

1-20

the state, philosophy, and the tyranny of the *logos*: an introduction to françois châtelet's "classical greece, reason, and the state."

adam e. foster

21-45

classical greece, reason, and the state

françois châtelet, translated by adam e. foster

46-71

who is country? a hermeneutic strategy toward philosophical responsiveness in australia

curkpatrick er al

72-113

artistic agency and the painting of sensation: francis bacon's challenge to the standard theory of action

sean bowden

114-138

figures of the monstrous in nietzsche's the birth of tragedy

paulo lima

139-167

rancière and the question of crisis

seckin goksoy / seçkin göksoy

168-191

paradoxes of equality: jacques rancière's politics and nonhumans

iwona janicka

192-220

prevailing, swaying, sovereignty. heidegger, heraclitus, derrida

gabriel wartinger

221-251

from heidegger to marx: rethinking philosophical humility

james gilbert-walsh

252-287

a cartesian ethical narrative

andreea mihali

288-309

bodies that still matter: resonances of the work of judith butler (2021)

kurt borg

**the state, philosophy, and
the tyranny of the *logos*:
an introduction to françois
châtelet's "classical greece,
reason, and the state"**

adam e. foster

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy, it has been argued, is a form of friendship. To be a philosopher is necessarily to be a friend. It is with these assertions that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari begin their book *What is Philosophy?*¹ At its very essence, philosophy-as-friendship entails a mode of thought wherein one thinks *alongside* another. Though Deleuze and Guattari speak of the philosopher thinking alongside the *concept*, it is not a stretch to imagine philosophers thinking alongside one another. To this end, if one looks at the 'friends' of a philosopher in a more material, less metaphorical sense—or the word friend as it is commonly understood to refer

to other human beings—it would not be surprising to find that they socialised primarily with other philosophers. This is certainly true for many of the theorists associated with post-World War II French philosophy and what is commonly referred to as ‘poststructuralism’; if one looks at the friends of philosophers like Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard, they will inevitably find the name François Châtelet.

Though his work has until now gone untranslated and been largely ignored in English scholarship, the historian of philosophy François Châtelet played a major role in the development of French thought that is on par with that of his more well-known contemporaries. Born in 1925, Châtelet was founding member of the University of Vincennes, Paris VIII’s experimental department of philosophy alongside Michel Foucault in the aftermath of the 1968 student protests. In 1983, he would establish the *Collège Internationale de Philosophie* in Paris along with other prominent philosophers, an institution that in Alessandra Campana’s words, is at “the forefront of militant and engaged critical thinking,” in which it has sought to “relocate philosophy at the intersection of science, politics, psychoanalysis, art and literature, jurisprudence, and economy.”² Châtelet’s association with radical educational institutions and the interdisciplinarity of research undertaken at the latter both point to what can be understood to be the essence of his philosophical project: that the history of philosophy is also a *politics* of philosophy. “La Grèce Classique, La Raison, L’État,” which was first published in 1978 and appears here in translation for the first time under the title “Classical Greece, Reason, and the State,” is exemplary in this regard, providing a powerful critique of the history of philosophy and its purported Greek origins. As Deleuze argues, Châtelet reveals that “Athens was not the advent of an eternal reason, but the singular event of a provisional rationalisation.” In this view, the essence of classical philosophy cannot be extended to the contemporary era—neither in its original form, or in a revised form that has been modified and updated across the passage of time. Therefore, by politicising philosophy and its history, Châtelet’s work also shows philosophy to be indicative of a particular cultural moment,

rather than as an isolated discipline cut off from the influences of material life. He establishes a form of ‘rational empiricism’ for conducting a history of political philosophy that rejects universality for potentiality.³ Said otherwise, his work is indicative of what might be called the poststructuralist critique of the historical narrative surrounding the canon of Western thought, a critique that Michael Hardt rightfully argues “has problematised the foundations of philosophical and political thought.”⁴ However, Châtelet has made important contributions to the poststructuralist approach to theorising the Western tradition that remain novel and insightful to a contemporary audience, rather than simply being one of many to problematise philosophy’s purported foundations.

The poststructuralist analysis of the history of Western thought is well-known. It is an approach that rejects the treatment of figures from the canon as historical icons, appeals to universality, and a fixed identity of nature.⁵ It adopts a “strategic relation to the tradition” that is “ambivalent, playful, supplemental, while at the same time undermining the coherence and integrity of the modern narrative.”⁶ Though sometimes misinterpreted as anti-foundationalist, its approach to the canon can be better understood according to Foucault’s notion of ‘problematization’: the subjection of concepts and narratives to intense inquiry that reveals how things which once seemed stable, self-evident, natural, and universally agreed upon are anything but. Instead, the act of problematization reveals that they are the byproduct of intense debates as well as social, economic, and political processes that render these objects contentious and contingent, as well as constantly evolving. In the case of the history of philosophy, this means showing that this history was not the result of an organic evolution according to progression in human thought. To the contrary, this narrative is constantly rewritten or rearticulated to conform to a particular objective; an objective whose resolution is presupposed in the initial impression one has prior to engaging in the analysis of problematization.⁷ There is no universal history of philosophy, but rather many different histories that are each contingent upon the image of Western thought one wishes to paint. As such, Hardt argues that poststructuralism is oriented towards “the exploration

of new grounds for philosophical and political inquiry; it is involved not simply in the rejection of the tradition of political and philosophical discourse, but more importantly in the articulation and affirmation of alternative lineages that arise from within the tradition itself.”⁸ This orientation is found in Derrida’s deconstruction, and Deleuze and Guattari’s deterritorialisation of geophilosophy. It is mirrored in Foucault’s charting of counter-histories, and Lyotard’s rejection of grand narratives. However, the degree to which poststructuralist thought performed such an analysis of the history of philosophy is often overstated; often, it is implied in their work or is gestured towards. None of these theorists undertook the arduous task of engaging with the canon directly, dismantling the tradition, and allowing for its rearticulation.⁹ Such a project was, however, undertaken by Châtelet. In doing so, he made what Alessandra Campana attests to as being “influential contributions to the debate on the politics, history, and institutionalisation of philosophy.”¹⁰ The author of an eight volume history of philosophy and alongside monographs and articles analysing figures from the canon of western thought, one might even be inclined to argue that Châtelet is the poststructuralist historian of philosophy *par excellence*, given the strength and breadth of his work in this area.

To say that Châtelet engages in an analysis of the canon from a poststructuralist lens broadly construed, however, does not do justice to the innovation inherent to Châtelet’s project. At the core of his work is an engagement with what Brian Massumi refers to as “State philosophy” in his reading of Deleuze: that is, the notion that (Western) philosophy and politics were born of the same gesture and have progressed in tandem with one another rather than as separate entities. What unites politics and philosophy in this view is a shared form of reason.¹¹ In truth, Châtelet may have inaugurated this line of inquiry rather than Deleuze. The twin birth of philosophy and politics was the subject of his first book on Pericles, who he argues is the founder of both Western philosophy and the contemporary democratic system.¹² As such, Châtelet might provide a stronger account of State philosophy than Deleuze. Unlike Deleuze, ancient Greece was central to

Châtelet's political philosophy. In addition to his book on Pericles, Châtelet published a book on Plato, along with several articles and book chapters that provide a poststructuralist inquiry into the nature of Greek philosophy. "Classical Greece, Reason, and the State" is one such work. Here, he problematises our view of Greek philosophy in such a way that it also problematises the foundations of the State. As Deleuze and Guattari argued in a footnote found in *A Thousand Plateaus* (which is the sole mention of this text in English scholarship until now), "Châtelet questions the classical notion of the city-state and doubts that the Athenian city can be equated with any variety of State."¹³ As such, it could be said that Châtelet provides a more engaged and direct intervention into the narrative of State philosophy, addressing it at the moment of its birth in order to attack it at its foundations.

Despite his attack on its roots, Châtelet's engagement with State philosophy is productive rather than destructive. What is ultimately of concern for him is the relationship between power and reason, rather than any given political system. In *Chronique des idées perdues*,¹⁴ he explains:

Political power does not attract me at all. Being against power, seeking to 'check' its activity—in my view, these are traps. What interests me is power as potentiality, that which makes power what it is. Now, potentiality is, strictly speaking, 'one for all'. I enjoy actualising my potential—doing what I can—in order to understand and disclose the mechanisms of the imprisonment of power, here and there, when I have 'information'... Potentiality was once a word for freedom.¹⁵

Power for Châtelet, then, can be said to refer to a particular action that brings something into existence. Rather than describing an excess of State power, he points to an imprisonment of this power-as-potentiality that exists within the multitude that acts as 'one for all'. It is through the social nature of this power that one arrives at reason. In Deleuze's words, Châtelet shows that philosophy results from "a process of rationalisation" that emerges and is defined "each time

we establish human relations in some material form, in some group, in some multiplicity.” The implication of this relational and materialist understanding of rationality is as follows: “act, qua relation, is always political. Reason, as a process, is political.”¹⁶ No form of reason can exist above politics, operating according to universal principles that exist *a priori* their discovery by the human mind. Instead, reason is the production of a particular epistemological regime created through an ongoing interchange of power. The entirety of human thought is governed by politics. If Athens and the classical tradition—which continue to loom over contemporary society—are roots to which modernity is attached and from which it cannot free itself, then there is only one solution: to reclaim the potentiality of philosophy from the grips of the State and engage in *new* processes of rationalisation. This tactic boasts the possibility for creating a new politico-epistemological order.

