The following is a translation of the final chapter of Raymond Ruyer’s 1958 La genèse des formes vivantes, forthcoming from Rowman Littlefield International.

Ruyer’s goal in La genèse is, first of all, to critically assess what were the contemporary scientific accounts of embryogenesis. He finds these accounts deeply problematic, fundamentally as a result of a continuing fidelity to classical Newtonian physics, which construes living beings as mechanisms: that is, as discrete, inanimate parts arrayed in a neutral space and connected partes extra partes according to a given structure. Not only is this view of reality, for Ruyer, clearly debunked by quantum physics, it is manifestly incapable of dealing with the dynamic, continuous and transforming process of embryogenesis. The latter can in fact only be understood by invoking a formation that is irreducible to the playing out of a pre-existent structure; the playing out of a trans-spatial ideal irreducible to an aggregate of brute cause and effect relations.

Ruyer’s thorough grasp of the sciences of his day is on clear display in this chapter, traversing not just embryology but biology more generally, neuroscience, psychology, animal ethology, and physics, before arriving, finally, to challenge the oldest paradigm of fixity in Western thought: Parmenidean being. As he indicates in the opening passage, Ruyer’s aim in this concluding chapter is to summarise his critique. But it also provides him with an opportunity to present his own positive account of morphogenesis, not just with respect to the embryo, but to reality as such. For this reason, what follows can be
Having compared the effort of tracking and cornering the mystery of morphogenesis to a criminal investigation, we can also present its conclusion in the same mode.

What appears clearly right away is the insufficiency of the notion of functioning borrowed from mechanist physics. A host of logical and experimental arguments can be deployed to prove the point that morphogenesis is irreducible to functioning, that is, to the setting in motion of a predetermined structure given in space.

**THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SPATIAL PRE-FORMS**

This is, logically speaking, to misrecognize the position of the problem, to reduce formation—that is to say the appearance of a structure—to the deployment [mise en marche] of an already existing structure. Functioning can only lead to the deterioration of that which functions.

Experimentally, the theory of preformation, which is the biological form of the theory of functioning, has been completely disproven. Even if, at the beginning of development, we look everywhere for hidden pre-forms—whose functioning would explain adult forms—we find nothing. Pre-forms are in neither chromosomes nor in genes. In fact, genes are distributed equally among all the divided cells in development. Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that genes could account for what Woodger calls “characterisation” (that is, specific characteristics), for the fact that a paw, tail, or liver of a dog is not the paw, tail or liver of a cat. What it cannot account for, however, is “organisation,” the fact that these particular embryonic cells will become a liver, or a tail, rather than a paw. This is particularly clear for the two, four, or eight cells that first result from the initial division of the egg. The nucleus has certainly been divided equally, since each of
the two, four or eight cells will give rise to a complete individual. It is not therefore the nucleus and its genes that explain the organisational differences between the right and the left half of the organism, or the front and the back, or the head and the tail. Incidentally, experiments with grafting show that the destination of a group of cells can be changed practically at will. What would have become a paw becomes a tail, and vice versa. Genetics cannot therefore explain embryogenesis.

Let us consider, again for the sake of argument, that the organisational pre-forms are found in the protoplasm. In many eggs, the protoplasm presents regional differences visible from the very beginning. The primer for bilateral symmetry, of the front and the back, the head and the tail can be recognized. However, the objections against the pre-forms in the nucleus also hold for the pre-forms in the protoplasm. Grafting experiments modify not just cellular nuclei, but the protoplasm as well, and yet the development is normal or normalised. In general, the visible differences in the protoplasm appear to be due only to the presence of nutritional reserves. Their development is not always modified by their displacement through centrifugation. Should we then invoke invisible chemical differences? In the egg, whose development is “mosaic,” a chemical heterogeneity between the egg’s parts can be found early on. In regulatory developments, though, a certain chemical homogeneity is conserved until gastrulation.\(^3\) Now, regulatory development is, as we have seen, the fundamental case; mosaic development would simply signify a premature determination.\(^4\) If chemical heterogeneity is already the sign of a determination, that is to say, of the establishment of a formative process, how then could it be its cause?

Extraordinary difficulties are encountered if pre-forms of “organisation” are located in the protoplasm, or pre-forms of “characterisation” in the nucleus and the genes. In effect, during the course of evolution, the most general and fundamental organisational traits—which are today, according to neo-Darwinism, characters of kind or level—are due to first appear as mutations in a species. At this moment, according to the hypothesis, they have to depend on factors or pre-forms in the chromosomes. However, still according to the hypothesis, as characters of kind or level, they must depend on pre-forms in the protoplasm. Now, how can we possibly conceive of the transfer of these pre-forms from the nucleus to the protoplasm? Placental organisation, mammary glands, the mammalian instincts of nutritional lactation had to have appeared as genetic mutations. How could these genetic mutations themselves become the fundamental traits of their own organisation and embryogenesis?
THE INSUFFICIENCY OF RELATIONAL EPIGENESIS

Given that there are no pre-forms in space, there remains only to admit, for the sake of argument, a sort of epigenesis through spatial relations themselves. The increase in structural complexity, during formation, is explained by the external or internal relations of the egg in development—relations with its milieu at first, and then, after the first divisions, inter-cellular relations. This is the solution at which Woodger arrives. A pure multiplication is not, by itself, a gain in complexity. However, a unified plurality of objects represents a level of organisation superior to that of each individual object that composes it. A forest can spring from a single tree, and yet the forest represents a superior level of organisation, in the sense that, for example, the trees on the edge will have leafy branches reaching ground level while the trees in the centre will have leaves only at the canopy level. One fully-grown flower would thus be a sort of “forest” of simple flowers, differentiated according to their place in the whole.

This “relational” or “social” explanation of morphogenesis, which is advanced today by Dupreel but also derivable from Gestaltist conceptions, has only a limited applicability. We have shown that the situation, or the primary role of organic components in the whole, only acts as an evocative stimulus of capacity, and not as its sufficient cause. This is already the case for the leaves of a tree in the forest, and, even more so, in the differentiation of fully-grown flowers—and even more so for the differentiation of cells in an animal. If the relational conception is true, the graft, in transplant experiments, should always act “locally” and never “originarily.” The determination of a tissue often depends in an indirect fashion on its location and its relations with another tissue. If, for example, a gastrulation towards the exterior is provoked, neutral differentiation does not take place due to a lack of good spatial relations, and the whole development is arrested. However, it would not be wise to take this as a ruling in favour of the “relational” theory, which would be like explaining the painting of a scene by relating painter and canvas in space. The relational theory does not explain the organism’s type, whose specific forms are maintained in spite of the milieu, and often in spite of incidental upheavals in their internal relations.

“Social” phenomena are real and of real importance in the whole domain of biology, but organic “sociality” is irreducible to a simple spatial “vicinity” produced by mechanically relational effects. Such a conception is only a return, in disguised form, to a theory of developmental functioning.

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The efforts of biologists who cling to the idea of functioning are even more unjustifiable in light of its decades-old abandonment by physicists and chemists. What we have called the crisis of determinism is in fact the crisis—or rather, the abandonment without return—of the conception of physico-chemical phenomena as structures first given in space, then put into motion, and functioning according to ready-made connections. An atom is already in itself a process, a formative activity; it is not a functioning structure. The morphogenesis of an animal, as complicated as it is, nonetheless follows atomic and molecular “morphogenesis,” as the existence of the living molecules that are the virus show. And the morphogenesis of an animal reveals the same traits writ large that are found in the “morphogenesis” of an atom, already in excess of functioning. There is today a true game of hide and seek between physicists and biologists. Biologists continue to make use of an outdated chemistry; physicists, who, in general, have the most misconceptions about genetics, ignore the fact that embryogenesis is an active formation.

FORMATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Let us resume the investigation. Having recognised the insufficiency of functioning, one has to then search for the positive factor of morphogenesis. This factor appears, as a first approximation, as complimentary to functioning, and takes on various aspects. They can be described them as “vertical themes,” “auto-conduction and auto-control,” “unitary behaviour,” “action according to an absolute surface,” “equipotentiality,” “mnemic melody,” “ability to react to a simple signal,” etc. Under all of these aspects, the causal factor essentially represents an improvisation and a creation of bonds [liaisons], in contrast to the simple play of pre-given bonds which characterises functioning. Finally, under all of these aspects the morphogenetic factor is revealed to be very close, not to a mysterious “vital principle,” but to the immediate experience of consciousness. All these aspects (themes, auto-conduction, etc.) are at the same time aspects of consciousness. Consciousness is not a passive knowledge, but the active unity of a behaviour or a perception. Consciousness is always a forming activity. It is always a dynamic effort of unification, without which “behaviour” would be a pure collection of movements and perceptions a pure juxtaposition of physico-chemical effects able to be imitated by machines. It is therefore natural to suppose that morphogenesis is, to the contrary, always consciousness. This hypothesis, we must underline, does not consist in saying that consciousness explains morphogenesis; it rather asserts that consciousness and morphogenesis are one and the same.
It is nevertheless important to understand that psychological consciousness (whether human or animal) that perceives objects in the world and acts on the world is a morphogenesis in one particular organic domain, that of the nervous system—those veritable amoebic colonies that constitute the systems where liaisons are incessantly made and unmade according to themes derived from the broader theme of the organic but adapted to the outside world. This neural morphogenesis is then transposed, through the relays of organic machines, into movements in space. Naturally, though, this cerebral consciousness or morphogenesis is only a particular case, derived from organic consciousness and morphogenesis. An embryo in formation is a field of consciousness as much as it is an active cerebral sensori-motor area. It also improvises the new connections according to a theme; it is absolute surface and melody, like the cinema screen in *The Mystery of Picasso* on which each state of the painting serves as sign for another state.7

Or better: it is because the embryo is the domain of primary consciousness that this embryonic part, consisting of nervous systems, can be the domain of perceptive consciousness, and can facilitate organic behaviour by adjusting it to the extra-organic world. We walk and we see, and we manipulate objects because our cerebral nervous tissue is directly capable of modifying itself and of possessing itself absolutely in its thematic forms and deformations. *Our hands of flesh and bone are only the auxiliary machines of the “absolute hand” of our cerebral cortex.* While the corporeal hand was being formed, drawing from the embryonic palette which gave it its outline it was already “absolute hand”—surface in possession of itself and sounding melody—indeed, of the cerebral hand that did not yet exist. However, in the adult organism—to the degree that it is alive, that is, capable of partially repairing and maintaining itself through nutrition and assimilation—it is no longer the “absolute hand.” As tool-organ, it can only function like a set of tongs or pliers, and all control of its behaviour has been transferred to the cerebral hand. It is the cerebral hand that is the “control” and consciousness of the active handling that facilitates the physical movements of the hand-organ.

We should not, however, be misled by this secondary dissociation. To the degree that it has not already begun to function in accordance with deployed machines, the embryo in development is a complete field of consciousness. A nervous centre, an embryo or an embryonic area in formation, an amoeba or a unitary colony of amoebae such as *Dictyostelium*, or even, let’s add, a molecule in which the zones of individual indetermination have been reunited in a continuous network—all of these domains are equally domains of consciousness, just as they are domains of
Consciousness in morphogenesis is not a superimposed principle, a *Deus ex machina*, or a ‘ghost in the machine.’ It is nothing other than form, or, rather, active formation in its absolute existence.

Contrary to those theories inspired by (often poorly understood) Husserlian ideas, consciousness is neither always nor essentially “consciousness of...,” consciousness of a real or ideal object. The consciousness inherent in formation is not consciousness of a formation, either as light or as intention directed toward this formation. Primary consciousness is not “consciousness of...” Only the consciousness of cerebral sensorial centres *qua* cerebral area becomes “consciousness of...” Having been modulated by an exterior structure, consciousness envelops the existence of this structure or refers to an object through it, and can as a result legitimately be called “consciousness of the object.” The primary consciousness of formation, if this incorrect expression, involving a genitive that does not refer, absolutely must be used, is this formation *qua* formation that conforms to a general theme that dominates the constitutive elements. Consciousness *of* an habitual action is not the consciousness *of* performed movements (which would, on the contrary, disturb action); it is the active unification of constitutive elementary movements *according* to the theme of the action. Where primary organic consciousness is concerned, it is as illegitimate to employ the “of” in Berkeley’s sense as it is in Husserl’s. Primary consciousness is neither consciousness *of* a perceiving Mind-subject nor the consciousness *of* an Object, whether real or ideal. Consciousness is any active formation in its absolute activity, and all formation is consciousness.

The viewer of the film, *The Mystery of Picasso*, has the illusion that the painting is painting itself since he does not see the painter behind the canvas. However, if we consider the painter’s consciousness, the viewer’s illusion corresponds to reality itself: the painting must form itself without a brush held by a hand being at work behind consciousness.

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF ‘VERTICALISM’**

The investigation into morphogenesis cannot end here. Having identified formation and consciousness, and jointly characterised them as auto-conduction and the improvisation of bonds according to a theme, it is necessary to pass from description to an attempt at interpretation and to finally find, certainly not the
cause of consciousness and formation—which would obviously make no sense—but rather their fundamental implication. At the beginning of this book, we invoked the metaphor of “verticalism” to describe the general impression that first arises, given the facts of development. We saw very quickly that the metaphor has more than merely a descriptive value. Biological induction, the evocation through simple signals of formational competences, truly epigenetic appearance in space and time, and specific complex structures all lead us to admit a non-geometric “dimension” - a “non-spatial” region in which the “ideals” of specific forms subsist in a “semantic” state, a state of significant themes analogous to the themes of an habitual act or an effort of memory or invention. At the same time, these ideals act dynamically on that which actualises them, and are actively realised by it; in turn, these are adopted as its ideas. This particular composite of activity and passivity is characteristic of all consciousness. The cycles of mechanical auto-regulation merely “symbolise” (in the Leibnizian sense) this characteristic, and only represent it in a “degenerated” state.

In any case, this conception suggests itself whenever we try to understand psychological consciousness. The studies of the Wurtzburg school, psychoanalysis, the psychology of instinct, and above all—since the revolutionary conceptions of H. Jackson—the studies of aphasia, have proven the reality of a semantic “verticalism,” and the central place of the trait [tâche], the theme, or the dominant tendency in behavioural and intellectual formation, which are incomprehensible if we remain at the level of pure “horizontal” associations. The brain serves as the "control”—in the cybernetic sense of the word—for the movements of the organism. It is that which informs these movements, and makes of them true behaviours, unified and guided. But while the “control” of an automated machine is also a machine whose construction must be controlled by an engineer, the cerebral control operates directly, because the brain, visible in space, is only the place where the non-mechanical feed back* to non-spatial ideals and themes is applied.

Let us observe the manner in which our actions on the outside world are regulated. The dynamic nature of our actions turns around the positing of a value-goal, and around diverse valencies, “fixed” on intermediary-objects, inhibitive or supportive that are displaced as action progresses. These “valorisations,” inherent in conscious activity, correspond to the improvised modification of liaisons in the cerebral centres. Consciousness, or the formation of the current act, thus corresponds to the intersection of ideal themes and the organic machine in space. This “dimension” of thematism is that which takes place in the adult and auto-con-
ducting organism, the engineer controlling the “control” of machines. According to J.C. Eccles\(^9\), the “will”—it would be better to say: the “vertical” themes—transforms the spatio-temporal activity of nervous systems into a state of unstable closure by exercising already structured “fields of influence”\(^10\). Alpha waves in no way represent, as it is sometimes suggested, a cerebral scanning\(^*\). It is rather that they cease as soon as a visual activity or mental calculation begins—which is in itself a return to a pure and autonomous functioning of rest of the nervous system, and which escapes the control of “vertical” themes.\(^11\)

However, since psychological consciousness is only one particular case of organic consciousness, and the cerebral formations one particular case of organic formations, all recent discoveries in neuro-psychology must be valid, mutatis mutandis, for morphogenesis in general. All organic tissue in development is the site of the intersection between formative and regulative themes, and structures in space. All organic formation, like all cerebral activity, is controlled and regulated by non-mechanical feedback\(^*\) in accordance with a trans-spatial ‘ideal’. An in vitro cell culture, into which a specific factor of differentiation is not introduced, resembles a cerebral area at rest emitting alpha waves. However, in the developing embryo all determined areas are put into circulation according to a theme that guides its differentiation, by modifying its internal liaisons and displacing its valencies.

For the purposes of this account, we have spoken as if, by beginning with functioning and its recognized insufficiency, we had to look for a supplement which would transform functioning into a morphogenetic behaviour. In reality, of course, it is morphogenetic behaviour that is primary, and functioning that is derivative in all true beings, as opposed to pure aggregates. Action, for modern physics, already indissolubly unifies time, space and energy; the cutting-out of an action in the time, space and energy of a particular system is always artificial and relative. The behaviour of an atom cannot be decomposed into a discrete functioning—itself already decomposed according to an absolute space-time—or into an \(x\) factor that modifies the functioning. The atom does not resemble the machines engaged by human activity plus something—on the contrary, phenomena and their laws make possible the existence of these very machines. Even less does the organism resemble a material machine, delivered passively into time and modified at each instant by an idea, an entelechy, beamed down from heaven. To recognise the dimension of a trans-spatial thematism indissolubly combined with spatio-temporal dimensions is not to accept the old dualism between body and soul, “entelechy” and matter, idea and reality, or vital principle and organic machine. The
organism is not a machine plus a soul. Organic beings only subsist dynamically - in an incessant flux that, every few months, renews all its molecules. It is constant activity and the permanence of dynamism, not the permanence of a material reality informed retrospectively by an ideal form.

Having identified formation and consciousness, we must guard against the conception of consciousness as the attribute of a mind-substance, and against conceiving of thematism as the passive reflection of a static Platonic idea. Consciousness is neither a distinct ingredient, a sort of added phosphorescent substance, nor the attribute of a spiritual substance. Consciousness is nothing but the act, whether intelligent or instinctive, perennially engaged in the thematic organisation of sub-domains, themselves in the process of organisation. Cerebral consciousness, the active improvisation of formations in the nervous system, is at the root of the activity of organic consciousness that, for example, is ceaseless in its pursuit of the oxygenation of cerebral cells, or that actively maintains proteins in their form. The horse is not material organic tissue plus the Idea of Horse. The horse is a horse because it “horses.” It is not that, before passing through the “blastula” stage, it is a pre-blastocoelic embryo plus the Idea of gastrulation; it has actively gastrulated, as actively as a bird migrates or nests. To conform to an idea, a mnemonic or instinctive theme, is still to be active.

FORMATIVE ACTIVITY AND MEMORY

Following Whitehead, R.S. Lillie has emphasised the fact that while the activity that produces novelty appears to be the prerogative of consciousness, the constancy of things, the stable and conservative side of nature, appears to be physical. Conscious existence is in the present and carries with it novelty and novel integrations. The past is what is left behind it as it advances into the future. The psychological, as Whitehead says, is always part of the creative advance of novelty. This conscious creation of novelty through integration always operates on a system that is pre-given and pre-structured by antecedent and subjacent activities, and it leaves in turn its structural imprint, its information—in the etymological sense of the word—on the system, which in this way develops according to an advancement of consciousness, while continuing to operate according to already acquired structures. This is to invert rather than to support the mechanical determinist view which asserts that the present actualisation—always action and always consciousness—is exclusively determined by the past. In fact, it is the past itself, or more precisely, previously acquired structures, that represents the
traces left behind in the integrated sub-systems by the creative advancement of actualisation. Biological “determination,” far from being the result of a determinism—that is to say, the functioning of what already exists—is always prospective. It resembles the carrying out of a new construction plan; it inaugurates a new instalment of formation; it is the announcement that a new theme will be put into play. The time of pure functioning, in which the present proceeds from the past, is nothing but the conventionalised and deformed product of the time of conscious actualisation, inapplicable to organisms in formation. In a “moment” [tranche] of conscious actualisation, there is no pure flowing of time from the past to the present, but rather the circulation of an a-temporal theme in a domain, inaugurating an action that brings about a new spatio-temporal domain. This new domain appears to be continuous with the one that preceded it, but it does not flow from it like the sand in an hourglass.

It is necessary, nonetheless, to specify the nature of “traces” and structurations left by creative advancement. These traces are, at a first approximation, of two very different types. Contrary to what R.S. Lillie seems to believe, they are not solely physical and material—that is to say, they are not analogous to the traces left behind by an orator’s voice on a vinyl record. They are also “psychic,” which is to say the actualisation of a theme or an idea produces recurrent effects on the non-spatial theme, and modifies it according to an ascending action that passes from the actual to the trans-spatial. The orator who improvises a speech by actualising an idea produces physical effects that descend into the outside world; he produces a series of waves that can be recorded and conserved, due simply to the inertia of the vinyl or a magnetic metal. We can also suppose that the orator, after having spoken, takes notes so as to be able to eventually recite the improvised speech. Finally, we can suppose that the orator’s nervous system, in its material structure, endures modifications analogous to those of the vinyl. But do conscious and creative advances have any effects other than material modifications? Such a thesis is unsustainable. Let us suppose that the orator would like to later repeat the speech that he had improvised. He consults his notes, which are, materially, only traces of ink on paper. They are nothing unless a conscious human being can understand and interpret them as signs. If in the meantime he suffers from agnosia, he will be incapable of using them. Can we say then that the interpretation of written signs depends on the sole cerebral traces of the orator, considered in themselves as a sort of writing or material recording left in the matter of the brain? But a material inscription, whether on cerebral tissue or paper, cannot read itself. Even the orator, having become aphasic, tries to speak; he still has the ideas...
whose actualisation is betrayed by the accidents that supervene on subordinate processes, psycho-motor schemes belonging to inferior levels that were developed through antecedent activity. He is not betrayed by a purely material confusion of purely material traces. An aphasic is not the same thing as a machine that prints words poorly. His consciousness is an act directed by structuration, an act troubled less by the erasure of material traces than by the pathological state of his auxiliary psychic habits of structuration.

What gives rise to this misleading impression, and to the belief that material traces in themselves are sufficient, is the fact that it is possible to substitute the playing of the record for the presence of the orator. The banal dynamism of the phonograph’s spring is the only thing required in addition to the structure of grooves on the record. Likewise, as Penfield’s experiments have shown, the application of an electrode to the temporal lobe of certain epileptics seems sufficient to reactivate a sort of memory and an automatic recitation. If active consciousness was really like this, then the mnemic act would be a simple amorphous force analogous to the force of the phonograph’s spring. All it would seem to possess in terms of structuration would in reality be given to it by the structure of the traces, that it would simply put into motion once more.

In what other way could consciousness be capable of improvising and “forming”? A conscious theme is not amorphous. It is structuring, but is already and by itself structured, in the sense that it includes a formal intention that action only refines. Memory is essentially psychological, and the material traces can be nothing more than auxiliary. A mnemic theme is an ideal theme whose first actualisation has, through repetition, already been given a precise form. To claim the contrary is to return once again to the theory of pure functioning.

Suppose we were tempted to respond that, after all, it is not clear why we would transform what we claim to demonstrate into a postulate. Suppose we accept the notion of a pure cerebral functioning for psychological memory. And suppose we were to go as far as admitting that, when the aphasic babbles, one part of the material brain reads another part of the same brain where the mnemic traces are printed, however badly. What will we have gained? Absolutely nothing—for if we pass from psychological memory to organic memory, we will no longer be able to pretend that mnemic consciousness can be reduced to the functioning of material traces through banal and mechanical reactivation. If a banal induction of nervous circulations in the adult brain under a faradic current may seem sufficient to
make it “speak” its memories, this is already enough to rule out the claim that the formation of the brain, from the egg to the newborn, could be a similarly simple reactivation of structures readymade in the egg. We cannot claim today that the egg, with its genes and protoplasm, contains—like a kind of “written plan,” or like the record that only needs to be played—all the future forms of the adult organism and its nervous system. The whole of experimental embryology, and all the studies of instinct, prove that formational dynamic themes are truly formational and organisational. They do not simply deploy structures, make structures “speak,” since these structures do not yet exist, and since it is precisely the formational themes that give birth to them. The embryo constructs itself through the coordinated actualisation of a whole, non-spatial architecture of themes that is at once formational and already informed. The problems of embryonic formation are always essentially “vertical,” like the problems of aphasia. They manifest themselves through condensations, agglutinations, duplications, preservations, abnormal developmental arrests—in short, through a gruelling transition into the space of non-spatial themes.

THE NATURE OF MATERIAL TRACES

The duality of the mnemic effects of actualization—material and psychological, spatial and trans-spatial—to which we had given provisory status is only apparent. Far from reducing everything to material traces, as the theory of functioning asserts, it is the material traces and spatial modifications that are reduced, in the final analysis, to thematic and trans-spatial modifications.

‘Material’ cerebral traces are supposed to be inscribed in the structure of cortical proteins, and conserved by inertia against the passage of time. However, it can be shown, through a very simple calculation using results acquired through the method of ‘isotopic marking’, that a protein molecule has an average life-span of several days. Proteins are ceaselessly destroyed and reformed. What is more—as we know in the wake of modern chemistry—even over the same period, the subsistence of the molecule is in no way the mechanical inertia of a structure, but an active persistence according to the rules of actualization and spatialisation. We cannot therefore assimilate the traces eventually ‘borne’ by these molecules to the letters engraved in marble by a sculptor. Even if proteins reproduce, before disappearing, their exact double, traces included, the molecules bearing these traces are not equivalent to those fossils in which primitive organisms no longer subsist other than as petrified forms. Material traces in the ordinary sense
of the word—grooves in the wax, or letters in marble—are only the secondary, solid effect encountered in our experience. Moreover all material inertia is also only a secondary effect. The molecules of the wax or marble bearing ‘traces’ are themselves also active structurations. Just like organic proteins, their apparently inert structure depends on an actualization, on a process always underway. It is primary memory, the trans-spatial subsistence of themes in activity, which creates the brute appearance of material inertia and the space-time of functioning as a secondary and statistical effect. It is actualization, inventive or mnemonic, and not the functioning of the past, which makes the present. The desire to explain the subsistence of forms through inertia is like wishing to explain the continuous activity of an atom through the inertia of a billiard ball.

In practical terms, we can speak of the material ‘traces’ left by an actualization on a material, conceived of as completely homogenous, when the trans-spatial theme of the formation is considered with respect to its terminal effects. The orator speaks before a tape recorder. As she speaks, according to a theme signifying the whole [ensemble], she puts into play linguistic schemata and auxiliary motor schemata (already informed by preceding expressive efforts) in a cascade of improvised determinations analogous to the cascading determinations in embryogenesis. The thematic form of her intentions results, in the end, in modifications to a magnetic metal—in other words, in a modification of molecular relations. These modifications, for a modern chemist, are also modifications of atomic and inter-atomic ‘activities’, but roughly speaking and in practical terms, we can treat them as structural traces. The narrator’s expressive effort has, along the way—in the vertical architecture of the trans-spatial—mnemonic effects on linguistic schemata. When we speak, vibrations are produced in the air, but also and in the first instance, we learn to speak, creating partial ensembles better suited to expression in general. Terminal, so-called ‘material’, modifications on the tape recorder or the nervous tissue are not fundamentally anything other than a kind of mnemonic modification of the linguistic and psychological schemata. But because they occur at the end, we can for all intents and purposes take them as the spatial modification of a plastic matter.

Yet we must not be misled by this simplified way of presenting things, and be taken in by the illusion of reducing the subsistence of the real to spatial inertia, even though this inertia is only a limit idealization. Embryology also results in physico-chemical phenomenon and seems to be reducible to them. But in this case, the illusion is more difficult to maintain—even though the blindness of biases can
uphold it—due to the enormous gap between the point of departure and the point of arrival. It is difficult to convince those who want to reduce the memory of the orator to the material traces in her brain. The brain is so much more complicated than we are capable of imagining it to be. It should not be difficult to argue that the memory by which an egg becomes a human being is irreducible to material traces in the egg, and that it implies a whole architecture of trans-spatial themes in which the egg, and then the embryo, are only the spatial (or quasi-spatial) fulcrum, modified throughout their evocation.

THE PYRAMID OF FORMS

At the end of this investigation into morphogenesis, we therefore find it necessary to admit a kind of non-geometric dimension containing formational themes. ‘Verticalism’ is not simply a metaphor. These themes regulate the incessant activity that makes life. Just as psychological consciousness is always an effort according to an ideal sense, an effort which is translated by psycho-physiological ensembles themselves never completely imitable to the mechanical ensembles of automatism, formative consciousness is always an effort according to themes, making it more stereotypical and mnemic in character, but without it becoming any less ideal and trans-spatial.

The economy of hypotheses is a good thing. The perseverance of biologists in explaining formation by physico-chemical phenomena is admirable. But the virtue of economy can be pushed too far, and at times reveals only a lack of imagination. He who persists in making four equilateral triangles with six match-sticks laid flat on a table without thinking about arranging them in a tetrahedron has also achieved an economical, if misguided, solution.

In all of the domains in which complex, organic or para-organic forms are found, it is remarkable that the pyramid of forms seems set down on its apex. Written language rests on twenty four letters and a few dozen signs; the most complex sentences and speech always come down to a few dozen fundamental sounds; music rests on a handful of notes. In the nervous system, the most complicated actions and shrewdest maneuvers always come down to the same few muscular commands. In the same way, the most elaborate calculator comes down to a play of elementary electrical impulses that substitute zero for one, and one for zero. More generally, the unbelievable variety of phenomena in the entire universe is always reduced in the end to the displacement and rearrangement of the same el-
ementary particles—electrons, neutrons, neutrinos. It is truly inconceivable that the whole pyramid is accounted for by its apex, by the movements of particles in space, and that the greatest masterpieces, in nature as well as in art, are only ‘an alphabet in disorder’. For the pyramid to hold, we require a proper consciousness of forms.

MORPHOGENESIS AND REASON

To explain all forms (whether of types I, II or III) by the zero form, in a fashion more or less renewed by Democritus—which is to say, by the fundamental disorder of atoms or elements—is in every way excluded by modern science, which only recognizes derivative phenomena in the zero form, in statistical molecular agitation, and in the equilibriums and laws of classical physics. The subsistence of forms I, II or III can only depend on a direct relation with an domain of order.

If we try to understand organic morphogenesis in general terms—leaving aside for the moment the detail of scientific explication, like someone listening to a speaker without also thinking about the sounds that are being uttered, or like the user of a machine tries to roughly understand the role of its parts without following in detail its processes of realization—we clearly grasp a reason in forms. For example, we see clearly that every organism must use sources of energy like a machine. We see clearly the reason why respiration, in a higher-order multi-cellular organism, requires a more complex system of channels than the respiration of a protozoon; we see why the respiratory system of an insect can be simpler than that of a mammal, and why the heart of a mouse or a sparrow must beat faster than the heart of an elephant. We see clearly the reasons for the organs of photosynthesis in plants. We see the reason why a plant can and must have a mode of growth very different from that of an animal, with solidified parts which no longer develop, and specialized parts that ensure ongoing growth. We also see the general reason which presides over the diverse systems of organic or inter-organic coordination, in cellular societies and animal or human societies. In short, organic forms are intelligible in their general technique, which is troubled by the same problems and often finds the same solutions as the more lucid and more self-aware human technique. Long before we had formulated a definition of cybernetics, we had come to realize that organic techniques could inspire industrial techniques, and that the progress of industrial techniques could allow for a better comprehension of organic techniques. All the forms, whether of type I, II, or III appear to depend on the same Reason.
But what is mysterious is the way in which diverse kinds of beings could attain this Reason. In order to advance their technology and perfect the forms of their industrial machinery, civilised human societies are required to create research departments and organize scientific research. Where are the research departments and the CNRS of organisms? Yet even before human laboratories, organisms discovered flight, electric batteries, calculators, ultra-sound, and so on.

The same applies to the problem of organic invention in general, as it does to the problems of vision, locomotion and manipulation. As a result of a strange anthropomorphic naivety, we believe that technical invention is natural and explicable if it is due to a human being, if there is a professional inventor endowed with a good brain and working in a subsidized laboratory. A technical invention in an organism, without a professional scientist or a research laboratory, appears mysterious and paradoxical, and we see no other reasonable solution than to attribute it entirely to chance mutation.

This is to simply forget that the human brain which invents itself is first of all an organic tissue, a network of cells, and that every human and social deployment of invention is only auxiliary and accessory. In the human invention of the radar or flight, everything rests in the end on the auto-conduction of some cells of grey matter, in which and according to a research theme, the instructions for assembly must have been combined in themselves.

‘How can a cellular colony, without a brain, invent the rational and technical dispositions of the organism?’ The question is naïve. What is the brain, if not a colony or cellular network? The human who stands amazed before the organic inventions of an amoeba colony or an embryonic tissue simply forgets that his own inventions are themselves organic inventions and cortical cellular formations, subsequently transposed.

We leave to pseudo-rationalists the assertion that it is superstitious to believe in organic finality, and that finalist action can only be conceived in human psychology and thanks to the human brain. The broadly speaking rational character of morphogenesis is explained by the connecting up of every organic domain with the world of trans-spatial themes. Forms-I are just as connected up with the themes as Forms-II and Forms-III. Or rather, Forms-II and -III are only connected up with the themes because they are particular cases of Form-I. The human is only conscious, intelligent and inventive because all living individuality is
conscious, intelligent and inventive.

THE HOMOGENEITY OF INTELLIGENCE

There is a fundamental homogeneity of consciousness, intelligence, finality and the capacities for generalization and abstraction in all organisms, according to a sense. These features belong in an essential fashion to all true forms. Each and every organic individuality, in the broadest sense of the word, is not only an absolute surface in possession of itself, a field of conscious, but also an inventive intelligence.

The psychologists who fabricate so-called IQ tests run into serious difficulty every time they want to utilize them for culturally non-homogenous groups.

In applying, for example, the first versions of the Binet-Simon test to rural and urban boys and girls belonging to different social classes, the test’s topics appeared to advantage boys of bourgeois parents, while disadvantaging city children. The same mental exercise, depending on whether it involves a marble or a doll, can appear easier for a boy or a girl. A test that asks what the word ‘sonata’ means is easier for bourgeois children than it is for a working-class child. In order to remedy this inconvenience, the tests are ‘balanced’, equalizing them until they no longer favour one particular group—but then it becomes impossible to draw any conclusions about the intellectual equality or inequality of the tested groups. The same scores, for example, between boys and girls simply prove that the tests are well-balanced. Unequal scores do not necessarily prove that boys and girls are intellectually unequal, but perhaps just that the tests have been insufficiently balanced. It is more difficult yet again to attempt to make the tests, even those that are not language-based, what is called culture free*. Drawings that represent a violin, a mechanical pencil, a pocket-knife, or a telephone would naturally be indecipherable for Melanesian children. Only topics supposed to be common across all cultures and trialed in diverse cultures can be used (cross cultured tests*)—but the simple use of paper and crayons, or even the simple presentation of abstract marks without practical signification in a testing environment, favours or handicaps certain cultures.

It is easy to see how serious this situation is, not only with respect to the significance given to IQ tests, but to the very idea of intellectual difference. And in fact, if we follow this to its conclusion, we rediscover the same fundamental difficulty when we conduct experiments on the psyches of various animals. Broadly speaking, a chimpanzee appears to be more intelligent than a dog, and a dog more intelligent than a hen. But it would be necessary to run ‘instinct-free* tests to actually decide. The chimpanzee has a hand, along with an instinct to hold onto branches,
along with its own instinctive ‘stick-age’. This handling of the stick gives humans
the impression of intelligence, above all because it recalls a human gesture. The
dog’s paw is incapable, for good reason, of such a performance—but does this
prove that the dog is less intelligent, or only that the dog, in its ‘organic culture,’
in its instinctive ‘ethology,’ applies its intelligence at other points?

We can even go as far as the amoeba, which would be even more handicapped
than the young Melanesian or by the pen and paper test. Would this be an absence
of intelligence, though, or the lack of a certain ‘acquired content’ in its mode of
organic culture? Is it more intelligent to walk with legs and eat with a mouth than
it is to succeed at eating and walking without legs or a mouth, with only the ap-
propriate deformations of a protoplasm? We might say that it is more intelligent
to have developed, in the course of evolution, a handy set of legs and a mouth.
But is this chance or skill? Chance and luck, which are absurd to invoke as re-
placements for consciousness and organic intelligence, are capable of explaining
the unequal satisfaction of organic intelligence as it comes to grips with different
milieus and circumstances. Ethnologists hesitate to link intellectual inequality to
the ‘inequalities’ of human cultures, since they perceive all too well the differenc-
es in directions of application. Likewise, the belief in the greater intelligence of
a particular human being is, in most cases, pure class prejudice, this intelligence
simply being applied to a broader scale or a more specific material. A cabinet min-
ister does not have to make a greater intellectual effort in balancing a budget of
hundreds of billions than a mayor does in regulating the spending of his town. A
manual labourer would have been able to become a laboratory scientist if he had
applied his intelligence to different objects. It is not in principle any more difficult
to find a conclusion to a syllogism when it bears on atoms or electrons than when
it bears on marbles, even though it is a fact, as experience shows, that a subject
little familiar with a certain ‘material’ of reasoning allows himself be disconcerted
by it. We all have, in the same way, what could be called a ‘species prejudice’, a
biological prejudice. The least civilized, including many primitive humans beings,
consider, with a wisdom worthy of Montaigne, the animals they hunt to be beings
as cunning as humans, but in possession of different habits. Not only Montaigne,
but also the psychologists of instinct, who today engage in ‘comparative ethology’
and who consider cross-sections of animal and human cultures on the same level
[plan] are our precursors here.22

What gives the thesis of the homogeneity of intelligence a falsely paradoxical, and
even purely fictional appearance, is, of course, that which interests the research-
ers as it does those who employ humans or animals—namely the genuine, actual or quasi-actual capacities of individuals and species. Now, however, the worker who would have been able to become a laboratory scientist cannot do so any longer. The chimpanzee is capable of performances of which cats and dogs are not. It is practically impossible to disassociate intelligent activity from its habits of application. But for the general problem of formation—our problem—this paradox is truth itself. As C.T. Morgan emphasizes, the capacity of generalisation, of reaction ‘to what appears similar’ can be observed in animals located right at the bottom of the phylogenetic ladder, and ‘in this respect, there has been no essential change throughout phylogensis.’

Given Spearman’s $g$ factor—that is, given the characteristic capacity of intelligence and cerebral consciousness to pass from given terms to the relation that unites them, or from a term and a given relation to a second term united to the first by the relation—we can discern a general organic capacity that we can dub the ‘gamma factor’, which is not only ‘noegenetic,’ but ‘morphogenetic’, and which acts according to the same laws. What is reproduction, regeneration, and the characteristic equipotentiality of all life, if not the capacity to ‘generalize,’ to act according to the similar or the thematic, rather than according to pure causes? Since, as we have noted, even the reproduction of a virus or a protein cannot be a mechanical molding, it must rather be an ‘eduction of correlates,’ indissolubly both morpho- and noe-genesis.

We have thus only been able to rediscover our fundamental conclusion, and the identification of formation and consciousness. We must not forget Spearman’s two principles—‘eduction of relations,’ and ‘eduction of correlates,’—themselves dependent on a first principle, that he rightly calls the ‘principle of consciousness,’ or ‘the principle of the apprehension of experience’: ‘All lived experience tends to immediately evoke a knowledge [connaissance] of its character, and an experiencing ‘I’.” This is to say that consciousness and life are one.

**METAPHYSICAL EPIGENESIS**

To recognize the homogeneity of consciousness or intelligence throughout the domain of life is not to add an adventurous metaphysics to a study that desired to stay as close as possible to scientific evidence, but rather to gain the means to respond to a last and apparently serious difficulty. By rejecting the false idea of functioning we reject all preformism. But by invoking a trans-spatial thematism
are we not lead to replace a mechanical preformism with a metaphysical preformism, simply placing the models of form outside of space instead of looking for them within it? The response can be drawn from human experience, since it is homogenous with all organic consciousness. The experience of technology or art clearly shows that morphogenesis through human intervention is guided by ideas, by glimpses of the possible or harrowing experiences of the impossible, while being in no way copied from a model. The inventor knows in general terms what she wants—what Claparède aptly calls guided invention—but she cannot read the details of the form of what is to be created in herself or in the heavens, but must engage in trial and error. By analogy with the radio, we desired the television, glimpsing its possibility and suspecting which lines of research would be involved, but its model existed nowhere—no more in the Platonic heavens than in our space. The guide of consciousness or active intelligence is not an Engineer or a transcendent Architect.

It is precisely the human experience of invention that forecloses the possibility of deriving any form of anthropomorphism from the principle of creation and organic morphogenesis. The prophet or the guilty sinner freely imagine a kind of Super-man, hanging over them, who speaks to or threatens them. But the inventor or artist, the creator of forms, believes in a standard of success and even inspiration, while nonetheless knowing very well that this inspiration is not, in an event, whispered to them from the wings. It is he and no-one else who must correct, retouch, eliminate the faults of the work, and laboriously draw near to the idea that he wants to incarnate in it. And it is also he who must profit from strokes of good fortune by noticing and preserving them. This fundamental approach remains unchanged when we pass from human to organic invention, from psychological noogenesis to organic morphogenesis. The organism too forms itself amidst risk and peril; it is not formed. The differences between them, as considerable as they are, do not bear on the essential. They concern, on the one hand, the more mnemonic character of organogenesis, such that it resembles the filling-in of a crossword puzzle. The puzzle’s author, rediscovering the grid and the list of questions created earlier, applies them now anew in order to resolve her own set of questions. On the other hand, they concern what the organism fabricates directly and does not—like homo faber—have to transfer its ‘fabrication’, through the cerebral relays, into an extra-organic matter. The living being is at once the agent and the ‘material’ of its own action. It is identical to brain tissue which would not have had to play the role of a first relay in an extra-organic realization, and which is self-sufficient. The living being forms itself directly in accordance with a theme,
without the theme first having to become an idea-image or represented model.

The difference between morphogenesis and noogenesis is in the end superficial. The living being forms itself just as the psychological idea forms itself in us, if not in the way the idea is subsequently realized with our hands. The true human experience of invention, true invention, that of the idea as such, frees itself from analysis and takes place through a direct actualization. To cite the poet:

> Even an artist knows that his work was never in his mind.  
> He could never have thought it before it happened.  

Invention is guided by a theme, it does not proceed by chance. But to conceive this trans-spatial theme as a model to be copied—in invention or morphogenesis—would be to be duped by the completely secondary and particular character of human invention.

Morphogenesis is neither the work of a copyist nor a pure active force. Correlatively, its directive Logos is not the patternmaker of a grand couturier or the creator of mechanical robots. It is in fact a non-spatial order, an unformulated yet effective ideal, a guide to activity indissociable from this activity itself. It does not keep for itself all real being, leaving forms to be mere copies; neither is it a pure illusory Nothing. The reality of organisms and of actual beings presupposes a non-Parmenidean being. An action, or an authentic formation, escapes from the Parmenidean dilemma of being and non-being. Being, opposed to non-being, cannot characterize an ‘active being’ since an ‘active being’ is by definition striving to be but is not [*cherche à être et n’est pas*]. If it purely and simply was, it would not act. Being, opposed to non-being, can no longer characterize the directing ideal, the theme of an as yet unformed form. If it was, it would no longer have the need for an active actualization. Only the set “theme -> form” is. To separate one term from the other is to condemn them both to vanish. Active, thematic formation alone is. Its conventional decomposition into ‘pure theme’ and ‘pure form’ leaves nothing but two shadows. To cite Lawrence once again in response:

> Even the mind of God can only imagine  
> Those things that have become themselves.
NOTES

1. The translators would like to thank Rowman Littlefield International, and Sarah Campbell, in particular, for their support and the permission to publish this extract, and Flammarion for granting the rights for the translation.


3. Cf. J. Needham, Biochemistry and morphogenesis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 139. TN: gastrulation is an early moment in embryogenesis, during which the initial surface formation of the embryo (the blastoderm, see note 14 below) further develops into a three-layered structure (ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm).

4. TN. Mainstream embryology claims that the various parts of the adult organism appear very early as zones within the developing embryo, and together form a ‘mosaic’. For Ruyer, this an overly abstract picture of development. It not only presumes that no extrinsic factor will come into play, it obscures the active dynamism that in fact characterises embryogenesis.

5. Woodger, Biological principles, 351.


7. TN. By using stop motion techniques, this film (which Ruyer makes frequent reference to throughout La genèse) makes it appear that Picasso’s works are painting themselves.

8. TN. Ruyer is referring here to the etymology of the word cybernetics itself, which comes from the Greek root kybernetes (steersman, guide, governor), and until quite recently, the word cyberrétique denoted the art of governing. Its contemporary use began with Norbert Weiner’s Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine (Minneapolis: MIT Press, 1948). On this point, see also Ruyer La cybernétique et l’origine de l’information (Paris: Flammarion, 1954).

9. John Carew Eccles, The neuro-physiological basis of man (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953). We do not follow Eccles when he invokes Rhine’s suspect experiments and his “telekinesis” to materialise this will as a real force, applying it to neurons as it is applied to any other object such as dice or playing cards. An idea, a theme of action, is dynamic in the present through the systemic unity that it gives birth to in the organic domain in which it is the trans-spatial correlative, but it does not come to bear on energy anymore than it does on matter. Consciousness is dynamic without being a particular form of energy. Its dynamism is borrowed from the individualities that it unifies. It is indivisible energy which is born in the attenuation of individuality of the constituents of the system. What appears to the physicist as bonding through energy exchange is nothing other than an elementary field of consciousness.


12. TN. Horse and horses are translations of Ruyer’s archaic Cabaleité and cabaliser.

13. TN. The blastula stage is an early moment in embryogenesis, during which the cells polarize into an exterior (blastoderm) and interior ‘(embryoblast).

14. R.S. Lillie, General Biology and the Philosophy of Organism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), passim, especially chapter 12. We have also emphasised this point—see Raymond Ruyer, Éléments de la psycho-biologie, 109ff.

15. Lillie, General Biology, 161.

16. Lillie, General Biology, 96 and 164.

17. Penfield’s observations have often been quite “embellished” in second-hand accounts. Penfield
notes that an “applied stimulation to what seems to be the same point of the cortex can produce an entirely different memory.” The memories evoked are, most importantly, thematic and not stereotypical. It is in this way alone that a patient expresses himself under the electric stimulation: “[T]here it is. It was like witchcraft. He was in the process of doing this, he snatched something from someone... a stick, or something.. At the top of the road...” (The patient had an epileptic seizure each time he witnessed someone snatching something from someone—under the guise of a childhood memory when he had snatched a stick from a dog). See Delafresneye (ed.), *Brain mechanisms and consciousness*, 296-7.

18. TN. This is part of a famous remark made by Jean Cocteau: ‘the greatest literary masterpiece is no more than an alphabet in disorder.’

19. TN. In the preceding chapter of *La genèse*, Ruyer presents a tripartite taxonomy of genuine beings, roughly corresponding to the divisions between the inorganic, the organic, and the psychic. In this passage, he briefly reiterates his argument that there is no form zero, which would consist of the smallest brute blocks of inanimate matter. For Ruyer, this level of reality does not exist. The ‘most basic’ forms, for instance a carbon atom, are not inert building blocks but already trans-spatial self-surveying forms. What classical physics took to be the building blocks of reality are only Forms I grasped from the secondary perspective of their aggregate behaviour.

20. TN. The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) is the major State-funded scientific research institute in France, founded in 1939.


24. Spearman, *The nature of intelligence and the Principles of Cognition* (London: MacMillan, 1923). Specialists in IQ tests today vigorously criticize the ‘g factor’ and the notion of general intelligence. But the lack of practical interest in the notion is related precisely to its universality. The g or gamma factor is present in all living beings and cannot be used to discriminate between them.

25. TN. For Spearman, noogenesis is the inferential capacity that allows for the acquisition of new information through observation and through the combination of what is currently known.


27. DH Lawrence, *Last Poems*. We borrow both this citation of Lawrence and the next from Leone Vivante’s in-depth study in *A Philosophy of Potentiality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955).
In granting his permission for this translation, Bernard Stiegler asked us to contextualise this article and clearly indicate its status as an early, formative piece. The circumstances surrounding this work are indicated at the beginning of the text itself below. It originally appeared as ‘Technologies de la mémoire et de l'imagination’ in Réseaux vol. 4, no. 16 (1986): 61-87. We thank both Bernard Stiegler and the editors of Réseaux for permission for this translation.

This article is Stiegler’s first published philosophical work, and it may be thought of as something like the rough urtext of the Technics and Time series (the first volume of which did not appear until 1994). Indeed, some passages in this article may be found in more or less revised forms in some of the later books. This text also intimates themes which have appeared in many of Stiegler’s other following works. We present this translation for historical and scholarly, as well as purely philosophical, interest: it helps shed light on the genesis of Stiegler’s project, as well as on the philosophical issues it treats.

—Ashley Woodward and Amélie Berger Soraruff
The text presented here is the abridged version of three documents written in the remit of a research program of the Collège Internationale de Philosophie, dedicated to the philosophical stakes of new technologies.

The reports were entitled “Les Nouvelles technologies. Aspects des enjeux philosophiques” (April 1985); “Culture et technologies de communication” (with Thierry Chaput, July 1985); and “Epoches et jeux de l’oubli: économies de la mémoire et de l’imagination” (September 1985).

The first objective of the research was to determine what is common in “new technologies of communication,” and to verify that they really do share something effectively new, which would constitute stakes of a properly philosophical nature.

The following points of view were developed first:

— The “new technologies of communication” are characterised by the artificial preservation of memory, which is also the production of memory as such and the exposure of the rules of its functioning.
— In this regard, it is not absurd to say that linear writing can be recognised as the “proto-neo-technology.”
— In other words, the newness is relative: the effects of rupture develop on the bedrock of a profound continuity. It is on the basis of this continuity that these effects are thinkable. They are retroactively ascertainable well before their patent development with the “new technologies of communication.” It is a question of noting:
   — A tendency for ethnic-territorial idiomatic difference to disappear.
   — A consequent modification of the processes of intellectual production (since thought used to be entirely idiomatic).
   — A general question of the translation (or interface [interfaçage]) between communities which are increasingly technological.
   — And the appearance of new technological modes of reflexivity, that is to say of rules for the interpretation of the common memory.

Our work on those questions leads us today towards a general reflection on objective memory and imagination, considered as profoundly technological, well before they are understood as purely psychological faculties.
MEMORY AND PROGRAMMING

We find in the new technologies of communication the unity of a complex process of the **impression** of memory. Indeed, everything that we designate by the expression “new technologies of communication” (or “information and communication technologies”—ICTs⁴) concerns the inscription, the preservation, the processing and the transmission (or publication) of memory.

The **inscription** is realised by equipment [matériels] for the **input** of data. The **preservation** operates on mnemotechnical **supports** (magnetic tape, discs, film, etc.) constituting databases. The data are **processed** by **programs** that can take very diverse forms. The data thus processed are **transmitted** on **networks**. One accesses these networks through **interfaces**, which in certain cases also allow the introduction of data into the network (and not only the reception of data from it).

The interfaces put all kinds of memories into relation and operate **translations** between them. It is important to emphasise that even though the terms used here to characterise this **mnemotechnical dispositif** are drawn from informatic⁶ jargon, the **dispositif** extends to modes of the conservation-production of memory which are not exclusively informatic, and might even not be informatic at all. A great diversity of equipment [appareillages]—consisting of media, networks, programs and interfaces—receive, process and disseminate many types of memories. The informatic databases receive digital information, transformable into graphic data. But the stocks of video or cinematic films, phonographic discs, archived photographs, documents written and conserved on paper, all constitute databases that are transposable onto informatic media. Processing programs, which formalise ways of processing the memorised data in order to produce new memories, sometimes taking other forms, and capable of being processed by other memories, constitute memorisations of the **functioning of memory** itself. In this respect, a television program (or a program grid⁷) and a program which utilises informatic files, which seem very different, must both be understood as processing programs. This also holds true for a film synopsis or screenplay, a mock-up of a journal, etc. A **program for processing memory** is a way that memory has of comprehending itself and of producing itself more or less widely, according to logics which are not easily comparable straight away, but which correspond to economies that must be characterised as much by what they have in common as by how they differ, since they integrate themselves with one another in vast technological complexes.
The **notion of program, or software** (understood as the program putting a logico-linguistic element to work), can be retroactively expanded to include all sorts of activities (academic programs, political programs, work programs, etc.) and be applied to everything that formalises rhythms, repetitions, and habits, even the most complex.

