the artist as enacting a different type of thought.³ In *Anti-Oedipus* this attitude is clear: "the artist presents paranoiac machines, miraculating-machines, and celibate machines [...] the work of art is itself a desiring-machine."⁴ It is not that they write in two genres: art criticism and philosophy, but that their writings cross the circumscribed boundaries of these genres to ask questions of each.

The importance of maintaining the difference of the visual is central to both Deleuze and Lyotard and it is because of a sensitivity to the particularities of the visual that their writings strive to work with that difference, rather than reduce it to a written form. Both Deleuze and Lyotard work knowingly with the paradox of writing about art—evoking rather than capturing its force—and it is in wrestling with this dilemma that their approaches can be particularly rewarding. I will discuss two pieces in particular: Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of*

Sensation (1981) which is his most extensive work on a single artist, and Lyotard's "It's as if a line..." (1983) on the Italian artist Valerio Adami.⁵ I have chosen to focus on this essay because it highlights aspects of separation and questioning, which encapsulate the differing approaches of Lyotard and Deleuze already apparent in their earlier exchange at the time of the publication of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* in 1972 and which their shared use of the term 'figural' might belie. It is the aim of this essay to distinguish Lyotard's conception of desire from that of Deleuze and Guattari and to defend his position from their criticisms. This difference becomes particularly evident in their respective discussions of art and it is here, I contend, that Lyotard's approach has a potential which remains little discussed.

LET'S START WITH THE FIGURAL

Start because the figural is always in flux: it is not a concept but rather a force that works through or works over established forms of codified discourse. The figural works through Lyotard's major 1971 work *Discourse, Figure* and is picked up and used by Deleuze ten years later in his *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.⁶ The figural is at times close to desire itself; its most extreme form—the figure-matrix—is described by Lyotard as being "hand in glove with desire" and as such shares much with the unconscious in its inability to be fixed, coded, translated or seen.⁷ The figure-matrix, like the unconscious as described by Freud, knows no negation and consequently cannot act like a language as Lacan would have it or be grasped except through recognition of its effects, distortions and transformations. *Discourse, Figure* moves through diverse terrain in its attack on structural linguistics, Lacanian psychoanalysis and reductive attempts to analyse art in both its visual and written forms. Yet the speed of its writing is slower than the whirlwinds of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) or Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1974); *Discourse Figure* engages with its interlocutors in a more traditional manner, referring excessively outside itself in a plethora of footnotes, almost a parody of the scholarly text which both reflects and refuses its initial manifestation as the thesis for his *doctorat d'état*. Lyotard acknowledges the limitations of the book's form in failing to match the demands of its content whilst also describing the process by which its focus moves—from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to Freud's psychoanalysis via Frege, Lacan, Klee and Cézanne (among others)—as the most figural aspect of the whole endeavour.⁸ In *Discourse, Figure* the figural is initially equated with the "mobile eye" that exposes the limitations of structuralist linguistics, but Lyotard is not merely wishing to re-inscribe a phenomenological sensibility onto language. Rather, Lyotard intends to draw attention to the figural as that which falls outside signification—to recover the trembling visuality that he recognises in the written, printed or painted letter, the sensory elements of Mallarmé's placings that do not merely signify oppositions within a system but open up discourse to the presence of the figural bound within it. Lyotard considers the figure operating within discourse not as opposed to it, but as given "thickness" through the "energetics" of the eye, a process he equates with the approach to painting by Paul Klee and Jackson Pollock, emphasizing the bodily aspect of each painter's dance. Both Lyotard and Deleuze refer to Klee's working methods as instances of the search for a figuration that attempts to free itself from the restrictive modes of perception and formulaic means of representation. They both quote Klee's aim: "not to render the visible, but to render visible".⁹

However, the figural is a process which cannot be captured and can only be referred to through analogy. "The artwork's 'subject', 'motif', or 'theme' entices us. But the artwork does not fulfill desire; it unfulfills it. Pleasure and death are cleaved in the artwork: its formalism is not the sign of the mind, but of the death drive."¹⁰ Lyotard ends a contemporary account of the work with the declaration "*Sous le discours = la figure; sous les pavés = la plage*": a bitter-sweet reminder of both its revolutionary origins and the essentially political nature of its attack on ideology.¹¹ Lyotard later expressed a wariness about the extent to which *Discourse, Figure* provided answers that were "too convenient" and remained "too close to a conception of the unconscious coming directly from Freud" but its effects are still evident in his later writing, even where the predominance of Kant suggests that this libidinal force had been abandoned.¹² It is to be hoped that the long-overdue English translation of *Discourse, Figure* will aid reconsiderations of his work and the particular sensitivity he shows to the manifestation of desire in art, not as the fulfilment of a wish but through its twisting, turning, "scuttling" intervention.

DELEUZE AND THE FIGURAL

In Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon we find many terms familiar to both Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's lexicon—sensation, Bodies without Organs, deterritorialization—but Deleuze also introduces the term 'figural', with specific reference to Lyotard's usage in *Discourse, Figure*: "[Painting] has two possible ways of escaping the figurative: toward pure form, through abstraction; or toward the purely figural, through extraction or isolation. If the painter keeps to the Figure, if he or she opts for the second path, it will be to oppose the 'figural' to the figurative."¹³ Explicitly Deleuze uses the term 'figural' in order to differentiate Bacon's use of the figure from a representational, figurative approach to painting, and his subsequent use of a capitalised 'F' for Figure, in reference to Bacon, brings with it that distinction. However, the figural is more than just a mark of formal distinction and encapsulates that which is central to Bacon's work for Deleuze—his striving for a different figuration that avoids clichéd forms of figurative representation and which works instead with sensations. Deleuze writes of sensation, following Cézanne and Bacon, as impacting directly on the nervous system, bypassing the modes of communication which need cerebral decoding: the "violence of sensation" is an affective sensation coming from matter itself.¹⁴ The approach of Bacon, according to Deleuze, is one which rejects a figuration that is too sensational, in the colloquial sense, and which relies on forms of narrative for its dramatic impact. Deleuze highlights Bacon's own hesitation regarding the famous series of screaming Popes, based on Velázquez's portraits of Pope Innocent X, and his caution with regard to narrative. Bacon's declaration of intent: "I want to paint the scream more than the horror" is repeated twice by Deleuze and again in the preface for the English edition; thus in some way becoming a leitmotif of the book it emphasises the importance, for Deleuze, of not representing mimetically but through sensation: "The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché)."¹⁵ Deleuze suggests that Bacon questions presumptions with regard to the representation and likens the process to that of Antonin Artaud—who forces a rethinking of what we understand to be cruelty—similarly, horror is rethought in Bacon's paintings. Therefore, despite Bacon's own misgivings about the overly sensational screaming Popes, Deleuze maintains their centrality as part of the search for a violence which is invisible: "it is rather the way in which the Pope himself sees nothing, and screams *before the invisible*."¹⁶

In this search for the underlying, disruptive forces of sensation we can identify the importance of Lyotard's *Discourse, Figure* to Deleuze, one which outweighs the book's single reference to the term 'figural'. The role of *Discourse, Figure* is highlighted by Ronald Bogue who gives an overview of Lyotard's use of the figural and acknowledges that whilst Deleuze "does not embrace all aspects of Lyotard's concept" he relates the figural to sensation and affect but "without resorting to the theoretical presuppositions of Freudian psychoanalysis or conventional phenomenology".¹⁷ It is to further question the extent of the confusion between Deleuze and Lyotard that we must consider their different responses to Freud—Is this the ungraspable difference to which Deleuze refers in the letter quoted at the start of this present article? Deleuze wrote a short but favourable review of *Discourse, Figure* in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* (May 1972), parts of which are incorporated into *Anti-Oedipus*. There are three sections of *Anti-Oedipus* which discuss *Discourse, Figure*, praising Lyotard's work as "the first generalised critique of the signifier".¹⁸ But, having praised his celebration of the figural element as desire, Deleuze and Guattari question the role he gives to transgression, arguing that it results in deformation rather than transformation:

But what can explain the reader's impression that Lyotard is continually arresting the process, and steering the schizzes toward the shores he has so recently left behind: toward coded or overcoded territories, spaces and structures, to which they bring only 'transgressions', disorders, and deformations that are secondary in spite of everything, instead of forming and transporting further the desiring-machines that are in opposition to the structures, and the intensities that are in opposition to the spaces?¹⁹

The role of disorder and transgression is key to the difference between Lyotard and Deleuze and Guattari, a difference that can be seen in the later writings on painting. As indicated in the quotation, transgression and

deformation are central characteristics of the figural in Lyotard's writing: the figural works within structured systems of representation and it is through deformation that the presence of desire is signalled. In his most concentrated refusal of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the section of *Discourse, Figure* titled "The Dream-work Does Not Think", Lyotard gives an account of the Freudian processes of dream-work to demonstrate their opposition to the rules of discourse and the violence of its transgression: "Desire does not speak; it does violence to the order of utterance".²⁰ It is not an already established order that is then transgressed but a simultaneous, primordial composite: "at once discourse and figure".²¹ Lyotard accepts that transgression cannot operate without a limit whereas in the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari there is no 'beyond'—as James Williams notes—and therefore no limit.²² It is clear that Lyotard recognizes this difference between their work, evident in "Capitalism énergumène," his commentary on *Anti-Oedipus*: "In Deleuze and Guattari's book you will see everywhere their utter contempt for the category of transgression" and in his final remarks concerning the movement of desire which "is not that of transgressing the limit, but rather of pulverizing the field itself into a libidinal surface".²³ The latter gives a foretaste of the libidinal band with which Lyotard opens *Libidinal Economy*: where there is no inside or outside there can be no limit, only a continually shifting surface of intensities. It is easier to identify a similarity of approach to a purely affirmative desire-as-force in the *Libidinal Economy*, to see it as flowing from the same compulsion as *Anti-Oedipus*, but it is wrongheaded to assume that this constitutes an abandonment of the hesitation that Deleuze identified in *Discourse, Figure*. The stopping, stalling, stuttering machines of Lyotard's writings are not the smooth accelerated flows of Deleuze and Guattari: he is "continually arresting the process" in his search for that which is rendered mute. This hesitation is particularly evident in his encounters with art.

BACON AND ADAMI

Lyotard wrote two catalogue essays to accompany exhibitions of work by Valerio Adami, both of which are incorporated into the book *Que Peindre? Adami, Arakawa, Buren*, published in 1987 by *Éditions de la Différence* as part of the same series as Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*.²⁴ Both publications are double volume editions consisting of one volume of plates, and one of text. It is Lyotard's essay 'It's as if a line...' which I will use here to parallel Deleuze's work on Francis Bacon in order to highlight the role of distance and separation in Lyotard's account which makes it markedly different to that of Deleuze and Guattari. Lyotard's essay was first published to accompany an exhibition of Adami's work at the Galerie Maeght in Paris in 1983 in a lavishly illustrated edition of the in-house magazine *Repères: cahiers d'art contemporain*.²⁵ Previous catalogues for the Galerie Maeght included essays on Adami by Italo Calvino and Jacques Derrida, the latter being incorporated into *The Truth in Painting*. However, whilst Derrida's focus is the framing devices and the margins of Adami's drawings, Lyotard's concern is the drawn line itself and its power. Although Lyotard no longer uses the term "figural" in his essay on Adami, he does refer to discussions which are central to *Discourse, Figure*, particularly the distinction between letter and line and the extent to which their functions overlap yet operate in significantly different ways. Questioning the compartmentalisation of the visual and the textual is a consistent theme throughout *Discourse, Figure*, analysing the means by which systems of representation have reduced pictorial forms to signification. The perspectival system of Alberti's *costruzione legittima*, for example, denies the eye its movement, its peripheral laterality and its plastic sensibility, thereby marginalising or rendering mute the figural frisson present in the co-existence of different spaces—identified by Lyotard in illuminated manuscripts, the work of Masaccio and the paintings of Cézanne. It is in order to recover the figural sensibility—that which is irreducible to a system—which leads to Lyotard's preoccupation with the re-inscription of corporeal resonance into the plastic space of the line, that which disturbs its signifying function:

The line is an unrecognizable trace, so long as it does not refer the eye to a system of connotation where this trace would receive fixed, invariant meaning. It is unrecognizable when it does not fit in an order of relations that would inevitably determine its value. The line is therefore figural when, by her or his artifice, the painter or drawer places it in a configuration in which its value cannot yield to an activity of recognition—for to recognize is to know well. From here on we must proceed with

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caution.²⁶

Lyotard is at pains to uphold this difference in order that the figural aspect of the line is not enclosed by the letter—that the visible aspect of the line is not written out when it is written about: this is at the heart of Lyotard's writings on art.

In the Adami issue of *Repères* the reproductions of drawings, paintings and Lyotard's lines construct a dialogue between demands, expectations and styles—the forcefulness of the line and the forms it suggests are questioned by the disrupted arrangement of space and the staged interlocutors (a frequent device used by Lyotard) which question our assumptions with regard to the function of the line. The stylistic strategy used by Lyotard gives presence to the lines themselves in the work of Adami, described as “inhabited by a desire”, they “make a demand”.²⁷ It is unsurprising that Lyotard moulds his essay around the line because Adami's is an odd line—strong, bold, decisive and beautifully curved, it opens up the picture plane to allow space in, if only the intersecting of planes would conform to the rules of illusion which we have been taught to expect. Even when a clearly delineated form, such as a figure, is cut from the background and its smoothness allows the illusion of a powerful three-dimensionality to emerge in a classical, sculptured manner, it is not permitted to exist without being overrun: either by the background colour (which will claim some part of the body), or by an abandoned line (which leaves part of the form missing), or by a shift in chromatic tone which does not allow the hand and head to co-exist on the same plane.

The following quotation from Lyotard's text indicates the approach he takes: quoting the artist, he uses these comments as prompts to his own discussion:

Adami quotes Diderot: ‘To paint the way they talked in Sparta.’ On April 9, 1981, he drew a Promenade du sceptique [Walk of the Skeptic]: the man, barefoot, walks on his head, the woman holds a magnifying mirror. She is sliced down the middle from top to toe. It would require this laconism in order to comment on the drawing and recover its tenderness. Diderot said that pictures are like great mutes. They disavow beforehand everything we write about them.²⁸

Quoting Adami, who is quoting Diderot, has the effect of distancing Lyotard's own voice which is, consequently, rarely felt in a direct way but is replaced by an internal dialogue in which the drawings and the lines themselves play a significant role. The lines are described as belonging to an already existing continuum of possibilities, reminding us of their anteriority: they are there before Adami and his decision to select some, and silence others. So too, argues Lyotard, the picture is there before the critic, anticipating that which will be written: “the line anticipates commentary and eludes it.”²⁹

In some respects the materiality of the line, and its independence from either artist or commentator, is similar to that described by Deleuze and Guattari in “Percept, affect, and concept” (*What is Philosophy?* 1991), perhaps their clearest statement about the role and functioning of the arts. Here the artistic gesture is described as existing independently of the artist and viewer: “The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself.”³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari argue that such a conceptualisation of sensation is possible because humans are themselves only collections of forces, having arisen from the intense flows of forces, not the source of life in a vitalist sense but a changing, unstable chaos without fixed origin from which unanticipated folds can emerge, and are not privileged creators or receivers of sensation.³¹ The questions which have been levelled at Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of flows concern the creation of a privileged space—whether for desire, the flux of forces or indeed for art—are they positing an idealised ‘beyond’ which is a return to transcendence in another guise?³² Deleuze responds to such accusations with a further explanation of desire, explaining that it is not a natural state that is returned to but something which exists when it is “*assembled or machined*. You cannot grasp or conceive of a desire outside a determinate assemblage, on a plane which is not preexistent but which must itself be constructed”.³³ This quotation emphasises the extent to which desire, being mobilised only through “construction” is neither an idealized pre-world, nor a utopian metaphysical goal

that exists in a “beyond”, but rather that desire is immanent: “There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.”³⁴ This argument can also be applied to the way that “sensation” is presented by Deleuze and Guattari; they argue that sensation comes from matter, not as something stable but as a constantly shifting potential that can open up the difference that normalisation has closed. This is not a return to a prior state but an opening of that which is closed to human perception through the activation of a potential futurity contained within the “vibration” of the sensation.³⁵ In *What is Philosophy?* art is a privileged space, but not in the sense that it is usually conceived: for Deleuze and Guattari it is always potentially there—not a transcendent beyond, nor a space separate from the social, but one that has the force to think difference.

Having made the connection between desire and sensation we can bring this discussion back specifically to *Francis Bacon* and the phrase “to paint the scream more than the horror”. The sensation which is heightened in this phrase, and to which Deleuze draws our attention, is the temporal interlude before the unknown: to paint the scream prior to the horror not only in a chronological sense but also prior to our conception of what that sensation might be. Both Deleuze and Lyotard are taking an approach to painting which is unusual, as Mary Lydon, the English translator of “It’s as if a line...”, explains: “Lyotard strives, like Adami, for the inexpressible, as if his sentences were Adami’s line pursued by other means.”³⁶

Lyotard’s essay comprises several voices: “He”, “She”, “The Other”, and finally, in the concluding section, “Me”. This collection of voices is another strategy to complicate the position of Lyotard as the writer and to allow the lines within the pictures to form themselves into words; consequently there emerges a polyphonic chorus. The voice labelled “The Other” appeals to the archaic time of classical mythology, prompted by the subject matter of Adami’s drawings, and to the passages of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: from man to woman (Tireseas), woman to sound (Echo) or woman to tree (Myrrha), noting that each passage relies on distance and separation. In contrast, the processes of becoming which Deleuze and Guattari describe, have neither beginning nor end. Writing of Bacon’s paintings, Deleuze recognises the process of “becoming-animal” which is not a passage from human to animal but a becoming through the “fact” of a common zone between man and beast, where the body attempts to “escape from itself” and dissipate into an assemblage of forces.³⁷ Deleuze writes that Bacon’s paintings are not of faces but heads, not of flesh but meat, and what this “constitutes is a *zone of indiscernibility or undecidability* between man and animal” where animal traits and animal spirit are actualised.³⁸ According to Deleuze, Bacon sees meat not with horror but as a “fact”. If we take this as an instance of the immanent, affirmative and transformative desire which concerns Deleuze, we can identify a difference in approach when Lyotard writes of the process of passage in “It’s as if a line...”.

Lyotard’s voice, “The Other”, writes that separation is essential to representation and it is that which Narcissus cannot attain: “Without the work of this mourning there will be no representation. Narcissus is not an artist but a representation of impossible art.”³⁹ Impossible because the thread between image and object, word and thing, can never be removed: ‘distanciation’ is a prerequisite of representation and language. It is this which preoccupied Lyotard in *Discourse, Figure* and highlights the double-bind inherent in writings about art: “For one needn’t be immersed in language [*langage*] in order to be able to speak; the “absolute” object, the language-system [*langue*], does not speak.”⁴⁰ It is in this ability to escape that the figural resides, not to be recouped into the strictures of a system such as writing, but to signal that the task of art is unfulfilment: “If desire can be fulfilled in the work of art, then the work of art gives something to hope for. I believe that what is revolutionary is precisely to hope for nothing.”⁴¹

This clearly differentiates Lyotard’s position from those who use psychoanalytic theory, Freud included, to analyse art as if it were a symptom, an exteriorisation of the artist’s phantasy. Lyotard explicitly rejects such reductive readings of art: in *Discourse, Figure* Lyotard recognised Klee’s efforts to avoid the simple production of a phantasy and go beyond a consideration of the work of art as the fulfilment of desire. But how might we understand the role of desire and phantasy at work in the voice of “The Other” whilst restricting ourselves, for the moment at least, to the historical context of the double-edged comments by Deleuze and Guattari on the role of desire in Lyotard’s *Discourse, Figure*: “despite his attempt at linking desire to a fundamental yes,

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Lyotard reintroduces lack and absence into desire”?⁴² In chapter three of *Anti-Oedipus* two passages refer to *Discourse, Figure*, both in sections referring to representation and designation. Here the impact of Lyotard’s work is acknowledged in what Deleuze and Guattari term “territorial representation”: using the eye to see the word, not to read it, thereby disturbing attempts to overcome the heterogeneous representation of words and things, with the resulting effect that “the eye jumps”. In a footnote Deleuze and Guattari refer to the following passage from Lyotard: “Words are not things, but as soon as there is a word, the object designated becomes a sign, which means precisely that it conceals a hidden content within its manifest identity, and that it reserves another face for another viewer focused on it... which perhaps will never be seen.”⁴³

What is not acknowledged by Deleuze and Guattari is the importance that Lyotard attaches to this process of negativity: the extent to which such a process of concealment equates to the source of figural force which will explode as libidinal desire, but which cannot be motivated in the way that Deleuze and Guattari infer, as Lyotard makes clear: “Desire is truly unacceptable. One cannot pretend to accept it, for accepting it is still to reject it. It will become event elsewhere.”⁴⁴ The role of negation in *Discourse, Figure* is key to that which differentiates Lyotard’s approach to desire, perhaps most evident in the section of *Discourse, Figure* titled “The No and the Position of the Object”.

NEGATION IN *DISCOURSE, FIGURE*

There are three main forms of negation discussed by Lyotard in *Discourse, Figure*: the negation on which Saussure bases his system of language as opposition within a closed system of differentiation; the negation by which phenomenology establishes the object through ‘distanciation’ and the psychoanalytic form of negation described by Freud. All three have a significance for Lyotard in that they reveal the dominance of discourse at the expense of the marginalisation of the figure but it is the latter that has a particularly deep-seated correlation with the figural-as-desire through the workings of the unconscious.

In addition to the syntactical negative of the grammarian or logician—*x is not y*—Lyotard draws attention to the role of reference as the absence which is hidden in all discourse but which gives it the ability to function. This referential aspect is introduced by Lyotard as a further critique of Saussure through a discussion of Emile Benveniste’s remarks on the characteristics of the personal pronoun “I”, as that which names and designates but does not signify. Signification occurs only when the personal pronoun is actualised in discourse, when the pronoun is adopted and thereby given a particular meaning and reference. However, as Benveniste explains, it is through the use of “I” that the speaker positions himself in language and is simultaneously positioned by language, a process which is necessary to signify subjectivity. The use of “I” governs all actualisation of language: “The ego is that which speaks”; it opens up discourse to that which is positioned outside of signification but which is fundamental to the operation of discourse: “The negation upholding the relation of designation is the split that, as it opens between discourse and its object, allows us to speak, since we can only say and have nothing else to say than what we are not, and since it is certain that, conversely, what we cannot say, we are.”⁴⁵ It is in this latter negativity, “what we cannot say”, that Freud identifies the work of desire, a negation that plays an important role for Lyotard’s discussion of the figural as desire.