This is the task undertaken by Châtelet in “Classical Greece, Reason, and the State.” Here, he seeks to liberate the Athenian City from the Platonic tradition, which has created a false equivalency between the *polis* and the modern State by virtue of the Platonic *logos*. Though the Greek City was *not* a proto-State, this is nonetheless how it has been treated in the history of philosophy. Demonstrating the inherent differences between the Greek City and the modern State, he shows that Athenian democracy was (using the ethnological work of Pierre Clastres as a conceptual point of reference¹⁷) a society *without* the State. Rather than operating according to the absolutism of sovereignty that is found in the State—which Châtelet treats as a byproduct of Platonism and its attempts to unify all knowledge claims under the singularity of the *logos*—Athenian democracy was constituted through power always remaining in ‘the middle’ of society, shared by all who participate in its administration. Moreover, he argues that Athens managed to avoid falling into the traps of accumulation and commodity-fetishism set by the capitalist system. This reconstruction of Athens is not provided to convince Châtelet’s readers that society ought to return to this model. To the contrary, he argues that societies must create their politics according to what they truly are. As such, it is up to

those living within a given milieu to determine how they can create their own society without the State that is at once diverse while also unified. What Athenian democracy reveals is that accomplishing such a task is possible.

“Classical Greece, Reason, and the State” provides a powerful and succinct statement on the themes mentioned above, which are major currents running throughout the entirety of Châtelet’s work. For these reasons, it can be thought of as a seminal text on poststructuralism and its relationship to the history of Western philosophy. Its absence in anglophone critical theory is palpable, revealing a lacuna in the reconstruction of the poststructuralist project that has begun by way of translating the works of its theorists into the English language. This lacuna is now being filled. Châtelet joins the ranks of philosophers like Gilbert Simondon as a giant of post-World War II French philosophy whose work was first published in English in the pages of *Parrhesia*. Though some readers may be familiar with his name, few are likely to be familiar with Châtelet’s work. Unfortunately, there are few resources for them to familiarise themselves; the absence of English translations of Châtelet’s work has also created a dearth of commentary and critical reflection on his work for those unable to speak French. This introduction will be of interest to those seeking to understand *why* it is so important that his work be translated for an English audience. Lastly, it provides preliminary remarks and reflections on Châtelet’s text that might serve as the catalyst for scholarship on his work in the anglophone academy. To provide such an introduction, I address two themes in Châtelet’s text: first, alterity and genealogy; and second, rationality, *logos* and the State.

ALTERITY AND GENEALOGY

Châtelet’s “La Grèce Classique, La Raison, L’État” was first published in an edited volume titled *En Marge, l’Occident et Ses «Autres»*.¹⁸ As its name (which translates to ‘On the Margin: The Occident, and its “Others”’) would suggest, the contributors to this book are concerned with questioning and problematising the history of Western thought and Occidental culture. Châtelet’s contribution is no exception.

His argument is hostile towards the reverence of ancient Greece and deference to its philosophy that is often found in work that examines this period, and within the history of philosophy at large. Taking issue with this deference, Châtelet's text performs a genealogy of the modern State that returns to ancient Greece. There, he finds a moment wherein the State first emerged, being born out of the Platonic tradition. Of course, Western philosophy did not *begin* with Plato. As such, his genealogy also reveals a form of politics that existed prior to the emergence of Platonism, that of Athenian democracy, which has its own associated political philosophy that can be accounted for through a genealogical inquiry.

The philosophical notion of genealogy is derived from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and would later be further developed into a total methodology for philosophical inquiry by Foucault. Châtelet does not explicitly state he is performing a genealogical analysis. Nonetheless, it is central to the text's methodology. It is alluded to in Châtelet's discussion of the 'temporal alterity' that is inherent to the relationship between classical Greece and the contemporary era. By this, he means that this relationship is constituted by the absence of the 'Other', understood as

some sort of ancestor, so far in the past that it cannot appear, among obvious differences, with features that are no less obvious than those manifest in the identity of the one and the other... This genealogical relation is understood as the return to a beginning or the mark of a decisive inflection; it is heard under the category of the Good—the occurrence of a reality or an idea that, because of its excellence, lasted, a happy change inscribed strongly in progress, a white stone laid down by divine Providence or human ingenuity—or the category of the Evil—'original sin', irreparable illegitimacy, or 'the beginning of the end'.¹⁹

In short, Greece constitutes a beginning of sorts for those fundamental concepts that have governed human thought within the confines of the philosophical tradition. This is also construed to the beginning of the social and political order

inherent to Occidental civilisation. In this sense, Greece is thought of as

a pre-formation of a present or future modernity, on the grounds that it is place of invention of the essential elements of the present-day reality, whether this modernity serves as an origin or, at the very least, as the chief moment of a becoming that is now being realised, whether its becoming is complete or has only just begun.²⁰

No doubt, Châtelet describes philosophy in Platonic terms, with its appeals to higher categories mentioned above: Good, Evil, and all their offshoots that would be articulated within Christianity by way of theology influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy. Given the continued salience of these concepts, it is understandable why society might turn to Plato as the birthplace of the Occidental worldview.

Châtelet's genealogy is ultimately a genealogy of State philosophy, and the variant of modernity it produces. For Châtelet, modernity is inflicted with a

totalitarian disease to manufacture, for the sake of the cause, unified fields where anything is put anyhow in correspondence with current affairs... in vehement and abstract juggleries, where the Master, the Slave, the Law, the State, the Angel, the Rebel rapidly swirl... This time, the mawkish negation of Hegel and the abstract refutation offered by Marx that sees in Hellenism the beginning of our misfortunes: precisely because it invented 'the tyranny of the *logos*' and the despotic State.²¹

His distaste for the tyranny of the *logos* inherent to modernity echoes Max Weber's account of the disenchantment of society under the conditions of modernity and the processes of rationalisation it heralded.²² Perhaps more importantly, though, it is worth noting Nietzsche's argument that "all things that live a long time gradually become so saturated with reason that their lineage out of unreason thus becomes implausible."²³ As Nietzsche shows, philosophical modes of reason are not truly natural, existing *a priori* according to a higher order.²⁴ This, in essence, is the goal of Châtelet's genealogy: what has come to be understood as 'Reason'

(not to be confused with the uncapitalised) is not endogenous to ancient Greek society. Therefore, a philosophical or political tradition that claims its origins in the history of Reason is inherently suspect. What a genealogy therefore calls into question is the supposed naturalness of the narrative told about the history of Western philosophy, and the preservation of its original form across time. As Châtelet argues, “the Greek world... is *designed* by histories of philosophy as the beginning.” The question that must be asked is: what “modernisations and adaptations imposed by historical discoveries”²⁵ were required for the realities of the contemporary moment to emerge from a past that is fundamentally different from the present?

RATIONALITY, LOGOS, AND THE STATE

Answering this question leads Châtelet to an inquiry into the nature and origins of Reason, or what in ancient Greece was referred to as *logos*. Deleuze notes that Châtelet “always defined himself as a rationalist.”²⁶ Though one might think this would make Châtelet an advocate for Reason rather than its opponent, it is because of his particular mode of rationalism, rooted in immanence and actualisation, that leads him to its rejection. Whereas Châtelet’s rationalism might ask questions like ‘whose reason’, ‘what form of reason’, or—best of all—‘what is responsible for bringing this form of reason into being’, Reason seeks to create a unifying discourse that is hostile to the pluralism inherent to immanent reason. Châtelet’s form of reason contains what Jean Borreil refers to as a ‘radical materiality’ that occurs through the actualisation of reason, “not as *logos*, but as the very movement of the act of reason.”²⁷ These two modes of rationalism are placed into conflict with one another in Châtelet’s text. The Reason of *logos* is that which is associated with State philosophy, which Châtelet refers to as “the tyranny of the *logos*.” As Châtelet shows, the philosophical premises for the State, despotic in nature, are found within the tyranny of the *logos* that was first established in Platonic thought.²⁸

Châtelet begins the conclusion to his book on Plato by declaring that the latter

had ‘invented’ philosophy. By this, he means that Plato “defines what culture will henceforth understand by *Reason*.” In doing so, “he draws the framework within which ‘Mediterranean-Occidental’ thought will build its values and develop its progress.”²⁹ Platonism does this by establishing a system of Reason that is *exclusive* and does not allow for competing knowledge claims. Instead, it seeks to subsume all philosophy and knowledge within its framework. As Jessica Moss notes, the concept of *logos* encapsulates a wide range of meanings but is most often translated into English as ‘Reason’ when discussing the works of Plato and Aristotle:³⁰ the two most prominent Greek figures found in the Western canon. Both make explicit reference to the existence of “true Reason”³¹ or “right Reason.”³² Moss explains the meaning of this phrase as follows: “the right *logos* is right Reason, and the virtuous person acts as Reason commands.”³³ As such, *logos* soon crosses over from the realm of epistemology into the realm of ethics, wherein having virtue is to act according to the rationality prescribed by this philosophical system.