But in that case, we should ask whether something like a *natural* memory exists, a memory which would not be always already artificial, that is, produced by programs which can be considered prostheses of memory. For example, is the reader-viewer-listener auto-programming herself prosthetically while she reads a book, watches a film or listens to a disc? Is it she who processes the data conserved on the media-support using one or several programs which she would herself be? Or conversely, do these mnemo-technical data constitute programs which allow the “processing” of the “data” of her “individual” memory? What is the organ (instrument) that a phonographic disc makes function: the record player, the listener’s sense of hearing, or both? Moreover, is a book not an interface of trans-lation [*tra-duction*] (which is also pro-duction [*pro-duction*]) between the reader and the *Literature* which constitutes a vast collective memory? And in that case, what is the *software* which runs on this apparatus?

If technological memory produces collective memory, and is not satisfied with reproducing it, the distinction between artificial and natural, technological and psychological, becomes increasingly tenuous and subject to caution. Such technologies are not only technics of conservation and transmission, but also techniques for the impression of memory (here in the “psychological” sense of the term). ICT troubles the most assured oppositions, notably on the level of “software” narratives that the media articulate: on a daily basis, the media narrate life in anticipation, with such a force that the narrative of life seems ineluctably to precede life itself. Public life is produced en masse by these programs; all sorts of interfaces introduce themselves into the intimacy of each and every life in such a way that the distinction between public and private becomes problematic.

The automatisation of the process of memory production, as quasi-prosthetic autoproduction, comes to impress individual memories **beyond national, ethnic, familial, and ethical frontiers and barriers**. This can inspire the image of a “re-alisation of absolute knowledge,” which would also be the absolute “derealisation” of knowledge, and can provoke massive anxiety.
Along with the novelty of ICT comes the feeling of an undecideable and incomprehensible precariousness, and an exhausted wait for a decisive moment which would complete what is a very profound process of change. At issue is a mutation capable of affecting everyone with respect to intellectual, moral and professional legitimacies, and consequently, of affecting resources (including material resources) for entire regions.

This apocalyptic feeling may be explained by the fact that the logical element (in the broader sense of this term) finds itself affected by what appears to be an autonomous development of the “technical system.”

This development destabilises the notions of cultural and national identity, of law and the sovereignty of peoples, of belonging to an historically constituted territory, and, finally, of the ethnic group. Ethnic difference, understood as a determined historico-geographical identity, can perhaps no longer characterise the human species. The “battle of standards” which develops in the spheres of ICT transgresses, with the same gesture, both national laws and the symbolic universe (which constitutes a direct infringement of the distinction between law and fact which was until now in force).

In Gesture and Speech, André Leroi-Gourhan characterises the human species on the basis of the opposition between ethnic difference and specific difference, and through an analysis of the technological and linguistic dimensions of ethnic memory. Yet membership of a community is undoubtedly less and less a matter of geographic and ethnic order in this sense, and more and more a matter of the technological order.

Networks of any and all types are what inform and will inform differences. This fact would be a consequence of what Leroi-Gourhan calls a “liberation of memory,” which comes about through an exteriorisation, that is, the development of a “technical system.” In the actual process of this liberation, the extra-linguistic aspect of ICT is undoubtedly essential to the opening of communities of non-territorial memory. If language is indeed essentially bound to a land, the image largely emancipates itself from this determination. There is thus, especially in cinema, an opening of spheres of memory’s technological production that bear no direct or necessary links to an ethnico-geographic community.
Leroi-Gourhan proposes that technical tools, and beyond them the “technological system” as a whole, can barely be isolated from living beings:

— “tools appear simply as an anatomical consequence, the only solution possible for a being whose hands and teeth had become completely useless as weapons and whose brain was so organised as to permit manual operations of a complex nature.”

— The tool is “a ‘secretion’ of the anthropoid’s body and brain. If that is so, then it is logical that the standards of natural organs should be applied to such artificial organs: They must exhibit constantly recurring forms, their nature must be fixed.”

— “In *Homo sapiens* technicity is no longer geared to cell development but seems to exteriorise itself completely—to lead, as it were, a life of its own.”

— “Analysis of techniques shows that their behaviour over time resembles that of living species, as though driven by an apparently inherent evolutionary force that places them outside human control. [...] There is room for a real “biology” of technics in which the social body would be considered as an organism independent of the zoological one—an organism animated by humans but so full of unforeseeable effects that its intimate structure is completely beyond the means of inquiry applied to individuals.”

Insofar as it constitutes the substrate of operational sequences, the tool is the essential vector of know-how (*savoir-faire*). There is, on the other hand, an original bond between the tool and language, which are two facets of a single development (a bond that is essential to take into account in the epoch of language machines (*machines à langage*)):

language is as characteristic of humans as are tools [...] both are the expression of the same intrinsically human property [...] as soon as there are prehistoric tools, there is a possibility of a prehistoric language, for tools and language are neurologically linked and cannot be dissociated within the social structure of humankind.

In fact, technical development, in the very broad sense, consists of a sort of “exteriorisation” of memory which is always already both technical and logico-symbolic. The path adopted by Leroi-Gourhan to characterise human memory is outlined as follows:
the problem of grouping would dominate the question of what is animal and what is human. Society of both animals and humans would be seen as maintained within a body of “traditions” whose basis is neither instinctive nor intellectual but, to varying degrees, zoological and sociological at one and the same time. [...] each survives thanks to the exercise of a real memory in which behaviours are stored. In animals this memory—peculiar to every species—is based on a highly complex instinctual apparatus, whereas in anthropoids the memory of each ethnic group rests on the no less complex apparatus of language. In insects memory is vested in society only to the extent that the latter represents the survival of a certain genetic combination in which the individual’s possibilities of comparison are practically nil. But the human is both a zoological individual and the creator of social memory...’

But this “creativity” of memory is only possible because, not being genetic, it possesses a prosthetic character:

The most important consequences of the transfer of ethnic memory outside the zoological species are the individual’s freedom to transcend the established ethnic framework and the ability of ethnic memory itself to progress. [...] Rapid and continuous evolution could apparently be achieved only by breaking the link between species and memory, an exclusively human solution.

[The most important fact is that the human brain has evolved in such a way that it remains capable of thinking everything—and that it is virtually empty at birth.]

Taking these points into account, in an epoch where ethnic difference seems to be disappearing, where programs automatically process and interpret memory data, and where the link between technics and language manifestly tightens itself in “exteriorisation,” one can wonder whether we aren’t witnessing a reversal. Strictly speaking, there would not be an “exteriorisation” of memory, for this would suppose a previous interiority. Rather, there would be a realisation of memory, in the form of a growing technological complexity, in which individuals are becoming instances that cannot be thought except from the point of view of the prosthetic complex (rather than the reverse). The technological medium appears to develop like a vast exoskeleton, produced by a “reversal of spirit into matter,”

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a reversal through which the spirit only achieves itself and only effectively takes place like a glove which turns itself inside out. The paradox mentioned above means, then, that the “material” realisation gives itself only as a “derealisation” of the “spirit.” The human being can therefore no longer be understood as an individual and original subject, but rather as something entirely prosthetic, in its language, its memory, and its knowledge. The non-genetic memory that characterises the human being is no longer ethnic; the ethnic undoes itself. Rather than belonging to an ethnic group that is geographically situated and traditionally programmed (the ethnic group’s program appearing to be “naturally” produced), the new technological human will affiliate herself with networks and with multiple associations which are no longer comparable with the reassuring naturality that the community, raised from a common land, preserved. One no longer leaves the established ethnic setting, because such a setting no longer exists. Ethnic memory no longer progresses; rather, various kinds of memories develop themselves.

We do not mean to imply that states are endangered. Nonetheless, we insist on the erasure of their ethnological character, in favour of the development of their technological character. States are now geographical technostructures.

Neither do we claim that the human would be “taken over by its own technics,” but rather that the human is techno-logical and that technics cannot therefore be considered as merely “means” serving “ends” that would not themselves be techno-logical.

Geographical technostructures, and the individuals that constitute them, will be increasingly expected to implement themselves in networks which act as audience domains, that is, as forms of memory. This supposes on their part a large capacity to develop programs of all types, and requires that they know how to develop a new mnemo-technological culture as well as a new configuration of the intellect. In so far as they are technologies of memory production, ICTs are reflexive on a scale comparable to that of writing, considered as the technique of speech inscription: they constitute a new techno-logy of thought. In Prospective et télécom No. 5, Alain Lelu notes that Jack Goody, in The Domestication of the Savage Mind, proposes that the invention of writing and the possibility of arranging signs on a support gave rise to a kind of conceptual thought unimaginable in oral civilisations; must not the power to have writing and audiovisual objects available on “hypersupports” [“hypertableaux”] lead finally to a comparable revolution in our modes of conceptualisation?
The stakes of the new technologies seem to us to be focused in the question of idiomatic difference.

Language is what is first affected by the multiplication of the telecommunication networks and their spheres of influence. Heidegger saw a major danger here and denounced what he called the instrumentalisation of language by cybernetics.

The question of the idiom in general—whose scope should be expanded beyond the linguistic sphere—is indeed essential, since the possibility of thought is concealed in it (because thought is always novel). Among other things, our research has aimed (in some further developments not included here) to determine whether there is appearing an idiomatic production of a non-ethnic, but rather technological, origin, or whether it is idiomaticity as such that is at stake. If idiomaticity as such is disappearing, then this would mean a pure and simple return of ethnic difference to specific difference. Questions of right [droit] and fact are implied here: what do expressions such as the right of the people and the right of the city mean today?

The value of this analysis, however, can only be established through an extensive reflection on linear and phonological writing in its capacity as:

— The first technology of preservation-production of memory to possess a critical reflexive character.
— The first technology to program its own massive development and systematic territorial expansion—a vast transmission of technology that is today being achieved globally.
— The first technology to liberate the very particular form of idiomatic difference called the principle of individuation.

The questions we must pose are:

— What is the origin of idiomatic difference?
— Does idiomatic difference continue to operate, and if so, what is its destiny with ICT?
— Is there a natural memory? What is a prosthesis? Should memory be thought always already from the concept of prosthesis?
The “first new technology” (profane linear writing) opens the question of the textuality of memory, which philosophy, characterised as metaphysics, avoids by dissimulating the technical question writing implies.

This double movement of opening and concealing is made possible by the critical reflexive character of the first new technology (critical and reflexive here also signifying “performative”). In so far as it constitutes itself as a hyper-program, metaphysics dissimulates the technological character of this reflexivity. This program functioned until the emergence of the contemporary new technologies qua new modes of being of the writing of memory. In their operation, these contemporary new technologies render sensible, if not manifest, the prosthetic character of memory and reflection, and pave the way for new types of reflexivity.

We might logically expect that this means a new version of the textuality of memory, with a more abundant interpretability. However, if we actually observe the multiplication of little narratives [petits récits] here, we experience, paradoxically enough, an increased possibility of programming memory, of getting rid of its interpretability, of eliminating its idiomatic promises.

Yet it is reflexive technology, as writing, which opens the possibility of individuation, of idiomatic difference as political difference, in its profane and historical becoming.

What, then, becomes of individuation if we acknowledge that idiomatic difference no longer needs to be ethnic?

Literature has always already troubled this ethnicity of difference and the individual: the possibility of translation (and its double reduction, that of the text translated, and of the text which translates) gives it a power of ex-portation of texts and ethnic programs, of the deterritorialisation of territories and the global extraterritorialisation of the beautiful.

Science is another instance of the worldwide exportation of programs. What difference is there between these instances of globalisation? Are not Hollywood and IBM examples of the technological conjunction between the globalisations of science and of the beautiful?
From the moment that the profane use of writing begins to spread, the linear and phonological writing of language is a technology of memorisation, at once preserving the same and producing otherness, in both speculative and normative senses.

In Ancient Greece this “use” of writing transformed the relation of the social body to its memory, that is, to what constitutes it as a social body. The conditions of interpretation, of the traditional heritage, are altered by the emergence of this technology. That is to say that the conditions of the reading of this memory and the conditions of access to knowledge, as well as the condition of writing—in other words, the production of knowledge—change. The present interpretation of the past constitutes a legacy that will have to be interpreted in turn in the future: the transmission of knowledge thus becomes, and is always already, its own concern and re-elaboration.

In the first place, the new conditions of interpretation (reading-writing) reveal the interpretability as such of inherited memory: the technological event desacralises memory by opening up a specific form of publicity (or audience).

New rules of the social game arise at the same time as the new rules for the conservation, processing, and diffusion of memory. Or, to put it another way, new social rules (whether or not they are explicitly social) represent the concrete and diversified expression, polymorphous and without an immediately perceptible unity, of a modification of the regulating game that constitutes memorisation in general.

This novelty at once affects public and private law, the conditions of the exercise of thinking, and (as it would be possible to demonstrate) the relation to the world in general, especially in its commercial and monetary aspects. Conditions of exchange, and thereby of translation, are modified.

Tradition can be subject to debate. This possibility, which is the “negotiability” of power and at the same time a new form of the elaboration of knowledge, rests on the possibility of publication and characterises political society (inasmuch as the adjective comes from the noun *polis*) as essentially *profane*, in opposition to...
the basilica society in which power is **sacred**. This then is how Western society could emerge with everything that characterises it: the historical relation to time, rational thought, and an exponential technological development corresponding to a global extension of its sphere of influence (its audience).

Political society emerges at the same time as the profane book. Insofar as this form of society depends essentially on knowledge and power being made subject to debate, it proceeds from the emergence of a new technological memory support which includes the publication of its rules of production.

Only the appearance of the profane book makes public law possible, opening the era of the new publicity. But a paradoxical opposition between two regions of knowledge also appears, or begins to appear: one which is essentially transmitted in the dominant form of knowledge, that is, the *theoretical* form that involves the mastery of the new communication technology that is writing, and the other which, as know-how, is transmitted in *practice*. The latter tends to be conceived in terms of “technique,” in opposition to the former, whose “technicity” is thereby concealed.

This dissimulation was perhaps necessary when knowledge was in the phase of its geographical expansion or, as it were, planetary explosion. Dissimulation became increasingly possible from the moment the West dominated the whole planet (an essentially technological domination) and its knowledge no longer needed to integrate and absorb ethnic alterities into the space of foreign knowledges. Knowledge revolves on and into itself in order to discover there the only otherness that can appear to it.

The question must be asked: with the appearance of ICT, are we dealing with an event comparable to that of the emergence of linear and profane writing? And if so, how do we deal with it?

Something like a becoming-political of the social body and its construction [*faire-corps*] (as it is not a given and presents itself above all in the form of a question) is only possible if one supposes what Cassirer called the **principle of individuation**.

A public domain is established on the basis of a right to private interpretation, that is to say the exercise of a **principle of difference**. There can only be public
debate if there are also private individuals likely to engage in debate. Such a form of individuality, representing a specific relationship with the original appropriation of the collective domain, is strictly dependent on the modes of transmission and elaboration of knowledge.

While the principle of individuation doesn’t concern speech alone, it nonetheless takes place through a technological transformation of the relationship to language. As a result, the latter becomes the medium par excellence in the on-going debate about the meaning of memory. It is through language that the transformation takes place, but this transformation also concerns the ensemble of social practices insofar as they are also spheres of tradition and, as practical actions, interpretations of knowledge. The diversification of individualities is accomplished in all spheres of social activity, in the form of styles, and political debate arises at the same time as what the Greeks call ēris. The “eristic” will later define the oral dispute; contradictory arguments in linguistic form. But ēris has a much more general extension: “This ēris inspires any man who sees abundance thrive in the fields and house of a neighbour who has worked harder than he to emulate that neighbour.”22 If there is a debate (polemos), it is in agonistic competition, which takes place not only in language, even though language constitutes the reference of any debate in general by formalising its legal conditions. The Greeks competed in every sphere of activity, and it was the question of the best (agathon) that spurred them to it. The best is what establishes [donateur] the rule of know-how, and this rule is and remains appropriable by those who are best. The authority of know-how imposes itself as a style, and the authority of a style is found in its performativity: society becomes political by becoming instructive [institutrice]], and it is not the individual who constitutes style, but style which institutes individuality.

The technological repeatability of the common text gives us the opportunity to consider the rule in a completely different way. The rule regulates an irregular element, which itself continually engenders new rules. At the same time, the text formally identified in its linearisation becomes essentially modifiable: the enigma that arises is that the identical is other, and the same is different. Linearisation reveals regularities, but at the same time gives rise to a textuality which is first of all a contextuality of the text. So, what I read today will not have the same meaning tomorrow, because it will be delivered in another context. The issue in question in textuality is differential repeatability, and it is with respect to its regulatory status that the rule is changed. Thus, the fact that reading is critical-reflexive
(both discerning and crisis-provoking) proceeds fundamentally from the possibility of a re-reading of the identical which also produces difference.

Today, given its development in nonlinguistic areas of activity and its tendency to generalise itself, a repeatability of this kind requires a thorough reflection on the technicity or techno-logic at work in any repetition with a reflexive character, in order to see the “techno-logical” operators of all reflection. This could undermine the linguistic privilege of all theorisation, and likely even undermine the possibility of a theory of reflection itself. There would be reflexive practices that would be their own theory. There would be techno-logical theories that no theory could account for from the unity of the logos as technologos. This would correspond with the end of the hegemony of philosophy as an academic project of metaphysics, but would not necessarily mean the end of all discourse of a philosophical nature, nor of any and all question of the universal.

It is necessary to reflect on the historical and philosophical privilege of speech and linguistic-graphic technicity, and to critique this privilege, which is about to end, or is at least profoundly in decline (getting rid of “men of letters” and “intellectuals” as it goes).

The hegemonic jurisdiction of the theoretical-philosophical (including its best-hidden developments in the technosciences) corresponds to a specific designation of the juridical: the law or right [droit], as it distinguishes itself absolutely from the fact, denies its performativity and relies on a metaphysical, a priori constativity. However, the reflexive technological fact being analysed here escapes this opposition: the fact founds, and is presupposed by, the opposition. The theo-constative jurisdiction proceeds from an exclusive privileging of speech in the giving of meaning, in which meaning is ultimately defined with reference to a primarily propositional understanding of the criterion of truth.

If a critical and technological reflexivity becomes possible in spheres other than language, then there are heterogeneous types of reflexivities, and our understanding of reflexivity as such is radically altered.

Semiological analyses, which originated with structuralism, do not take these questions into account. They do not grasp the fact that reflexivity, opened by the technological repetition at work in speech, also opens a specifically linguistic-grammatical configuration. They seek to find the same grammatical configura-
tion in non-linguistic “languages,” and, because they fail, generally conclude that only language [langue] is fully a language [langage], and therefore thought. Starting from their own linguistic subject matter, whose technological dimension they almost entirely ignore, they seek to isolate something like non-linguistic “signs,” “signifiers” and “signifieds.” However, the production of equivalent reflexive categories in a non-linguistic reflexive technology is not guaranteed (which does not exclude a reflexivity proper to it) and, in any case, can only be produced in the very practice of this technology. The semiologists import concepts straight from the metaphysical understanding of the text, for example the concept of code. This is particularly the case with their analysis of cinema. To these semiotic tendencies, with their linguistic origin, we must oppose endogenous reflexivities, for example of the kind that are proper to cinema.

According to Plato, non-linguistic spheres cannot legitimate themselves: cooking cannot claim the status of being a science because it is not able to explain how it operates, nor justify why. Because it is in the same position as cooking, rhetoric is only an accident of language and is not, at bottom, logical by nature. These spheres are accorded to the body, while the soul is opposed to it: the soul does not dress up nor play cards, nor gesticulate on stage, and “when I drink a beer, I do not drink a beer, I give a beer to my body to drink.”

What is thus postulated is the rule of theoretical-linguistic capital over the techno-bodily regions of sense. But this rule finds itself, and even founds itself, in the relation maintained between theoretical-philosophical language and language in general.

Pro-positivism formulates syntactico-semantic norms supposedly at work in the use of language, whether or not this use is philosophical (in which case ontology and logic are understood as a philosophical dictionary and grammar). However, this “theorism” systematically conceals the fact that the “exposition” of the syntax of a language, as well as its general rules of use, is always that of its “synchronic” rules. These rules belong to a text that does not, strictly speaking, exist. (The French language is made of its various occurrences but can never be produced as such: French does not exist other than in the diversity of its effects). There are no synchronic rules that can be uncovered or explained by right [droit] that would be the result of a constative description instead of a performative inscription.
When scribes, grammarians and intellectuals explicate the rules of a language (and from this explication draw a general economy of the rules of being-together), they must choose a unity among the diversity, up to the point of formalising, in the very statement of these rules, the truth of their statements. This choice is never absolute: it is made in the process of a systematic search that is ultimately not conscious, but rather “enacted.” Here the deceivers are the first deceived—a characteristic of all metaphysics and one that radically distinguishes it from sophistry. This choice always ultimately amounts to the fact that this synchrony, that is, legal publicity and the law [droit] in general, is exclusively that of the capital at the expense of regional areas, of the head at the expense of the body, or the sky at the expense of the Earth.

Concerning this, Jean Bazin and Alban Bensa write:

In a society which knows writing, there are at least two sorts of statements: those which are produced spontaneously by virtue of a linguistic habitus (which differ according to the social position of the speakers) and those which are produced expressly with reference to a norm or a model (usually defined by the dominant group) transmitted by writing across the scholarly system. As Pierre Bourdieu remarks, ‘when we speak of language as such, we tacitly refer to the official language of a political unity, that is, the language which is fixed by “specialised and authorised agents” (grammarians, professors, etc.), so then the language which is written, or quasi-written, or worthy of being written’ (Bourdieu and Boltanski, “Le fétichisme de la langue”). The comparison of language with a code supplied to partners for the encoding and decoding of their message is never, whether desired or not, really innocent of all reference to a codification, to a legislation of communicative practices. The proof is in the relative incapacity, characteristic of the “structuralist” attitude, ‘to conceive of speech and more generally of practice other than as execution’ (Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice), as obedience to a rule.

Many analyses could follow from these remarks, which should be compared with Jean-François Lyotard’s views on language games and forms of knowledge and Jacques Derrida’s on the retroactivity of declarative acts and all forms of signature. These should nourish a reflection on the general techno-reflexive performativity of repetitive recording technologies and the normative strategies developed with them.
The enunciation of grammatical rules would be both normative and speculative, which would mean that every utterance of this type is performative rather than constative—unless there is simply a radical undecidability regarding the question “what is the enunciation of a rule: a performative or a constative?,” given that the performative act is also the observation [constat] of its performance. The shape of such a question is determined by the a priori pertinence accorded to the question “what?” in general. Such a pertinence is violently disturbed by the battle of technological standards (whether it deals with the standards [normes] of compatibility of materials, with those conveyed by the programs and software, or with standards of national and international law as they are affected by the technological development of telecommunications) and the issue of “simulacra” it conceals. The stakes are, to say the least, enormous. However, it is particularly important to note that this “battle” is far from new. The “new” communication technologies reveal the fact that this battle has had a long and intense history.

The question regarding the enunciation of rules is increasingly relevant, as performative-normative models of knowledge in general are not only “transmitted by writing from the academic system.” Rather, the academic system increasingly becomes a relay and auxiliary for a system of technological-media networks distributing software and programs and “processing” memories, with the help of multiplying types of interfaces. One could provocatively say that professors and other teachers are only a part of this system. Many remarks by Armand Mattelart and Yves Stourdżé are heading in this direction. For example:

Nothing can deny that, in the recent past, school/media actions were born and developed in the complementarity of the interests of the mass media and of secondary school teaching: we have contributed to an attempt to reduce the gap between a partially unadapted secondary teaching and the ideological exigencies of the practical integration of the “youth,” by recourse to a teaching more ideologically adapted, more “contemporary,” and more practical for the media.29

This is ultimately a reflection on the instituting moment30 called for by these collected remarks. The initial stakes of this reflection would be the following: technological reflection is never merely the description of a pre-existing reality that it would instruct us about, but an inscription (or per-formance [per-formation]) and perhaps also something like a “derealisation”—a disappointment with regard to an exhausted metaphysical project, a realisation—“derealisation” that would ap-
pear here as the “work of mourning” of a “post-modern condition.”

If it is necessary to make a distinction between right \textit{droit} and fact \textit{fait}, then it is necessary precisely to \textit{make} it, that is to say, to produce it and not only to constate it: this distinction is not constatable because it is not given (which does not exclude the possibility that it can be that which gives).

What is thus posed is a question of the technological limits of the right \textit{droit}. With the appearance of new technological reflexivities we witness the emergence of new rules of judgment, thereby calling for new critiques.

It is not an exaggeration to call it a “Copernican revolution.” Kantian philosophy encouraged the philosophical focus to turn away from the ontology of the object itself towards a knowing subjectivity productive of its objects, apprehended as phenomena. (This knowing subjectivity being at the same time paradoxically limited.) What now calls for philosophical work are the technological conditions of possibility of something like a reflective, knowledgeable, knowing, and enjoying subject—\textit{qua} reader and interpreter of an always-already prosthetic memory. The first question becomes that of supports as regulative \textit{dispositifs}.

We must begin to reflect on the conditions of critical access to reflexive technologies. What we call here “critical” does not seem to us essentially determined by reference to a critique of the ideology which would be conveyed by the new networks. This question derives from another question, one that is even more critical.

The ICTs are not new means of transmitting already-constituted knowledge. They convey a knowledge that is in the process of being instituted. Their massive introduction in the traditional institutions, for example the schools, presupposes that all the issues at stake have already been well measured. This introduction is, however, indispensable if the distinction between right \textit{droit} and fact has to be \textit{made}, and if such a distinction can only be made by those who will \textit{know how} to make it.

\textbf{LANGUAGE AND INSTRUMENTALITY: THE QUESTION OF THE “MEANS”}

In \textit{The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking}, Heidegger takes the advent of cybernetics to be co-incident with a possibility for thought that had previously
been held in reserve:

No prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now establishing themselves will soon be determined and regulated by the new fundamental science that is called cybernetics. [...] The sciences are now taking over as their own task what philosophy in the course of its history tried to present in certain places, and even there only inadequately, that is, the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art). The interest of the sciences is directed toward the theory of the necessary structural concepts of the coordinated areas of investigation. “Theory” means now supposition of the categories, which are allowed only a cybernetic function, but denied any ontological meaning.  

These sciences:

- can deny their provenance from philosophy, but never dispense with it.
- For in the scientific attitude of the sciences the certification of their birth from philosophy still speaks.
- The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilisation that is based upon Western European thinking. [...] 
- [I]s there a first possibility for thinking apart from the last possibility that we characterized (the dissolution of philosophy in the technologized sciences), a possibility from which the thinking of philosophy would have to start, but which as philosophy it could nevertheless not expressly experience and adopt? 
- If this were the case, then a task would still have to be reserved for thinking in a concealed way in the history of philosophy from its beginning to its end, a task accessible neither to philosophy as metaphysics nor, even less, to the sciences stemming from philosophy.  

All this would come into play around a question of language and its instrumentalisation. Cybernetics is characterised as that which “transforms language into an exchange of news. The arts become regulated-regulating instruments of information.” Without doubt “global civilisation” and cybernetics incorporate and signify a threat to idiomatic difference. What must be thought, however, is the “trivialisation” of language in its cybernetisation. Heidegger also writes that
“man’s essence must first open itself to the essence of technology,”34 even though the late Heidegger’s thought revolves entirely around the very question of language, and occurs within the vast “linguistic turn of western philosophies.”

The Heideggerian dispositif was initiated with the question of forgetting—the forgetting of the question of Being—and is defined from the start as a reminder, an effort of memory, and a retrospective undertaking regarding the origins of philosophy. It is oriented, that is to say, towards the question of Being in which Being is apprehended as a questioning, as the matrix of every question and as a question-ing35 for a Dasein. Furthermore, it is a retrospective of the history of philosophy, a history understood at the same time as the forgetting of this question and of its fundamental questioning power, but also as the keeping of this question in reserve, and thereby also as its preservation.

The question of Being concerns a distinction that must be made: the ontological difference between Being and beings. It is the “vehicle,” or the medium, we could say, of the remembrance and maintenance of the Western world’s origins as a becoming-world. It is the messenger of the Difference which is also a factor in its forgetting, in “indifferentiation.” Tradition preserves and buries, closes and discloses. It is philosophy which, as metaphysics, engenders cybernetics.

The questions thus opened are those of memory, language, the medium, cybernetics, the instrument, and technics.

The “new technologies” concern all of these: they are language machines, cybernetic machineries, instruments of pressure, of impression, of expression, of distribution and publication, of “artificial” memory.

The current “instrumentalisation” of language is anticipated by what, with Aristotle, takes the name of Organon, of Instrument, the first treatise of formal logic. It is with Plato, however, that the possibility of such an instrumentalisation is born. From this origin (which is even more significant than Aristotle), it is Platonism which gives instrumentalisation the imprint which will destine it to inscribe itself in the vast metaphysical programme. The proposition isolated from the text to which it is tied, as presented in The Sophist, is the theoretical matrix of cybernetics and the logical algorithm. But the organon (instrument) is also the condition of possibility of philosophical discourse: it is already on the basis of an instrumentalisation of language that metaphysics proceeds to denounce the technical
(sophistical) usage of the logos: for in order to denounce the technical usage, it is necessary to forge an instrument and to construct an entire technology which contributes to reinforcing the efficiency of what is denounced. The instrumentality of the logos is irreducible.

If an instrumentalisation of language is possible, it is because this instrumentality is originary. The question is one of knowing how the instrument must be understood. It is not a question of fighting against the instrumentalisation of language, but of resisting the reduction of the instrument to the rank of a means, in a conception where means are opposed to ends.

In a very broad and general way, philosophy devalues technics and the knowledge of technical essence. It is only as subject to a critique that technics can acquire a real positivity in the eyes of the philosopher.

Technics confronts philosophy with a dangerous challenge: by positing that theoretical thinking must precede action, philosophy finds itself in conflict with technological pragmatism. The efficacy of know-how, developed in practices without theory, is a fact. There is a positivity of fact and an unreflectiveness of technics, which is independent of any theory, and which philosophy does not recognise.

Philosophy makes the determination that it is only wholly theoretical reflection—in other words, reflection that is philosophically founded—that is capable of justifying action, and thereby any implementation of a technique, in its full necessity. An act, to be legitimate, must make reference to the law [la loi] which founds it. Know-how does not know what it is doing. The only necessity know-how can invoke on its own is to be a fact. To oppose reflection and technics philosophically is always to oppose right [droit] and fact, that is to say, ends and means. Left to its own devices, technics would mean the reign of the right [droit] of the strongest, and confusion between right and fact, means and ends.

In antiquity, the word tekhnē covered a large semantic field, in which technological pragmatism, which does not know what it is doing, appeared to be even more dubious: with the Sophists and poets, it attained to the level of the medium of reflection itself. This presence of the technological in reflection resurfaces today in a particularly pressing way—with artificial intelligence, for example, but more insidiously with the media in general (though it is the same issue).
For modern philosophy, just as for ancient philosophy, the technical \textit{technicienne} manipulation of the logos, whether under the guise of scholastic habit or of a metaphysics that misrecognises its own limits, is the producer of illusory ends and therefore of fiction. It is in this way, for example, that Husserl analyses Kant’s critique of his predecessors:

\begin{quote}
[Their] reflection on knowledge, however, was not \textit{transcendental reflection} but rather a reflection on the \textit{praxis of knowledge} and was thus similar to the reflection carried out by one who works in any other practical sphere of interest, the kind which is expressed in the general propositions of a \textit{technology}. It is a matter of what we are accustomed to call logic, though in a traditional, very narrow, and limited sense. Thus we can say quite correctly (broadening the meaning): it is a matter of a logic as a theory of norms and a technology with the fullest universality, to the end of attaining a universal philosophy.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

In the modern period, art, whether as imitation of nature or as celebration of the religious spirit, does not seem to be grasped from its technical \textit{technicienne} es\-sence.\textsuperscript{37} (Two words are therefore needed to designate two different realities.) The emancipation of art is borne out with the industrial revolution, with which it takes shelter from the alienation of labour and know-how, as well as from the widespread generalisation of mercantile activities. If art once again finds a place in political struggle in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, in the avant-garde of the revolutionary struggle and critique, it is in virtue of its disobedience to the logic of capital.

Conversely, science is increasingly conceived as technoscience. On the one hand there is a sort of objective convergence between art and philosophy, and on the other, a convergence between science and technics. This probably does not reflect what \textit{should} be (the world turned right side up would see technics and science join art and philosophy), but is the result of a power relationship that asserts a conflict between these new domains.

The technics of technoscience, then, is industrial logic, i.e. the means for the domination of capital. It allows this domination not only over the working classes, but also over intellectuals who enable the penetration of science into society in the forms of technocratic and ideological rationalisation (Habermas). But the biggest danger is more likely to be in the absorption of the first domain (art and philosophy) into the second one (technoscience) through the integration of all
intellectual activities, i.e. the elaboration and transmission of knowledge [savoir] according to industrial and mercantile logic. The critique of such a situation was initiated through the concept of the culture industry (Adorno). The development today of what are conventionally called the “new technologies” substantially increases the field of such a critique.

All these philosophical critiques of technics are based on the idea that there is a non-technological origin of idiomatic difference, that is, of thought. They all remain stuck in the opposition: ends/means. They proceed from a pre-critical understanding of instrumentality, which is taken to be evident.

There are two possible ways of understanding the instrument. Either:

1. it is apprehended as a pure means in the service of a pure end, or
2. it is conceived as what forms [instruit] something as an end by its very implementation (and by this alone): there is no exteriority of the means relative to the end. The separation of the two is only a formal distinction.

Similarly, there are two possible ways of understanding language. Either:

a. language is understood as a way to convey information, a means of which we would make a “use” and which would thus be secondary to “information,” “sense,” and “feeling,” to what happens through the medium of language and its “use”—which would then be second in relation to the subject, or
b. language is thought as such, the event itself, what happens. In this case we cannot reduce language to the transmission of information, nor to an instrument in the sense of (1). We cannot make “use” of language. One does not possess language: one is possessed by language.

It is from this point of view that a thought like Heidegger’s arises. Yet, if we accept that language cannot be instrumentalised unless it has always been instrumental, then we plunge back into (a) if one assumes (1). Adopting view (b) then means, strictly speaking, to adopt (2) and to refuse to consider the instrument as essentially a means.

It must be said that in general the medium is not transparent to an aim that would be anterior to it and that would be achieved through it. If an anterior aim can anticipate the result of the setting-in-motion of the medium, it is in reality already
the existence of the medium which determines the aim in its very possibility. The medium is necessarily contemporary with the aim: it bears the possibility of the aim and actualises it.

“Psychology, sociology, pragmatics, and a certain philosophy of language have in common this presupposition of an instrumental relation between thoughts and language,” writes Jean-François Lyotard. “This relation follows a technological model: thought has ends, language offers means to thought. How can the addressee discern the addressor’s ends from the means of language put to work in the message?”

The technological model he alludes to corresponds to (1). It consists in understanding the medium as intermediary when it instead needs to be thought of in terms of a milieu, an element, in a sense very close to what Lyotard calls a universe: “the addressor must be understood as a situated instance in a phrase universe, on a par with the referent, the addressee, and the sense.” The phrase, as medium, makes an addressor, an addressee, and an address [un destiné] appear. The medium by which this happens, it is true, is always already conditioned by previous media. The medium therefore has a technological and instrumental, prosthetic character, which implies that it is always already the media and the différence existing between them: that the phrase is donation [donation] does not mean it is given [donnée]. That the phrase as medium is also inter-mediary does not signify that it is an available means; on the contrary, since it needs to be interpreted, the phrase is not simply something at one’s disposal.

Thus “[t]he human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence (and of pleasure which accompanies the invention of a new idiom), that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognise that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist.” Now it is in the same way that the pianist is required by the piano, the score, the musical genre, etc., which are all instruments of interpretation, which means: the exposure of idiomatic difference.

The two understandings (1-a) and (2-b) that it is possible to have of the instrument and language correspond to two accounts of the relationship between lan-
guages and instruments, accounts that are always already intertwined.

The first account thinks to possess language and master the instrument. It tends not to allow us “to institute idioms which do not yet exist.” It understands the phrase as a primary univocity and the instrument as a transparent availability, where the plurivocal or un-forseen effects are accidents of the process, inessential parasites. This account (1-a) understands the program as mastery.

The second account understands itself as the interpretation of previous interpretations, and as an interpretation itself interpretable for the future, which is the promise, or the “presenti,” of what happens. What is to come is the true pleasure of instrumental phrasing. In the account (2-b) the program is both less and more than a program; the promise it includes is not that of the addressor, but of the medium. It is on the basis of this that the medium promises that something like a promise may be intended by an addressor, for an addressee.

The relationships indicated by these two accounts are in permanent tension; they are like constitutive “tendencies” of an economy of instrumental interpretation. They constitute a difference that must be maintained between performance and performativity, between program and promise—a difference which is not one of opposition, but of composition.

Therefore the “subject” does not “use” language or the instrument. The subject takes place in the milieu of language and the instrument; the milieu gives place to the subject; which does not stop us from saying that it is only thanks to the subject’s place (or point of view) that the milieu actually takes place.

Language is at its root technological, just as instrumental implementation is always already an act of language. This is why Jean-François Lyotard can say that “phrasein in Greek designates some non-linguistic ways of signifying. In itself—but this sense is never attestable—everything can function as a phrase that would open, even for a short moment, a sort of universe and manifest some senses to be determined.”

If one can say that language is thought, that thought does not distinguish itself from language, does not precede it, does not control it, and only constitutes itself through it inasmuch as it is possessed “by” language, then Western thought—that is to say philosophical, scientific, artistic, or doxological thought—corresponds to
a certain technological state of language, that is, to a certain state of technological law \([\text{droit}]\). This state of law is territorial idiomatic difference, and it is undergoing a profound alteration. Territorial reference is effectively the possibility of characterising idiomatic difference as a natural difference (and also of opposing nature and culture in such a way that the ethnic community appears natural). It is reference to a chthonic origin myth founding communities and “natural” languages.

To the extent that profane linear writing—a reflexive technology—had formalised the conditions for instrumental translation and the interfacing between linguistic idioms, it had already opened onto non-territorial communities, assuring the West of a capacity for global expansion in which technoscience constitutes the essential vector.

The question of translation and of the unity of community, of idiomatic difference as instrumental interpretation, is generalised by the development of optoelectronic technological networks, of programs for the processing of memory applied well beyond the linguistic medium, and by the proliferation of interfaces opening up the possibility for non-territorial technological communities that are not regulated by criteria such as, for example, scientific truth. All of this retro-acts on the understanding that it is possible to have of language itself: language now appears to be one of the technological states of memory, always already informed by its instrumental conditions of interpretation.

Heidegger critiques the instrumentalisation—the cyberneticisation—of language as the elimination of idiomatic difference (it “transforms language into an exchange of news”). This elimination proceeds from a state of affairs characterised by the technological realisation of the principle of non-contradiction, which is then no longer merely a factor in the coherence of apodictic knowledge claims, but the vector of technical power \([\text{pouvoir}]\).

We have argued above that the analysis of logos based on its propositional structure, and excluding its textual environment, was the condition for the cyberneticisation of language. We might add here that idiomatic difference is what distinguishes the semiotic (textual, sequential) dimension of language from its cybernetic dimension.
This distinction does not at all mean that idiomaticity would be something non-instrumental and non-prosthetic in language. Semiotics is as instrumental as cybernetics. Rather, there are two types of **instrumental rules**: some are propositive, while others are what we call dispositive. Some examples of propositive rules are: the propositional syntax of a language, the rules regarding how the pawns of a chess game can move, the register of a musical instrument, the constraints of a programming language. Some examples of dispositive rules are: the rules for the semantic sequences of a lexicon, literature about possible moves in a chess game, musical programs that can be played on an instrument, a particular piece of software in a particular programming language.

**It is not a question of seeking to isolate a non-instrumentality of language or of idioms in general: there are none. Rather, it is one of interrogating the modes of being of instrumentality as such, as containing the conditions for idiomatic differentiation, and the multiple dimensions of what could be called the instrumental condition.**

A musical instrument is a support for an immanent and original grammar of rules. Such a grammar opens infinite possibilities of interpretation.

The instrument is part of a coherent set of fluxes, of which it is one path. One can say, schematically and provisionally, that before the instrument we find matter ready to be instrumentalised, and after it, we find products, instrumentalised or “informed” by the instrument: we are speaking of informed matter, of information.

But matter is always already information: in the example of the musical instrument, matter consists of a text which can be recognised as such, and is thus notated [noté]. It can function just as well as an undefined text, a memorisation without notation but rigorously conserved in the heritage of collective memory and life. As for the product, it’s a question of a formalisation, that is to say also an interpretation, of the matter insofar as it is textual. In its turn, interpretation can be notated, inscribed, carved, or left undefined.

The product can itself become matter for interpretation. While the instrument constitutes the original set of rules for immanent grammars, the product of the instrument constitutes in turn another original set of rules: this is why it is shaped like a text and can itself become matter for instrumental interpretation. There
are three sets of rules here: matter which is only interpretable because it is textually framed by musical rules, which can also be called the musical genres; the instrument as the concretisation of its own rules which constitute a possible path through which a musical genre can manifest itself; and finally, the interpretation as the manifestation of the original grammar of the interpreter, itself available for interpretation.

The instrument informs a matter which, truth be told, would never take place without this information. The matter no more precedes the instrument than it does the performer.

The instrument is the manifest element of a technique that consists in the integration of various levels of rules which are not necessarily recognised as rules. The same goes for rules of language: one who does not know how to write, knows a grammar but not its rules.

Such a technical ensemble constitutes a grammatical domain which is a field of telecommunication, that is to say of interpretation. The interpretation of matter is always an interpretation of memory. The interpretation of memory may be a reduction as much as a translation, and it must even be said that every translation is a reduction. However, such a reduction may also be a “production” of difference: translation tends then to be a transposition. That is to say that the very movement of translation tends to register the idiomatic difference concealed in the translated idiom, enacting its differential power.

Every instrument must be understood as an interface of translation. This is the case for the hammer, which can, for example, be an interface between a coppersmith and copper. The hammer at the same time informs the coppersmith of the state of the copper, and the copper of the state of the coppersmith.

Conversely, every translation, every interpretation, supposes an instrumentality, which doesn’t necessarily present itself or manifest openly as an instrumental technical object. A book, being an interface, always already implies an instrumentality. And broadly speaking, every intermediary is an instrumental interface.

The instrument always inscribes itself in a complex of rules, and it is on the basis of this complex that it can be understood. Outside the complex—one might say in the language of Aristotle—the instrument only exists potentially. The entelechy of
the instrument is the movement of interpretation in all its instances. Considering that it is always an interpretation of rules, the instrumental question is in the end a textual, and at the same time a technological, question.

As we suggested earlier with regard to to memory, instrumental interpretation not only deals with data. In producing norms of interpretation, instrumental interpretation also produces rules of functioning for memory. While it produces them, this does not mean it constates them: this production is performative; not only programmatic, but promising [prometteuse]. The production of rules of memory is not their exteriorisation, but their realisation. This is why it is necessary to speak of an instrumental retroactivity in a sense which follows Jacques Derrida’s analysis of signatures, particularly that of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America:

One cannot decide—and this is the interesting thing, the force and “coup de force” of such a declarative act—whether independence is stated or produced by this utterance. [...] Is it that the good people have already freed themselves in fact and are only stating the fact of this emancipation in [par] the Declaration? Or is it rather that they free themselves at the instant of and by [par] the signature of this Declaration? [...] This obscurity, this undecidability between, let us say, a performative structure and a constative structure, is required to produce the sought-after effect. It is essential to the very positing or position of a right as such [...]. Every signature finds itself thus affected. [...] If it [“the people”] gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer. This signer can only authorize him- or herself to sign once he or she has come to the end—if one can say this of his or her own signature in a sort of fabulous retroactivity.43

This is the essentially technological question of the instituting moment, which becomes particularly critical at a time when communities are decreasingly related to complexes of ethnic regulation (whether of the family, the clan or the “social networks” of the town or the nation). Contemporary media, being in principle global (since their duty is to inform about the state of the world), bring this fabulating retroactivity to life on a daily basis, a retroactivity that is all the more effective in that it produces as many reinterpretations of the entire past as it does contemporary frames of reference.
Moreover, just as Jacques Derrida wrote that speech is always already writing, we could say that life is always already cinema. That is why something like cinematography can produce the rules of common memory that it informs.

In turn, the camera, the instrument of cinematographic interpretation, is a consciousness, as Gilles Deleuze does not hesitate to write:

> Does this mean that for Bergson the cinema is only the projection, the reproduction of a constant, universal illusion? As though we had always had cinema without realising it? But then a whole range of problems arises. Firstly, is not the reproduction of the illusion in a certain sense also its correction? Can we conclude that the result is artificial because the means are artificial? [...] [Cinema] would no longer be just the perfected apparatus of the oldest illusion, but, on the contrary, the organ for perfecting the new reality. [...] We can say of the shot that it acts like a consciousness. But the sole cinematographic consciousness is not us, the spectator, nor the hero; it is the camera—sometimes human, sometimes inhuman or superhuman.

At this stage of the analysis, the question which finally poses itself remains this one: who reads? For whom and by whom is there interpretation? Translation? What are audiences? What then, finally, is the origin of idiomatic difference?

**OF AN ORIGINARY TECHNOLOGICAL COMPLEX**

The reference to an historico-geographical territory, understood as originary, is the production of an origin which gives itself as natural, full, proven, and fundamentally founded—and not as the original case of an hermeneutical and promethean absence of origin—and which thus permits and even implies the unity of a subject.

Territorial unity (the ethnic group, the city, the nation) is defined by the existence of other ethnicities, by the opposition to other, exterior identities, an opposition marked by the existence of borders and the hatred of nomads.

But territorial unity also enables the constitution of interior rival identities (a rivalry regulated by ethnic programs) which also refer to historically dated territorial origins. These identities come from family histories which are their imme-
memorial but chthonic origin, their Geschlecht, assured by the genericity of a name.

The explosion of ethnic reference is also that of the identity of the subject. It is not by “chance,” nor is it only due to a supposed law of harmony between scientific discoveries and technical “progress,” that the opto-electronic networks are multiplying at the same time as associations of “surrogate mothers.” The question is the same as that of Argument 2 for Les Immatériaux: “How should we understand the maternity of sense?”

The disappearance of geographical borders is also the appearance of idiomatic opacities (originalities) of a new type: the general question of translation is first of all this one.

It is in the context of this problematic configuration that we asked ourselves in the introduction if there could exist something like a natural memory, which amounts to asking whether there could exist an idiomatic difference that would not always already be technological.

Does the reader, the viewer, the listener, when auto-programming a book, a film, or a disk, process the data stored on the media-support? And if this is the case, are we dealing with one or several processing programs? Where do they come from? And finally, can we really talk about auto-programming after all?

Or should we consider mnemonic data-supports as already being programs with which the reader “processes” the “data” of “her” memory? And furthermore, is there anything in that memory which is not already “the” reader? How, under these conditions, would “the” reader not already be “multiple” readers?

Should we not say, strictly speaking, that the disc, the phonograph, the auditor’s sense of hearing, the auditor herself—in her capacity as individual memory but also as the representative of various memory networks (ethnic or otherwise)—and finally the music as such (if indeed music could take place as such), are cases of organs (instruments), and instances of the mnemotechnical complex that constitutes a medium?

Is there a program that ultimately manages this media complex? Is there not, on the contrary, an original de-fault of such a program? A de-fault which would be like the promise of the infinity of idiomatic programs which are to come? A de-
fault that would be the very reason for the interactive interpretation of memory’s movement, interfering in these multiple interfaces? But can such a promise be heard otherwise than through the establishment of programs?

All these questions are summed up in a question of reading.

What must be grasped is an idiomatic complex, not an originary and simple unity—which the differentiality of the idiomatic difference itself immediately excludes. This complex is characterised by a movement of interpretation. It includes various instances, none of which precede any of the others as they are found always already co-implicated (and complicated) in a medium.

Let us call this the idiotextual complex, the idiom always being a memory, and this memory, a text. The idiotext contains at once the questions of the interpretation and of the audience, that is to say of the skill to hear [savoir-écouter] and of the capacity to understand [pouvoir-entendre], which is also the power of making understand, that is to say, of interpretation. This is the question of translation.

The interfacing [interfaçage] process supposes languages of access (whether or not they are explicit). With the multiplication of technological networks and of non-ethnic idioms, interfacing and translation processes pose problems that become more serious as the “transversality” of objects increases. This is the case not only in the domain of scientific research, but also, for example, in the management of public affairs (including themes such as the synergy of actors, and of local development). This necessary transversality, combined with the absence of a common, universal, and non-prosthetic language, is one of the biggest difficulties posed to state geographic technostructures by the technological complexification of memory-data and their modes of processing.

The interfacing process signifies the programmed mediatisation of the targeted publics by the idiom (a programming which is not necessarily deliberate). Indeed, one has no audience if one does not cultivate the skill to listen [savoir-écouter] and the capacity to translate [pouvoir-traduire]—with all the difficulties and simplifications that translation implies. The necessity of cultivating one’s public (and also of knowing how to limit it) is often confused with levelling down and “vulgarising” language at the level of the most common—that is to say, of the least idiomatic. This is to ignore everything about the interpretation of memory as complexification. On the contrary, those who do not integrate this mediated
dimension of the public interpretation of memory are doomed to disappear.

This has for a long time been one of the main preoccupations of the builders of computing machines. The most well known example is that of the Macintosh microcomputer: the machine’s access control list (the protocol) is programmed by the machine itself.₅₀ But the machine is only one case of the technological complex. Human groups, institutions, and individuals as such, are also complexes and interfaces. And as such, they require access protocols [langages d’accès] which must be programmed, according to diverse modalities that cannot be reduced to the modalities at work in informatics. This question of access to the idiom (to the signifi-er) is that of appropriation, or of publication; of the becoming-communal [devenir-commun] of what is private, of what is outside the community [hors du commun]. These terms are altered by cultural industries and the new editorial function, and are redistributed by the technological conditions of publication.

But the idiom itself is always already an access protocol, a relay-form. The “author” of a text is always already the interpreter of another text—that is to say, she is a performer, and in this sense, a reader, rather than an author. What is appropriated is not her own [le propre]: the idiom is not property [propriété], but rather the improper, the de-fault, the deficiency—let us call this the hermetico-promethean “technological condition.” This “appropriation” of the improper is superbly illustrated by some famous fictional characters—for example, Charlot [the Tramp], whose de-faults such as his limp, his rags and his misery arouse much sympathy and joy, feelings that in turn actualise the movement of the medium.₅¹

Given the problems posed, for example, by artificial intelligence, and notably by the automatic generation of literary texts, we evidently cannot bypass the question of the subject, of what was called the “author.” However, this subject-user of instruments, the performer and/or author of programs, is neither the author nor the performer of the promise which carries the authority of the program in its text. The question is one of knowing where this authority—the authority of an idiom—comes from. We posit the principle that the author is a derived, rather than originary, instance, taking seriously Calvino’s argument:

And so the author vanishes—that spoiled child of ignorance—to give place to a more thoughtful person, a person who will know that the author is a machine, and who will know how this machine works.₅²
The idiotext is a prosthetic memory, mobilised by what we call “the consistent.” The consistent is a case of textuality. The idiotext is a memory affected by its textuality.

It is a memory that only writes itself through reading, and only reads itself through writing. “Memory” here is not at all psychologically determined. We can easily give examples of idiotexts: Western memory, with its marble monuments, libraries, roads, its networks of all kinds, its stocks, people, etc.—but just as well, Monsieur Dupond, with his books, furniture, buildings, instruments, networks, body, etc., or even philosophy, with its texts, syntaxes, lexicons, histories, institutions, or its relations with the sciences, the arts, politics, and so on.

One can never speak of an idiotext “as such.”

If, for example, I speak about the French language, I will always speak about a particular French, and from a particular point of view. A French from Paris or from Toulouse, the French of mathematics or of the bourgeoisie, Proust’s French or eighteenth-century French. It can be from the doxic point of view, from the Parisian doxic point of view, or from the linguistic point of view; from the stylistic linguistic point of view, or from the sociological point of view, and so on. The very fact that I speak of the idiotext already implies a certain point of view adopted “on” it: I could just as well sing this idiotext, or dance it, or put it to music, or paint it, or (why not?) play it on a chess game.