The section of *Discourse, Figure* titled “The No and the Position of the Object” gives an account of the role of spoken negation in analysis through a detailed reading of Freud’s short 1925 essay *Die Verneinung* [“Negation”].⁴⁶ Lyotard highlights the role of negation as signalling the unrepresentable presence of desire in discourse—fuelled by the unconscious. Although, for Freud, the unconscious knows no negation, its presence can be indicated in the conscious realm when uttered as denial. Therefore, the persistence of denial in the discourse of the analysand signals the workings of desire, rendered through negation. As Freud argues, “Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed.”⁴⁷

Lytard pays particular attention to one example given by Freud: a patient recalling a person in a dream: “it’s *not* my mother” they insist. Freud disregards the negation, as being the work of denial, and concludes “So it *is* his mother”. It is this transgression of the logic of language which constitutes the basis of Lyotard’s analysis as an example of the figural at work. In the statement “it’s *not* my mother” the patient is able to differentiate between the person in the dream and his mother, following grammatical negation, and to use the structuralist system of opposition to distinguish the mother from all other objects; but it is with the analyst’s shift to “it *is* his mother” that the negativity of denial is rendered as an affirmation, thereby introducing a different type of negation. Lyotard explains that desire is at work here, indicated through the transgression of conventional linguistic spacings: the mother must be placed outside designation and signification—because dreaming of her is forbidden by virtue of the incest taboo—and in denying that he has dreamed of his mother the patient reconstitutes her as a “lost object” and renders the repressed desire as positive, through the repetition of denial. The mother is thereby simultaneously constituted on different planes in radically heterogeneous forms: reconstituted as a presence in discourse (as a “lost object”) the repressed is “intellectually” accepted, whilst a destructive desire to negate the “mother” remains “outside”: “it would not even be true to say that the interpreter replaces No with Yes. Rather, she or he goes from the No of syntax to the No of transcendence, the latter being a position ‘outside’, *ekthesis*.”⁴⁸

The “No of transcendence” refers back to Lyotard’s initial discussion of phenomenology and the constitution of objects through the negativity of distance, the process of “distanciation” which, in this case, is necessary to bring the dream into articulated discourse. The acceptance of denial on the level of knowledge leads Freud to speculate on the process by which judgement in the formation of both pleasure-ego and reality-ego might be aligned to the “primary instinctual impulses”. Whilst the pleasure-ego follows an impulse to introject that which is good and eject that which is bad, the reality-ego establishes an understanding of exteriority based not on an object’s quality but its accessibility and the ability to re-find perceptions externally. Both processes of judgement rely on interior and exterior thus prompting Freud to follow an implied correlation between acceptance by the ego and Eros and between expulsion and the destructive drive, as he writes: “The polarity of judgement appears to correspond to the opposition of the two groups of instincts which we have supposed to exist. Affirmation—as a substitute for uniting—belongs to Eros; negation—the successor to expulsion—belongs to the instinct of destruction.”⁴⁹ This correlation presents several problems for Lyotard, who points out that the complex process of negation described in relation to repression is undermined by the reductive correlation of “No” as a symbol of negation linked to the destructive drive, despite being accepted intellectually by the patient.⁵⁰ Lyotard questions the elision of the two forms of judgement without consideration of what drives the shift from pleasure-ego to reality-ego, also rejecting the implication that the former’s ‘spitting out’ is somehow involved with the constitution of reality. Lyotard explains:

What is spat out is what is spat out, and no longer exists for the body of pleasure: it is obliterated. For what has been rejected to *be something* nonetheless, the drive to destroy must be supplemented by the opposite power to appresent [*apprésenter*] absence. Then loss may count as loss, the presence of a lack, and the object may count as reality, something that *is* even when it is not there. But what exactly is this power to render present, to ‘reproduce as representation’ an absent object? It is, says Freud, the power of linguistic negation.⁵¹

Here is the key to Lyotard’s argument, that whilst discourse is based on a necessary rupture and distanciation, affirmative desire for the lost object is at the heart of all discourse—“its silent support”.⁵²

The figure of the mute reappears in the Adami essay, as quoted earlier, where Lyotard refers to Diderot’s claim that “pictures are like great mutes. They disavow beforehand everything we write about them”.⁵³ Lyotard’s description of the process of drawing contemplates Adami’s seduction: the possibilities presented by the line necessitate the rejection of many, which are reduced to a visual trace, a process evident in the drawings’ erased surfaces. The erasure of some, their “sacrifice”, gives an added power to those selected. In order to bring “strong configurations” out of the “disorder” Adami counters the potential proliferation of lines and their

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multiple possibilities: “The line is inhabited by a desire, it has a desire’s infinite power.”⁵⁴

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice, used frequently as a metaphor for the inaccessibility of the unconscious and also the subject of one of Adami’s pictures, is used to illustrate the task of the artist—caught between capturing emotion from the “watery underworld” and rendering visible through line.⁵⁵ We are left with the suspension of “affective power” which is memorialised, rather than realised on the page, in the struggle between form and emotion. It is the same struggle which Freud briefly attends to in *Die Verneinung* when he remarks that an intellectual acknowledgement of repression does not constitute its removal: “We can see how in this the intellectual function is separated from the affective process” and which was commented on tellingly by Jean Hyppolite in his “spoken contribution” to Lacan’s seminar, as follows:

This seems very profound to me. If the psychoanalysed person accepts this, he goes back on negation and yet the repression is still there! I conclude from this that one must give what happens here a philosophical name, a name Freud did not pronounce: negation of the negation. Literally, what transpires here is intellectual, but only intellectual, affirmation qua negation of the negation [...] At this point...Freud finds himself in a position to be able to show how the intellectual separates <in action> from the affective, and to give a formulation of a sort of genesis of judgement, that is, in short, a genesis of thought.⁵⁶

It is this polarisation of the intellectual and the affective which Lyotard repudiates. The ungraspable, personified by Eurydice, will not be brought to the surface through articulated presentation—be it Lyotard’s words or the lines on Adami’s page—but their trace is always felt: “If you want to lie with her, Orpheus is told, don’t eye her. He turns round to see her. That look puts her away.”⁵⁷

“It’s as if a line...” reaffirms that the problem which faces Lyotard, as a writer commenting on the visual, is not only a question of doing justice to another medium but is, rather, a problem which is shared by the artist, that of attending to “desire’s infinite power” in the line. When Lyotard writes that “his line arouses the graphite in my ball-point”, it is both a nostalgic call to the writer’s own artistic ambitions and a call to that “childhood of thought” which later concerns him in *The Inhuman*: “This debt to childhood is one which we never pay off. [...] It is the task of writing, thinking, literature, arts, to venture to bear witness to it.”⁵⁸ Although the rhetorical trope of “bearing witness” is aligned to Lyotard’s writings on the sublime, the parallel with the “action” of Orpheus—in turning round to look at the forbidden figure of Eurydice—makes the connections between the different periods of his writing sing, like the song which “rose from the dismembered body of Orpheus”, as Lyotard described in 1969:

Orpheus turns around. His desire to *see the figure* overcomes his desire to bring it to the light. Orpheus wants to see in the night, to see night. By trying to see Eurydice, he loses all hope of making her be seen: the figure is that which has no face; it kills the one that looks at it because it fills him with its own night. [...] We must stop looking at the problem of art in terms of creation. And as to the wish to look at the night, a work is never more than the proof of a failure to fulfill it.⁵⁹

This description of Orpheus’ failure and his subsequent destruction at the hands of the Maenad women is an apposite metaphor precisely because his was not a failure but the accomplishment of the destructive desire to “look at the night”.

For Lyotard, art should disturb, not console, it ought not to be born from the conventions of good form but from the rupture which is embedded in the process of representation. As we have seen, the importance of this rupture is reiterated in *Discourse, Figure* through a questioning of the premise of Freud’s metapsychological works of the 1920s, including *Verneinung*, where the simultaneous constitution of reality, subjectivity and desire are attributed to the original split (of identification) and the function of language in this split.

Lyotard argues that it is not simply a process of establishing the “thread of referential distance” necessary to language through the child’s establishment of the mother as lost object, but that the question of desire is more complex, as he explains: “The pulsing between eaten-introjected and spat-expelled does not determine a *relation* with the breast. Instead it marks the pleasure-ego’s rhythm—non-cumulative and non-referred, oscillating between release and tension and governed by the principle.”⁶⁰ This “pulsing” of desire does not fit into the idea of a simultaneous creation of ego and language. What the child of Freud’s “fort-da” scenario proves with his bobbin is that there are two faces to reality, that based on the opposition of absence and presence, which incorporates both systems of signification and designation, but also that which remains hidden—the force which absence is not allowed to show. Discourse based on an opposition does not allow the missing to appear and proof of words and acts are required if they are to be accepted as evidence of a shared ‘reality’.

For Lyotard the repetition of the patient’s denial “it’s *not* my mother” brings with it the scansion of desire “rerouted through the negativity of transcendence, through the play of language” which, bringing us back to the essay on Adami, ensures that there will always be a separation, not only between the line of the artist and the line of the writer who forms his lines into letters, but between these lines and the objects they represent.⁶¹ This is not a melancholic reconciliation to an impossible situation, however, but the affirmation of that which is absent: which reminds us that there is always “something rather than nothing” and that “any reconciliation (spiritualist or materialist) is illusory”.⁶²

Deleuze and Guattari attacked Lyotard for clinging to the negation on which they consider the hegemony of desire as lack to be founded, where repression is ultimately figured as the inescapable debt of guilt in the Oedipus complex. Yet, for Lyotard, the process of separation does not necessarily indicate a utopian beyond—the religious space of Hegel’s spirit [*Geist*] or Merleau-Ponty’s “One” [*On*]—but a necessary part of activating difference. The line that cannot become letter is what both Lyotard and Deleuze are struggling with in the hope that theirs might simultaneously activate a line of desire that is already there. But Lyotard emphasises the role of “distanciation” in the passage to representation, which does not merely exclude the object of representation but brings into play the force of its absence, which is released as desire in the line itself. What the line of Adami opens (not encloses) through desire is between form and emotion “at the limit of the visible”.⁶³ The process is not that of “distanciation” between subject and object, it does not seek to represent through a phantasmatic lost object, but to reveal an instance of desire. This opening of desire reveals, albeit momentarily, that representation is premised on the establishment of an enclosure, the “theatrical-representative set-up” that removes the mobility of desire and harnesses the circulation of libidinal energies. Yet the fluidity and transformative potential of art objects is the investment which Lyotard makes in his writing, in spite of the ease with which they can be subordinated to the demands of other set-ups.

Walking into such a set-up—a historical survey in the Hayward Gallery, London, titled *Invisible—Art about the Unseen 1957-2012*—I do not expect to find either discomfort or the rupture of which Lyotard writes. I enter a room through a protective curtain; it is empty except for two large cooling systems blowing loudly, their brand name “Symphony” is accompanied by a jocular model name “Sumo XL”. Then I read the wall text:

Teresa Margolles

Aire / Aire 2003

This room appears to be empty, apart from a couple of working cooling systems. The slightly humid air is cooled by water from public mortuaries in Mexico City that was used to wash the bodies of unidentified murder victims prior to autopsy. Teresa Margolles, who holds a Diploma in Forensic Medicine, works with death as her primary material; she focuses not on the dead themselves but on the physical traces left by death, and the attendant evils of violence and poverty, preferring “not to exhibit the physical horror, but the silence”.

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NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze "Lettre à Jean-François Lyotard", *Europe: revue littéraire mensuelle*, (Mai, 2008, 264). My translation. The context makes it likely that the letter is from the period 1975-6.
2. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
3. This article is loosely based on sections from my book 'Lyotard and the *figural* in Performance, Art and Writing', London: Continuum, 2012. Thanks to the publishers for permission to adapt work from this publication.
4. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Hurley, Seem & Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, 32.
5. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith, London: Continuum, 2005.
6. Jean-François Lyotard "It's as if a line..", trans. Mary Lydon, *Contemporary Literature*, 29:3 (1988, 457-480).
7. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*. Trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011
8. Lyotard, *Discourse*, 233.
9. Lyotard, *Discourse*, 13, 19.
10. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 40.
11. Lyotard, *Discourse*, 387.
12. Jean-François Lyotard, "Entretien, Jean-François Lyotard: 'En finir avec l'illusion de la politique'", *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 1-15 May 1972, 19.
13. Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 10. In Bamford, *Lyotard and the figural*, I argue that Lyotard's conception of the sublime retains a figural force, informed by the physiological emphasis of Burke's writings subsequently eradicated by Kant.
14. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 2.
15. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 28.
16. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 28.
17. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 27-8.
18. Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*. London: Routledge, 2003, 112.
19. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 243.
20. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 243.
21. Lyotard, *Discourse*, 233.
22. Lyotard, *Discourse*, 267.
23. See: James Williams, *Lyotard: Towards a Postmodern Philosophy*. London: Polity, 1998, 130.
24. Jean-François Lyotard, "Energumen Capitalism", trans. James Leigh, *Deleuze and Guattari: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers, Vol. II*. ed. Gary Genosko. London: Routledge, 2001, 584, 598.
25. Jean-François Lyotard, *Que Peindre? Adami, Arakawa, Buren*, Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1987.
26. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1981
27. Jean-François Lyotard "On Dirait qu'une Ligne" *Repères: cahiers d'art contemporain* 6 (1983).
28. Lyotard, *Discourse*, 213.
29. Lyotard, "It's as if a line..", 458-9.
30. Lyotard, "It's as if a line..", 462.
31. Lyotard, "It's as if a line..", 480.
32. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Graham Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 164.
33. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 212.
34. See Judith Butler's critique in her *Subjects of desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 205-15. Also Peter Hallward's consideration of Deleuze's work as tending "to proceed broadly in line with a *theophanic* conception of things" in his *Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation: Out of this World*, London: Verso, 2006, 4.
35. Gilles Deleuze, "What is desire?", trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam, *The Deleuze Reader*, ed.

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- Constantin Boundas, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, 136.
34. Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 29.
35. See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, London: Athlone, 1987, Chapter 11. "1837: Of the refrain" on the role of rhythm and vibration, which is similar to Deleuze's use of Henri Maldiney's systolic and diastolic in *Francis Bacon*.
36. Mary Lydon "Translator's Preface to 'It's as if a line...'", *Contemporary Literature*, 29:3 (1988, 456).
37. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 20.
38. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 16.
39. Lyotard, "It's as if a line..", 479.
40. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 8.
41. Lyotard, 'Notes on the Critical Function of the Work of Art', trans. Susan Hanson, ed. Roger McKeon, *Driftworks*, New York: Semiotexte, 1984, 78.
42. Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 244.
43. Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 204. Quoting *Discours, Figure*, 82.
44. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 18.
45. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 118.
46. Sigmund Freud, "Negation", *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, London: Vintage, 1989.
47. Freud, "Negation", 667.
48. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 121.
49. Freud, "Negation", 669.
50. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 122.
51. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 123.
52. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 118.
53. Lyotard, "It's as if a line...", 462.
54. Lyotard, "It's as if a line...", 458.
55. The centrality of this figure to the work of Maurice Blanchot is acknowledged by Lyotard in "The Psychoanalytic approach to Artistic and Literary Expression", Trans. Anon. *Toward the Postmodern: J-F Lyotard*. Eds. Robert Harvey & Mark Roberts, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993.
56. The Freud quotation is from "Negation", 667; the extended quotation from: Jean Hyppolite 'A spoken commentary on Freud's "Verneinung"', Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, New York: Norton, 2006, 883.
57. Lyotard, 'It's as if a line..', 459-60.
58. Lyotard, 'It's as if a line..', 462; Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby, London: Polity, 1991, 7.
59. Lyotard, 'The Psychoanalytic approach to Artistic and Literary Expression', 5-6.
60. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 125.
61. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 126.
62. Lyotard, 'It's as if a line..', 480; *Discourse, Figure*, 127.
63. Lyotard, 'It's as if a line..', 459.

NANCY, VIOLENCE AND THE WORLD

Marie-Eve Morin

We tend to think of violence as something that happens within the world, something done by a thing, a being or an existent or to another thing, being, existent. But what would it mean to speak of the violence done to the world or reciprocally of the violence done by the world? Are there ways in which an existent, a being, can do violence, not to another existent, but to the world itself within which existents come to presence? Reciprocally, is there a sense in which the world itself is a sort of “primordial” violence? Answering these questions, gesturing towards the possible link between violence and world presupposes that one gets clear on what is meant here by “world.”

I want take up this question from a very specific point of departure: the thought of the world developed by Jean-Luc Nancy in the wake of Heidegger. This choice might at first sight seem arbitrary but I think that the question of violence and of its relation to the world arises in a pregnant way from within Nancy’s ontology and this for two reasons. First, there is something about Nancy’s thinking of Being-with, exposition and world that makes them appear as essentially peaceful. After all, Nancy does talk about “the generosity of Being” and the “spaciousness of the world.” This fact only makes the question of violence more urgent. Is the world purely peaceful? What is violence and where does it come from? Or is the world, the coming to presence of existents, their exposition, essentially violent? And if we answer either of these questions in the affirmative, that is, whether we say that the opening of the world is peaceful or whether we say it is violent, how are we to differentiate between violent existence and peaceful existence, between kinds of existence, kinds of expositions? What criterion do we have that could be given to us by an ontological description of existence as Being-with? Second, Nancy’s thinking of the groundlessness of the world, his recasting of the motif of creation *ex nihilo*, is presented as an exit out of nihilism, out of a way of being/living that experiences the dissolution of all transcendent values into a mere (subjective) valuing and that faces senselessness and disorientation. If it is the case that only a thinking of the world, a thinking at the height of the world—which knows no verticality/transcendence but only horizontal connections—can yield sense today, does such a horizontal thinking think in a violent way? Does it do so by imposing a truth? Or else does it overcome senselessness by letting everything

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be, by opening a space for everything to expose itself, to make sense? If the latter is the case, two questions arise. First, if the world to the space upon which a truth is imposed, is it not all too similar to the space without relief, without absolute value, of capitalism? And second, if this space, this world, is the world where we, all of us, each and every one of us, can expose ourselves and make sense of ourselves, does that also include violent terrorist subjectivities (or singularities)?

I will try to unfold the double question of the violence of the world and the violence done to the world by keeping in mind the questions we just raised above. I will first start with a discussion of existence, world, and sense in Nancy in order to then move on to a discussion of violence. In order to do so, I will try to keep the definition of violence as open as possible. At the most general level, violence is a force, yet one that erupts without regard for the system of forces in place. It refuses to enter into the order of reasons, refuses to enter into relation or dialogue with other beings and instead destroys for the sake of destroying. What it destroys is not only the body, the mind, or the life of the victim but likewise the victim's very existence, that is to say, his or her possibility of sense-making. Violence reduces the victim to a wound. It is this irruptive, destructive characteristic of ontic, intraworldly violence that will serve as guiding thread in my discussion of violence at an ontological or worldly level.

EXISTENCE, WORLD, SENSE

For Nancy, to exist is to be unto or toward the limit, to be "turned" inside out, or to be exposed. Essence is nothing unless it is exposed to (presented to) itself. Something unexposed would be pure meaningless immanence that could not even be said to be anything. Nancy explains, "To exist does not mean simply 'to be.' On the contrary: to exist means *not* to be in the immediate presence or in the immanence of a 'being-thing.' To exist is not to be immanent, or not to be present to oneself, and not to be sent forth *by* oneself. To exist, therefore, is to hold one's 'selfness' as an 'otherness,' and in such a way that no essence, no subject, no place can present *this otherness in itself*—either as the proper selfness of an other, or an 'Other,' or a common being."¹ The 'otherness' of the self that is not present as another self is the unappropriable limit or edge to which I am exposed and which properly belongs neither to an inside nor to an outside. This edge is "where" existence happens or is felt. There has to be a necessary spacing or distance at the heart of the "thing" that allows it to be, to exist. This "spacing", *is* not (that is, it is nothing that can be given in the form of presence), but allows that there be things.

Everything that is, in Nancy's terms, every singularity, is posed or positioned there, thrown down, given over, abandoned, offered up somewhere with and amongst other things. 1) Position (existence) can never be the position of a single instance of existence, independent and cut off from everything else (including itself). That there is something means that some "ones" (more than one) are exposed, disposed. This "ex-" or "dis-" is the originary meaning of the with: me with you, you with your cat, a cat with a stone, singularities with singularities and worlds with worlds. 2) The logic of exposition knows no hierarchy and no individuality (it is not restricted to what we take to be individuals—uncutables, it applies equally to supra-individual entities and infra-individual ones). Hence singularities are not just humans, and not just things, they are everything that exists: stones, cats, communities, books, thoughts, cities, etc. The "logic" of the limit or of exposition applies to it all (to any "thing", any "I", to any "we").

It is here that Nancy departs more markedly from Heidegger's ontology. For Heidegger, to exist means to be exposed to limits that are not at one's own disposal or under one's control: birth, death, world. Distended in this way, the existent (Dasein) is, without reason or ground, claimed by being, thrown into the clearing of being. We know that Heidegger limits existence, in that specific sense, to the human Dasein and therefore also limits "worlding", or the opening of the world, to humans, because "world" is defined as the space of intelligibility or significance that allows Dasein or the human being to encounter entities (including itself) meaningfully. If Nancy rethinks existence as exposition, then he also departs from the Heideggerian concept of world and its essential link to sense or intelligibility.

For Nancy, the world is the “totality” of our (of all) expositions. The world is formed of limits or edges between singularities, of their articulations, of the play of their junctures “where different pieces touch each other without fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limit of the other without the mutual *play*—which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them—ever forming into the substance or the higher power of a Whole.”² The world is not the totalization of what is, an overarching horizon or a big container that would bring everything together. Yet, the world has a stance; it holds together the multiplicity of expositions between singularities, between worlds. “The unity of a world is not one: it is made of a diversity, including disparity and opposition. It is made of it, which is to say that it is not added to it and does not reduce it. The unity of a world is nothing other than its diversity, and its diversity is, in turn, a diversity of worlds. A world is a multiplicity of worlds, the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and its unity is the sharing out [*partage*] and the mutual exposure in this world of all its worlds.”³

This is what *mondialisation* or world-forming means: we singularities, form a world at our outer edges, we articulate ourselves with and among each other. Hence *mondialisation* is not a human activity, as if the human arranged what is into a coherent whole, but an ontological one: it worlds, or: there is sense, sense circulates.

This happening between two is also what Nancy calls “meaning” or “sense” [*sens*].⁴ Meaning is normally thought of as signifying event, as the relation of a signifier (a word) to a signified (a concept) or a referent (a thing), or as the relation between a thing and its “what-for”. For example the word “table” signifies something by virtue of pointing to the concept “table.” Its signification lies in its ability to point away from itself to something of a different order, a concept or a thing. In the same way that, if I say that the smoke signifies fire, I mean that it points away from itself to its origin or cause. Or if I say that the knife is for cutting, I am pointing away from the knife, towards its meaning in a telos or purpose. We can think of the meaning of Being or the meaning of existence or of the world on the same model. On this model, the meaning of existence lies in some other thing outside of existence, which existence has to appropriate in order to make sense. Humanism is the school of thought that attempts to fix the sense of human existence, its signification, which humanity would then have to accomplish historically. But for Nancy (following Heidegger), to exist is precisely not to have such a signification. This non-givenness of signification can be experienced as a loss of sense, yet it is only if there are no given significations that existence and sense are possible. Hence, Nancy will differentiate sense from truth. “Truth is being-such [*l’être-tel*], or more exactly it is the quality of the presentation of being such as such. Sense, for its part, is the movement of being-toward [*l’être-à*]. . . .”⁵ Sense as the movement of being-toward is what makes it possible that a truth be exposed, communicated.⁶

Sense is the encounter with an exteriority or an alterity that resists its assimilation. This alterity is not a big Other, or the other “as such,” which would either remain inaccessible as such or which I would have to appropriate (either in making it my own or in making myself other). It is an always singular and finite other that does not let itself be identified as other but infinitely alters itself and announces itself.⁷ It is the alterity of another origin or another “stroke” of existence, another “one” to which I gain access (this is the event of sense) exactly on the mode of not gaining access. (BSP, 13). Gaining access is not “appropriating” (BSP, 20), it is touching.

For Heidegger, the stone does not touch the earth because the stone is not opened to or affected by the ground; it cannot make sense of the ground and of itself as being-on-the-ground, as not-being-the-ground, etc. Dasein can say that the stone is on the ground because it meaningfully relates to being-a-stone and being-ground and can let one be open to the other. For Nancy, sense or touch is what happens at the limit, in-between singularities, that is, in-between the stone and the river, me and you, you and the tree, etc. The stone is not exposed by the human or for the human but it exposes itself to (itself and others). The stone is not for a Dasein that would let it be what it is in relating meaningfully to it. I can relate to the stone because it is there, exposed in its hardness, resisting my grasp (in both senses of the word).⁸ The stone remains outside of the thought that thinks it (or the writing that writes of it) in the same way that it remains outside of the hand that grasps it and touches its hardness.

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Sense for Nancy, unlike for Heidegger, is not something there is only when there is human understanding. Sense, or communication, is what happens at the limit, in-between the stone and the river, me and you, you and the tree, etc. The stone is not exposed by the human or for the human but it exposes itself *to* (itself and others).

If there is sense for and with the stone, if the “sense-making” of the stone is not its “intelligibility” for Dasein but its being-exposed to the ground and the rain, the hand and the thought, then “world” itself also needs to be rethought. For Heidegger, world is the space or clearing of intelligibility that allows entities to be encountered meaningfully. Hence, world is sense (or significance) and there is no significance outside of the world—i.e., there is no sense, no intelligibility or significance, unless a Dasein exists. Heidegger is right to say that the stone is worldless. Pointing out that the stone also has world because it is on the ground and affected by the rain changes nothing about it: Dasein’s world is the intelligibility of the “environment” of the stone, its “light.” Speaking of world and worlding (or world-forming) independently of the human being, without equivocating on the term “world,” is only possible on the basis of a transformed notion of sense. For Nancy, the world is not merely the wherein of factual human existence; it is not a coherent milieu of significance already laid out in advance, but the space of sense, the sharing of singularities exposed to one another (stone, ground, dog, grass, star, and me, and you). That the world makes sense means that bursts of sense happen in the spacings and articulations of singularities. If sense is in the spacing, then the sense of the world is not found in any instance beyond the world, nor can it be assumed or accomplished by any one singularity within the world. “But thought in terms of a world, sense refers to nothing other than to the possibility of the sense of this world, to the proper mode of its stance [*teneur*] insofar as it circulates between all those who stand in it [*s’y tiennent*], each time singular and singularly sharing a same possibility that none of them, any place or any God outside of this world, accomplishes.”⁹

It is in order to think “world” as such that Nancy reappropriates and displaces the motive of creation *ex nihilo*. That the world is created out of nothing implies that it is without pre-supposition or pre-condition: without ground, reason, origin or end. The nothing of creation *ex nihilo* does not propose a ground but undoes any premises or principles. That the world is without principle means that neither an all powerful and benevolent God-Artisan, nor prime matter, nor the Nothing can justify it. *Creatio ex nihilo* is, for Nancy, another way of saying that beings are only what they are, that there is nothing outside of the world. “The idea of creation *ex nihilo*, inasmuch as it is clearly distinguished from any form of production or fabrication, essentially covers the dual motif of an absence of necessity and the existence of a given without reason, having neither foundation nor principle ... *Ex nihilo*, which is to say: ... nothing but that which is [*rien que cela qui est*], nothing but that which grows [*rien que cela qui croît*] (*creo, cresco*), lacking any growth principle. ... *ex nihilo* means: undoing any premise, including that of nothing. That means: to empty *nothing* [*rien*] (cf. *rem*, the thing) of any quality as principle.”¹⁰

The *ex nihilo* of creation essentially signifies the groundlessness of the world, the ever-renewed coming-to-presence of the world: singularities, each time other, each time with others. To speak of the creation of the world is therefore to see the world as the “explosion of presence in the originary multiplicity of its partition.”¹¹ Nancy also calls this partition a free dissemination of being: “The free dissemination [of existence] (whose formula might well be only a tautology) is not a diffraction of a principle, nor the multiple effect of a cause, but is the an-archy—the origin removed from every logic of origin, from every archaeology—of a singular and thus in essence plural arising whose being as being is neither ground, nor element, nor reason.”¹² There is nothing but the world, nothing but the coming to presence, the *surissement*, of the world¹³—a world without ‘God’ but not without opening, even if this opening opens unto—nothing.