Logos then crosses over from ethics into politics, and political philosophy. In the *Republic*, Plato establishes the *logos* as the criteria for governing; the “true” philosopher—that is, the one who meets the ideals of wisdom set by Platonic philosophy rather than that of the Sophists³⁴—is said to be the ideal ruler in the perfect city.³⁵ As Châtelet shows, the ideals of Platonic political philosophy would later be re-articulated within the framework of sovereignty and the Hegelian State³⁶ and its similar emphasis on the need for uniformity and its appeals to universality and universal reason.³⁷ The reasons for which Châtelet declares *logos* to be tyrannical become clear, and why a State built upon its foundations would inevitably be despotic. Under such a regime that governs human thought and action, anything that does not conform to the principles of Platonic philosophy are deemed irrational or illegal by virtue of its not conforming to this imagined ‘right Reason’. Accordingly, Châtelet argues elsewhere in an article titled “Sur le Concept du Violence (ou Non)” that violence becomes “a conceptual element which remains decisive, since thanks to it and to the alterity that it defines, the reality of Reason (or λόγος [*logos*]) is found to be manifest.”

Today, he says, philosophy is “designated as violence no matter what.”³⁸ Said otherwise, the unifying of human thought into a single mode of reason is not peaceful or apolitical. In fact, Châtelet argues that philosophy is fundamentally political, and has been political from the outset through its attempts to create unity out of multiplicity. Creating such an order is an inherently violent act.³⁹ As such, he asserts that philosophy’s project is fundamentally the following: to present this violence, to name, to reveal its aspects, to bring to light what is active, actual, but which gets lost every time one tries to talk about it (as witnessed in the naively misleading τέχνη [techne] of politicians and rhetoricians); to reveal Reason, antithetical, and its modalities, to reveal what is active (on top of this), but which is hidden and which only imposes itself when one *simply tries* to speak or to determine what speaking means.⁴⁰

Reason and violence are intimately related in Châtelet’s philosophy. They may even refer to the same process or force. This argument can be carried over to “Classical Greece, Reason, and the State,” and helps emphasise the necessity for challenging the Platonic foundations of the modern condition, expressed in the modern State. Though Châtelet does not explain the progression from Plato to Hegel in detail⁴¹—much like it is assumed that the latter’s model of the State describes contemporary society, rather than meticulously proving this is the case—he sees the violence of Platonic unification within Hegelianism as well. He rightfully does so, given Hegel’s assertion that the State

requires a universal centre... in which the various powers, foreign relations, defence, and their relevant finances etc. are united, a centre which not only directs [the whole] but also has the necessary power to assert itself and its resolutions and to keep the individual parts in [a state of] dependence on itself.⁴²

While the political dimensions of the *logos* may not be immediately apparent from the discussion thus far (though they are far more apparent when reading Plato’s work itself), their manifestation in the Hegelian State is unmistakable.

The function of Platonism, therefore, is exactly as Massumi says: to establish a tradition of thought that coincides with the ideals of the State. Problematising State philosophy and the tyranny of the *logos* on these grounds is the goal of Châtelet's text.

This goal is pursued in two ways. First, he challenges the purported necessity of the State. Pointing to Pierre Clastres' work,⁴³ Châtelet argues that ethnological anthropology has shown the existence of societies that lack the State, or anything that resembles it. Whereas such societies are conventionally thought of by the disciplines of ethnology and political science to be lacking something, Châtelet argues that nothing is missing from these societies. In reality, these societies do not lack their own discourse or refined thought, nor are they wanting of material goods. Rather than a lack, the difference between societies that live under the yoke of the State and those that do not is that the latter make a conscious "political" choice to "exclude the establishment of a central power embodied in an individual and exercised externally on the community."⁴⁴ Clastres' work, therefore, dismantles the assumption that humans *must* live under the yoke of the State-form, an assumption that situates the State as the point of departure for any social or political project. To the contrary, the State is contingent, rather than *a priori*. One must ask what causes it to emerge.

Second, Châtelet argues that Platonic philosophy is *not* actually indicative of ancient Greek society. In fact, Châtelet labels Platonism as "heterodox" in the context of Greek political ideology and argues that "the conception of *logos* expounded in the *Republic* was held by its contemporaries to be excessive, even aberrant."⁴⁵ We cannot, therefore, reduce ancient Greece, nor ancient Athens, to Platonic philosophy; this would betray the democratic ethos with which Athens is associated. Plato's critique of democracy, found in the *Republic*, is well known. Defining democracy as the "power of the mob," Plato argues that democracy inevitably leads to demagoguery, which in turn leads to the installation of a tyranny.⁴⁶ Such an argument, Châtelet argues, undoes the work done by Cleisthenes, Ephialtes and by Pericles (as attested to by Thucydides) to transform this mob rule into

the democratic system that is most commonly associated with ancient Athens: a society where the decisions of politics are made by an Assembly composed of all citizens, who are constituted as equals.⁴⁷ Such a society might then mirror the society without the State, whose existence and viability was proven by Clastres. However, such a society is absent from the canon of Greek philosophy, despite its importance in classical history. This is because, in Châtelet's words, "Hellenism is reduced to Platonism, and Platonism restricted to its academic pedagogy; this is the kind of reduction required to make the classical Greeks the inventors—like it or not—of tyrannical Reason and the State's Reason."⁴⁸ As such, a philosophy of Athenian democracy must be reconstructed, which Châtelet is able to do by way of his genealogical method and reference to the works of classical Greek historians.

Châtelet's reconstruction of Athenian democratic theory is not done with the goal of advocating its society as a viable alternative to the contemporary State. As Châtelet notes, "societies must invent their politics according to what they are."⁴⁹ As his text emphasises, contemporary Western societies cannot be characterised as the descendants of Athens. To try and emulate the model of Athenian democracy would be just as foolish as the political Platonism that Châtelet's chapter attacks. The purpose of reconstructing such a democratic philosophy is done only in furtherance of this attack, demonstrating exactly how the Athenian *polis* cannot be said to be the progenitor of sovereignty and the modern State. In fact, protections against the emergence of an apparatus of power that might produce something like sovereignty were woven into the fabric of Athenian democracy. Rather than adopting a true Athenian model of politics, the prescriptive dimension of Châtelet's text is instead to reject the linear-progressive histories that have made the State and its philosophical foundations appear natural, universal, and unavoidable. In doing so, societies are freed from thinking of themselves through the framework of the State and its apparatuses. Though he does not provide a particular image of what such a political order might look like, liberating our thought from the yoke of the State will allow for the creation of new societies without the State (even if they might not look like that which existed in ancient Athens).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When translating a work of philosophy, there is always the risk of the original meaning being inadvertently altered or weakened through the act of translation. This is especially true for theorists who were deliberate in their use of language, vocabulary, and grammar, playing with the mechanics of writing and the meaning of words to create multiple layers of signification beyond that which is found within a factual and literal reading of the text. Châtelet, like many of his contemporaries, is among those writers. In response to the difficulties that come with translating such an author, certain choices were necessary that play an impactful role in shaping the English text that was produced. It is worth discussing these choices broadly.

In translating this text, attempts have been made to retain the style of Châtelet's writing as much as possible. This has meant retaining his fondness for the use of dashes to create lengthy sentences composed of several clauses that are at times confusing, and certainly defy the norms of scholarly writing in the anglophone world. The reader is encouraged to allow themselves to engage with the complexity of these sentences and find the intricate and detailed arguments found within. Châtelet's grammar and style have been retained for this very reason: to ensure that no meaning is lost for the sake of clarity or to conform to the conventional aesthetic of 'proper' English writing.

As the above would suggest, this translation is conservative in making changes to Châtelet's text. The only substantial modifications that have been made to his writing are cases wherein the meaning of the original text is better preserved by not adopting a literal translation, or when a literal translation is simply not possible. Most important to note is that at times, a translation that does justice to the original text is simply not possible. "Classical Greece, Reason, and the State" is rife with clever wordplay, wherein Châtelet draws upon the dual meaning of words, or the phonetic similarities between two terms. Because such a practice draws on the specificities of the French language, his wordplay often cannot be

reproduced in English. In these instances, the original French term has been placed in brackets, followed by an endnote that explains the alteration in question. The reader is therefore encouraged to consult these notes, which give the translation a *metatextual* dimension. A term coined by Gérard Genette, metatextuality refers to a relationship that “unites a given text to another.”⁵⁰ In this case, the notes link the translation to the original text, allowing it to traverse the gulf separating the English and French languages. It does so by offering an account of the rhetoric employed in the original text. Other notes link the translation to other texts, pointing the reader to the source of arguments and other scholarly work addressed or alluded to by Châtelet, both explicitly and implicitly. What motivates the writing of these notes, as well as this introduction, is a desire to provide readers with the opportunity to read and appreciate Châtelet’s text fully, without any of its meaning or cleverness being lost. With these features preserved, the reader can experience the full power of Châtelet’s rejection of Platonism, whose implications are so strong that they in turn reverberate through the entirety of the history of Western thought, shaking all political theories that have been built on its foundation. They will also experience the ingenuity of Châtelet’s reconstruction of Athenian democratic theory, showing a Stateless society that was able to achieve greatness without an invocation of sovereignty or the capitalist system. Lastly, if the translation and the text itself are successful in their aims, then the reader will heed Châtelet’s call to begin imagining a mode of politics that can adequately address the issues of the contemporary era, in a way that is fundamentally democratic, and emerges out of a social and political theory that is free from the yoke of State philosophy and the constraints it has put on human thought.