Moreover, if I speak of “me” or “someone else,” this will always involve me speaking, philosophising, eating, or being-French; in other words, playing. And because I speak French, I do philosophy from the perspective of a certain tradition, I eat according to the local customs, etc. Being French-speaking, in short, means playing games in a particular way.

All these are “constructions,” “technics,” and are in turn idiotexts, that is to say, idioms, which are equally texts, networks, instruments, interfaces and programs. And a program, for example a book or a musical score, opens a prosthetic memorial community of readers, and only exists by opening such a community. As such, it is already an idiotext.
PROGRAMS OF MEMORY, EPOKHE OF IMAGINATION

We have proposed that memory is realisation (and not simply exteriorisation in Leroi-Gourhan’s sense), the essentially techno-logical character of which is also derealising.

This realisation, as global becoming, is also the mark of a non-ethnicity (a non-determination of ethnic programs) felt first of all as technological universality and “decline.” This raises the question of a technological corrosion of idioms, at least insofar as they would be ethnically—and by the same token, psychologically—constituted and intended. This goes beyond the persistence of an idiomatic differentiation in the global technological configuration.

It is assumed that the ICTs, the pretext of these matters, follow an archaeological movement of history and politicity, which marks its beginning as the advent of critical memory (in crisis) as it is accomplished as a technological phenomenon in linear writing. The hypothesis is: linear writing is the technical condition (hear “condition” as in the phrase “human condition”) and, more precisely, an epoch of this condition, characterised by a form of textual repeatability which opens, as linear formality, a crisis of the common heritage of memory (and of its interpretation). This is also the beginning of critique, that is to say, of the political life of the ethos—where the preservation of memory, which is always already technological, is also its production (beyond its simple reproduction), which currently implies a crisis of political right [droit] in technological universality.

It is, consequently, a question of thinking the relation of reflexivity to tekhnē (a general conception of tekhnē totally bound up with writing, which is not limited to writing in the usual sense of the word) and of operating an anamnesis of the relationship of philosophy to technics, especially with regard to the question of instrumentality, such that it does not result in the opposition of ends and means. This problematic field is situated in what was named the originary prosthetic complex (idiotext), for which reference to Aristotle and to the thought of the actual and the potential, as thought of the meson (milieu), would be privileged.

Various observations can then be made.

*In the first place*, the question of the knowledge of which we speak, under the name *reflexivity*, remains open. We want to insist (if such an insistence is needed) on
the fact that linear writing is not posited as the cause of reflexivity, primarily because we are not talking about reflexivity in general, but about critical reflexivity (in the political sense of the term). Linear writing could then appear as the mirror stage of humanity in general; but again, that is not what we mean, unless we specify that this would be the “mirror stage of political humanity.” This is because, first of all, there is no humanity in general; second, because humanity is not political in general; and finally, because any idea of a “childhood” of humanity, whether political or not, should only be taken as a metaphor. This means that linear writing is not even the cause of the criticality in reflexivity. Criticality finds its “cause” in reflexivity itself—understood as the interpretation of memory by itself—before any other determination. Here attention should be focused on proto-political poetics, especially in Homer, as the _polis_ seems to be anticipated in the _Iliad_ (the “banquet where all are equal,” the circle—_agora_—where the warriors debate). It is certainly also a question of the passage to politics as _ēpokhē_, that is to say the suspension of strictly ethnic programs. It is a general question of the _epoch_ that leads us here to a more general question of the _tekhnē/causality relation_.

_In the second place_, from a Kantian perspective—where the beautiful, the feeling of beauty and the faculty of judgment, as analysed in the judgment of taste, specify reflexivity—the question of art (_tekhnē_) becomes the guide for a reflection on reflexivity before any other epochal determination, especially any critical determination that can be understood from a purely historico-political point of view. Indeed, if we hold on to a view of reflexivity as something produced by linear writing and/or politicity, if we reduce reflexivity to criticality or to its political form of crisis, pre-political art would become incomprehensible, or art in general would go beyond the scope of reflexivity. Homer, who is already in “literature,” is not yet in linear writing, nor in politicity (even if we find him there retroactively). Moreover, how can we correctly appreciate Lascaux without seeing there the perfection of nascent reflexivity in the “birth of art”? Bataille notes that formerly, before the discovery of Lascaux,

we were accustomed to thinking of the Greeks as the first to have all the marks and all the titles of modern man. I wish here but to indicate that, Lascaux having been found, this critical moment may be situated many thousands of years earlier than we once thought. Resolutely, decisively, man wrenched himself out of the animal’s condition and into “manhood”: that abrupt, most important of transitions left an image of itself blazoned upon the rock in this cave. The miracle occurred at Lascaux.
This other **proto-moment** (which as such can only be a fiction, which is its strength) in fact needs to be analysed thematically according to our previous remarks—and it needs to be disengaged from a metaphysical vision that stills seems to govern Bataille’s very beautiful text, especially where the art of *homo sapiens*, as play, succeeds and is opposed to the useful **work** of *homo faber*. It is already the question of technics and of the two faces of the universal which confront each other here.

These two clusters of questions here are the outline of a **general thematic of memory as realisation, of the production of memory as imagination in forgetfulness, by the suspension of programs and the programming of this suspense**; a general question of the épokhê which is also that of discipline and of work in this sense (*askesis, mêlê, praxis*), and consequently of the instrument (*organon*). The imagination supplements the de-fault of memory; it is thereby the ultimate memory, which is more than ever artificial, and made in the image of the outside.

Mnemosyne is the mark of the improbable, the unhoped-for coming of the immemorial; chance. Poetry is improbable (Yves Bonnefoy, *L'improbable*). It is memory because it is forgotten (Maurice Blanchot, “Forgetful Memory”).

Poetry represents one of the typical forms of divine possession and madness, the state of “enthusiasm” in the etymological sense of the word. The poet, through being possessed by the Muses, is the interpreter of Mnêmosynê, just as the prophet, through being inspired by Apollo, is the interpreter of that god.

It is a question of a **memory of non-lived time**, of a recollection [*sous-venir*] of the immemorial, of the **more-than-human character of memory**.

The bard and the diviner share the same gift of “second sight,” a privilege for which they have had to pay with their vision. They are blind in the light of day, but they can see what is invisible. The god who inspires them shows them, in a kind of revelation, the truth that eludes the sight of men. This double vision relates in particular to the parts of time that are inaccessible to mortal creatures, namely, what happened in bygone days and what is yet to come.
The poet is not short-sighted; he is not Epimetheus (the reverse side of Prometheus, who is foresight, his brother makes possible this foresight by making it bearable, through a more essential thoughtlessness only revealed afterwards [après-coup]: Epimetheus represents both the unconsciousness of danger and the epimētheia: the science of coming later). He is more than the reverse side of Prometheus: he is the knowledge of the identity of the two—he is more than foreseeing. The one who foresees remembers. But the immemorial, which escapes foresight, comes to the poet because he forgets what remains foreseeable: the presence of the non-lived past comes from a discipline, from a mélețē which is also tekhnē and a work without probable goal, from an apprenticeship of repetition without ends which brings exhilaration and enthusiasm.

Improvisation is poetry par excellence: unexpected memory, proclaiming the improbable.

Nor does the use of improvisation in the course of the song preclude his fidelity to a poetic tradition preserved from one generation to the next. On the contrary, the rules of oral composition insist that the bard have at his command not only a whole body of themes and tales but also a technique of formulaic diction that comes to him ready-made and involves the use of traditional expressions, predetermined combinations of words, and established rules of versification.59

In addition, this technique involves what are in a way programs of the improbable, the unexpected; matrices of an enthusiasm which is thus pre-textualised, and which is also épokhē, the suspension of programs of voluntary memory and of habits. It is a inhabitation according to disembodiment of the close, of the familiar. In the course of its interpretation, the traditional poetic program suspends all programs. It programs only a clearing of memory, an effacement of foreseeable traces, and it effaces itself. There is double vision because there is double memory and the redoubling of forgetfulness. This duplicity proceeds from a first de-fault: there is vision thanks to the lack of a foreseeable organ of sight; the poetic program is the prosthesis for a handicap of sense; the imagination is the redoubling of this handicapped memory and the power of its images. Homer, blind before history, bequeaths to it his imagination and the authority of his memory—he could only understand history because he could not see it.

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Between Mnemosyne and Prometheus, Hermes moves on the river Lethe, forgetfulness.

The improbable memory, the one that has not been lived, is the one which signifies and authorises. It is only because of this memory that foreseeable memory is worth anything. This improbable memory is the theme of the dialogue _Meno_, where for the first time Plato, in the story of Persephone's myth, suggests that the only question is reminiscence and the authority of a memory which is unexplainable because it is literally and radically improbable, and of which the proof could in no way be given—this is the reason why recitation of an imaginary history is required.

The myth of Persephone responds to two aspects of an aporia that _Meno_ submits to Socrates. The first and most famous has always occasioned—as it has been taken up in various forms—the great moments of _philosophical épokhé_ (it is the _skepsis_ par excellence): it is not possible to find what one is searching for, unless one has already identified what it is, and is therefore not truly searching. If one did not already know what one seeks to establish in its being, then even if one found it, one would not be able to recognise it, because one would not know what it is. The second aspect of the aporia concerns the terms of the dialectical definition: they remain undefined; it is therefore with indefinite terms that one builds definitions. They are not strictly speaking definitions (because they are not definitive), but conventions between players (in the dialectic, understood as a game of rules).

To the first question, Socrates' answer is simple: what we seek, we have forgotten. Knowledge is recognition, the _anamnesis_ of _another time_, immemorial for the memory of lived experience. Reminiscence takes place around a problem that is the result of a dialogue (between thinkers, as well as of thought with itself, whereby it is thus _redoubled_). Mythically speaking, it seems that the soul lived another life; it is in this sense immortal. But in truth, it is the life of the _logos_ as memory that we are talking about, a memory that could not have been lived because it has no place _in_ the soul, but is the place _of_ the soul, as _logos_.

To the second question, Socrates replies that there are conventions (the undefined terms of the definition) that coincide with the definition. It is with these conventions that _anamnesis_ emerges for the dialecticians. These conventions bring the dialecticians together by imposing themselves as terms of _authority_. Plato distinguishes two modalities of convention: the contingent (received ideas,
pro-grammed by habit, which the sophists abuse) and the suitable [convient], which would be like the true fruit of the dialogue in its movement, the infinitive result of the dialectical definition. In other words, it is necessary to distinguish between conventional conventions [conventions convenues] and suitable conventions [conventions convenantes]. The question is that of their origin [provenance], which the myth answers, or rather to which it responds (because a myth would not constitute an answer). The reminiscent dialogue is the production of a movement—and of a feeling—of the origin in the logos as being its necessity. The dialogue in this sense is maieutic, where the interlocutor is always the midwife of the speech of the other: it is a question of giving birth to the logos from what it conveys and who conveys it. The suitable [convenable] dialogue is the one in which, in the forgetting of the conventional and the programmed, improbable memory gives itself. (In Aristotle there will be a similar question of axioms, in the Second Analytics, and of the credible, in the Rhetoric.)

Anamnesis is then the maieutic of a memory common to partners in dialogue but immemorial because not lived by them. For this reason, such a memory is never able to be definitively established. It is advent because it is épokhē, forgetting (the confusion and torpor of the slave in the dialogue Meno): this is why the authentic dialogue is epoch-making [fait époque]. This understanding is inscribed in the oldest Greek tradition: anamnesis.

Through the contact it establishes with the first ages, the divine aiōn, primeval time, it enables [the poet] to escape from the time of the fifth race, so fraught with fatigue, wretchedness, and anxiety. For Hesiod, Mnēmosynē, she who makes one remember, is also she who erases the memory of evils, the lēsmosunē kakōn. The necessary counterpart to recollection of the past is the “forgetting” of present time.” “[I]n her association with Lēthē, she is an infernal power, operating on the threshold of the afterlife. The beyond to which she gives the initiate access is identified with the world of the dead.”

Later, however, the épokhē will become Plato’s askēsis and lusis, no longer understood only in the sense of the “epochal,” “suspending” practice, but as detachment with regard to mortal life and the expectation of a return of the soul to immortal life. The myth of Persephone, whose mythical form was the mark of an original aporia, becomes the dogma of the immortality of the soul. This evolution in Plato’s work had been anticipated by the mystical tendencies of the tradition
itself:

Mnemosyne has undergone a transformation. She is no longer the one who sings of the primeval past and the genesis of the cosmos. Now she is the power on whom souls depend for their destiny after death, and as such she is connected with the mystical history of individuals and with the transformations that occur in their successive incarnations. By the same token, what she brings to mortal creatures is no longer the secret of origins but the means to reach the end of time and to put an end to the cycle of generations.\footnote{61}

The Platonic evolution takes place under the effect of the enigma of the story [\textit{récit}] and its retroactive power, its mimetic and duplicitous authority (which affects art and tekhnē in general) for which there is no criterion (other than “performative” chance). This enigmatic power would be misused first and foremost by the sophists and then, through them, the politicians would misunderstand it. The legitimacy of the story becomes that of the instrument at the service of the dialectician, and no longer that of the elementary milieu of maieutics. The essential point turns around the definition, and the authority shifts to the apodictic regime of the science of the One (\textit{orthotēs}).

Plato therefore breaks with the Greek tradition insofar as mortality, which is the Promethean condition, marks the whole paradigm of memory configured by Mnemosyne.

\textit{Epokhē} becomes \textit{askēsis}, and the latter detaches itself from all tekhnē. Memory and imagination move towards a determination (as faculties) which is psycho-logical, not logical, and even less techno-logical. The de-fault of an organ of sense, which is the exigency of the \textit{ēpokhē} as such, becomes the fault of the body, the prison of the soul and the support of a wild, unpredictable imagination.

**THE CULTURE OF PROGRAMS, MEMORY PRODUCTION, AND ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY**

The economic and cultural crisis, of which the ICTs have become a kind of obsessional symptom, calls for a profound “modernisation” of major infrastructures, primarily the productive and cultural infrastructures. A major discourse on the ongoing mutation is taking place. It emphasises the need to make every effort
to adapt ourselves, highlighting delays and the obsolescence of the apparatuses of production. This is the discourse of industrial redeployment strategies, which calls for the development of professional qualifications around new technologies. The redeployments in question cannot take place without causing social conflicts, and the new technologies are not necessarily understood as a benefit for those they disqualify, which may be whole regions as well as individuals. Are these technologies creating new jobs that would compensate for the losses? Many doubt it today, which raises problems for the often-presented argument for the necessity of socialisation: the economic argument according to which we should learn to become “literate” in new technologies, with the explicit aim of finding a job. This argument characterises the need to acquire this new knowledge exclusively in terms of a productive finality.

From the sombre economic perspective, these discourses seek to promote a new technological conviviality, or emphasise the possibilities for individual autonomy opened up by the portable hardware being made available to a broad public (home computing and video), or the “interactive” possibilities of future networks. All of these appear more as compensatory phenomena than as future realities.

At the same time, the Ministry of National Education is developing a computer-literacy plan, with the possibility of an extension to the audio-visual sphere in certain cases. This is in response to the imperatives of professionalisation, but also of adaptation to the necessity of a new basic technoculture (which is not necessarily inscribed in a schema of strict professionalisation).

The thematic of “new technologies,” which is developing in the context of a globalisation of stakes, organisations and strategies—and essentially within the economic perspective of intense international competition—is understood primarily in relation to the question of employment.

This general framework generates various rearrangements, some of which are quite paradoxical:
— The economic question is also directly cultural, and even aesthetic: it is primarily a question of producing knowledge and information, that is to say “immaterial goods” [*biens immatériaux*], software, programs of all kinds—so that at the same time as we seek to eliminate spending considered unproductive, we invest heavily in the “spiritual.” The question is of knowing how, and under what conditions, an increase of “spiritual production” is possible, especially if
technoculture—which is its milieu—must be thought from the sole viewpoint of productivity.

— At the same time as we witness globalisation, localisation takes place at various levels of management, leadership, and decision-making. This is true in industry in general, where we divide up large production units and where, in the name of flexibility, deregulation and privatisation of public monopolies is advocated. In the context of decentralisation in France, local collectives are put in decision-making positions, especially from the viewpoint of national policy regarding ITCs (cable networks).

— These tendencies of the public sector towards disengagement are nevertheless accompanied by a great interventionism of states (in France as well as, for example, the USA), which manage and subsidise research and the necessary restructuring. In France, however, this interventionism seems to focus mainly on the material infrastructure, while there is an explicit disengagement with the content, with the danger of a separation of these two aspects (containers and contents). This danger is also that of opening up new markets to international program industries without a simultaneous intake of new national skills.

— The social bond has to be reformed around the technological vector, which would become the matrix of local communities in the global community. New media engender a synthesis and a complexification of traditional stakes: economy, culture, political and social life. Social development, understood as a project of local community, is now conceived essentially as coming from technological development, which is a very new fact in the history of communities. With this change there appears the concrete danger of a process of social (economic and cultural) division, again on the two planes of the local-national and the global, according to a double dichotomy:

— North/South
— Literate (i.e. active and even hyper-active)/illiterate (i.e. inactive or under-active).

What has developed is an essentially productivist point of view on the necessity of a new techno-culture (in which we see the economists legislate on the conditions of the transmission and development of knowledge). Broadly speaking, one could say that the argument upheld up is ultimately the following: “The economic environment has changed. To adapt the (national) productive machine to this change is to adapt the skills of the individuals who compose this machine.” The individuals are here like the cells of a great living being, which would be the productive machine.
That such an evolution is seen as required is a quasi-biological point of view, thought in Darwinian terms. To adapt individuals is to modify (or manipulate) the genetic code of cells. This point of view is, consciously or not, based on a prevailing socio-biological ideology, and influenced by ecological metaphors that are not devoid of pertinence, but are only metaphors and not concepts. A business, a market, a technology, and even culture in general, would live in an “ecological niche”; the “technological milieu” would be a living milieu, and this living milieu would be determined by biological laws common to plants, animals and human societies, where the key word is adaptation. We do not disclaim all interest in this model for thinking technics (André Leroi-Gourhan, to whom we frequently refer, speaks of a quasi-biological development of technics). But we do think it is necessary to state limits: if we are dealing with technologies of memorisation, with a transformation of the conditions of the transmission and the development of knowledge, with reflexivity, and with the symbolico-aesthetic dispositifs in which all these consist, then the biological viewpoint evoked in a vague way by the terms “adaptation” and “learning” leads purely and simply to failure if it is not placed in its proper context, and if the issue is not thought in an appropriately reflective way. In other words, the stakes are not only those of optimising the efficiency of the productive machine—and we must even say that they are not primarily this. On the contrary, the optimisation of productivity is conditioned by principles which in essence escape productive finality.

The discourse on the “new technologies” is also dominated by a thematic of rupture. It is stated in several discourses:

The discourse of production and the “technological challenge,” as we have seen, follows a biological model, and calls for the acquisition of skills to conform to new norms of production.

The discourse of the socio-cultural activist aims for the appropriation of the “new means of expression” by individuals and social groups for their emancipation, and the establishment of a “new social regulation.” It constitutes a sort of technological messianism.

The discourse of techno-social marketing legitimates itself with reference to the notion of social experimentation. Its concern is to bring forth new forms of consumption rather than of production—that is, a “social need” that would allow the creation of new services and ensure the “scaled growth” of networks (in other words, their commercial viability).

For the discourse of pedagogy, the “new means of communication” extend
the pedagogical power of teachers (but they are not understood as matrices of new forms of knowledge).

None of these discourses take into account the continuity of the ICTs with the knowledge of books, understood as the technological processing of memory through the instrumental (and institutional) practice of writing.

Today, states are tasked with equipping the communities they represent with the capacities needed to produce programs of all types. This issue is felt in various ways, but is well expressed by the stated desire to make new generations widely “literate” to ICT, especially informatics.

We should reflect on the pertinence of applying the metaphor “literate” to techniques other than linear writing.

Writing already constitutes a technology for the processing of memory, and not only of its conservation. This processing requires processing programs, which are in this case textual, literary, political, legal, administrative, and scientific. We can say retroactively that learning to write is learning to program; that is to say, to produce (at the same time as to read) texts—and it’s also learning to think in a certain mode of thought. The notion of program should be widely extended without erasing the differences which characterise the diversity of programs. However, whether these are books, musical scores, records, radio program grids, newspaper mock-ups, movies, games, or computer programs, they all always assume an instrumental practice applied to a material that it informs, which results in information that is also memory data, at the same time stored and produced by its formalisation.

To learn to program does not here mean “to learn a language” in the sense that in informatics one would learn an access code and a set of procedures (protocols), but rather to learn to analyse—or in other words, to formalise and instrumentalise—memory. The applications of informatics in teaching a language make this aspect apparent: the use of scripts, narrative sequences stereotypically describing micro-worlds (via MOP, memory organisation packets), shows the language student formal regularities, narrative rules that linear writing does not make directly evident, and which require from the student more rigour in the formalisation—that is to say, in the analysis—of her statements (those she writes as well as those she reads). In the techniques of the moving image, the question of the program
presents itself in many ways, and first of all in terms of editing, which constitutes
the formal (for it is instrumentalised) implementation of rules of sequencing
[règles d’enchaînement], as in the previous case. These formalisations, and the
insights that their practice implies, are made possible by, and can be identified
because of, the repetitive nature of the technologies which authorise them: it is
because they can be repeated that programs uncover the regularities they pro-
duce by revealing them (like the judge produces documents in the investigation
of a file). The same goes for linear writing: the literal conservation of a sentence
and the reading it necessarily implies not only allow, but require, that we wonder
about its regularity.

However, we do not wonder enough about the profoundly instrumental character
of the relationship that a literate individual maintains with his or her memory.
Public education and the literacy that supports it are so well integrated into our
cultural practices that they are second nature. However, our access to language,
mediated by these practices and institutions (among the most significant of mod-
ern states), which requires many years of coaching and learning, is entirely tech-
nological. This is a reality which tends to completely escape us.

Yet the ideal of public education is recent: it is Republican. It became an official
ideal of power with the French Revolution, and an institutional reality with Jules
Ferry.

In Republican idealism, only a literate, educated subject is a true citizen, because
they are a person likely capable of making a choice, that is to say an épokhē. The
institution of secular education, free and compulsory, is also the right and the
duty of all to access memory technologically—a technological access that is
a right to emancipation from the traditional and dominant programs. An access
whose ideal is speculation, that is to say, a critical thinking constitutive of the
Republican individual fit to pronounce a political choice, as well as to produce an
alternative.

If the great nineteenth century social project of literacy was led by a humanist dis-
course of emancipation of individuals and of social progress, inherited from the
Revolution, it is clear that it responded in the first place to economic imperatives:
at the time of its development, industrial society needed to fight against illiteracy,
which became a major hindrance to its requirements for production (such as the
establishment of means of social regulation). We may think that Jules Ferry had
not essentially intended to make the working masses more critical. And yet, this literacy could be achieved only by way of the development of literary practices perfectly irreducible to pure efficiency requirements. Literacy is only possible by including the highest forms of the practices that it produces, which are essentially reflexive. Literacy does not endow the subject with a means supplementary to those it already has: it constructs it as this subject. Learning to write is an instrumental practice, but one which does not aim at the mastery of a means of power. Rather, it aims at the constitution of a reflexive subject in the political sense of the term, which only constitutes itself effectively through the practice of this instrument of knowledge. The instrumental practice is the central issue.

We will not linger over many objections which could be made to this “ICT-literacy project” (and notably this one: the socialisation of writing by public instruction was preceded by three thousand years of practices restricted to private tutoring which have prepared for this “massive” appropriation, etc.). In order to conclude, we want to say that if the question of the production of memory and imagination is that of the ἐποχή, and of practices of which it is the result—practices which, in modernity, the academic institution is itself the mark—then this institution, in its ideal of emancipation, addresses itself to a citizen, that is to say to a subject belonging to a city defined by the existence of walls or borders. It would be a question today of cultivating the “epochal” power of communities, of forming “neo-technological” citizens. The subject of the media is perhaps not that of the Enlightenment and Republican ideals, because the media overcome the walls of households as well as of cities: the “subject” of the media is without doubt no longer a citizen properly speaking.

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NOTES

1. All explanatory notes are the translators’. We are grateful for the many helpful comments and suggestions on this translation given by Jon Roffe, Arne De Boever, and Jason E. Smith.

2. The full French text is available online: http://www.persee.fr/doc/reso_0751-7971_1986_num_4_16_1204

3. In particular, this translation has benefited from comparison with a few passages in Stephen Barker’s translation of Stiegler’s *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

4. The original French gives the acronym NTC for “nouvelles technologies de communication.” While it would have been possible for us to keep this as an acronym for the equivalent English phrase “new technologies of communication,” for the sake of contemporary clarity and readability we have chosen to substitute the familiar English acronym ICT (Plural: ICTs), which stands for “information and communication technology.”

5. The French term “dispositif” is sometimes translated as “device,” “apparatus,” or “set-up.” We have chosen to leave it untranslated as it is becoming well-known in the community of Anglophone scholars through the works of philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Giorgio Agamben.

6. In translating “informatique” and related terms we have followed Stephen Barker’s precedent in his translation of *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*: “The French term informatique originally referred strictly to the computer; by the end of the 1990s it came to mean something more general: the virtualizing of information by—but also beyond—the computer; therefore, I have chosen to translate l’informatique as ‘informatics’ rather than ‘computers’ or even ‘computer science.’” (249). In the interests of consistency we will generally therefore use, for example, “informatics” rather than “computing” to translate such terms, but—especially considering the dating of the research presented in this paper to the nineteen-eighties—the predominance of the sense of “computing” should be borne in mind when such terms are used.


8. While context has occasionally demanded otherwise, for the most part we have employed the following conventions established by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins in their translation of Stiegler’s *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): “The French terms ‘une technique’ and ‘des techniques,’ referring to one or more individual, specialized ‘techniques,’ are translated as ‘technique’ and ‘techniques.’ The French ‘la technique,’ referring to the technical domain or to technical practice as a whole, as system or result, is translated as ‘technics’ or ‘the technical.’” (280)

9. Stiegler’s French terms here are “droit” (right or law) and “fait” (fact). Here and in other sections of the article he is referring to the old legal distinction between de jure and de facto, and to the important philosophical sense was given to this distinction by Immanuel Kant in distinguishing between the questions quid facti? and quid juris? The former question: “by what fact?,” concerns experience and is the question asked by the kind of empirical deduction which, according to Kant, was employed by philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume. By contrast, Kant’s own method of transcendental deduction focuses on the latter question: “by what right, law, or principle?,” or in other words, how can the legitimacy of a claim be established? (See Kant’s *Cri-
We have translated *droit* variously as “right” or “law,” depending on context, although it is not always entirely clear which would be preferable, and the confluence of these terms—as well as the notions of “principle” and “rule” which are also often implied—should be kept in mind. Stiegler’s main point is to argue that new technologies (ICT) are problematizing the traditional distinction between *droit* and *fait,* in all these senses, both legal and philosophical.

15. “Operational sequence” [*chaine opératoire*] is a key term in Leroi-Gourhan’s *Gesture and Speech* and in the wider anthropological discourse that it influenced. It refers to the step-by-step technical process involved in the production and use of artifacts through material actions, including the social and cultural dimensions of such a process. In his introduction to the English translation of *Gesture and Speech,* Randall White explains that “[for] Leroi-Gourhan such operational sequences constitute the building blocks of technology, indeed of culture. They are culturally or ethnically conditioned and highly structured but through repetition and conditioning at a young age become more-or-less subconscious. Whether these operational sequences structure the fabrication of stone tools, the manufacture of personal ornaments, or the construction of painted and engraved underground sanctuaries, they are the focus of analysis. For archaeologists they represent an accessible entry to social organization and cosmology. But these operational sequences often remain unverbalized and unrecognized by those who practice them” (xviii).
21. The French expression “*droit de cité*” translated here refers to the right to citizenship.
23. See note 29 for some of the resonances of meaning which may be heard here.
24. The concepts of “constative” and “performative” derive from J. L. Austin’s philosophy of language. Constative utterances are statements of fact. With constatives there is a distinction between the statement and the fact itself, such that the statement may be true or false in relation to the fact. By contrast, performative utterances do not state a fact, but are the performance of an action. For example, “I promise.” For Austin, a clear-cut distinction between these types of utterance is only preliminary, and he argues that there is a performative dimension to all utterances. In addition to his well-known book *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), see Austin’s paper “Performative-Constative” in Charles E. Caton (ed.), *Philosophy and Ordinary Language* (University of Illinois Press, 1963), 22–54. Notably, this is a translation by G.J. Warnock of an article which originally appeared in French: “Performatif-Constatif” in *Cahiers de Royaumont, Philosophie No. IV, La Philosophie Analytique* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1962), 271–304. Stiegler’s characterisation of the constative as metaphysical likely draws on Jacques Derrida’s discussion of Austin in “Signature, Event, Context” in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass.
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
25. Gérard Granel, course notes.
29. Armand Mattelart and Yves Stourdze, Technologie, Culture et Communication: Rapport remis à Jean-Pierre Chevènement, ministre d'Etat, ministre de la Recherche et de l'industrie. La Documentation Française, 1983.
30. Le moment instituteur. The French “instituteur” is from the Latin “instituer,” implying something foundational/formalising/organising/regulating and administrating. Stiegler seems to be punning with these meanings and with the meaning of “instituteur” in the lexical field of education, where it is used to refer to a primary school teacher. We are taught by formalisation, regulation, and initiation: the “instituting moment” can be understood as a key moment of both instituting and teaching, in these senses. It can also be understood as linking with “institution” in the social and political sense of the term.
35. This translates “questionnance,” a French neologism.
40. Lyotard, The Differend, 13 (section 23).
41. Présent refers both to the “present” timeline and the idea of a gift.
42. It is important to note here that the French interpretation can mean both “interpretation” in the English sense, as what we do when we seek to understand a text, and “performance” as this term would be used in a musical context. In these passages both these senses are intertwined as Stiegler develops a thesis on the textuality of musical instruments.
45. Deleuze, Cinema 1, 8.
46. Deleuze, Cinema 1, 20.

47. Stiegler is referencing a document for the exhibition Lyotard directed, Les Immatériaux, held at the Georges Pompidou Centre, 29 March—15 July, 1985. This document is available in the Bibliothèque Kandinsky. The relevant passage reads: “The materiels [hardware] do not cease to complexify themselves. A line was crossed when their brains were made to operate with digital information, without analogy with their origin. It’s as if a filter has fallen between things and us, a screen of numbers. A colour, a sound, a matter, a pain, a star, are reproduced as numerical indices of very precise identifications. These encoder-decoders inform us of much more ungraspable realities.

In the end we have analysed and reconstituted good and beautiful matter itself in complex formulas. Reality is made of indiscernible elements organized by laws of structure (matrices) on inhuman scales of space and time. How could the question of the origin of these innumerable messages and of their destination not consequently arise? Can we still believe that we are their special addressees? To what end do we constantly attempt to grasp, to decipher, and to produce novelties if we do not think thus to honour their donator? How should we understand the maternity of sense? [Qu’en est-il de la maternité du sens]?”

48. We have here followed the convention introduced by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins in their translation of Stiegler’s Technics and Time vol. 1: The Fault of Epimetheus: “We wish to stress here Stiegler’s insistence throughout the work on the originary défault of the human species which makes of it a technical being, in distinction to other living species, and, as a result, a contingent and undertermined being. To distinguish, therefore, défault from the connotations that inform either the English term “lack” (the term has been much used in recent French thought concerning the ends of the concept of a “subject”) or the work (more Derridean in tone and inspiration) on “radical lack,” we believe it worthwhile to translate the term by the neologism de-fault,” thereby picking up the play between “default” and “fault,” but also the connotations of “failure,” “lack,” “mistake,” “deficiency,” and “defect” which inform Stiegler’s use of the French term.” (280)

49. In a 2014 interview with Benoît Dillet, Stiegler indicates that the concept of the idiotext, briefly developed here, was central to the last part of his doctoral dissertation, titled “The Idiot.” This material remains unpublished, as he does not feel it is yet ready. See Stiegler, Philosophizing by Accident: Interviews with Élie During, ed. and trans. Benoît Dillet (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 117.

50. An access control list, in any computer operating system (including Apple’s), is the list denoting who has permission to read and/or write a given file or folder.

51. The reference is to Charlie Chaplin’s most famous character, known as The Tramp in English, but as Charlot in French and several other languages.


53. “Monsieur Dupond” is a generic name for an individual, the French equivalent to the English “John Smith.”


It will be a question here of reading a text whose question is precisely that of reading—a text that even presents itself as a defense and an illustration of a certain practice of philosophical reading: the second chapter of Jacques Derrida’s Of Grammatology puts forward a reading of chapter 6 of the introduction of the Course in General Linguistics where Saussure first considers the question of writing. Derrida shows the strangeness and even the anomaly of this chapter within the conceptual apparatus put in place by the Course. He sees there the symptom of a problem that the “structuralist adventure” (as Barthes called it) reveals and conceals [manque] in the same movement.

I take these pages of Derrida to be essential for understanding what made the 1960s a truly philosophical moment. Not, however, because this chapter has long been considered the one that opened the passage from “structuralism” to “post-structuralism,” from the “philosophies of structure” to the “philosophies of difference,” but rather because it makes clear, in the most characteristic manner, the essential tension that animates “structuralism.” To understand the philosophical stakes of the research associated with this movement in the human sciences, and above all in linguistics, requires that we highlight a kind of excess of their discovery over the conceptual resources in which it was expressed. This allows us then to position ourselves at this decade’s most essential point of instability, a point that gathers it by dividing it, not only into different historical phases, but also
into different disjointed projects. A philosophical moment cannot be considered simply as an epoch, one that would be defined by a certain number of theses or presuppositions; it is always the opening of a thinking that ceaselessly demands to be taken up again and that can only be taken up again by being renewed. Derrida’s text is a paradigmatic illustration of this creative repetition, which was to remain one of the great examples of structural analysis, at the same time as it proposed a profound re-interpretation of it.

In order to grasp it, however, I would like to confront Derrida’s text with a text other than the one he commented on, a text, which, moreover, he was not able to read since it had not yet been published: I am referring to the relatively fragmentary traces that we have of the texts, the teaching, and the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, from which the editors of the Course in General Linguistics assembled their apocryphal book. Only recently has this body of work become available to us and it has already provoked numerous new interpretations of the Saussurean event. It will be a question here of evaluating the retroactive effects of this text on the reinterpretation of the 1960s.

Of course, in proposing this reading, I heed the warning concerning the very nature of the text that are at the heart of Derrida’s chapter. I do not wish to contest Derrida’s reading as much as I wish to grasp a movement that envelops his reading at the same time as the latter produces this very movement without necessarily fully comprehending it, a movement whose origins are deeper and that also takes other forms. In short, I wish to grasp there something of the philosophical moment of the 1960s that I would willingly characterize as a tireless attempt to rewrite the book that Saussure himself, for essential reasons, was unable to write. To situate deconstruction in the interminable writing of this impossible book is to begin this work of rereading the 1960s, which seems necessary today, and to search therein for the still active epicenter of the question that this moment poses to us.

I. DECONSTRUCT, HE SAID

Of Grammatology opens with a discussion of an hypothesis, that of a science of writing and of its eventual relation to the project of constituting language as the object of a positive science, such as it is supposed to have been put forward by Ferdinand de Saussure in the Course in General Linguistics. Saussure sets himself the task of showing that this project, the linguistic project, finds its condition of
possibility in its inclusion in a larger project, *semiology*, defined as the “science of the life of signs in society.” We know, however, that Derrida immediately discovered a paradox in this project: writing, far from being given to semiology as a natural theoretical object, appears as a devalued, secondary object, even a nuisance: the true object of the sciences of language would be *spoken* language. Better still, orality would constitute the *real* of language, its ontological basis, while writing would function as a usurping representation that winds up passing itself off as what it represents.

Derrida attentively rereads Saussure’s chapter in order to highlight how writing is truly *condemned* by the master from Geneva in the style of a Calvinist preacher. On the one hand, writing harms the scientific study of language since linguists no longer directly study the thing, but its “image.” On the other hand, it corrupts the object itself by modifying the evolution of language; speaking subjects begin to pronounce a word according to how it is written. Thus Lefèvre, though technically spelled *Lefebvre*, ends up being read *Lefebure*. Though it seems natural to us today, the pronunciation of the final *t* in *vingt* is actually the result of an orthographic reform. Saussure even goes so far as to call all of these phenomenon “pathological” and “teratological” insofar as they present cases of phonetic evolution that do not in any way follow the laws of the evolution of historical phonetics: though we can make clear the general phonetic mutations which, for example, make *caballus* become *chevail*, there is no reason immanent to spoken language for which *le faber* becomes *lefèbure*.

Derrida does not linger over the fact that this double argumentation indeed seems to be in contradiction with itself, since, after all, the fact that writing intervenes in the very history of language is proof that there is a reason to take it into account when studying the latter. He is more interested in the fact that Saussure’s motives for quarantining off writing seem to be in direct contradiction with the very definition of the sign that he had already given. Indeed, Saussure can only carry out this condemnation in the name of a pre-structuralist conception of the sign, which sees writing as *representing* speech in an “image.” What follows from there is a movement that will soon become the canonical example of every deconstructive reading. It is a matter of showing that this derived object, writing, functions in reality at another level as the originary model that allows for spoken language itself to become a theoretical object. Not only is it always the *letter* that Saussure gives as an example of the sign; not only does semiology only make sense on the condition that language be, as Saussure says, “comparable” to writing as to other
systems of signs; but more importantly, the affirmation in the last instance of the “formal,” “algebraic,” and “in no way phonic” character of language shows that it is only on the condition that we consider language as a kind of writing that the linguistic phonemes can be constituted as objects of a rigorous science. According to Saussure, the error of linguists is to have not seen that language is not to be confused with the phonetic or acoustic substance, to not have seen that there is, in the very “signifying” part of language, an immaterial dimension or, as he says himself, “incorporeal.” The units of language must be defined, not in positive terms as empirical types of sound, but rather as oppositional terms whose realization in a particular substance (graphic or acoustic or articulatory or gestural, etc.) appears from then on as contingent. It is indeed this program that will give rise to all structural phonology, which we can consider as the veritable demonstration of the fecundity of Saussure’s hypotheses.8

But Derrida does not stop there. He wants to show that the concept of writing defines the object of the science of signs at the same time that it can only constantly, for the same reasons, be subtracted from it. This is what is at stake in Derrida’s remarkable reading of Hjelmslev and the works of the Copenhagen Circle, which constitute the most systematic accomplishment of the Saussurean project of establishing language as pure “form,” independent of all substance. Indeed, Hjelmslev quietly assumes that there is not any particular primacy of orality over writing, and that writing must be an autonomous object of study for semiology. But Derrida points out that writing can be conceived neither as derived from orality, nor as completely independent of it, since it is rather its condition: there is a grammatical dimension in speech if it is true that it is made up of purely differential punctuations. If we must no longer define the sign by the property of referring back to a thing (the sign as nomenclature), but by a set of differences by which it is opposed horizontally to other signs, we see that the sign is always not only signifier of a signifier—which corresponds already to a rather intuitive notion of writing—but even pure positional marking: the sign is the instituted trace of a difference to be made, the positive terms that will be distinguished being from then on relatively contingent. For instance, the French r can be rolled or pronounced uvularly without resulting in the loss of the operative difference. To speak a language is nothing other than to have such a system of traces at our disposal.9

All of this takes place then as if there had to have already been a certain relation to the possibility of writing, in the sense of a pure trace, in order to be able to speak. However, Derrida notes that this notion of writing cannot be confused with the
graphic systems invented by humans in relation to their language activity. Writing is not as much an empirical concept as it is a transcendental concept (or, more precisely, quasi-transcendental, since it can only function as an origin insofar as it ceaselessly erases the possibility of an origin, in making the structure of reference itself the origin of language and of meaning). It is in order to designate this status of writing that Derrida introduces the concept of arche-writing or arche-trace. Indeed, the trace is not a thing that would be in relation with another thing, Friday’s footprint being a thing in the sand and Friday’s body another thing. It is the way in which Friday is absent from the beach (or more precisely from each of these surfaces of the beach where a foot is put down) that constitutes its trace in the sand. The phenomenological structure of such an object is already complex. But it is more radical still in the case of language, since in this case, we can and even must abstract from the “substance” in order to determine these traces: it is the way in which the words bain and main and lin absent themselves from one another that reciprocally constitutes the word pain. Linguistic signs are thus necessarily, for structuralism, traces of traces. Derrida again sees supplementary proof of this in the definition of the sign as a “psychological imprint of sound,” and even as a cerebral trace. It seems then that Saussure’s conceptual apparatus rests upon a kind of circle wherein the notion of writing intervenes twice: a first time in the classical empirical sense, as a system of graphic notations, and a second time in a transcendental sense, as an originary trace. The concept of arche-trace that some have found incomprehensible, has no other aim than to draw our attention to this double positionality, or this double play, of the notion of the trace. We once again find here the movement already operative in Derrida’s commentary on The Origin of Geometry: writing cannot simply be the object of science since it is also the condition of science itself.

It appears then that linguistic structuralism, according to Derrida, produces a theoretical object (the differential and oppositional entity of language [langue]) that exceeds the conceptual resources of traditional metaphysics, since it indeed posits something like a structure of reference without a first term, nor any final completion. But at the same time, it covers over this metaphysical “monstrosity” with the very concept of the “sign” by looking to it for something like an immediate unity of sound and meaning, of speech and thought. The condemnation of writing would be at once a symptom of Saussure covering-over his own discovery, and a resource to retrospectively bring it to light, hence the use of paradoxical formulations such as at the origin was the non-origin ...
Different objections have been made to Derrida’s philosophical program. Some simply saw it as a repetition of a classical hermeneutic theme, one that makes the unattainable character of meaning an essential property of meaning. It is because we cannot completely fix meaning that there is something like meaning, something that is always to be taken up again, always to be reformulated. All meaningful phenomena would presuppose this essential opening. Meaning that could actually be encountered would no longer have any meaning. So that there be meaning, there always has to be more meaning, a “meaning behind meaning” as Lévi-Strauss said about Ricoeur. This simply amounts to saying that meaning is ideal, in Kant or Husserl’s sense. But this is to not fully understand the displacement Derrida performs here: we must not look for the ideality of meaning in the origin of signs, but, on the contrary, look for the very origin of the ideality of meaning itself in the ontology of the sign: it is because every sign is the trace of a trace that meaning is ideal. I take this reversal as essential and profoundly faithful to the Sausseurean project: philosophy has to accept that the true problems are not there where it has always looked, in speculation on the nature of meaning, but in phenomenon apparently so modest that belong to the type of perceived object that is the sign.13

Others have accused Derrida of drawing glaringly metaphysical consequences from a linguistic phenomenon that does not warrant as much: if phonemes are purely differential and oppositional, it is because they have the function of differentiating between significations. They thus do not constitute purely differential entities and do not pose any staggering ontological problems.14 But it seems to me that Derrida is, on this point, closer to the methodological and empirical stakes of linguistics than his critics. They would be right if the signified was not just as differential and oppositional as the signifier. But this is precisely Saussure’s hypothesis and an entire structural semantics is built upon it.15 I only have in mind images of something when I say “metro” because it differs from “train,” in the same way that bus differs from car, or route from street. Certainly, this is a particular empirical hypothesis, and certain linguists, even some “structuralists,” beginning with Jakobson and Martinet, refuse it. But for this reason we can say that they were not structuralists, but functionalists: language is for them, at bottom, an instrument. This is not the case for Saussure and what concerns him. It seems that we could say precisely that signs are positive entities constituted uniquely by the correlation of differences, in short, of traces, that is to say traces of traces, entities that cannot be accounted for according to a certain conception of being (as presence).
How then are we to understand Saussure’s insistence on the “monstrosity” of writing? Would he not have to see therein the monstrosity of language and of the sign in general? To be sure, this is precisely what he does, as we will now show.

II. WRITING AND THE METAPHYSICAL SCANDAL OF LANGUAGE ACCORDING TO SAUSSURE

We know today that the editors of the Course significantly altered the structure of the lectures. They transformed what was for Saussure a critical process going from the actual practice of linguists (“showing the linguist what he does”, as Saussure said in a famous letter to Meillet)—a practice that is nothing other than that of comparativism—to a clarification of the problematic character of the very object that they produced (“to show what type of object language is,” he said in the same letter) into a dogmatic, axiomatic, and foundational program. To understand the status of these remarks on Saussure’s “general linguistics” it is important to recall that he was educated in Leipzig in the 1870s at the height of the “neogrammarian” movement. The neogrammarians wished to sort out linguistic’s epistemological status in order to make it a science of observation and induction like the others. This observable data would simply be the individual ways of speaking, and change would be explained by the physiological and psychological constraints exerted on speaking subjects. They were thus rigorously opposed to the hypostatization of language in their predecessors (in particular, August Schleicher and Max Müller) who believed in being able to conclude, from the idea that languages evolve in a harmonious way that the speaking subjects do not realize, that languages constitute a kind of supra-individual spiritual organism. Saussure’s whole project is set up against this normalization of linguistics. Nobody was more aware of the aberration that constituted language itself than Saussure when he wrote, “whoever enters the realm of language may as well abandon all hope of finding a fitting analogy, earthly or otherwise.”16 For him, it is a matter of highlighting the truly philosophical scandal that linguists discovered without ever taking it up or even recognizing it.

Reflection on the “object of linguistics” is not the result, contrary to what one wanted to believe in the 1960s, of some “epistemological break”: it is not meant to be axiomatic, but problematic, and it in fact falls within the scope of what we call ontology. It is a matter of showing that a positive discovery exceeds the conceptual resources available for characterizing the type of objects brought to light or produced in a theoretical practice. Saussure’s manuscript notes are particularly
explicit on this point. There he speaks incessantly of “Being,” “entity,” “essence,” “substance,” etc. When Saussure says “we are very far from wanting to engage in metaphysics,” it is to show more clearly that it is language itself that forces us to pose these questions:

Unless I am mistaken, in other domains one speaks of different objects of inquiry, if not of things existing themselves, or at least of things encapsulating certain positive things or entities requiring different formulations (unless perhaps facts are taken to the very limits of metaphysics, raising the question of the nature of knowledge, which we cannot go into). The science of language appears to be in a different situation whereby the objects it must deal with never have any innate reality, are never distinct from other objects of inquiry. There is nothing underlying their existence other than their difference, or DIFFERENCES of whatever kind that the mind manages to attach to the fundamental difference (however, each one’s entire existence depends on reciprocal difference). Never do we abandon the fundamental, eternally negative factor of the DIFFERENCE between two terms, rather than the properties of one term.17

We can see that this is not only an “ontic” matter, to speak like Heidegger, that is to say, it is not only a question of correctly designating what does and does not fall within the scope of language, but it is “ontological,” that is to say, that it implies a reopening of the very question of being due to the strangeness of a singular “being” that is highlighted by a particular science. It seems then that Saussure’s project has a good deal in common with Derrida’s: to show the excess of a positive discovery over the metaphysics that attempts to cover it up.

It just so happens that, in the three courses, the reflections on writing are part of this critical movement and can only be understood in this context. It is always a matter of showing that there is a “problem” with what constitutes linguist data itself, that is to say, the “unities” and “identities” that are at work in language. Saussure’s position is inscribed in a double refusal: on the one hand, a refusal to believe that alphabetic writings give us a proper analysis of the flux of language (as was done by Bopp or Grimm by speaking of “letters” in order to designate the elements on which phonetic mutations operate), and, on the other hand, a refusal to believe that one could position oneself in front of individual speech acts and observe them in total neutrality in order to find in them pre-given identities and unities. By inverting the order of the presentation of the lectures, which went
from the practice of linguistics (Indo-European) to the exposition of the philosophical problems they raise, the editors obscured the meaning of these remarks on writing. Even more problematic, they separated them from the critique of phonetic physiology to which they were closely linked in the first and third courses. But the critique of writing only makes sense in the context of a critique of the utopic idea of a direct observation of spoken language, that is to say, of the very idea of phonetics.

We can summarize this critique in the following way: Saussure shows that the observation of articulatory actions does not give us any unity; the articulated flux is, if not continuous, at least articulated in such a way that has nothing to do with the unities that we perceive:

Even if all the movements made by the mouth and larynx in pronouncing a chain of sounds could be photographed, the observer would still be unable to single out the subdivisions in the series of articulatory movements; he would not know where one sound began and the next one ended.18

The phonetician will only have something to describe by leaving the domain of the strictly observable and entrusting himself to the “ear’s judgment,” which alone perceives unities. However, these unities are not concrete sounds that would have to be analyzed from the point of view of their physical substance, but “acoustic impressions,” that is to say purely qualitative effects, spiritually induced sensations, as we know, by their association with a “concept.” In short, these are the entities of language [langue]. The consequence that follows is that we cannot do without a hypothesis about language in order to describe the activity of language. Instead of saying that a language is a statistical abstraction resulting from the imitation of the ways in which concrete individuals speak, we have to say that to speak is essentially to speak a language [langue], that is to say, to realize pure possibilities that preexist their actualization. It is here that Saussure reintroduces the table of pronunciation that he had condemned in his analysis of writing, but in order to revisit it in greater detail: yes, to speak is to pronounce a preexistent virtuality, but it is not necessary that such a virtuality be a written text in order for it to be already operative in language:

We both hear and speak. This much, gentlemen, is certain, but it only ever follows on from the acoustic impression, which is not only received, but mentally assimilated; it is this alone that decides what we produce. Ev-
Everything depends on this; it is enough to be aware of this to know that language will be produced, but I repeat that the acoustic impression is essential for any specific linguistic unit to be produced.  

Saussure is thus led to reintroduce a kind of hypostasis: language [langue] as a set of double entities, differential and articulated. In sum, what he discovers in studying the procedures of the phonological analysis of the “spoken chain” is that there are realities that are such that they can only be understood as actualizations (what means, at bottom, “pronunciation”), and which in turn requires a separation between “virtual” entities and the processes of actualization. There are parts of the real that are real only because they are actualized. In short, language confronts us with an ontological problem. The concept of the sign tries to respond to this problem by claiming that linguistic unities are not given on only one plane of observation because they are always double, negative and systematic.

III. DECONSTRUCTION: AN EPOCH IN THE HISTORY OF COMPARATIVISM

It then seems to us plausible that the status of the critique of writing was misunderstood by Derrida: far from wishing to tranquilize us with respect to the essence of language, its objective is to force us not to evade the problem, at once methodological and metaphysical, posed by linguistics. But what ultimately does this mean? Would we be able to take all of the operations that Derrida performs on Saussure’s text in the name of deconstruction and attribute them to Saussure himself? The interest of such an approach would certainly be scant. Furthermore, it would corroborate a profound miscomprehension of the very spirit of deconstruction, which does not pretend to operate on the text from the outside, but is founded upon the hypothesis that a text deconstructs itself. This would then be the best confirmation of Derrida’s reading.

But to show that the question of writing is already for Saussure symptomatic of the metaphysical strangeness of language is to provide the means to re-inscribe the Derridean enterprise itself in a different history than the one in which Derrida places himself: this history is no longer the completely speculative history of Being, but one that is, in the first instance, scientific, that of comparativism. The next question that will be posed is to know whether the concept of the sign put forward by Saussure or the concept of arche-trace put forward by Derrida best captures the metaphysical problem that comparativism provoked despite itself.
Three points deserve to be brought up here. The first concerns the relations of philosophy to positive knowledges [savoirs]. It sometimes seems that Derrida, following Heidegger, wants to show that the destiny of science is itself dependent upon metaphysical decisions made several millennia earlier: “philosophy before linguistics”\textsuperscript{21}... But I believe that we have to resist this overly Heideggerian reading: if Derrida is so important to us, it is precisely because he saw that the project of the human sciences, such as it is defined throughout “structuralism,” or more precisely, “semiology,” escapes \textit{de facto} the metaphysical conceptuality that leads us to define a science as having a relation to an \textit{object}. He prolonged the work of Saussure in the sense that he sought to take stock of the questioning of the very nature of objectivity that is implied in the production of a certain type of theoretical “object,” the linguistic object. In doing so, he truly left behind the phenomenological tradition of the transcendental reduction where it risked incessantly closing-in upon itself, at the risk of taking up a “reactionary” attitude (the critiques of technology by Heidegger and, in a more complex way, of the project of the positive sciences by Husserl in the \textit{Krisis}, feel, it must be said, a bit dated)...