WORLD AND VIOLENCE

Nancy’s ontology gives the sense of a positive fullness of being and of sense: everywhere beings, everywhere making sense. But it is, in a sense, the opposite. Plenitude, full presence is the loss of the possibility of the circulation of sense, the filling up of the spacing. Sense is not for Nancy signification, that is, not the reference

to another instance in which the sense of existence or of the world would be found. It is nothing but the singularities themselves, in each instance exposed to all others. Sense is “an outside that is open right at the world, right in the middle of us and between us as our common sharing out. This sense is not the conclusion of our existences; it does not subsume them under a signification but simply opens them to themselves, which is also to say, to one another.”¹⁴

What would it mean then to put an end to sense or to do violence to the world, which again is not the collection of entities, not the environment or nature or things that stands opposed to or alongside humans themselves, but rather the condition of possibility of sense? Before we can answer this question, it is necessary to explain how it is possible at all, if sense is the ontological constitution of the world, to destroy that world.

Even though humans have no privilege in world-forming, Nancy does assume that the human has a “special” relation to exposition (exposure) and to world. We are not the world’s composer and if we are its overseer it is not in the sense that we have primacy over or stewardship of the singularities that compose the world but rather in the sense that we humans are the exponent of the world, the expositor of the exposing. Humans are “those who expose as such sharing and circulation.”¹⁵ This exponential characteristic of man means that man is also potentially the unexposer of the exposing. If existing for us takes on the active connotation of deciding to exist, it is because it is always possible for the existents that we are to close off, to exterminate existence, exposition. “To exterminate means to finish with ... and here that means to abolish the very access to the end, to liquidate sense. ... It seems--and this is a new thought--that existence can grasp its own being as the essence and hence as the destruction of existence and, moreover, as the senseless insanity that closes off the aspect of existence that opens onto the need for sense. Extermination ... is the negation of the ‘eachness’ of sense, of being-toward-self.”¹⁶

The decision of existence is the decision to keep the spacing that allow for self-relation open, the decision not to close the gap that would close the entity upon itself. This decision should not be understood as a sovereign decision. I do not decide out of myself to exist, I do not give myself existence, I do not either decide to enter into relation with an exteriority as if I were first there in an interiority. But I exist and this existence is a praxis not a brute given. As long as I exist, I am not done with having to exist. Existing puts into play existence, existence is at play in existing. Human existence, for Nancy, is at once an ontological fact, an ethos (a way of dwelling in the world, a conduct) and a praxis (a way of acting or engaging the world that does not produce anything but transforms the agent itself). To exist is to be exposed; hence it is to be engaged in, responsive to and responsible for existence as sense. Sense is not given, it is not to be made, but I engage sense in being engaged in existence. The praxis of sense is not an attempt at grounding or justifying existence (justifying that there are things rather than nothing) but an opening, exposing, spacing. This means that to exist is to decide for the good, and to decide for evil is to refuse existence. We ultimately have tension between two movements: existence resists the closing off of sense, but since existence is not a given but an “act” or a “decision,” sense must be reopen each time, at each place, at every turn for fear that sense may close itself off. The (re)-opening of the spacing, this (re)-engagement of sense is a struggle for the world, so that the world can form a world [*faire monde*], so that it can be a world, that is, “that in which there is room for everyone: but a genuine place, one in which things can genuinely *take place* (in this world).”¹⁷

There are two opposite ways in which the human can do violence to the world, put an end to the sense that the world is. The first way is by imposing of a transcendent truth, an absolute ground or value on existence, by defining or fixing the “meaning” of existence and hence not letting each existent make sense of its own existence by articulating itself with other existences. When such an imposition happens, the singular existent can only make sense by appropriating the transcendent truth, and this means, inevitably, by sacrificing its existence to it, by sacrificing the “here and now” of existence to an “elsewhere and afterwards.”

The absence of transcendent value seems however to leave the door open for the universal equivalence or exchange of all with all, in short for capitalism. Yet, this would be to misunderstand the “absolute value” of

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each and every singularity (human being, animals, cultures, words, languages, works of arts, communities, etc.), for if a general value or a general currency is imposed on all singularities, then the circulation is exactly as meaningless as if a transcendent value were given from the start. “For nihilism is nothing other than the nullification of distinctions, that is, the nullification of senses or values. Sense or value comes about only through difference: one sense is distinguished from the other like right from left, or sight from hearing, and one value is essentially nonequivalent to any other.”¹⁸ In the case of the equivalence of all, nothing meaningful can happen between one and the other, that is, at their limits. Any difference can be fixed and measured through comparison: “ends, means, values, senses, actions, works, persons ... all of them exchangeable because none of them is related to anything that might distinguish it, because all of them are related to an exchange that ... is but a substitution of roles or permutation or places.”¹⁹

For Nancy the absence of an absolute value as such or of a final sense as such does not lead to equivalence but happens in favour of the sharing of existences, in favour of the world. What has absolute value is not something transcendent (something else than existence) but the infinite exposition of each and all. We have to think a plurality of absolutes, the sharing of incommensurables, which is sharing and not exchange, for only in this way is there sense. The strength of Nancy’s position as I see it is that it deconstructs “the logic of the principle,” which he calls “monotheistic,” i.e. the search for a grounding principle for what is, be it God, Man, Nature, The Nothing, without falling into the senselessness of sheer circulation, capitalism, or what he calls the unworld. The world is for nothing, yet it is sense. Sense happens.

If each existent needs to be let make sense of its own existence by articulating itself with other existences and if such a sense-making is only possible when existence is delivered from fixed Sense and abandoned to existence, this does not mean, for Nancy, that we can forgo the critique of and a struggle for the material condition of existence. The difficulty of such a critique is that it is normally carried out in the name of and guided by “the regulative idea of the (original and final) self-production of man and, at the same time, by a general and generic concept of this ‘man.’”²⁰ Can this struggle not be “guided” instead by the thought of finite, singular existences? This would imply not deciding in advance what an existence is worth, what a meaningful life is, yet at the same time provide the material condition for such an existence to expose itself “meaningfully.” Can we provide these material conditions without first fixing what a meaningful exposition would be? How can we know what is required for a meaningful exposition without first deciding what the latter is? For Nancy, the material condition of existence should not be seen as a means to achieve a pre-determined end (happiness, for example defined as the free self-production of man). “Nor, moreover is it a question of regarding the material, economic, and social condition of men as a negligible happenstance, external to the domain in which a thought of finite sense would operate. The ‘material’ condition of existence is, on the contrary, each time what makes up the ‘each time,’ A place, a body, flesh, a gesture, a job, a line of force, an ache, ease or misery, having time or into time: These define the finite *each time* of any access to finite sense. They don’t ‘determine’ it in the sense of a causal instance; rather, they *are* it.”²¹ If the sense of existence cannot be separate from the existent’s material condition, from its material “here and now,” then the existent, each one each time, must be allowed to be “here and now,” and not run after an elsewhere and a later, be it that of “hunger, fear, and survival, or of wages, savings, and accumulation.”²²

We are now in a position to answer some of the questions we started with. A world yields sense by letting everything be, by opening a space for everything to expose itself, to make sense. This space is not the space upon which a truth is imposed, nor is it the space without relief, without absolute value, of capitalism. “A world is precisely that in which there is room for every-one: but a genuine place, one in which things can genuinely take place (in this world).”²³ The two ways of putting an end to sense we discussed above are radically, primordially, and ontologically violent in that they deny “the opening of the world” that allows entities to articulate themselves; they deny what it means to be for an existent and destroy the world as spacing. This violence is not directed at the existent itself but at the world “within” which anyone can meaningfully exist. It seeks to shut down in advance any possibility for Being, any space for meaningful encounter.

At the same time we have at the ontological level, the level where we describe what it means to exist, a criterion to distinguish between kinds of existence and identify “violent” singularities. We saw that existence in as much as it is the “decision of existence” is an exigency (an ethos and a praxis) not a brute given. Hence, a “violent” singularity is one that seeks to deny existence, either its own (by closing itself off from any exposure) or that of others (by imposing a fixed meaning on them or treating them as exchangeable units). And since to be is to be-with, these two denials are intertwined: denying the existence of other singularities means closing off my own exposure. The solution to the denials of existence is, as we saw, the decision of existence: to decide to re-open the space of the exposition and re-engage sense in each instance. At the same time, we saw that this “letting be” of each, each time, has nothing to do with the laissez-faire of liberalism, but demands a struggle for the world, for existences in their concrete material conditions.

We have left out a central question: if the world is generosity, spaciousness, liberality, spacing, exposition, is this world pure peace? Or is this spacing/opening of the world itself violent?

In order to discuss this question, it is helpful to first make a detour through a short text titled “Image and Violence.” In this text, Nancy proposes a short discussion of violence and truth that I think can help us complicate the question of the relation between violence and world, even though the text does not take up the question of the world. Nancy first starts by defining violence as “the application of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or energetic system into which it intervenes.”²⁴ The example given by Nancy is that of an unskilled or impatient carpenter trying to extract a recalcitrant screw and ripping it out with pliers, hence no longer following the logic of the screw’s thread or of the wood. Violence, Nancy explains further, “does not participate in any order of reasons, nor any sets of forces oriented toward results”²⁵ It refuses to “play the game of forces.”²⁶ It is a force that is no longer a force: “pure, dense, stupid, impenetrable intensity.”²⁷ Violence is the pure monstration of itself, without any sense other than this monstration itself; it does not transform what it assaults but deprives it of its own meaning and turns it into the mere imprint of violence. Violence so defined is, we could say, pure or absolute. It is not a means to an end, and it is not at the service of truth, that would redeem it, give it meaning. Violence destroys absolutely.²⁸

Yet, given this definition, Nancy remarks that there seems to be an essential complicity between violence and truth. In its irruption, truth refuses negotiation with the existing order; it tears apart the established order. It does not offer arguments, reasons, proofs but rather imposes itself. When it does negotiate, it assumes the order of systemic knowledge, following Badiou’s distinction between knowledge and truth. What Nancy discusses as the violence of truth can in turn be linked to a sort of ontological violence, the violence of being as *phusis*—that which irrupts and comes to presence from out of itself and in doing so disrupts the order of knowledge. Nancy explains in an interview, “The truth imposes itself -- and one can neither avoid it nor prefer something else to it. But still, one must not confuse verifiable truth with unverifiable truth, the truth that imposes itself prior to, or over and above, any verification.”²⁹ And he adds, “It is not a matter of an unverifiable that imposes itself by force (whether by terror or stupidity), it’s a matter of an ‘imposition’ that frees the person upon whom it’s imposed.”³⁰ This truth that imposes itself can be the coming to the world of a work of art, a idea, a gesture, etc. “True” means: that to which you cannot deny consent. It is what precedes all meaning, all signification, by opening up the signifying realm: “but what is this opening like and how does it act? Like a hole that terrifies and swallows up? Like a blow in the face? Like an explosion? Like love at first sight?” In any case, truth *acts*, it doesn’t (or not only) “inform”. ... It transforms its subject (its agent or its patient...). Verifiable truth doesn’t do anything: it is itself made, constructed.”³¹

The ambiguity between brute violence and the violence of truth rests on the fact that both are intractable. Both exercise themselves “without guarantor and without being accountable” to any superior instance. But this intractability has two faces; it can be the mark of “truth’s opening or of truth’s closing.” It can be the mark of a truth that is violent because it opens a space for the manifestation of the true or it can be the mark of a violence that is true because it refuses to engage any established order and merely imposes its blows.

NANCY, VIOLENCE AND THE WORLD

The first thing that should be pointed out is the fact that worlding (the withdrawal of Being that shares out existents and exposes them to themselves and each other) shares the characteristics of the violence of truth: the world exists without reason, without arche or telos. What we have here is an “originary” pre-ontological violence of the kind described by Derrida in “Violence and Metaphysics”: the originary withdrawal of Being, which is the first defeat of nihilistic violence, of pure nothingness, which as such cannot be said to be violent and, which is the first epiphany of Being,³² or in Nancy’s words: “the explosion of presence in the originary multiplicity of its partition.” This violence is the originary violence that tears being, glued to itself, out of its pure immanence. It is irruptive and destructive, even though what it “destroys” is “pure nothingness” that cannot even be said to be. It is the originary irruption that opens up existents to themselves and to each other, and hence also to being assaulted, violated, exterminated.

The second thing I would like to suggest regarding the ambiguity between the act of brute violence and the irruption of truth is that violence is constitutive of the world itself. A world is not the self-enclosed system that metaphysics describes. Metaphysics, Nancy writes, “denotes the representation of being [*être*] as beings [*étant*] and as beings present [*étant présent*]. In so doing, metaphysics sets a founding, warranting presence beyond the world (viz., the Idea, *Summum Ens*, the Subject, the Will). This setup stabilizes beings, enclosing them in their own beingness [*étantité*]. Everything—properly and precisely *everything*—is played out in the mutual referral of these two regimes of beings or presence: the ‘immanent’ and the ‘transcendent’; the ‘here-below’ and the ‘beyond’; the ‘sensuous’ and the ‘intelligible’; ‘appearance’ and ‘reality.’ Closure is the completion of this totality that conceives itself to be fulfilled in its self-referentiality.”³³ Such a self-enclosed system is an unworld, a world that does not world at all, that does not include any spacing. If we want to say that “this unworld” is violent, then it would have to be of a violence prior to the difference between peace and violence, a pure violence, which as Derrida shows again in *Violence and Metaphysics*, is indistinguishable from pure peace.³⁴ In a finite enclosed totality where everything has its place and is accounted for, a totality without opening—which is what the violence directed at the world that we discussed above sought to achieve—, it makes no sense to speak either of peace or violence. For peace to be meaningful, violence—brute violence, the violence that imposes its truth and closes off sense—has to be possible. This means that the totality must be opened, dis-enclosed, exposed to an alterity right at the world itself. This alterity is not another transcendent world, since reference to that Other would only reproduce the enclosure at a higher level, but rather the movement of excess of what is. This movement does not accede to any superior realm, it exposes what is to its edges.

The self-dis-enclosing of the world is the condition of possibility of the couple “violence/truth,” of the irruptive coming to presence of singularity or the brute violence that crushes the exposition of the existent to the world. To put an end to the possibility of brute violence would mean putting an end to the opening of the world, out of which something (some truth) can irrupt. Paraphrasing Derrida we could say: world (sense) is doubtless the first defeat of violence, but paradoxically, violence did not exist before the possibility of sense.³⁵ The war between world and violence, spacing and closure, is inescapable, except by denying sense, denying world, denying existence. Truth, sense, existence, world comes at this price: Brute violence must always remain possible.

To summarize the various relations between violence and world that we have encountered in a schematic way, we could say: 1) The opening of the world is the withdrawal of Being that shares and divides beings and lets them be exposed to themselves and to one another. This irruption destroys “pure immanence,” which is pure nothingness. Hence we can speak of an originary or a pre-ontological violence, though violence is used here in a metaphorical sense since there is neither agent nor patient—nothing which commits violence or nothing to which, strictly speaking, violence is done. 2) This opening, as the condition of possibility of sense, exposes singular existences to each other and hence to ontic violence, or brute violence. Yet, this opening is also the condition of possibility of “truth,” of the coming to presence of an existent. This coming to presence can be seen as violent since through it something happens and imposes itself. We see a complicity between violence and truth. Hence it only makes sense to speak of violence and peace within a world, a dis-enclosed totality. As Derrida says: for peace to be meaningful, war has to be possible. 3) Closing off the opening or attempting to do so—be it with the aim to render ontic violence impossible—is doing violence to the world and can be

seen, following Derrida, as the worse violence. This closing off of the world's violence can be attempted in two opposed ways: imposing a transcendent value (deciding in advance what the Sense of each and every existent is) or reducing value to equivalence and submitting each and every existent to a general valuation. In both cases there can be no world.

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NANCY, VIOLENCE AND THE WORLD

NOTES

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Being-in-Common," in *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. The Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1992, 2.
2. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. Ed. Peter Connor. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 76.
3. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*. Trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007, 109.
4. Across the translations of Nancy's works, *sens* is sometimes translated as sense and sometimes as meaning. We will use sense here since it captures more of the connotation of the French word *sens* (meaning, direction, sensation, hunch, etc.) The rationale for using meaning in some translation probably comes from the fact that even though the Heideggerian *Sinn des Seins* is translated into French as *sens de l'être*, in English it is rendered as the meaning of Being.
5. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*. Trans. Jeffrey Librett. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 12.
6. At the same time, truth punctuates sense so that it does not become undifferentiated being-toward. On sense and truth, see Nancy, *The Sense*, 14; 88-89.
7. On the capitalized Other, see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Sharing Voices," in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*. Ed. G.L. Ormiston and A.D. Schrift. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, 246 and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, 11-13.
8. Nancy engages with Heidegger's affirmation that "the stone is without world" most thoroughly in *The Sense*, 59-63.
9. Nancy, *The Creation*, 43.
10. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 24.
11. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 21; trans. mod.
12. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*. Trans. Bridget McDonald. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, 13.
13. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 2-3; 16.
14. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Truth of Democracy*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, 18.
15. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 3; trans. mod. See also *Being Singular*, 18: "Humanity is the expositor [*l'exposant*, the exponent] of the world, it is neither its end nor its ground—the world [i.e. the exposing of singularities to themselves and each other] is what is exposed by and to humanity [*l'exposé de l'homme*], it is neither its environment, nor its representation" (trans. mod.) and also *Being Singular*, 83-88.
16. Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*. Ed. Simon Sparks. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 17.
17. Nancy, *The Creation*, 42.
18. Nancy, *The Truth*, 22.
19. Nancy, *The Truth*, 24.
20. Nancy, *A Finite*, 20.
21. Nancy, *A Finite*, 18.
22. Nancy, *A Finite*, 19.
23. Nancy, *The Creation*, 42.
24. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 16.
25. Nancy, *The Ground*, 16.
26. Nancy, *The Ground*, 17.
27. Nancy, *The Ground*, 17.
28. Here we seem to have something similar to Benjamin's divine violence—though divine violence as sheer, bloodless destruction that puts an end to time and history has a goal outside of itself, or outside of its pure manifestation, its pure blow: expiation, the renewal of history. The similitude does not work if one interprets the relation between violence, expiation and the possibility of a fresh start in divine violence as that of means to an end, but this need not be the case.
29. Jean-Luc Nancy, "'Derridas Spuren: Über das Risiko des Denkens und Die Schrift im Herzen der Stimme' Jean-Luc Nancy im Gespräch mit Sergio Benvenuto." *Lettre Internationale* 70 (Fall 2005), 101.
30. Nancy, "Derridas Spuren," 102.
31. Nancy, "Derridas Spuren," 102.
32. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 149.
33. Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 6.
34. Derrida, *Writing*, 146-147.
35. Derrida, *Writing*, 117: "Speech is doubtless the first defeat of violence, but paradoxically, violence did not exist before the possibility of speech."

‘CAPITALISM’S CALIFORNIAN REVOLUTION’: YANN
MOULIER BOUTANG, *COGNITIVE CAPITALISM*. POLITY 2011.

James Burton

Yann Moulier Boutang’s *Cognitive Capitalism*, which first appeared in French in 2007, is premised on the understanding that we are currently undergoing an epochal transition to a new mode of capitalism. Viewing this transition as on a scale with what Karl Polanyi called the “great transformation” that produced the modern market economy, even going so far as to liken it—if somewhat grandiosely—to a second Neolithic revolution (22), Boutang sets out simultaneously to help us better understand this new form of capitalism, and to offer something like a manifesto for how we should attempt to engage with and shape its effects as it comes into being.

The book distances itself from various forms of political and epistemological orthodoxy, attempting to move beyond conventional (descriptive) sociological and economic accounts of contemporary capitalism on the one hand, and established frameworks of left-wing (Marxist) political critique on the other. At every stage, Boutang is keen to suggest that attempts to understand this emerging new form of capitalism by using perspectives that were developed with regard to industrial capitalism, will be found wanting, whether one’s aim is to accumulate wealth, or fight against exploitation.

Whether a reader responds positively to *Cognitive Capitalism* is thus likely to be determined less by her particular political persuasion and more by the degree to which she feels attached to *any* established economic or political approach to capitalism; in the contemporary era of political uncertainty, this ought to translate into a wide potential readership. Perhaps the book’s most difficult aspect, at least for those subscribing to a strongly left- or right-wing perspective, is the implicit suggestion that cognitive capitalism offers new possibilities – and new reasons for optimism – for both capitalists and their critics. Thus from either a neoliberal or a Marxist perspective it may seem to hold out the prospect of an unwelcome compromise. Yet for Boutang, the transformation is taking place whether we assent to it or not, and the real question is how we engage with it. Nor does this mean a lowering of the stakes of political involvement: the survival of the ecosystem and thus of the human species, their transformation in a new era of biotechnology and living labor, remain radically

open to question, both in the context of the new, emergent form of capitalism, and under continued threat from the older industrial capitalism that is only slowly passing away, and which remains capable of doing immense damage as it does so.

Regardless of whether or one accepts Boutang's core theory that we are in the midst of a new great transformation, the thesis of cognitive capitalism and the terms and concepts he uses to discuss it constitute potentially valuable resources for anyone seeking alternative ways to discuss the contemporary human economic, social and political situation. At the same time, it is quite plausible that no one will be entirely satisfied with the range of Boutang's concepts or the extent to which he develops them. He has (necessarily) chosen to explore some areas more than others, bound to an extent by the fact that the effects of cognitive capitalism are so far-reaching as to touch on almost every area of contemporary life. Furthermore, while some have criticized a degree of vagueness in his elaborations of key concepts, this is partially mitigated by the inherently immaterial and uncertain status of his objects of focus, such as cognitive activity, living labor and complex economies. As process philosophers and fuzzy logicians have been attempting to teach us for over a century, when dealing with complex or nebulous phenomena, it may well be more, not less precise to avoid reducing them to rigid principles and static, clear-cut representations. While readers may at times feel a desire for more detailed exploration of some of the lines of analysis and speculation Boutang opens up, simply by awakening this desire with regard to contemporary capitalism – and with it the sense that further elaboration and exploration, as well as new strategies, are indeed possible – the book achieves some of its (worthwhile) aims.

WHAT IS COGNITIVE CAPITALISM?

The transition in which we have been increasingly immersed since the mid-1970s, according to Boutang, is comparable to (though not isomorphic with) the shift from early to industrial capitalism, when mercantilism and slavery as the main bases for generating capital were replaced by industry and waged labor. The third mode of capitalism that is upon us today sees another “radical transformation of the foundations of wealth” (184), away from material, industrial production towards immaterial labor and associated means of accumulating capital. National and global economies are increasingly focused and dependent on financial markets and immaterial goods and services, particularly in the form of “information-goods” and “knowledge-goods”. Like many theorists, Boutang recognizes the crucial roles played by digitalization, the Internet and other modern communications technologies in developing the favorable conditions for this “virtualization of the economy”. (50) Yet where the theory of cognitive capitalism differs from many other approaches to these trends is in its emphasizing of the thorough-going nature of these changes, their penetration into the basic constitution of both capitalism and life.

The increased centrality of knowledge and intellectual labor in this new socio-economic mode do not replace the material side of production, but re-arrange it and take over its dominant role in determining the eventual exchange value of the goods produced. In the process, production becomes more flexible and its geographical locale less important as it “begins to mimic, in its material organization, the versatility of taste.” (33) This adds complexity to economies formerly based primarily on the slow fluctuations in the value of manufactured goods, and gives rise to a proliferation of new economies. Not only is it difficult to measure such economies and the creative collective activity on which they are based, they are also difficult if not impossible to manipulate or control. The most radical factor differentiating cognitive from industrial capitalism is not the increased dependence on information and immaterial labor, but on a collective intelligence whose valuable effects may be captured, but which cannot be reduced to pure mechanisms or resources.