FRANÇOIS CHÂTELET (25 April 1925 – 26 December 1985) was a French historian of philosophy and political philosopher. He served as one of the original members of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII – Vincennes along with Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault

and was one of the founders of the Collège International de Philosophie along with Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and others. His research explores the history of the totalizing universal rationality that he sees as underpinning both Western philosophy and the modern state. In doing so, he challenges the dominant, linear narratives that surround our understandings of the Western philosophical tradition. His works include *Périclès et son siècle* (Pericles and his Age), *La naissance de l'histoire: la formation de la pensée historique en Grèce* (The Birth of History: The Formation of Historical Thought in Greece), *Logos et praxis: recherches sur la signification théorique du marxisme* (Logos and Praxis: Research on the Theoretical Meaning of Marxism), books on Plato and Hegel, and his eight-volume history of philosophy. Châtelet's work appears here in English translation for the first time.

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NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–6.
2. Alessandra Campana, “From Pericles to Verdi (and Back Again): An Introduction to Gilles Deleuze’s Pericles and Verdi,” *The Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 713–14, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbi101>.
3. Gilles Deleuze, “Pericles and Verdi: The Philosophy of François Châtelet,” trans. Charles T. Wolfe, *The Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 720.
4. Michael Hardt, “Introduction: Hegel and the Foundations of Poststructuralism,” in *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xi.
5. Benoît Dillet, Iain MacKenzie, and Robert Porter, “Introduction,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, ed. Benoît Dillet, Iain MacKenzie, and Robert Porter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 4.
6. Simon Lumsden, “Poststructuralism and Modern European Philosophy,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, ed. Benoît Dillet, Iain MacKenzie, and Robert Porter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 24.
7. Michel Foucault, “Problematics,” in *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–84*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 418–21.
8. Hardt, “Hegel and the Foundations of Poststructuralism,” ix–x.
9. The exception to this would be Deleuze, who did engage in such a history of philosophy in his early career for these very reasons. See Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to a Harsh Critic,” in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6. However, Deleuze’s history of philosophy is incomplete, providing only a partial analysis of the Western tradition beginning with the Renaissance, apart from Duns Scotus (who occupies a central role in Deleuze’s philosophy), and a few brief remarks on Plato and Lucretius.
10. Campana, “Pericles to Verdi (and Back Again),” 714.
11. Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 4.
12. Campana, “From Pericles to Verdi (and Back Again),” 714; Also see François Châtelet, *Périclès et son siècle* (1960; repr., Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1990).
13. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 565n16. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 539n16 for this passage in the original French text.
14. In English, this title could be translated as “Chronicle of Lost Ideas.”
15. François Châtelet, *Chronique des idées perdues* (Paris: Stock, 1977), 218, quoted in Deleuze, “Pericles and Verdi,” 716.
16. Deleuze, “Pericles and Verdi,” 717.
17. See Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stein (New York: Zone Books, 1990).
18. François Châtelet, “La Grèce classique, la raison, l’État,” in *En Marge, l’Occident et Ses «Autres»* (Paris: Aubier Montagne, 1978), 197–213.
19. François Châtelet, “Classical Greece, Reason, and the State,” trans. Adam E. Foster, *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, no. 38 (2023): 22.
20. Châtelet, 23.

21. Châtelet, 24.
22. See Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 129–56.
23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, trans. Brittain Smith, vol. 5, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 8. For a discussion of how Weber's notion of disenchantment can be brought into conversation with Nietzschean philosophy, see Adam Foster, "Heretic Gnosis: Education, Children, and the Problem of Knowing Otherwise," in *Childhood, Science Fiction, and Pedagogy: Children Ex Machina*, ed. David W. Kupferman and Andrew Gibbons (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 172–74.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley, trans. Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 166–70.
25. Châtelet, "Classical Greece," 23.
26. Deleuze, "Pericles and Verdi," 716–17.
27. Jean Borreil, "François Châtelet, Ou Les Raisons De L'autre," *Le Cahier*, no. 8 (1989): 269–270. All translations my own.
28. Châtelet, "Classical Greece," 26.
29. François Châtelet, *Platon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 243. All translations my own. Reason has here been capitalised for the sake of consistency in discussing the term in the context of Platonic philosophy. It does not appear capitalised in the original French text.
30. Jessica Moss, "Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle: On the Meaning of 'Logos,'" *Phronesis* 59, no. 3 (2014): 182–83.
31. See Plato, "Theaetetus," in *Theaetetus and Sophist*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 201c–202c.
32. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.2, 1103b–1104a.
33. Moss, "Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle," 183–84.
34. See Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 491b–93 for an account of this dismissal of Sophist philosophy.
35. Plato, 428b–d; 502c–d.
36. Châtelet, "Classical Greece," 30.
37. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §270, §§275–276, §§278–281.
38. François Châtelet, "Remarques Sur Le Concept De Violence (Ou Non)," *Les Études Philosophiques*, no. 1 (1968): 31–32. All translations my own.
39. See Robert M. Cover, "Violence and the Word," *The Yale Law Journal* 95, no. 8 (1986): 1601–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/796468> for a discussion of interpretation as an act of violence by imposing a particular order upon the world.
40. Châtelet, "Concept De Violence," 34. Some punctuation has been changed from the original text for the sake of clarity. Specifically, dashes have been replaced with parentheses in the fourth line.
41. However, Châtelet does see a fundamental relationship between Platonism and Hegelianism. In his book on Hegel, he argues that every Hegelian must begin their philosophy with a reflection on Platonism, given that Platonism established the criteria for which something can definitively be thought of as "philosophy." See François Châtelet, *Hegel* (1968; repr., Paris: Editions du Seuil,

1994), 54.

42. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The German Constitution," in *Political Writings*, ed. Lawrence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12–13.

43. See Clastres, *Society Against the State*.

44. Châtelet, "Classical Greece," 25.

45. Châtelet, 27.

46. Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 562a–569c.

47. Châtelet, "Classical Greece," 27–28.

48. Châtelet, 28.

49. Châtelet, 37.

50. Gérard Genette, "Five Types of Transtextuality, among Which Hypertextuality," in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 4.

classical greece, reason, and the state

françois châtelet

translated by adam e. foster

Classical Greece has served as a constant reference in Occidental culture from the moment of its formation. Sufficiently dated and, in a certain way, strange—polytheism, slavery, pederasty, the weasels¹—it is also sufficiently contemporary—with an abundance of loans and relationships of kinship easily discoverable in the domains of thought and expression—thereby designing a particular type of *alterity*.

This alterity is alterity in time. Alterity in space (whether it's geographical or abstract)—which means the co-presence of the one and the other—can be defined

as *position*: one arises by rejecting, excluding, annihilating (either empirically or ideally) the other, using techniques of sharing and encapsulation with varying degrees of complexity whose practice, according to the ‘frontier’ of the North Americans after the conquest of ‘their’ continent, or the conception of the ‘living space’ defined by Ratzel’s² geopolitics and implemented by Hitler’s Germany, gives them significant designs.³ What works from this perspective, it seems, is a *strategic model*. To be sure, alterity in time returns to *one* present that is measured according to the *other*’s absence. It is absolutely absent because, in this case, there is no reference (there is no common space, and therefore no place to *differ*, but instead there is something like an *extra*). What is needed is a distance. In short, that which no longer exists [*révolu*]. The model at play is that of the *familial genealogy*: the other is some sort of ancestor, so far in the past that it cannot appear, among obvious differences, with features that are no less obvious than those manifest in the identity of the one and the other, the filiation between the one and the other or the anticipation of one by the other. This genealogical relation is understood as the return to a beginning or the mark of a decisive inflection; it is heard under the category of the Good—the occurrence of a reality or an idea that, because of its excellence, lasted, a happy change inscribed strongly in progress, a white stone⁴ laid down by divine Providence or human ingenuity—or the category of the Evil—‘original sin’, irreparable illegitimacy, or ‘the beginning of the end’.

Classical Greece has imposed itself on Occidental thought like an ever-present ancestor of the European reality for at least the past eight hundred years. Without a doubt, it shares this dangerous privilege with ancient Rome [*la Romanité*].⁵ On this point, more precisely and by way of an example, Pierre Vidal-Naquet notes the role of Greco-Roman history as a point of reference during the French Revolution in his remarkable preface to the French translations of the lectures, no less remarkable, given by Moses I. Finley on this theme: *Democracy Ancient and Modern*.⁶ Greek history appears like a mirror in which each present strives to rediscover, dressed like the ancient, its image and to spot, in this configuration, the traces of its actual existence. In this regard, viewing a European history in

comparison to Greek history would be highly revealing: we would see the complex effects of reference and capture at work such as the one that, recently, connected, in French historical research, the profound reworking [*remaniement*]⁷ caused by the deciphering of the Mycenaean ‘linear B’⁸ in the periodisation of the archaic Greek past and the contemporary speculations issued by Marx’s hypothesis on the existence of an ‘Asiatic mode of production;’⁹ it also tells of the transformation in the way the articulations between myth and reason are understood, which, after having been opposed to one another, are now complicit with each other, and in relation to the changes that have occurred, because of ethnology, because of the interpretation of mythic thought and the recent philosophical distrust of the tribunal of Reason.¹⁰

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How does Ancient Greece now intervene in the representation that the present day affords it? What type of ‘genealogical’ alterity defines it? The analysis that follows—which is a summary or index of research that must be deepened—sticks to those aspects that are, in essence, political, because it seems that they are, in an ideal context, the most important—for better or for worse. The academic response to these questions—if we can synthesise such a position—is largely indebted to the three grand philosophies of history that mark the previous century; it is either the direct expression of one of them, or a mixture which combines them according to the various proportions, with the modernisations and adaptations imposed by historical discoveries. In any case, the design is simple: Greece as a pre-formation of the present or future modernity, as a place of invention of the essential elements of the present reality, as the origin or, at the very least, as the chief moment of a becoming that is now being realised, whether its becoming is complete or has only just begun.