Above all, semiology destabilized the sovereign position of philosophical thinking alone grasping at the joints of world history whereas all other human practices, especially those associated with “modernity,” would be trapped in a kind of metaphysical cage whose nature they ignored. I believe that Derrida’s project is, at its best, the exact inverse of this: it is always a question of taking account of the effective excesses produced by metaphysics.

The second point concerns the point-source of this excess in the case of structural linguistics, in particular, \textit{comparativism}. In order to understand that the critique of writing in Saussure is a way of highlighting the ontological problem that language poses, and its blockage, demands that we reread both Saussure and Derrida in the wake of the comparativist discovery. Linguists discovered that it is possible to reconstruct languages that have long since disappeared, of which we truly have no record, but of which we can nonetheless reconstitute immense parts by \textit{comparing} a plurality of present languages. We can thus reconstruct Indo-European, a non-documented language from 6,000 B.C., by comparing Latin, Greek, High German, Sanskrit, etc. We do not insist as much anymore, convinced that we have simply overcome this kind of linguistics—and overcome it, precisely, with structuralism—on the extraordinary nature of this discovery. It signifies nothing less than an entirely new conception of history and event. It establishes the possibility of a history without a positive document, which proceeds uniquely by constituting many phenomena as alternative variations of one another in order to find in them
the traces of a previous unity: it is because Indo-European became Latin, Greek, etc., that we can reconstitute it. But then what are we reconstituting? Not a certain manner of speaking, that is, particular sounds, but rather a certain structure. This is exactly what Saussure himself did in his book, *Mémoire sur le système des voyelles*, which immediately made him famous at the age of 21, where he establishes that there must have been 4 forms of a in the Indo-European language, and not 3 as was previously held. It is impossible to know if these a’s were pronounced as a—there could have been completely different sounds—but, then again, we can establish the number and the function of vowels, indeed, their structure. From there Saussure proposed the strikingly “modern” definition of phoneme in the *Mémoire*: “an element of a phonological system, whatever its exact pronunciation may be, is recognized as different from every other element.”22 It is thus the possibility for completely distinct empirical realizations to include in reality the same value, that is to say, to be the transformations of one another, and, inversely, the possibility for a single empirical realization, corresponding in reality to different values, that led Saussure to posit the non-empirical character of linguistic values. It is also the reason for which he believed it possible to say that a language has an “algebraic” character. Indeed, a sign is not as much an empirical type as it is a correlation between the limits of variation. Thus, a phoneme must be defined by the way in which a certain articulable variation is compatible with a certain acoustic variability:

This shows that in a well-thought-out system all the considerations of possibility (or impossibility) which constitute the basis of combinatory phonology would not take the form of a rule which, given a particular starting point, suggests that the very fact of going beyond this point takes one into a completely new case. Rather it would take the form of an algebraic equation in which, apart from having certain terms balanced on both sides of the equation, there is no indication of what can happen if one exceeds them.23

The third point follows from the second. Indeed, for Derrida, the great discovery of structuralism is the differential character of the sign. But we’ve seen that for Saussure that this is only a response to a deeper problem, that of the efficacy of the comparativist gesture and the type of object it produces. To make this claim is perhaps to propose a completely different history of structuralism in which the textual-conceptual work of Derrida would be included without Derrida himself having had the means of correctly identifying it. It is no longer as much a prob-
lem of identity and difference, but rather a problem of the one and the multiple. What comparativism discovers is that there is a positivity of the multiple as such. Instead of being an obstacle to a scientific investigation, variation becomes its privileged instrument: it is because Latin is French, Italian, and Spanish that it can be an object of knowledge and only this variation ultimately tells us what the active values of Latin were. Far from having to conclude with Montaigne that due to the variability of human customs there is an absence of “communication with being,” we must, on the contrary, define being itself as *that which varies*, that which exists only across many variations. It is no longer a question of overcoming this variation so as to reach the invariant, but of finding, in the alternations that each instantiation proposes of the other, the only source of truth that can be spoken of. If there was ever a reversal of Platonism this is perhaps the most radical: not because it renounces the ontological project, but, on the contrary, because it separates the notion of being from that of the invariant in order to identify being with variation. If this interpretation of the history of structuralism is correct, it appears that Derrida’s deconstruction does not belong to the long and fundamentally speculative history of Being, but to a relatively short history that depends upon a positive discovery, namely, the metaphysical shock that the comparativist disciplines imposed, surely but subterraneously, on all of thought. What irrupted from thought, and which found itself in excess over metaphysics, is, strangely enough, the Indo-European language and with it the notion of *variation*.

IV. SIGN OR ARCHE-TRACE?

It is on the basis of this question, which predates both Saussure and Derrida that it is well worth the effort to take up again the dialogue between them. Two questions arise here: 1) Is the affirmation, recognized by Saussure, of an autonomy of orality in relation to writing justified in light of the metaphysical radicality that he claims? 2) Does the concept of the “sign” that he will propose in order to grasp this very radicality not betray itself? Are we not forced to replace it with the paradoxical concept of arche-writing that Derrida proposes?

We first have to correct a few precise points in Derrida’s interpretation so that we do not take up any false problems. First, Saussure does not claim that writing must faithfully reproduce speech. On the contrary, he wishes to establish its independence. It is the reason for which, moreover, he does not favor a reform of orthography. Nor does he misrecognize the autonomous character of the semiological system of writing, not even when he “critiques” it. On the contrary, this is
precisely what he seeks to establish so as to separate it from orality:

 [...] the study of spelling would thus be a social at the same time as a semiological study. This would clearly be very interesting, <as long as> it was separated from spoken semiology <which cannot be joined with it> in an imaginary unity. I shall thus confine myself strictly to the spoken language.  

These are, he says, two separate traditions, which each evolve on their own. We must not confound the one with the other precisely because it is a question of two distinct systems. From this point of view, we can reverse Derrida’s argument: it is precisely because writing does not represent speech that it must be kept separate from the analysis of speech, and we must study each system for itself.

Likewise, to be sure, Saussure does not morally condemn teratological evolutions like Lefébure, but rather is content to affirm its exceptional character from the point of view of phonetic evolution. Better still, he accepts that we can consider such an evolution as “normal” in a broadly alphabetic context and goes as far as to say that it is these phonetic laws themselves that are transformed:

The error suggested by writing being a general one, we can say that phonetic laws transform change when spoken language takes on a system of written signs. We then have in the language two semiological axes; even if we take these phenomena of falsification as regular and not as pathological, we have two linguistic sciences and we must consider spoken language completely separately from the written language.

It is thus not a matter of repressing these kinds of phenomena. On the contrary, Saussure insists on the necessity of taking writing into account in order to understand the evolution of alphabetic languages (“we cannot completely refuse the importance of writing”; “we are obligated to take literary, written language, into account”). What Saussure then wants to say regarding writing is that there exists a semiology of speech that is de jure independent of the semiology of writing, that speech has laws unknown to writing, and vice versa. This does not mean that there is no semiology of writing to be done, nor does it mean that there are not many interesting things to be said about the particularities of alphabetic languages. Nonetheless the fact remains that what is essential in human languages is not dependent upon on writing, either because they have never been written,
because the oral tradition continues its path independently even in an alphabetic context.

But the true question that arises is how can Saussure both say that the two semiotic systems are distinct and that the one is subordinated to the other? The third course is particularly insistent on this point:

A language and writing are two systems of signs, one having the *sole* function of representing the other. [...] one is only the servant or image of the other.  

Similarly he writes in the first course:

The purpose of the alphabet is to fix by means of conventional signs what exists in speech. There are not two kinds of words (at least in every phonetic writing system, discounting purely ideological systems like Chinese); the written word is not coordinated with the spoken word but is subordinate to it. By right therefore preeminence falls to the spoken word over the written word.

How are we to understand this subordination? Why can the one only be the image of the other? Is this not contrary to the very notion of the sign Saussure himself constructed?

But is there truly a contradiction between saying that writing is a semiotic system and that its function is to represent spoken language? I do not think so. The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, for example, does not mean that language has nothing to do with the world, quite the contrary. It means above all that we must not explain a sign by its isolated relation with an idea (or a thing), but by the reciprocal structuration of two continuums, which Hjelmslev following Saussure calls “substances,” producing two emergent systems (or “forms”) of expression (signifier) and of content (signified). Signifier and signified are not externally related to one another: “meaning” is a dimension *internal* to the signifier, and vice versa. In short, the sign is a synesthesia, a “sound-image,” a third completely original percept. In the same way, it would be an error to believe that a graphic sign represents an oral sign in isolation, that is to say, that the *signified* of a graphic sign is already given in the oral *signifier*, whereas the sound that we read (the way a graphic sign sounds to us) is proper to writing: all linguistic writing is also a synes-
thesia, a “speech-graphic.” This does not mean that it does not have any relation to speech. Nor does this mean that semiology treats only the oral form itself as a substance to be analyzed, and that it is analyzed by means of another substance, the graphic substance, and from which a new form will result. The particularity of writing with respect to speech is thus that the substance of its content is already a form of expression. It is in this sense that we can say that writing is a “representation,” that is to say, a second system. That writing represents speech is thus not in contradiction with its semiological dimension; it is simply a way of saying that it is a matter of a semiological system that restructures an experience already structured by another semiological system.

But we then touch on a deeper question, since one might object, and rightly so, that Derrida’s thesis is precisely that every system of signs is already secondary, that every system capable of producing meaning already belongs to this order. It says quite simply that a symbolic system never arrives alone: it always operates on at least one other symbolic system, which itself etc. If Derrida affirms that writing is a better model than orality for thinking the sign in its generality, it is precisely because writing is a secondary system that is founded on the deconstruction-reconstruction of another, and that there is no sign without this movement of “representation.” What he rejects then is the idea that the substance of the content of oral language is not also already the form of expression of another semiological system.

This, in fact, is an empirical thesis that would have to be put to the test. But we cannot help but be struck by how much this thesis is in reality faithful to certain fundamental insights of structuralism. Lévi-Strauss speaks thus of culture as a system of symbolic systems in a disjointed relation with one another,\(^\text{32}\) of bricolage as the essence of the savage mind,\(^\text{33}\) or myth as a second system, connected not to the signifying side of natural languages like writing, but to the side of the signified.\(^\text{34}\) Or there is the concept of instances of a structure in Althusser,\(^\text{35}\) or the “aberrant communications” between the faculties in Deleuze, or the complex relations of the “visible” and the “sayable” in Foucault, etc. But Saussure himself compares language to a “garment covered with patches cut from its own cloth”\(^\text{36}\) or again to a “stick thrust into an anthill, the damage will be repaired immediately.”\(^\text{37}\) More generally, he often insists on the fact that language does not cease to reconstruct itself with its own debris, to reinterpret itself, in such a way that the history of languages is a movement by which the formed materials become substances to be reinterpreted by the next generation.
[...] when new forms appear, the process, as we saw, is one whereby existing forms are deconstructed and other forms reconstructed from material belonging to the existing forms.38

We were able to show elsewhere that for Saussure a system is always in the process of remaking itself, worked over by an essential secondarity, and it is moreover the reason for which there is no origin of language.39 It seems then that Derrida touches here upon a fundamental point that is at the heart not only of the mysteries of Saussure’s thought, but also of its “structuralist” heritage in its most acute points of the 1960s. He emphasizes the double exigency that structuralism is confronted with: to maintain both a certain immanence of the determination of signs inside systems and the communication of these systems with others. It is perhaps this problem that explains the internal tipping point wherein structuralism had always already begun to get mixed up with “post”-structuralism.

So, do we really have to replace the concept of “sign” with “trace”? It is unclear what we truly gain in doing so. There are three things that we have to be able to think simultaneously if we wish to conceptualize the essence of the unthought theoretical object produced by comparativism that need to be clearly distinguished and that the notion of trace used by Derrida tends to confuse. First, the differential and systematic character of the unities of language, next, the double character of these differences, and finally, the intrinsically secondary character, “bricolé,” deconstructed and reconstructed, of every system, that is to say, the fact that every structure is the restructuration of another structure, and, in the first instance, a restructuration of itself. If the notion of trace does well to capture the first it treats rather poorly the second two. The second is absolutely essential. It corresponds to what Saussure calls the “double essence” of language, what Hjelmslev called “biplanar,” a property according to him that distinguishes authentic semiotic systems from formal languages.40 It means that a difference never comes alone, but that it is always double: a phoneme does not refer only to other phonemes, but depends upon a difference between signifieds, and vice versa. Certainly, Derrida seems to say something like this when he affirms that the trace is always the trace of a trace. But if we still hold onto the language of the trace, we have to at least account for the process by which each trace traces the other, as in the style of a drawing by Escher where two hands draw each other reciprocally. Better still, we would have to be able to imagine a drawing where a human hand draws a wolf’s paw that in turn draws a computer that then draws the first human hand (with as many intermediaries as you like, and above all the uncoupling pro-
duced by the lateral relations of the hand with other hands that themselves draw other wolves’ paws, etc.). We see that the structure of this object is more complex than even that of a multi-level temporalization.

The same can be said for the third property: the notion of the trace only captures it by sacrificing its complexity. It is indeed present in Saussure, but there it is associated with a distinction between *levels* at the very heart of language, between what he calls *differences* and *oppositions*, a distinction that corresponds to what linguists since Martinet call the “double articulation” of language. If language is always a kind of representation it is because these *oppositions* between whole signs (double entities) pass through *differences* that can be repeated from one sign to another: for example, the same difference is operative between *pain* and *bain* as in *pal and bal* (likewise on the side of signified, between *metro and train, bus and car, or street and route*). Just as the level of oppositions is purely formal (that is to say that we can in theory abstract from all substantial traits), the level of differences is still partially substantial (it is a question of qualitative differences, selected by their association with other qualitative differences). Saussure sets himself the task of showing that the linguistic instinct does not cease reconstructing the formal system of oppositions (of values) on the basis of qualitative differences such as they are produced in a certain linguistic environment. And Saussure even wishes to find in this mechanism of “integration” or “retrospective reflection” the fundamental principle of linguistic change. Thus, precisely because what alone matters is maintaining certain gaps (or oppositions) between terms, subjects have a good deal of flexibility when it comes to pronunciation. This is then why the plural in Germanic languages can vary, *fôti* becoming *fêti* then *fêti* or *feet*, likewise *têthi* becomes *teeth* etc. But this free variation produces a new opposition, no longer founded upon the addition of a flexional ending, but upon the alternating root: the speaking subjects born into this context are going to interpret this qualitative variation as a new opposition of value, the singular/plural opposition being from now on no longer the result of a declination, but of an alternation. It is thus the whole grammatical mechanism that changed as result of the double play between, on the one hand, a relatively free variation of differences and, on the other hand, an interpretation of formal oppositions bearing on these differences. We see that Saussure thus explains linguistic change by this phenomenon of the internal representation of language by itself, a result of this doubly determinate character, as differences and as oppositions, of the entities of language.
We thus see that the concept of arche-trace is too simplistic to give an account of the ontological object discovered by comparativism, that is at once differential, dual, and doubly articulated. On the other hand, we have to credit Derrida with having clearly seen this ontological problem, and of having kept open the work of writing that Saussure, for essential reasons, had not succeeded in addressing in a book length work. That the concept of trace is perhaps unsatisfying means only that this work on writing is not yet finished. It is indeed still our task today.

A final word must be said here. If Derrida uses the notions of trace, writing and arche-writing, it is also because he does not think that the substitution of one ontology for another will resolve this ontological crisis. It can only be carried out by the destabilization of the oppositional couples of traditional metaphysics. The question here is strategic, and it indeed implies an entire conception of philosophical practice. On the one hand, a deconstructive wager, and on the other hand, a constructive wager. We would here have to oppose Derrida to Deleuze: it is Deleuze who without a doubt set himself the task of constructing this other metaphysics that would be in line with the radicality of the Saussurean concept of the sign and the comparativist innovation that preceded it. The choice between these strategies would not, however, be purely conceptual. It is also a matter of efficacy: which of the two would best preserve and prolong the theoretical creativity of the comparative sciences. It is not only a question of “saving the phenomena,” but also of wanting to see something new in them, to move towards new formalisms that would not sacrifice the nature of the object in the name of “modelization,” in short, it would be a question of setting up new conditions for a productive dialogue between the sciences, formal disciplines (that is to say, mathematics, in particular), philosophy, and even the arts and poetry. But the evaluation of the success of these strategies would lead us well beyond the 1960s: the decades that follow will indeed be the ones where we will see these philosophical operations reversed in the human and even in the formal sciences (one thinks of the popularity of deconstruction in Anglophone area studies, or in a completely different register, Jean Petitot’s usage of Deleuze in his attempt to formalize structuralism), the ones where we will also see a more direct intervention by these authors in these fields (one thinks of Deleuze and Guattari in Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus), the ones which lead us finally to the questions which are ours today: the questions of an active heritage of the 1960s.

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sance du structuralisme (Léo Scheer, 2006), and an editor of the MétaphysiqueS book series (Puf).

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Endnotes

1. TN: The translator would like to think Patrice Maniglier and Les Presses universitaires de France (PUF) for granting permission to translate this article. It first appeared as “Térontologie saussurienne: ce que Derrida n’a pas lu dans le cours de linguistique générale” in a volume edited by Maniglier entitled Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France (Paris: PUF, 2011). The translator would also like to thank Alexander R. Galloway for his encouragement and generosity.


7. Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, 119.


9. On this point, we should mention a note in Saussure’s recently discovered manuscripts that Derrida could not have known: “While out walking, I carve a line in the bark of a tree, without saying a word, as if for pleasure. The person who is with me retains the idea of this line and un-denially associates one or two ideas with this line, when in fact my only idea was to mystify them or to amuse myself. To us any material thing immediately constitutes a sign: i.e. An impression we associate with others, but something material seems indispensable. The linguistic sign’s one particularity is that it produces a more precise association than any other, and we may one day see that it represents the most perfect association of ideas, since it can only be established on a conventional sôme.” (Writings in General Linguistics, p. 79)


11. We could add to this the idea that language is a “treasure” and a “residue”. See Maniglier, La vie énigmatique des signes. Saussure et la naissance du structuralisme, 204-213.


20. See *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 66, editors note: “the sound-image is par excellence the natural representation of the word as a fact of potential language, outside any actual use of it in speaking.”
25. Saussure clarifies this point in his lectures: “Of course here I am making merely a scientific judgement” (Saussure, 1996, p. 10a).
27. *Premier cours de linguistique générale*, 12.
42. On this point, I am forced to refer the reader to my book *La vie énigmatique des signes. Saussure et la naissance du structuralisme*, in particular, on the distinction between difference and opposi-
tion, see p. 298-333, and how it is used to explain change, see p. 422-429.
INTRODUCTION

A recurring theme of Foucault’s lectures on ‘The Government of Self and Others’ over the two years before his death in 1984 was their reappraisal of the philosophical tradition—indeed of the Socratic opening of that tradition, no less. Rather than reproduce the Nietzschean condemnation of Platonism that, for example in the work of Foucault’s contemporary, Deleuze, had become a staple of the French thought of his generation (“the task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn Platonism”), Foucault seemed more interested in a line of Socratic philosophy, a line exemplified in Ancient Cynicism, that he clearly saw as irreducible to Platonism and which he also sought to place Plato in. That Plato was not a Platonist was already a commonplace of Heidegger’s. Even Deleuze demurred that “with Plato the issue is still in doubt: mediation has not yet found its ready-made movement.” Foucault, however, developed this point in new ways. One of these—the subject of the discussion that follows—involved resuming his long-standing feud with Derrida.

Although much has been said about the disagreement between Foucault and his erstwhile student, that Foucault was still engaged in this dispute in his last lectures has not, to my knowledge, received comment. This is partly for the simple
reason that these lectures have only been available (in French, as well as in translation) for the last decade.

Foucault’s often arcane debate with Derrida, which started with a squabble over a few pages of Descartes’ *First Meditation*, are more important than might first appear. As Boyne notes, they relate to nothing less than “the nature of Western thought,” and, we might add, to how that thought thinks itself. In short: how is a history of reason possible? In Derrida’s anti-historicist reading (with its debt to Heidegger), history is marked not only by the unveiling logos—the reason—that shapes each epoch differently, but more primordially by the veiling of Being, that deeper logos, that is at work in every epoch and that, as Foucault put it in his ‘Reply to Derrida,’ “infinitely exceeds, in its retreat, anything that it could say in any of its historical discourses.”

If Foucault (as we shall see shortly) had identified the exclusion of madness by reason with a particular historical juncture (the “classical age” of the eighteenth century), then Derrida argued that both reason and madness are co-constituted by that logos which is always already implied in any such division (but which, after Heidegger, is destined to be forgotten). Pinpointing a time when reason first “excluded” madness carries the danger of thinking that there was a time, before “the fall” (a time thereby in principle recoverable), when such a differentiation did not occur, when reason was hospitable and madness was at home in a still unified logos. This would be a time when Being was one; a time that, for Derrida, never was and never could be. Being is excessive by way of its withdrawal in an infinite self-differentiation, not in its having an outside. “[I]n question is a self-dividing action, a cleavage and torment interior to meaning in general, interior to logos in general....”

Derrida was in effect accusing Foucault of a metaphysical longing for an originary unity—for an Origin. Given Foucault’s project, this must have stung. That it stung will become clear when we look at Foucault’s main response (the essay ‘My Body, this Paper, this Fire’), which is largely defensive, responding point by point to Derrida’s doubts regarding his reading of Descartes and finishing with a dash of *ad hominem*. In Foucault’s final rejoinder to Derrida a decade later, however, Foucault is on the front foot. It is now one of Derrida’s central concepts—logocentrism—that is being problematized. Rather than reason excluding madness, it is now a matter of a philosophy that is defined by its exclusion of writing. And while Foucault does not dispute that this exclusion has been constitutive of philosophy,
his bold move is to make this exclusion of writing not only other than logocentric metaphysics, but even an attempt to avoid it.

DERRIDA’S CHALLENGE

In 1963 Derrida invited Foucault to a lecture, which he attended, at which Derrida delivered a critique of Foucault’s immense work, *History of Madness*, which had been published two years previously. In addition to discussing Foucault’s Preface to this work (a preface Foucault tellingly removed from the second edition), Derrida took Foucault’s brief reading of the first of Descartes’ *Meditations* to task.¹⁰

In this meditation, Descartes elaborates his method of radical doubt, famously questioning the evidence of the senses and even wondering whether an evil genius might have planted his ideas in his head.¹¹ Yet when it comes to those impressions which are not to be trusted because they appear to those who are devoid of sense’ itself, Descartes seems to draw back from a full and fearless investigation, passing over this possibility with the seemingly much too-quick observation: “But they are mad, and I should not be any the less insane were I to follow examples so extravagant”.¹² Descartes, as Foucault notes, thus seems to expunge madness from reason by fiat. The Cogito, by its very essence, could not possibly be mad, because this impossibility “is inherent in the thinking subject rather than the object of his thoughts.”¹³ Madness is a condition of impossibility for thought and so the man of reason cannot be mad by definition. While dreams and errors are invalidated by the structure of truth itself (such that, being outside the knowing subject, they must remain an ongoing concern), “madness is simply excluded from the doubting subject.”¹⁴ Unlike falsehoods and illusions, madness is no longer Descartes’ concern. While the man of reason, freed from the errors of the senses and guided by the light of true things, will be able to steer a course through the ocean-scape of dreams, madness need not be navigated at all. For he who doubts is no more vulnerable to unreason “than he is of not thinking or being.”¹⁵ Men can go mad, but thought cannot.¹⁶

Derrida notes the following about this argument.¹⁷ First, in the disputed passages, Descartes does not in fact circumvent the eventuality of sensory error or dreams. He never sets aside the possibility of total error for all knowledge gained from the senses or from imaginary constructions. Second, Descartes only pretends that (close) sensory experience cannot be doubted without siding with the mad. Actually, as the case of dreams indicates even better than madness, there are no sen-
sory (only intellectual) foundations of certainty—the sleeper or the dreamer is madder than the madman! It is in the case of sleep, not madness, that the totality of ideas of sensory origin become suspect. Madness is only a case—and not the most serious one at that—among all cases of sensory error.\(^{18}\)

Thus, on Derrida’s reading of Descartes, it is only with the evil genius that a total madness threatens knowledge—even those purely intellectual perceptions that had survived the first, sensory, level of doubt.\(^{19}\) This, then, is not the exclusion of madness but the welcome of its possibility into the very interior of thought, its inner sanctum. In principle, nothing is opposed to the subversion of reason that is named insanity. In practice, however, this subversion cannot be admitted since all discourse must, of necessity, escape madness—carrying its normality, namely its sense, within itself. This belongs to the meaning of meaning itself. By its very essence, the sentence is normal.\(^{20}\)

If madness is the absence of a work then this is not imposed at one moment rather than another (Foucault’s classical era) but is essentially so. The silence of madness is necessarily linked to an act of force and a prohibition which open history and speech in general (Heidegger’s sense of history as the abandonment of beings by Being is clearly at work in this thought). “Like non-meaning [Being], silence is the work’s limit and profound resource.”\(^{21}\) But if madness is silent then language is the very break with madness. This means that, and quite contrary to Foucault’s intentions, language adheres more thoroughly to its essence and vocation, makes a cleaner break with madness, as it gets closer to it.\(^{22}\) It is not, then, as Foucault says of Descartes, that “I who think, I cannot be mad.” Rather, the Cogito escapes madness only because it is valid even if I am mad. There is a value and a meaning of the Cogito, as of existence, which is beyond the division between reason and madness. Thought need no longer fear madness and has no need to exclude it as Foucault had argued.

For Derrida, Descartes only claims to exclude madness during the hyperbolical moment of natural doubt.\(^{23}\) Descartes never interns madness since his mad audacity is that madness is only one case of thought, within thought:

[\(E\)xceeding the totality—within existence—is possible only in the direction of infinity or nothingness; for even if the totality of what I think is imbued with falsehood or madness, even if the totality of the world does not exist, even if nonmeaning has invaded the totality of the world, up to and

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including the very contents of my thought, I still think, I am *while* I think.\textsuperscript{24}

Foucault’s claim that Descartes reduces madness to unreason is of course but a small piece of his larger thesis that at the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the classical age, madness is silenced. Descartes’ method of radical doubt, argues Foucault, is symptomatic of the classical age in refusing any common ground between reasonable philosophical doubt and the delusions of the mad.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite his quibbles over how to read Descartes, Derrida too is really interested in going after this major thesis about the fate of madness in the classical age. And the “infeasibility” of this thesis, for Derrida, is that it seeks to write a history of madness “*itself.*”\textsuperscript{26} Foucault wants to let madness speak for itself rather than being spoken of in the language of reason. Despite being the most admirable aspect of Foucault’s history of madness, says Derrida, this is also the maddest. Foucault attempts to write about madness without recourse to the reason that has imprisoned it, arguing that a history of madness, as a history of what has been silenced by reason, is effectively an “archaeology of silence.”\textsuperscript{27}

Derrida asks whether there can indeed be a history of silence and whether an archaeology does not remain a logic, an organised language, a project, an order?\textsuperscript{28} An archaeology of silence would then be the “restoration or repetition of the act perpetrated against madness “at the very moment when this act is denounced.” “*Nothing* within this language,” writes Derrida,

> and *no one* among those who speak it, can escape this historical guilt [...] which Foucault apparently wants to put on trial. But such a trial may be impossible, for by the simple fact of their articulation the proceedings and the verdict unceasingly reiterate the crime... Order is denounced within order.\textsuperscript{29}

Given their silence, the misfortune of the mad is that those such as Foucault who represent them the best are those who betray them the most. Whenever a spokesperson for the mad speaks up on their behalf, attempting to convey their silence itself, then this spokesperson “has already passed over to the side of the enemy, the side of order...”:

> The unsurpassable, unique, and imperial grandeur of the order of reason, that which makes it *not* just another actual order or structure (a deter-
mined historical structure, one structure among other possible ones) is that one cannot speak out against it except by being for it, that one can protest it only from within it.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus the exclusion of madness as un-reason is not only a feature of Foucault’s classical age but is found already in Greek logos.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, to assume that reason gets split between reason and unreason only in the classical age is to make the metaphysical move par excellence of assuming an original unity of reason.

FOUCAULT’S RESPONSE

Before looking at Foucault’s resumption of his disagreement with Derrida in his last lectures at the Collège de France, it is important to consider his earlier responses to Derrida. The first of these came in 1969 in a seminar held at the Société Française de Philosophie, under the title ‘What is an Author?’. As Campillo has demonstrated, although Foucault doesn’t mention Derrida in this text, his rejection of the move to give writing “a primal status” must be referring to earlier presentations of what would soon become (in 1974) Derrida’s critique of “logocentrism” (about which more below).\textsuperscript{32} Foucault had this to say about the elevation of writing:

\begin{quote}
Giving writing a primal status seems to be a way of retranslating, in transcendental terms, both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character. [...] To imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple repetition, in transcendental terms, of both the religious principle of the work’s survival, its perpetuation beyond the author’s death, and its enigmatic excess in relation to him. This usage of the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author’s privileges under the protection of the a priori.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

But it was in ‘My Body, this Paper, this Fire’, an essay included as an appendix to the 1972 edition of History of Madness, that Foucault responded openly to Derrida.\textsuperscript{34} Here Foucault disputed, first, that madness is simply neglected by Descartes in favour of the more radical example of dreaming, as Derrida had argued.\textsuperscript{35} The Cogito might mistake its dreaming thoughts for wakefulness (or vice versa) but it will not mistake itself for a madman. In other words, what differentiates the philosopher’s thinking from that of the madman is established—it does not have to be tested. Imitating madmen will not persuade the philosopher that he is mad

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in the way that thinking of dreams will convince him he is asleep. While it would be mad to want to act the madman, to think about dreaming is already to have the impression of being asleep. Since “madness is excluded by the subject who doubts, in order that he may qualify himself as a doubting subject,” there can (no longer) by any truth in madness.36

Second, and against what he saw as Derrida’s Heideggerian pretensions to go beyond any philosophical determination in the direction of Being, Foucault sought to reassign Derrida squarely to the philosophical tradition.37 Understood as a philosopher, Derrida’s stake in madness not being excluded by philosophical discourse becomes clear, since then philosophical discourse would be determined as other than the discourse of madness. This would send philosophical discourse across to the “other side,” into the pure presumption of not being mad. This separation/exteriority, suggests Foucault, is a determination from which the philosopher’s discourse must be saved if it is indeed to be a “project of exceeding all finished and determined totality,” if the philosopher is really to “go directly to the calling into question of the “totality of beingness.”38 The Cartesian exclusion must be excluded because it is determining. This, then, is why Derrida works hard to make it that philosophical discourse is finally excluded from excluding madness. For Foucault, famously, Derrida’s appeal to that which goes beyond any determined history of beings to the nothing of in-determination (Being), with its intimations of Heidegger, is as metaphysical as it gets:

a reduction of discursive practices to textual traces; the elision of events that are produced there, leaving only marks for a reading; the invention of voices behind the text, so as not to have to examine the modes of implication of the subject in discourses [...] I would not say that it is a metaphysics [...] I would go much further. I would say that it is a historically well-determined little pedagogy, which manifests itself here in a very visible manner. A pedagogy which teaches the student that there is nothing outside the text, but that in it, in its interstices, in its blanks and silences, the reserve of the origin reigns; that it is never necessary to look beyond it, but that here, not in the words of course, but in the words as crossings-out erasure, in their lattice, what is said is “the meaning of being”. A pedagogy that gives inversely to the voice of the master that unlimited sovereignty that allows it indefinitely to re-say the text.39


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Taking their disagreement up again in his 1982-3 lectures on ‘The Government of Self and Others,’ Foucault’s attack is this time proactive—even as he ceases to mention Derrida by name. No longer defending himself against Derrida’s charges, Foucault will instead broaden the scope of his earlier argument about Derrida facing the text’s differences to target a fundamental moment of Derrida’s critique of metaphysics: Derrida’s apparent reduction of the philosophical tradition to logocentrism. For Foucault, the elision of textual difference is not just a problem in Derrida’s reading of Descartes’ *Meditations*, but is characteristic of Derrida’s account of the text of the entire philosophical tradition.40

In the name of the differences of this text, Foucault will argue that, from the moment of its Socratic event, philosophy branched into two paths. While Derrida’s accusation of logocentrism might apply to the (more familiar) path which charged philosophy with discovering what is timeless in truth, another (much overlooked) path gave to philosophy, understood this time as way of life, the task of being the true life.41 The truth of life versus the true life as something really to be lived. And this bifurcation, claims Foucault, is visible in Plato’s dialogues themselves, raising the question of whether Plato can be placed in the vanguard of logocentrism.42 While Foucault does not want to say that there is nothing in Plato’s dialogues of this first, metaphysical, path, he does want to say that Plato is also very much of this second way.

And it is the Plato of this second way, argues Foucault (2010: 249), who excludes writing not because of a nascent “logocentrism”—as Derrida had argued in *Of Grammatology* (1967)—but because philosophy as a way of life must precisely be lived and cannot be reduced to doctrines. Given that the Platonic exclusion of writing is central to Derrida’s argument in *Of Grammatology*, we cannot mistake this move on Foucault’s part with a minor footnote to their earlier squabble concerning Descartes. In attacking logocentrism, Foucault is going after a central concept of deconstruction, a concept that we now need to introduce if we are to grasp the substance of Foucault’s objection.

LOGOCENTRISM

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes that “From the pre-Socratics to Heidegger,” the history of metaphysics “always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been the debasement of writing, and its repression outside ‘full’ speech”43:
As was the case with the writing of the truth of the soul, as in Plato, in the Middle Ages too it is a writing understood in the metaphoric sense, that is to say a natural, eternal and universal writing, the system of signified truth, which is recognised in its dignity. As in the *Phaedrus*, a certain fallen writing continues to be opposed to it. A history of this metaphor remains to be written, forever opposing divine or natural writing to human and laborious, finite, and artificial inscription.\(^{44}\)

Why is speech always preferred to writing in the philosophical tradition? The metaphysical privilege enjoyed by the φωνή (phōnē) is that, like the signified truth of a divine writing, it points to an originary speech outside of all interpretation or representation. Speech is the “system of hearing oneself thinking”\(^{45}\) through the phonic substance, which presents itself as a speech that is fully present: the speaker exhibits self-presence, is present to himself.\(^{46}\) In speech, unlike in writing, I coincide with or am identical with myself.

Speech, then, is privileged over writing because of its proximity to the source of the utterance.\(^{46}\) In speech, the correspondence between my words and their meaning is guaranteed by my physical presence. Writing, by contrast, separates the speaker from his utterance. It is second-hand, a mere transcript of speech. From Aristotle—“spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words”—to Saussure—“Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first”—a speaking subject is conjured time and again as if its living presence emanated through every text.\(^{47}\) The full presence of that subject is manifest only in speech, never in postlapsarian writing.\(^{48}\)

Thus the model for understanding language has long been a phonetic one in which the phoneme retains the presence of the originally speaking subject. This figure of the speaking subject is one of a masterful autarky: the subject speaks for itself, makes itself present, brings itself forth into being. The valorisation of speech is indicative of a wider onto-theology in which only that which escapes re-presentation enjoys full being as presence. In ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ from 1968, we read that

writing appears to Plato (and after him to all of philosophy, which is as such constituted in this gesture) as that process of redoubling in which we are fatally (en)trained: the supplement of a supplement, the signifier, the representative of a representative.\(^{49}\)
In ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ as in Of Grammatology, Derrida singles out Plato’s Phaedrus as a key early statement of the logocentric exclusion of speech. In the Phaedrus, Socrates recounts a myth concerning the Egyptian god Theuth.50 Theuth invented number, calculation, astronomy but, “above all,” writing. Revealing these arts to the Egyptian king, Thamous, Theuth tells him that they should be passed on to all Egyptians. In response to the King’s question concerning the use of these arts, Theuth explains that, in the case of writing:

“Your highness, this science will increase the intelligence of the people of Egypt and improve their memories. For this invention is a potion for memory and intelligence.” But Thamous replied, “You are most ingenious, Theuth. But one person has the ability to bring branches of expertise into existence, another to assess the extent to which they will harm or benefit those who use them. The loyalty you feel to writing, as its originator, has just led you to tell me the opposite of its true effect. It will atrophy people’s memories. Trust in writing will make them remember things by relying on marks made by others, from outside themselves, not on their own inner resources, and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds. Your invention is a potion for jogging the memory, not for remembering. You provide your students with the appearance of intelligence, not real intelligence. Because your students will be widely read, though without any contact with a teacher, they will seem to be men of wide knowledge, when they will usually be ignorant. And this spurious appearance of intelligence will make them difficult company.”

With writing, then, people call things to remembrance no longer from within themselves but by means of external marks. Derrida takes this as a key statement of the logocentric sense of being that characterises metaphysics: “The Phaedrus would already be sufficient to prove that the responsibility for logos, for its meaning and effects, goes to those who attend it, to those who are present with the presence of a father.”51 The full presence of the subject of the logos is manifest only in the immediacy of the living spoken word, never in the “cadaverous rigidity” of a writing that is only secondary or derivative—fallen.52 If metaphysical speech is the originally speaking subject present to, or identical with, itself then writing, by contrast, is present only in the absence of this origin-subject. This is why writing is suggestive, for Derrida, of the trace, his alternative to the metaphysical sense of being as presence.53
Foucault acknowledges that many of Plato’s dialogues point in the direction of a metaphysics of presence.\textsuperscript{54} In the Alcibiades, for example, Plato seeks to answer the question of the care of self (\textit{epimeleia heautou}) by elaborating what the self \textit{is} in its essence or self-identity. Selfhood, it turns out, is given by an immortal, unchanging soul. Foucault insists, however, that this ontological concern is matched in Plato’s dialogues, taken as a whole, with attention to the ethical question of what the \textit{care} in the care of self consists in. And here it is no longer a question of human being but rather of human existence. The seemingly metaphysical question: “who are you?” turns out to hinge on the ethical question of: “how do you live?” In support of this argument Foucault points to the end of the Gorgias, for example, where Socrates says:

Renouncing the honours at which the world aims, I desire only to know the truth, and to live as well as I can, and, when I die, to die as well as I can. And, to the utmost of my power, I exhort all other men to do the same. And, in return for your exhortation of me, I exhort you also to take part in the great combat, which is the combat of life, and greater than every other earthly conflict.\textsuperscript{55}

Foucault wants his auditors to see Plato not only as the philosopher of conversion to the Absolute but also as the philosopher of \textit{practices}; not only as the philosopher with a fixed bearing towards external realities but as the philosopher following a path, a way of life. And this way, in Foucault’s reconstruction of it, is marked by an initial choice of a way of life that must be followed assiduously throughout life. This is a principle of movement rather than one of self-identity, of overcoming rather than self-sameness. The philosopher must work on himself rather than contemplate a soul that does not change. Indeed, for Foucault, building on the work of Pierre Hadot\textsuperscript{56}, the very reality of ancient philosophy is this “work of self on self.”\textsuperscript{57}

Foucault makes his disagreement with Derrida’s charge of Plato as logocentric explicit by way of his commentary on Plato’s letters. Although he never mentions Derrida by name he does say that

in no way should we see in this Platonic refusal of writing something like the advent of a logocentrism in Western philosophy. You can see that it is more complicated than that. For the refusal of writing here [...] is not at all presented in terms of an opposition between writing and the meaning and
valorization of *logos*. On the contrary, what this letter takes up is precisely the theme of the insufficiency of the *logos*.58

How does Foucault arrive at this conclusion? Perhaps the most well-known refusal of writing in Plato is at the end of Letter II, where Plato reiterates that his doctrines should not be written down since this way they will end up being demeaned by a wider public that will not be able to appreciate them. The only way to avoid this fate is

> to avoid writing and to learn by heart; for it is not possible that what is written down should not get divulged. For this reason I myself have never yet written anything on these subjects, and no treatise by Plato exists or will exist.59

Plato signs off by asking his readers to commit his letter to memory before burning it. Foucault reminds his auditors that this letter is later than Letter VII, which he proposes to focus on, and perhaps only a Neo-Platonist summary of Letter VII.60 Besides, at stake in Letter II’s precaution about writing is probably a simple matter of Pythagorean esotericism.

So Foucault turns to Plato’s seventh letter, which was written concerning Plato’s failed enterprise to turn Dionysios The Younger, the Tyrant of Syracuse, into a philosopher (if philosophers can’t be kings, then kings should be philosophers).61 Plato writes in this letter, the authenticity of which is now not generally disputed, that he had heard that Dionysios had written his own treatise of philosophy based partly on Plato’s teachings. Knowing nothing of the contents of this text, and not wishing to know, Plato continues that

> This much at least I can say about all writers, past or future, who say they know the things to which I devote myself, whether by hearing the teaching of me or of others, or by their own discoveries—that according to my view it is not possible for them to have any real skill in the matter. There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much conversation about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself. Yet this much I know—that if things were written or put into words, it would be done best by me, and that, if they
were written badly, I should be the person most pained. Again, if they had appeared to me to admit adequately of writing and speech what task in life could I have performed nobler than this, to write what is of great service to mankind and to bring the nature of things into the light for all to see? But I do not think it a good thing for men that there should be a disquisition, as it is called, on this topic—except for some few who are able with a little teaching to find it out for themselves. As for the rest, it would fill some of them quite illogically with a mistaken feeling of contempt, and others with lofty and vainglorious expectations, as though they had learnt something high and mighty.62

Arguing that both writing and speech are incapable of imparting philosophy, Plato suggests that those who have no natural kinship with philosophy cannot be brought to it by learning or memory; “for it cannot be engendered at all in natures which are foreign to it.”63 Indeed, even kindred spirits of philosophy can only engage the task of truth in a dialectical manner, proceeding together “by question and answer” and “without ill will.”64 For this reason, the writing down of philosophy, in addition to being pointless given that the true philosopher has no risk of forgetting what he has seen, is tantamount to claiming for oneself what can only come to light in the context of a life lived together with others.65

Foucault makes the following points about this passage from the VII Letter. First, Foucault notes that the term used by Plato to denote that which should not be written down is mathémata. Mathémata,66 argues Foucault, should be understood in its double meaning both as particular items of knowledge but also as “the formulae of knowledge.” What Plato is saying cannot be written down, then, is not the content of philosophical knowledge so much as the expression of this knowledge in the manner of formula. Plato, suggests Foucault, is saying that philosophical knowledge is not formulaic or ready-made and that it is for this reason that it cannot be committed to writing as something that can be taught and learned in a prescribed way.

Unlike technical forms of knowledge, which can be set down, philosophical knowledge is passed on through sunousia rather than mathémata. Sunousia was often used to denote sexual union, but Foucault takes it to mean “live with” in this context.67 The one who would be a philosopher, then, must cohabit with philosophy rather than learn its doctrines; he must be always alongside philosophy rather than merely familiar with its formulas. Foucault points out that Plato does
not deny that it would be a useful thing for everybody if philosophy could be reduced to a written code; but this would not work, and would in fact be deceptive, because then the truth of philosophy—that it requires constant coexistence with philosophy—would be obscured. By the same token, for those who actually live philosophy, writings are unnecessary.

Foucault’s Plato, then, does not disavow writing because of his speech-centric logocentrism, but, quite the opposite, a certain logos (writing and speech) is de-centred inasmuch as it is separated from a living, a form of life that can neither be taught in the abstract nor lived alone. Writing down philosophy might mislead the one who seeks philosophy that it is only logos when instead it is a way of life—an ergon (work). Contra Derrida, the exclusion of writing means only that “philosophy has no other reality than its own practices”. The exclusion of logos is therefore carried out in the name of something positive, “in the name of tībē, of exercise, effort, work…”:

And in this way two complementary figures are avoided: that of the philosopher who turns his gaze towards another reality and is detached from this world; [and] that of the philosopher who arrives with the table of the law already written.

If it was the Cynics who took this injunction to actually live philosophy most seriously in their rejection of teachings and their recourse to tales of exemplary lives, then at least part of the reason for Foucault’s interest in the Cynics (the focus of his lectures on The Courage of Truth from 1983-84), is that he wants to show that the Cynics, like Plato, were drawing on a contemporary understanding of philosophy as a mode of life. And this understanding is one that a deconstructive reading of “logocentric” texts, a reading that abstract these texts from their wider discursive contexts, cannot but overlook. That the Cynics also took the Socratic injunction to live philosophy seriously—to the extent of producing, like Socrates himself, no writings whatsoever—shows not that they, too, were logocentric but rather that the exclusion of writing was epiphenomenal to the widely shared Socratic concern that philosophy not become fixed and dogmatic but proceed always by questioning. The Cynic Diogenes says this explicitly: “Hegesias having asked him to lend him one of his writings, [Diogenes] said, ‘You are a simpleton, Hegesias; you do not choose painted figs, but real ones; and yet you pass over the true training and would apply yourself to written rules’.”
Foucault goes as far as to say that, far from marking the advent of logocentrism, the Platonic prohibition on writing was “the advent of philosophy itself”:

Of a philosophy whose very reality would be the practice of self on self. It is something like the Western subject which is at stake in this simultaneous and conjoint refusal of writing and logos.74

If philosophy and logocentrism often mean much the same thing in deconstructive readings, Foucault leaves us in little doubt that he does not see it this way. Philosophy—indeed the Western subject—emerges in a certain refusal of logos. Philosophy, from the Cynics to Foucault himself, finds its reality in a self-fashioning that implies no self-presence but rather the ceaseless movement of life in which philosophy is present only in the sacrifice of self, only in the very absence of identity that Dionysian self-overcoming affirms.

Given the significance of Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of presence on Derrida’s concept of logocentrism, it is both interesting and important to note that Heidegger’s account of Plato’s exclusion of writing is much closer to Foucault’s than to Derrida’s. In his lectures on Plato’s Sophist, Heidegger too takes the prohibition of writing in Plato to be an exclusion of logos and not only of writing. Heidegger emphasises that, for Plato, what is said, as much as what is written, “can by itself deliver nothing.”75 To take up the logos, whether as speech or writing, one must already know what is spoken of or written about. The true philosopher must “see” matters for himself, in his own soul:

There is a double logos, the living, i.e. the one that takes its life from a relation to the matters themselves, from dialogue, and the written one, in the broadest sense the communicated one [i.e. including speech], which is a mere image of the other, living logos.76

Also in support of Foucault’s thesis, we might note that the view that writing down philosophy can be problematic in a pragmatic (rather than a logocentric) sense is still evident in the Neo-Platonism of late antiquity. In Porphyry’s account of the life of his master, Plotinus, we read of a certain Thaumasius who, frustrated by the dialogical nature of Plotinus’s discourse with Porphyry, insisted that Plotinus speak in such a way that it could be written down. Plotinus replied: “But if we could not solve the problems Porphyry raises, we would be unable to say anything that could be written down.”77 Although Plotinus did not refuse writing,
Porphyry tells us that his books were entrusted only to his inner circle, and that Porphyry himself only gained access to Plotinus’s texts once having engaged in a lengthy written exchange with another of Plotinus’s disciples in which Porphyry finally concedes that the master is right. The reasons for this, as Hadot reminds us, are not difficult to discern—manuscripts could be reproduced and copied at will, such that Plotinus, echoing Plato’s concerns, was careful to ensure that his writings were not made available to just anyone. Hadot claims that, in acting thus, Plotinus was merely “conforming to a widespread practice,” one that included Augustine, for example, who similarly provided a list of the friends to whom one of his writings could be distributed.

Focusing his attack on Derrida by turning specifically to the Phaedrus (the logocentrism of which Derrida had invoked in Of Grammatology), Foucault argues that what we “should note straightaway” is that “Plato does not at all put oral discourse (logos) on one side and written discourse on another.” Throughout the text, indeed, the term logos denotes both written and oral discourse. Indeed, Foucault points out that there is even a point in the dialogue where Plato makes explicit the absence of any such division, which is the point where Phaedrus says that Lysias’ speech is not worth much because Lysias is only a logographer, namely someone who writes his speeches, and whose discourse therefore does not arise from his own logos. Lysias, in Phaedrus’ dismissive view is merely a hired speechwriter. But Socrates replies sharply to Phaedrus that he should not despise the logographers, for there is nothing intrinsically shameful in writing speeches—what matters is rather, whether in writing or in speech, one speaks well or badly.

Rejecting the classical distinction between the logographers’ written discourse and the living logos, the real question for Foucault’s Socrates/Plato, is how to distinguish between the good speech and the bad speech, whether it has been written down or not.

For Foucault, the purpose of the Phaedrus is to dismiss the idea that the true discourse could know the truth in advance, since then discourse would be nothing other than the dissimulation of what is already known (doxa), which would reduce philosophy to rhetoric. Given that it can speak for or against the same thing, rhetoric is indifferent to truth. Lysias’s speech in the Phaedrus epitomises this, since it seeks to prove that a boy should bestow his favours on the man who does not love him rather than the one who does. Indeed, for the true discourse to be other than rhetoric it is not enough even to posit that the true discourse seeks logocentrism? · 115
the truth. Philosophical discourse rather stands in a constant relation to truth—it is truth-telling as ontology, as a way of being, beyond any epistemology. In seeking the truth as something external to the soul, we would be reproducing the claim of sophistry that the truth can be had, merely displacing this having of the truth from the beginning to the end of our discourse. True discourse is marked not by any knowing at all but by its capacity to modify the soul. Only the soul can accede to truth; is this capacity for truth. Truth can only recognise itself in the soul which it modifies.

Yes, the exclusion of writing in the Phaedrus is part of a wider attempt to differentiate philosophy from rhetoric or, to say the same thing, truth from opinion. But this differentiation does not place a logos-centric, self-same soul alongside the sophistical soul of a dissembler. Rather, the distinction that matters is that the logos of the philosopher, transformed by the dialectic, changes while the sophist must remain stuck with the doxa (opinion) of his day. The philosopher's soul is thus in motion while the soul of the sophist is what remains self-identical—unchanging regardless of what side of the argument it adopts, as rhetoric demands. The sophist, hence his name, has the measure of truth, which is why he can sell his techne. The philosopher, meanwhile, must submit to the demands of the dialectic—to the parrhesia (which Foucault came to translate as the courage of truth) which is a pact of mutual submission to the truth. This pact means that I only get to test the soul inasmuch as he tests mine in return. In the dialectic, truth is a process rather than a possession.

This also implies that while the sophist, by definition, is a bad sophist if his rhetoric does not prevail, the philosopher does not need to win the argument. The end of the Protagoras is exemplary here—are we not supposed to hear in Socrates’ admission that he and his sophist protagonist have switched places (such that each ends up where the other started out) the essential difference between philosophy and sophistry? Philosophy, Plato seems to be telling us, is an idea of the movement of truth in place of the stasis of sophistry. The sophist’s discourse must remain where it started where the philosopher’s must be transformed.

Foucault’s understanding of Plato’s exclusion of sophistry is therefore very different to that of deconstruction. In Derrida’s account in Platon’s Pharmacy, Plato’s refusal of sophistry maps onto his exclusion of writing, since both writing and rhetoric are seen as dissembling an original presence, whether that of Speech or of Truth. Taking the example of the speech-writer that appears in the Phaedrus,
Derrida notes that, in writing “what he does not speak, what he would never say,” the speech-writer is already stuck in the “posture of the sophist: the man of non-presence and of non-truth.” Thereby, “the incompatibility between the written and the true is clearly announced”:

For writing has no essence or value of its own, whether positive or negative. It plays within the simulacrum. It is in its type the mime of memory, of knowledge, of truth, etc. That is why men of writing appear before the eye of God not as wise men (sophoi) but in truth as fake or self-proclaimed wise men (doxosophoi). This is Plato’s definition of the sophist. For it is above all against sophistics that this diatribe against writing is directed: it can be inscribed within the interminable trial instituted by Plato, under the name of philosophy, against the sophists. The man who relies on writing, who brags about the knowledge and powers it assures him, this simulator unmasked by Thamus has all the features of a sophist: “the imitator of him who knows,” as the Sophist puts it (268 c).