Boutang thus distinguishes “cognitive capitalism” from related terms such as “information society”, “the knowledge-based economy” and “technological capitalism”, which for him describe aspects of the new capitalism, but lend themselves to reductive views, importantly the tendency to reduce knowledge to information. His preferred adjective “cognitive” is used in order to highlight the degree to which value, in modern economies, comes to depend not only on the new storage and processing capacities of modern

information technology, but on the collective use of these capacities by networked humans engaging in non-programmed, creative activity (which he terms “invention-power”, after Maurizio Lazzarato). Moreover, it is not simply a matter of directing this invention-power towards set tasks or ends, which would again follow the logic of industrial organization: since creative cognitive activity is not easily measured or controlled, cognitive capitalism, rather than attempting to commodify the products of creative labor, must find strategies “to increase its capacity for engaging in creative processes and for capturing their benefits.” (57)

This means that one of the key features of cognitive capitalism is its increasing reliance on what economists have traditionally termed “positive externalities” to generate profit (externalities are indirect costs or benefits accruing from economic transactions that are not transmitted through the transactions themselves). For Boutang, by far the most lucrative such externalities are found in the sphere of networked digital interaction. Entrepreneurial intelligence today thus entails, primarily, the ability “to convert into economic value the wealth that is already present in the virtual space of the digital.” (109) Boutang credits the “whiz-kids” of the “Californian digital revolution” with discovering and inventing the new form of value (49) – not only because of their pioneering use of modern information and communications technologies, but also for their maximizing the effects of collective intelligence: he repeatedly refers to the central activity of cognitive capitalism as the “cooperation of brains in the production of the living by means of the living, via the new information technologies” (57).

EXPLOITATION WITHOUT ALIENATION?

One of the reasons Boutang finds a cause for optimism in cognitive capitalism is this very dependence on the positive externalities of collaborative, collective, creative labor. Where the classic Marxian account reveals the worker as alienated through the transformation of the products of his labor into an exchange-value for the benefit of a capitalist employer, it is in the interests of cognitive capitalism to leave the original use-value of the creative labor intact, and indeed in the hands (or circulating among the networked brains) of the cognitive worker(s) among whom it originated. This seems to suggest the possibility of what we might think of as a form of exploitation without alienation (though Boutang uses the more neutral-sounding distinction between first and second degree exploitation). If this controversial idea could be allowed to function well, it would seem to hold out hope of a situation in which everyone wins: the capitalists can exploit without subjugating, and the cognitariat can sustain themselves without giving up their freedom. It is unsurprising that Boutang draws on the “hacker ethic” (Pekka Himanen) and the free software movement as models, with their emphasis on work-as-pleasure, information-sharing and openness.

Some will certainly regard with scepticism the rosy hue that at times seems to surround Boutang’s depictions of a scenario in which, it seems, everyone may be able to get what they need and want. Boutang himself is aware that he runs the risk of sounding utopian, or of appearing to offer “a neoliberal apologetics”. (92) Yet while he promotes an open-minded engagement with cognitive capitalism, in both practical and academic contexts, trying to convince us that the transformation we are undergoing is genuinely revolutionary and will be long-lasting, he does not claim to have all the answers (or even to have posed all the relevant questions). The cognitive capitalism thesis, while at times presented with polemic confidence, is also part of an ongoing research project, a working hypothesis for exploring and experimenting with phenomena that it takes to be in the process of becoming central to contemporary global life. It is to the book’s credit that, whether the reader partakes of Boutang’s optimism or rejects it as blind utopianism, his central ideas and hypotheses retain their value as analytic and speculative resources.

In chapters three to six, following his elaboration and analysis of the key features of cognitive capitalism in the first three chapters, Boutang explores how several contemporary socio-economic phenomena might be re-framed using the perspective of the cognitive capitalism hypothesis. In each case, he finds reasons for optimism in the possibility that what may seem, from the perspectives of emancipatory politics and ethics, to be unwelcome expansions of capitalism’s reach, may now be construed as effects relating more to the transition

itself than to what it produces – to the conflicts and tensions between two ultimately incompatible capitalist modes, rather than to the cognitive capitalism that is emerging.

For example, financialization, which many regard as the epitome of post-Fordist neoliberalization, is viewed by Boutang not as the rapacious growth of old capitalism but as its attempt “to control something that can no longer be controlled by the Fordist regime” (139) – namely, the invention-power of cognitive capitalist modes of production and accumulation, and the new forms of immaterial valuation to which they give rise. Thus the possibility is raised that financialization marks the gradual decline rather than expansion of key features of industrial capitalism. Another example is the sphere of intellectual property. The greatly increased social, cultural and economic importance of information-goods over recent years has led to unprecedented levels of activity in attempting to manage, control and legally assess the rights and means by which economic value can be derived from the socio-cultural valuation of such goods. Boutang suggests that cognitive capitalism is “synonymous with a creeping crisis of property rights” (101) comparable to the struggles over enclosures at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Yet where the enclosures of land and resources formed, at least for Marxist historians, the basis of industrial capitalism’s dominance, the new attempts to enclose intellectual property – the multi-faceted and often vicious attempts to prevent “piracy”, inhibit peer-to-peer information sharing and monopolize areas of the informational economy – ultimately for Boutang have “little future” (107). Not only are they incompatible with the fundamental principles of democracy, he suggests, but more importantly for his own thesis, cognitive capitalism *depends* upon the very freedoms that such efforts seek to restrict:

Due to the nature of the raw material it exploits and seeks to transmute into economic value, it becomes absolutely necessary to allow spontaneous cooperation to create itself unhindered. Without the richness of the multitudes who “pollinate” society through the wings of the digital, the honey harvest (that of traditional capitalism) weakens; but then, above all, we can bid farewell to the profit opportunities offered by the knowledge society. (108)

Here Boutang uses one of his favorite metaphors, the notion of pollination, an idea that is central to his subsequent (untranslated) book, *L’abeille et l’économiste* (2010) [*The Bee and the Economist*]. The major distinguishing factors between industrial and cognitive capitalism are encapsulated in the difference between focusing on the production of honey versus the value of pollination: the central role played by externalities, of collective, networked invention-power and implicit knowledge, and the qualitative difference between old and new forms of exploitation are all at work in the idea that the bees’ pollinating effect on the local environment (on which they also ultimately depend) is far more important in generating “wealth” than the honey they directly produce.

ALLERGIC REACTIONS

This difference is also crucial to the feature of the transition from industrial to cognitive capitalism in which the political stakes are perhaps highest: the revolutionizing of traditional notions of class and division of labor, and the possibility of moving beyond the wage-labor system. Boutang attends to the way precarity has in recent years become an increasingly normal condition of work: under-employment and lack of job security (and therefore a lack of financial and health security) are effects of the rise of the knowledge-based economy and the transformation of the nature of work (flexible production requires part-time labor, short-term contracts and so on). Yet instead of aligning himself with left-wing struggles in democratic societies to protect what remains of the wage-labor system, and to halt the erosion of welfare provision and income entitlements for workers, Boutang suggests that what we really need is to leave behind altogether the notion of being paid a wage in remuneration for a calculated amount of work. From his perspective, the movement towards precarity and intermittency as defining features of working life only has pernicious effects on the general welfare of a population because it is not accompanied by the emergence of an adequate set of social institutions. If social security were to be decoupled from employment altogether, and made a basic provision that is “guaranteed,

universal, and as unconditional as possible” (134), then many of the negative effects would disappear, and the benefits to both workers and capitalists could be optimized. Thus at the center of his “manifesto for the pollen society” (chapter seven) he passionately advocates the adoption of a guaranteed social income.

Many problems may be (and have been) raised in relation to the theory and elaboration of cognitive capitalism and the pollen society. It is by no means clear, for example, that the second degree forms of exploitation which Boutang associates with cognitive capitalism, as opposed to the first degree forms characteristic of industrial capitalism, are ethically and politically more favorable – though this is an implicit aspect of the “optimism of the intellect” he promotes. While this remains open to question, the risk of legitimating exploitation should not be neglected. Even if we accept that waged labor is both practically and politically no longer desirable, the question of “who jumps first” in terms of abandoning it – especially when the political orthodoxy of various camps is still a long way from embracing the possibility of a radical transformation of capitalism – would be extremely delicate. Giving up the struggle to defend against the erosion of (for example) public sector workers’ income, pension funds and the basic entitlement to social security could be catastrophic in an era in which right-wing politics wedded to neoliberalist capitalist principles remains strong.

Another concern would be the possibility that the externalities generated by vast networks of interacting brains may not be universally positive, or not equally valued by all. What if some of the bees turn out to be allergic to pollen? Though Boutang wants to find new grounds for agreement between old adversaries, or rather, to convince them of interests they already share, it may well be that just as many are resistant to taking up their places within the cognitariat as are turning away from old ideologies and politics, not to mention the likelihood of new cognitive classes becoming riven by their own hegemonic structures and divisions. Nevertheless, Boutang is not unaware of such issues, and surely not resistant to their being addressed. Indeed, at various moments he acknowledges the scepticism his claims are likely to engender, even to the extent of including a welcome new chapter in the English edition, which deals with the question of whether cognitive capitalism has been stopped in its tracks (or “stillborn”) by the unprecedented effects of the so-called economic crisis that has dominated global affairs since the book’s original publication.

Whatever shortcomings it may have, *Cognitive Capitalism* certainly achieves its aim of helping “remove the epistemological obstacles to a shift of paradigm” (149) – developing new ways of thinking about what most agree appear to be wide-ranging contemporary transformations in the relationship between economy, politics and culture. What makes it recommendable to a wide readership is the fact that, wherever Boutang leaves us thinking there is more to be thought and said about an issue, he also frequently leaves engaging productively in such cognitive activity. To use his own metaphor, while some parts of the book may be less rich in honey than others, its value in terms of pollination, in terms of its capacity to generate cognitive value in collaboration with dynamic networks of heterogeneous brains, more than compensates.

Numerous philosophical approaches to the critique of modern social development focus on the reduction of the human to object-like or machinic status, from Marx’s alienation to Foucault’s accounts of disciplining, from Bergson’s engagement with mechanization to Heidegger’s critique of modern technology as that which renders both humans and nature as “standing-resource” [*Bestand*]. If there is even a possibility of a form of capitalism whose exploitation, as Boutang seems to imply, no longer necessarily entails such a reduction, one which “co-produces labour as a living activity” and allows both knowledge and life to remain in a form that is “irreducible to machinism” (54), this would have huge relevance for a wide range of contemporary areas of critical theory, philosophy and cultural studies: while some may simply reject such a hypothesis as an apology for biopower, others might find it productive to engage critically with its potential implications. Whether the cognitive capitalism thesis reflects reality or attempts to shape it, or is considered merely an idea, in an era increasingly characterized by ecological, biopolitical and posthumanist modes of existence and thought, it is valuable simply to pose the question of where the baseline for ethical and political resistance will lie, if and when the horizon of capitalist and imperialist power can no longer be regarded as the reduction of the living to the status of the dead.

YANN MOULIER BOUTANG, *COGNITIVE CAPITALISM*

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‘DECLARES BY THE VOID...’:¹ BRUNO BOSTEELS, *BADIOU AND POLITICS*. DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011, AND
AJ BARTLETT, *BADIOU AND PLATO: AN EDUCATION BY TRUTHS*. EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011.
Bryan Cooke

Not so long ago, the allegedly deleterious influence of French philosophy on Anglophone academia was one of those topics—like childhood obesity or How the Semi-Colon Became Lost Knowledge—which would be seasonally bemoaned in the kind of lower-middle-brow newspapers which have weekend literary supplements and middling phone-hacking capabilities. While the melange of more or less worthy intentions which can be found at the root of such complaints (invariably linking, as they do, the apparent Gallic menace with a mostly imaginary intellectual vogue cum civilisational rising damp known as “post-modernism”) makes such screeds at once too numerous and too diverse to allow for easy summary, there was (and is) at least one fact at the heart of every angry op. ed. on this topic which cannot be dismissed as the simple product of ignorance or prejudice. This is the truth, occasionally acknowledged, that the relationship between French philosophy and humanities education in the English-speaking world has been (and remains) decidedly odd.

Today as twenty years ago, European (and particularly French) philosophy is both marginalised (if not actively derided) in philosophy departments everywhere from Harvard to New Delhi, while, at the same time, leading another, perversely successful second life, as something rarely understood, but nonetheless compulsively invoked in dissertations on everything from ethnography to Theatre Studies.

In Australia, like Britain and the U.S., European philosophy’s “inclusive-exclusion” can be traced back to the 1970s and particularly to English and Cinema departments, both of which were prominent in bringing about the heyday of “theory” in the 1980s and 90s. As anyone who studied humanities at a university during this time knows, this was an epoch when names like Derrida and Foucault were mentioned everywhere from seminars on the Victorian novel to barely coherent pub arguments about gender roles in recent anime depictions of the Roman Republic. But while “theory” (as it was then called), was constantly (if glibly) mentioned, it would have been virtually unthinkable, at this time, that the average undergraduate should have been exposed to (let alone have read) Heidegger’s *Being and Time*; Hegel’s *Science of Logic*; Canguilhem’s histories, Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*; Mallarmé’s poems, or any other number of works (including novels, plays, paintings, languages,

histories, textbooks on differential calculus) that might have seemed a *sine qua non* for understanding the authors whose names were dropped with such metronomic frequency.

According to a recent review by Nicholas Dames in the journal *n+1*, there is even evidence that semi-autobiographical *Portraits of the Artist as Recovering Theory Student* are becoming a kind of rite of passage for neo-realist American novelists of a certain age:² an opportunity for the Jonathan Franzens of this world to look back in semi-affectionate superciliousness to the days when their silly younger incarnations could be found constantly invoking Big Name Thinkers with that mixture of possessive fondness and weary contempt that people usually reserve only for talking about their oldest friends with their newest. The fact that the names, along with certain out-of-context technical terms, were rarely used to deliver much beyond a kind of adolescent catechism of late-capitalist platitudes (cultures are different; meaning is slippery, people see things differently, judging other people's opinions is Unfair, belief in truth leads to Judging; Judging leads to Fascism; Fascism gets in the way of Life, Sex and Fun) contributed greatly to both the fame and the infamy of so-called "Continental" thought, thereby adding further evidence for a case that history (and particularly the history of ideas) has never stopped making—namely, that something can be simultaneously lauded and castigated from sea to oil-slicked sea without anyone having to even the vaguest intimation of what they were talking about.

A few decades on, the extent to which the situation has changed is debatable. Certainly, the "analytic" tendency in philosophy departments retains something like its old hegemony, despite any number of attempts to expose the extent to which Anglophone philosophy's great divide is propped up by ignorance, parochialism, prejudice and misunderstanding.³

Similarly, today, perhaps even more so than thirty years ago, it is common to hear graduate students in education, English literature or art history with little to no prior interest in philosophy nevertheless breezily asserting that they are "using" a given "theorist" in their theses or for the purposes of teaching undergraduate classes. As a result, the verb 'to use' when followed by the name of a philosopher is arguably coalesced into a fully-fledged graduate-student idiom. In context, "*to use [x] in one's thesis*" means simultaneously something like "I don't really know anything about x" (such knowledge being, after all, little more than a train-spotter's epaulette, i.e. of interest only to other Aspergics), but that, at the same time, no-one should be too coy about associating my own work with the aura of the aforementioned Big-Name, given that I have, after all, almost definitely slightly surpassed her in putting her to work in a process that actually culminates in a certificate.

However, if (as is indisputable) the names of European philosophers, along with a handful of their "signature" concepts, have been debased into a colourless, phatic jargon suitable primarily for the breathless vacuities of arts and education bureaucrats, this is not, of course, as the literary supplements once sniffily suggested, because there is nothing more to "Continental" philosophy than modish vacuity—the vacuity of the modish notwithstanding. Instead, the fact that philosophy has a cringe-inducing bureaucratic afterlife in what I'm tempted to call, after Lacan, the "discourse of the curator" ("Her work explores notions of Space and the Body through Deleuzian motifs of de-territorialisation") has far more in common with the ethos of would-be *New Criterion* or *Spectator*-subscribing enemies of "fashionable French nonsense" than the latter would like to admit.

In fact, what the breathless theory-"user" and the disdainful *Observer* reading theory-skeptic have in common is that they are both in the position of avoiding (taming, confining, positioning, reducing) that which precisely *as* philosophy, i.e. as thought, resists being put into the service of any complacently pre-existing dogma about what constitutes utility or good sense. Put differently, the person for whom the likes of Lacan, Virilio, Rancière, Deleuze or Laruelle are *a priori* charlatans (pied pipers who are alleged to have led "our" youth away from the rigours of analytic philosophy, metrical poems, or faith in the two-party parliamentary system) *and* those who glibly embrace such thinkers so as to better position themselves on the intellectual cutting edge of something which they weren't previously aware was a knife; both ultimately perform the same function, i.e. they serve to defend against an actual encounter with a body of thought. Further, the fact that such defences should be

erected by those who are otherwise ideologically or at least sartorially opposed is not surprising when we consider that (as both Spinoza and Socrates knew) all rigorous, unfettered thought is anxiety-provoking (as well as the source of strange joy) precisely because it has no obvious place within either our bureaucratic/professional/everyday language games or the equally uneventful ideological tennis-matches whose alternately posthumous and still-born progeny make up the majority of political discourse in an age where (it would seem) only investment bankers believe that the world can be shaped by their will. (Mark Fisher has given an incredibly pithy and useful account of this latter phenomenon under the apt label of ‘capitalist realism.’)⁴

Ultimately, the irony of the anti- “theory” position is that its objections simply do not fit the famous French philosophers which it greets with an exaggeratedly arched eyebrow. Instead, the real target of such criticisms is something which owes its existence to the assiduous institutional avoidance (either in the mode of execration or celebration) of precisely those spurs to thought which exist in every book of philosophy worthy of the name. For this reason, whether the antipathy for philosophy comes from card-carrying Leavisites (if any still exist); devoted Medievalists or Classicists who (wrongly) suspects that the likes of Foucault, Benjamin, and Giorgio Agamben betray rather than fulfil Aby Warburg’s dictum that “God is in the Details”; or a first-time reader of Alan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (with its surprisingly cogent jeremiad against ‘openness’ as the ‘last virtue’ of a complacent and senescent polity), the animus of the critic is misguided, not because the everyday sophistries these polemics oppose do not exist, but because these latter are not a product of, but a prophylactic against, the philosophy which the theory skeptic condemns by association.

To the extent that 20th and 21st century European philosophy is worthy of its name, it is, contrary to the slanders of its critics, because, both in its parts and as a whole, it points to something that is distinct from (and operates diagonal to) the received wisdom and the specialist knowledges of our time. For this reason, the tepid, compulsory “theory component” that tends to be gratuitously appended to the final years of so many undergraduate humanities courses should not be thought of as marking the hegemony of European philosophy in the universities as much as a kind of massive auto-immune reaction against it—something whose purpose is to ensure—as in a famous spoof of sex education by *The Simpsons* that now that the children know what it [i.e. rigorous, imaginative, unfettered thought] is, they should be sure to “never do it.”

But if the tendency to make *de facto* compulsory the invocation of barely read thinkers is mainly designed to make what Deleuze called “thought aiming at infinite speed” into a minor bureaucratic hurdle on the endless path of certifying Career Competence, the story of Anglophone encounters with European philosophy is, like the history of thought generally, the story of a series of fortuitous misfirings, i.e. of moments where the machine breaks down, the stock-market speaks in *villanelles* and the police join the people on the other side of the barricades. Put differently, the story of Anglophone encounters with French philosophy is, in fact, a dizzying multitude of untold tales whose oneiric genre would sit uncomfortably between drama and farce, Gothic and Lovecraftian horror, epic poem and lyrical ballad. But what links all of these stories together is an event (common to every story about education in any epoch) in which what was ultimately supposed to inoculate the individual permanently against thinking somehow leads to an outbreak of exactly that which was supposed to have been contained. In the process, as with anything that constitutes an event, worlds are turned upside down, neuroses engendered, terrible beauties are born and education departments are forced to confront something that they are professionally required to find incomprehensible, namely, the desire to be educated, as something over and above the development of a specialist-knowledge, vocational competence, or the vague promotion of currently venerated ‘values’.

In any case, the untold story of how any number of young Anglophones came to philosophy (and thus to a wondrous and mortifying glimpse of something (to quote the title of a selection of Fernando Pessoa’s poems) “a little larger than the entire universe”, arguably reflects an aspect of the story of education in all epochs. This is because education has always been about the way in which a body of knowledge which was transmitted to a variety of young people to achieve a finite and familiar purpose (e.g. the production of good, ideologically sound citizen-consumers; sufficiently polished second-sons of the European bourgeoisie ready to rule the

Colonies, mandarin-bureaucrats et cetera) every now and then produces something shocking, unprecedented, i.e. *subtracted* from the world in which it is supposed to play a drab and desultory part. We know this story, because it has been played out again and again: of how the outworn clothes of forgotten epochs are displaced from the historical strata in which they are embedded, blasting open, as Walter Benjamin says, the continuum of history.⁵ But what is important is that this displacement of past categories occurs to mark something in that is irreducible to and unrecognisable in terms of the concept and the categories *of* that present. As Benjamin implies, the displacement of the past therefore provides names in the present for a present-effulgence which itself serves as the harbinger of a future whose afterglow in our own time goes by the name of an “event”.⁶

Through processes such as these, cultural artefacts that were intended to be no more than ornaments for aristocrats (or curiosities for cultural taxidermists) have time and again become the forges in which revolutionary ideas were tempered, in which dull texts that were supposed to be quickly digested on the way to Better Things start to eat their way out of the student from the inside like an Alien who brings stupefaction, melancholia, and (black) fire “leashed in like Hounds” in its wake: the night-stalker deliriums of study; the barren places between the world as it is and the world as it might be.

In this sense, if philosophy has been, as has been pointed out to the point of tedium, an occasion for fashionable nothings, it has also been to thousands of young people, the basis of an awakening to something which had no precedent in their experience or their expectations: something anomalous without being subjective, universal without being ubiquitous, irreducible to “culture” and its language games and yet profoundly connected with the desire that animates both the creation and reception of art.

In Alain Badiou’s language, philosophy is, as it has always been, something “inexistent” to the “state of the situation”, i.e. to what counts as “knowledge” or as useful, laudable, worthy, sensible.

Amongst living European philosophers, Badiou is not only (along with Agamben, Rancière and Žižek) one of the most renowned, he is also, I maintain, the figure whose thought best lends itself to explaining what education is (and isn’t) and therefore, by extension, for giving an account of how exactly the Anglophone encounter with French philosophy should never be mistaken for its most visible (and tawdry) avatars.

There are several reasons for this. One is that in both his systematic and popular works (the latter of which include books like the two manifestoes for Philosophy, *Ethics*, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Radical Universalism* and the magisterial lecture course *The Century*) are directed explicitly against the mixture of maudlin, moralistic, pragmatic, relativist, “ethno-sentimental”⁷ and, ultimately, managerial world-views that Badiou sees as linking together such old enemies as post-modern prophets of difference, liberal-humanitarians, reactionary defenders of capital and its seigneurial rights; as well as those strange reactionaries for whom the post-Galilean sciences, feminism, or modern egalitarianism is a virus attacking some pure body of theological dogma.

Second, Badiou also has the distinction of having been singularly well-served by his English interpreters. Adroitly translated (particularly in Oliver Feltham’s exemplary English edition of *Being and Event*), Badiou has been the focus of a number of discussions of psychoanalysis, art, politics and mathematics, without having attracted the kind of media-circus that once attached to a figure like Jacques Derrida who had the misfortune, at the height of his fame, to be both rarely read and frequently denounced as both an enemy of civilisation and someone too shallow and frivolous to be worth mentioning.

In contrast, Badiou has not only been the subject of some excellent introductory works and essay collections, but the last 10 years have also seen the publication of such monographs as Ray Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound*, Nina Power’s *One Dimensional Woman*, Alberto Toscano’s *Fanaticism*, Jon Roffe’s *Badiou’s Deleuze*, Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* and Peter Hallward’s *Damning the Flood*, all of which (in very different ways) attest to the fact that Badiou’s influence is both wide and deep enough to be evident in works where he is scarcely mentioned, continually criticised, or translated into contexts very different from those explicitly addressed in his work.

Badiou's recent announcement of a third volume of *Being and Event* will have provoked both great excitement as well as quickly-shaken-off groans that there is more work to do, new mathematical models to learn, in short, a new labour of thought if we are to keep one of the present ages's very few contemporary philosophers within the horizon of our vision.

While the philosophical community waits for *Being and Event III*, it is worth pausing to examine two of the most recent works on Badiou: each of which gives a different answer to the question: what does it mean to think, philosophically, now with Badiou: to respond to his unique challenge to contemporary thought?