In this global perspective, this schema [*schéma*]¹¹ attributes to the Greeks the work of having been, at the same time and by the same movement, the initiators of the unifying rationality and the producers of the first formation of the State. This recognition of paternity is accompanied—and it must be because there is a linear and progressive history—by the definition of a lack. To speak briefly, this lack, in the Hegelian version of the schema, is the subjective principle—that will bring Christianity—without which Reason remains abstract and fails to constitute itself in Spirit [*Ésprit*],¹² without which the State, the lack of moral mediation, is incapable of willing history. In the positivist version, what was lacking in the Greeks is the positive mind [*esprit*],¹³ that of the sciences of observation: the defect, which has therefore prevented them from going beyond a metaphysical use of cognitive activity and a speculative conception of scientific research. As for the version of historical materialism, it ascribes to the servile mode of production, characterised by the weakness of productive forces and the non-dialectical status of the relations of production, the pre-eminence of idealist philosophy and the impossibility in which the City found itself resolving its contradictions, thus passing from youth to decadence.

The cradle or first act of modernity, the Greek world, from the Homeric archaism to the Aristotelian synthesis by way of Pythagoras, Thales, Hippocrates and Plato, is designed by philosophies of history as a beginning. It is also in this way that very recent texts take it, ones that are journalistic more than they are philosophical, which would not be worth talking about if they were not the symptom of this totalitarian disease to manufacture, for the sake of the cause, unified fields where anything is put anyhow in correspondence with current affairs [*actualité*]¹⁴ in vehement and abstract juggleries, where the Master, the Slave, the Law, the State, the Angel, the Rebel rapidly swirl [*tourbillonnent*]¹⁵... This time, the mawkish negation of Hegel and the abstract refutation offered by Marx that sees in Hellenism the beginning of our misfortunes: precisely because it invented ‘the tyranny of the logos’ and the despotic State.¹⁶

However, it turns out that the central question of the State today has been posed

in the original and pertinent way, also recent, of Pierre Clastres.¹⁷ Drawing on ethnological resources, he establishes that ‘savage’ societies, deeply cohesive and organised, have adopted provisions that exclude the establishment of a central power embodied in an individual and exercised externally on the community. The leader—there is always a man so chosen—has the task of *expressing* the *consensus* and of reminding everyone of its foundation: he doesn’t command; everything is done, up to and including the ordinance of war, so that he cannot detach himself from society to impose his will. These are societies *without* the State or anything that looks like it. This status is commonly understood by ethnology and political science as a lack (or as an archaism). In truth, they lack nothing: no discourse, no refined thought, no goods to consume [*consommer*] or devour [*consumer*]¹⁸—the association usually established between primitive economy and destitution being proven erroneous: if they gave up accumulation and progress, if they limited the time dedicated to work, it’s not because of the poverty of their thought and technique, nor their absorption in a naturalistic religiosity nor the spontaneity originating from their logic, it’s according to a ‘political’ choice: the refusal of centralised power monopolised by an individual or by a group.

In this way, Pierre Clastres highlights that, decisively, such a power is not needed by the normal social order; it is not inevitable that the *consensus* will divest itself for the benefit of such an authority. He is thus led to oppose broadly [*à opposer globalement*]¹⁹ what constitutes two fundamental choices: with the State/without the State. However, as significant as this opposition is, it presupposes, still, that all centralised authority separates itself from society and becomes a State; a brutal alterity is thus at work. The hypothesis that is proposed here is that it’s appropriate, in this case, to be wary of notions of otherness, exclusion, or filiation. And, as the beginning of proof (to be established more precisely), can we not refer to this historical formation that was the Greek City, specifically under the conditions of Athenian democracy at the time of Pericles—around 460 to 430? *The democratic City is not a State, in the modern sense of the term*—a modernity dating back to the 17th century; the concurrence established between the appearance of this ‘first

State’ and the invention of tyrannical Reason is false—and all the more so because it is a surprising ignorance to reduce Greek rationality to the only model espoused by Plato in *The Republic*. In short, the project of this communication is to reveal the simplistic character inherited from the philosophies of history and their futile negation, according to which the classical Greeks alone would be the initiators—for the Good or for the Bad²⁰ of humanity depending on the interpretation—of the transcendental Reason of the despotic State. And, suddenly, to suggest that the despotism of the contemporary scholarly State is not the affair of ideology, but of power.

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As for the establishment of the status [*statut*]²¹ and the nature of the ‘right philosophy’, the Platonic text is not stingy with arguments or details. It fights, with all the forces of irony, the evil certainties of public opinion; it demonstrates the outrageous processes of ‘tradespeople’ who, with a strong know-how, claim a universal competency; it puts poets and soothsayers back in their place as imitators; it ferociously refutes the rhetoricians and sophists who pretend to legislate and govern while they are good at filling the courtroom with their well-constructed speeches; it denounces political men who pretend to confuse the power of persuasion with the science of command. But it is an adversary with whom, it seems, it does not measure up. Athenian democracy doesn’t just produce ‘tradesman’, professors, artists and demagogues: it also creates [*suscité*]²² historians.

Now, in this conjecture, the fact of wanting to be a historian—as evident by the ‘introduction’ to Herodotus’ *History* and the celebrated §22 of the first book of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*—means that we take a position on the problem of the use that should be made of rational discourse, or, what we now

call the relationship between theory and practice. This omission is surprising. It is as if philosophy would prefer not to approach the ‘solution’ of the historian; or, more accurately, as if it would prefer to treat it from a bias: either by referring the becoming of societies to the cosmological field, or by refuting historical analysis through the discredit he casts on those with whom it concerns itself. Thucydides is ignored, but Pericles is quoted many times: always in scornful terms and with considerations that belong more to our current electoral campaigns than political analysis.

In truth, this opens a debate of extreme importance. To understand it, one must accept the disturbing idea that political Platonism is a heterodox aspect of Greek political ideology, and the conception of *logos* expounded in the *Republic* was held by its contemporaries to be excessive, even aberrant. The precautions Plato took in his demonstration, those which surrounded Aristotle when he proclaims himself a ‘Platonist’, are revelatory of the fact there are other exercises of this new rationality that are much more normal and that, at any rate, are in use: those of physicists and medical doctors, for example; but also—more interestingly in our case—those which underline political practices and the strategic leaders of Athenian democracy grouped around Pericles. In this exercise, Thucydides’ narrative forms a complete account, one that defines a program for the greatness of Athens and the pacification of Greece. The *logos* that is therefore acting doesn’t presuppose a world of transcendent Ideas, nor a supreme distance judging omnitemporally without any appeal to the truth of words and morality of conduct. What is at work [*à l’œuvre*],²³ is the *noûs*, the understanding that reflects and judges, and is constantly immanent in practice.

When Plato condemns democracy, he ignores this dimension of Athenian politics. He takes for granted that at the origin of the democratic ‘temperament’, there lies and can only ever be—the drive [*l’entraînement*]²⁴ of interests and passions and false imagination. In the deduction of political regimes seen in book VIII the *Republic*, he introduces a cosmic necessity that inevitably leads democracy—defined as ‘power of the common people, or, the masses [*foule*]²⁵ (*oi polloi*)—to

demagogy whose excesses will soon provoke the installation of tyranny. In doing so, he completely cancels the effort made—and is successful in part, if we believe Thucydides—by Cleisthenes, by Ephialtes and by Pericles to change the nature of democracy, to transform this ‘power of the masses’ into a regime organised around principles where decisions are made (and enforced by designated magistrates) by an Assembly comprised of all citizens, rich and poor, discussing in common and voting after the statements of pros and cons. In a similar *politeia*, power is no longer the prerogative²⁶ of any fraction of the community: it is ‘in the middle’. In the middle of Society. As is immanent in this one understanding that calculates and works within the debates of the Assembly.²⁷

This use of the ‘new discourse’— that speaks in prose and ‘prosaically’ of social human existence in its sensible [*sensible*]²⁸ status and the sequence of its limited causality—is different not only from its use by the masters of rhetoric (who, basically, for the first time may be able to define the idea of ‘theoretical practice’ or institute the discourse as the place of conflict and resolution), but also from that which determines philosophy, that establishes *logos* as the ultimate tribunal. This use seems to have even been politically dominant. So, if it is already an unacceptable simplification to oppose globally the archaism of mythic thought—Dionysian supposition, desirous, consensual, ‘popular’—to rational thought—Apollonian, reflective, authoritarian, elitist—(a mistake that did not reach Nietzsche), it is as unfortunate as hearing the Greek rationality under the slogan of the didactic Platonism of the *Republic*. The Aristotelean critique seen in the *Politics* that refers to the civic tradition and wants to give it a firmer foundation, is significative of its strong design: the Ideas constitute a necessary recourse—the true discourse (‘logic’) says that Being (which is ‘ontological’)— but it is exorbitant to understand Ideas as separate from one another—there is no world other than this world in front of us.