Derrida, then, although in no way championing sophistry as such, sides with the sophists against the pretensions of philosophy to overcome representation with presence. For Foucault, by contrast, there is something much more historically situated going on. First, the rise of rhetoric, along with the sophists who taught it, was concretely the outcome of the way in which democracy introduced rules of political equality that well-born Athenians now needed to overcome if ever they were to recover their station as the best. Sophistry sold the rhetorical tools necessary in order for these young men to prevail once again over the hoi polloi. Philosophy, by contrast, took up the problem of democratic equality not at all at the level of the political game, but rather out of concern for the future of parrhesia (here translated as plain-spokenness):

the expulsion and exclusion of rhetoric was not at all the eulogy of a logocentrism that would make speech the form peculiar to philosophy, but the affirmation of the constant connection of philosophical discourse—no matter whether in written or oral form—to the truth.

Second, Foucault’s Plato insists on differentiating philosophy from sophistry because the former renounces the agonistic relationship between souls characteristic of rhetoric (in which each seeks to prevail over the other) in favour of a relationship in which one soul tests another and itself at the same time. This “test
relationship” established by *parrhesia*, by plain and courageous speech, replaces aristocratic competition (a competition that had to lead, by contrast, to rhetoric) with the natural affinity of friendship. The aim of the true discourse is no longer to win but, through love, to establish a homology between two souls such that both can accede to the same truth⁸⁸: “to agree, to say the same as the other, to mean the same as the other.”⁸⁹ The identity of the logos between friends’ souls is here the measure of truth, not the identity of a divine or natural logos.

In establishing friendship as the ground of truth and truth as constitutive of friendship, Foucault introduces a division between the will to truth and the will to power that goes much further than his earlier work, where truth-power had seemed inseparable, if not indistinguishable for all that.⁹⁰ In philosophical friendship the parrhesiast relates to the other not in the political sense of seeking supremacy, but in the ethical sense of the test. By way of the test, namely telling the truth to the other, but also accepting the challenge of truth for oneself, the parrhesiastical pact establishes a measure of equality between the parties in which the will to truth remains irreducible to the will to power. Though there is still struggle, it is struggle for the truth, not by the truth, and it is a struggle that unites, rather than dividing. The parrhesiastic relationship is one in which the truth is put to work not over against the other but for him, and for oneself too. This is the dual structure of care for self, which is also care for others. The test of truth with the other is a collaborative rather than a competitive endeavour because establishing a relationship to the truth is not something that one can do alone. Just as the other requires my challenge, so also I need his. While in rhetoric I seek only to modify the soul of the other (through flattery), philosophical discourse modifies my soul too.

In this sense, notes Foucault, the “logographic mode” of discourse (whether written or spoken) found in rhetoric lacks the problem of Being that the auto-asceticism of philosophical discourse maintains.⁹¹ If Being is always a question, then the *movement* of the soul enabled by the dialectic establishes the real difference of philosophy from sophistry beyond any logocentrism.

**CONCLUSION**

In Foucault’s last lectures on ‘The Government of Self and Others’ at the Collège de France, Plato’s exclusion of writing relates not to the timelessness of the logos—this is not an ontotheology—but to its need to be timely, to be actually
lived rather than identified with a set of fixed doctrines. It is not, then, a matter, as Derrida held, of opposing the logos of a “divine or natural writing” to a “fallen,” “finite” writing, but rather of opposing a writing that can never be finite enough viz philosophy as a mode of life in which life precisely changes.

Foucault in this way returns to and renews his earlier attack on Derrida’s thought as ahistorical—unable to see anything outside of the text. Derrida’s construction of the philosophical tradition as logocentric ironically reproduces the very philosophy of presence it is supposed to refute. For it gives us a philosophy that, despite its apparent differences, is at bottom self-same—identical with the exclusion of writing. It is enough for Foucault to show that, from the moment of its Socratic event, philosophy was never identical with itself in this way. First, the exclusion of writing in Plato is a straw person; it is more accurately described as the exclusion of a certain logos (both written and spoken) that Plato sees as insufficiently mobile and collective for philosophy. If philosophy is to manifest a living logos rather than lifeless doctrines, then it requires that the logos take the form of the dialectic. Second, while Plato’s dialogues do exhibit a philosophy of presence, there is as much that is concerned with practices—with the ethics of care of self rather than with metaphysical essences.

Finally, even if Plato is indeed guilty of logocentrism, this does not mean that ancient philosophy stands similarly charged. Ancient philosophy was not just Platonism. The implicit exclusion of writing in Cynicism in particular stemmed from the refusal of any formal teachings—Cynicism did not want to be another philosophical school—in order that philosophy be characterised by the ongoing test of the courage of truth (parrhesia), a test that must continually be taken up again throughout life. The parrhesia that, as Foucault shows, the Cynics made central to the philosophical life would be badly characterised as logocentric. For parrhesia, where the logos is characterised by the test of truth and not by its content, is never identical with itself, never the full presence of a divine or natural word. As merely the courage to bind oneself to the truth through a risky confrontation with normalising power (the nomoi, the laws or customs that the Cynics rejected), the life of the Cynic was rather characterised by a crude and confrontational logos defined only by its opposition to citizenship. What is present in the logos of the Cynic is really only the absence of any given identity. The being of the Cynic is merely his non-being, his being a-polis, without a state.
Foucault’s account of ancient Cynicism intends, among other things, to show that there is much in the philosophical tradition that is not logocentrism. Is Foucault’s relationship to this tradition finally more affirmative than that of deconstruction inasmuch as he is alive to its difference from itself? Where deconstruction grudgingly acknowledges its dependence on that which it deconstructs, almost as if caught in the net of its own logic, Foucault finishes with a much more assenting statement of his dependency. For Foucault finds an alternative to the metaphysics of presence not in the absences and elisions of metaphysical texts but rather in the diversity of lived practices of philosophy.

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NOTES

8. Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 38. There is no space to expand my account of the difference between Foucault's archaeological approach to history and Derrida's insistence on a more 'transcendental' approach here. Interested readers should consult Khurana (“The Common Root of Meaning and Nonmeaning: Derrida, Foucault and the Transformation of the Transcendental Question,” in O. Custer et al. (eds), *Foucault/Derrida: Fifty Years Later* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), who argues that despite Foucault’s accusation that Derrida’s critique of him is ahistorical and built on an entirely canonical post-Kantian concern with transcendental conditions, in fact Derrida’s transcendental questions are far from the conventional kind.
12. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 7
15. Foucault, *History of Madness*, 46
20. Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 54
22. Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 55
23. Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 56
25. Foucault, History of Madness, 47
27. Foucault, History of Madness, xxviii
34. In the same year there was also a shorter ‘Reply to Derrida’, which was initially published in the journal Paideia and which Foucault also included as an appendix to the second edition of History of Madness.
35. Foucault, History of Madness, 553-4
36. Foucault, History of Madness, 561
37. Foucault, History of Madness, 568
38. Foucault, History of Madness, 569
39. Foucault, History of Madness, 573
41. Foucault (History of Madness, 569) had already argued in ‘My Body’ that Derrida had missed this ‘essential discursive determination’ in Descartes’ exclusion of madness: namely ‘the double weave of the exercise and the demonstration’. Foucault now conducts a full genealogy of this philosophical ‘double-weave’.
44. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 15
45. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 7
46. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 18
47. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 11 & 30
48. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 71
51. Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 77-8
52. Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 79
53. See, for example: Jacques Derrida, Speech and Phenomena: and other essays on Husserl’s theory of
55. Foucault, The Courage of Truth: the government of self and others II, 163
57. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 242; see also, 255
58. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 253-4
60. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 247
61. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 247
63. Plato, “II and VII Letters,” 344a
64. Plato, “II and VII Letters,” 344b
66. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 247
68. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 248-9
69. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 249
70. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 254
71. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others 255
72. As the first Cynic, Antisthenes, told a friend who had lost his notes: ‘you should have inscribed them on your mind instead of on paper’. Antisthenes also ‘maintained that virtue is an affair of deeds and does not need a store of words or learning’ (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Vol. II, trans. R.D. Hicks (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1991), 7 & 13).
73. Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, 51
74. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 254
75. Martin Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 237-8
76. Heidegger, Plato’s Sophist, 239
78. Hadot, Plotinus: or the simplicity of vision, 88
79. Hadot, Plotinus: or the simplicity of vision, 89
80. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 329-30
81. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 330-1; 335; 352
82. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 335
83. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 370
84. Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 68
85. Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 105-6
86. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 369
87. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 352
88. Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 335; 371; 374
90. In the *Will to Know*, the Collège de France lectures from 1971, Foucault is by contrast entirely true to the Nietzschean schema, as can be seen from his lecture summary, in particular, where he sees truth as only a fictitious outcome of the will to power. See: Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, trans. G. Burchell (Houndmills: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013), 197-8.

This article presents an exercise in reading Michel Foucault. More concretely, it poses an attempt to mobilise fragments of his thought in order to make it speak in an emancipatory voice. The question I ask is, what is political rationality? This question is my way into, first, a discussion of a certain reception of Foucault’s works on power—routinely called ‘governmentality studies’—and, second, an exegesis of Foucault’s writings that foregrounds his lifelong preoccupation with historical articulations between politics and rationality. This exegesis yields both a scandalous thesis on the historicity of reason and the makings of an emancipatory project that far surpasses the ethos of refusal that Foucault routinely expounded; a project that calls for a radical disarticulation of politics and rationality and that has, in recent decades, been pursued by Giorgio Agamben.

In October 1979, Michel Foucault delivered the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Stanford University, which he entitled ‘“Omnes et Singulatim”: Toward a Critique of Political Reason.” This title alone goes to the heart of Foucault’s concerns at the time: the phrase “omnes et singulatim,” Latin for ‘each and all,’ signi-
fies the individualisation that he claims is at the heart of pastoral power and that, according to Foucault, is carried over into modern ‘governmentality’ and state power, which is at once individualising and totalising. The term ‘critique’ is a reference to what he considers to be the central (if self-assigned) task of philosophy since the Kantian moment: “since Kant, the role of philosophy has been to prevent reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience.” This enterprise is not, however, confined to reason and the reasoned subject’s experience of the world, for “from the same moment […] the role of philosophy has also been to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality.” And, as is clear from this last quote, the term ‘political reason’ (or ‘political rationality’) refers to that which the (Kantian, or, better, Kant-inspired) critique must have as its object. But here the title starts collapsing in on itself; for if philosophy has, since Kant, charged itself with keeping watch over political rationality, then why does Foucault feel the need to profess that his lectures move toward a critique of political rationality? Surely his aim is not simply to reiterate this task, for this would be to join the ranks of the speculative philosophers.

What, then, is the critique that Foucault seeks to move toward? Before this question can be answered, a more fundamental question must be considered first: what is political rationality? Throughout “Omnes et Singulatim” the term remains shrouded in mystery. Foucault’s concluding assertion is especially perplexing:

Political rationality has grown and imposed itself all throughout the history of Western societies. It first took its stance on the idea of pastoral power, then on that of reason of state. Its inevitable effects are both individualization and totalization. Liberation [La libération] can come only from attacking not just one of these two effects but political rationality’s very roots.

The uncharacteristic lexicon Foucault employs here makes one pause in wonder. Surely it was Foucault who tirelessly reminded his readers not to think in terms of inevitability and to eschew sweeping claims about liberation. The enigma of this passage must be solved if the problem of critique and its relation to political rationality is to be understood.

III

Part of what makes the term ‘political rationality’ so unclear in “Omnes et Singulatim”...
**tim**” is that Foucault varies between using the term in an abstract sense, as in the concluding paragraph cited above, where it signifies political rationality as such (even as that term allows for historical heterogeneity), and in a determined sense, where it refers to a particular rationality. He employs the term in the latter way, for instance, when he notes that, when engaging with *raison d’État*, one must take care “to pin down the specific type of political rationality the state produced” because, in the realm of political practice, “it’s not ‘reason in general’ that is implemented but always a very specific type of rationality.”

A year and several months before delivering the Tanner Lectures, Foucault was interviewed by a round table. When prompted by his interlocutors to clarify his stance on what is called, with reference to Max Weber’s work, ‘rationalisation,’ Foucault replies:

> I think one must restrict one’s use of this word [rationalization] to an instrumental and relative meaning. [...] One isn’t assessing things in term of an absolute against which they could be evaluated as constituting more or less perfect forms of rationality but, rather, examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices or systems of practices, and what role they play within them—because it’s true that ‘practices’ don’t exist without a certain regime of rationality.10

It is, then, because the term ‘rationalisation’ implies that there is one political rationality that gradually unfolds across history that Foucault rejects it.

These comments make one wonder what the status is of the concluding paragraph of “*Omnes et Singulatim*”: How can Foucault warn against invoking rationality in general on the one hand and champion ‘attacking’ political rationality’s ‘very roots’ on the other? I contend that the ambiguity that marks the term ‘political rationality’ signals the makings of a critical project that pivots on the historical articulation of rationality and politics. In order for the notion of political rationality to serve this purpose, however, a tradition of commentary that has sought to pin down its meaning must first be reconstructed and dismantled.

**IV**

Foucault did not start reflecting systematically on political rationality until the late 1970s. It was around the same time that, especially in English-speaking aca-
demia, several sensitive readings of his thought emerged that emphasised Foucault’s stance on the historicity of rationality. Thus in the afterword to the 1980 volume *Power/Knowledge*, Colin Gordon writes that it is a “complex set of relationships between the notions of historicity and rationality that form the framework of Foucault’s critical thought.”

Gordon concludes that piece (published approximately half a year after Foucault had delivered the Tanner Lectures) with a remark that chimes with the conclusion to “Omnes et Singulatim”:

> [W]hat if instead of stigmatising the unacceptable in order to supplant it by the acceptable, one were to call in question the very rationality which grounds the establishment of a regime of acceptability and the programmatic logic whereby the ‘unacceptable’ is regularly restored to the ‘acceptability’ of a norm? It is at the points where the role of a whole species of rationality and the status of a whole regime of truth can be made to open itself to interrogation that the possibility of a profounder logic of revolt may begin to emerge.\(^\text{12}\)

According to Gordon, Foucault has inherited the problem of the historicity of rationality from his mentor, Georges Canguilhem, with the crucial difference that the former’s work on power and its intimate tie to knowledge and rationality render fathomable the questioning of entire regimes of rationality.

A similarly incisive reading was presented in the afterword to the 1983 book *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow: “The genealogist looks for the moment in our history when human reality in its three dimensions (truth, power, and ethics) was first structured in a way that set up a space in which the kind of rationality that could lead to our current norms could work itself out.”\(^\text{13}\)

It did not take long for the term ‘political rationality’ to become central to these readings of Foucault. In his introduction to the *Foucault Reader*, which first appeared in 1984, Paul Rabinow provides a summary of Foucault’s overall project. “His concern,” he writes succinctly, “is the subject and power, as well as the political rationality which has bound them together.”\(^\text{14}\)

V

In the decade following the publication of *Power/Knowledge*, collections of Fou-
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cault’s essays and interviews on the topic of power continued appearing in English (with the 1988 Politics, Philosophy, Culture and the 1991 The Foucault Effect being the most influential). Around the same time a body of literature developed out of these texts that similarly put great emphasis on the notion of political rationality, but that, in the main, lacked the subtlety and sensitivity of the readings put forward by Gordon, Dreyfus, Rabinow, Graham Burchell, and others, instead focusing more on extracting a streamlined methodological apparatus from Cault’s work on power and government. This body of literature has since become widely referred to as “governmentality studies.”

Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller’s work is paradigmatic of this literature. Rose’s 1989 Governing the Soul is, to my knowledge, the first book that attempted to mine Cault’s analytics of power—extracted from “Omnes et Singulatim” among other texts—with the express aim of breaking open a particular scientific discipline, namely, in this case, psychology. Foremost amongst the conceptual tools thus mobilised was the notion of political rationality, which, for Rose, referred to “those forms of rationality that comprise our present, the ways of thinking and acting with which they have been caught up, the practices and assemblages which they have animated, and the consequences for our understanding of our present, and of ourselves in that present.”

Rose continued using the term in the same manner in his co-authored work with Peter Miller. In an influential article published in 1992 they describe political discourse as “a domain for the formulation and justification of idealised schemata for representing reality, analyzing it and rectifying it. Whilst it does not have the systematic and closed character of disciplined bodies of theoretical discourse it is, nonetheless, possible to discern regularities that we term political rationalities.” For them, political rationalities are characterised by three core features: they are moral in the sense that they are normative, they are epistemological in the sense that they articulate and construct certain objects of government, and they are linguistic in the sense that they mobilise the apparatus of language to render reality thinkable.

What Miller and Rose did for psychology was repeated in the years to follow by Mitchell Dean and Thomas Lemke for sociology. Dean’s 1994 Critical and Effective Histories, for instance, sought to mobilise “a number of concepts, themes and theories” drawn from Cault’s work for “historical-sociological studies,” whilst his authoritative Governmentality, first published in 1999, was a systematic intro-
duction to the notion of governmentality with the express aim of outlining “some fundamental precepts for those who are sufficiently persuaded to wish to employ at least some elements” of what Dean called “an ‘analytics of government.’” Both books posit that Foucault establishes an intimate link between governmentality and political rationality, where the latter is understood as the knowledge that “is anterior to political action and a condition of it.” In Governmentality, Dean (with explicit reference to Miller and Rose) argues that “the way we think about exercising authority draws upon the expertise, vocabulary, theories, ideas, philosophies and other forms of knowledge that are given and available to us” and so, on this account, a political rationality is a systematic form of knowledge specifically aimed at formulating techniques and objectives of government.

Lemke’s equally influential work undertakes to do much the same. In his 1997 Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft one encounters a very similar definition of political rationality, linking it to “programmes” of government, which “do not only express wishes and intentions, but define an implicit knowledge [Wissen].” In a revealing footnote, Lemke expands upon his use of the term “political rationality,” insisting (with reference to Miller and Rose) that the very term “governmentality” already implies a distinction between “governing (‘gouverner’) and way of thinking (‘mentalité’).” In his subsequent work on Foucault, power, and governmentality Lemke continues to rely upon this distinction and continues to define political rationality as “the knowledge that is part of [governmental] practices.”

In its zeal for formalisation and systematisation of Foucault’s methodological apparatus, the ‘governmentality studies’ literature defines political rationality as the discursive field from which the tools and techniques of specific governmental regimes are forged. In these works—which chiefly rely upon each other and upon “Omnes et Singulatim”—political rationalities are consistently described as ‘knowledges,’ ‘mentalities,’ and ‘ways of thinking’ and are seen as that which must be studied if we are to capture the ways in which the objects of government are constructed and its techniques legitimised; how, in other words, specific political practices become possible.

VI

After having passed through the ‘governmentality studies’ phase, the notion of political rationality went on to fulfil a significant role in the analysis and critique of neoliberalism. Whilst Foucault’s account of neoliberalism, developed in the
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1978-79 lectures at the Collège the France entitled *The Birth of Biopolitics*, is too sensitive, complex, and layered to be summarised adequately here, it suffices for my present purposes to say that, in Foucault’s view, the emergence of neoliberalism marks a novel moment in the history of governmentality. It is at once a continuation of liberal governmental rationality and a thorough critique of it; a critique necessitated—according to neoliberals—by the inadequacies and crises of classical liberal governmentality. The works of such figures as Wilhelm Röpke, Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, and Gary S. Becker (to name but a few) effectuated a series of shifts in liberal governmental rationality that amounted to an altogether “new programming of liberal governmentality” and thus, according to Foucault, neoliberalism was born.

The ‘governmentality studies’ literature followed Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism closely. Because the vast majority of this literature was concerned with applying a formalised version of Foucault’s work on knowledge, power, and government to concrete social formations, it lacked a systematic attempt to study neoliberalism and its history with any rigour. For the most part, authors repeated the analysis developed in Foucault’s lectures, or, more commonly—because the lectures themselves were transcribed only in 2004 and translated into English in 2008—Gordon’s summary of it.

One of the first significant attempts to break open Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism came from Wendy Brown, who turned her attention to neoliberalism in the early 2000s, starting with a 2003 essay called “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy.” The merit of her critique is that it relies upon, but simultaneously distances itself from, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Brown’s greatest innovation is that she does not stop short at asking how neoliberalism reconstructs politics, the subject, and contemporary life at large—which was Foucault’s concern as well as his followers’—but that she also inquires into the consequences of those reconstructions. Thus all of her work on neoliberalism is animated by a concern for what politics and the subject cease to be when they are reconstructed according to neoliberal parameters. This question is already captured by the title of her most detailed study of neoliberalism, *Undoing the Demos*, which, in her words, “is a theoretical consideration of the ways that neoliberalism, a peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms, is quietly undoing basic elements of democracy.” Her project, in other words, is to consider what is undone, overturned, vanquished as a result of neoliberalism’s transformation of our political imagination.
In her work on neoliberalism Brown reserves a crucial role for the notion of political rationality, which she receives from the ‘governmentality studies’ orthodoxy. “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” for example, borrows the notion directly from Lemke’s summary of the Birth of Biopolitics lectures and even reproduces, term by term, Lemke’s distinction between ‘governing’ and ‘mentality.’ In another authoritative essay on neoliberalism, the 2006 “American Nightmare,” she insists that “a political rationality is a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship.”

By thus representing political rationality as a ‘mentality’ that underlies and orients the practice of ‘governing,’ Brown situates herself squarely within the ‘governmentality studies’ framework. In other words, it is primarily via Lemke that Brown’s early writings on neoliberalism inherit the rather formalistic conception of political rationality that Rose, Miller, Lemke, Dean, and others had developed in the 1990s.

VII

Whilst Undoing the Demos shows a clear continuity with her earlier pieces on neoliberalism it is also somehow out of kilter. In stark contrast to her earlier essays, Undoing the Demos is at pains to define what a political rationality is and, in doing so, pays explicit homage to the ‘governmentality studies’ literature. Her working definition of political rationality falls in lockstep with Dean’s and Lemke’s: political rationality is “a particular regime of power-knowledge” that “is not an instrument of governmental practice, but rather the condition of possibility and legitimacy of its instruments, the field of normative reason from which governing is forged.”

At the same time, however, something changes in the term’s definition, furtively setting the analysis presented in Undoing the Demos apart both from critiques developed in the ‘governmentality studies’ literature and from Brown’s earlier work on the topic. This shift in meaning revolves around the term ‘hegemony,’ which is suddenly incorporated into the definition of political rationality. Consider the following passage, in which Brown seeks to distinguish political rationalities from what she terms ‘forms of reason’:

Political rationality [...] differs from a normative form of reason, although the former emanates from and is suffused with the latter. Neoliberalism might have remained only a form of reason generated by Ordoliberalism
and the Chicago School, without ever becoming a political rationality. Indeed, this seemed its likely fate at midcentury, although Foucault […] insist[s] that postwar Germany was already organized by it. Political rationality could be said to signify the becoming actual of a specific normative form of reason; it designates such a form as both a historical force generating and relating specific kinds of subject, society, and state and as establishing an order of truth by which conduct is both governed and measured.39

Here and elsewhere, Brown argues that what makes a rationality, that is, a form of reason, a political rationality is that it has come positively to organise and govern personal and governmental conduct: “political rationalities are world-changing, hegemonic orders of normative reason, generative of subjects, markets, states, law, jurisprudence, and their relations.”40 Even though she ascribes this understanding to Foucault, the idea that there is a difference between forms of reason and political rationalities, and, what is more, that this difference turns on the latter being hegemonic in a given context is without doubt alien to Foucault’s use of the term.

This rendering of political rationalities as hegemonic forms of reason does a lot of work in the background of Brown’s argument. Most notably, it allows Brown to single out neoliberal rationality as the only hegemonic rationality in today’s discursive landscape, making her critique more streamlined and giving more force to the argument that democracy is under attack (even though this view jars with the account developed in “American Nightmare” and elsewhere,41 which precisely investigated how the congruence of several different political rationalities – such as neoliberal and neoconservative political rationalities in the Bush Jr. administration – constituted an unprecedented assault on democracy). At the same time, however, it distances her account of neoliberalism from Foucault’s to such an extent that it has effectively become an altogether different approach, rendering void any claims that Brown’s is simply another voice in the choir of Foucaultian orthodoxy.42

VIII

Brown’s already complex use of the notion of political rationality is troubled further by the manner in which her understanding of it intersects with her understanding of the notion of governmentality.
In a piece on genealogy and politics, first published in 1998 and reprinted in her 2001 *Politics Out of History*, Brown reflects on the notion of political rationality systematically for the first time. There she anticipates her use of it in her studies of neoliberal rationality when she writes that the term refers “to the discursive logics legitimating all regimes of power,” but adds that Foucault also uses the term in a historically specific sense, indicating the specific form that power takes in Western modernity. The essay in question mostly relies upon a reading of “*Omnes et Singulatim*,” where Foucault indeed describes political rationality in this manner. Yet, as readers of *Security, Territory, Population* know, Foucault more commonly uses the term ‘governmentality,’ not ‘political rationality,’ to express these ideas.

Because she bases her definition of political rationality on Foucault’s use of it “*Omnes et Singulatim*,” the term inherits the complexities that that piece introduced into its fabric. As a result, Brown has difficulty distinguishing between governmentality and political rationality in all of her subsequent writings on governmentality, political rationality, and neoliberalism. “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” for instance, oscillates between describing neoliberalism as a governmentality and as a rationality and elsewhere she uses phrases that are habitually used in connection with governmentality—such as the “conduct of conduct”—to define political rationality instead. This equivocation comes to a head when, in *Undoing the Demos*, Brown attempts to distinguish the two neatly, leading to an awkward passage that overemphasises the State in Foucault’s account of governmentality even as the terms it employs to describe governmentality are exactly the same as those used to describe political rationality mere pages before (and elsewhere):

Political rationality is also not the same thing as ‘governmentality,’ Foucault’s term for an important historical shift in the operation and orientation of the state and political power in modernity. This is a shift away from sovereignty and its signature—‘do this, or die’—to what Foucault calls governing through ‘the conduct of conduct’—‘this is how you live.’ Put differently, governmentality represents a shift away from the power of command and punishment targeting particular subjects and toward the power of conducting and compelling populations ‘at a distance.’ Foucault does indeed speak of neoliberalism as a ‘new programming of liberal governmentality’—it changes the way the liberal state reasons, self-represents, and governs and it also changes the state-economy relation.
But these changes mark something apart from the political rationality of neoliberalism. Political rationality does not originate or emanate from the state, although it circulates through the state, organizes it, and conditions its actions. 46

Brown’s thought inherits the equivocations Foucault introduced into his own terminology and pushes them to the point where political rationality and governmentality become indistinguishable. This is, without doubt, the upshot of the attempt to fashion a set of streamlined analytical tools out of the writings of so complex and inconstant a thinker as Foucault.

IX

With Brown’s rigorous and piercing critique of neoliberal rationality the conception of political rationality that started with Rose and Miller has reached its full potential. Her work has had a significant impact on English and French critical thought, inspiring thorough critiques of the history and composition of neoliberal political rationality, 47 accounts of the relationship between neoliberalism and democracy, 48 studies of resistance to neoliberal rationality, 49 as well as scholarly critiques of her stance on resistance to neoliberalism. 50 Brown’s work demonstrates that this understanding of political rationality, however circumscribed and formalistic, can be a powerful tool in what she terms critique “in the classic sense of the word,” that is, “an effort to comprehend the constitutive elements and dynamics of our condition.” 51 Because, in this account, political rationalities are historical regimes of discourse and practice, they can be subjected to genealogical critique—what is more, they demand to be, for “what must be captured for them to be subject to political criticism is their composition as well as their contingent nature.” 52

Yet this approach to political rationality has several drawbacks that ultimately limit the rich critical potential carried by the notion. Because it only considers political rationality in the determined sense—i.e. this or that particular political rationality—this method fails to connect determinate political rationalities to political rationality in an abstract sense. In other words, it understands ‘rationalities’ as synonymous with ‘knowledges’ (of which political rationalities compose a subspecies) and proceeds to interrogate their specificity, historicity, and contingency, as well as—in Brown’s case—the implications they carry for our political and moral life. However, this method does not inquire into political rationality in
an abstract sense; that is, does not ask what it could mean to suggest that political rationality must be attacked at its very roots. Neither does it ask how political rationality in the determinate sense might interact with political rationality in the abstract sense; how, that is to say, this or that rationality constructs rationality or rational conduct in an abstract sense and what role such construction plays in the broader mechanism of the ‘conduct of conduct.’

A distinct but related drawback of this conception of political rationality is that it is based entirely on Foucault’s work on power-knowledge, which culminated in the late 1970s in his lectures on the history of governmentality and modern dispositifs of power (including, crucially, “Omnes et Singulatim’’). Neither the ‘governmentality studies’ literature nor Brown relate this work to Foucault’s earlier work on the archaeology of the social sciences or his later work on subjectivation and the care of the self. As a result, the scope of their analysis of political rationalities is limited to what Foucault, in the first volume of The History of Sexuality, called the “‘analytics’ of power”.

If, instead of working with this formalistic understanding of political rationality, one departs from a consideration of the different stakes of Foucault’s thought as a whole, it becomes possible to see in this notion the makings of a problematic that touches upon the very fabric of Western political discourse.

X

In the 1980s—that is, as Gordon’s, Rabinow’s, and others’ readings gained in influence—a distinctly philosophical reception of Foucault developed in France. Especially significant is Gilles Deleuze’s reading, which remains unsurpassed in elegance and incisiveness.

In the years following Foucault’s death in 1984 Deleuze published several pieces and delivered several talks and interviews on Foucault’s thought, of which the short 1986 monograph Foucault is only the most well known. These pieces sought to trace the “logic” of Foucault’s thought, which means “the whole set of crises through which it passes.” Following Foucault himself, Deleuze paints a vivid picture of Foucault as an inheritor of the Kantian inquiry into conditions, but with the crucial difference that “the conditions are those of real experience (statements, for example, assume a limited corpus); they are on the side of the ‘object’ and historical formation, not a universal subject (the a priori itself is historical);
Again following Foucault’s own understanding of the trajectory of his thought, Deleuze identifies the three major problems that Foucault’s thought passes through as knowledge, power, and the self. These three problems—or “dimensions,” as Deleuze calls them here—are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. It is not possible, in this view, to separate one dimension from the others and treat it in isolation. After all, Foucault’s turn to subjectivation was necessitated by one of those ‘crises’ that Deleuze’s reading seeks to trace: “at the end of [The History of Sexuality, volume 1] Foucault finds himself in an impasse,” which led to the question “where power itself places us, in both our lives and our thoughts, as we run up against it in our smallest truths”; and thus Foucault’s thought turned to “a new axis, different from the axes of both knowledge and power.” Attempts to formalise or apply the dimensions of knowledge and power without taking into consideration the dimension of the subject must therefore encounter the same impasse and must founder on the problem of the subject’s relationship to power.

In a talk delivered at a meeting organised by the Michel Foucault Centre in January 1988, entitled “What is a Dispositif?,” Deleuze further develops his reading of Foucault through the notion of dispositif (habitually translated as ‘apparatus’). When considering the philosophical implications of Foucault’s thought, he singles out one theme that, in his view, haunts each of its three dimensions, or, as he calls them here, “lines”:

Perhaps it is Reason [la Raison] which poses the greatest problem because the processes of rationalisation can operate on segments or on regions of all lines under consideration. Foucault pays homage to Nietzsche regarding the historical nature [historicité] of reason; and he suggests the importance of epistemological research on the different forms of rationality [rationalité] in knowledge [le savoir] (Koyré, Bachelard, Canguilhem) and of sociopolitical research into modes of rationality [modes de rationalité] in power (Max Weber). Perhaps he was reserving the third line for himself: the study of types of ‘reasonableness’ in subjects he was dealing with [dans d’éventuels sujets].

In this reading it is reason, or rationality (rather than the problem of the subject, as Foucault has forwarded in “The Subject and Power”), that can tie together the
different problems (or crises) that animate Foucault’s work. Following Deleuze’s suggestion I shall, in the remainder of this essay, provide a reading of Foucault that links his theses on the historicity of rationality to the other two dimensions, that is, modern governmental power and practices of subjectivation. This will result in a complex rendering of political rationality, which I shall, in conclusion, use to decipher the final paragraph of “Omnes et Singulatim.”

XI

Foucault’s earliest works, that is, his archaeological studies, were fundamentally concerned with the historicity of the social sciences. They were indebted to the work of Georges Canguilhem, his mentor and friend, about whom Foucault wrote several pieces, including the foreword to the English translation of The Normal and the Pathological, and whom he considered a “historian of rationalities.” In a revealing interview from 1983, Foucault accordingly situates his own work in this tradition (which, besides Canguilhem, includes such people as Alexandre Koyré and Gaston Bachelard) and confesses that he embarked on his archaeological studies because, in his view, phenomenology (in the 1960s at the height of its influence in the French academy) could not give an account of “the historicity of reason” or develop a “history of rationality.” This, then, is what prompted Foucault to write the history of madness—which he also termed the history of the separation between “Reason and Unreason”—and to write the history of how the human sciences imposed order on things. At base, therefore, his archaeological studies hinged on the attempt to historicise the subject and the (ir)rationality that divides her from herself.

XII

To be sure, the history of rationality is itself a rational endeavour: in the same way that Canguilhem, “[t]his historian of rationalities, [is] himself a ‘rationalist,’” Foucault’s archaeological works in no way champions the irrational. Thus, in a lengthy 1978 interview with Duccio Trombadori, Foucault insists that his History of Madness “wasn’t an irrationalist history” but was, on the contrary, “the most rational possible history, of the constitution of a knowledge [savior], of a new relation of objectivity, of something that could be called the ‘truth of madness.’”
This position invited a lot of scorn. Jürgen Habermas famously claimed to have detected a “contradiction in which Foucault becomes enmeshed” because the latter supposedly cannot develop his “critique of power” without accepting categories such as truth and rationality, which he precisely rejects. This “self-referential denial of universal validity claims,” as Habermas puts it elsewhere, causes Foucault’s genealogy to be “an unholy subjectivism” and a “relativism” that undermines its own “putative objectivity of knowledge.” When Foucault was asked to reply to this charge in a 1982 interview with Rabinow he formulated a response that played precisely with the ambiguity inherent in the category of rationality, observing that “if it is extremely dangerous to say that reason is the enemy that should be eliminated, it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning of this rationality risks sending us into irrationality.” Why dangerous? Because it was, Foucault reminds us, “on the basis of the flamboyant rationality of social Darwinism that racism was formulated, becoming one of the most enduring and powerful ingredients of Nazism.”

Much more rigorous was Jacques Derrida’s critique of History of Madness articulated some two decades before Habermas’ accusations. In a 1963 lecture on that book, Derrida develops a deconstructive reading that precisely turns on the impossibility of writing a history of rationality from within the language of reason. Foucault, so he argues, seeks to put Western reason on trial, “[b]ut such a trial may be impossible, for by the simple fact of their articulation [élocution] the proceedings and the verdict unceasingly reiterate the crime.” Even if, he goes on to argue, Reason in general can be divided into historically determined episodes it will not thereby lose its generality and therefore “the expression ‘history of reason’ is difficult to conceptualize [est difficile à penser].” Derrida devotes most of the rest of his lecture to a critique of Foucault’s reading of the first of Descartes’ Meditations, a passage that covers three pages of the History of Madness.

Foucault’s reply to Derrida constructed the latter as an insulted philosopher who cannot bear the historicisation of reason. In focusing solely on the (for the book’s main hypotheses altogether unimportant) reading of Descartes, Derrida presupposes that “all rational discourse entertains a fundamental relation with philosophy, and that it is in this relationship that this rationality or this knowledge have their foundation” and that, accordingly, any (rational) text can be criticised by revealing its implicit philosophical contradictions. Foucault proceeds to use Derrida’s critique to distance himself from the traditional French manner of practicing philosophy and even remarks about his History of Madness that what it “tried
to show […] is that philosophy is neither historically nor logically a foundation of knowledge; but that there are conditions and rules for the formation of knowledge to which philosophical discourse is subject, in any given period, in the same manner as any other form of discourse with rational pretension.

If what is at stake in Foucault’s attempt to think the history of rationality in terms of singular historical events (such as the bifurcation of the subject into reason and madness) is to break free from the discourse of contemporary French philosophy (with its phenomenological subject on the one hand and its attachment to Reason on the other) then these controversies, with Derrida first and Habermas later, are more than petty squabbles between fragile egos: they mark the moment when thought refuses to side with or against rationality and instead turns rationality’s gaze towards itself, which in turn invokes a backlash in the name of a Reason that feels beleaguered. For Foucault, the upshot of any philosophical project that attaches subjectivity to rationality is that philosophy becomes implicated in the very exclusions that critical thought purports to uncover and grant a voice. Such was the point Foucault made in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France where, in what is without doubt a thinly veiled slight at Derrida, he asks: “What is ‘écriture’ (the writing of the ‘writers’) other than a […] system of subjection [système d’assujettissement], which perhaps takes slightly different forms [des formes un peu différentes], but forms whose main rhythms are analogous?” He immediately connects this question to philosophical practice more broadly: “I wonder whether a certain number of themes in philosophy have not come to correspond to these activities of limitation and exclusion, and perhaps also to reinforce them.” It comes as no surprise that, for Foucault, philosophy’s mechanism of exclusion works “first of all by proposing an ideal truth as the law of discourse and an immanent rationality [une rationalité immanente] as the principle of their unfolding.”

This may be called Foucault’s scandalous critique of philosophy: the insistence on the historicity of philosophy on the one hand and, on the other, the accusation that historically, philosophy has produced and upheld manifold exclusions in the name of (and by way of) Reason. From the point of view of traditional philosophical practice, the history of rationality can only be scandalous.

XIII

Let me return to tracing the impasses that functioned as the motor of Foucault’s thought. The impasse that Foucault’s archaeological work encountered becomes
palpable in the closing pages of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. In the concluding section of that book Foucault remarks that archaeology might be applied to problems of a different order than epistemic ones, including, crucially, “political knowledge [du savoir politique]”: “One would try to show whether the political behavior of a society, a group, or a class is not shot through with a particular, describable discursive practice.” Such an archaeology of political knowledge would not interrogate the manner in which this or that political theory is or was applied in practice, but would rather locate a political knowledge “in the field of different practices in which it finds its specificity, its functions, and its network of dependences.” It is clear, at this point, that he senses the importance of exploring the intersection between knowledge and power but that he does not yet have the tools to do so, which explains why, several pages earlier, Foucault has to take recourse to the notion of ideology in order to give an example of such a political knowledge. In his 1979-80 lecture series, called *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault reconstructs this impasse, explaining that his turn to “power-knowledge” was necessitated because the limitations of the notion of ideology made it inadequate in the “analysis of the procedures and techniques by which power relations are actually effectuated.” A turn to power, then.

Foucault’s studies on power were marked, from the first, by an interest in the manifold ways in which determinate regimes of power—such as techniques of punishment, methods of correcting deviant sexuality, or forms of state-centred governmental practices—are marked by forms of rationality. Thus, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault proffers the following proposition:

Power relations [...] are intelligible [...] because they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; let us not look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality [rationalité]; [...] the rationality [rationalité] of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed (the local cynicism of power), tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems [des dispositifs d’ensemble].
The rationality of power relations must therefore be sought on the level of ‘tactics,’ yet Foucault also signals that these tactics find their justification elsewhere.

In the years to follow Foucault would use the term ‘rationality’ to describe both the tactics themselves, or, in this later lexicon, governmental ‘techniques,’ and what one might call the regime of justification that renders these techniques possible in the first place. In his work on governmentality this proposition would reach its maturity, and thus his 1977-78 and 1978-79 courses at the Collège de France see him study what he calls ‘governmental rationality’ or ‘governmental reason’ on both of these levels: the rationality of the techniques employed and the rationality that justifies and discursively brings into being certain governmental objectives, techniques, and practices. There is, in other words, a two-tiered analysis of the intersection between government and rationality: on the one hand, there is the question of how government is practiced and, on the other, there is the question of how these practices are elaborated in discourse, in thought, in historical documents. The term ‘rationality’ traverses both of these themes. An example from Security, Territory, Population will illustrate this two-sided use.

In his discussion of the emergence of raison d’État (an event that he, significantly, calls “an event in the history of Western reason, of Western rationality, which is undoubtedly no less important than the event associated with Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and so on”), Foucault describes this form of “governmental reason” as “a certain way of thinking, reasoning, and calculating” and as “a different way of thinking power, the kingdom, the fact of ruling and governing.”

As this is a governmental rationality that centres on the State, it can also be said that it is a way of reasoning that views politics and power through the State: “The state was a way of conceiving, analyzing, and defining the nature and relations of these already given elements”; elements such as the king, the sovereign, and wealth. Here ‘governmental reason’ is pegged to ‘a way of reasoning.’ In this context, rationality should be connected to questions of truth and knowledge: a form of governmental rationality or governmental reason, in this sense, is a regime of knowledge from which governmental techniques derive their constitutive grammar and legitimacy—e.g. Polizeiwissenschaft and statistics for raison d’État or political economy for liberal governmentality. (This, to be sure, is the understanding of rationality that Miller, Rose, Dean, Brown, and others draw upon in their rendering of political rationality.)
Immediately after having introduced *raison d’État* as a certain way of reasoning about power and governing, Foucault notes that the State not only is that which structures governmental reasoning, but that it also “functions as an objective in this political reason.” He continues: “The state is what must exist at the end of the process of the rationalization of the art of government.” And:

The state is what commands governmental reason, that is to say, it is that which means one can govern rationally according to necessity; it is the function of intelligibility of the state in relation to reality, and it is that which makes it rational, necessary, to govern. Governing rationally because there is a state and so that there is a state.

Here governmental reason is articulated as the problem of *how to govern rationally*, which means that the techniques used in governing must themselves be rational, or, to rephrase, that “the art of government” must take a “rational form.”

That he uses the term in these two different but related ways becomes clear when, in the first lecture of *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault summarises the project he had been working on the previous years:

[I]t is in the general framework of this notion of government that I tried to study two things, as examples: on the one hand, the birth of *raison d’État* in the seventeenth century, understood not as theory or representation of the state, but as art of government, as rationality elaborating the very practice of government, and, on the other, contemporary American and German liberalism [...], also being understood, not as economic theory or political doctrine, but as a certain way of governing, a certain rational art of government.

Foucault sees these two understandings of governmental rationality—i.e. the form of reasoning from which arts and techniques of government are moulded and the question of rational arts and techniques of government—as inseparable. After all, one cannot govern rationally if one does not work with a form of reasoning thatprescribes what it means to do so: this, of course, is precisely the point conveyed by the notion of power-knowledge.

The passages cited here reveal a third level that I shall touch upon in further detail below: from a certain point in history, the rationality, or knowledge, upon which
a rational governmental art is constructed assigns a fundamental role to the category of rationality as such, which is why Foucault calls the emergence of the doctrine of *raison d’État* an *event* in the history of Western rationality. From this point onwards, that is, with the birth of the specifically modern form of power that we call ‘government,’ constructions of the rational subject become pivotal for how politics is thought and practiced.

XIV

It is only after his lecture series on the *Birth of Biopolitics* ends in April 1979 that Foucault starts using the term ‘political rationality’ with any regularity (*pace* Brown’s insistence that “‘[p]olitical rationality’ or ‘governing rationality’ are the terms Foucault used for apprehending, among other things, the way that neoliberalism comes to govern as a normative form of reason”). In the course summary of that series he writes that his aim that year was to look at the phenomena that constitute biopolitics, but that he had to take a step back for these to become fully comprehensible: “It seemed to me that these problems were inseparable from the framework of political rationality within which they appeared and took on their intensity. This means ‘liberalism,’ since it was in relation to liberalism that they assumed the form of a challenge.” Then, in October 1979, he delivered the Tanner Lectures where, as I have shown, he effectively substitutes the term ‘governmentality’ for the term ‘political rationality/reason’ in such a way that their semantic and analytical content starts overlapping to a significant degree.

Not long after the Tanner Lectures Foucault shifts his attention in a manner similar to the shift from archaeology to the ‘analytics of power.’ For Deleuze, as already noted, this new shift was necessitated by another “impasse,” one that revolved around the relationship between power and the subject and that necessitated “a general reshuffle” of Foucault’s approach. Indeed, in the first lecture in *On the Government of the Living*, given a mere three months after the Tanner Lectures, Foucault announces that he wants to recalibrate his analysis and wants to inquire into the relationship between governing and truth; into how, in his words, the “manifestation of truth is required by, or entailed by, or linked to the exercise of government and the exercise of power.” This recalibration is an explicit attempt at extending his genealogy of governmentality to the ancients. He continues:

I would like to go back and show you how the relations between government and truth were not finally formed when society or the State appeared
as possible and necessary objects for a rational governmentality. For the link between manifestation of truth and exercise of power to be made, we don’t have to wait for the constitution of [...] modern relations between an art of government and, let’s say, political, economic, and social rationality.96

The problem of government, Foucault says here, is not exclusively modern, and neither is the relationship between government and political rationality. This means that, from the first, Foucault’s “genealogy of the subject” revolved around the nexus between government and rationality.97 It is, differently put, by extending his genealogy of governmentality that Foucault first pushes his work from the dimension of power-knowledge to the dimension of the subject and that he begins to focus on “the element of the first person, of the ‘I,’ of the ‘autos,’ of the ‘myself’ in what could be called alethurgy or veridiction or the rites and procedures of veridiction,” that is, what he calls the “point of subjectivation.”98

Speaking more generally, when Foucault’s attention shifts to the problem of subjectivation, he also adjusts his approach to the topic of rationality. Indeed, in his studies of ancient practices of “work of the self on the self,”99 undertaken in the final years of his life, one recurring theme is the question of how subjects are incited, by themselves or by others, “to do such and such things because we are rational beings.”100 Or: “How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers?”101 In posing these questions, Foucault implicitly troubles his earlier tendency to place rationality in a position of externality vis-à-vis the subject; to represent, that is, the subject as a passive product of historical political rationalities. Rationality now becomes internal to the subject once more—without thereby regaining its transcendence or its universality.

Rationality is, then, one of the central axes of analysis in the genealogy of the subject. In the 1980-81 lecture series on Subjectivity and Truth, for example, Foucault contends, in a discussion of discourses that posit marriage as a rational technique of the self, that “to say that these general principles [concerning marriage] are rational principles [des principes rationnels] implies a very peculiar conception of marriage or of reason, and perhaps of both at once.”102 From the lectures on the Hermeneutics of the Subject onwards, the connection between techniques of the self and rationality has become so intimate that Foucault starts using the terms “truth” and “rationality” as if they were interchangeable. Consider his reading of
Marcus Aurelius, to give but one example. There, in a series of considerations of the problem of practices of self-constitution (called askēsis in Greek), Foucault launches into a discussion of the notion of paraskeuē, which is “an open and an orientated preparation of the individual for the events of life,” or, in other words, a set of habitual practices which makes one prepared for any unknown future challenges. In Marcus Aurelius’ thought, this paraskeuē “is made up of logoi (discourses),” which means that one’s paraskeuē consists of lessons and phrases (in a word, discourses) that one has memorised and internalised. Foucault goes on:

As the word logos indicates, they are propositions justified by reason. Justified by reason means that they are rational, that they are true and constitute acceptable principles of behavior. [...] These really existing phrases, these materially existing logoi are then phrases, elements of discourse, of rationality: of a rationality that states the truth and prescribes what we must do at the same time.104

Here truth and rationality have become indistinguishable, which is without doubt itself a technology of power that must be explained. Practices of subjectivation, in ancient thought, pivoted on the self’s rational self-construction to such an extent that Foucault is even prompted to say, near the end of that year’s lectures series, that, as a general rule, the Greeks and Romans held that “[t]he human being is such, his bios, his life, his existence is such, that he cannot live his life without referring to a certain rational and prescriptive articulation.”105

These questions do not yet involve a discussion of political rationality, however. The latter theme starts coming to the fore in the two years leading up to Foucault’s death. Thus in the 1982-83 lectures on The Government of Self and Others and in The Courage of the Truth, delivered the following year, Foucault wonders how politics as a practice was understood in ancient thought and focuses, as is well known, on the notion of parrēsia, or “free-spokenness.”106 The problematic of parrēsia, the meaning and use of which shift over time, essentially revolves around the practice of constituting oneself (and directing others in their self-constitution) as a subject who tells the truth about themselves as a citizen of the polis. It is in this connection that Foucault finds the notion of parrēsia being used in several texts in relation to rationality: in Euripides’ Ion the term parrēsia means the “mak[ing] use of discourse, but of rational discourse, the discourse of truth” by the one in charge of the city;107 in Thucydides’ discussion of Periclean democracy in the History of the Peloponnesian War the term refers to Pericles’ “dis-
course of political rationality, the true discourse”;\textsuperscript{108} and in Isocrates’ On the Peace, likewise, it means delivering “rational and true arguments in order to persuade the Assembly and get it to change its opinion.”\textsuperscript{109} Foucault’s discussion of Plato’s letters deserves special mention in this context. In his reading of Plato, the latter looks to \textit{parrēsia} for a way to make philosophy more than the mere engagement in abstract thought:

It is by taking part directly, through \textit{parrēsia}, in the formation, maintenance, and exercise of an art of governing that the philosopher will be not merely \textit{logos} in the political realm, but really \textit{logos} and \textit{ergon} [which Foucault translates as ‘action,’ ‘task,’ or ‘work’], in accordance with the ideal of Greek rationality. In reality, \textit{logos} is complete only if it can lead to \textit{ergon} and organize it according to the necessary principles of rationality.\textsuperscript{110}

For Hellenistic thought, then, the ultimate end of the citizen of the \textit{polis} is rational political conduct. Speaking truthfully—that is to say, to practice \textit{parrēsia}—is nothing other than fulfilling one’s purpose as a rational agent in the \textit{polis},\textsuperscript{111} and, conversely, whoever fails to practice \textit{parrēsia} is someone who “do[es] not index their discourses to reason.”\textsuperscript{112} In these passages from his final two lecture series, ‘political rationality’ almost becomes synonymous with \textit{parrēsia}, and therefore Foucault’s account of \textit{parrēsia} could also be called a genealogy of political rationality understood as a process of subjectivation.

Whilst, in these last few lecture series, ‘political rationality’ has not ceased referring to a regime of knowledge that conditions governmental conduct (see, e.g., Foucault’s assertion that, for Plato, “it is not necessarily or inevitably as the statement of what political action must be, it is not, if you like, as political program, as intrinsic political rationality that philosophy in its truth-telling has a role to play in politics”) the term is now also inserted into the analysis of forms of subjectivation and has become, as something of a synonym of \textit{parrēsia}, inseparable from the genealogy of subjectivity.\textsuperscript{113}

XV

If, following Deleuze, one approaches Foucault’s thought through the theme of rationality, what comes into view is the scandalous project that all of his works contribute to: the history of rationality, which is always already the history of its constitutive exclusions and therefore \textit{inherently and irrevocably political}.  

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When considered in relation to Foucault’s thought as a whole, the term ‘political rationality’ alone gives rise to a three-tiered critical programme that one might term, with Foucault, the “historical analysis of our political rationality”: 1. An archaeological history of those regimes of knowledge and those forms of veridiction that produce the division between the rational and the irrational. This archaeology would isolate those discursive practices and historical conditions that made it possible for reason to circumscribe the domain proper to itself and to set itself apart from its ‘Other,’ that is, from unreason. It would document, in other words, the historical conditions of possibility that rendered singular moments in “the endless, multiple bifurcation” of reason possible. 2. A genealogical history of the intersection between politics and rationality. This genealogy would document the dynamics of exclusion that are made possible by the ‘othering’ of unreason. The rationale of such a genealogy would be close to Wendy Brown’s genealogy of the relation between masculinity and politics: like the latter, it would ask “[w]hat counts as political and what is excluded from politics, what is considered pernicious, threatening, or inappropriate to politics,” but it would index this to rationality, rather than to masculinity—even though it would doubtlessly uncover that “constructions of manhood” are historically indivisibly related to “formulations of [...] rationality.” Such a genealogy would not involve tracing the exclusions made possible by constructions of rationality in general, but would rather question historically determinate forms of political rationality. 3. A genealogy of modes of subjection. This genealogy would record how the subject has been incited to relate to herself as a rational subject; how, to rephrase, the subject is made to work on herself in order to conform to a standard of rationality and because she is purportedly rational. The manner in which this process always involves the active participation of the subject has been interrogated incisively by Judith Butler, who, in a reading of Foucault, insists that in any moment of subjection

[t]here will be a reflexive action of a subject, and this action will be occasioned by the very rationality to which it attempts to conform or, at least, with which it negotiates. This form of rationality will foreclose others, so that one will become knowable to oneself only within the terms of a given rationality, historically conditioned, leaving open and unaddressed what other ways there may have been, or may well yet be, in the course of history.