To begin with the figure who is perhaps most familiar to the readers of *Parrhesia*: Bruno Bosteels is, along with Peter Hallward and Alberto Toscano, one of the best known of Badiou's English-language interpreters. The translator of Badiou's important early work *Theory of the Subject*, Bosteels is also known for a number of significant articles on and interviews with Badiou as well as a series of closely related writings on Hegel, radical political movements and the literature of both Europe and the Americas. In addition, Bosteels has translated and written introductions to some of Badiou's recent publications *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (2012), and *Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophy* (2011) among them.

Bosteels's *Badiou and Politics* (2011) offers to be his most substantial and wide-ranging book to date, bringing as it does Bosteels' considerable erudition and familiarity with Marxist politics, French philosophy and Romance language-literature to bear on Badiou's corpus.

The results are mixed and, at times, remarkably disappointing.

The problems begin with the introduction. After describing his first personal meeting with Badiou in "his country house in Saint Gaudens, just South of Toulouse,"⁸ his role in organising Badiou's first trip to the U.S., early discussions with Slavoj Žižek in which both men agreed that Badiou's lack of fame in the Anglophone was something that desperately needed to be remedied, Bosteels goes on to outline what he sees as *Badiou and Politics*' unique contribution to the study of Badiou's philosophy.

While doing so, Bosteels mentions several times that his own book lacks the mathematical focus of other works on, or inspired by, Badiou. Unexpectedly, he then devotes a considerable portion of his introduction to arguing why this should not be regarded as an oversight on his part, but instead as a necessary corrective to an unfortunate tendency within Badiou's reception.

Thus, early on in the book Bosteels says that:

Many readers will argue that this [Badiou's engagement with axiomatic set theory and the theory of *topoi* –B.C.] is precisely the most distinctive feature of Badiou's work, so that mathematics *would actually meet, if not exceed, the importance of politics as the principal condition of philosophy*" [my italics] (Bosteels, xvii)

Here, as elsewhere,⁹ Bosteels paraphrases an imagined critic objecting to the fact that *Badiou and Politics* hardly ever discusses mathematics, or at least only discusses it in the context of saying that it is vaguely salutary *not* to do so. The problem, however, is that Bosteels's portrait of his potential critic makes the latter seem so fumbling and incoherent that Bosteels's inevitable "refutation" of this figure is hard to take seriously.

Thus, in the sentence quoted above, Bosteels implies that certain unnamed scholars, not content with taking the mathematical component of Badiou's thought seriously, have advanced (what would indeed be) the truly egregious suggestion that, for Badiou, mathematics is more important or ranked higher than love, art or politics (what Badiou famously names as the remaining three out of four of philosophy's "conditions"¹⁰). As Bosteels knows very well, to elevate mathematics to the state of such an *Ur*-condition, even to the status of *primus inter pares* would involve disregarding everything Badiou has ever said on the topic of the conditions; shutting one's

eyes through most of *Being and Event* and probably randomly excising or displacing words like ‘not’ from key passages in anything else Badiou has written.¹¹

The only reason that the position to which Bosteels objects can be excused is that it has, (to my knowledge), never been maintained by anyone ever. Certainly, if anyone did assert that mathematics was, for Badiou, the *principal* condition of philosophy, this person should indeed instantly be dismissed for not having bothered to achieve even the most superficial familiarity with the philosopher’s thought. But Bosteels names no names by which his reader might identify the guilty parties in this affair. Nor does he offer any citations by which the reader might identify why such a fundamental mistake could have been made by even one of Badiou’s commentators, let alone spread (as Bosteels implies) like an airborne super-virus amongst those studying the philosopher’s corpus.

Nonetheless, in a two-page disquisition called “Whither Mathematics?” Bosteels goes on to characterise his own project in terms of saving Badiou from Badiou scholarship by uncovering “an iceberg of emancipatory politics that is all but hidden—if it has not already suffered a complete meltdown as a result of global warming—below the arctic waters of mathematical formalization”. (Bosteels, 43). This is a curious choice of image, first of all for the fact that it seems to count against rather than support what I take to be Bosteels’s point. After all, if Badiou’s mathematical formalisation is supposed to be identified with the “arctic waters”, and “emancipatory politics” with the iceberg, wouldn’t the best way to run into the politics-iceberg be to traverse the “icy waters”, as opposed to, say, hoping that the iceberg is amphibious? Conversely, wouldn’t a journey through the waters be destined, Titanic-style, to end in the (in this case, desirable) conclusion of boat-meets-iceberg, especially because (as per the conventional use of an iceberg metaphor) the bulk of the iceberg is *below the surface of the ocean which it nonetheless inhabits*? In direct opposition to such an interpretation, Bosteels’s intention in this passage appears to be to say that the mathematical formalisation *obscures* the politics, an obfuscation which *Badiou and Politics* then explicitly sets out to remedy.

In pressing his charge against what he calls the “die-hard fans” of Badiou’s “otherwise undeniable mathematical tendency”, (Bosteels, 35), Bosteels does name a number of figures such as Tzuchien Tho who have undeniably... written about Badiou’s mathematics. However, Bosteels offers no evidence at all as to how the patient work of a scholar such as Tho has served to obscure rather than to illuminate Badiou’s sustained and uncompromising reflections on politics. The only way that such a proposition might make sense is if (as is surely not the case) that the discussion of Badiou’s mathematics were caught in a kind of zero-sum rivalry with his politics such that every attempt to clarify of the one could only result in the obfuscation of the other. But as Bosteels, of all people, surely knows, while there is absolutely nothing in Badiou’s work to vindicate the vision of such an either/or there is an absolutely overwhelming amount of evidence to dismiss it out of hand.

To use just one example: at the beginning of his *Metapolitics*, Badiou explicitly states that “Philosophy, which requires the deployment of four conditions, cannot specialise in any one of them.”¹²

Given this, it is inconceivable that Bosteels could be suggesting (in an Arendtian/Aristotelian, i.e. *anti-Platonic mode*) that there exists a fundamental incompatibility between mathematics and politics.¹³

To make such a claim would be to ignore not only Badiou’s strange and beautiful remarks about Jean Cavaillès in his *Metapolitics*,¹⁴ but also everything that Badiou has ever said about Plato, Lacan or Cantor. More importantly, it would involve a kind of hermeneutic deafness to the way in which Badiou’s work perfectly conforms to his own prescriptions for philosophy as a revived Platonic enterprise. Particularly from the “high watermark” of *Being and Event* onwards, practically every sentence of Badiou’s shows the mark of truth-procedures that are operative with regard to each of the four “conditions.” In the face of this, the most that Bosteels could possibly mean by his talk of mathematical excess is that Badiou *scholarship* has become narrowly mathematical in a way that Badiou’s work patently isn’t.

Even if the claim is restricted to secondary literature on Badiou, it is, however, much easier to demonstrate the opposite of what Bosteels is claiming than to find support for his position.

For example, in 2006 Badiou published *Logiques des Mondes* [Logics of Worlds] the long-awaited “second volume” of *Being and Event* (the English translation by Alberto Toscano following relatively quickly in 2009.)

As is reasonably well known, *Logics of Worlds* takes the set-theoretical ontology of *Being and Event*, and attempts to offer what Heidegger might have called an “ontic” supplement to the earlier book. This supplement takes the form of a formal theory of appearance that attempts to think phenomena and (indeed phenomenality) while totally detaching the notion of appearance from the idea of a finite subject who would represent the world in her mind. Instead, Badiou draws on aspects of category theory (developed in the 1940s by Samuel Eilenberg and Saunders MacLane on the back of the work by Alexander Grothendieck) to construct something that could be legitimately compared to a “phenomenology” if and only if it is understood that we are dealing with a phenomenology not only shorn of the transcendental subject (as in Heidegger) but also of the subject-object “correlate” which remains operative in the “hermeneutic” phenomenologies of Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion.¹⁵ In *Logics*, Badiou has recourse to this new mathematical paradigm in order to address a fundamental (if deliberate) limitation of *Being and Event*. In the earlier book, one of the advantages of ZFC set theory for ontology was its capacity to allow for a formal description (i.e. a mathematical *inscription*) of anything at all with recourse to only a single, equally formal relation—‘belonging’.¹⁶ Category theory, by contrast, allows Badiou to perform the more difficult task of modelling situations (“worlds”) which, in their “ontic” rather than ontological dimension, are principally composed of relations, transformations, inter-connections (the “arrows” of category theory) whose “transcendental” “minimum” and “maximum” of appearance Badiou will demonstrate can nonetheless be shifted, or indeed, inverted under the pressure of an event.

As far as I’m aware, however, in the six years since the publication of *Logics*, no sustained or substantial treatment of the mathematical core of this work exists in the English language. Early reviews of the book set the trend for what would come, as Peter Hallward,¹⁷ Zizek,¹⁸ and others focused primarily on Badiou’s critique of ‘democratic materialism’; his new typology of the ‘reactive’ and ‘obscure’ subjects and above all, on offering slightly patronising (not to mention) vague congratulations to the effect that Badiou had apparently brought a (much-needed) degree of ‘mediation’ to his system which was apparently lacking in his previous *opus*.¹⁹

Doubtless, the coyness of *Logics*’ reviewers’ has something to do, not only with the confines of a review article, but also with the inherent difficulty of non-mathematicians coming into contact with a new (and fearsome) mathematical field. In addition, while the least attentive reader of *Being and Event*, is likely to have gleaned a first-rate introduction to axiomatic set theory alongside one of the most original philosophical works of the last century (‘Come for the set theory primer/stay for the overturning of Everything You Thought You Knew About Philosophy!’), *Logics of Worlds* does not explain category theory with anything like the degree of clarity (or detail) that marks the equivalent account of set theory in *Being and Event*. In addition, and symptomatically, there is, at present, no treatment of Badiou in English that deals with category theory with anything like the depth with which Hallward’s *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* treats of set-theory. How then can Bosteels suggest a kind of mathematical *hegemony* in Badiou scholarship that might have muscled out all of those whose interests were less rarefied and more practical?

After all, even if such a major aspect of Badiou’s work had received the exhaustive treatment that it transparently has not, a glance through the literature would quickly demonstrate that the few articles dealing explicitly with Badiou’s mathematics are easily outnumbered by essays, books, and interviews which—while possibly *mentioning* Badiou’s mathematics—are largely devoted (as is, for instance, Adrian Johnston’s book on Badiou and Zizek)²⁰ to Badiou’s political interventions: to Badiou as unapologetic *soixante-huitard*; as the intransigent defender of the “communist hypothesis”; as the scourge of Sarkozy and *les nouveaux philosophes*, and generally, as a member of the “Lacanian Left” and generally as a thinker whose thought is all the more

potent for its total refusal to concede to the political pieties of the present age.

It is, of course, well and good that what is, after all, such a fundamental and emphatic aspect of Badiou's thought should be emphasised by those who talk about it. But is it really the case, as Bosteels insists, that Badiou's mathematics is in danger of covering over, dominating, or somehow holding back the political discussion of Badiou's work? The closest that Bosteels gets to providing evidence for the alleged trend is his quotation of a statement by Sam Gillespie (the author of an exceptional early treatise on Badiou's work called *The Mathematics of Novelty*) in which the latter can be found claiming that:

...however open Badiou's theory of truth may be to non-mathematical interpretations (such as found in Zizek, Critchley, Bruno Bosteels), it is in fact only through a thorough exposition of Paul Cohen's generic set theory that we can adequately grasp what Badiou is doing with the classical category of truth." (Gillespie, quoted in Bosteels, 33)

There is, of course, as Bosteels is surely aware, nothing in this statement that can be interpreted as an affirmation that, for Badiou, 'mathematics is *more important* than politics'. There is only the (surely unobjectionable) suggestion that if we are to understand Badiou's theory (and, in particular, what he says about truth), we must pay attention to the formal, mathematical dimension of Badiou's philosophy through which his concept of truth is elucidated. The difference between the former thesis (what Bosteels imputes to Gillespie) and the latter (what Gillespie actually says) is the difference between the idea of philosophy "sutured to a single condition"—a vision ridiculously, inexplicably and above all *explicitly* out of step with Badiou's whole enterprise and a position which, as Gillespie points out, performs the basic courtesy of taking what Badiou says seriously.

If, as we can assume, Bosteels is aware of this, his argument for the existence of an excessively and narrowly mathematical focus in Badiou scholarship must lie elsewhere than in Gillespie's claim that "truth", in Badiou, is not an intuitive concept upon which Badiou imposes an unhelpfully arcane mathematical analogy. After replying to the statement from Gillespie with a series of increasingly incoherent rhetorical questions,²¹ apparently supposed to represent the voice of a Potential Critic, Bosteels goes on to reply to Gillespie by making the supremely unobjectionable statement that: "It is important to be precise, however, about the function of mathematics in Badiou's thought." (Bosteels, 33)

In the name of this goal, Bosteels then makes, what I take to be, three major points. These are:

1) That Badiou's interest in and commitment to politics is lifelong, unmistakable and never far from his mind whether he is talking about set theory or Wagner, Beckett's novels or Lacan's reading of Antigone.

2) That many of Badiou's mathematical categories (e.g. his decision to use the term 'state' in reference to the power set) have avowedly political overtones that have a precedent in the radical political tradition that runs from Marx to Mao via Lenin and Trotsky.²²

And, finally, 3) That Badiou explicitly restricts the use of mathematics to ontology, on the one hand, (axiomatic set theory as that which formally inscribes being-qua-being as inconsistent multiplicity) and the logic of appearance, in the name of which Badiou martials the topos/category theory of *Logics of Worlds* is deployed.²³

While a) and b) are undeniable (as well as obvious) it is still not at all clear how either Badiou's fidelity to an intransigently egalitarian politics, nor his unbroken dialogue with a political tradition result in a forced choice between the scientific (i.e. mathematical) and the political conditions of Badiou's philosophy. C) is trickier. On the one hand, Bosteels is certainly right to suggest that Badiou's use of mathematics is restricted in the sense that his philosophy neither practices nor permits an *arbitrary* application of mathematical concepts to anything and everything. (In the absence of such a restriction, Badiou's critics would have every right—as they, in fact, do not—to shout the words "Sokal hoax" whenever they hear third-hand rumours that this Gallic interloper has dared to mobilise mathematics for the sake of philosophy.)

At the same time, however, Bosteels's warnings to whichever mysterious person are supposed to have been forcing Badiou's mathematics into inappropriate contexts grossly underestimate the role of mathematics in both *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, by implying that they are for Badiou no more than the language of a couple of 'regional ontologies' in the phenomenological sense of the term.

Pace Bosteels, Badiou does not only argue that set theory in its Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatisation inscribes the "presentation" of inconsistent multiplicity which he calls 'being qua being'. Badiou also puts this ontological schema (and the ZFC axioms in particular) to work in deriving a formal theory of the "subject" that is not an individual or (worse) an *ego* in Lacan's sense, but rather as "any local configuration of a generic procedure from which a truth is supported".²⁴ The point of such an enterprise, to which the entire second half of *Being and Event* is devoted, is to give such fundamental concepts as "generic extension", "forcing", "subject" and "condition" a mathematical inscription, which, given the argument of the first half of the book, *means a connection to ontology without which these concepts would be mere analogies*—devoid of any anchor in reality. The purpose of Badiou's meditations is *not*, therefore, to find a mathematical *analogue* for politics—as if he were responding to the not terribly reasonable demand of a few strange mathematicians that the revolution be explained algebraically—instead, Badiou attempts to demonstrate how the set of concepts that constitute his mature 'theory of the subject' are grounded in a reality that, though vertiginous, is nonetheless accessible to formalisation (and thus, ultimately, to thought). The whole point of Badiou's labours on this point is to demonstrate, not only how something new might be possible *within* a situation, but also how there might be, on the basis of this *real* rather than merely apparent novelty, a universe that is composed, to invoke the motto of *Logics of Worlds*, not only of bodies and languages, but also truths.²⁵ The icy waters of formalisation, are not therefore, supposed to replace or even supplement the *praxis* (which is to say also the thought) that Badiou consistently maintains that politics *is*: instead they are supposed to inscribe the possibility of subjects and of truths in something other than (as one of Badiou's "finitist" or hermeneutically-inclined opponents might say) the mere preferences or prejudices of an author, or a culture, or a life-world.²⁶

At this point, I realise that it may seem strange or even malicious that I should have devoted so much space to criticising Bosteels for what is essentially his pre-emptive reply to a harsh (if strangely incoherent) imaginary critic, a reply that, moreover, occupies only a relatively small portion of a book of over 300 pages.

The reason for doing so, however, is that, as we will see, this aspect of Bosteels' introduction both contains and prefigures a problem that suffuses his book as a whole.

To explain: after promising to retrieve the emancipatory-politics-iceberg from the surrounding mathematical ocean, *Badiou and Politics* launches into a discussion of Louis Althusser: his fundamental concepts ("structural causality", "over-determination", the relationship of science to ideology); the various *aporiai* of his thought and their importance for later Marxist theory; the connection between Althusser and Lacan's psychoanalysis; the young Badiou's role in the Althusser-Lacan encounter; the attempt (exemplified in the works of Jacques-Alain Miller and the Slovenian Lacanians) to connect Marxist and Freudian notions of over-determination via the creation of a kind of Lacan-Hegel axis; and finally a defence of dialectical materialism that emphasises (with Žižek) the links between psychoanalysis and Marxism as two theories/praxes of struggle.²⁷

The next two chapters deal, respectively, with Badiou's response to Althusser and Lacan and his position in the history of French Maoism.

These chapters contain what (with the exception of an extraordinary final interview in the appendix of the book) are by far the best moments of *Badiou and Politics*.

However, while Bosteels succeeds in illuminating-through-contextualising he falters when he attempts to link his various comparisons and contrasts (which are so wide-ranging as to consist in such things as comparisons between Badiou and the French Heideggerian philosophy)²⁸ to a coherent reading of Badiou's contribution to political thought. This is because Bosteels is at his best in providing (or narrating) context, i.e. in offering

impressive quantities of information which will undoubtedly help any number of readers get a sense of Badiou's influences, his 'invented predecessors' and, ultimately in answering the not insignificant question about where and how Badiou might be placed with regards to those of his peers who remain dedicated to universalistic, egalitarian politics, as well as those, like *les nouvelles philosophes* who have noisily betrayed these ideals in the name of *bien pensant* notions about the moral obligation of rich and the powerful to alternate in bringing (to borrow an image from Žižek) either bombs or food to the billions of human beings who consistently lose at the tables of capitalism's planetary casino, without ever being invited to sit at them.²⁹

In fact, if *Badiou and Politics* were shorn of its introduction and conclusion and consisted only of its first three chapters it might have been an admirable book on "Badiou in context". In addition, however, Bosteels also presents *Badiou and Politics* as an argument about how Badiou should be interpreted. And it is this, far more than the afore-mentioned (and helpful) contextualisation which is supposed to constitute Bosteels's unique contribution to the (vast) territory of politico-philosophical arguments with which *Badiou and Politics* is concerned.

Bosteels' argument, in essence, is that Badiou is a dialectical thinker who, at no point, (and notwithstanding some of the latter's own rhetoric), should be regarded as positing a gulf between, on the one hand, the universe of 'truth' (and the 'subject') and that of the situation(s) on the other. (This is, incidentally, a point which Bosteels has made in print several times prior to the release of *Badiou and Politics*.)³⁰ To elaborate: for Bosteels, Badiou's reference to "Being", on the one hand and [the] "Event" on the other, does not point to the existence of two incommensurable orders of reality whose possible connection then becomes mysterious, but rather to two aspects of the *same* reality that are to be regarded as fundamentally imbricated in a dialectical fashion. Put differently, Badiou is not and has never been a "Kantian", at least not in the pejorative Hegelian-Marxist use of the word where this means "someone who divides the world into two orders (duty vs. inclination; phenomena vs. noumena; post-evental grace and pre-evental situation) whose interconnection would then seem to hinge on a kind of *deus ex machina*."

The most notable thing about this part of Bosteels's argument is that it is absolutely, indubitably correct.

Here, in contrast to his earlier argument about mathematics "die-hards" and their (ostensibly) unfortunate influence on Badiou scholarship, Bosteels has ample evidence to suggest that, first, the mistake that he imputes to others has in fact been made (mostly by critics, but also by some defenders of Badiou's work)³¹ and, second, that it is indeed a fundamental misunderstanding of Badiou's work.

Many passages could be cited in defence of Bosteels' point.

For instance, in his *Ethics* Badiou states that:

A truth is the material course traced, within the situation, by the eventual supplementation. It is thus an immanent break. Immanent because a truth proceeds *in* the situation, and nowhere else—there is no heaven of truths."³²

Many more passages could be cited in support of this (important) claim, but Bosteels himself offers something much better, i.e. the following lapidary formulation which is taken from the first of two very rich interviews between Badiou and Bosteels which form the appendix to *Badiou and Politics*. Thus, Badiou:

the principal contribution of my work does not consist in opposing the situation to the event. In a certain sense, that is something that everybody does these days. The principal contribution consists in posing the following question: What can we derive or infer of this from the point of view of the situation itself? Ultimately, it is the situation that interests me. I don't think that we can grasp completely what a trajectory of truth is in a situation without the hypothesis of the absolute, or radical, arrival of an event...But in the end what interests me is the situational unfolding of the event,

not the transcendence or the entrenchment of the event itself.....” (Badiou in Bosteels, 306)

The problem that I find with Bosteels’s attempt to sew together the various threads of *Badiou and Politics* via his insistence on a “dialectical Badiou” is not that Bosteels is wrong about the importance of the dialectic for Badiou—even if it must be stressed, as Bosteels does, that for Badiou the dialectic is a dialectic of scission and not of reconciliation.³³ (“One”, as Badiou likes to say, divides into “Two”³⁴.) Instead, it is precisely *because* Bosteels is correct on this point that his laboured suggestion that those who would learn from Badiou must search for and, as it were, recover Badiou the dialectician seems super-erogatory.

To elaborate, Bosteels’s claim that Badiou is a ‘dialectical thinker’ is absolutely accurate if it is understood negatively, i.e. as a *caveat lector* against a certain (sloppy) interpretation of Badiou’s work. Thus Bosteels can be seen to reject, but also to ward off a false, “Kantian” image of Badiou whose prevalence Bosteels plausibly traces to both certain passages of Hallward’s *A Subject To Truth* and even more to Žizek’s disastrous coinage of the term ‘Truth-Event’ in his 2000 book *The Ticklish Subject*.³⁵ By implying a conflation between truth and the event, Žizek’s Badiou starts to look like precisely the kind of ‘Kantian’ theorist whose thought would be mired in the problem of how to connect the secular grace of the event to the banality of (actual) situations. Instead, as Bosteels is right to point out, Badiou’s real interest is not in the mere possibility of an event (whose tremulous anticipation is a staple of precisely the kind of “weak Messianisms” which Badiou has on more than one occasion derided)³⁶, but instead in how a “subject” proceeds—rigorously—“point by point”, *and in this world*, in the afterglow of an event’s “fragile scintillation”. In other words, what really interests Badiou is how what he calls a “subject” *proceeds*, where this procedure will involve connecting together elements (bodies, affects, fragments of already-existing languages) that were always, already present in a situation, but whose “generic” inter-connection is invisible to the situation’s principle(s) of “inclusion” (what Badiou calls the situation’s “state”).³⁷

But if Bosteels correctly identifies that what interests Badiou is the “situation”, i.e. with how “a subject” acts *within* a situation, according to a principle that is *alien* to that same situation, it is not clear why it becomes urgent (as Bosteels seems to think it does) to look beyond (or rather behind) *Being and Event*, to Badiou’s earlier *Theory of the Subject*, to the history of the European Radical Left, or even (as Bosteels suggests) to a possible *detente* between Badiou and the French Heideggerianism of Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in order to find the more robustly dialectical Badiou that Bosteels himself (accurately and continually) announces as being both already and explicitly present within Badiou’s corpus.

Given that the criticisms of *Being and Event* as a Kantian or (as Bosteels puts it) an “absolutist” work are false in that they involve ignoring great swathes of Badiou’s work (even, and especially *Being and Event*), in favour of a single aspect of his rhetoric, why, the reader wonders, does Bosteels spend so much time bringing Badiou into the company of more traditionally dialectical thinkers, as if the aura of “Cartesianism” or of “Sartreanism” needed to be exorcised before Badiou was fit for company and that this exorcism could be achieved by simply pushing Badiou into the company of acknowledged dialecticians. Badiou’s own suggestion, in the same interview quoted earlier, is that his interest in situations leads him to assert that the “fundamental” categories of his work are those of “genericity and of forcing” (Badiou in Bosteels, 306), i.e. two central concepts of *Being and Event* which a) have no parallel in either Marx or Hegel and b) which are inextricably caught up with Badiou’s with the formal, mathematical side of Badiou’s work which Bosteels seems to find embarrassing.