Hellenism reduced to Platonism, and Platonism restricted to its academic pedagogy; this is the kind of reduction required to make the classical Greeks the inventors—like it or not—of tyrannical Reason and the State’s Reason.

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The same kind of approximative thinking governs the analysis that, cheerfully mixing heteroclitite considerations on the Law, the Mastery, the Speech, the State, sees in the City the first link in the chain of domination. In Hegelian and Freudian texts, Greek history is solicited in the most fanciful way for facilitating variations on the incurable servitude of humanity in the grip of politics. The *Polis*—if we judge, in particular, by the example of the Athenian *polity*, though an examination of the Spartan Constitution would not yield different results, it seems—is not a State, or at least not as we understand them today. And this isn't due to the diversity of modes of production, nor demographic or territorial data, or the principles that would be present here—all elements that, without any doubt, entered historically through the historical constitution of difference, but do not explain this entrance like the cause-reason explains its effects in the philosophies of history. This is because *difference is in the very form of politics itself*.

This difference is drawn on the background of an extrinsic resemblance: existence, in the two 'regimes', of a central decision-making power applied to a fiercely diversified society regarding the division of labour, including 'economic' inequalities and practicing the rules of exchange of the merchant civilisation. However, the analogy stops here: in the Greek City, particularly Athens, power remains immanently to Society, while the modern State, defined as sovereignty, is transcendent to it. Everything even happens as if the Athenians, educated by the tyranny they had to endure and the neighbourhood [*voisinage*]²⁹ of barbarian Empires, had endeavoured to ward off, by multiple provisions, the risk of a separation between a fraction of citizens holding the decision and the community [*collectivité*]³⁰ promising obedience. We rely here on five fundamental differences. This analysis supposes—which seems hardly deniable if one sticks to description

alone and brackets the political consequences Hegel draws from it—the relevance of the overall picture [*tableau*]³¹ drawn of the modern State in the *Principles of the Philosophy of Law* a century and a half ago.³² Each of these differences, without a doubt, would merit a thorough study, one that would introduce the nuances, but wouldn't compromise the general view proposed. Because it is a question here, above all else, of discarding simplifications that are common and highly damaging, both theoretically and politically.

1. Hegel shows that the State as it should be known is characterised, amongst others, firstly, as a sovereign principle and second, as the realisation of reason. This double characterisation requires that the place of sovereignty, unique by definition, be occupied, in order to be objective, by an empirical individual holding, both formally and in action, the power of decision without appeal, once it has been recognised as the incarnation of sovereignty. On the other hand, he rallies behind the idea of a monarchy that is hereditary (and also constitutional, cf. below § 3). We have not changed much: the tendency of contemporary States is, evidently, more and more monarchical, whether they are one party states, investing in a supreme leader, or democracies rallying ever more to the diverse varieties of presidential regimes. The planning rationality and the requirements of the nuclear strategy make this unification necessary. We see in § 5 how democratic Athens is forearmed against the risk of *apparatuses* [*appareils*]³³ of power. It must be emphasised that, as of now, it has been concerned with multiple ways of keeping the place of the 'sovereign' command free—the quotation marks here noting that the Greeks did not possess a conception of sovereignty like that which is attached to the modern State, which is instead an outcome of the Christian worldview. One of the most significant of these processes is that which governs the designation of the *prytanean epistatēs*, the magistrate who sits at the highest level of the Popular Assembly and possesses the seals of the City [*Ville*]:³⁴ he is chosen at random each morning and for that day only, avoiding the risk of having his head turned by this precarious honour that envies the Gods!

2. By the same token, the democratic *politeia* is applied to limiting in time the

delegation of power and to proscribe any representative system. The reshaping of civic space operated by the reform of Cleisthenes, which is the origin of the organisation of the *deme* (the ‘municipalities’) and the division [*découpage*] of the population into ten tribes, aims to remove any screen between the assembly of citizens, each of them being characterised by their *autarkeia* (the disposition of the self) and the central power, assured by the totality of the citizens, united into a single body this time within the *Ekklēsia* (the Assembly of the people)—the tribunal of Heliaia or the *Boule* (the five-hundred-member council that deals with day to day business during the intervals between meetings of the people’s Assembly), for example—they are *parts* of it, not its *representation*; those who sit there aren’t delegates, but completely temporary officers. In the eyes of the Athenians, the procedure of the draw, widely used as long as the new civic figure of *ten* is always respected, guaranteeing the presence of each tribe in any college, is the most democratic. This signified, of course, the trust that should be shown to the tutelary gods and the hope that ‘they will keep the balance equal’. But this means above all that democracy believes in the judgement of its ‘basic organism’: the assembly of the *deme* whose task is to inscribe on the register of citizens the young people of its jurisdiction whom it deems fit to wage war for the City and to devote itself to its management. In such an assembly, we know each other well, to live together constantly, and a partisan decision is almost impossible. It is there that *consensus* is exercised, which is reflected in the *Ekklēsia*. And whatever mistakes may have been committed by the latter—which Plato is pleased to report, not without reason—we are far from the representative systems that, in contemporary States, suppose that *consensus*, incapable of expressing itself by itself, must pass through the intermediary of a representation that thinks and wants on its behalf—the technique of expression by the Party being even more deceptive than the electoral procedure.

3. When Herodotus, before describing the great clash between the Greeks and the Persians, draws up a comparative table of the forces present, he signals as a decisive element likely to compensate for the numerical inferiority of the

former which distinguishes the Greek warrior from the barbarian, for the latter obeys a master of flesh and blood, while the former is free with no master other than the law. Is the law, then, not the transcendence we say does not exist in the City? Here again the example of Athens allows us to answer that this is not the case. The refusal of a conception of transcendental law is even what strongly marks democratic reform. The *politeia* poses, in part, a certain number of general principles that globally define the status of citizenship: equality before the tribunals, the possibility for any citizen to take legal action against any other, and the freedom of the disposition of the self, among others. Aside from its principles, the popular will decides a certain number of provisions regarding the organisation of the City, the Army and the Navy, provisions that can be amended more or less profoundly so long as no attack is made on the principles. So, little by little, such a tribunal, bequeathed by tradition, like the Areopagus, will see its prerogatives become more and more symbolic without ever being eliminated. For the rest—that is to say, the historical essence—the *Ekklēsia* proceeds by decrees, and its will manifests itself in the designation of the magistrates who are charged with governing the City. The *politeia* is in no way a constitution in the modern sense of the term, whose thoroughness, sacredness, and durability are inherited from canon law.³⁵ The system of laws does not constitute a transcendent network to society; formed by a set of statements coordinated around simple principles, the political order is immanent to Society. Everything happens as if legislation has, as its goal, establishing each meeting of the Assembly of the People as a re-foundation and strengthening of the *consensus*, which is also assured by the multiple civic ceremonies where the citizens, both rich and poor, see themselves performing, both tragically and satirically, in dramas both near and far from the community, that evoke problems posed to it.

4. Two provisions particularly require attention. One of them—the *graphē paranomōn* or ‘trial for illegality’³⁶—aims to avoid that which the *Ekklēsia* takes, by proposal of a citizen, a decree that contradicts the principles which govern the City: every citizen, therefore, is in their rights to charge [*attaquer*]³⁷ before

the tribunal whoever successfully had the text approved, who is then condemned to a heavy sentence and the decree is annulled. The other permits any member of the civic body to bring a magistrate to justice by removing them from office, regardless of their rank, for bad or fraudulent management. This adventure arrives, as we know, to Thucydides the historian, who was convicted of military incompetence, had to go into exile; Pericles himself was the victim of this and was forced to pay a fine and reimburse, out of his own property, the deficit, for not being able to justify a ‘gap’ [*trou*]³⁸ in the budget for which he was responsible. What is remarkable is that these two provisions presuppose that the political—whether it is legislation or government—are the affairs of everyone. Holding a public office or being approved by the Assembly doesn’t protect the citizen, like the private person, from the obligation to justify their political actions. More precisely, the individual who takes on political responsibilities cannot claim there is a split between his private being and his public being. For failing as a strategist, Thucydides loses his property and his status as a citizen: he is condemned to exile. This is a constant rule that we rediscover in modern nations during periods of grave trouble and of revolution. We would be tempted, suddenly, to bring this situation closer to the body of citizens promoted by J.J. Rousseau when he counts on the constantly renewed exercise of the general will³⁹—a kind of continuous creation—to reinforce the cohesion of society, or that which Jean-Paul Sartre attributes to the “Group-in-Fusion.”⁴⁰

5. Here, lastly, is the most important aspect which, itself, suffices to establish that the Greek City and the modern State cannot be thought of according to the same categories. Hegel has cogently shown that what characterises the modernity of the State is the existence of a body of functionaries, recruited according to their competence, responsible for the technique of government and ‘specialists of the Universal’. The passage of time has not proven him wrong: this dimension has increased exponentially in the contemporary era and it is a banality to note (and to complain of) the technocratic hypertrophy of contemporary societies [*sociétés actuelles*].⁴¹ But there is nothing like it in the City. It even seems that the *politeia* is

made in such a way that not only the risks of personal power are prevented, but also of the formation of a political class whose profession is the government. The task of our functionaries is assured by the magistrates. In Athens and many other cities, the magistracies are collegial and precarious: the conditions of renewal for the same post are very strict and don't exceed two or three years;⁴² the drawing of lots for magistrates who do not require any special knowledge compensates in part for the danger represented by the combinations that can be introduced during electoral processes; democracy reigns "at the base" in campaigns and neighborhoods to merit a good circulation of political information. In short, that which Plato denounces as 'licentiousness' and as 'incompetence' aims to prevent the despotism of groups who, strong through their knowledge, seize central power and become permanent governments, the apparatuses.