That these forms of subjection are always thoroughly political does not escape
Butler. Whenever I, in my becoming of a subject, negotiate a certain form of rationality, “I am also putting power to work in discourse, using it, distributing it, becoming the site for its relay and replication.” At stake, in other words, is the point of contact between external rationalities, whose mode of existence is historical, and internal techniques of the self, which are ethical (and therewith inescapably political).

XVI

The history of political rationality is inevitably an history of political rationality’s ‘Others,’ that is, a history of exclusions: the exclusions from the *polis* that the intersection between politics and rationality has produced—and that philosophy had no small part in legitimising—are legion. The exclusion from politics proper of all non-philosophers in Plato’s ideal state, and the exclusion of all women and slaves in Aristotle’s *Politics* are, in this sense, only two paradigms for what, across the long history of Western political rationality, would unfold as a sheer endless list of categories of the irrational, themselves products of discourse, that could, as categories, be excluded by determinate political rationalities. Such a list features, in different times and places, the mentally ill, the non-male (or non-masculine), the poor, the colonised, the incarcerated, the non-human, the enslaved, the non-Western, the non-white, the uneducated, the non-economic, the under-aged, and so forth.

XVII

Yet the history of political rationality is not only an history of oppression, but it is also a preamble to resistance, for its three lines come together to form the possibility of emancipation. If the subject is not a passive recipient of power but is implicated in its distribution and application, it follows that she can also relate critically to the terms set by dominant forms of rationality. This, of course, is the work of ethics—which Foucault also calls “spirituality”—and is made possible by genealogy, which, says Foucault, “will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” that he also calls “the undefined work of freedom.” Such resistance to forms of rationality does not, as I have already pointed out, imply that one ought to embrace irrationality or champion unreason; rather, it involves mechanisms of disidentification with what are revealed to be historical—and therefore always precarious—constructions of rationality.
This is not to say that resistance to political rationality is simple, or indeed that it is always possible. After all, as Foucault says in a 1984 interview, at times “one is faced with what may be called a state of domination [état de domination]. In such a state, it is certain that practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited.”123 This, no doubt, is often the case for those who have been assigned the role of the radically irrational and therefore unpolitical. Foucault goes on to conclude from this “that liberation [la libération] is sometimes the political or historical condition for a practice of freedom.”124 Here one catches a glimpse—a rare one, to be sure—of Foucault imagining a more fundamental mode of resistance; a mode of resistance that precedes the practice of freedom and, in this sense, ethics.

XVIII

It is now possible to grasp the scandal contained in the concluding paragraph of “Omnes et Singulatim.” Foucault’s insistence that “[l]iberation can come only from attacking […] political rationality’s very roots” proves to refer back to an accusation levelled as much at modern articulations of power as at traditional forms of philosophy, which have produced and upheld the ‘othering’ of unreason.125 These words call for nothing less than a history of rationality’s exclusions, and, what is more, for the upheaval of the entire machinery that the articulation of politics and rationality gives rise to.

It follows that it is not enough to document the genealogies of determinate political rationalities, even if such documentation is among the core elements of the critical history of political rationality. The genealogy of neoliberalism, e.g., may assist in combating its particular effects (technologies of debt and austerity, logics of sacrifice, determinate processes of de-democratisation, etc.) but in terms of political rationality all it can do is denaturalise neoliberal constructions of the rational subject. Yet even if one were to succeed at knocking the neoliberal subject off the stage of political rationality, the gap it leaves behind will doubtlessly be filled by other constructions of (political) rationality. Wendy Brown’s insistence that, for this reason, the Left requires a “counterrationality,” that is, “a different figuration of human beings, citizenship, economic life, and the political” is problematic precisely because no such counterrationality can hope to succeed unless it includes an articulation of rationality, in which case it is must reproduce political rationality’s constitutive exclusions.126
It seems to me that what Foucault’s words point toward is that only the attempt at disarticulating politics and rationality can put a stop to political rationality’s sinister reign over the destiny of Western politics. Attacking political rationality’s very roots would mean, in this view, launching a critique of the ways in which Western philosophy has pegged politics to man’s rationality (and, vice versa, his rationality to his political inclination) in order to make possible a fundamentally different understanding of the subject and the polis. This would involve not “cast[ing] the blame on reason in general,” which Foucault warns against in “Omnes et Singulatim,” but a historico-philosophical critique of the mechanism by which the exercise of power was destined towards reason. This is an arduous philosophical task, the stakes of which are high and the urgency of which is great.

XIX

It might be useful, by way of conclusion, to connect the reading of Foucault forwarded here to Giorgio Agamben’s philosophical project as developed in the Homo Sacer series.

Indeed, when foregrounded in the manner here attempted, Foucault’s call to arms at the end of “Omnes et Singulatim” anticipates the main objectives of Agamben’s Homo Sacer project. Thus, in the epilogue to The Use of Bodies, Agamben writes:

> The archaeology of politics that was in question in the “Homo Sacer” project did not propose to critique or correct this or that concept, this or that institution of Western politics. The issue was rather to call into question the place and the very originary structure of politics, in order to try to bring to light the arcanum imperii that in some way constituted its foundation and that had remained at the same time fully exposed and tenaciously hidden in it.¹²⁸

What he has attempted, in other words, is to uncover the moments at which the Western tradition has sought to define, capture, and destine the human so that these moments may be “deactivated [disattivato]” with a view to “liberating [liberando] living human beings from every biological and social destiny and every predetermined task.”¹²⁹

It is inviting to view Agamben’s project as taking up the aporias (as he might say) concerning the nexus of politics and rationality that Foucault left unresolved af-
ter his death. To be sure, in the concluding section of the first volume of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben expresses his doubts about the political potential carried by Foucault’s understanding of biopolitics, saying:

At the end of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, having distanced himself from the sex and sexuality in which modernity, caught in nothing other than a deployment of power, believed it would find its own secret and liberation [*liberazione*], Foucault alludes to a ‘different economy of bodies and pleasures’ as a possible horizon for a different politics. The conclusions of our study force us to be more cautious.\(^{130}\)

Here Agamben has in mind the danger that inheres in grounding a politics in the body, which “is always already a biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power.”\(^{31}\)

However, in an essay entitled “Absolute Immanence,” which was published the year after *Homo Sacer* first appeared, Agamben gestures towards a very different reading of Foucault. There, at the heart of Foucault’s essay, “Life: Experience and Science” (which is a slightly edited version of his introduction to Canguilhem’s *The Normal and the Pathological*), Agamben finds the tentative makings of “a philosophical task” that revolves around dislocating the theme of transcendence that has haunted Occidental thought since the classics.\(^{132}\) In the passage in question—already discussed briefly above—Foucault claims that the work of Canguilhem, that “historian of rationalities,” allows for the reformulation of “the whole theory of the subject.”\(^{133}\) That is, it holds out the possibility of a philosophy not dependent on a transcendental theme; a philosophy that, in this sense, is the polar opposite of the axis of modern philosophy that, in the twentieth century, culminated in phenomenology. Writes Foucault:

> Although phenomenology brought the body, sexuality, death, and the perceived world into the field of analysis, the *cogito* remained central to it; neither the rationality of science nor the specificity of the life sciences could compromise its founding role. In opposition to this philosophy of meaning, the subject, and lived experience, Canguilhem has proposed a philosophy of error, of the concept of the living, as a different way of approaching the notion of life.\(^{134}\)
Note that, in a complete reversal of his position in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault here ascribes the twin thematics of the body and sexuality to the philosophy of transcendence, linking them to the centrality of the *cogito* instead of investing his hopes in them.

Commenting on this passage, Agamben writes that

> what is at issue here is [...] something like a new experience that necessitates a general reformulation of the relations between truth and the subject and that, nevertheless, concerns the specific area of Foucault’s research. Tearing the subject from the terrain of the *cogito* and consciousness, this experience roots it in life.\textsuperscript{135}

He sees in this text—the last text Foucault authored before he passed away, which therefore, for Agamben, has a “testamentary” quality—a glimpse of “the coming philosophy,” one “that has freed itself of all cognition and intentionality.”\textsuperscript{136} The first step in this trajectory of philosophical liberation, however, is “to embark on a genealogical enquiry into the term ‘life.’”\textsuperscript{137}

These remarks summarise the stakes of the *Homo Sacer* project. Genealogically, Agamben has sought to demonstrate that “Western politics has [...] been conceived as the collective assumption of a historical task (of a ‘work’) on the part of a people or a nation. This political task coincided with a metaphysical task, that is, the realization of man as rational living being.”\textsuperscript{138} Politically and philosophically, he has sought to articulate “a politics that corresponds to the inactivity of man, one which is determined, that is, not simply and absolutely beginning from the being-at-work of human rationality, but from a working that exposes and contains in itself the possibility of its own not existing, of its own inactivity.”\textsuperscript{139}

When the Foucault presented in “Absolute Immanence,” and not the one presented in the first volume of the *Homo Sacer* series, is viewed as Agamben’s point of departure, it becomes possible to view the entire project less as an attempt to ‘correct’ Foucault’s work and more as the pursuit of a philosophical task that Foucault left as his final “inheritance.”\textsuperscript{140} What, indeed, is the *Homo Sacer* project if not an attack on the roots of political rationality with the objective of liberating humanity from its own biopolitical destiny? What is Agamben’s work if not the attempt to articulate the ‘critique of political reason’ that the subtitle to Foucault’s Tanner Lectures had gestured towards?

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In recent years a large body of literature has amassed that faults Agamben for making claims that are too grand to be analytically useful and for proposing too radical a politics. Oftentimes, such critiques juxtapose Agamben’s ostensibly grandiloquent philosophy to Foucault’s more nuanced analyses. Paul Patton, for instance, writes that “[w]here Foucault pursues a historical inquiry into the different conceptions of the purpose, objects, methods, and instruments that have informed the exercise of political government since the seventeenth century, Agamben prefers to subsume all under a single amorphous concept of biopolitics.” And: “the difference between [Agamben’s] approach and that of Foucault is not so much a matter of correction and completion as a choice between epochal concepts of biopolitics and bare life and a more fine-grained, contextual, and historical analysis intended to enable specific and local forms of escape from the past.”

Interesting to my own purposes is that many such critiques of Agamben come from the very same authors who, in the 1980s and 1990s, formed the phalanx of the ‘governmentality studies’ approach. What is more, they routinely disparage Agamben for lacking a sufficiently precise methodological ‘toolbox’; a toolbox that, unsurprisingly, consists of the methods and concepts they spent their careers fashioning out of Foucault’s writings, including, crucially, the concept of political rationality. Thomas Lemke, for example, published a critique of Agamben in 2005, contending that “the social dynamics of the relations between bare life and political existence, between technologies of the self and political rationalities, remain theoretically underdeveloped in Agamben’s work”. In 2011 he released another salvo, claiming that Agamben’s “notion of life remains curiously static and ahistorical.” This is problematic, in Lemke’s view, because it consists of a betrayal of Foucault: “Agamben’s attempt to correct and amend Foucault,” he writes, “abandons the latter’s central insight, namely, that biopolitics is a historical phenomenon”. Nikolas Rose and Paul Rabinow similarly write that whilst Agamben’s work is provocative, “we need a more nuanced account of power, and of sovereign power, to analyse contemporary rationalities and technologies of biopolitics.” Colin Gordon, finally, recently remarked that Agamben’s work on biopolitics “has little to do with whatever is distinctive about Foucault’s work and also does not seem to be very productive except as doxology or theology”.

Mitchell Dean, for his part, has faulted Agamben for lacking the capacity to analyse politics in terms of “a series of discontinuous, contestable mobilizations
of different rationalities and practices” and preferring the “worthy and mighty topics of sovereignty and law.” Elsewhere, he repeats this critique, noting that rather than offering a ‘tool box,’ as Foucault does, “Agamben offers us something like a ‘jewel box’ containing the most perfect, attentive analyses and the most lapidary of theses. One can admire and display these gems,” he goes on, “but only in their uniqueness. They are very hard, if not impossible, to apply and use, and to reproduce.” Dean goes on to assail Agamben’s “radical politics,” preferring to articulate a different “way of playing the game of orderability” over a complete overturning of the Western “machine of domination.”

As these quotes show, the attempt to juxtapose Foucault to Agamben by devotees of the former tends to rely precisely upon the analytically formalistic and politically tame reception of Foucault that lies at the heart of the ‘governmentality studies’ literature. I have tried to read him in a different manner, looking for moments where he speaks in a voice more radical and emancipatory than we are accustomed to; moments that signal a continuity between Foucault’s work and Agamben’s rather than a betrayal of the former by the latter. I have contended that when approached through the notion of ‘political rationality,’ Foucault’s work yields the makings of a radical critique of the exclusions upon which the historical nexus between politics and rationality rests. Whether Foucault had such a project in mind or instead spoke of ‘liberation’ in an unguarded moment is both impossible to ascertain and of little consequence. His thought provides the tools and the impetus for the great and urgent philosophical work of thinking the political subject in a radically different way. Let this be the clandestine aspiration of Foucaultian critique.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to Tim Huzar for feedback on an earlier version of this article and to German Primera, without whose interlocution many of the ideas presented here would never have occurred to me.


7. Foucault uses the terms (or concepts) “reason” and “rationality” interchangeably in “Omnes et Singulatim” and elsewhere. This is not simply a slip of the tongue (or pen) or an equivocation on his part. Rather, as Judith Revel argues, “la confusion raison/rationalité est précisément l’un des mécanismes de pouvoir qu’il s’agit de décrire.” (Judith Revel, La vocabulaire de Foucault. Paris: Ellipses, 2002, 52.)


17. Rose, *Governing the Soul*, x.


34. Brown, Undoing the Demos, 17.
35. Brown, Edgework, 141n1.
37. See especially Undoing the Demos, 115-116.
39. Brown, Undoing the Demos, 118.
40. Brown, Undoing the Demos, 121.
42. As, for instance, Audier argues in Penser le ‘néolibéralisme.’
44. See e.g. Brown, Edgework, 37.
45. Brown, Undoing the Demos, 48.
46. Brown, Undoing the Demos, 117-118.
51. Brown, Undoing the Demos, 28.
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55. Deleuze, Negotiations, 84.
56. See e.g. Michel Foucault, “Foucault,” included in Essential Works of Foucault, vol. 2, 459-463.
57. Deleuze, Foucault, 60.
59. Deleuze, Foucault, 114.
60. Deleuze, Foucault, 96.
61. Deleuze, “What is a Dispositif?,” 162.
63. In Foucault, Deleuze argues a very similar point, but uses the term “thought” (la pensée) rather than “reason” (raison): “In truth, one thing haunts Foucault – thought [la pensée]. [...] He writes a history, but a history of thought as such. To think means to experiment and to problematize. Knowledge, power and the self are the triple root of a problematization of thought.” (Deleuze, Foucault, 116; cf. Deleuze, Negotiations, 95-96.)
69. Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” 255.
74. Derrida, Writing and Difference, 42.
75. Foucault, History of Madness, 576.
78. Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 64.
80. Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, 214.
81. Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, 214.
82. See Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, 203ff.
84. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 95.
116. Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988, 4. Of passing interest to the present inquiry is that Brown's piercing feminist critique of the political-philosophical tradition in fact mobilises terms “political rationality” and, furthermore, does so in a manner reminiscent of the two ways Foucault uses it in *“Omnes et Singulatim.” Thus, in the introduction to *Manhood and Politics*, she claims that Aristotle’s political writings (the first of her three case studies) develop “a political rationality to facilitate [the]
domination” of the natural necessities of life (p. 5). A mere two sentences later she asserts that in Machiavelli’s time (the second case study), “[p]olitical rationality has grown more forthrightly instrumental” (p. 5). That her text shifts – in the space of three sentences – between “political rationality” in the determinate sense and in the general sense may once more be seen as an indication of political rationality’s abstruse nature.


119. Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself, 125.

120. Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” included in The Essential Works of Foucault vol. 1, 281-301, 294. See also Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject.

121. Foucault, Politics of Truth, 114.


126. Brown, Edgework, 59. See also Chambers, “Undoing Neoliberalism”: “one can challenge the hegemony of [neoliberal] rationality only through the production of a distinct rationality.”


129. Agamben, Use of Bodies, 277, 278.


135. Agamben, Potentialities, 221.

136. Agamben, Potentialities, 220, 238, 239.

137. Agamben, Potentialities, 239.


145. Lemke, Biopolitics, 63.


150. Dean, Signature of Power, 218, 217.
what does it mean to make-up the mind (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε)?
justin murphy

Under what conditions can thought and speech participate meaningfully in systemic political transformations? In my view, two bodies of late twentieth-century thought stand out as the most advanced efforts to answer this question. Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, in their own registers and of course with very different accents, both suggest substantial but complicated roles thinking and speaking might have to play in any viable future project of emancipatory politics. Given the idealistic associations and connotations of such terms as thinking and speaking, it is no surprise that both figures have been charged with similar crimes: individualism, aestheticism, or escapism, all of which are typically implied to render their bodies of work unhelpful for projects of organized, collective political change.

In the present historical moment of the so-called age of information, we are now in a better position than ever to understand the ways in which mere thought and speech are unable to generate politically significant emancipatory dynamics. In modern global capitalism, it has never seemed more clear that what is called freedom of speech and the public exchange of ideas is perfectly consistent with the perpetuity and even intensification of oppressive institutional dynamics. Yet, I wish to suggest that in this rightful disillusionment with mere thought and speech lies an opportunity for improving our understanding of the unique conditions under which certain types of thought and speech might be keys to unlocking new forms of emancipatory politics today, in the context of what Deleuze called “con-
If it is true that Foucault and Deleuze are two of the most advanced thinkers of this question—and yet even they remain uncleared of charges relating to political triviality—then it would seem that the surest way to advance the question would be to begin at the edges of where they left off. As Foucault’s references suggest, the peculiar and conditional, but radical political power of thought and speech is a motivating concern in some of the founding discourses of Western political thought. The largest portion of this study is therefore dedicated to Plato’s Republic, because it is in that most strange text that I believe this question receives one of its most impressive treatments. This treatment, however, remains only partially understood. Additionally, as Foucault and Deleuze both constructed their works to some degree against the foil of psychonalysis, it will not be too surprising that psychoanalysis emerges as a natural frame for formalizing how and why thought and speech are typically pacified into consistency with political orders.

In the very beginning of the Republic, Polemarchus says to Socrates and Glaucon that he simply will not listen and that they “better make up [their] mind to that” (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε). What could it mean to “make up one’s mind” to the fact that one will not be heard? Drawing on the history of ancient Greek religious practices and Lacan’s topological, diagrammatic heuristics for his theory of the drive, I demonstrate how the Republic offers a remarkable solution to the problem of how to think and speak in contexts where political factors may doom one not to be heard. In particular, I extend Lacan’s diagrammatic heuristics to show that what is typically called knowledge is a product of a circular process in which supposedly free thought emerges from, and returns to, brute political forces. As we will see, this perverse circularity is also an explicit concern in the work of Foucault and Deleuze.

The first contribution of this study will be to show how and why mere thought and speech, even true speech, are typically doomed to political impotence. The key problem, in short, is that where power is unequally distributed, the dominant can always choose not to listen. While this may seem obvious, conventional notions about the roles of free thinking and free speaking in creating social transformation become mystified to a degree that remains underestimated. What is called free, critical, or oppositional thought and speech typically coincide with the status quo to a greater degree and on a deeper level than is widely believed. The second and main contribution will be a possible or at least partial solution to the
puzzle. The line of thought elaborated here suggests that the solution involves tactically variable deployments of parrhesia—truth-telling or frank speech (franc-parler)—which, if undertaken correctly, have the unique properties of being indecipherable to the dominant and irresistibly, non-communicatively generative of autonomous collective power. It turns out that the dominant do dig their own graves, not by creating an impoverished industrial proletariat, but because their cultivated aural numbness renders them helpless when their mechanisms of control are discovered by the subjects who learn their contributions to dialogue are falling on deaf ears. Instead, subjects become revolutionary when they learn how to “make up their mind” about this.

The tactical maneuvers Foucault discusses under the heading of “courage” are comparable to those Deleuze and Guattari discuss under the heading of nomadology, all of which are consistent with what Plato appears to mean by the notion of “making up the mind.” All of these refer to techniques through which minds are “made” by a cultivated openness to real objective forces (the only forces that can attune diverse mental processes of individualized bodies into shared movements toward liberation) but also “made up” in creative, performative alterations of social reality. Such operations are typically invoked as examples of faux-radical dandyism or individualistic, bourgeois “lifestyle politics” but the analysis shows that, on the contrary, these are empirically sophisticated models of how currently atomized bodies begin to enter into collective processes capable of transforming institutions that operate at population level.

“BUT COULD YOU PERSUADE US, IF WE WON’T LISTEN?”

In one of his later lectures published as “The Courage of Truth,” Foucault is interested in the conditions under which, in ancient Greek culture, an act of truth-telling would or would not come to be recognized as such by a speaker or listener. Foucault is clear that he is not so interested in the discursive or logical structures that make something recognizable as true, but the interpersonal and performative conditions that allow someone to function as a subject telling the truth. He notes a few key conditions:

In short, parrhesia, the act of truth, requires: first, the manifestation of a fundamental bond between the truth spoken and the thought of the person who spoke it; [second], a challenge to the bond between the two interlocutors (the person who speaks the truth and the person to whom this
truth is addressed). Hence this new feature of parrhesia: it involves some form of courage, the minimal form of which consists in the parrhesiast taking the risk of breaking and ending the relationship to the other person which was precisely what made his discourse possible. In a way, the parrhesiast always risks undermining that relationship which is the condition of possibility of his discourse.\(^5\)

While the listener can be anyone, for an act of truth-telling to take hold, the listener “must accept the game of parrhesia; they must play it themselves and recognize that they have to listen to the person who takes the risk of telling them the truth.”\(^6\) We can already see here the theoretical vulnerability of any politics based on what Foucault called the aesthetics of existence, or “the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game.”\(^7\) Any politics contingent on even the attention of others, let alone a cooperative attention, could be accused of begging what is so difficult about politics in the first place, namely, how to proceed in the face of willfully non-attentive and/or non-cooperative others? It is therefore reasonable to wonder skeptically how Foucault’s subsequent elucidation of the workings of parrhesia could ever generate any useful, let alone radical or revolutionary, insights into how political situations defined by inequality and domination might ever be fundamentally altered. Furthermore, if the key conditions are not met, parrhesia can turn out very badly. Relevant to the analysis that follows this section, Foucault notes about the Republic, that Plato explicitly diagnoses “the bad democratic city, which is all motley, fragmented, and dispersed between different interests, passions, and individuals who do not agree with each other. This bad democratic city practices parrhesia: anyone can say anything.”\(^8\)

Deleuze and Guattari are explicitly concerned with this same dilemma. In A Thousand Plateaus, they will repeatedly identify a certain pattern of political conservatism, which they will often associate with psychoanalysis: “Silence people, prevent them from speaking, and above all, when they do speak, pretend they haven’t said a thing: the famous psychoanalytic neutrality.”\(^9\) Many of the conceptual personae in that book—the white wall of the signifier, the black hole of subjectivity, and the machine of faciality—are all variations on the theme of social technologies that channel, deflect, distort, or otherwise pacify potential becomings into the circuits that generate the life and consistency of the dominant social system. For Deleuze and Guattari, contemporary liberal democracy and the “paradox of the legislator-subject”\(^10\) is the apotheosis of this pattern: “... the more you obey the statements of the dominant reality, the more in command you are as subject of enunciation
in mental reality, for in the end you are only obeying yourself! You are the one in command, in your capacity as a rational being. A new form of slavery is invented, namely, being slave to oneself.” Just as we find in Foucault, at stake here is the problem that speech may be perfectly free and not only fail to have any political potency but even become the mystified lifeblood of the dominant social system one sets out to question, challenge, or transform.

Plato’s Republic begins with a curious staging of this problem. In the very beginning, Glaucon and Socrates are heading home to Athens. Polemarchus sees them from a distance and sends a slave to stop them. When Polemarchus catches up, he has Adeimantus, Niceratus, and others by his side. Very abruptly, Polemarchus points out that he has more men in his group, and that Glaucon and Socrates must therefore “prove stronger,” or will be forced to stay. Socrates asks if there is not a third possibility, namely, that he and Glaucon persuade the others to let them pass. Polemarchus poses the counter-question: “But could you persuade us, if we won’t listen?” to which Glaucon replies, “Certainly not.” Polemarchus closes this discussion with an extremely enigmatic statement: “Well, we won’t listen; you’d better make up your mind to that” (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε). Immediately after, Adeimantus describes the enjoyments they can expect that evening, “persuading” them to stay after they have already been told they have no choice. Οὕτω διανοεῖσθε is a peculiar phrase. Οὕτω is an adverb, which means “in this way,” and thus signifies a limitation of some kind, a restriction with an implicitly commanding or imperative dimension. However, διανοεῖσθε is constructed in the optative mood and means “to be minded,” thus implying a free choice in the use of the mind. It is a strange syntactical pairing of the proscriptive/prescriptive with the optative—it seems to suggest a sort of forced freedom.

Furthermore, as if to redouble this tension semantically, διανοεῖσθε contains νόος, mind—the mind of philosophy and understanding, of logical thought—but begins with δια, a commonly used particle to denote necessity, the necessity of something in need of doing. “In this way, you two will have to do with your mind.” The mind will have to do. Thus, Plato’s language awkwardly combines, on two different linguistic levels, the connotations of force and free thought. As a result, none of the English renderings is immediately comprehensible for us. For, what could it mean to “make up one’s mind” to the fact that one will not be heard? This does not link up clearly to any of the multiple meanings that for us are attached to the idea of “making up one’s mind.” However, this very gap is heuristic: because this current expression conserves quite clearly the contradictory construction of
διανοεῖσθε and at the same time is essentially incomprehensible in the context of the Republic, this provides the roadmap of a certain distance—a resistance, if one pleases—that would need to be traversed to bring this small piece of Plato’s thought into mutual illumination with our own. This being the present aim, a brief justification may be in order. Will the exegesis not be disproportionately extensive with respect to this passing remark in what is not yet even the substantive dialogue?

First, one must be immediately struck by the quite sudden and apparently arbitrary politicization this exchange represents. Especially because Adeimantus is Glaucon’s brother, the introduction of the question of force here seems rather contrived. One might read the inorganicism of this question’s appearance as an indication that something important must be addressed straightaway, a sacrifice of organic narrativity that must serve another function. Second, beyond this vague hint, in some sense the whole subsequent dialogue has this injunction to “make up one’s mind” as its very condition of possibility and can be read as responding to its call, because otherwise Glaucon and Socrates would have simply returned home never encountering the conditions for the production of the Republic’s ideas. My reading seeks to confirm that both the inorganicism and early placement of this seemingly unnecessary and merely rhetorical prelude are both called for by the very argument that this scenario dramatizes.

THE CIRCULARITY PROBLEM

I maintain that it is at the level of analysis—if we can take a few more steps forward—that the nodal point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality must be revealed. This nodal point is called desire, and the theoretical elaboration that I have pursued in recent years will show you through each stage of clinical experience, how desire is situated in dependence on demand—which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both, absolute and inapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued, an element that is called desire.¹⁵

A demand is an injunction directed to another, and as a claim or receipt on the desire of the other, the individual is located within a psychic economy that is not merely metaphorical. If desire only functions in dependence on demand, the
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An economy of desire between persons is an economy of scarcity, composed of individuals who cannot say everything at once and must therefore make distributional decisions in speech, but who are also sometimes players in a zero-sum game of conflicting desires. What a subject will articulate is a choice always made with respect to the aims of a desire among other conceivable desires and is therefore always the function of a particular distribution of energy among other alternative and forsaken distributions: a political decision. But the metonymic remainder of the subject’s articulation introduces a second site of psychic politics: the inescapable condition of articulation is the dissimulation or repression of the primordial violence or cutting of language’s entrance onto the scene.

One would never get around to venturing the primordial word if one waited for justification, a reason in advance of reason. The commonplace dialectical paradox of political theory, that the state is logically and empirically founded on the criminal act of its institution—the founding act is external to the state’s laws which are only established after the fact, as attested by examples such as Romulus’s legendary murder and the founding of Rome—finds a parallel in language, or more specifically what I will call the theoretical as such. The theoretical is founded on an analogously primordial violence and repression/dissimulation. Not only does desire imply forsaken desires, but as speaking beings our articulations imply one of the politician’s greatest pastimes: the “cover-up,” in which an objectionable action that appears at the time practically necessary and desirable demands further objectionable actions to keep off the surface the original act and also sustain its desirable practical necessity. We continue to speak to cover up the unsatisfied, impossible, inapprehensible lack that motivated our first utterance.

In politics, we endure while continually revising our management of the profits and losses incurred in the primal political scene, through alterations in the status quo (small to large killings of the father, from mundane legislation to revolutions) and we enjoy their successes and atone for their failures in a way that dissimulates their reality. In the theoretical, we find the same structure. The history of the theoretical is a history of the management of a theoretical ambivalence, between the enjoyments and gains made possible only with the pre-theoretical breach of articulation and a moral consciousness we have become cognizant of only because of the original cut into the world by signification.

When Polemarchus makes his odd suggestion/injunction, he evokes this whole set of problems with remarkable efficiency. The root of διανοεῖσθε is διανοέοµαι,
which contains the well-known nous, and means, “be minded of, purpose, or intention.” To be minded of: to have something in mind, but also to have the mind forced by the object of attention into its attention. Socrates has to make up his mind about Polemarchus, consider the situation, play with it in his mind theoretically, etc., but only because the desire of Polemarchus oppresses and represses that mind. Theory is both repressed and repressing. It is repressed by the objects of its attention, the desire of the other that is its calling and whatever else its particular fascination might be, and it is repressing because, in order to function as sound reason, it must keep off the record the founding violence of its intellectually arbitrary distributive choices (why it's not doing something else, for instance) in its logically arbitrary origination. The mind simply cannot mind itself in a pure movement of justified reason, just like a state cannot found itself in a pure movement of already legal legislation.

This is what explains Plato’s paradoxical construction, which suggests a forced “making” or doing of the free mind. Plato is pointing us toward theory’s obscene, and from its own standpoint, intolerable condition of possibility: that reason and truth are founded on a situation thoroughly mediated by an interpersonal negotiation of desire, i.e. the free-thinking mind of philosophical thought is made possible by what, according to its own canons, is a crime: a vulgar, practical necessity laced with selfish aims and opaque strategies. This helps to explain why the opening scene of the Republic takes recourse to such an opaque condensation of contradictory meanings. If the implication of this little passage remains overlooked, it is no wonder. As with theory’s founding self-deception, for this text to get off the ground it is necessary that this odd little passage be overlooked in the beginning.

Thus, we can understand this initial scenario as a metatheoretical gloss on the analogy between soul and city that is quite appropriately oblique, suspicious, and dissimulated insofar as it cannot escape the economies of repression that belong to both the theory of politics and the politics of theory. The reason this is so important is that it will help to explain one of the thorniest puzzles in the history of emancipatory politics: the perennial, seemingly constant tendency for oppositional political projects to result in oppressive outcomes strangely similar to what they oppose, as in the various examples of twentieth-century left totalitarianism. To better understand this problem as a concrete, empirical pattern—in order to ultimately understand the full sophistication of aesthetic—existential strategies—the following section explores the cultural and historical coordinates
of this problem articulated in the Republic’s opening scene.

THE STRUCTURE OF THEORIA IN THE REPUBLIC

Andrea Wilson Nightingale has shown very well that Plato draws heavily on the civic and religious traditions of theoria in order to constitute what is, at the time the Republic is written, the new practice of philosophical theoria.\(^1^8\) Indeed, she suggests that the Republic, of all dialogues, leans on traditional social forms of theoria “especially clearly.”\(^9\) She observes that Socrates and Glaucon, in the opening scenario, are returning from a “theoric event,” the festival of Bendis. As she emphasizes, the establishing function of this theoric event is tightly integrated into the text, particularly in its anticipation of the metaphysical theoria developed in books V-VIII.

As a result of this debt to traditional forms of theoria, in Plato’s Republic one can plot quite rigorously what I will call a “theoric structure.” In the parallels between traditional forms of theoria and Plato’s philosophical theoria, we have the material to sketch this structure more formally. To anticipate, this theoric structure consists in three elements: 1.) the desire for a particular kind of knowledge, which leads to 2.) a confrontation with the object of that knowledge, and 3.) the problem of bringing that knowledge back in the form of a return account. The point of departure is invariably a function of forces and competing desires, and the return account is always compromised by the political reality of the desires into which it must integrate itself. The pattern is, I believe, essentially equivalent to what Deleuze and Guattari seek to capture in their well-known descriptions of “determinantalizing” and “reterritorializing” dynamics.

In the case of religious theoria, the theoros often desires divine knowledge, and also operates as a function of others’ desiring. The theoros is sent by a city to consult an oracle, perform the relevant rituals, have the consultation, and return home to provide an account of what was said by the oracle. If not to an oracle, a theoros might be sent to a religious festival for the same purpose, and with the same expectations. As Nightingale notes, the latter form of religious theoria was as political as it was religious, insofar as the theoroi were most often aristocrats sent as representatives of their city.\(^2^0\) As we will see, there is another political dimension to this form of theoros in that the content of the return account would by definition be a comparative political assessment of one’s home city, favorable or unfavorable.
Even apart from an implicit political critique implied in a comparative view, messages right from the mouth of an oracle could be a significant political liability for the theoros, as in Oedipus Tyrannus.\textsuperscript{21} Part of the expectation for oracular missions was a scrupulous emphasis on the faithfulness of the return account, an insistence that one not “add anything,” nor “take anything away,” from the “sacred pronouncement.”\textsuperscript{24} However, there are several indications that this emphasis only testifies to the marked impossibility of such a pure account. Much like the dialectical paradox of the rule and its transgression, the prohibition does not testify to widespread aversion toward an unfaithful recounting so much as the problem of a tendency toward it.

First, that the whole point of visiting an oracle is to bear witness to something with one’s own eyes as opposed to just hearing an account,\textsuperscript{23} already indicates an inherent inadequacy, an invariable gap in the completeness of the most articulate return account. Secondly, oracular truth was never something to be recorded and transmitted, but it rather consisted in a ritualistic practice, what Elsner calls “ritual-centered visuality.”\textsuperscript{24} This visuality supported by practical, ceremonial supports, keeps the theoros from “interpreting images through the rules and desires of everyday life. It constructs a ritual barrier to the identification and objectifications of the screen of [social] discourse and posits a sacred possibility for vision.”\textsuperscript{25} In this way, too, the divine vision is from the start not susceptible to a faithful return account, insofar as the practical ritual conditions cannot be simply replicated at home in a do-it-yourself manner. Finally, although Nightingale cites the \textit{Ion} for its rendering of what a return account looks like, she does not notice the irony: in the excessively “vivid detail”\textsuperscript{26} of the chorus’s description of the Oracle at Delphi, and also in the chorus’s comparison of the Delphic sculptures to the ones with which they are familiar from home, can we not see a note of mockery at the expectation, proffered by the likes of Theognis, of an absolute fidelity in the return account?

In the case of theoria as a search for wisdom, the theoros undertakes the work of personal cultivation to obtain a personal kind of knowledge or wisdom. The theoros would journey abroad simply for the sake of learning. Through Herodotus, Nightingale highlights Solon, who privately traveled abroad for ten years, “wandering” in the name of “intellectual cultivation.”\textsuperscript{27} Instances of personal self-cultivation with political sponsorship, if not correctly “returned,” held political risks. Anacharsis was sent to Greece by the king of Scythia and after studying Greek religious practices, he attempted to introduce some of the Greek religious practices
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into Scythian religious culture. The king of Scythia then shot and killed him with an arrow for this attempted importation of foreign ways, and the Scythian people then disclaimed all knowledge of Anacharsis. 28

The life of Socrates also followed the theoric trajectory as an instance of personal theoria, distinct from the discipline of philosophy as Plato would later conceive it. Socratic skepticism, which consists in knowing that one knows nothing, was only a negative knowledge, a limiting knowledge used for the maintenance of one’s own soul. Socrates’ practical efforts to provide an account of what he learned were limited to extreme modesty and ironic detachment, and critique of others’ claims and arguments. The benefit or gain of Socratic dialectic was only to be found in Socrates’ inner peace, and it is well known that his minor forays into practical conversion or positive intellectual production, his “corrupting the young,” 29 ended in dramatic political failure.

The Myth of Er, which concludes the Republic, follows the same structure. Er participates in military battle as the practical access point to knowledge of the afterlife. Plato narrates how Er is killed in battle, travels to the afterlife, but then awakes to give an account of what he witnessed to the people of his home city. The place of the afterlife, revealingly, is described precisely as a religious festival, and there he is given an injunction to bring home to mankind everything he witnesses there. 30 When he entered the afterlife, he was instructed to “listen to and look at everything in the place” because he was to be a “messenger to human beings about the things that were there.” 31 However, just as in the other kinds of theoria, Plato in at least two ways highlights that “everything in the place” is certainly not reported.

The fantastic ensemble Plato describes, between the notoriously obscure “light and spindle”?32 to the lives of men which are laid out—“...all the other things were there, mixed with each other and with wealth, poverty, sickness, health, and to the states intermediate to them” 33—seem to represent something like absolute totality. If the experiential content of Er’s visit to the afterlife is absolute totality itself, than Er’s task of reporting “everything in the place” is like the “vivid detail” of the Ion, an insistence on a completely comprehensive description of an experience that is at the same time understood to be impossibly rich.

Secondly, one finds here another peculiar statement, which has the same functional significance of the curious narrative prelude which introduces Socrates and
Glaucon in the beginning of the text. Plato tells us that Er “said some other things about the stillborn and those who had only lived for a short time, but they’re not worth recounting.” Why, if these things are not worth recounting, is it worth it for Plato to briefly recount them and also recount that they are not worth recounting? It is worth recounting for Plato because the Republic is an example of how one can creatively signal the way in which logos imposes ineluctable distributive choices and political pressures that excise and pacify and distort; again Plato is communicating—in what Deleuze and Guattari call “hearsay,” “relays,” “noncommunicating,” or just “indirect discourse”—the theoretical and political problem that communications make sense within a status quo only to the degree they de-claw themselves in accordance with it. While no thought or speech can avoid this primordially distorting and conservative effect of communicative sense-making, one can produce “event-thoughts... problem-thoughts,” speeches, texts, or behaviors that make the receiver see, hear, or feel in a non-communicating way the nature of this problem and possible ways out of it. We return to this when we return to Foucault and Deleuze.

In Book V-VII of Republic, Plato constructs, for the first time at length, the new, specific activity of “philosophy,” as something distinct from general intellectual cultivation (philosophein). Nightingale shows in great detail how the philosopher is constructed on the grounds of traditional theoria. The Allegory of the Cave, for instance, is the story of a theoric pilgrimage from shadow to light and back into shadow. The desire of whoever leaves the cave differs from mere personal cultivation in that the philosophical theoros seeks not to “wander” so as to work on the self, but to see being as it really is, to see it in its truth unadulterated by the shadows of personal desires, biases, illusions, etc., in order to bring it back into the cave. This would be the difference between wisdom and philosophical truth: the first is negative, a peeling away of excesses, biases, and illusions for the improvement of one’s soul; the second is a positive acquisition or production, gained through a mixing with an outside, intended for ultimately linking back up with others. The error of Anarchasis, or Socrates for that matter, was to make a politically inept production of their acquired wisdom.

FORMALIZING THE STRUCTURE OF THEORIA

If we wished to represent the structure of theoria graphically, we would have to show thought “ascending” from earthly obviousness to a better-lit plateau, followed by the descent back “down to earth,” to “reality.” Figure 1 presents a dia-
gram of the general trajectory of theoria as it appears in the Republic. The different types of theoria (oracular, diplomatic, etc.) all have the same structure, but different vocabularies, as indicated by the different labels at each part of the trajectory.

**Theoric discovery**
- Religious difference or mystery
- City-state difference
- Knowing one knows nothing
- "Marvellous" place between Heaven and Hell
- Blinding light

**Form of the discovery**
- Divine knowledge
- Political knowledge
- Personal knowledge
- The afterlife
- Really real being

**Practical conditions**
- Oracular mission
- Diplomatic mission
- Personal cultivation
- Military battle
- Philosophical mission

**Reinsertion in social order**
- "Special crisis"
- Political critique
- Socratic negativity
- Strong storytelling (alkimou)
- "Awkward" and "ridiculous"

In each case there is, to begin with, a set of practical conditions or in other words a particular institution—a more or less distinct and stable desire (more: religious theoria; less: philosophical theoria, which is for Greek philosophy radically insecure) propped up by some relationship to some reserve of power or force, be it military might, state funding, or the resources of a lone individual. This desire takes off, as it were, and is propelled by these resources to an encounter with some object. What is interesting about this object, designated here as the theoric discovery, is that in each case the object is not so much a positive attainment, but some finally insurmountable resistance to the upward theoric flight: mystery, difference, skepticism, limbo, and blindness, respectively.
On return, the desire of the theoros and the journey it motivated must reintegrate itself into the practical institutional context from whence it came. As noted, the expectation of this reintegration is itself a condition of possibility for the theoric journey. But also indicated here, this reintegration is a negotiated result. It is not determined in the strong sense; there is room for play, between, for instance, a radical Socratic negativity which maintains fidelity to the truth of thought’s experience, and a more selective and discreet narrative of the experience.

Constituted by the very shape of the journey, clustered in the negative space underneath the arc of the way taken, are the positive designations for the contradictory objects which both propel the journey upward and then repel it downward. These several kinds of knowledge serve to denote the positive stamp, whether implicitly or explicitly, Plato gives to the invariably elusive object at the height of the theoric flight. After discussing a similar structure, which pertains to the psychic economy, we will gain additional resources to say more about this theoric economy.

In the psychoanalytic understanding, sexual drives must be rigorously distinguished from the animal instinct, because it is only the latter which take a particular, determinate object. As is well known, the story of sexual development, as told by the younger Freud, is the story of the infantile sexual drives (oral, anal, etc.) and their gradual organization at the genital level. Despite Freud’s early insistence on this tendency of the child’s “polymorphous perversion” to consolidate at the genital level, Freud later realized, and Lacan emphasized, that this organization always remains inherently incomplete and precarious at that. Lacan links the partiality of the drives to what he somewhat ambiguously calls an “economic factor,” implied by the pleasure principle’s relationship to the Real-Ich, what can be conceptualized as essentially the central nervous system. It must be remembered that the pleasure-principle has nothing to do with a kind of hedonistic insistence on simply seeking pleasures, but is rather the reduction of excitations as such, the maintenance of equilibrium or harmony in the psyche. It is not about pursuing excitations, but about gratifying and sating excitations so as to get rid of them because they are unpleasurable from the standpoint of the psyche.

The central nervous system, in maintaining a certain “homeostasis of the internal tensions,” achieves a minimization of excitations, a containment of energies, and is therefore the pleasure principle itself. But in the maintenance and containment of these excitations, it is what gives them the character of a “pressure,” in
other words, what accounts for them as unpleasurable. In other words, it is the
maintenance of the homeostasis of the excitations, but a maintenance that, as it
were, runs on the very energy of those excitations. This is why they are partial
drives, drives which find no satisfaction in a final goal or destination, but which
only drive out in order to drive back in.

In order to interpret this topology, consider Lacan’s following explanation of the
partial drives in connection to the larger course of life itself: “Sexuality is realized
only through the operation of the drives in so far as they are partial drives, partial
with regard to the biological finality of sexuality... If all is confusion in the discus-
sion of the sexual drives it is because one does not see that the drive represents
no doubt, but merely represents, and partially at that, the curve of fulfillment of
sexuality in the living being. Is it surprising that its final term should be death,
when the presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death?”

Lacan is referring here to the beyond of the pleasure principle—what Freud re-
ferred to as the death drive. If we could imagine Lacan’s topology of the partial
drives with the drive rather going straight up and reaching a goal beyond its mere
point of departure we would have a topology of animal instinct, death itself for
human being. Life is precisely what is sustained by the return and the repetition
of the drives, and is little more than this circular circuit (the central nervous sys-
tem), in the same sense that a home becomes a home only with its inhabitants’
repeated returns. In any event, Lacan bases his topology of the partial drives on
Freud’s use of the three voices (active, reflexive, and passive) to describe the cir-
cuit of the drive. Freud uses the pleasure of seeing as an example. One sees (ac-
tive), and from this seeing one is able to see oneself (reflexive). These two voices
would appear, at first glance, to provide a sufficient description of the drive’s cir-
cuit, which is an “outwards-and-back” movement. But Freud notes a third mo-
ment in the pleasure of sight, namely, that in seeing oneself one arrives at a notion
of being seen (passive).

Lacan’s interest here is that in this circular circuit, something new emerges. There
is suddenly a subject, not the subject of the drive, but a subject that is other from
the subject of the drive, someone to see the subject of the drive. A feature of this
process is what Lacan calls the objet a. This objet a is not the object of the drive as
a particular, determinate bull’s eye, rather it is the name for the hollow space that
the drive creates by not attaining any final satisfaction outside itself. This is how
humans are distinct from the other species insofar as the object of their drives is

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not given, it is not limited and neatly constrained by an automatic instinct; in the movement of the partial drives which constitute human being, virtually anything can be occupied by the void within the partial drive, that is, what we retroactively and only fantastically determine as missing after the drives run their course.

What is the rim? It is the *quelle*, the source, of the drive. In short, the rim-like structure of the drive’s source is implied in the notion of the drive as an excitation, a movement, a deviation from an equilibrium: as such, it must be seen as a breaking into/out of something back through which it returns. For the drive to emerge as a concentration, as a particular force rather than forceless diffusion, there must be a minimal surface against which it finds resistance. This is simply the Real, defined as obstacle or resistance, the unwelcome.\(^4\) It is because of the
realization of the homeostatic system that sexuality comes into play only in the form of partial drives." A drive is what presses through a gap in the Real, but the Real is necessary for the pressure that constitutes the drive.

If we seem far afield from our initial concerns, we have to elucidate what the partial drive has to do with rationality. Repression, in other words, the very constitution of the partial drives as drives (as opposed to the death drive, the explosion of the central nervous system in an enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle) is a signifier insofar as it sets up a subject (here, the Real-Ich becomes an objectified subject) for another signifier. This other signifier is, of course, the symptom, the return of the repressed, which Lacan teaches is homogenous with the repressed and connected to it in what can be conceived as a scaffolding.

Opposed to this one extreme of repression as such is not some kind of vulgar hedonistic, excessive pleasure, but simply interpretation. “Desire, in fact, is interpretation itself.” The move from one signifier to another, in other words the search for meaning, the traversal of the scaffolding which represents the very libidinal investments the returns on which are the perpetuity of life, can be understood in this sense as an illicit travel into a territory blocked-off by the Real, that is, structurally blocked off by life and the pleasure principle: every move between signifiers is unjustified from the standpoint of the pleasure principle, as it represents an excitation which upsets the equilibrium of any particular moment and the horizon of significations which constitute it. Interpretation—rather than being on one side with the Real, as in the conception of interpretation as a search for pure Truth—is opposed to the Real, an obscene and dangerous movement which moves precisely against the Real.

The topology of the partial drive illustrates that the desire of a sexed being does not attain a final satisfaction, but perpetually recreates, by virtue and within the space of an encircling, a lost object, which retroactively appears as the cause of desire. In other words, the partiality of the drives (sexuality itself) assures us is that a final interpretative satisfaction—in, say, the finality of a pure truth, the desire for which we can now understand as the death drive—is out of the question.

If we return to our visualization of theoric structure as it appears in Plato’s Republic, and we stand by the premise of the homology between the well-ordered soul and the well-ordered polis, it would appear that missing from the graphic representation is a source, a quelle, or rim-like structure. If the theoric structure
resembles a bow, the curve of fulfillment of human sexuality, much like the circuit of the partial drive, do we not learn from Lacan’s topology that such a trajectory cannot, as it were, power itself without the pressure of a Real out of which the theoric departure would erupt? In other words, the mind must be made up, out of the Real, which presses on it.

Whereas attaining a final goal outside of itself would be the death drive, the will to inorganic thing-like existence, the drives of a sexed being return into themselves as return on an investment. So it is with the mind and the so-called free-thinking subject: the Real presses, builds a pressure—or, in economic terms, invests itself—into a speaking being, and the being re-presses that pressure into the production of a truth that is true only insofar as it slots itself back into previously existing signifiers, essentially producing a kind of linguistic profit or return on the initial investments.

![Diagram of True knowledge, Thought, The political, and Goal]
Recall that Socrates and Glaucon are returning from a fairly significant theoric event, heading home to Athens, when Polemarchus and the others capture them. Clearly, in the light of the preceding remarks, their capture functions on the narrative level of the dialogue according quite strictly to how Socrates describes “the return” phase of all the other theoric structures he invokes. That is, returning from a theoric event, he encounters resistance on his return home, a resistance based on a Thrasymachean advantage of the stronger. Let us emphasize also that the festival at Bendis was not a trivial affair. The Athenian polis exercised the right to permit or prohibit forms of worship and the festival to which Glaucon and Socrates refer had the political significance of being the first Thracian festival permitted in Attica.50

Furthermore, recall what Socrates and Glaucon learned at the Thracian festival in Attica. As it is said briefly and in passing in the very first lines of the text, the procession of the Thracians was “no less outstanding” than the “fine one” conducted by the Athenians. It may seem a banal remark, but as Nightingale points out, Plato goes out of his way to have Socrates voice a non-Athenocentric viewpoint.51 Thus, what he learns from the theoric event is a comparative political knowledge that conflicts with the patriotism of those back home to whom he will have to provide an account. When Socrates, in the dialogue, encounters the political problem of “selling” the idea of justice to otherwise selfish people, he takes recourse to myth—to strong stories instead of strong knowledge.52

If we conclude that Plato himself would have to adopt the strategy he attributes to Socrates literally from the first pages to the last, that is, making up his mind—with all of the reverberations of that phrase—then what does this tell us? All of the ambiguity surrounding the Forms—that they are not strictly speaking attainable, that they are modeled on mystery—can be restored a profound coherence at the point we interpret the theory of Forms according to the formula outlined here. The theory of the Forms is made up, or to be more precise, Plato made up his mind to them in order to provide a return account of the truth. Of course, a key figure in this equation is the historical Socrates. Why are the Forms so ontologically and epistemologically mysterious? Because they are a politicized theory of Socratic negativity, a contrived positivity (content) for the radical negativity of the truth (form), the pure form of the “I know that I know nothing.”

The theory of Forms is therefore Socratic negativity plus political strategy, creativity. The passage that acts as the narrative condition of possibility for the dialogue

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of the *Republic* invokes a Socrates that is different from the historical Socrates precisely in that he is politically shrewd; with this most curious text, Plato offers us a creation partially communicative but partially “non-communicating,” or indirectly communicative, deploying affectively intelligible “event-thoughts” or “problem-thoughts” that function as relays or signals to those who can hear him but which are imperceptible to those who have vowed not to listen.

CONCLUSION

If we look to Plato’s *Republic* for political guidance in the content of the text, it might only be because we suffer from what Deleuze and Guattari call the disease of interpretosis. As they remind us, the idea that a text should be interpreted would appear to be one of the many circular tracks along which the contemporary legislator-subject of liberal democracies cannot help but constantly reproduce their own self-enslavement. If we look to Plato’s *Republic* as a creative experiment in thought, self-conscious of the political dilemma it brings to our attention in the very first pages, it becomes a remarkable lesson in how thought takes flight, not to some other world, but toward another kind of life in this world. One might be inclined to assume that the political communication strategy favored by Plato would be Socratic irony, but all the strange creative flights in the *Republic* are evidence of something very different. The entire book can be read as a performativ solution to the limits of Socratic irony, what to do when Socratic irony cannot even begin because the others will not engage: “...lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.” Is the method of Deleuze and Guattari not the method of Plato’s bizarre text, if one can learn to be affected by it in this way?