The danger of the exercise in which the bulk of *Badiou and Politics* is engaged does not, therefore, derive from any risk of falsely identifying Badiou as a dialectical thinker. Badiou *is* a dialectical thinker, at least in the slightly glib sense in which this would mean that he most definitely does not think in terms of metaphysical gulfs or ostensibly Kantian dichotomies. And Bosteels is also right to suggest that Badiou has been constantly occupied with the dialectic for the duration his philosophical life.

However, in attempting to prove this by constantly positioning Badiou within what (for the average student of continental philosophy) will be more familiar political and philosophical frameworks, *Badiou and Politics* continually risks minimising what is, in fact, singular and unprecedented in Badiou's thought, by making it "just another" feature in the field of European thinkers whose family resemblances in the matter of political attitudes apparently demands that they should be more brought into dialogue rather than opposed.

In saying this, I am not, of course, suggesting that Badiou should only ever be spoken of as if he were an ineffable being of infinite alterity, incomparable to his philosophical contemporaries, nor that there is anything wrong about attempting to place his thought in its historical, political or national-academic context. On the contrary, I have already said that there is real worth in Bosteels's attempts to clarify Badiou's relationship to both of the above. However, the more Bosteels engages in the work of *positioning* Badiou within a broader philosophical situation, the more that Badiou's actual contribution to that situation seems elided.

At this point, the whole issue of Bosteels's attitude to mathematics re-emerges.

Thus, while I have mentioned that I can find no evidence for Bosteels's claim that mathematics dominates Badiou's reception, there is of course a very old stereotype (going back at least as far as Aristophanes' satire of Socrates in *The Clouds*) that associates philosophy with a kind of Laputan adoration of abstraction, which allegedly leads to incalculably deleterious political effects. Because of this tendency, so the story goes, the philosopher constantly needs to be dragged back to the real world of "concrete" struggles, by those with a more pragmatic, humane, sensible, or in a Marxist idiom, more robustly "materialist" attitude.

The problem, however, as Hegel (and even more so Adorno) have pointed out, is that it is not always obvious where the "concrete" lies, particularly when it comes to those who would make themselves its spokespersons, advocates, or privileged initiates.³⁸ One correlate of this is that there is nothing to suggest, for instance, that *The Science of Logic* is, *a priori*, of less relevance to a series of concrete political struggles than a book with the title: "Urgent Political Events of the Present and my Extremely Significant Contribution to Them."³⁹

Furthermore, the advocacy of "immediacy" can often be understood as precisely the kind of false concretion of the sort that Hegel condemns with regards to Early German Romanticism and which Adorno finds in both phenomenology and existentialism. For both thinkers immediate reality ("this night, here now, with her breath on my cheek") is an abstraction, precisely because its presentation *as* immediate relies on the systematic obfuscation of everything that allows the taken-for-granted "thisness" of a moment, a feeling, an experience, to have emerged, to have become (as Hegel will point out paradoxically) *identifiable* as a singularity.⁴⁰ This, of course, applies *a fortiori* to mere *appeals* to immediacy which Hegel rightly identified as utterly compromised by a Romantic (impossible and vaguely reactionary) nostalgia for the putatively pre-lapsarian world before the vivisection of the concept.

To put this less technically, whereas stupefaction and melancholia might be the concomitants (as Giorgio Agamben points out) of "study"⁴¹, the problem of thought's distance from "concrete" struggles is vitiated rather ameliorated by the academic habit of pre-emptively deflecting the charge of Ivory Tower irrelevance by overt suggestions that, say, my reading of *Pride and Prejudice* should have the aura of a street battle just because these are mentioned in my monograph, whereas all other such interpretations are so much...literary criticism. At its worst, this gesture recalls the moment in *1984* when Winston Smith shouts out 'Do it to Julia!': i.e., it says: "I may be a privileged academic engaged in abstruse discussions, but aren't there even less 'relevant' figures out there whose service to various popularly accepted 'goods' is even *less* obvious than my own? Why not single *those* people out for punishment?"

But while I'm certain that Bosteels is aware of exactly this problem of false concretion, the rhetorical organisation of *Badiou and Politics* consistently suggests otherwise. In the end, the book is far too deferential to some real or imagined sceptic who, demanding assurance that there is more to Badiou than nerdy mathematical enthusiasms, believes that she is entitled to a protracted defense of Badiou's Marxist credentials. However,

given that such “concerns” about Badiou’s political *bona fides* are likely to be based either on ignorance or on the kind of bureaucratic literal-mindedness that thinks that the most politically useful parts of a thinker’s work must be identical with the moments where she talks explicitly about politics, it is hard to see why it is necessary to have a book that refutes these charges by uncovering a more respectably dialectical (read: “political”) Badiou.

As a final, related, point, I cannot end the review without saying something about Bosteels’s style. Bosteels is, of course, capable of writing both elegantly and eloquently and this capacity is on display in the majority of his articles. However, in a number of passages of *Badiou and Politics*, Bosteels descends into an equivocating mode that (combined with the sheer number of discussions of philosophies distinct from Badiou’s own) has a tendency to hollow out his book’s centre, preventing its myriad threads from being integrated into a coherent whole.

Thus, at one point Bosteels attempts a criticism of Alberto Toscano’s suggestion that Badiou’s 1985 essay *Peut-on penser la politique?* marks a transition in the latter’s work from a paradigm of destruction to a paradigm of ‘subtraction’:

Toscano’s analysis nonetheless seems to waver somewhat in the attempt to draw a neat conceptual boundary between the operations typical of the transitive mode of politics (reappropriation, destruction, purification) and those that presuppose a certain deconstruction of the metaphysics of transitivity...At the same time, *such resonances do not necessarily signal an inaccuracy [my italics]* in Toscano’s account of Badiou’s philosophy. In fact, many of the operations that were pivotal before actually do continue to be important today, albeit in different ways with a different emphasis. Thus, in more recent statements, Badiou’s supposedly linear shift from destruction to subtraction or from purification to the play of minimal difference, gives way to the complex reordering of simultaneity. Toscano’s hesitation bears witness to the possibility of such a combination, which only recently has become a reality for Badiou. (Bosteels, 151)

The reader is left wondering not only what a “complex reordering of simultaneity” and a “certain deconstruction” might mean, but also about which things Bosteels is calling “pivotal albeit in different ways and with different emphases.” Also, what does it mean to “waver *somewhat*” (as opposed to the already non-committal activity of wavering?) Most importantly, isn’t Bosteels’s *ultimate* point in this paragraph simply that Toscano is, in fact, *wrong* to suggest that there is a definitive break (or as Bosteels puts it a “linear shift”) between Badiou’s focus on “destruction” and his later focus on subtraction? Why then does this criticism need to be expressed in the form of a conciliatory (but, as such, strangely patronising) suggestion that Toscano, far from “signalling an inaccuracy” [sic] is to be praised for a degree of “wavering” that apparently anticipates Badiou’s own future blurring of a distinction and trajectory which Toscano once expressed clearly?

Ultimately, the problem with *Badiou and Politics* is that it is simply too interested in *positioning* both Badiou and its author in regards to extant academic debates. It is, in this sense, far too attentive to alliances, rivalries, filiations and (by extension) to clearly distinguishing between those figures (like Toscano, Žižek, or Jean-Luc Nancy) who apparently require the author’s deference or circumspection and those who do not.

Admittedly, as I’ve mentioned, some of the book’s best aspects definitely come from the tendency to try and position Badiou’s work in a broader context. At its best, *Badiou and Politics* is a helpful, erudite and illuminating companion to Badiou’s work. However, as the book progresses, the attempt to position Badiou with respect to other thinkers is vitiated by the sheer number of comparisons, analyses and digressions that Bosteels seems to take as in some way authorised by his (in itself unobjectionable) thesis about a ‘dialectical Badiou’.

But with so many fine introductions to Badiou’s work already available (by Hallward,⁴² Feltham,⁴³ Barker⁴⁴ and Pluth to name just the most prominent)⁴⁵, the problem with Bosteels’ book is that it remains too much a book

about “Badiou and Politics”, rather than (what it might have been) an actual intervention into political thinking that is grounded in Badiou’s thought. What is unfortunate about this is that Bosteels’s knowledge of French philosophy, radical politics and Romance language literature puts him in an excellent position to write just such a book. Unfortunately for us *Badiou and Politics* isn’t it.

To find something that comes much closer to achieving the goals that Bosteels’ book only promises, it is necessary to now turn to the next book under review, A.J. Bartlett’s *Badiou: An Education by Truths*.



In almost every respect, Bartlett’s book could not be more different from Bosteels’s.

Where *Badiou and Politics* devotes much of its 400 page bulk to more or less interesting attempts to position both Badiou and his own argument in terms of contemporary academic trends (telling anecdotes about philosophical bloodlines, shouting out to friends and colleagues, noting lines of filiation, ruptures, clandestine continuities) Bartlett’s book, by contrast, is marked by an obvious but unostentatious *disinterest* in its own place in the contemporary Continental philosophy scene.

Thus, Bartlett never flaunts his bona fides, never calls upon allies to bolster his argument and never so much as approximates the suggestion that he has (or more importantly could have) a personal mandate from the master that could confer authority on his statements. Instead, *An Education by Truths* is a terse, trenchant, in many ways ‘classical’ work of philosophy that is notably ‘generic’ in its address. This does not mean, as the conventional use of the word might suggest, that the book is populist, demagogic or that the author contents himself with the circulation of inoffensive platitudes. On the contrary, Bartlett has about as much in common with the likes of Alain de Botton as Bletchley Park under Alan Turing has with a monologue by Michelle Bachmann. Instead, by “generic”, I mean that the address is, in Badiou’s sense, universal without being “empirically universal”. Put differently, *An Education by Truths* is, like Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, “a book for everyone and no-one”, not because (as with Nietzsche) Bartlett’s book awaits the advent of future *Übermenschen* to find a suitable audience, nor because he adopts the opposite (sinister and ingratiating) strategy of never making a statement that has not already been marked out as blandly innocuous by the appropriate focus groups. Instead, everything about Bartlett’s book (from its structure, to its style) is staked on the idea of truth (in Badiou’s sense) and thus on the belief that there exist elements already present in our world (in Badiou’s terminology: immanent to the present situation, albeit indiscernible to the situation’s “state”) whose principle of inter-connection or community must be constructed, fought for, endlessly invented and continually organised in ways that break with the divisive predicates by which identity and difference are usually measured.” For Badiou, this “construction of the generic”, is the fundamental task of art, politics, science, philosophy and, as Bartlett will demonstrate, education. But where Bosteels attempts to play down the importance of Being and Event and its more difficult mathematical sections, Bartlett, gives the lie to Bosteels’s dilemma (mathematics or politics), by simply deploying the very categories of Being and Event that Bosteels eschews (forcing, the generic, the operator of fidelity) in a context which renders the power of these categories —and their properly political importance—unmistakable.

Fundamentally, to read *An Education by Truths* is to experience an encounter with a fierce, occasionally furious, and above all, exemplary piece of philosophical writing which cannot be understood as a book about Badiou, but rather, as Ray Brassier (hardly the most gushing or sentimental of Badiou’s readers!) says on the book’s jacket, must be understood as an intervention into the contemporary discourse on education, designed to show the void at the latter’s heart, or, what is the same thing the infinite orders of infinity that this discourse excludes and obscures. In order to appreciate the importance of Bartlett’s book (both within and beyond the field of Badiou studies) it is necessary to first understand the fact that there are three distinct “sites” into which its argument intervenes.

The first, and most obvious, site of intervention is the (relatively small, but rapidly expanding) field of Badiou scholarship. The second, and arguably the most significant, is what Deleuze and Guattari might call the “existential territory” of the Platonic corpus, insofar as this means not only the dialogues and their interpretation, but also the but also the schisms, truisms, heresies and orthodoxies that have marked and continue to mark the dialogues’ reception not only within academic (i.e. “state”) philosophy, but within philosophy per se (from Porphyry to Bernard Stiegler). Here, above all, what is at stake in Bartlett’s work is the dialogues’ capacity to say something about, but also to the present that is monstrously in excess of that strange mixture of reverence, indifference and condescension which so often marks contemporary attitudes to “classics”⁴⁶.

The third site into which Bartlett intervenes (which cannot be separated from the other two) is the field of “education”, which, with some notable exceptions, is rarely addressed by contemporary academic philosophers, despite or more likely because of their dependence on the vagaries of the neo-liberal university.

In intervening in all three fields simultaneously, *An Education by Truths* takes as its point of departure an isolated remark of Badiou’s that “the only education is an education by [or through] truths.”⁴⁷ [*par les vérités*]

In attempting to establish what this might mean, Bartlett does not take the predictable (and all-too-easy) route of simply grabbing a handful of Badiou’s categories and then glibly “applying” them to what might pass for contemporary “debates” on education.⁴⁸ Instead, Bartlett does something that is, as far as I know, completely unprecedented in Badiou scholarship, i.e. he treats Badiou’s repeatedly avowed Platonism seriously enough to actually engage the Platonic corpus.

In claiming that this move is unprecedented, I am aware that almost every account of Badiou mentions the philosopher’s avowed (if “post-Cantorian”) Platonism. And indeed, what discussion of Badiou’s work could be complete or even coherent without a discussion of his principled rejection of modern “sophistry”, his defence of the category of truth, his outright rejection of the pathos of finitude that he declares marks contemporary philosophy in its analytic, post-modern or hermeneutic modes,⁴⁹ his insistence that being, politics, art and love can be *thought*; that science is a condition for philosophy even if “suturing” philosophy to science (or art) is a form of philosophical suicide;⁵⁰ that human beings are *not* perpetually shackled to the cave of their cultures, traditions or language-games, but are in fact capable of living (as opposed to merely existing) by coming into contact with that which is properly (though without concession to any theology) called “eternal?”⁵¹ However, this standard acknowledgement of Badiou’s Platonism, is frequently accompanied by mention of Badiou’s (apparent!) predilection for rhetorical extravagance.⁵² Apologising for this purported “tendency”, the commentator could not unreasonably suggest that while the name of Plato might serve Badiou well in his attempt to smash the idols of the age (the *bien pensant*, ‘anti-Platonism’ of ‘postmodern relativists’, democratic pragmatists, or analytically-inclined neo-Wittgensteinians), to *actually* treat Badiou as a “Platonist” would, surely, involve ignoring the extent to which Badiou is a) both manifestly and avowedly a ‘thinker of the multiple’—the author who declares at the beginning of his most systematic work that the “One is not”; and b) someone who is obviously indebted to modern (and even modernist) figures like Sartre, Cantor, Lacan, Paul Cohen, Althusser, Albert Lautman, Heidegger, Schoenberg, Mallarmé and Beckett, none of whom (apart from maybe Lautman and, in a perverse way, Lacan) could be regarded as anything like “Platonists.”

Given this, it seems perfectly reasonable that someone might hesitate about calling Badiou a Platonist without qualification. But if we are to assess whether and to what extent Badiou’s “Platonism” is genuine (as opposed to merely rhetorical), surely we have to have some prior understanding of what a Platonist is. But if there is, after all, more to Plato than simply hoary (and second-hand) clichés about a pious believer in supra-uranian chairs to whom the most vacuous under-graduate can feel instantly superior? Do we not, equally, have reason to question the other images that have been handed down by a philosophical tradition whose Great Figures’ attitudes to Aristotle’s most famous son have often (as Bartlett shows glossing Whitehead’s famous remark) been symptomatic of their own most fundamental ideas?

But Bartlett does not waste time wrestling or engaging with arguments of this sort. Instead, adhering as he does to an enhanced version of the screenwriter's maxim of never telling when you can show and never showing when you can set fire to a complacent scholarly orthodoxy, Bartlett (while never forgetting that Badiou is a post-Cantorian, nor what he has learnt from Lacan) simply turns to the Platonic dialogues armed with the concepts and categories of *Being and Event*. The result of this, remarkably, is that the dialogues open up to these categories like a treasure-chamber in the Arabian Nights to the person who has pronounced the magic word. Instead of proffering a Badiouian "reading" of the dialogues, Bartlett sets up a collision between two philosophical planets which, at the moment of what all good sense dictates should be their disastrous impact, do not explode, but merge into something larger than either entity before their collision. In other words, what Bartlett will demonstrate is not only that Badiou is (really) a Platonist, but that Plato is a "Badiouian", even though this identity is not literal, so much as it is essential.

Obviously, this latter thesis will be controversial, especially for that majority of contemporary Plato scholars who will not have heard of Badiou and who are therefore likely, in accordance with the territorial and parochial instincts of academic life, to assume that his work is of no importance. At the same time, I feel that Bartlett's reading of the dialogues (at least those on which he can focus), is so unforced and his engagement with Plato scholarship so scrupulous that it is a real tragedy that so few "Platonists" are likely to ever go near *An Education by Truths* on the grounds that it has the name of a contemporary French philosopher in its title.

But how, the reader is doubtless wondering, does Bartlett accomplish all this?

Bartlett begins by attempting to examine the place that the Socrates of the dialogues occupies with respect to the Athens of his (and Plato's) day. Initially drawing particularly, but not exclusively on the *Apology*, Bartlett shows that Socrates and his insistence on the possibility of a "non-sophistic education" is something indiscernible to the "state" of the Athenian situation with its vested and competing interests. By "state", Bartlett, like Badiou does not refer only to the machinery of government (armies, magistrates, et cetera), but to those principles, even and especially, the ostensibly "private matters" (e.g. personal wealth) which determines what matters, i.e. what, in the broad sense, counts in the twilight years of Golden Age of Athens. The ultimate symbol of these beings who belong without inclusion are, of course, the slaves who, while present in the Athenian situation are not included in it in the sense that they *count-for-nothing* once measured against those predicates (wealth, status, fashion, autochthonous origins, markers of nobility) by which the state at once measures and grants varying degrees of appearance to human beings. For the Athenian state as exemplified by Socrates' accusers Meletus, Anytos and Lycon (each of whom, as Bartlett points out, represents a particular interest group within the *polis*):

Socrates is condemned to be singular and, as such, not of the state. *Quite simply, for the state, he is the only figure present to Athens who does not educate or improve the youth of the state.* He is nothing to education. The obverse of this is that every Athenian citizen apart from Socrates (whose citizen credentials are certainly at stake here) does educate: as every Athenian citizen is constitutive of the state, the claim amounts to the fact that the state educates while Socrates alone does not. (Bartlett, 32)⁵³

The two famous charges by which Socrates is condemned ("not believing in the gods" and "corrupting the youth") are, therefore, ultimately identical with each other in the sense that they are both finally concerned with the fact that Socrates represents, points to and embodies something that is invisible to the interests of the Athenian "state", where this does not simply mean "State Apparatus", or 'Official Government' but rather everything that "counts" in the city *even and especially* when this refers to "private (read: pecuniary) interests"⁵⁴

In particular, Socrates opposes sophistry, which for Bartlett provides the only kind of education recognisable to the state, i.e. an education marked, first, by what Bartlett calls the sophistic *end* (of preparing the youth with "skills" to make their way in the state'), second by sophistic *practice* (which treats education as a commodity

to be exchanged for other goods) and, finally, by sophistical *theory*, which is exemplified in the “democratic” relativism of Protagoras’s maxim that “man is the measure of all things.” (Bartlett, 37)

Plato’s Socrates, as someone who points to the possibility of a *non*-sophistic education, is thus presented as engaged in an educational practice that is unrecognisable to the state of the situation (the way worth is measured and “counted” in Athens) and which therefore can only be recognised as an enemy, a parasite, a cancer.

Having thus deployed Badiou’s category of the “state” (along with an exegeses of its formal place in the theory), Bartlett will go on to deal with what Badiou calls the [evental] “site” of the Athenian situation. As readers of *Being and Event* will remember, the site is Badiou’s name for a moment or a point within a given situation which is “on the edge of the void”, an aspect of the situation which, by pointing to what is, paradoxically, both a nothingness (as far as the situation is concerned) and an enormous, uncontainable, immeasurable plenitude, which the situation and its “recount” in the state cannot contain, points to a way of grouping extant elements (be they people, objects, ideas, stars, affects, concepts, colours and/or their named or nameless parts) of the situation together in ways and *into* combinations that are impossible on the basis of the state’s ways of determining (in Badiou’s terms (re)counting) what belongs to the situation. For the state, therefore, the site is the name for nothingness; for a gap or a void.⁵⁵

For Bartlett, the “site” of the Athenian situation is precisely *education* as a “capacity common to all.” (Bartlett, 78). In the Athenian polis, what counts *as* education is certainly not common to all, not only because it is far from accessible to everyone (think: women, slaves, the poor), but because, even if some second Cleisthenes were to suddenly declare a modern-day-democratic “universal right to education”, what passes for education would remain a “state” education, not because it was provided *by* the city (nothing could be further from Bartlett’s intentions than a Thatcherite paean to “privatised” education!) but because what would be taught would only be what *the city already claimed to know*. The knowledge of the city (and we must remember that both Plato and Bartlett understand that most education is civic education, in the sense of being *by* the city even when it is not obviously either funded, organised or directed to *the city*) is equivalent to the city’s values, its prejudices and its myths, in short, to the *Republic*’s famous cave.

At the same time, even the dissemination of less obviously ideological knowledge and techniques are nonetheless subordinated to as well as over-determined by the goal of allowing students to manage (“i.e. get by and get ahead”) in a world marked as well as riven by particular interests, hierarchies, and so much else that is irrelevant (as both Plato and Badiou never tire of reminding us) from the perspective of truth. But it is because, rather than despite the fact that Athens has no place for an “education by truths”, that education as a capacity (always, already common to all) can constitute a site, the “wandering spectre of the void” within the Athenian situation which qua void opens up the possibility of another Athens, the “just city” of Plato’s *Republic*.

Having identified the issue of education as the “site” of the Athenian situation, Bartlett then goes on to declare that each of Plato’s dialogues can be understood as an “event/intervention”, in which the figure of the void (represented by Socrates) encounters different aspects of the Athenian situation and its elements. (Thus, we will have Socrates arguing with military commanders like Nicias in the *Laches*, learning from Pericles’s mistress Aspasia in the *Menexenus*, confronting the great gathering of sophists and their students in the *Protagoras*, taming the ambitious Alcibiades in the *Symposium* by kindling a passion which the latter (for once) cannot satiate through charm or strength; and above all, in a scene that Bartlett turns into a kind of emblem of the dialogues, demonstrating that a slave whose ability to utilise a diagonal to solve a mathematical problem points not only to the indifference of every truth both to the distinctions which the city constantly affirms but to any predicate (any marker of identity or difference) by which one temporary loci of a truth process be distinguished from another.⁵⁶

In every case, Bartlett, says, the point of the dialogues is to confront different aspects of the Athenian situation with that which exceeds it, points beyond it, portends an “in-common” that is unimaginable to the city. This

culminates in the moment where Socrates (significantly) in pursuit of the question of justice will attempt to found a *new city* in speech, a city which is “inexistent” (scandalous, impossible) to Athens and thus requires the “new idea” which Bartlett (as part of an exemplary reading of the *Republic*) sees adumbrated in the torch-race that the participants of the dialogue are promised, but which they do not get to see because the contained or gentrified “novelty” that they are expecting is replaced by an encounter with the genuinely new in the form of the idea of justice.⁵⁷ But, as Bartlett will later maintain, Plato’s republic is not a state, it is, rather:

the subjective exposure of its lack. It is not founded on the “prohibition of un-binding” but is instead a labour of love, a supplement to the lack of rapport. The Republic is realised as a counter-state: or, as we say, an ideal non-state. (Bartlett, 201)

Here, Bartlett mixes Lacan’s terminology with Badiou’s to speak of Plato’s Republic, not as an ideal state—which *qua* “state”, would function in Badiou’s terms to curb the excess (the capacity for “unbinding”) that lies at the heart of every situation, but as a name for the “generic extension”, i.e. a mixture of that which visibly belonged to the situation with that which is indiscernible to it in a mixture whose consistency is given only by a new *egalitarian* principle which is indifferent to identity and difference, privilege and its lack. In linking novelty and equality, Badiou’s point, among other things, is to suggest that equality cannot be reached by either the mere assertion of its existence (although this is often of tremendous importance) and especially not by pointing to some allegedly universal predicate *in respect of which people may be equal despite “Real Existing Inequality”*. Instead, Badiou, not only retains a Marxist suspicion of formal (‘liberal’ equality),⁵⁸ but like Giorgio Agamben is eminently aware of how the appeal to a “shared essence” (‘we are all human, mortal, fond of sex et cetera’) as a basis for equality often coincides with the common predicate being selectively *denied* as part of a suggestion that Our Enemy (via her mad religion, “culture” or ‘ideology’) should be regarded as *inhuman*—devoid of any trace of humanity and thus able to be killed without this genuinely constituting murder.