It is in this sense that we must understand the violent polemic begun by Aristotle against the Plato of *The Republic*. The Kallipolis is the prefiguration of the technobureaucratic society. But by the very admission of its inventor, it remains an ideal. This is the ideal that Aristotle, a strong supporter of the civic tradition, fights with vigour: he considers it contradictory to the end of the City which is the *Eu zein* (the dignified life of man) and the portrait of the citizen drawn in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the opposite of this man with hierarchical souls and situated hierarchically in the social whole built by Plato. And it must be admitted that political practice of the City finds its expression in the texts of Gorgias, Thucydides, Isocrates and Aristotle and not in the Platonic heterodoxy.

In the *polis*, the centralisation of power does not take the form of the State, nor does it accompany an institution of transcendence, or the stratification of government apparatuses occupied permanently by specialised citizens. The social division of work—specifically: the fact that society is formed by different articulated professions involving relations of plus or minus, more or less rich, more or less skilled at a particular trade or in speech and writing, more or less 'recognised'—this doesn't translate mechanically by a formal principle of organisation implied in the separation of the State and the society, of a class of governors [*gouvernants*]⁴³

and a mass of governed, the segregation of the dominant and the dominated. It would be unwise to suppose that the old civic classification operated by Solon assigning the highest magistrative positions to the richest citizens and excluding the poorest,⁴⁴ lost all its effect after the reform of Cleisthenes. But the democratic *politeia* states its objective is precisely to conjure global, political consequences in this situation: it fights, through a series of institutional dispositifs, against the movement of separation at the locus of the political order that tends to institute the seriousness of the hierarchical ‘economic’ society and the market civilisation. *Autarkeia*, *isonomia*, and *isegoria*⁴⁵ intervene as social practices that must be permitted to remedy the inequalities of wealth—at least during the prosperous period of democracy.

Without a doubt there is a context that makes this usage of politics possible. The determining element is the fact that the Greeks ignored what we now call *capitalism*. If there is an exploitation of the labour of slaves and also that of the small farmers [*petits paysans*]⁴⁶ and manual labourers [*manouvriers*]⁴⁷, if there is commercial profit, in order to ensure leisure for the property owners and the rich, and guarantee them an abundant uptake, and at the same time as enjoyment [*jouissance*],⁴⁸ notoriety. Never is a system of capital formed. Improvement to the techniques of ‘production’ are meant less to increase the quantity of goods than it is to save time. Labour, which is natural, does not ever leave nature and, as a result, doesn’t create anything—and especially not history. Therefore, it is unthinkable that what is natural in society—and which causes inequalities (of fortune, of talent, of chance)—can be abolished. That which is at the disposition of men, is *praxis*, the most serious form of which is political activity: this has the capacity to change relationships between persons. It is therefore important to choose the *politeia* that has the best chance of realising for each and every citizen a happy life worthy of a man. Sparta’s oligarchic constitution, strict and stable, is content to reflect and make effective the inequalities given in the territory of Lacedaemon; the Platonic project of the *Republic* reinforces and formalises the inequality produced by the cosmic order in order to impose a irreproachable morality; the democratic

regime of Pericles attempted to invent a political organisation that compensates for natural inequalities without doing violence to nature, with the goal of assuring the maximum cohesion of the City—a pledge of its own *autarkeia*—thanks to the *autarkeia* of every member of the civic body.

The second element of this context is obviously slavery. However, here again we must beware of anachronisms and precisely interrogate the existing relationship between the ‘servile mode of production’ and democratic power and more generally the status of the City.⁴⁹ For it is too often that we present the ‘Greek miracle’ as having as its counterpart, for a necessary setback, the scandal of slavery, the monstrous harshness of the latter explaining the success of the former, as if the accumulation provided by slave labour was needed to promote the freedom of the citizens.

This is to reason in modern terms. It’s true that, in Athens, slaves ensured the essential subsistence of the population of Attica and thus gave the citizens the leisure without which they could not so easily become warriors, magistrates, geometers, poets or navigators. But they only play a small part, it seems, in the surplus production thanks to which it is economically possible for democracy to function: payment of the magistrates, the financing of military equipment and expeditions, sumptuary expenditures intended to vivify the community, prestige policies aimed at subjugating men and placating the gods... which allows the City to be a sort of ‘public limited company [*société anonyme*]⁵⁰ whose citizens are stakeholders’, according to the excessive and provocative expression of Gustave Glotz⁵¹, is the considerable income brought in by the Empire, into which the Attico-Delian line⁵² is transformed and, also, the taxes levied on the transit of goods through the ports of Athens.

It cannot therefore be considered that there is a link necessity between the ‘servile mode of production’ and the political system of the City, a central power immanent in the Society—slavery and transcendental power go well together, as evidenced by a number of historical events. The *polis* as political order—and,

especially, Athenian democracy—results in a choice or a collective affirmation that at the same time corresponds to a certain historical given. That there is a given means that there is nature—that is to say by good or bad luck, by chance, from power relations, by causality; as for the affirmation, it amounts to asking, when it comes to Periclean democracy, if there is a political organisation capable of remedying this ‘disorder’ through a type of power that compensates for the relations of domination by guaranteeing the exercise of the *autarkeia*. It is probably from this perspective that one must understand the Aristotelian theory of slavery, which has so often scandalised the moderns. This theory has nothing to do with any dialectic of the Master and the Slave—nor does the latter, as its commonly used today, have anything in common with the works of Hegel, when we read them ‘in their place’ in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The goal of Aristotle is to establish—against the proponents of the idea that politics is founded on violence—that those, in the City, are absolutely devoid of *autarkeia*—the slaves—do not belong to the political order, but the natural order. Because in his eyes, politics is the practical discipline of the free disposition of the self: in this domain, it is absurd (and shameful) to think that there can be men who are permanently subjugated by virtue of legislation. This is a new argument against tyranny, against regimes of ‘excessive’ oligarchy and... against the Platonic *Republic*.

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It is therefore a fable, and a bad one at that, that presents the City as the first form of the State. If the *polis* gives the example of an ‘abstract’ central power, the function of politics is to prevent the creation of a *Sovereign*, in the sense that modern theories and practices give this term. Should we consider the City as a model, then? That would be childish. Societies must invent their politics according to what they are. Ours seem to be riveted to the State and its apparatuses: they seem

unable to think of themselves outside of this framework, accepting the thousand-and-one reasons peddled by the powers—the breadth [*étendue*]⁵³ of nations and the mass of their population, technology, science, security, progress. Because, of course, the State—like the capitalist *system*, like the socialist *system*—is the only way to solve the problems that would not arise... if there was no State. The Greek City does not provide any lessons: it simply says that a society can want [*vouloir*]⁵⁴ a ‘comfortable’ existence without falling into the trap of accumulation, it can be mercantile without getting caught up in commodity-fetishism; it says that work comes from nature and not from culture, and that reason, in its simple use, is not a tribunal but the means of action. But it is so fundamentally *other* that it doesn’t tell us how to dispel our contemporary din; and its willingness to abstain from all prophetism makes it mute as to our history and our stories. It is up to us to try and determine what a society that is both *united* and *diverse* could look like today, whose organisation doesn’t proceed from either the order of the despot nor the transcendence of the sovereign: a democratic society without the State.⁵⁵

FRANÇOIS CHÂTELET (25 April 1925 – 26 December 1985) was a French historian of philosophy and political philosopher. He served as one of the original members of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII – Vincennes along with Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, and was one of the founders of the Collège International de Philosophie along with Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and others. His research explores the history of the universal rationality that underpins both Western philosophy and the modern state. In doing so, he challenges the dominant, linear narratives that surround our understandings of the Western philosophical tradition. His works include *Périclès et son siècle* (Pericles and his Age), *La naissance de l’histoire: la formation de la pensée historique en Grèce* (The Birth of History: The Formation of Historical

Thought in Greece), *Logos et praxis: recherches sur la signification théorique du marxisme* (Logos and Praxis: Research on the Theoretical Meaning of Marxism), *Platon* (Plato), *Hegel*, and his eight-volume history of philosophy. Châtelet's work appears here in English translation for the first time.