Understanding Plato’s work to be a political-communicational innovation at the limits of Socratic irony provides a convenient segue back to our original motivation. In *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault analyzes at length several cultural variations on the Socratic “care of the self.” Especially useful for concluding our discussion is Foucault’s treatment of Cynicism. Briefly, ancient Cynicism, most famously embodied by Diogenes of Sinope, consisted in applying principles of philosophical wisdom to one’s own life to a scandalous degree. In this practice, the hypocrisy of normal life is exposed and the Cynic gains eudaemonia or a happiness rooted in the living of true life, which is an *other life* (*une vie autre*), relative to what is generally considered life. One of the key tenets of ancient Cynicism
was that one must “alter the value of the currency.”\textsuperscript{55} By living truly, the Cynic demonstrates that the coin in circulation (the norms and values of status quo institutions) is overvalued, and that the true coin, repressed by status quo institutions, is undervalued. What is remarkable about Cynicism for our purposes is that it was perhaps the first recorded political-philosophical “movement” that appears to be a solution to the dilemma outlined at length in this article. The Cynic must learn how their true coin is objectively superior to the false coin that obtains in the conventional status quo, through an experimental process in which the Cynic conducts “tests,” (e.g., the seemingly ridiculous stunts of Diogenes), which separate the true from the false, the really valuable from the not valuable, generate eudaemonia, and fundamentally alter social distributions of attention, perception, and behavior, all in the same immanent process. Although Foucault does not fully draw this out in his cautious lecture, Cynicism appears to be a kind of radical politics uniquely adapted to overcome the circularity problem detailed at length above. It is a political project of liberation that begins in the subject, but only by attacking precisely where status quo institutions enter the subject, such that maneuvers of self-creation are better understood as a kind of militant direct action on cultural institutions. With empirical evidence such as the effects on public culture, the testimony of Alexander, etc., Cynicism demonstrably generates autonomous, intrinsically anti-institutional political power, immanent in a process that is nothing other than becoming oneself through play with objective forces. Finally, this is not an individualistic process because it requires honest and objective interactions and comparisons with others:

...the fundamental precept is “revalue your currency”; but this revaluation can only take place through and by means of “know yourself,” which replaces the counterfeit currency of one’s own and others’ opinion of oneself, with the true currency of self-knowledge. One can handle one’s own existence, take care of oneself as something real, and have the true currency of one’s true existence in one’s hands, on condition that one knows oneself. And Julian comments that when Diogenes obeyed the Pythian Apollo, when he began to get to know himself, the coin he was took on its true value. To get to know himself, Diogenes had to be able to recognize himself, and be recognized by others, as superior to Alexander himself. This refers to the famous confrontation between Diogenes and Alexander. Alexander says: If I had not been Alexander, I would have liked to be Diogenes.\textsuperscript{56}
It is easy to see how the politics of Deleuze and Guattari will fit into this tradition. Conveniently, not long after his discussion of Diogenes, Foucault indicates the path through Spinoza. Foucault suggests that if the radical Cynical practice of philosophy appears to subside over time, it is because it becomes “confiscated” into religion and “invalidated” by the dominance of scientific standards for truth. But, Foucault suggests, it reappears with vengeance in Spinoza, whose “philosophical practice... implied a true life of a completely other type than that of everyday life.” Deleuze is interested in identifying the concrete mechanisms within which this true life can learn to immanently produce itself, endogenous to the realization that many will not listen. The more one comes to see the deeply circular nature of thought, speech, and status quo political institutions—as in the dynamics of de- and re-territorialization—the question becomes how to demonstrate these traps to others without falling into them, without lapsing back onto that circular track that always seems to bring us back to the center. The way to do this is essentially the Cynical way, through tests or what Deleuze and Guattari call experiments, in a process they call “nomad science.”

Whereas royal or conventional science seeks the stable and constant laws governing the movements of linear and solid things, nomadic science is a vague science in which the affects of the scientist are no longer banished, as in royal science, but rather become part of the problem guiding the research. It would appear to involve a theoretical and empirical training of the intuitions that pertain to becomings, where “flux is reality itself,” rather than a “secondary characteristic,” excluded “in the name of royal science.” Nomad science operates in a smooth and open space, into which the scientist is distributed by affective turbulence toward a holding of space instead of being held by space like the royal scientist. If philosophy is the creation of concepts, nomad science is the political science of life itself, the creation of technologies, through an intuitive experimental method, that produce autonomous collective becomings: “...in other words, the task of occupying an open space with a vortical movement that can rise up at any point.”

How does nomad science arrive at working technologies for autonomous collective becomings? Just as a philosophy must create its own plane of immanence, nomad science must create its own plane, and draw its own circle. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that one can build a home, hum a tune, or walk in a circle as in a children’s dance; all are possible ways to begin the process. Then “one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets some one in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth.” But how does one do this, exactly? Perhaps Deleuze
and Guattari could be more clear, but we might venture the ambulatory-scientific hypothesis that one does this \textit{however works} for one and one’s other(s). This is essentially an intuitive, affective version of the scientific method, for a smooth open space. Opening and proceeding through this circle is not a kind of glorified interior navel-gazing that semi-mystically leads to some supernatural sphere, “... it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.”\textsuperscript{66} By drawing a circle on a new, smooth plane, or improvising a single tune, one need only wait and see what is returned by an other to learn what to do next. If this is done in an iterative and sensitive fashion, autonomous milieus will learn how to form along sustained rhythms. Much of the work of Deleuze and Guattari is dedicated to specifying more exactly how this aggregation of liberated flows works and fails to work under different conditions. This basic process is arguably the only way to generate autonomous collective power dynamics without subordinating them to some previously established center that would invariably trace back to the status quo, as with all too many previous, revolutionary projects. The refrain increases “the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form organized masses.”\textsuperscript{67}

Recalling our readings of Plato and Foucault, this tune or refrain “hinges” on a “state of force on the part of the listener.”\textsuperscript{68} The refrain is not heard by someone interpreting the sound, as if from a distance; it is felt, affectively. “Nomads entertain tactile relations among themselves.”\textsuperscript{69} It operates by non-communicative functions, “the eye itself has a haptic, nonoptical function.”\textsuperscript{70} This helps to explain the insistence on “becoming imperceptible,” and Deleuze’s many favorable comments on silence. Intellectual, artistic, or political projects are only worthwhile insofar as they work by “blazing life lines;”\textsuperscript{71} ideally they may become weapons to others, but in their actual functioning they should not be heard by those not in a state to receive them affectively. And when given opportunities to speak into the circular circuits of signification emanating from the center, knowing full well that one will not be heard, typically the optimal response is silence. The life of a Diogenes is only one possible, idiosyncratic outcome of the essentially social-scientific intuition that drawing one’s own circle, opening it a crack, and improvising with whatever forces are lying around, is a concrete pathway to the transformation of macro-social coordination/control mechanisms (e.g. the price or value mechanism). The refrain, as a model for the elementary unit of revolution-
ary becomings, is at once child’s play and yet risky (as in Foucault’s descriptions of parrhesia) because to anyone who cannot join up with one’s refrains, such an improvisation “necessarily appears in a negative form: stupidity, deformity, madness…”

Deleuze disliked the language of truth, perhaps because he believed it always leads one back to useless discursive squabbles he knew to be red herrings, but Foucault remained interested in the concept. One way to square this difference is to see how a real fidelity to what is the case will always exceed veridiction because of political constraints inherent to communication. Correctly understood along the lines of Cynical parrhesia, living truly, doing science truly, doing philosophy truly, and true revolutionary politics may be essentially one immanent process, the process of experimentally becoming who one is, which one always discovers to be a multiplicity, and always beyond veridiction. True life is a process of escaping the circular tracks in which this life, false life, constantly reproduces itself through bodies that are only beginning to learn what they can do, what they truly are. Although we may sometimes speak of escape, it is not “escapism” because these modes of escape are demonstrable processes based on fidelity to empirical realities. At stake here is the micro-political, empirical knowledge of real or “active escapes,” which are inherently collective, the mechanisms of which can be learned and shared with anyone who wants them. Fortunately, enemies of liberation will never know how to hear those little refrains, which become milieus, which eventually become revolutionary movements. And to the degree they learn to hear them, they will no longer be enemies of liberation.

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what does it mean to make-up the mind?
54. Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 244.
64. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 493.
what does it mean to make-up the mind?

The centrefold photo in a December 2014 issue of The New Scientist shows the head of an adolescent hooked up to the exhaustive array of wires and rubber tubes of an electroencephalographic monitor. As a technique for measuring neuronal activity, EEG is more habitually reserved for coma patients and epileptics, but, along with the offspring of many other anxious Chinese parents, the young man in question is being treated for something quite different. A resident at the Internet Addiction Treatment Centre based in Beijing’s Military General Hospital, his diagnosed excess of time spent online is dealt with in much the same way as heroin dependency: through a combination of abstinence, electroshock therapy and, rumour has it, physical torture. His hi-tech headgear is offset by camouflage clothing, which hints at the centre’s “military-style activities, including exercise drills and the singing of patriotic songs.” Placing well-publicized cultural differences to one side, what might look like therapeutic overkill is perhaps understandable in a region whose South Korean neighbours have seen the virtual rearing of an infant-avatar lead to the death of a real-life baby from neglect, in 2010; and where an epidemic of internet abuse is deemed symptomatic, if not also causal, of the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal that the Japanese term hikikomori. But similar stories are also emerging from the US and Europe—of the Oklahoma couple, for example, whose daughter starved while they played Second Life—to say nothing of the mounting evidence of diminished concentration and harmful sleep-deprivation among adults who, placing themselves at considerable risk of
disturbed mental health, obesity and heart-disease, now spend more time per day on media devices than they do asleep. In addition to extreme pathological cases, there is concern that we are witnessing a society-wide shift in our mean levels of attention, brought about by digital subjects’ increased craving for the constant stimulus of our technological devices. And there is further concern over the ecological circumstances that are leading us to consume in the first place. It isn’t just a question of technologies of cognitive and affective overload, but of the anxiogenic, dislocated environments in which the toxicity of addiction is exploited as a kind of anxiolytic cure. Addiction practitioners have spoken of an “addictogenic society” inseparable from industries seemingly intent on creating “addiction by design.” More recently, I have suggested “dopamining” as the name for an economic model that both targets the extraction of dopamine and simultaneously creates a social instability that underpins pathological forms of consumption.

The emergence of digital addiction within the context of a broader phenomenon of “generalized addiction” has been of particular interest to the French philosopher of technology, Bernard Stiegler, a vociferous critic of our exploitation by consumer technologies that, by seizing hold of our attention, leave us affectively exhausted. The symptoms of what he diagnoses as a “crisis of attention” include not just spiralling rates of attentional deficiency, but the global pandemic of depression and even the 2008 financial crisis, read as the apotheosis of postmodernity’s addiction to short-termist thrill-seeking. Drawing heavily on anecdote and a “libidinal economic” theory of desire still grounded in a somewhat metaphysical, Freudian, language of “drives,” Stiegler himself provides sparse hard evidence for these claims, thus doing little to dilute his reputation as a nostalgic conservative and excitable panic merchant. His position nonetheless finds substantial corroboration in a growing body of evidence on the transformative effects of prolonged immersion in restricted-focus environments, most notably in an emerging critique of the dominant “disease model” of addiction treatment, which draws on research into brain plasticity and the relation of addiction to social exclusion to reject the identification of dependence with genetic susceptibility and the specific properties of a highly politicized range of narcotics. We can combine this work on the ecology of addiction with Stiegler’s interest in the idea that the biological organism is “reinvented” through the technical objects that make up culture. More specifically, his occasional, allusive, comments on the neurology of experiential learning, offer an argument that the dopamine system, so inextricably bound up with addiction, is also the interface through which the neurocircuitry of the brain is organised by the tools, or artificial organs, that condition the physiologi-
ical body. This, in turn, becomes the basis for establishing a relationship between our technological environments and addiction, understood as an adaptive state of interiority corresponding to, and produced by, social breakdown.

Stiegler’s account of the construction of desire through technics, shares with the nascent neuro- and sociological approaches to addiction not just a diagnosis, but also a vision for therapy based on creating alternatives to the “proletarianizing,” or “dislocated” environments in which addiction takes hold. His argument that desire is a product of the tools one uses to construct oneself a future anticipates the focus of contemporary neuroscience on the creation of “alternative reinforcers” and perspectives that enable addicts to “realign desire,” by expanding the “narrowing tunnel of attention” beyond the “immediate relief” of consumption. Underwriting Stiegler’s position is his theory and logic of the pharmakon, “the cure that is also the poison.” This is not the pharmacology of the pharmaceutical and rehab industries, whose mass-production of consumable, commodified treatments risks counterproductively facilitating the indiscriminate disavowal of our underlying symptoms, while simultaneously locking us into ever more restrictive patterns of use. It refers, rather, to the idea that the issues arising from the prevailing technological culture can be mitigated and overturned through the reorganisation of the tools and techniques of entrapment to create ways out of an impasse.

ADDICTION AND THE PHARMAKON

The addictions supported and induced by all manner of pharmaka—kinds of fetish and writing, technics in general qua supplements in general—form a logic of the supplement that is transformed over the course of the history of the supplement, in which the forces that shape libidinal economy are also transformed, and in which addictions are the supports of the games of mutual dependence through which humans are linked, starting with love—the highest form of addiction. In other words, addictions are the concretization of the process of adoption in which psychic, collective and technical individuation consist.

Stiegler’s conception of the pharmakon is Platonic in origin, inherited from The Phaedrus, a text ostensibly on the nature of love, but which since Derrida’s Dissemination (1972) has been read predominantly in terms of its ending on the intoxication of writing. Composed around 370 BCE, at around the time of The Re-
public, the dialogue begins with Socrates encountering the eponymous Phaedrus on his way to the country. Phaedrus is concealing something in his cloak and the philosopher rightly guesses that it is the written text of a speech on love (228d), which his companion confesses he is off to reread and consume to excess in private, beyond the admonishing gaze of Athens’s elders.\(^{14}\) Although famed for never venturing beyond the Athenian walls (230d), Socrates announces that Phaedrus has “found a potion to charm me into leaving” society behind, and which he’ll pursue like a hungry animal until he gets his fix (230d). In a series of claims that are complicated by his penchant for irony, Socrates declares himself “sick with a passion for hearing speeches” (228b) and roused into a “frenzy” at the prospect of the text (234d). The language of pathology becomes more pronounced over the course of the ensuing conversation, in which the visceral experience of love—be it for people or physical objects—is portrayed as a sickness in the head (231d), a cause of rage, social withdrawal, bad judgement and loss of wealth (232c, 234b, 252a). Socrates compares lovers to beggars (233e) and famously evokes cicadas as the legacy of people so entranced by music that they stopped eating and drinking and died (259b-c). As the addiction psychologist Bruce K. Alexander has observed of comparable passages in \textit{The Republic}, “there can be little doubt” that such symptoms “are similar to contemporary depictions of severe addictions.”\(^{15}\)

The image of Socrates as craven nuances his frequent depiction as ascetic and abstemious, exemplified perhaps most notably in \textit{The Symposium}, where he plays the chaste master of desire to the addled and weak-willed Alcibiades (212e-214a). But in \textit{The Phaedrus} he holds back from advocating complete abstinence. Despite his reputation for mistrusting writing, Plato makes a series of crucial distinctions between “slavish” love, experienced at the level of the bodily pleasure, and a higher love of the soul (258e); love for its own sake, fetishized as an end in itself, and love as a means to the end of truth. To each of these poles there corresponds a distinct kind of “madness,” the craving induced by addiction and the headiness of intoxication: “one produced by human illness, the other by a divinely inspired release from normally accepted behaviour” (265b). The kind of writing craved by Phaedrus—a text to be devoured for amusement and the thrill of its composition—falls short of the writing that serves only as an instrument, a means of accessing “what is truly written in the soul” (277e-278e). Writing is thus not intrinsically bad or addictive, but a “pharmakon” (275a), toxic or redemptive, depending on whether it enslaves or liberates the body. The term means both “good and evil,” “remedy and poison,” but as Stiegler explains, commenting on \textit{The Phaedrus}, “the \textit{pharmakon} becomes a poison only when it provokes dependence.”\(^{16}\)
Stiegler complicates the alignment of toxicity and dependence, by stating that addiction, too, is pharmacological. There are toxic and curative addictions, and our relationship with technics is moreover always one of addiction, in the sense that the life of the mind, or what Stiegler terms “spirit,” is constitutively dependent on the material, technical supports in which we are externalized. If the “noetic soul” is “addicted” to its technical objects, it is because technical objects are the supplements without which it cannot exist, serving as the (“atranscendental”) conditions of users’ horizons of expectation, attention and desire; hence the claim that “the great addiction, making all others possible, is spirit.”

Socrates’ idea of “writing in the soul” thus becomes, for Stiegler, a literal statement about the way that the neuronal circuitry of the brain is continuously rewritten and organized by our technical prostheses.

The groundwork for this idea is laid out in the *Technics and Time* series, in which technical objects are formulated as external memory supports, or ‘tertiary retentions’ that generate “protentions,” causing consciousness to anticipate the futures that might be realized when we use tools to build artificial environments. Stiegler’s subsequent work develops this into a theory not just of time, but of the unconscious, elaborating on Freud’s ideas on the plasticity of the libido and Winnicott’s work on “transitional objects” to argue that desire is created when we stand in an affective relation to possible futures that we are able to envisage through the adoption of tools that facilitate their realization. The experience of desire to which different tools give rise varies depending on the kind futures they enable us to project, and the extent to which these futures offer deferred or immediate, enduring or throwaway gratification. The formation of desire is characterized by addiction when adhesive libido attaches itself to *pharmaka* that generate rhythms and expectations of such immediate reward that the focus of attention becomes narrowly fixated on the present. The relation to a more distant future breaks down, locking the addict into a cycle of short-termist acquisition and despair. Strictly speaking, where automated craving dominates over the anticipation tied to the realisation of longer term projects, Stiegler argues that desire cannot even be formed. The latter only comes into existence when biological “drives” are “disautomated,” or “sublimated,” through “the differance of pleasure,” the deferral of quick hits of gratification for the sake of a more distant expectation of reward.

The language of libidinal economy will inevitably make for consternation in the Freud-averse extended world of the harder sciences, but the argument translates...
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The most pertinent parallel is found in the brain’s dopamine system, which plays a decisive role in establishing horizons of anticipation and the motivation to realize them. The central component of neural mechanisms of reward, the dopamine system is also fundamental to a biophysical version of Stiegler’s distinction between automatic drives and plastic desire, understood to differ, not in kind, but by degree, pertaining to shorter and longer circuits in the iterations of libido. Dopamine doesn’t correspond directly to pleasure and the satisfaction of desire (“liking”), but rather to “wanting” and expectation. The evolutionary value of the dopamine system consists in it being the trigger that teaches and reminds us to eat and procreate, by attaching craving for repetition to memories of satiation and pleasure. The release of dopamine into the nucleus accumbens, the part of the basal forebrain that controls motivation and goal-directed behaviour, coincides with the creation of new neuronal connections, which are reinforced by the anticipation of reward. Dopamine thus plays a constitutive role in our ability to form habits and learn from experience, influencing the kinds of protention that are attached to acquired behaviours. In a point that gains significance when paired with Stiegler’s claim that time is produced through technics, this rhythming of attention is thought to be a major component in creating our sense of temporality. The addict is not hedonically motivated by a guaranteed access to pleasure, but, rewired by dopamine to crave the chemical’s continued release, joylessly consumes in spite of a higher-order volition to go clean. The same pattern holds true for the tormented lover, who manifests all the symptoms of addiction. In its curative pharmacological dimension, love opens up alternative futures by automating new habits and transforming our horizons of expectation; Stiegler reads it in terms of a shared relation to the tools through which we construct a life that lifts us above mere adaptation to circumstance. When it turns toxic, the love-addict endures the same impossible choice between tortuous, destructive consumption or withdrawal sickness and the overwhelming disruption of everyday life. A toxic addiction would be one that entails a dehumanizing life lived in servitude to the objects that hijack the body, restricting us to regressive patterns of consumption as an end-in-itself. Both love and drug addiction trigger the flow of dopamine into the reward pathway of the brain and evidence links the neurotransmitter to all forms of experience associated with dependence, craving and repetitive urges. In an essay that sketches out a systems-theoretical approach to addiction, “The Cybernetics of ‘Self’: A Theory of Alcoholism” (1971), Gregory Bateson accounted...
for the difficulty of renunciation by arguing that the alcoholic’s selfhood is not somehow independent of drink, but forms “only a small part of a much larger trial-and-error system” in which alcohol itself “does the thinking, acting, and deciding.” Stiegler reiterates this position, describing how technical objects bring about a function-shift in our physiological organs, transforming our field of experience. Just as the experiential coordinates of the drunk revolve around inebriation, those of one who lives through their smartphone will be mediated by the habituation of their eyes and hand to the touchscreen. In both instances, the pharmakon both emboldens and impairs decision-making in accordance with the curative and redemptive logic of pharmacology. This making and unmaking of habits amounts to a “defunctionalization and refunctionalization” of both the body and brain, which become adapted to the new objects of their attention. For the most part, Stiegler’s analysis is psychoanalytic in register. When limbs and senses forge new relations with technical instruments, “these organs no longer economize libido in the same manner,” which is to say: induce a shift in expectation, desire and attention.

But the science of neuroplasticity, more familiar in the work of Catherine Malabou, is also at work in the background. The reinvention of the body through new tools coincides with a “reorganization of the cortex” and the “formation of neuronal circuits,” the creation of synaptic relations that these tools “literally inscribe . . . into the cerebral organ.” Although Stiegler does not refer to it himself, the dopamine system is at the heart of this process of inscription. It occupies a privileged position within the circuitry of what he terms “general organology,” a concept that encompasses the relations between physiological organs, artificial organs (technical objects, pharmaka) and the cultural organisations that govern how our technical prostheses get used. In the sense of being both cure and poison, dopamine is itself a pharmakon, or at least, a fundamental physiological correlate and nexus through which technical organs de- and refunctionalize the body.

PHARMACOLOGY OF THE DOPAMINE SYSTEM

Addiction is broadly understood as an “overwhelming involvement” with a pursuit that becomes detrimental to both society as a whole and to the individuals whose self-administration comes at the expense of other (professional, familial, social) activities. There is widespread recognition of its multiform causes, which comprise varying (and debated) degrees of genetic susceptibility plus environmental factors, such as poverty, trauma, and access to addictive substances. The dominant approach among specialists narrows this down, locating the addict’s
problems in “a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry,” characterized by a fault in the dopamine system of neurotransmission, which is to say, in the parts of the brain that establish communication between past experience and future decision-making. The dominance of this “disease model” of addiction is exemplified by the central role it plays, for example, in the treatment ethos of Alcoholics Anonymous, whose prescription of complete abstinence is underpinned by a presumed link between uncontrollable cravings and structural changes in the wiring of the brain, supposedly induced by substances with *virtus dormitva*-type addictive properties. The changes in brain chemistry are what account for the classical etiological distinctions between “physical,” “substance dependences” and the mere “psychological” cravings still frequently deemed to pertain to everything else. Yet emerging evidence points to “strong neural similarities” that effectively deconstruct the distinction—in the Derridean sense of undoing a supposedly rigid binary—between “physical” and “psychological” addiction, and in so doing undermine the basis of the disease model. It is increasingly recognized that “every experience that has potent emotional content changes the NAC [nucleus accumbens] and its uptake of dopamine,” meaning that the dopamine system can be programmed by technology just as much as Class A drugs: “Video games, like Internet porn, meet all the conditions for plastic brain map changes,” with users manifesting typical symptoms of disavowal, craving, neglect of other activities and withdrawal, as well as a diminished capacity for attention. Experimental measurements, for instance, connect computer games to increased craving for high levels of sensory stimulus, which leaves gamers more easily distractible in less immersive environments. Korean and Taiwanese studies suggest that half of children addicted to internet gaming qualify for diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and where 18% of 15-23 year-old students classed as internet-addicted showed symptoms strongly linked to ADHD. Debates persist over whether correlation entails causality, which is to say, whether those with ADHD are more susceptible to the freely available addictive games, or whether the technology itself is a cause of the addiction. The alternative is not that “one is causing the other, but that both are symptomatic of the same single common brain state: two sides of the same mental coin.”

At its best, one might say, dopamine serves as an expression of the plasticity that, in anthropological terms, makes us distinctively human, by furnishing the mechanism through which the acquired experience of the past generates expectations and anticipation of the future. At its worst, however, “excessive associative learning” means that we habituate ourselves to the expectation of a reward that is not
forthcoming, giving rise to a vicious circle, by desensitizing the reward circuitry of the brain to the point where we need more and more to achieve the same effect.\textsuperscript{41} The dopamine system becomes saturated in such a way that only the addict’s drug of choice triggers the chemical’s release. As the synaptic pathways that fire in response to the object of addiction are reinforced, other pathways in the prefrontal cortex weaken and are “pruned” away, further narrowing the horizons of attention and leaving us unable to form new connections, envisage possibilities of desire, that could counteract the tightening grip of the neurotransmitter.\textsuperscript{42} We are locked into a dehumanizing spiral, where constant craving leaves us incapable of experiential learning, unable to imagine alternative futures. The use of the term “dehumanizing” is not incidental, here: neuroplasticity is far greater in \textit{Homo sapiens} than in chimpanzees and other mammals, who can generate only a fraction of our neural connections.\textsuperscript{43} Research also shows that rats and primates, with their smaller frontal lobes in the cerebral cortex, lack the specific (D2) dopamine receptors that constitute a highly developed “Stop impulse” in (non-adolescent) humans. This “Stop impulse,” which has been described as “the voice of reason,” is precisely what is compromised when dopamine-induced cravings short-circuit our ability to project horizons of expectation.\textsuperscript{44} Lewis explicitly equates this short-circuiting with a regression to child-like behaviours and “constellations” of neuronal wiring “more typical of kids than adults.” In the absence of (pruned) synaptic connections that would enable the switching of attention away from cravings, the addict falls back on “primitive” and “childish,” affectively exhausting, attempts to suppress their inclinations, the end result of which is “ego fatigue,” or the depletion of the capacity for self-control.\textsuperscript{45} The same language of immaturation and dehumanization is used by Stiegler, who writes of our infantilization by a society organized around advertising’s prescription of consumption.

The second chapter of Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert’s classic, \textit{Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function} (1899), offers a detailed description of various rituals through which the (hitherto profane) participants, site and instruments of sacrifice are performatively cleansed, elevated to the status of the sacred, by the adoption of specific clothes and instruments that keep sacrifice distinct from murder. Sacrificial blades are either stored in special cells, withdrawn from any contact with the unpurged, or manufactured anew for each occasion and jettisoned—for example, thrown into the sea—as soon as a sanctioned killing has taken place.\textsuperscript{46} Similar accounts from Detienne and Assoun, among others, confirm that the function of such ritual is to enact the sacredness of a fetishized object, preventing its collapse back into profanation.\textsuperscript{47} The Stieglerian argument is that such sacrificial
rituals have now given way to a reversal in which marketing prescribes what was once proscribed: the fetishized technical object is no longer kept at a safe distance to mitigate misuse, but relentlessly presented for a consumption we cannot refuse.48 The organisation of society now falls to rituals of commerce explicitly targeted at the reward systems of the brain, with the intention of getting consumers deleteriously hooked on the high-stimulation, immediate gratification they promise. We are continually bombarded with the injunction to consume by advertisers who, fetishizing the curative aspect of pharmaka with minimal concession to their toxicity, compete for consumers’ “brain availability” (temps de cerveau disponible) and reduce self-control to an afterthought of small print.49 The ways in which we employ our consumer technologies are moreover predominantly determined by similar forms of prescription, notably proprietorial modes of use that limit our artefactually constructed horizons of expectation to preprogrammed pathways set in place by manufacturers. The “vast subservience of individuals to apparatuses” of consumerism “induces regression to minority,” the decomposition of the deferred pleasure of desire into the servicing of short-termist, compulsive drives.50

In a formulation rendered problematic by its suggestion of a passage, or “sublimation,” of animal automation into rational desire and “desublimating” return to animality, but which is perhaps lent a measure of credence by the less developed plasticity and resistance to compulsion of other species that have been studied, Stiegler describes this regression as “bestialization.”51 We are “bestialized” when locked into restrictive environments that provide “no alternative” to consumption and idiocy (“la betise”). Echoing Andy Clark’s claim that “environmental engineering is also self-engineering,”52 Stiegler identifies a major factor in the genesis of addiction as manufactured cultural environments that privilege what Graeber would call systemic “structural stupidity,” referring to conditions that actively curtail the imaginative labour of those who are confined to them.53 Bestialization is thus synonymous with what Marx called “proletarianization,” a concept that Stiegler reworks to denote a situation of structural imbalance. The mutual constitution of the who and the what, the subject and the technical object, becomes massively skewed towards users using tools to consume but not to produce. The kinds of “proletarianizing” technologies privileged by consumerism and the cultural rules that govern their adoption mean that the tools through which we interface with the world reinvent us, adapting us to them, without us being able to employ them for active self- and environmental transformation. The effect of repeatedly bombarding the senses with the high-intensity, monocultural stimuli of our desk-bound, screen-enthralled existences is to leave the brain profoundly
lacking in what Stiegler and I have termed “noodiversity,” and Warren Neidich “epigenetic, neural biodiversity,” referring to the variety and vitality internalized by and reproduced in the life of the mind. Cognitive, consumer capitalism brings about a widespread “destruction of attention” and “a generalization and mutation of addiction,” meaning a diminution in the kinds of tools that foster the curative dimension of the pharmakon, and a proliferation of those that, by priming us for immediate gratification, short-circuit the deferral of pleasure through which drives are sublimated into desire. Reworked through the discourse of the new addiction sciences, where addiction is less a disease than the side-effect of a plastic brain that reshapes to fit its environments, we might say that the homogenization of cultural stimulus goes hand-in-hand with the neural-Darwinian pruning of pathways no longer activated by our technological milieus. Focused around industrialized dopamining, or the constant triggering of dopamine hits, coupled with locked in, passivified consumption without production, the narrowing diversity of our technological diet gives rise to a negative feedback loop in which we lose the very diversity of neuronal relations that could enable us to envisage and create alternative futures.

In saying this, Stiegler’s pharmacological approach intersects not only with neuroscientific work on the plasticity of the dopamine system. It also lends itself to research that downplays the significance of dopamine, in favour of focusing on the relationship between addiction and contextual dependence. This line of argument suggests that toxic forms of addiction should be understood less in terms of chemical changes in the brain than in terms of the environments that occasion their use. According to its logic, we take drugs to escape from surrounding misery and it is the misery rather than the drugs that traps; the latter, for the most part, only exacerbate the entrapment of the former.

POVERTY OF SPIRIT

At the end of the twentieth century, the capitalist way of life has become an addictive process that is decreasingly capable of bringing satisfaction, leading to a widespread malaise in the consumption that has replaced culture.

Routinely invoked to justify the “War on Drugs,” received wisdom on the dangers of addiction tends to draw on now legendary stories of clinical experiments in which lab rats and monkeys repeatedly self-administer cocaine and heroin to
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the point of oblivion. The findings have long been presented as proof of the intrinsically addictive properties of narcotics, with researchers paying little attention to the stressful circumstances in which the animals recourse to intoxication. But subsequent experiments have demonstrated that the rats disautomate their behaviours when housed in more sociable environments. When provided with other rats and play activities to keep them occupied in Bruce K. Alexander’s “Rat Park” experiments, the drugs become dramatically less attractive. The so-called “spontaneous remission” of the inhabitants of “Rat Park” mirrors the behaviour of American soldiers returning from Vietnam, whose heavy consumption of readily available, high-grade heroin amid the fog and stress of war never translated into a much feared crisis of addiction upon their return home, when only 10% continued to abuse. It also fits with evidence that between 50-80% of addicts will stop using voluntarily, without the need for professional intervention. The evidence that environmental change leads to behavioural disautomation lends itself to what Alexander calls the “dislocation” theory of addiction. This theory casts addiction as an understandable and moreover “adaptive” response to the demoralising, alienating effects of community breakdown, or the “poverty of spirit” that comes about when “society systematically curtails psychosocial integration in all of its members.”

Returning to Ancient Greece, Alexander suggests that the Socratic ethics of “self-control,” meaning the reigning in of appetitive desire and ‘weakness of the will’ (247d, 250b), should be read in the context of a putative prevalence of addiction in Athenian society, which can itself be traced to the violent upheavals of the time, namely the decline of the golden age of democracy and slide into tyranny that came off the back of the Peloponnesian Wars of 431-403 BCE. The image he paints is in keeping with others’ descriptions of toils of war that left the de

demos susceptible to demagogy and commercial interests, effectively excluding citizens from political decision-making. They reacted to this exclusion by further withdrawing from the generational family structures that organized the polis. Traditionally obligatory and highly regimented communal meals (syssitia), intolerant of drunkenness, increasingly gave way to debauched private clubs hosting symposia—the drinking parties from which Plato’s other famous critique of physical love takes its name. Eric Havelock situates this dramatic shift in social organisation in terms of the transition from oral to written society. Prior to the invention of writing, he argues, Athens had been a rigidly hierarchical culture based on the disciplined rote-memorisation of poetry, in which oral poems served as a vehicle for the transmission and learning of unwritten laws. As writing grew in popular-
ity over the course of the fifth century, the increasing ability and temptation to rely on written texts entailed the perceived loss of discipline and a rise in the use of text for social criticism, which exacerbated the loosening hold of traditional forms of authority over younger Athenians. With the advent of digital technologies, and in circumstances exacerbated by the liquid society of capitalism, we are living through an analogous transformation between social-technical systems, and a corresponding spike in addictive behaviours. This time, it is not writing and alcohol that escape attempts at social moderation, but consumption as such, comprising everything from sugary fast food and gambling to technological gadgets that offer an escape from the entrapment of everyday life.

Comparing Athens to the present, Alexander argues that contemporary Western society is characterized by a similar failure of “psychosocial integration,” in which shopping—and increasingly also religious fanaticism—serves as a “pseudosolution” to the experience of dislocation, filling the void left open by the sacrifice of community and meaningful employment to the creation of wealth. For Stiegler, the same set of circumstances mean that Alexander’s spiritual “poverty” has grown into a full-blown “crisis of spirit,” marked by systemic paralysis of participation and social mobility and symptomatized by disaffection and a dulling of the senses that corresponds in turn to a “loss of the feeling of existence.” We have internalized the neoliberal ideology of TINA: “there is no alternative” but to adapt to the competitive, liquid environments forced on us by late capitalism. It is in this context that consumption to the point of addiction becomes a short-termist strategy of adaptation, dulling the pain of dislocation through “affective saturation” while holding open the dim prospect of redemption, to be eeked out through the castrated fantasies of one who cannot change the future, but who can buy fleeting moments of respite from the mundanity of the present and cling to the prospect of becoming heroic in some virtual world detached from this one. Anecdotal figures of over one million Japanese hikikomori, the predominantly male, younger members of society who withdraw from all forms of social interaction and spend their lives in their bedrooms, surfing the net and playing videogames, are offered up by Stiegler as evidence of this. He doesn’t acknowledge that both the figures and the link to addiction are disputed. The other evidence Stiegler cites for the impact of “generalized addiction” is similarly conspicuous in its sparsity, comprising a couple reports on the potentially deleterious relation between prolonged television exposure and the synaptic development of two-year-olds, plus a short essay by a literary critic who has since distanced herself from the scale and political implication of his conclusions.
In that article, the seminal “Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes” by N. Katherine Hayles, Hayles proposes that we are witnessing a technologically-induced “generational shift” away from the “deep attention” of the age of the book, towards the “hyper attention” and “low tolerance for boredom” of digital natives. Her argument has become a constant reference for Stiegler, despite what Hayles dismisses rather hastily as his “broad condemnations” of contemporary technology and corresponding disregard for the pedagogical strategies she proposes as an antidote to attentional narrowing. He, too, perhaps underestimates the extent to which Hayles anticipates his own pharmacological response to the effect of dramatic technological change on the impoverishment of spirit. Recognizing that “the dopamine cycle is not the whole story,” Hayles notes that video games succeed when the cravings they elicit are underwritten by gaming environments that facilitate “achievement, freedom, and in some instances connections to other players even more satisfying than the fun of playing. Stimulation works best, in other words, when it is associated with feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.” Her comments converge with findings in the therapeutic field, which stress how the momentary oblivion of the addict negates the opposing experience of dependence, failure and disconnection. In using, the user withdraws from the toxicity of surrounding environments and finds respite from a “sense of overwhelming helplessness,” “the unbearable sensation that no options are available,” which addiction functions psychologically to reverse. By way of partial illustration, the anthropologist Natasha Dow Schüll relates how gambling addicts enter into a pacific, trance-like union with the betting terminal, a “machine zone” where “the whole world is spinning around you, and you can’t really hear anything. You aren’t really there—you’re with the machine and that’s all you’re with.” Dopamine hits alleviate anxiety in the face of chaos. Withdrawal into gaming, shopping and social media is as much about avenues of escape that substitute for the frustrations of “bullshit jobs” and societal sclerosis. But when pharmaka open onto worlds that hold out the prospect of success elsewhere, the possibilities of harnessing them for environment-making and self-invention can trump the automated craving.

For Stiegler and Hayles alike, the trick would be to reorganize technological culture in such a way that intermittently glimpsed moments of redemption translate back into wider society, becoming a means for de-proletarianization, or participation in, rather than exclusion from, the construction of symbolic order. A similar line of thought is at the heart of campaigns to decriminalize drugs, the aim of which is to lessen the vicious cycle of stigmatization and marginalization.
that entrenches addicts in their social dislocation, by treating reintegration as a prelude to self-reinvention. The technological equivalent of decriminalization would be to replace an industrial model organized around the legal enshrinement of a hyperspecialized division of labour and the proprietary control over increasingly narrow uses of technology with an “economy of contribution” that allows consumers to reinvent themselves as amateur participants in the design and construction of an “ecology of spirit,” which is to say of pharmaka and technological environments that would facilitate self-care and a renewed focus on attention. In place of a society of the dislocated and disaffected slumped in front of screens to anaesthetize the shock of relentless technological change, Stiegler envisages one of makers using the tools they have hitherto only consumed to experiment and produce new futures. To get there, he calls for a “politics of brains” to cultivate varied stimuli for the diversification of neuronal development and to overturn the monocultural diets on which we are feeding them. “Noodiversity will be the key issue over the next few decades, and this will require a noopolitics to operate above and below the emerging neuroindustry.”

The search for what this would mean in practice is already under way in new approaches to addiction therapy, which increasingly take aim at the consumerism of the multibillion dollar “rehab industry.” In the eyes of more than one commentator, the latter is the very archetype of toxic consumer lock-in, based on the sale of a commodified cure, grounded more in the fetishization-effect of marketing than in medical science, which puts its success rate at just 5%. As Lewis puts it, “the definition of addiction as a disease, endorsed by the medical and scientific communities may be the most powerful marketing tool there is” for the purveyors of institutionalized rehabilitation, but “probably does more harm than good for most addicts.” This is because of the way it reduces residents to passivified consumers, whose treatment depends exclusively on surrender to narrow modes of use prescribed by the rehabilitation environment. At the heart of the commercial arm of the disease-model of addiction treatment is the renunciation of self-control, the infamous surrender to a higher power so familiar from the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve-steps programme. It works by treating addicts as sick, the hapless victims of some genetic misfortune, who can only be cured if they substitute one potentially unlimited consumption with another, namely the interminable stints of often oppressive, often luxurious, residential therapy, which users are encouraged to consume to excess not just when it works, but above all when it fails. The failure of rehab to curb addiction is routinely attributed to the failures of the addicts themselves, via the dogmatically repeated mantra that they lack the
desire to go clean, or have not yet reached the “rock bottom” point required to generate that desire. But this dogma omits to consider the structural role that rehab plays in the further proletarianization of addicts, who are required to submit to depersonalizing, institutional regimes of sobriety, and who accordingly “do not participate in decisions about their care.” While this standard therapeutic technique may spare inveterate users a degree of guilt, it nonetheless repeats the act of submission to the object of consumption, at the cost of preventing residents from developing techniques to transform themselves by taking control of their surroundings.  

CONCLUSION

There is a special kind of denial that is completely postmodern, something that only awareness of addiction ... can produce: the non denial denial. It used to be that you’d actually say that you weren’t a drunk ... Nowadays you can’t get away with that; knowledge of the nature of dependency is too pervasive. So you start to have people like me, people who say, I am an addict and I like it, try and stop me.  

According to the writer and recovered junkie, Elizabeth Wurtzel, denial, once the hallmark of the addict’s unconscious guilt, has nowadays given way to the blithe recognition of dependence. Stiegler might seem to agree, here. He has argued that the desublimation of desire into craven drives coincides with the collapse of the social superego and the sense of shame it caused us to feel at the experience of desire. Consumerism’s relentless promotion of greed and short-circuiting of the prohibitions that, by deferring satisfaction, make desire possible, has given rise to a “monde sans vergogne,” a “world of shamelessness” and guilt-free consumption (Stiegler 2005a). But one can qualify the apparent absence of affect by noting the role of addiction as a technique of disavowal for the momentary alleviation of guilt. Does disavowed disavowal thus become another symptom of an addiction-addled culture? If so, it permeates right through to the science of addiction, despite attempts to exonerate itself of complicity. Deliberating on the dissociative, detached sociality of young people, who over the last generation have exhibited “a dramatic decline in interest in other people,” and who “purpose-driven, plugged into their media, ... pay little attention to those around them,” the psychologist Sherry Turkle looks like a prime example of one who allows the unpalatability of presumed conclusions to justify a refusal to countenance the prospect that consumer technologies might be addictogenic. Technology addiction is no more than
metaphorical addiction, she insists, implicitly invoking the dubious, outdated, distinction between “real” addictions that induce chemical brain change and the mere “psychological” ones that don’t.

But however apt the metaphor, we can ill afford the luxury of using it. Talking about addiction subverts our best thinking because it suggests that if there are problems, there is only one solution. To combat addiction, you have to discard the addicting substance. But we are not going to ‘get rid’ of the Internet. We will not go ‘cold turkey’ or forbid cell phones to our children. . . . The idea of addiction, with its one solution that we know we won’t take, makes us feel hopeless. We have to find a way to live with seductive technology and make it work to our purposes.87

For all her good intentions of wanting to avoid a dispiriting mass-stigmatization, Turkle’s aversion to a diagnosis of addiction rests on a distaste for what would be an absolutist and retrograde approach to addiction treatment, which sees abstinence as the only cure for excess. The assumption of a stark choice between unregulated consumption and complete withdrawal repeats the exculpatory, ideological—which is to say, naturalizing—mantra of the rehab industry: addiction is hardwired in nature and inescapable, rather than environmental, plastic and programmable. Stripped of alternatives, she is left with no choice but the classical disavowal of the addict who denies that there is a problem. Over and above a denial, Stiegler would also call it a “repression”—the repression of our originary technicity, of the way in which we are not “natural,” but constituted through and through by the artefactual pharmaka that inscribe second natures into the brain via the dopamine system.88 From the standpoint of Stieglerian pharmacology, the dichotomy Turkle sets up is a false one. The cure is not to jettison the pharmakon, but to cultivate its capacity for transformation. The same drug that, when consumed in a toxic environment, further mires us in toxicity, can also enable us to project visions for environmental and self-transformation. The key for therapy, surely, is to build pharmaka that facilitate, rather than inhibit, the construction of alternatives.

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current monograph is *Artificial Selection: Towards a Critique of Adaptationist Reason*, which expands upon the material in this article by bringing Stiegler into dialogue with the contemporary evolutionary and life sciences. He can be contacted at gerald.moore@durham.ac.uk
NOTES

23. Terry E. Robinson and Kent C. Berridge, “The Neural Basis of Drug Craving: An Incentive-
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54. See the closing paragraphs of Gerald Moore, “Prolégomènes à un manifeste des études digita"les” Études digitales, 3 (2018), given originally as a paper at the conference General Organology: Minds, Bodies, Social Organisations and Techné, at the University of Kent, in November 2014, and again, in January 2016, at the Institut de Recherche et d’Innovation, in Paris. Stiegler first employs “noodiversity” in print in around 2017 (“The New Conflict of the Faculties and Functions: Quasi-Causality and Serendipity in the Anthropocene,” trans. Dan Ross, Qui parle, 26:1, (2017, 94)), though the bases of the idea are already hinted at as early as 2005, in Le Motif européen, where he writes that the “the diversification of types” is as “indispensable to social life as biodiversity is to the growing vitality of organisms” (64). An unverified, but much earlier and potentially similar use of the term appears in an unpublished seminar paper given by F. Ambrogetti and G. Constantini, “For a Contribution of Political Sociology to the Study of Technology: The Concept of ‘Noodiversity’” Technological Strategies for the New Europe (Lecce, April 2003).
I welcome Prof. Ingo Farin’s critique of my *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*. His article appeared in *Parrhesia*, 26 (2016) 117-135 under the title “A Response to Sheehan’s Attempted Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Studies.” What follows is my attempt to engage his critique.²

Prof. Ingo Farin is a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Tasmania, who has translated two of Heidegger works into English and edited two important collections about his philosophy—which is to say that Farin has certainly earned his spurs in Heidegger scholarship.

Nonetheless, Prof. Farin’s text shows that he and I have been reading very different Heideggers over the years. It also raises the question of how closely he read...
the book I wrote. The first issue is more important and is the main focus of what follows.

Compared with the pressing problems of the world today, Prof. Farin’s and my disagreements amount to little more than a tempest in a Heideggerian teapot. But if you’re intent on drinking Heideggerian tea, it’s important to find out what’s in that pot. As Mrs. Grogan says in Ulysses, “When I makes tea, I makes tea, and when I makes water, I makes water” (to which Mrs. Cahill added: let’s hope she doesn’t make ’em in the same pot).

So, what’s actually brewing in the Heideggerian teapot? And which one of us—Prof. Farin or I—is making tea, and which is making water?

His critique of Making Sense of Heidegger comes in three parts and concludes with a call for a non-subjective concept of meaning. Each of the three parts raises an important question about Heidegger’s philosophy:

Part I: what his basic question was
Part II: how his thinking developed
Part III: how his phenomenology deals with meaning.

As I read him, Prof. Farin advances eight major criticisms, among a number of lesser ones: Part I argues three theses in opposition to my book:

1. that “being” (Sein) cannot be eliminated from Heidegger’s texts;
2. that it’s wrong to interpret the being of things (das Sein des Seienden) as the meaningful presence of things (das Anwesen des Seienden);
3. that Heidegger’s basic question was not about what accounts for the meaningful presence of things.

Part II argues that my book is seriously flawed inasmuch as, among other things:

1. it focuses solely on SZ to the neglect of the later Heidegger;
2. it reads Dasein’s appropriation (Ereignis) as Heidegger’s later reinscription of Dasein’s thrownness (Geworfenheit).
Part III claims that:

1. I read Heidegger’s phenomenology in terms of Husserlian subjectivity;
2. I think meaning occurs only after a phenomenological epoché; and
3. I reduce meaning to a subjective performance of intentionality (hence Farin’s call for a non-subjective concept of meaning).

I argue that Prof. Farin is wrong on all eight points. But since his first three points are the basis of the rest of his argument, I will take them up first under the rubric: Which Heidegger has Prof. Farin been reading? (in seven points). Secondly, I will briefly ask, how closely did Farin read Making Sense of Heidegger? (in two points).

I. WHICH HEIDEGGER HAS PROF. FARIN BEEN READING?

NOTA PRAEVIA

Prof. Farin begins by agreeing that Heidegger’s Sein should not be reified, but he chides me (1) for claiming any Heideggerians would think otherwise and (2) for not naming names (pp. 117-119).

I’m happy to hear that no one reifies Sein—although Heidegger seemed to think otherwise (GA 9: 442.22; GA 66: 340.13-14; GA 73, 2: 975.22-23)—which in turn saves one the embarrassment of outing those unfortunate few who still do hypostasize being (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω).

But whether hypostasized or not, is Sein really the core of Heidegger’s thought, as Prof. Farin claims? Or is “being” only a provision stage on the way to his fundamental and final issue? Let’s consult Heidegger himself on the question. He writes: “I no longer like to use the word ‘Sein’” (GA 15: 20.8–9). Indeed, he says that at the core of his thought “there is no longer room for even the word Sein” (GA 15: 365.17-18)—note: not even the word “being.”

William J. Richardson notes that in the later Heidegger the word Sein “has almost completely disappeared from his vocabulary,” and Heidegger provided the reason for that:

“Sein” remains only the provisional term. Consider that “Sein” was originally called “presence,” in the sense of a thing’s staying-here-before-us-in-disclosedness [i.e., in meaningfulness].

(GA 7: 234. 13–17)
The motto of *Making Sense of Heidegger* is Aristotle’s διορίσωμεν (1048a26), “Let’s make some distinctions,” a philosophical *sine-qua-non* that can help sort out good readings of Heidegger from bad. Unfortunately, Prof. Farin’s text shows a less than firm grip on seven fundamental distinctions in Heidegger’s work:

1. the two very different meanings of *Sein*
2. the difference between metaphysical *Sein* and phenomenological *Anwesen*
3. the ontological difference in its phenomenological articulation
4. the world-of-meaning vs. the meaningful things within it
5. Heidegger’s preliminary question vs. his fundamental question (*Grundfrage*)
6. the existent*ial* structure of human being vs. the existent*iel*—personal elements
7. the difference between Heidegger’s and Husserl’s approaches to phenomenology.

Absent a clear sense of these ground-level distinctions, it’s impossible to fathom what Heidegger was about. I’ll take up each one of these issues in turn and compare Heidegger’s position with what Prof. Farin claims.

1. **The two different meanings of *Sein***

In Heidegger’s texts “*Sein*” has two quite different meanings.

1. Sometimes it refers to the *Sein des Seienden*—the phenomenologically interpreted essence and/or existence of persons and things.
2. Sometimes it refers to the thrown-open clearing (*die ereignete Lichtung*) that makes the *Sein des Seienden* possible.

Heidegger was less than careful in how he used his technical term “*Sein,*” and *Making Sense of Heidegger* lists seventy-four texts (none of which Farin mentions) in support of that claim. Finally, in 1954 Heidegger did get around to admitting that, yes, there was some major confusion about the two meanings of *Sein*—while adding the lame excuse that at least *he* knew the difference! (GA 12: 104.16–105.3)

But does Prof. Farin? It would seem not.
First, Farin seems to agree with Heidegger that being stands in correlation with human being. Farin writes: “This ‘correlativity’ [of Sein and Dasein] is constitutive for Heidegger’s basic take on being; there is no being as such outside this correlation with the human or with Dasein” (118.12-14).

Yes, that’s true—but Farin doesn’t bother to tell us which of the two senses of “being” he is referring to. This failure is the stumbling block that trips him up throughout his critique.

In both its meanings—as the being of things and as the clearing—Sein is indeed correlative with human being, but in two very different ways. Prof. Farin never acknowledges that. Instead, he uses the word “being” throughout his text (88 times by my count) without ever adding the requisite qualifications or telling us which of the two senses of “being” he’s talking about. In doing so, he reinforces the confusion that has plagued Heidegger scholarship for decades.

2. The difference between metaphysical Sein and phenomenological Anwesen

Having failed to distinguish the two meanings of Sein, Prof. Farin goes on to commit a fundamental error that runs through his entire paper: missing Heidegger’s reinterpretation of Sein as Anwesen.

In chapter 3 of SZ Heidegger worked through the question of how tools have their Sein (their “being”). He argued that the Sein of a tool is not some intrinsic ontological substance or metaphysical insentivity that the tool possesses (cf. SZ 71.37–38; 74.31–34); rather, it is the tool’s usefulness or serviceability with regard to a task. In Heidegger’s phenomenology, the “being” of a tool is its phenomenological presence-as-significance—Anwesen as Bedeutsamkeit—specifically, the tool’s ability, or not, to do the job.

From his earliest courses, Heidegger made it clear that when he writes das Sein des Seienden he means das Anwesen des Seienden: not the metaphysical essence-and-existence of something nor its mere presence-in-space-and-time, but its meaningful presence, its significance to a human being. This is a basic phenomenological fact that Heidegger constantly reiterated from early on. He did so, for example, at GA 64: 23.32–33; 24.2–3; 25.13–14; and 65.18–19—that is, in a book that Prof. Farin himself translated. How could Farin have missed the point?
But Farin does miss the point and thus accuses me of holding the same position that Heidegger held: that what the metaphysical tradition called Sein is what Heidegger understands phenomenologically as Anwesen.