In his fourth chapter, called “fidelity”, Bartlett suggests that the “the operator of ‘faithful connection’ (to the Socrates-event) is the statement “I know nothing”. Here, Bartlett is not suggesting that fidelity to Plato (or the figure he will later call “Platocrates”) consists in the disingenuous “democratic” modesty that would profess ignorance as a way of having done with the rigours of inquiry while, at the same time, inviting popular acclaim for affirming the ridiculous, but nigh-on ubiquitous prejudice that thought is the enemy of equality rather than its pre-condition. On the contrary, for Bartlett, the formula “I know nothing” only deserves to be called an “operator of fidelity” (in Badiou’s sense) insofar as it signifies not the glib profession of an individual, but the continuation of a truth-process for which (as we have seen) the individual is a matter of indifference.

By “continuation of the Platonic enterprise” I do not, of course, mean Plato scholarship (however excellent or tedious this might be) but rather an existential and almost of necessity collective practice that begins, as Badiou would undoubtedly note, with the axiom of all Platonism: that there are truths, i.e. something more than either opinion or knowledge, insofar as these latter remain merely “state” concepts. Put differently, for Bartlett following Badiou, finds that both ubiquitous and (today piously fetishised) opinions and expert “knowledge” are always bound to the present state of things and its ways of ordering, accounting for, evaluating. Given this, the Platonic profession of ignorance is as incompatible with modesty as it is with complacent relativism, precisely because “Platonism” exists only to the extent that there are “subjects to truth”. Yes, there are bodies and languages, but there is also that which seizes bodies and electrifies them, that which forces languages into a poetic (or as Deleuze says) a properly philosophical stuttering.

In the fifth chapter of *An Education by Truths*, “Subject”, Bartlett turns to Plato scholarship and thus to the question of why Badiou’s work is so indispensable to restoring a vision of Plato, as neither a theologian, nor a “totalitarian”. At the same time, Bartlett mobilises his Badiouian Plato to reject the near ubiquitous tendency in Plato scholarship to oppose (in manner of Gregory Valstos and his [numerous] epigones) a “humanist, democratic” (i.e. good) Socrates—whose inquiries all terminate in *aporai* and—a (bad) dogmatic Plato whose

“totalitarian leanings” apparently owe—as contemporary neo-Aristotelians are quick to insist—something to the Platonic devotion to mathematics. Contra Vlastos (a major target of Bartlett’s book), Bartlett offers a reading of Plato that affirms the latter’s (devastating) critique of the slave-owning and war-mongering democracy of Plato’s day, but that, at the same time, refuses to turn the author of the *Statesman* and the *Philebus* into either an embittered aristocrat waiting for a “benevolent tyrant” like Dionysos, or an “Aristophanic” defender of the pre-Periclean oligarchy.⁵⁹ To both of these visions, Bartlett opposes a *Badiouian* Plato, whose devotion to truth, and whose discovery of mathematics’ power to “punch a hole” (as Lacan says) in knowledge, offends present-day sensibilities as much as the egalitarian doctrines of the fifth book of the *Republic* would have scandalised his contemporaries.⁶⁰

In addition, Bartlett shows, in great detail, but with no accompanying loss of depth, how much contemporary assumptions about what Plato (and even more so “Socrates”) actually says are over-determined by attitudes that resemble the sophistry of Plato’s day. This is not because there is nothing new under the sun, or that “human nature” allows for an unbroken line between Plato’s time and our own. Instead, it is because both the state of the Athenian situation and our own “state” (whose way of counting owes so much to the unfettered power of Capital and its own peculiar obsession with “counting”) both find ways to avoid the “Plato-event”, by attempting to measure the possibility of an “education by truths” in terms of the dominant opinions (and “knowledges”) of their respective epochs. Vlastos, for Bartlett, gives a paradigmatic demonstration of this tendency, insofar as his obvious discomfort with Plato’s refusal to equate justice with democracy, or opinions with truth leads him to perform a kind of Kleinian splitting of the Platonic corpus into Good (“democratic”) Socrates and Bad (“proto-totalitarian” and “overly-mathematical”) Plato. That so many of the great (for Vlastos “late”) dialogues become problematically “Platonic” as a result of this split is a further vindication of Bartlett’s argument for the way that the intervention represented by the dialogues provokes a kind of defensive scramble on behalf of what counts as knowledge in a given society or epoch—an attempt to shore up dominant opinions against their potential Platonic ruin. But though Bartlett is, of course, interested in bringing contemporary readers to take up the challenge of the dialogues, he is not motivated by any kind of antiquarian notion that they contain eternal truths of “human nature”, nor insights that require (in a Heideggerian vein) a “destructive-retrieval” to save us from some perceived epochal destitution.

Instead, Bartlett’s reading of the dialogues through Badiou makes Plato (as Badiou once said of St. Paul) a “poet-thinker of the event”, i.e. neither someone who presents an unassailable doctrine, nor a “predecessor” to whom we can continually embalm, so much the better to blithely ignore. Bartlett’s Plato is instead someone who recognised, in the life of Socrates, the shattering power of an event, which by pointing to the void of the (Athenian) situation, also opened on to the possibility of generic procedures, i.e. to *truths* of the amorous, scientific, artistic and political kind. Moreover, Bartlett/Badiou’s Plato is the first philosopher, to have brought the tension between all four “truth procedures” into a system that not only retains a fidelity to the particular truths which mobilise it, but that sets up a contest with sophistry and with the state that must be prosecuted precisely because truths (as Badiou never tires of pointing out) have a tendency to end their lives as *knowledge*, i.e. as something totally assimilated to a usually later version of the state which *qua* state holds back the paradoxical mixture of infinity and the void on which (for Badiou) the possibility of a truth depends.

In the last chapter, Bartlett turns to the question of education in our own time and its relationship to “The Republic of Plato” understood not so much as the name of Plato’s most famous dialogue, but as the “just city” for which, Bartlett insists, Socrates participates and which, for a subject to truth, is both something possible and worth working towards. (Bartlett, 202). As can be guessed by what has been said so far, on Bartlett’s assessment there are no policies, no tendencies, no extant practices of education in the present that he defends as fitting Plato’s attempt to both describe and make possible (through the dialogues) an education by truths, not least because (as the reader will remember) such an education would have to be generic in the sense that it would neither rely upon, nor serve the extant distinctions (especially of power and wealth) which our present societies love to multiply and render ever more visible and implacable.⁶¹ In the end, however, what Bartlett wants to talk about is the way in which, today, we talk endlessly of education, vaguely approving

it, mechanically celebrating it, occasionally despairing over it; convening endlessly to discuss the reform of yesterday's reforms. In such discussions it is as if the apparently unequivocal good that the word "education" named was constantly on the point of expiring only to be saved at the last moment by a new deference to slogans which must sound shallow even to those who have invented them. Thus, as Bartlett is aware, our politicians never tire of or announcing the near-miraculous capacities of education to serve an ever increasing list of bureaucratically described and approved goods (Values! the Future! Creativity! Prosperity! Enjoyment!). But amidst all this triumphalist, chin-stroking and sloganeering discourse, Bartlett asks in his conclusion, does anyone ever take the time to ask the all-important, Socratic question "*what is education?*"

Responding to this question, Bartlett has no time for either conventionally "conservative" calls for a defence of some apparently glorious body of tradition, nor to "liberal" calls to cultivate "openness", or "respect for diversity"; nor for straightforwardly vacuous calls to cultivate whatever ponderous name for the promotion of Generalised Niceness has been deemed to be essential to the promotion of Imagination, Innovation or The Future of a Changing World. [sic] This is because, for Bartlett, no extant ideology or practice of education escapes Bartlett's verdict that today:

The Academy, at the absolute service of capital's power demands absolute subservience to what is—this *pensée unique*. The Academy today teaches exactly what the sophists of Plato's time did: how to make one's way in the world so that the world remains exactly as it is. (Bartlett, 192 n.33)

An Education By Truths is not, however, a book about pedagogy, nor does it seek to either praise or condemn the efforts of different teachers past and present. Instead, it is an "untimely" (in Nietzsche's sense) reminder that education cannot take place without a constant interrogation of what education is and what it is for. And this too is inseparable from the question (which haunts the Platonic dialogues) of who (a city, an individual, a set of laws) may be said, ultimately, to educate. By what right? To what end? For whose benefit?

For Bartlett, following Plato, education is, in the first place, the name for a 'void' in what counts as knowledge, i.e., something meaningless, invisible and, even in its effects, diagonal to what counts in the world as we know it, even and especially to what tends to count as education. But it is because and despite of this, that a genuine education (i.e. to an education by truths), can, like philosophy, be described in terms of the slogan of the old Communist Internationale: "We are nothing; we will be everything."⁶² To paraphrase Badiou, education, like philosophy, is "logical revolt" (Rimbaud) wherever it is more than a Rameau's Nephew, i.e. a courtier to what exists as opposed to the void/infinity at the heart of this existence. As revolt, education is something which *begins* with a glimpse of another world at the heart of the one we know. However, what counts is not this initial erotic pull of transcendence, but rather, as Badiou ceaselessly tries to point out the tireless attempt to try and show how this other world consists in nothing more than elements that are already present (though indiscernible) in this one. The gambit of education, what Freud rightly called its "impossibility", rests on the notion that what Badiou has called the "fragile scintillation" of an event could be pursued in such a way that a myriad of things which have been separated by a thousand divisive predicates could find themselves conjoined in unprecedented, nameless and *newly divisive* combinations by which that which had been previously condemned to obscurity would become suddenly radiant in the light of a movement in thought which, without invoking any Absolute Beyond, nonetheless has no other purpose but to give rise to new ways of seeing, thinking and living in defiance of what passes for "fate" or "wisdom" in a world in which what Plato called the doctrine of the unfair share continues to reign supreme.

There is no education but an education by truths: this is something that is known to anyone who has ever had the good fortune to encounter a real teacher (whether it took the form of a book or a person, a lover or a work of art, a political struggle or a symphony). And if it takes a dead Greek and an elderly Frenchman to remind us of this, this is because education has always been something that happens to us more often despite rather than because of what goes by that name. For this reason, and only for this reason, it is even possible for suburban, unpolished Antipodeans, in the process of being taught how to mould jargon with which to confuse

those condemned to count for even less in the current state of things than they do, to not only, as they are supposed to, simulate the tawdriest and most hollow contemporary simulacrum of sophistication en route to lucrative careers, but to catch a glimpse, against all odds, of something like *philosophy*: a rock against which all knowledge breaks, a whirlpool in which all opinion is devoured, a properly collective task which neither death nor defeat interrupts.

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NOTES

1. From the opening lines of Paul Valéry's *La Feuille Blanche* as translated by Peter Dale. The full stanza is: "IN TRUTH, A BLANK SHEET/DECLARES BY THE VOID/THAT THERE IS NOTHING AS BEAUTIFUL/AS THAT WHICH DOES NOT EXIST ("EN VERITÉ, UNE FEUILLE BLANCHE/NOUS DECLARE PAR LE VIDE/QU'IL N'EST RIEN DE SI BEAU/QUE CE QUI N'EXISTE PAS), in Paul Valéry, *Charms and Other Pieces: A bi-lingual edition*. Trans. Peter Dale. London: Anvil Press, 2008, 170-171.
2. See Nicholas Dames, "Theory And the Novel" *n+1 Number 14: Awkward Age* (Summer 2012, 157-169)
3. See Simon Glendenning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. The most subtle and profound account of this issue I know can be found in Sherah Bloor, *Sophistry and the Aporiai of Meta-philosophy: A Critical Account of the Analytic-Continental Divide* (unpublished master's thesis). Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2012
4. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009.
5. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* Trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1998, 262
6. This is not an exact quotation, but rather an interpretative collage of a number of motifs from the "theses on the philosophy of history" c.f. Benjamin, "Thesis" 261, 255.
7. I owe this term, which aptly describes a prevalent breathlessness in the face of "cultural" particulars over claims to universality, to Justin Clemens.
8. Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011, ix. All subsequent parenthetical references to "Bosteels" in the text are to this work.
9. c.f. Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 33
10. The fourth condition is what Badiou names "science". As several critics have pointed out, Badiou most often uses this term to refer to mathematics, rather than, say, to physics or (even more so) an empirical science like biology. While there are reasons for this within Badiou's philosophy (what might be termed his 'rationalism' over his empiricism), I would argue that it is no accident that Badiou insists on the broader term (science). On the topic of the conditions, a formal, difficult and (without context arcane) account of Badiou's sense of the word can be found in Meditation 33 of *Being and Event* as a preliminary to Badiou's account of the generic extension, see Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* Trans. Oliver Feltham, London: Continuum, 2005, 355-371. For a (much) more straightforward and less formal introduction to the conditions as conditions of philosophy, see Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Trans. Norman Madarasz. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
11. For a luminous argument on Badiou's insistence on the need for philosophy not to 'suture' itself to a single condition, see Alenka Zupancic "The Fifth Condition" *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* ed. Peter Hallward. London and New York: Continuum, 2004, 191-201.
12. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*. Trans. Jason Barker. London, Verso: 2011, xxxi C.f. Badiou's emphasis on the compossibility of the four generic procedures in Badiou, *Manifesto*, 20, 37, 82
13. On Arendt's anti-Platonism see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1959, 199-203
14. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 2-5
15. Quentin Meillassoux has recently devoted a closely-reasoned and influential polemic against the often-taken for granted notion that thought and experience are (to use Heidegger's formula 'always, already' [*immer schon*]) within a subject-object/mind-world correlate of this sort. The remarkable ambition of Meillassoux's text, however, is not only to dislodge a philosophical dogma, but to open the way for a new, speculative philosophy, shorn of what Badiou (Meillassoux's doctoral supervisor) would call 'finist' pieties. See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. Ray Brassier. London: Continuum, 2008.
16. Like the corresponding category of 'set', which it defines and by which it is defined, 'belonging', as a purely abstract category operates (like most mathematics) without the need to appeal to any intuitive definitions of what it means 'to belong' or what kind of entities are being inscribed as belonging to a given set. The advantage of this is that the laws of set theory apply irrespective of whether we are dealing with stars, cats, portions of a cat's genome, aspects of quarks, unicorn-hallucinations et cetera. Put differently, what makes set theory so utterly useless for describing 'what there is in the world' (i.e. the poorest of poor substitutes for physics, chemistry or metaphysics) makes it perfect for *ontology* in Badiou's sense, because it allows us not to *describe*, but to *inscribe* what Badiou calls the 'presentation' of 'Being' as *such*. By the opening gambit of *Being and Event*, "Being" is defined as 'inconsistent multiplicity', i.e. as 'multiplicity without the one'. What set theory allows us to do is to think this (intuitively mind-boggling) reality, by showing how the 'presentation' (structure, unity, i.e. oneness) that pertains to everything that is manifest as a *being* (of any kind) is in fact the result of an *operation*, what Badiou calls the 'count-as-one' rather than an intrinsic property of reality. For a less cursory account of this see, Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23-48. Note, that the relation of 'inclusion' is dependent upon (and thus secondary) to belonging.
17. Peter Hallward, "Order and Event" *New Left Review* 53 (September-October, 2008, 97-122)

18. Slavoj Žižek "On Alain Badiou and *Logiques des Mondes*". 2007 <http://www.lacan.com/zizbadman.htm>
19. This is a major part of the argument of Hallward, "Order and Event". c.f. John Milbank "The Return of Mediation: Or the Ambivalence of Alain Badiou", *Angelaki* 12:1 (April 2007, 128-143)
20. Adrian Johnston *Badiou, Žižek and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009.
21. "In minimizing the importance of the mathematical framework, then, am I not disabling a proper understanding of this thinker's singularity, or worse, falling into the traps of vulgar cultural bias for which mathematics is either too hermetic or and coldly abstract or else, in a politically correct inversion of the same bias, too masculine, falsely universalist but actually elitist, and at bottom Eurocentric?" (Bosteels, 33). This passage is marked by a strange rhetorical inflation, whereby a serious (and I would argue legitimate) objection to Bosteels's procedure is appended, for no discernible reason, to an incoherent and indeed ridiculous accusation, which distracts from the original objection without answering it. Thus, at the beginning of this passage Bosteels's imagined critic makes the perfectly reasonable objection that by neglecting Badiou's mathematics, the author of Badiou and Politics is in danger of both 'disabling a proper understanding of [Badiou's] singularity' through capitulating to the 'vulgar cultural bias' whereby mathematics is '...too hermetic and coldly abstract...'. But, what is the 'inversion of this bias', whereby mathematics is described as too 'masculine', 'elitist' and 'Eurocentric'? Granting, with some chagrin, that this might constitute somebody's (peculiarly incoherent) objection to discussing mathematics in relation to politics, why would anyone suggest that by neglecting Badiou's mathematics Bosteels must be guilty of supporting this (utterly bizarre) position? Further, and more importantly, what does this have to do with the important issue of whether Bosteels's neglect of mathematics is a serious problem for his reading of and presentation of Badiou on politics? Here, the serious objection is deflected by way of its connection an additional criticism that, as Bosteels is clearly aware, is too silly to deserve a response.
23. Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, xviii
24. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 391 c.f. Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verso, 44-46
25. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. London: Continuum, 2009, 4.
26. I take it as given that much of the grandeur of *Being and Event* comes from precisely the attempt to ground these points as more than a matter of rhetoric. In addition, Bosteels curiously fails to mention the claims of Badiou's extremely important essay "Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism" see Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, Trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano, Eds., London: Continuum, 2004.
27. Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 45-76; 77-109
28. Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 179-186
29. For the context of Žižek's remark ("Perhaps the ultimate image of the 'local population' as *homo sacer* is that of the American war plane flying above Afghanistan: one can never be sure whether it will be dropping bombs or food parcels") see Slavoj Žižek "Are we in a War? Do we Have an Enemy?" *London Review of Books* 24:10 (May 23, 2002, 3-6). The image of the planetary casino, though doubtless too observable to really require citation was a favourite of the late Cornelius Castoriadis.
30. See for instance Bruno Bosteels "On the Subject of the Dialectic" in Hallward, *Think Again*, 150-164. C.f. Bruno Bosteels "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject: The Re-commencement of Dialectical Materialism?" *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2001, 200-229) and (2002: 173-208).
31. Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 6-7; 141-150 c.f. Daniel Bensaïd "Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event", in Hallward, *Think Again*, 94-106. To re-iterate, I consider Bosteels' criticisms of Bensaïd to be entirely justified.
32. Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 42
33. See Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 140-143.
34. See for instance Alain Badiou, *The Century*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007, 58-68.
35. Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 167. C.f. Slavoj Žižek *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso, 1999, 155-170.
36. Badiou, *Manifesto*, 51-52. C.f. Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*. Trans and Ed. Bruno Bosteels. London: Verso, 216-222
37. See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 81-103
38. For some examples see Theodor Adorno *Negative Dialectics* trans. E.B. Ashton. London: Continuum, 2007, 11-12, 92-93
39. On this point: why else did Lenin turn to *The Science of Logic* in a moment of revolutionary defeat, rather than say, what must have been the numerous pamphlets directed to the current troubles of the Communist Movement and the situation in Russia in particular. Why did the return of the Medici to Florence provoke Machiavelli's study of Livy's histories?
40. In calling something 'singular', we attempt to designate the fact that it is incomparable to anything else. However, like all concepts which attempt to grasp singularity, the idea of the 'singular' is a formal concept that, precisely as such, could apply to any number of things. Hegel points out this problem in the famous disquisition on immediacy and deixis in the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, see G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977

41. See Agamben, *Idea of Prose*. Trans. M. Sullivan and S. Whitsitt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 63-64 c.f. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Trans. Ronald L. Martinez. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1933, 3-22.
42. Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
43. Oliver Feltham, *Badiou: Live Theory*. London: Continuum, 2008.
44. Jason Barker, *Badiou: A Critical Introduction*. London: Pluto Press, 2002.
45. Ed Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*. Cambridge: UK, Polity Press, 2010
46. On this topic see Bertrand Russel's remark: "It has always been correct to praise Plato, but not to understand him. This is the common fate of great men. But my view is the opposite. I wish to understand him, *but to treat him with as little reverence as if he were a contemporary English or American advocate of totalitarianism*." The paratactical connection between clauses in the last sentence speaks volumes. Bertrand Russel *History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1946, 125.
47. A.J. Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato: An Education by Truths*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, 1. All subsequent parenthetical references to "Bartlett" in the text are to this work. The original quotation in English is in Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
48. Unfortunately exemplifying the pitfalls of such an approach see Kent den Heyer Ed. *Thinking Education Through Alain Badiou*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010
49. Badiou, *Manifesto*, 27
50. Badiou, *Manifesto*, 61-67
51. C.f. Badiou's epilogue to his recent "hyper-translation" of Plato's *Republic*. Alain Badiou, *Plato's Republic: A Dialogue in Sixteen Chapters*. Trans. Susan Spitzer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 337-354.
52. For example, Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy remark in a lucid introduction to an otherwise fine collection speak of how "Plato, Descartes and Hegel are singled out by Badiou, in typical exaggerated fashion, as the only crucial philosophers." (Sean Bowden and Simon Duffy Eds, *Badiou and Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). It is tempting to paraphrase Adorno in saying that in Badiou "only the exaggerations are true."
53. On Socrates accusers see Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato*, 31; n35, 66.
54. On Badiou's use of the term "state" and its relation to the Athenian state see Bartlett, *An Education*, 33-67.
55. Formally speaking, Badiou relates the 'site' to the requirement in set theory, that every set include the null-set as one of its members. For Badiou, the null-set or the void is the 'proper name of Being', i.e. the marker within ontology of being understood as 'inconsistent multiplicity'. The fact that this mark belongs to any and all possible sets is for Badiou a formal inscription of the fact that 'any situation contains within itself its own void, the marker of its own destitution, finitude, in the form of an index to that which exceeds its ways of counting that which belongs to it.' For an excellent political analogy of Badiou's use of the term site, see Oliver Feltham's "Translator's Preface" to Badiou, *Being and Event*, xxv
56. The *Meno*, the slave-boy, and the latter's 'diagonal proof' is, for Bartlett, an absolutely crucial, revolutionary moment in the Platonic oeuvre. See Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato*, 135-140, 173; n12, 63. C.f. Bartlett's extraordinarily ingenious reading of the *Cratylus*. (Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato*, 151-155.)
57. Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato*, 104-106.
58. Badiou often points to the importance of political axioms and their declaration, e.g. "All human beings are equal...", "Everyone who is here is from here...", "The capacity to thought is held in common by any and all human beings...", etc. At the same time, he shares the Marxist suspicion that "state" declarations of equality tend to cover over actual inequalities (or injustices) which therefore require other declarations, and other activities to bring out the truth of the original declaration which exists in only a reduced, ossified, obfuscated or repressed institutional or state form. For a pertinent example, consider the pious rhetoric of any and all Western governments about 'the right of all citizen's to education', alongside the awareness that "education", like "income" tends, for the most part, to be distributed along obvious class lines.
59. An attenuated version of the latter position (and not, as a certain popular wisdom has it, the former), seems to be implied in Leo Strauss's *The City and Man*, Chicago: University Chicago Press, 50-139. In contrast to a figure like Vlastos, Strauss's interpretation has the merit of being attentive both to Plato's scathing criticisms of democracy in the *Republic* and the fact that democracy is nonetheless the second-best regime, while also refraining from immediately equating, like Popper, Russell and Vlastos the *Republic* with a blue-print or inspiration for the 20th-century totalitarian State. However, this break with *bien pensant* opinion does not, from Bartlett/Badiou's perspective go nearly far enough, insofar as it maintains that philosophy is fundamentally about opinion and its clashes, and thus that it is a realm impervious to truth. It is interesting to consider, in the light of Bartlett's work that Strauss's tendency from consigning (in a manner which could not be less like Badiou's) the "communist" aspect of Plato's thought to the realm of satire or "utopia", seems to share with Vlastos's otherwise incompatible liberalism the belief that Plato cannot be taken seriously when he emphasises either mathematics or equality.
60. These doctrines (particularly the claims of communism, equality between the sexes and philosopher-Kings) famously scandalise Glaucon, Adeimantus and the others in attendance during the dialogue. See Plato, *Republic* 457a C.f. Badiou, *Plato's Republic*, 186-196
61. Giving the lie to Bosteels's assertions about a division between politically and mathematically inclined Badiou's scholars,

Bartlett's account of the "generic procedures" is extraordinarily successful in integrating Badiou's mathematical definitions of concepts like 'generic procedure', 'condition' and 'state' into an interpretation of Badiou, Plato, Plato-scholarship and the 'state of education today'. This is particularly manifest in his book's last chapter entitled "Generic" (Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato*, 196-226.)

62. For an exemplary account of how this is more than a slogan, i.e. 'because the movement it prescribes has ontological support', see Bartlett, *Badiou and Plato*, 205

FRANÇOIS LARUELLE, *THÉORIE GÉNÉRALE DES VICTIMES*.
MILLE ET UNE NUITS 2012.

Alexander Galloway

François Laruelle, the highly idiosyncratic French thinker and promulgator of “non-standard philosophy” has published a steady stream of books since the 1970s, but is currently experiencing a renaissance of sorts, particularly in the English-speaking world, where a first volley of three translated books recently appeared, and where no less than eight books are said to be currently in production at various publishing houses, not to mention a handful of adjacent anthologies and secondary sources. Having mapped out a way of thinking parallel to, and more or less incompatible with, philosophical thought, first articulated fully in *Principes de la non-philosophie* [*Principles of Non-Philosophy*] (1996), and most recently extended in *Philosophie non-standard* [*Non-Standard Philosophy*] (2010), Laruelle has directed his methodology at various topics and themes, from Marxism and photography, to mysticism, ethics, and psychoanalysis.

Laruelle’s newest book to appear in French, *Théorie générale des victimes* [*A General Theory of the Victim*] addresses the question of victims and victimhood, from slavery to the holocaust, from the persecution of Christ to modern genocides and crimes against humanity. In the book Laruelle elaborates a general theory of the victim, rooting it in a generic humanity, with the ultimate goal of freeing the victim from a received dogma that fetters victims with never-ending persecution. While admittedly dissimilar in both its method and outcomes, Laruelle’s book treads the same terrain encountered in Hegel’s famous discussion of the master-slave dialectic, or even Frantz Fanon’s treatment of alterity and violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The central question is crime and punishment, winners and losers, the powerful and the powerless, violence and victimization. Yet Laruelle refuses to approach the question from the perspective of tyranny, in an attempt to defang the powerful or somehow to use the master’s tools to bring down the master’s house. Likewise he refuses to admit that the dialectic itself exists. In other words, neither the powerful nor the power structure itself are determining for Laruelle. As with the biblical prophecy that the meek shall inherit the earth, Laruelle instead argues that the true ethical position for humanity is something like a generalized meek or, in the language of this book, a generalized victim. We are all, at the level of real lived experience, fragile victims in the most generic sense. Such a discovery is the only way that, according to Laruelle, humanity will be able to exit the vicious circle of

dialectical power relations (as with the master and slave locked in endless struggle) and enter into a condition of generic human ethics.

The heart of the text, occupying approximately one quarter its length, is the opening chapter on “The Victim-in-Person.” This is followed by a series of shorter chapters which expound on additional themes: the role of the intellectual, the “weak force” of the victim, crime and punishment, animals and animality, victims’ resurrection and insurrection, and ultimately Laruelle’s thoughts on some of the most significant historical instances of victimization such as the holocaust, Christ’s crucifixion, and crimes against humanity.

The central villain of the book is the intellectual. Laruelle particularly scorns those media-savvy liberal intellectuals who hawk their punditry from talk show to newspaper column. These are intellectuals in the Sartrean mold, “engaged” or “committed.” At times Laruelle also calls refers to them as “embedded” intellectuals, adopting the English word and leaving it untranslated in that way the French do when they want to firewall what they see as suspicious phenomena encroaching from overseas. Rather, then, than pursuing a course of engagement with crises, or trying to become embedded with the victim, Laruelle suggests a slight deviation into a parallel world. Instead of engaged intellectuals, Laruelle proposes *generic intellectuals*. “They are put under the condition of humanity,” he writes, “rather than put in service to the ‘values’ and ‘ends’ of philosophy” (84). Similar in spirit to Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual, or Benjamin’s call, in the “Author as Producer,” for the intellectual to merge directly with the mode of production, Laruelle’s generic intellectuals are put under the condition of humanity, meaning they fuse directly with mankind in the most general sense. This is a radical particularity; all persons can only be understood “in person.” There are no victims, only you and me and everyone else. Hence the most important coinage in the book: *the victim-in-person*. Television might show us victimized individuals and survivors, overexposing and circulating their images endlessly. But, if one should withdraw and cease to participate in such circuses, one will discover a non-representational victim, the “real” victim if you will. This is the victim-in-person. Where victims are individuated and tagged with certain classifications (via various biopolitical stigma, HIV status, citizenship status, etc.), the victim-in-person withdraws from such classification schemes, remaining generic, or whatever it happens to be.

The proper relation to the victim is thus never pity for Laruelle but compassion. He admits that his use of the word compassion might sound to some readers a bit old fashioned, if not patronizing, but the point is that, under a regime of compassion, all suffer together equally. Hence Laruelle’s is something of a “mystical maoism,” if such a thing is even possible: we are all generic victims determined by the insufficiency of the one. Thus while it might seem that those who are not victims are still patronizing the victim by showing compassion, or romanticizing the victim by seeking to emulate its glorious suffering, Laruelle insists that we are all always already victims, simply by virtue of being human. The problem is thus not so much victimization itself, but the decision to divide the world into victims and not. (This being, in Laruelle’s assessment, part and parcel of the philosophical gesture itself.)

While not present on every page by any means, there are two key sparring partners lurking deep in the book: Levinas for his work on ethics, and Badiou for his theory of the event. Laruelle is notoriously cagey about acknowledging influence; he typically fends off even the closest potential allies. (Intellectually speaking, Michel Henry is perhaps the closest, and while Gilles Deleuze is also close his very nearness presents a threat that must be subdued.) Laruelle considers Levinas an important philosopher of ethics, and cites him without prejudice. Yet in Laruelle’s view Levinas ultimately imports victimhood into philosophy and in so doing founders there. Badiou, on the other hand, earns little felicitation from Laruelle, seeming to haunt Laruelle’s recent writings more than other philosophers, to vivid effect of course in *Anti-Badiou* (2011), but also here. For Laruelle, Badiou represents all that is wrong with philosophy. Where Badiou argues for a volunteerist fidelity to the event, Laruelle sees the event as a generic resurrection of the One. Where Badiou thinks in terms of dialectics, Laruelle thinks in terms of “superposition”—a term which Laruelle unapologetically borrows from the world of quantum mechanics, to the chagrin of those who would view such a move as diletantish and pseudo-scientific.

So, in confronting him directly, Laruelle pokes fun at Badiou's powerful triad of body-language-truth, stated perhaps most clearly in the opening pages of *Logics of Worlds*: there are only bodies and languages, *except that there are truths*. Laruelle swaps in two different terms, lived experience and algebra for Badiou's opening pair (bodies and languages). That is to say, the real lived experience of bodies, which Laruelle prefers to call persons, or people as they are experienced "in person," and the language of formulae and variables in relation known as algebra. But then, true to form, Laruelle refuses to synthesize his two terms dialectically, as Badiou does. Instead he holds the two terms in "superposition." Thus for Laruelle, there are not Badiouian truths so much as "the algebraic objectivity of human lived experience" (53).

But it is not simply the dialectic that Laruelle finds distasteful in Badiou. The two thinkers also differ on the question of the event. We need "a theory of the event that leans toward quantum theory," Laruelle asserts, "by way of the generic" (153). By this he means that the event should be understood more as the withholding of decision rather than the consummation of it. Subjects are not so much individuals with wills who, through their own gumption, convert themselves, and in so doing further define themselves in relation to truth. On the contrary, the concept of "subject" is precisely the problem. The point is not to "increase the resolution" of the subject by adding more definitional predicates—I am militant, I am freedom fighter, I am subject to truth—but rather to de-individuate the subject, again using the metaphor of "superposition" or suspension of definition, toward a condition of generic being. What results are no longer individuals but *persons*, which taken together form not so much a mass or a nation but *humanity*.

Perhaps the best way to understand the difference between Badiou and Laruelle is to consider how the bible and Christianity figure in their work. Badiou has famously relied on Paul and the road to Damascus, the biblical story of revelation and conversion. The story of Paul's conversion fits Badiou's political theory because it represents a subject who experiences an event (the vision of Jesus) and whose life is decisively changed in allegiance to that event. The event, for Badiou, requires trenchant decisions made by subjects. Laruelle's theory of the event, on the other hand, could not be more different. Instead of rooting the event in a particular time, bound to a particular subject, Laruelle removes the event from temporal and spatial particularities making it both radically archaic and ultimately final (two temporal conditions that Laruelle enigmatically labels "before-the-first" and "in-the-last-instance"). Christ therefore, not Paul, takes center stage for Laruelle. For in the resurrection of Christ Laruelle sees a type of event that is not dialectical and not bound to the singular trenchant decisions of subjects. Thus resurrection not conversion is the driving force behind Laruelle's theory of the event. (Here Laruelle again appears a bit old fashioned even reactionary, compared to the I-can-change-the-world enthusiasm of the Badiouian militant, which Laruelle views as hopelessly narcissistic.) Conversion is too incorrigibly philosophical. And likewise that most emblematic philosophical event, to "know thyself," is too tainted by the logic of conversion. Both philosophy and religion rely too much on the lightning strike of revelation, Laruelle suggests. "A material formalism modeled after quantum theory, not a philosophical materialism, is the best way to think the event," he offers instead. "Christ and his resurrection are not so much a miraculous event as a non-standard or non-theological one" (154).

This comes to a climax in the book's provocative ending section, "Toward a Non-Standard Ethics / For Philosophers to Use." In a few brief pages Laruelle talks directly about specific instances of victimization, first with the holocaust, but also again by way of Christ's crucifixion, and ultimately with crimes against humanity. Yet this is one of two key areas left undeveloped in the book. Readers will be disappointed if they are expecting Laruelle to tackle human rights, genocide, the holocaust, or other matters of world-historical importance in any sustained way. This is not a book about political events and the waves of violence and trauma they produce. For better or worse he remains stubborn on the question of theory: Laruelle's non-standard philosophy can and must move forward using theory and theory alone. Analyses of events such as the Shoah or, for Christians, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are only useful to the extent that they can be re-jigged as theoretical constructs. So while this book perhaps veers closer to the newspaper headlines than past Laruelle projects, which are wildly obscure and aggressively theoretical, and is thus for that reason one of the more readable Laruelle volumes, it is still properly labeled a "general theory" of victims, not a tally sheet of the dead or a

manifesto for breaking the bonds of subjugation.

The second area that remains undeveloped is that of mass media and the public sphere. The book mentions the “media-savvy intellectual” but does not follow the thread very far. There is no talk at all about television, internet or other media, no real talk about how discourse operates in the public sphere, and no discussion or critique of contemporary public intellectuals such as, in today’s France, Bernard-Henri Lévy. So this is not exactly Laruelle’s treatise on the role of the intellectual. The theme is present, but relegated to the supporting cast.

Still the primary ethical task remains clear in Laruelle’s book: to view humanity as indivisible, without resorting to essence or nature. The only way to do this, he suggests, is to radicalize the generic condition of humanity, not to universalize the liberal subject, as with the “we are the world” conceits of Western privilege, but rather to do the opposite, to underdetermine persons rather than overdetermine them, to admit to a baseline insufficiency of personhood. Or as he says in a floating epigraph that launches the book, “why shouldn’t the victim be the cornerstone of humanity?”

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HASANA SHARP, *SPINOZA AND THE POLITICS OF RENATURALISATION*. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2011

Dave Mesing

In her recent book, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, Hasana Sharp carries out an important contribution to contemporary political philosophy. Building on her work in several recent articles,¹ Sharp thinks through the implications of Spinoza's naturalism to develop a "philanthropic posthumanism," defined as "a collective project by which we can come to love ourselves and one another as parts of nature" (4-5). Sharp founds her project on the basis of a thorough analysis of Spinoza's account of affect and his re-inscription of human freedom in such a way as to avoid a relocation of external standards within the human community or mind. This is a problem in many strains of humanism that nevertheless share a rejection of supernaturalism with Spinoza. Sharp's approach is thus posthuman to the extent that she follows Spinoza's critique of merely relocating supernatural power within the human, but it is decidedly not an attempt at articulating a nonhuman standpoint. This is the sense in which Sharp's politics of renaturalization is philanthropic; Spinoza focuses on the flourishing of human power in the *Ethics*, and both the smuggling in of supernaturalistic qualities and the valorization of the nonhuman are anathema for human power. According to Sharp, therefore, "Spinoza's naturalism aims to engender enabling self-love in humanity by eroding those models of man that animate hatred, albeit indirectly, by suggesting that we are, at one extreme, defective Gods or, at the other, corrupt animals who need to be restored to our natural condition" (5).²

Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization is not an exegesis of Spinoza with an eye towards politics and definitions of the human in the abstract. Sharp notes that, in various ways, the discourses of feminism, race theory, Marxism, phenomenology, and critical theory have rightly been concerned with philosophical accounts of nature, and a common strategy has been to denaturalize nature in order to undermine the authority of normative recourses to nature that have been wielded in the service of oppression. Sharp is sympathetic to the concerns of these traditions, noting that "we cannot advocate the naturalization of humanity without taking the naturalistic ideology seriously" (7). Although Sharp does not hubristically claim that her politics of renaturalization eliminates all ideology, she offers this work as an explicit contribution to a "less oppressive imagination" and engages extensively with contemporary political philosophy, especially through the discourses

of feminism and deep ecology (7).

The book is divided into two parts, each composed of three chapters. In part one, “Reconfiguring the Human,” Sharp puts forward her interpretation of Spinoza. She grounds this reading in an understanding of action as affect, which entails both a relational ontology and a brief engagement with transindividuality. Despite the long categorization of what might look like emotions to the modern reader at the end of part three of the *Ethics*, Spinoza’s understanding of affect is not simply a description of emotional life, which would already grant preference to humans and perhaps other “higher” animals. Instead, Sharp helpfully shows that affect is a universal power to affect and be affected, meaning that each finite being has some potential to affect another, either through an increase or decrease of another’s power and vice versa. Unlike many understandings of emotion as a reaction, Spinoza’s concept of affect is better defined as more thoroughly intertwined with his discussion of causes. Affect is thus “a qualitative change, equally corporeal and mental, in the intensity of a being’s power to persevere” (29).

This interpretation of affect as an event of causation is equally bound up with Spinoza’s so-called parallelism of mind and body in proposition seven of part two of the *Ethics*, where he writes that “[t]he order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”³ Sharp succinctly shows that Spinoza’s parallelism indicates that actions of the mind (ideas) and actions of the body do not express one another, but rather one and the same order of causes. Affects allow us to understand changes in human power, and Spinoza identifies three primary affects: joy, sadness, and desire. Other affects are defined in terms of their capacity to increase or decrease joy and sadness, and desire acts as an always-underway individuation of each being.

Thus, Sharp contends that Spinoza’s account of human action as effecting affective changes necessitates a relational ontology wherein being is continually differentiating itself. Following the work of Étienne Balibar, Sharp briefly engages Gilbert Simondon’s theory of ontogenesis in order to sketch the transindividuality of Spinoza’s theory of affect, avoiding the characterization of Spinoza as either a proto-liberal who understands the independence of individuals as irreducible, or a proto-Hegelian for whom individuals are merely dialectically interdependent parts subjected to a totality, even if such a totality continues to develop. Simondon’s theory allows Sharp to strategically defer the affirmation of an individual reality in order to focus instead on “distinctive agencies but never as anything other than relational phenomena” (36). This relational ontology entails a blurring of the distinction between Being and beings, and transindividuality complicates the articulation of freedom that Sharp will begin to approach in the latter half of the book.

With her account of the place of affect in Spinoza’s ontology in place, Sharp turns to the role of ideology critique with respect to the politics of renaturalization. One of the consequences of Spinoza’s parallelism of mind and body is that, like all other natural things, ideas are able to grow in strength or shrink to the point of extinction. Sharp’s version of ideology critique examines ideas as forces of nature rather than only true or false representations of reality. Renaturalizing ideology helps to resist an anthropocentric psychology that remains narrowly focused on false consciousness, attending instead to the affective power of ideas.

Although the politics of renaturalization is, in line with Althusser and others, a materialist critique, Sharp is careful to note that renaturalizing ideas is not the same as reducing them to corporeal causes, which would violate the parallelism at the heart of her reading. By contrast, Sharp argues that “the ‘conditions’ of freedom and servitude are as ideal as they are corporeal” (69). Sharp emphasizes that there is a certain prerequisite of self-knowledge required to understand the mind and its dependency on various causal networks of ideas. As parts of causal networks within the affective plane of action that Sharp has developed, ideas can hold a power that extends beyond their truth and falsity, and thus, in addition to self-knowledge, displacing sad ideas requires attention to the systemic conditions that produce oppressive situations in order to develop effective strategies. “The only way to gain a critical purchase on Ideology is to affirm that one cannot be but in thought, in this determinate and infinite form of nature’s power” (70-71).⁴ Ideas survive when conditions favor them, and thus renaturalized ideology critique, developing out of an initial self-critique, seeks not only to name damaging

ideas that increase sadness, but also attempts to curate new, joyful ideas, hoping that they might take root.

Taken together, Spinoza's affective understanding of human action and ideas allows Sharp to present a renaturalized version of human agency that stays focused on human beings. Indeed, Sharp points out that Spinoza makes continual reference to human nature in his writings, even though such a term might seem completely at odds with the relational ontology and transindividuality of affect that she has underscored. In the concluding chapter of part one, "Man's Utility to Man: Reason and its Place in Nature," Sharp turns to Spinoza's references to human nature in order to find an account of the politics of renaturalization. She argues that there are three primary "rhetorical functions" of Spinoza's use of the term human nature: a humbling function, an admonishing function, and a unifying function. These do not contradict each other unless we fall back into the habit of a spiritualized understanding of rationality as expressive of an unchanging and universal moral law. Rather, these rhetorical functions have strategic roles in order to challenge certain human generalities.

Such challenges are not an attempt to eradicate weaker affects, which is a perfectionist temptation that would forget the prerequisite self-knowledge of ideology critique that we are in ideology. Sharp argues that we must continually account for weak affects so that we do not forget them, and claims that this works out politically as a certain kind of democracy. "Spinoza's remarks about human nature, even as they apply universally to any and all natural things, advocate democracy. Our desire to persevere in being, our opposition to those who threaten it, and our inability to survive alone make combination into the largest possible body the most enabling way of life" (91). Indeed, even our recourse to the term human nature and our need for models of human flourishing is an indication of our finitude. Sharp notes perceptively that in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's most systematic text, the references to human nature and the need for an exemplar are found only in part four, "Of human servitude." Spinoza's specific discussion of democracy in the *Political Treatise* was limited to a sexist conception of citizens as men. Sharp challenges this restriction by Spinoza, which is at odds with the major points she has extracted from his thought. Thus, in the conclusion to the first part of the book, Sharp questions whether we must only have recourse to human nature with respect to democracy, and in the second part of the book takes up this line of thinking in detail through an engagement of contemporary feminism and deep ecology.

In chapter four, "Desire for Recognition?: Butler, Hegel, and Spinoza," Sharp sets the agenda for her more detailed and contemporary engagements with political philosophy through a critique of the work of Judith Butler. As is well known, unlike many who see only a standoff between Spinoza and Hegel, Butler uses the two thinkers in a complementary fashion; Hegel grounds a theory of intersubjective recognition that is lacking in Spinoza, whom Butler finds useful as a thinker of desire, which she interprets as human fragility. Butler's unique approach offers a contemporary alternative to mainstream political liberalism, in continuity with the project that Sharp has laid out. If Spinoza and Hegel can offer such an alternative, however, Sharp argues that there is nonetheless a disjunction between Spinoza and Hegel, and convincingly demonstrates just how acute this divide is in the concluding chapters of the book.

Unlike many contemporary writers, Sharp claims that positing the difference between Spinoza and Hegel as one of affirmation and negation, respectively, misses the fundamental point of contrast for contemporary political thought. Even though this charge is often made by anti-Hegelian Spinozists, it casts the difference in terms that are Hegel's own in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.⁵ The principal difference between them, according to Sharp, is the way in which desire functions in their ontologies. Both think relationality in terms of desire, but "Hegel is concerned above all with relationships of representation, while Spinoza examines relationships of composition among human and nonhuman forces" (121). These opposed accounts of relationships are based on differing theories of power, agency, and politics, and it should be clear that any Hegelian politics of recognition will be a project that accords a special status within nature to humans.

This is a project to which Spinoza cannot be aligned, and Sharp argues further that Hegel's account of desire justifies the necessity of institutionalized domination as a means of socialization, and thus affirms these relationships as necessary even though a Hegelian political philosophy advocates their overcoming. By

contrast, Spinoza's understanding of desire as part of the *conatus* argument entails a certain illusory freedom of human exceptionalism that must be overcome in order to forge associations that are in line with the relational ontology Sharp develops in the first part of the book. Her constructive engagements with the work of Elizabeth Grosz and deep ecology, which make up the concluding two chapters of the book, are promising lines of thought in this direction.

Before turning to an examination of Grosz's work, Sharp offers a helpful characterization of her own project as one of strategic antihatred.

Spinoza frequently identifies his naturalism as a response to the psychic and corporeal damage entailed by the proliferation of hatred, which can be extended to misogyny and cultural imperialism. The politics of recognition rightly aims to respond to this damage, but renaturalization maintains that the cure for dehumanization cannot be achievement of "personhood," as long as personhood depends upon regarding one another as uniquely capable of transcending nature (159).

Sharp eventually advocates a much stronger position, in agreement with Grosz, that identifies the politics of recognition as "a self-hating endeavor" (173). The reason for this is that the project of recognition theory requires the perpetual deployment of respect, centered around the figure of the human, in order to "demarcate our sphere of moral concern" (172). Renaturalization, in line with Grosz, requires the displacement of this very drive for respect, opting instead for a liberating experience of one's own place as a constitutive force within nature. Grosz's criticism of recognition is fundamentally a rejection of both humanism and anthropocentrism as such, which she argues reinforce phallogocentric homogenization. Grosz turns to both Deleuze and Guattari and Nietzsche for a politics of imperceptibility, which Sharp affirms as moving beyond the model of recognition. Grosz's politics remain underdeveloped, and Sharp offers Spinoza's thought as "a notion of thought that acknowledges the imperceptible forces operative in our affective engagements with human and nonhuman beings" (180).

By tarrying with Grosz's arguments against recognition, Sharp is able to put forward a political framework that does not take the establishment of a humanistic utopia as its goal, but rather affirms our collective dependency in order to strategically enhance power. In her final chapter, "Nature, Norms, and Beasts," Sharp turns to the work of the deep ecologist Arne Naess to take up the topic of Spinoza and the nonhuman. Sharp's interjection into this debate shows that Spinoza's philosophy does emphasize that human interaction attenuates itself with the nonhuman, but stops short of subordination to nonhuman power either through submission or valorization. She demonstrates this through an analysis of Spinoza's references to animals in the *Ethics*, which deal with different valences of a moralizing tendency to treat animals as models for humanity. Such an admiration is melancholic, which is ultimate powerlessness according to the *Ethics*. "The transformation of our passionate disposition is as fundamental to our well-being as the basic factors of hydration and nutrition. Melancholy, applying as much to the soul as to the body, indicates a generalized impotence" (197). As such, Sharp clarifies that although the politics of renaturalization remains thoroughly critical of a recourse to humanism, it is equally suspicious of a "reactionary antihumanism," thus maintaining human liberation as its central focus (219).

Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization constructs a new, exciting terrain for contemporary political philosophy. Although she notes in her critique of Butler that she is uninterested in barring creative uses of Spinoza, Sharp's arguments against recognition theory strike at its lynchpin, presenting an either/or choice between a politics of renaturalization and a politics of mutual respect. However, it is worth noting that Sharp's continual emphasis on the importance of context and strategy for politics, which is a welcome contrast to weary rehearsals of language medicine that would declare the political utopia in advance, may leave open a role of some utility for representation, perhaps reformulated through further engagement with transindividuality rather than reciprocal self-certain consciousnesses. In addition, the constitutive aspect of Sharp's politics of renaturalization clears a promising pathway for future research, particularly in some of the traditions she mentions early on in the book as potential allies, such as race theory and Marxism. For the politics of

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renaturalization to grow and thrive, such encounters, among others, must proliferate.

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NOTES

1. See Hasana Sharp, "Why Spinoza Today? Or, A 'Strategy of Anti-Fear.'" *Rethinking Marxism* 17, no. 4 (2005): 591-608 and "The Force of Ideas in Spinoza." *Political Theory* 35 (2007): 732-55.
2. In her discussion of Spinoza's philosophy as it applies to humanity, Sharp notes that she preserves his sexist language in order to avoid a false implication that inclusive phrasing exists in Spinoza's work (1n1). She is able to wield Spinozist thought against this very tendency, such as when she turns Spinoza's sexist examples of women as gossipers on its head. Instead of reading Spinoza's sexist moments as somehow indicative of his otherwise great insights, she argues, "Spinoza's own examples might be seen as 'citations' of cultural norms and as consequences of having been affected by proximate bodies in his own environment" (47). Since this review considers Sharp's constructive use of Spinoza, I will use gender inclusive language when referring to human beings, unless I am quoting Sharp's citations that preserve Spinoza's wording.
3. See Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics and Other Works*. Trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 119.
4. Sharp follows Althusser in referring to ideology in the singular as a more general and neutral account, rather than the plural ideologies, which indicates a specific set of concerns within a particular discourse. See Sharp 57n7 and Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes toward and Investigation." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
5. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Trans. E.S. Haldane. New York: Humanities Press, 1996, 477.