According to Sheehan, in Heidegger’s works the term “being” connotes “the meaningful presence” of things to humans, that is, the presence of things “within the worlds of human interests and concerns, whether those be theoretical, practical, aesthetic, religious, or whatever.” (119.17-20, citing Making Sense of Heidegger, xii).

Yes, that’s exactly right, and it’s Heidegger’s own position throughout the half-century of his career. This is a fundamental fact that has been accepted (as far as I know) in all reputable Heidegger scholarship for well over seventy years.

3. The ontological difference in its phenomenological articulation

Having missed Heidegger’s reinterpretation of metaphysical Sein as phenomenological Anwesen, Prof. Farin then commits the most elementary error in Heidegger scholarship: failing to understand the ontological difference.

After correctly stating Heidegger’s position (as cited just above: 119.17-20), Farin then attacks that position for allegedly conflating “being” (Sein read as Anwesen) and beings (das Anwesende). He does so in two steps:

First, he accurately reports Heidegger’s position: “For humans there is no being as such outside or beyond these humanly intelligible worlds”; (119.20-21)

And then he claims this position conflates beings and their meaningful presence: “[that is to say,] there are only these meaningful things as encountered in the world.” (119.21-22)

Farin makes a double mistake here. First, he claims that holding Heidegger’s own position—that things within the world of meaning are intelligible—means eliminating “being” from the picture. Second, he claims that if, along with Heidegger, one holds that Sein = Anwesen, one thereby conflates das Sein and das Seiende and thus eliminates the ontological difference.
This can only mean that Farin (1) does not accept Heidegger’s interpretation of \textit{Sein} as \textit{Anwesen}, and/or (2) cannot recognize the ontological difference between \textit{das Anwesen} and \textit{das Anwesende}. Farin seems to understand the ontological difference in its metaphysical form: \textit{Sein} as distinct from \textit{das Seiende}. But as his text shows (119.24-33), he does not recognize the ontological difference in its \textit{phenomenological} formulation: \textit{Anwesen} as different from that which is meaningfully present.

\textbf{4. The world of meaning vs. the meaningful things within it}

Prof. Farin confirms and compounds the three previous errors by denying that the world of meaning (\textit{Welt}) is what Heidegger’s phenomenology understood by “\textit{Sein}.” He does that in three steps.

1. He begins by agreeing with Heidegger that the world is “a nexus of meaning and ‘meaningfulness’ [\textit{Bedeutsamkeit}].” (120.40-41)

2. Then at 120.44-47 he correctly reports my own position that:  
   \begin{itemize}
   \item “\textit{being}” is another term for “\textit{world}”; 
   \item “\textit{world}” is the meaningful context or intelligibility of things; 
   \item “\textit{being}” is equivalent to “\textit{meaningfulness}” or “\textit{intelligibility}” as such, i.e., \textit{Anwesen}.
   \end{itemize}

3. But then Farin denies that Heidegger ever held this position: “[T]he equivalence of world = meaningfulness = being is nowhere affirmed or espoused by Heidegger.” (120.48-49)

But that is quite wrong: Heidegger himself was very clear on this point. (1) He identified meaningfulness as the primary character of the being of “\textit{world}” (\textit{Bedeutsamkeit als des primaren Seinscharakters der Welt}, GA 64: 24.2-30), and (2) he equated “\textit{world}” and “\textit{being itself}” (\textit{Die Welt ist . . . das Sein selber}, GA 79: 51.34–52.1).

The equivalence of world (\textit{Welt}) and \textit{being-as-such} (\textit{Anwesen als solches}) has been a fundamental datum in the scholarship for over half a century ever since William J. Richardson amply demonstrated that fact.\textsuperscript{7} The equivalence is obvious once one realizes that (1) \textit{Sein} in its second sense means the clearing and (2) the clearing is what Heidegger means by “\textit{world}.” (\textit{Die Lichtung des Seins, und nur sie, ist}
Welt,” GA 9: 326.15–16). But Farin does not accept either of these two positions of Heidegger’s.

5. Heidegger’s preliminary question vs. his fundamental question (Grundfrage)

Because Prof. Farin does not distinguish between Heidegger’s two senses of Sein, he misses the crucial difference between (1) Heidegger’s preliminary question about the being of things and (2) his fundamental question about the thrown-open clearing that makes the being of things possible.

Classical metaphysics, beginning with Aristotle, distinguished between (1) the being of things and (2) the source (ἀρχή and αἰτία) of that being. When Heidegger moved into phenomenology, he carried over that distinction—but in a phenomenological form—as the difference between the Anwesen of things and the source of that Anwesen (die Herkunft von Anwesen: GA 6:2, 304.11–12).

The first issue (Sein as the Anwesen of things) was only Heidegger’s preliminary topic, whereas the second—focused on “that from which and through which being occurs at all” (GA 73, 1: 82.15–16) —was the final goal of his work. He called that source the Urphänomen (GA 14: 81.13–14), and it rode under various titles in his philosophy, among them

- the appropriated clearing (die ereignete Lichtung, GA 71: 211.9; GA 85: 98.8-9)
- the appropriation of Da-sein to be the clearing (Ereignis: GA 12: 247.2–4; 249.4–6)
- the thrown-open domain (die Entwurfbereich: GA 9: 201.31; GA 14: 35.23–24)
- Da-sein, as that which “gives” (makes possible) the clearing (GA 73, 1: 642.28–29).

In addition, by failing to distinguish between Heidegger’s preliminary topic and his final goal, Prof. Farin also misses what Heidegger meant by “the meaning of being” (der Sinn von Sein). Farin writes that

one might argue that Heidegger is really after the “meaning of being,” because meaning is the third term that mediates between “being” and
“man.” Indeed, that Heidegger is not after being per se, but after the meaning of being is a perfectly acceptable thesis in my view. But Sheehan is not arguing along these lines at all. (120.64-68)

But contra Farin, that is precisely what I argue. However, I follow Heidegger’s rather than Farin’s understanding of “the meaning of being.”

Heidegger makes it clear that “der Sinn von Sein” is only an early stand-in name for die Lichtung des Seins. Throughout his career he gave the final goal of his philosophy a variety of titles, among them the following, all ex aequo: Sinn = Entwurfsbereich = Offenheit = Wahrheit = Offenheit = Lichtung = Ortschaft = τόπος.10 They all stand for what makes the being of things possible and necessary. Once one realizes that Heidegger’s final topic was not Sein but the appropriated clearing that makes Sein possible, Farin’s objections dissolve.11

6. The existential structure of human being vs. the existentiel–personal elements

One of Prof. Farin’s recurring criticisms of my book deals with the term “existential” in relation to SZ. He claims (1) that “[Sheehan] reads this book as an existentialist treatise” (126.13); (2) that “Sheehan reads all of Heidegger’s work through the prism of a rather existentialistically interpreted Being and Time” (126.27-28) and (3) that I have a “bias for an existentialistically conceived subjectivity” (127.2-3).

Farin’s second and third claims reveal his inability to distinguish between Husserlian sub-jectivity and Heideggerian e-jectivity, a topic I shall return to in no. 7, below. But with the first criticism, Farin falls into the all-too-common trap that hobbles much of Heidegger scholarship today: the failure to distinguish between the two meanings of “existential,” which Heidegger himself clearly delineated in SZ and never abandoned.

In SZ Heidegger worked out the “essence” of human being as Existenz in the etymologically literal sense of ἔξ + the causative verb ἱστημι. The essence of human being is ex-sistence, “to be made to stand out and beyond,” to be thrown as possibility into possibilities.12 And further, in a bold reversal of the traditional schema of act-potency Heidegger declared: “Higher than actuality is possibility” (SZ 38.29-30).
Ex-sistence defines the whole of one’s human being, and like centuries of philosophers before him Heidegger distinguished between “instance” and “essence”—in Aristotelian terms, between τόδε τι (this-particular-thing) and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι (what and how this-particular-thing necessarily is and cannot not be if it is to be this-particular-thing). Heidegger did this by making a distinction between the two elements of ex-sistence:

- the essential aspects of Existenz, shared by all human beings, which he called “existentials”
- the personal, idiosyncratic instantiations of Existenz in one’s own particular life, for which he used the adjective and adverb “existentiel” (existentiell).

Prof. Farin ignores this crucial distinction when he accuses me of an “existentialistically interpreted Being and Time.” By “existential” he means “existentiel,” whereas Making Sense of Heidegger argues consistently and unambiguously that Heidegger’s existential perspective on human being runs through all his work from SZ to the last texts.

What is more, the existential structure of human being is the clearing, i.e., that which makes the meaningful presence of the things we encounter (their Sein as Anwesen) both possible and necessary. And within that existential clearing it is we ourselves who existentially decide, correctly or not, what the Anwesen or phenomenological “being” of something is.

These two crucial elements of Heidegger’s work—and the distinction between them—are what Farin misses. He begins by quoting me correctly:

“Being” is not some “higher dimension” added on to and surpassing existence. It is simply what we do, finitely and mortally, in our groundless freedom.

That statement holds true in two senses. (1) Existentially, by our very essence, we “do”—that is, we are—the clearing. (2) Existentielly, as specific, particular persons we do take-things-as-this-or-that, i.e., we “project” them in terms of their meaningful presence, whether correctly or not.
But Farin objects: “I doubt that Heidegger would be willing to entertain this [position] at any stage of his career” (126.26). He can say that only by (1) ignoring the existential-existential distinction, (2) neglecting the existential-hermeneutical sense-making act of “taking-as,” and (3) failing to understand what Heidegger meant in saying that ex-sistence is, existentially, what “gives” being:

Welt “gibt” Sein; das Dasein ist das je vereinzelte “es“, das gibt; das ermöglicht und ist das “es gibt.”

World “gives” being; ex-sistence is the ever-individualized “it” that gives, which makes possible and is the “es gibt.”

(GA 73, 1: 642.28–29)

7. The difference between Heidegger’s and Husserl’s approaches to phenomenology

Prof. Farin seems to agree that all of Heidegger’s philosophy from 1919 until his death was phenomenological (cf. GA 14: 54.2–14; 147.16), and he agrees that Heidegger did indeed employ what he called a “phenomenological reduction” (GA 24: 29.15). But Farin then makes two critical mistakes: (1) He fails to understand Heidegger’s revolutionary recasting of the phenomenological reduction as phenenomenological inDUCTION; and (2) he accuses me of a “broad and unqualified subsumption of Heidegger’s work under the banner of Husserlian phenomenology” (122.10-11). I will take both issues together.

Prof. Farin and I agree that Heidegger’s reduction is quite different from Husserl’s, but Farin fails to realize what that difference is, as he demonstrates when he claims that “in Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie Heidegger does endorse an ontological reduction, leading beings and entities back to being.” (122.10-11)

We note Prof. Farin’s claim: that Heidegger’s phenomenology begins with an “ontological” reduction to “being.” But clearly he fails to understand Heidegger’s radical move from Sein to Anwesen, from traditional ontology to phenomenological ontology. Let us consult Heidegger himself on the matter. In 1927 he defined his own sense of the phenomenological reduction:

For us [in contrast to Husserl] the phenomenological reduction means leading one’s phenomenological gaze back from one’s grasp of the entity,
however that grasp is determined, [and redirecting it] to the understanding of the being of the entity. . . .

—and Farin stops there, whereas Heidegger goes on to add a set of parentheses (which Farin does not discuss) within which he says exactly what he means by “understanding the Sein” of something:

das Verstehen des Seins (Entwerfen auf die Weise seiner Unverborgenheit) dieses Seienden.

That is: “Understanding the being of an entity” means “projecting the entity in terms of how it is disclosed.”

Farin misses this capital point. For Heidegger, to understand the “being” of something is to understand the way the thing is phenomenologically disclosed, that is to say: the way it is anwesend, aka ἀληθές, aka meaningfully present. The “being” Heidegger has in mind here is Sein phenomenologically reinterpreted as Anwesen.

This is the crux interpretum that stumps Farin both here and in his previous six mistakes. But to miss this point is to miss everything that is revolutionary in Heidegger’s “phenomenological ontology” (SZ 38.21)—a phrase in which the adjective swallows the noun. A phenomenological ontology is one in which Sein is understood as Anwesen, the meaningful presence of an entity.

All phenomenology, including Heidegger’s, is correlation-research, and as such it is about meaning, and specifically about the meaningful presence of what one encounters (GA 64: 23-25). In the natural attitude we mostly look “through” (that is, ignore) the meaning-constituting correlation. Thematizing the phenomenological correlation entails shifting the philosophical gaze away from an exclusive focus on the object and redirecting it instead onto the correlation itself. The radical difference between Husserl’s phenomenology and Heidegger’s begins at this point. The following two diagrams illustrate that difference.

For Husserl the correlation is between the meaning-constituting subject and the meaningfully constituted object.
For Heidegger, on the other hand, the existential essence of human being is not subjectivity but ejectivity: existence thrown ahead as possibility into possibilities; and thus the phenomenological correlation lies between what we encounter and the meaningful possibilities we are living into. (GA 14: 131.16-17).

Therefore, Heidegger’s refocusing of the phenomenological gaze is not a Husserlian reduction (ἐπαναγωγή) but an induction (ἐπαγωγή), a redirecting of the gaze forward to the correlation between what we encounter and our concerns (GA 9: 244.12-35). We could call Heidegger’s refocusing of the gaze a phenomenological re-duction, as he himself did (GA 24: 29.15) so long as we remember that leading the gaze “back” means leading it back to where we already are: a priori ahead as possibility among possibilities.

Prof. Farin misses both Heidegger’s notion of Da-sein as ejectivity and his recasting of the phenomenological reduction, and he evidences as much when he writes (1) “it is quite doubtful that Heidegger ever subscribed to the Husserlian kind of phenomenological reduction [sic!] as invoked by Sheehan.” (121.31-32); (2) “his
[Sheehan’s] concept of meaning remains within a subjective cast” (130.7-8); and (3) “According to Sheehan, the focal meaning of ‘the open’ is human Da-sein, understood as human subjectivity” (124.4-5).

With each of these assertions Prof. Farin shows that his dogmatic cathectic on “Sein” precludes any understanding of Heidegger’s phenomenological revolution and thus blocks his way to a proper grasp of what Heidegger’s texts, whether early or late, are about.

Moreover, in Heidegger scholarship it goes without saying that once Heidegger had positioned his work within the proper phenomenological correlation, his goal was to go further and discuss “being itself” (das Anwesen selbst) and its source, in what he once called a “phenomenological construction” (GA 24: 30.2). This was the task that he set for the unpublished division, SZ I.3. Following that, the topic of SZ II (also unpublished) was to have been a “phenomenological destruction” of the history of ontology.¹⁶

But the only way into these tasks was, and still is, the phenomenological reduction that Heidegger recasts as a phenomenological in-duction. Thus contra Farin (121.25-122.1) that initial move remained for Heidegger—and still remains for those who would understand him—“the only entrance into Heidegger’s work.”

II. HOW CLOSELY DID PROF FARIN READ MAKING SENSE OF HEIDEGGER?

The rest of Prof. Farin’s criticisms are grounded on the seven misunderstandings discussed above. Therefore, rather than going into each one of them in detail, I will respond to only two.

1. The alleged lack of references

Prof. Farin repeatedly criticizes me for (1) inadequately referencing Heidegger’s texts and (2) trying to patch up this embarrassing lack by some translational sleight of hand. He makes the claim most pointedly in the following passage:

Although Sheehan often repeats his thesis that “being = realness = meaningfulness” “is Heidegger’s own,” he provides no textual evidence whatsoever for this extraordinary interpretation. Nor does he adduce any
reference in support of this interpretation from the existing body of Heidegger scholarship. Unimpressed by this embarrassing deficit, Sheehan attempts to patch up his position by “translating” Heidegger’s word “being” by the English word “meaningful presence,” or “significance,” or “intelligibility.” This is as unprecedented as it is blatantly false, for “being” never means “intelligibility” or “significance,” or even “meaningful presence.” Sheehan’s translational legerdemain obviously fails to make up for the lack of textual evidence in his argumentation.

(121.1-10)

The book contains, I believe, some 1174 footnotes, many of which provide three to five (and sometimes up to seven) separate references to and citations of Heidegger’s texts. That makes for well over 2200 references to Heidegger’s works, both to the German originals and the English translations, with page- and line-numbers provided for each one.

While I do not expect Prof. Farin to trace down each and every reference, he might have checked at least a few of them—for example, the references to Heidegger’s texts on Sein, Welt, and Bedeutsamkeit mentioned above in no. 4, which clearly contradict Farin’s claim.

And there are others. For example, when he attacks me for arguing that “thrownness and appropriation are identical, simply earlier and later names for the same existential structure” (130.20-21), we might have expected him to first check at least some of the seven supporting footnotes, which in fact show that identification to be the case. For example:

Der Sprung (der geworfene Entwurf) ist der Vollzug des Entwurfs der Wahrheit des Seyns im Sinne der Einrückung in das Offene, dergestalt, daß der Werfer des Entwurfs als geworfener sich erfahrt, d. h. er-eignet durch das Seyn.
(GA 65: 239.1-6)

Der Entwurf als geworfener: Gemeint immer nur der Entwurf der Wahrheit des Seyns. Der Werfer selbst, das Da-sein, ist geworfen, er-eignet durch das Seyn.
(GA 65: 304.5-9)
Another example: Prof. Farin claims I am wrong to say that ex-sistence/\textit{Da-sein} is the open clearing in both the early and the later Heidegger.

Sheehan writes: “Metaphorically speaking, as thrown-open (i.e., appropriated), human being is the ‘open space’ or clearing within which the meaningful presence of things can occur.” And to make sure that no one misses the point he immediately adds in parenthesis that this just quoted ‘sentence is Heidegger’s philosophy in a nut-shell.’ Clearly, Sheehan assumes that what is a proper characterization of “the open” in \textit{Being and Time} fits all other works by Heidegger as well.

\textit{(124.5-10)}

\textit{Making Sense of Heidegger} amply substantiates the claims cited above with multiple references to Heidegger’s texts, both early and late. Perhaps Farin should have at least glanced at some of them. Those texts include (here I give only the references, since the texts themselves are provided in the book at 137-138):

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textit{SZ} 133.5
    \item \textit{GA} 3: 229.10-11
    \item \textit{GA} 14: 35.23-24
    \item \textit{GA} 45: 154.27-28
    \item \textit{GA} 66: 129.5
    \item \textit{GA} 69: 101.12-13
    \item \textit{SZ} 147.2-3
    \item \textit{GA} 6: 323.14-15
    \item \textit{GA} 15: 380.11-12
    \item \textit{GA} 45: 213.1-4
    \item \textit{GA} 66: 321.12
    \item \textit{GA} 70: 125.12
    \item \textit{GA} 9: 325.20-21
    \item \textit{GA} 15: 415.10-13
    \item \textit{GA} 49: 60.25-27
    \item \textit{GA} 66: 328.1-2
    \item \textit{GA} 71: 211.8-9
\end{itemize}

As well as texts outside of the Gesamtausgabe:

\begin{itemize}
    \item Heidegger’s “Lettre à Monsieur Beaufret, (23 novembre 1945),” 182.27–184.3
    \item “Die ‘Seinsfrage’ in \textit{Sein und Zeit},” 9.23
    \item \textit{Zollikon Seminar} 156.35–157.3; 157.31–32; and 351.14–17.
\end{itemize}

There are yet others, but these should suffice.

In short, I believe Prof. Farin’s allegation of insufficient references to Heidegger’s work does not stand up to the evidence.
2. Phenomenology, meaning, hermeneutics

A couple of issues gather under this rubric. In the first place, Prof. Farin criticizes me for holding, with Heidegger, two positions: (1) that Sein in all its forms is always written under phenomenological erasure, and (2) that after a philosopher enters the phenomenological correction, the field of investigation is exclusively the meaningfulness of things to human beings. Farin objects: “But that is not even true for Husserl” because “after the reduction we are still dealing with what is given to the natural attitude.” (121.19-28)

With that Farin exposes the basis of his misprision: he attributes to me a position that neither I nor any phenomenologist I know would ever hold, namely, that (in Farin’s words) “meaning, and in particular meaningfulness, is the prerogative of philosophical or phenomenological reflection alone” (128.28-29).

Can Farin point to a single sentence in Making Sense of Heidegger that says or even intimates that? The book is quite clear on the matter, especially in chapter 4 which draws on GA 64, the book Farin himself translated. To paraphrase Heidegger (GA 42: 169.22–25), meaning is the air we breathe, without which we would descend to the level of the mere beast. Our very Existenz is sense-making (GA 21: 146.29–31;150.26–27). We live in intelligibility, we live and breathe meaning, whether in our everyday practical lives or our theoretical worlds. That has been the case, as best we can tell, ever since Homo sapiens came on the scene some 200,000 years ago. And that is what In-der-Welt-sein is all about: “Dasein . . . in seiner Vertrautheit mit der Bedeutsamkeit” (SZ 87.19-20).

All that the phenomenological reduction/induction does is to thematize the world of meaning that we already live in but overlook both in our everyday lives and in our theoretical pursuits. And once the philosopher carries out that thematization, the only topic left—the objectum materiale of all phenomenological work—is meaningfulness.

The second issue under this rubric is Prof. Farin’s complaint that my book overlooks hermeneutics and especially the influence of Schleiermacher and Dilthey on Heidegger. I don’t think Farin gets it—where the “it” refers to the major source of Heidegger’s notion of hermeneutics, which is neither Schleiermacher (least of all Schleiermacher) nor Dilthey (for all that Heidegger owes to him) but rather Aristotle, and specifically De interpretatione (Περὶ ἑρμηνείας). This is a treatise that
Heidegger worked through time and again from 1922 until 1930 as he crafted his own meaning of “hermeneutics.”

A major defect of Prof. Farin’s paper, which vitiates his entire critique, is his failure to say a word about Aristotle. This, despite the fact that Heidegger is virtually incomprehensible absent a nuanced awareness of what he got from Aristotle regarding being, ex-sistence, truth, language, technology—the list is virtually endless. For now, however, just a word about how this omission on Farin’s part undermines his critique regarding hermeneutics.

It is noteworthy that, despite its title—Περὶ ἑρμηνείας—that entire treatise does not make a single reference to “hermeneutics” in the current philosophical sense of the term. If Aristotle had written a book about hermeneutics in our contemporary sense (Farin’s sense), the title would have been Περὶ ἑρµηνευτικῆς (that is, Περὶ τῆς τέχνης ἑρµηνευτικῆς), “Concerning the Art of Interpreting,” and its Latin translation by Boethius would have been entitled De interpretativa (= De arte interpretativa) instead of De interpretatione.

In Περὶ ἑρµηνείας the word ἑρµηνεία does not mean “hermeneutics” but instead refers to an ἀπόφασις, a declarative sentence. How Heidegger got his doctrine of sense and meaning from a treatise on the parts and forms of declarative sentences is laid out in his early courses, and has been spelled out elsewhere. The short version of the story is: Heidegger burrowed under the discursive structure of declarative sentences in order to find and articulate what Aristotle had left unsaid: the thrown-openness of Da-sein as what makes such discursivity possible and necessary. Heidegger did what neither Frege nor the Husserl of Logical Investigations had attempted: he explicitly grounded his theory of sense and meaning on the groundless existential structure of human being. Pace Farin, Heidegger’s fundamental hermeneutical move in SZ had nothing to do with what Schleiermacher meant by hermeneutics, and it went far beyond anything Heidegger had learned from Dilthey. That move consisted in rooting his Bedeutungslehre or doctrine of meaning in his analysis of ex-sistence (SZ 166.9-10).

Farin’s complaints at 130.1-11 that (1) I do not “acknowledge Heidegger’s indebtedness to Schleiermacher and Dilthey”; (2) that my “concept of meaning remains within a subjective cast”; and (3) that I read Da-sein as what “Husserl would refer to as transcendental consciousness” simply reveal his failure to grasp what Heidegger’s theory of meaning was all about. And that failure, in turn, rests on his
demonstrated inability to make the seven basic distinctions mentioned earlier.

So finally: What is brewing in the Heidegger teapot? And why does it matter?
First of all, one may not want to drink only Heideggerian tea. Maybe Prof. Farin’s own idiosyncratic blend would taste better. But then we wouldn’t call it Heideggerian tea, would we?

Secondly, Prof. Farin’s critique may well be spot on, and I may be the one making water. For one thing, I clearly have not responded to all his points, especially about Heidegger-I and Heidegger-II—although, were there world enough and time, I would argue that those criticisms suffer from the same problems evidenced in the first seven issues discussed above.

And thirdly, why should it matter? After all, Heidegger is dead, and he never wanted disciples, and he was wrong about a whole host of issues, both in philosophy and in life. Maybe what he actually said should not stand in the way of Prof. Farin proposing what he wants Heidegger to say.

In any case, I end (and perhaps every philosophy text should end) with the sentiment that the young Shelley expressed in 1811 when announcing the publication of his pamphlet on The Necessity of Atheism:

As a love of truth is the only motive which actuates the Author of this little tract, he earnestly entreats that those of his readers who may discover any deficiency in his reasoning, or may be in possession of proofs which his mind could never obtain, would offer them, together with their objections, to the Public, as briefly, as methodically, as plainly as he has taken the liberty of doing.

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NOTES

1. From Ioannis Antiocheni fragmenta quae supersunt omnia, 2463, f. 11, 5. Roughly: Keeping philosophers on the path is like herding kittens.
2. Prof. Farin's article is available online at https://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia26/parrhesia26_farin.pdf. I cite Farin's text by page and line number, and Heidegger's work by the Gesamtausgabe number, followed by page and line. One exception: I cite Sein und Zeit as SZ, with page-and-lines from the Niemeyer edition.
3. Richardson, Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), 633.16–17; also 633 note 30: “Even in SZ, presumably, Heidegger sensed the inadequacy of the term but could find no other way to designate the process under discussion.”
4. Re. conflation: Farin reveals how little he understands my book when he speaks of its “straightforward identification of being with meaningful things [sic!] as they show up in the world” (119.32-33)
5. Farin confirms that he misses the ontological difference between das Anwesen and das Anwesende when he writes: “But this cannot be right, for Heidegger takes great pains to distinguish between meaningful things and entities on the one hand and being on the other hand” (119.23-24).
6. On world as meaningfulness, see SZ 87.17–18; 334.33–34; etc.
7. Richardson, Heidegger, 36 n. 22; 167 n. 15; 231.5-7; 572.14-15; 578.24-28 and n. 4; 625.35-36; 626.5; 633.16–17 and n. 30.
8. See also GA 7: 91:12-15; GA 12: 23.10 and 23.18.
9. Cf. also GA 2: 53 note 3; GA 10: 131.19–20 and .28; GA 73, 2: 984.2; GA 14: 45.29–30; etc.
11. Farin further shows he understands neither Heidegger’s Grundfrage nor my book when he claims (128.1-2). that I make “significance”—i.e., Anwesen as Bedeutsamkeit—“the sole subject matter in Heidegger’s work.” On the contrary, the book consistently emphasizes that Heidegger’s Grundfrage is about the Herkunft of significance, viz., Ereignis.
13. For Heidegger’s reading of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, see, for example, GA 2: 114n and SZ 326.1: “wie es je schon war.”
16. The unpublished second half of SZ was to be entitled “Grundzüge einer phänomenologischen Destruktion der Geschichte der Ontologie am Leitfaden der Problematik der Temporalität” (SZ 39.36–38).
17. Also “Übernahme der Geworfenheit (SZ 325-26) and “Über-nahme der Er-eignung” (GA 65: 322.6–9) and other texts cited on pp. 236-37 of Making Sense of Heidegger.
18. This, I think, explains why he misses the fundamental arguments of the book. The first 100 pages of Making Sense of Heidegger are virtually all about Heidegger’s Aristotle, as is much of the remaining 200 pages. But nary a word on that in Farin’s essay.
I would like to thank the staff at *Parrhesia* for generously offering me the opportunity to respond to Prof. Sheehan’s long critique of my review article about his important book *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*. My original review article “A Response to Sheehan’s Attempted Paradigm Shift” appeared in *Parrhesia 26* (2016), pp. 117-135. Sheehan’s critique of that review appears in this volume.

First of all, I very much welcome Prof. Sheehan’s attempt to clarify his position, especially with regard to (1) Heidegger’s and Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, and (2) the alleged insignificance of Dilthey and Schleiermacher as sources for Heidegger’s hermeneutical philosophizing. However, I have no desire to engage the rhetorical armature Prof. Sheehan put in place against me. Nor will I answer in detail the alleged egregious mistakes and errors he divines in my review article. Sheehan’s public tutorial creates a smokescreen behind which the critical points of my original review disappear. It is not my intention to assist him in that, although I am quite willing to learn from him. In any case, the issue is Heidegger’s philosophy and Prof. Sheehan’s interpretation of it, not my apparent failure to satisfy Prof. Sheehan’s criteria for excellence in Heidegger scholarship.

I. ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEIDEGGER’S AND HUSSERL’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION
In his response to my critique of his book, Prof Sheehan accentuates the difference between Husserl and Heidegger in a new and illuminating way, going far beyond what he had claimed in his book *Making Sense of Heidegger*. He now holds that whereas for Husserl the “re-duction” is a veritable re-tracing of “the thing encountered” to “transcendental consciousness,” Heidegger instead envisions a kind of “in-duction” of the encountered thing into its meaningful possibilities within our lives, such that Dasein is not the underlying subject-pole or “sub-ject” for the object, but, rather, that which “e-jects” what it encounters into the horizon of its (Dasein’s) possibilities. As Sheehan writes in his response to me, Heidegger’s phenomenological “in-duction” must not be confused with Husserl’s phenomenological “re-duction.” Prof Sheehan even goes to the trouble of producing a beautiful diagram to illustrate this point.

I welcome this clarification and note only two things. First, what Sheehan expounds as Heidegger’s phenomenological “in-duction” of the encountered thing into Dasein’s possibilities is, I would like to submit, quite close to what Heidegger explicates as hermeneutical understanding in his 1922 “Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation.” In that piece Heidegger insists that instead of positing reified meanings, abstracted from the actual context in which they occur, proper hermeneutical understanding of an encountered thing unfolds along three axes: (1) from the appropriated perspective at the beginning, the “Blickstand,” the initial position of looking, that is, the factual situation of life in which the encountered thing appears in one’s field of vision, (2) along the direction of looking, or “Blickhabe,” which determines as what the encountered thing is kept in view, the hermeneutical as-structure, (3) towards the projected trajectory in light of which the encountered thing is seen, or what Heidegger calls the “Blickbahn.” What Sheehan calls Heidegger’s “in-duction” of an encountered thing into Dasein’s possibilities corresponds to Heidegger’s conception of the trajectory of one’s view, the Blickbahn, in line of which the encountered thing is interpreted, understood, and explicated. However, Heidegger does not qualify this conception of the hermeneutical understanding as a variant to Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. The reason is simple enough: it isn’t part of the phenomenological method at all. The entire conception grows out of the hermeneutical tradition, as already the terminology betrays: Blickstand, Blickhabe, and Blickbahn can all be traced back to Chladenius. In short what Sheehan presents as Heidegger’s version of the phenomenological reduction, the so-called “in-duction” of the encountered thing into Dasein’s possibilities, is in reality and truth much better and much more comprehensively explicated in terms of Heidegger’s conception of hermeneutical understanding.
(Husserl’s protention and retention do not yield the same result at all.) I would argue that Heidegger introduces this specifically hermeneutical conception into phenomenology, whereby he turns reflective phenomenology to hermeneutical phenomenology.

But Prof Sheehan does not acknowledge this, for, although he frequently talks of Heidegger’s hermeneutical tendencies, in his book Making Sense of Heidegger, he never isolates the directly hermeneutical contribution in Heidegger’s philosophy, as I have done above, because of his overall thesis that Heidegger’s philosophy is phenomenological through and through, from beginning to end. He thus misses the finer points, and the most crucial point, i.e., that Heidegger transforms Husserl’s reflective and theoretical phenomenology into hermeneutical phenomenology.3 And one of the big issues here is whether or not Heidegger hangs on to a kind of phenomenological reduction after the hermeneutical shift in phenomenology. If the phenomenological reduction requires recourse to a transcendental subject, Heidegger is surely not willing to practice it! While I think that Prof Sheehan agrees with this point, I doubt that his quick fix of naming Heidegger’s phenomenological reduction an “in-duction” has sufficient conceptual clarity, complexity, and subtlety to settle this admittedly rather difficult theoretical issue.

The other point to make here is that, pace Prof Sheehan, Heidegger nowhere contrasts a so-called phenomenological “in-duction” to Husserl’s phenomenological “re-duction.” In other words, Sheehan’s clarification concerning the two different types of phenomenological reduction, and thereby the two different conceptions of phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger, has absolutely no basis in Heidegger’s texts. (For, as I have shown above, where we can find a connection from Sheehan’s so-called “in-duction” to Heidegger’s texts, it is through his view of hermeneutic understanding, not his explication of a phenomenological reduction, as Sheehan insinuates.) Moreover, if we now go to the one passage where Heidegger directly elaborates on the phenomenological reduction, nota bene, not “in-duction,” as Prof Sheehan would have it, namely in Heidegger’s 1927 Basic Problems of Phenomenology, we find the following. Contra Prof Sheehan’s claim, Heidegger explicitly understands the phenomenological reduction as a reduction from entities to Being, “die Rückführung des Blickes zum Sein.”4 Heidegger sees this in contrast to the phenomenological reduction to consciousness in Husserl. Heidegger reiterates his commitment to this kind of a “re-ductive” method or “reduction” several times in the text! No word or idea of an in-duction, as Prof Sheehan would have it. But not only is Heidegger holding on to a concept of a
“phenomenological reduction to Being,” he also insists that a proper phenomenological method must include a phenomenological “construction” of Being, which requires a proper “projection” [Entwurf] of the meaning of Being gained from the investigator’s unique historical situation. It is precisely here that Prof Sheehan can rightly claim that Heidegger does refer to projection. But he overlooks that all of this is part of a method involving at least three distinct moments. (It is not just projection or, as Prof Sheehan would have it “ejection” or “in-duction.”) For, as Heidegger points out, besides reduction and construction, the phenomenological method also includes the “deconstruction” [Destruktion] of accumulated layers of distorted traditional meanings. With this, then, we enter into a full hermeneutical phenomenology, the kind of which Heidegger pursues. In Sheehan’s reconstruction of Heidegger’s phenomenological reduction, however, we get in lieu of Heidegger’s rich tripartite hermeneutical structure the rather bland quasi-logical opposition between Husserl’s “re-duction,” and Heidegger’s “in-duction.” Prof Sheehan’s theory does not hold water, in my view.

After this theoretical excursion, I would like to say a few words about Prof Sheehan’s critique of me. For, when in his Response Prof Sheehan chides me for failing to recognize Heidegger’s “in-duction” as Heidegger’s very own version of Husserl’s reduction, I must confess that I am baffled not only because it is not to be found in Heidegger’s texts, as shown above, but also because it is not to be found in Prof Sheehan’s own book Making Sense of Heidegger, the book I reviewed! Although there are indeed at least three texts in which Prof Sheehan elaborates the distinction between a phenomenological “in-duction” in opposition to a Husserlian “reduction,” all these texts appeared after my review article, and none of this is part of his original book. I believe that Prof Sheehan will concede that I cannot be held responsible for missing something that wasn’t there in the first place, not in the original Heidegger texts, nor his own book!

To return one more time to the theoretical matter at hand, I understand that Prof Sheehan is particularly upset at me for having dared to call Heidegger’s phenomenological reduction an “ontological reduction,” by which I only meant a reduction to Being, in the sense that Heidegger spells this out. I do not think that I am therefore guilty of attributing a metaphysical understanding of Being to Heidegger or harbouring such evil metaphysical thoughts in my own mind, as Prof Sheehan seems to think. But it is quite instructive to reflect on the fact that Heidegger’s reduction to Being does resurface in his later work again, albeit in a different context, the history of Being. In “Anaximander’s Saying,” Heidegger...
argues that as Being manifests itself in and through entities, it thereby also conceals itself as itself, withdraws itself, and thus keeps to itself. Heidegger holds that this keeping to itself may very well be called “the epoché of Being.” There is a kind of “reserve” and “withholding” in Being that has a structural resemblance to the withholding or bracketing in Husserl’s reduction, albeit with the big difference that here Being becomes accentuated, not consciousness. In fact, in the 1969 seminar at Le Thor, the one that Prof Sheehan likes so much, Heidegger again refers to the “epoché of Being,” arguing that in this epoché one comes to stand “vis-à-vis Being as Being,” that is, without its relation to beings. What Heidegger means is the genuine and unmediated encounter with what is outside the mere intentionality or immanence of consciousness. In leaving behind the immanence of consciousness, humans come to themselves by standing in the “clearing of Being,” which is something “entirely different” from the human. I believe that Prof Sheehan would agree with that. Everything hinges on “giving up the priority of consciousness” [Vorrang des Bewusstseins] for the sake of entering into the region where humans encounter “what is not human,” but which determines them nevertheless. Heidegger holds that we must think of this as entering the “Ortschaft des Denkens.” Thus, the turn away from Husserl and the turn to post-subjectivist thought is a turn towards the topology of Being. But, regrettably, on the topology of Being Sheehan has nothing much to say. It is precisely his lack of engagement of interpretations that investigate Heidegger’s post-subjectivist turn that Prof Sheehan’s own distance to a post-subjectivist phenomenology fails to get its own profile, especially when coupled with his rousing defence of modern subjectivity, technology, etc. The point here is that a post-subjectivist phenomenology does not at all require abandoning the reciprocity that binds Dasein to Being and Being to Dasein.

II. ON THE ALLEGED RELATIVE INSIGNIFICANCE OF DILTHEY AND SCHLEIERMACHER FOR HEIDEGGER

I welcome Prof Sheehan’s clarification on this point. It was not my intention to claim that Aristotle is not of the highest importance for Heidegger, especially in terms of his understanding of metaphysics and even phenomenology, and, in particular, hermeneutics. However, Prof Sheehan surely has read Heidegger’s “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache,” in which Heidegger does assert that he first encountered “hermeneutics” through his “theologies studies,” and that “without this theological provenance” he would never had come upon the path of hermeneutics. Indeed, Heidegger continues by writing that after his theological studies
he not only studied hermeneutics in the context of Dilthey’s hermeneutical philosophy, but that he also studied Schleiermacher himself. Indeed, Schleiermacher is so important for Heidegger that he even quotes a long paragraph from Schleiermacher in the dialogue on language. All of this is only to say that Sheehan’s blanket dismissal of Schleiermacher and his slightly more qualified judgment about Dilthey needs to be scrutinized against Heidegger’s own very different comments and his systematic reliance on hermeneutics, as I have tried to show above with regard to one particular area. Again, I think that Prof Sheehan’s mono-focal interpretation of Heidegger, namely that Heidegger was a phenomenologist through and through and nothing else, blocks him from seeing the many philosophical currents that issue in Heidegger’s thinking, without, of course, thereby entirely determining it. I wish something of the hermeneutical spirit could also soften the current discussions about Heidegger’s philosophy. After all, philosophy is an ongoing conversation, not a collection of propositions that are either true or false, which does not mean that analytic and conceptual clarity is unimportant. It is in the sense of an ongoing conversation that I read and keep re-reading Prof Sheehan’s book, Making Sense of Heidegger.

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Endnotes


17. See also, *Hermeneutical Heidegger*, ed. Michael Bowler and Ingo Farin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), especially the essay by Daniel O. Dahlstrom, “Hermeneutics in Being and Time,” which traces out Heidegger’s relation to the hermeneutical tradition in Dilthey, Schleiermacher, and beyond.
While Manuel DeLanda’s philosophy is associated with the most cutting-edge innovations in continental thought, his *Assemblage Theory* should be considered a work of secondary scholarship that builds upon the concept of assemblage first sketched by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. DeLanda characterizes his own theory as “an extension of their work” which is deferential to “its value and resilience” and remains committed to “preserve and extend Deleuze and Guattari’s insights” (65, 131). Though DeLanda significantly expands on their ideas, conceiving of properties and capacities of assemblages not envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari to develop a comprehensive “ontology of assemblages,” the work is ultimately one of creative exegesis that remains grounded in the latter’s philosophy (127).

DeLanda begins by elaborating the defining traits of assemblages and the ontological framework they compose. All assemblages, he explains, are singularities, they are historical and individually unique, and are therefore not “particular members of a general category” (6). Because each is unique, a primary function of assemblage theory is to map the individuation process that has given rise to an assemblage. Unlike the relationalist ontology described in Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, where each entity is defined by its interactions with other entities—by its capacity to affect and be affected by other entities—DeLanda’s assemblages consist of parts that remain autonomous and independent of their network...
of relations. Each part is capable of detaching to form new relations and therefore assemblages are characterized by “relations of exteriority.” In contrast to the “relations of interiority” that characterize Latour’s assemblages, where relations “define the very identity of the terms they relate,” relations of exteriority are non-constitutive of component parts (2). As opposed to the ontological contingency of assemblage components described by Latour, in DeLanda’s assemblage theory, relations do not define the terms of the relation. However, while the parts of an assemblage remain independent and are not defined by the whole, the nature of the whole assemblage is a function of the interrelations of its parts. Assemblages are characterized by the “emergent properties” that are “produced by the interactions between components” (12). As such, the nature of assemblages are not determined by “essences [that] belong to a...transcendent plane,” but are contingent on immanent material interactions (12). That is, while the parts maintain an autonomous identity independent of their relations, the nature of the whole assemblage is contingent on the emergent properties that arise through the relation of its parts.

One way that DeLanda seeks to correct or improve upon Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory is to argue that assemblages and their components possess mind-independent agency. He sets out to invest the components of assemblages with an autonomous will that Deleuze and Guattari formerly denied them and argues that we must regard assemblages as “legitimate agents” (9). In the first three chapters of the book, DeLanda attempts to prove this by developing “a more detailed social ontology” than we find in Deleuze and Guattari, one that takes “into account a greater variety of forms of social agency” (65). In the sixth chapter, he attempts to show that “assemblages must be considered to be fully independent of our minds” by examining the individuation processes of atoms, elements, genes, and biological species (138). While this is a major feature of his assemblage theory, DeLanda fails to develop a rigorous or systematic account of non-human agency to the extent that other new materialists have, such as Jane Bennett and Levi Bryant, and to sufficiently differentiate his concept of mind-independence from that of other thinkers.

More broadly, DeLanda’s assemblage theory is a flat, materialist ontology of immanence. It is flat because “the ontological status of all assemblages is the same,” and immanent because all assemblages “populate the same ontological plane,” one that is not derived from an anterior, transcendent level of existence (19). DeLanda argues that its non-hierarchical ontology distinguishes assemblage theory
from other realist philosophies which make “strong ontological distinctions between levels of existence, such as genus, species, and organism” (13). Perhaps DeLanda’s most well-known contribution to Deleuze and Guattari’s theory is his contention that reality consists of assemblages all the way down. All that is, he writes, is an assemblage, or rather, “assemblages of assemblages” (3). Each component of an assemblage is also an assemblage and “the environment of an assemblage is itself an assemblage” (7). All of existence is composed of a “nested set” of assemblages that operate at varying levels of scale, terminating in “the grand cosmic assemblage, the plane of immanence” (7). In short, assemblages are historical, unique, relationally contingent, mind-independent agents that are part of a flat, non-hierarchical plane of existence that is immanent rather than transcendent and material rather than ideal.

DeLanda’s foremost revision of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory is “to parametrise the concept of assemblage” (56). In place of Deleuze and Guattari’s binaristic distinctions—between strata and assemblage, molecular and molar, micro and macro—DeLanda proposes that we conceptualize assemblages as having variable parameters that are analogous to “control knobs” (19). This would allow what formerly appeared to be dichotomous categories to be unified as different phases in a continuum. He writes, “Unlike mutually exclusive binary categories, phases can be transformed into one another, and even coexist as mixtures, like a gel that is a mixture of the solid and liquid phases of different materials” (19). By replacing distinct ontological categories with historically variable parameters, all entities can be recognized as existing in a unified, immanent field of assemblages. DeLanda proposes that all assemblages are characterized by two variable parameters: the first quantifies its degree of territorialization and deterritorialization, the second quantifies its degree of coding and decoding. The two parameters are analogous; territorialization is to coding as deterritorialization is to decoding. As in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, territorialization refers to the components within an assemblage that give it “its defining boundaries and maintains those boundaries through time” (27). When the “control knob” of territorialization is set at a high value, the assemblage exhibits a high degree of stasis, fixity, homogeneity, normalization, and self-replication. Conversely, when deterritorialization values are high, the assemblage exhibits mobility, flux, heterogeneity, destabilization, novelty, and a loss of unity. The values of each parameter are tied to two classes of traits found in every assemblage: expressive or symbolic components, and material or physical components. In a social assemblage, for example, territorialization is expressed symbolically and materially through rituals, routines, regula-
itions, traditions, conventions, laws, standard procedures, rights, and obligations that are aimed at reproducing the assemblage, whereas deterritorialization is expressed through innovations that destabilize the continuity of the assemblage. Like social entities, linguistic entities are assemblages which “operate at several levels of scale at once,” from the level of the phoneme to the linguistic codes that enforce social obligations. When the variable parameter of territorialization or coding is high, linguistic assemblages function as enforcement mechanisms used to maintain homogeneity and conformity to a standardized norm. When deterritorialization values are high, linguistic assemblages function to break down formerly rigid social codes.

DeLanda devotes each chapter of *Assemblage Theory* to a different kind of assemblage, each operating at varying levels of scale and modality, in an effort to exemplify his concepts. Chapter one is concerned with social assemblages, chapter two with linguistic assemblages, chapter three with martial assemblages, chapter four considers scientific practices as assemblages, chapter five examines diagrammatic assemblages of the actual and virtual, chapter six gives an account of atomic, genetic, and chemical assemblages, and chapter seven looks at the solutions to scientific and mathematical problems as assemblages.

While parametrizing Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage is DeLanda’s primary extension of their ideas, his most thoroughgoing critique of their philosophy concerns what he calls “reified generalities.” He begins at the level of social theory and then extrapolates the consequences of these premises to develop his own realist ontology. DeLanda wishes to correct “the limitations of Deleuze’s social ontology,” which “is made up of only three levels: the individual, the group, and the social field” (40, 39). By offering “a more finely grained ontology, with many levels of social ensembles between the person and society,” he can design a more valid materialist philosophy (4). What we have traditionally designated as “society [is] an assemblage of assemblages” (37). As such, we cannot “coherently speak of ‘society as a whole’” (38). Rather, social assemblages exist at different levels of scale, such as families, communities, bureaucracies, corporations, cities, territories, and nation-states. Similarly, we cannot speak of a unified “economic system that encompasses all of society” (15). What have formerly been regarded as “monolithic entities” such as Capitalism or the Market must be recognized as an assemblage of individual entities, each of which are “valid historical actors” such as local marketplaces, as well as regional, national, and continental markets (16, 15). DeLanda maintains that “Deleuze and Guattari get their eco-
nomic history wrong” by failing to recognize that macro-entities like the Market or the Capitalist System do not exist as “individual emergent wholes” but consist of a nested set of assemblages “operating at different scales,” each with their own historically contingent parameters (46, 16). DeLanda argues that Deleuze and Guattari are not alone in this error. Rather, he contends that “the academic left today has become prey” to a “double danger” (48). First, by “politically targeting” reified generalities such as the Market, Capitalism, the State, Power, and Labor. Second, by abandoning a realism that recognizes reality to be mind-independent. Assemblage theory, DeLanda argues, offers a more valid materialist, realist ontology which rejects any appeal to such reified generalities and leaves “behind the dream of a Revolution that changes the entire system,” as no monolithic social or economic system exists (48). By recognizing the “heterogeneity...and variety of...the real agents of economic history,” assemblage theory can correct the left and effect the kind of change it has failed to accomplish (16). DeLanda develops this social theory in the first chapters of the book. In the remainder of the text, he extends his critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s social ontology to argue that other nested sets of assemblages such as language, science, nature, and culture have been falsely regarded as unified wholes and must also be reconceptualized in light of assemblage theory.

The most significant contributions to scholarship that DeLanda makes in Assemblage Theory are found in the first three chapters of the book. Here, he ably brings greater clarity and coherence to the theory first sketched by Deleuze and Guattari while also building upon it in ways that have proven to be immensely influential to other thinkers who have been identified—sometimes unhappily—with New Materialism. Just as DeLanda has expanded and fleshed out Deleuze and Guattari’s nascent assemblage theory, resolving inconsistencies and filling gaps to create a comprehensive system from an evocative and elliptical set of concepts, other new materialists, most notably Levi Bryant, have effectively developed the novel ideas DeLanda imparts in Assemblage Theory and elsewhere. Many of the fundamental principles of Bryant’s “machinic ontology” are drawn from the still inchoate concepts in DeLanda’s Assemblage Theory. Chief among them are DeLanda’s immanent ontology, the Deleuzian cartographic imperative he prescribes (but fails to describe), his rejection of reified generalities—what Bryant calls transcendent agencies—and the abandonment of such false dichotomies as nature / culture and individual / society. Undoubtedly the greatest strength of the book lies in DeLanda’s development of a new materialist social theory, one that Bryant also effectively elaborates in his own brand of assemblage theory.
However, the exceptional virtues of the first half of *Assemblage Theory* are equally matched by the immense deficiencies of the last four chapters of the book. The disciplined rigor and clarity of the early chapters gives way, in the second half of the book, to a seemingly endless procession of excursuses and explications of scientific and mathematic ideas which are then clumsily grafted onto Deleuzian concepts in the hopes of creating a patchwork ontology. In the process, any semblance of a coherent and well-wrought argument is lost. DeLanda yields the floor to a large cast of other thinkers like the economist Fernand Braudel and to mathematicians such as Felix Klein, Friedrich Gauss, Henri Poincaré, Leonard Euler, Neils Abel, Evariste Galois, Stanislav Ulam, and John Von Neumann, flitting from one discipline and concept to the next, including thermodynamics, genetics, geometry, astrophysics, chemistry, the history of the periodic table, the history of algebraic equations, velocity vector field dynamics, projective geometry, and discrete mathematics, to name but a sampling. This is not to say that these figures and ideas are incapable of valuably illuminating aspects of assemblage theory, but that DeLanda’s treatment of this material for such purposes is murky, tedious, and ineffective. When, in earlier chapters, he engages in eclectic exemplifications, such as the effect of the Battle of Hastings on the development of English dialects, it still remains clear how these are working to legitimate a premise of assemblage theory. But by the time we get to the later chapters, these asides become progressively unmoored from any discernible argument and the careful rigor of the first half of the book is altogether absent.

While DeLanda is widely regarded as a novel thinker, and the extent and scope of his talents are certainly undeniable, this volume must essentially be regarded, if one is reading charitably, as a commentary on Deleuze. And, in DeLanda’s defense, he frames it as such. To be sure, DeLanda offers an adept reading and expansion of Deleuze and Guattari’s work. If one is being less charitable, however, the book can be described as a digressive, derivative work of eclecticism. There is scarcely an idea to be found in the text that is not derived from another thinker. Deleuze defined philosophy as the creation of concepts and there simply are not many new concepts presented here. It is an inelegant work of syncretism where DeLanda’s voice is lost in the cacophonous din of other voices. Of course, philosophy is arguably an accretive practice that continually builds up and refines the work that precedes it, but the measure of novel ideas in this text is far outweighed by those of others, and the latter are not applied in a manner that lends greater insight to the former.
A final, perplexing omission in the text, as it is glaring and easily remedied, is the complete absence of any kind of concluding remarks. The book simply comes to an abrupt end. After one hundred pages of a seemingly endless hodgepodge of concept explications that appear to have no clear connection to premises, some form of summation was sorely needed. If there was ever an occasion to offer remarks that could tie up the diverse threads of an argument, this was it. Without that, this erratic tapestry of ideas appears unfinished.

Ultimately, *Assemblage Theory* is a remarkably uneven text. The first half of the volume is as indispensable for anyone interested in contemporary continental philosophy as the second half is inconsequential. Despite the book’s deficiencies, DeLanda is unquestionably one of the most important thinkers in the field and this work, particularly the early chapters, is essential reading for anyone wishing to obtain a thorough account of the new direction in continental thought.

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