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NOTES

1. Translator's note: In Ancient Greece, weasels were considered a bad omen, akin to the black cat in contemporary western culture.
2. Translator's note: That is, German political geographer Friedrich Ratzel.
3. Cf. Jean-Pierre Faye, *Langages Totalitaires*, Paris, Hermann, 1972; Maurice Ronai and Michel Korinman, "Les Idéologies du Territoire" ["The Ideologies of Territory"] and "Le Modèle Blanc" ["The Blank Model"] in *Histoire des Idéologies*, [*The History of Ideologies*] Hachette, Paris, 1978.
4. Translator's note: During antiquity, jurors were given a white and black stone through which they would communicate their judgment of innocence or guilt concerning a defendant.
5. Translator's note: The French term, "la Romanité" lacks a proper equivalent in English. Its literal translation, Romanity, is sometimes used to refer to Roman Catholicism. Romanité in French does not carry this connotation. Instead, it refers to the character and nature of ancient Rome.
6. Translator's note: See Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "The Tradition of Greek Democracy," *Thesis Eleven* 60, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 61–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07255136000600000006> for a slightly abridged translation of this text.
7. Translator's note: The French term 'remaniement' could be translated as 'reshuffling'. It refers to a modification in the ordering and organisation of a thing's constituent elements. It is most often used in the context of government and politics; a cabinet shuffle would be the most notable example. I have opted to instead use the word 'reworking' for two reasons. Firstly, Châtelet's metaphor does not translate to English perfectly. As the example of the cabinet shuffle demonstrates, English political discourse does not use the term reshuffling in the way that French political discourse uses the term remaniement. Moreover, what Châtelet describes is absolutely a *reshuffling* rather than a shuffling, or a *reworking* rather than the original working. There is a return inherent to what is described. Secondly, the term reworking better describes the procedures at play in this passage, as the words shuffling and reshuffling lack the immediate political resonance in the English language that is found in the original French text.
8. Translator's note: Linear B is a script of Mycenaean Greek that emerged, at the latest, during the end of the 15th century BCE. It would not be successfully translated until 1952 CE. See John Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
9. Translator's note: In Marxist thought, the Asiatic mode of production refers to a particular pre-capitalist mode of production associated with a despotic state, and the total ownership of property by the monarch. See Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978); and Karl Marx, "The Grundrisse," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978).
10. Translator's note: The tribunal of reason is a juridical metaphor used by Immanuel Kant in his first critique. There, he issues "a call to reason ... to set up a tribunal that will make reason secure in its rightful claims and will dismiss all baseless pretensions, not by fiat but in accordance with reason's eternal and immutable laws. This tribunal is none other than the critique of reason itself: the *critique of pure reason*." See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. James W. Ellington, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 8; In this view, critique entails competing knowledge claims being brought before the tribunal of reason where they are subjected to scrutiny and judgment according to the principles of rationality that govern

human thought with the authority of a code of law. For a further analysis of the tribunal of reason, see Sofie Møller, “The Tribunal of Reason,” in *Kant’s Tribunal of Reason: Legal Metaphor and Normativity in the Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020);

Châtelet’s reference to “the recent philosophical distrust of the tribunal of Reason” might suggest that Reason (which Châtelet notably capitalises) be equated with the Occidental philosophical tradition, or—in Brian Massumi’s words—a form of “representational thinking that has dominated Western metaphysics since Plato, but has suffered an at least momentary setback during the last quarter century at the hands of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and poststructuralist theory generally.” See Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 4. Though Kant is not named directly as the target of this attack, he undoubtedly is part of this tradition. Kant is alluded to as such when Gilles Deleuze refers to him as an ‘enemy’ in relation to his own critical project (in which he also references the ‘tribunal of Reason’). See Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to a Harsh Critic,” in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6. Interpreting Châtelet’s reference to recent philosophical distrust towards the tribunal as the poststructuralist resistant to State philosophy would be in line with the end result of the critique-as-tribunal: the erasure of epistemological pluralism and the reduction to a single mode of reason. Critique of Pure Reason, ed. James W. Ellington, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996

11. Translator’s note: Given his earlier critique of Kant’s tribunal of reason, and his discussion of Reason in this paragraph, it is tempting to interpret Châtelet’s use of the term ‘schéma’ here as an equivalent to the Kantian schema. In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant uses the term ‘schema’ to refer to the means by which a sensible object (which is not necessarily material) is “subsumed” under a concept that allows for its understanding. See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 209–19; and Nicholas F. Stang, “Kant’s Schematism of the Categories: An Interpretation and Defence,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 1 (2023): 30–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12761> However, Kant’s schema is generally translated into French as ‘schème’ rather than ‘schéma’, with the latter referring to something akin to a schematic or blueprint. This would suggest that Châtelet is not here invoking the Kantian subject. Nonetheless, there are valid reasons for which the reader might infer a connection to Kantian philosophy.

12. Translator’s note: That is, the Hegelian notion of the ‘geist’.

13. Translator’s note: The word ‘esprit’ in French is used to refer to the conscious mind as well as to the spirit. Given the nature of positivist philosophy, it is likely that Châtelet is here referring to a certain intellectual mindset that engages in certain epistemological practices.

14. Translator’s note: The French term ‘actualité’ has two meanings here. First, it can refer to a media text on current events, akin to the English term ‘news item’. Reference to ‘l’actualité’ or ‘the actuality’ specifically (which is how it appears in Châtelet’s text) can refer to either an individual news item or the entirety of what we would call ‘the news’. The term can also refer to the philosophy of actuality, understood as the opposite of virtuality and the realisation of potentiality. As Gilles Deleuze argues, the actualisation of potentiality is a major theme across Châtelet’s work. See Gilles Deleuze, “Pericles and Verdi: The Philosophy of François Châtelet,” trans. Charles T. Wolfe, *The Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 716–17. Both meanings of the term are meant by ‘actualité’ in this passage. It follows that Châtelet be referring to current affairs given his previous reference to journalistic works. However, the dynamic of actualising a potential within ancient Greece is also present in Châtelet’s argument, which seeks to activate

other actualities within Greece, rather than say that the modernist interpretation of Greece is false.

15. Translator's note: The French term 'tourbillonnent' carries a connotation of the word 'tourbillon', which often is used to refer to a whirlwind but can refer to any rapid and circular movement. Something is lost in translation in using the word 'swirl', as would be true for other possible translations like 'whirl' and 'circle'; they lack the connotation of force that is found in this movement. As such, the word rapidly has been added, which is missing from the original French. The reader should therefore imagine the Master, the Slave, the Law, the State, the Angel, the Rebel spinning in a whirlwind alongside popular discourse on current events.

16. It must be emphasised, concerning both Hegelian philosophies of history and Marxist analyses of history, that the texts, in their own development, often contradict the massive meaning their authors attribute to them in the overall demonstration. The pages devoted to the Greek *Sittlichkeit* [that is, the German term for morality] denies the stiffness of the Hegelian theory of Art-Religion-Philosophy relations; likewise, the 8th section of *Capital, Volume 1* contradicts the simplistic dialectical scheme of productive forces/productive relations.

17. *Society Against the State*; also by the same author, the two articles published in volumes 1 and 2 of the journal 'Libre'.

18. Translator's note: Both italicised terms can be translated as 'consumed', though they refer to two different senses of the word. There are, however, no other words that come as close in terms of accuracy. As such, the terms I've used are far from adequate representations of Châtelet's argument, which can perhaps be completed by giving the definitions of the original French terms. '*Consommer*' refers to consumption akin to eating; it refers to the consumption of goods discussed in economic discourse. '*Consumer*', on the other hand, refers to a more violent sense of consumption: the gradual destruction of something until nothing remains, like the burning of an object. Overlaying these two meanings on top of each other reveals a Marxist critique within Châtelet's wordplay.

19. Translator's note: The French term globalement has here been translated as 'broadly'. The literal cognate 'globally' might also be used. However, in English this risks implying a geographical sense which is absent from the original French, where the term instead refers to a broad or wholesale opposition.

20. Translator's note: It is possible that Châtelet is here invoking the distinction between good and bad by Friedrich Nietzsche. See Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic," in *Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, vol. 8, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 218–20, §2.

21. Translator's note: The term *statut* is the French equivalent of both the English words 'status' and 'statute'. Given the political nature of Châtelet's argument, both meanings of the word should be considered.

22. Translator's note: Unlike créer, the French verb susciter carries an affective dimension, closer to 'arouse,' 'excite,' or 'provoke,' suggesting that democracy actively calls forth or elicits historians rather than simply producing them.

23. Translator's note: Châtelet opts to use the word 'œuvre' rather than 'travail'. The latter refer to work as one might normally think of it. However, the former refers to work in the context of artwork. What is at play, then, is something creative at its very essence.

24. Translator's note: Entraînement carries the primary sense of being swept along or drawn in by forces but can also mean 'training' in the sense of deliberate conditioning, giving the phrase a

somewhat different meaning.

25. Translator's note: 'Foule' could alternatively be translated as 'crowd'.

26. Translator's note: It is worth remembering the legal origins of the term prerogative, referring to an exclusive right that is afforded under the law or government.

27. Cf. for all of this, see P. Levêque and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Clithène*

28. Translator's note: The French term sensible has a much narrower definition than its English counterpart, correlating to sense perceptions. It should not be mistaken to be synonymous with 'reasonable' or 'rational'.

29. Translator's note: Neighbourhood here does not refer to the physical space in which one lives, but rather the collective of neighbours themselves, and the relations between them. One could think of *voisinage* as the state of being a neighbour and having neighbours in turn.

30. Translator's note: Though 'community' is an appropriate translation, the English word 'collectivity' would not be unreasonable, and also carries different connotations from the former term.

31. Translator's note: The French tableau denotes a formally composed or structured representation that is not necessarily implied by 'overall picture'.

32. Relevance *overall*. In this connection, it is necessary to make one remark and note two reservations. The remark concerns the fact of the pertinence of this description in no way invalidates the relevance of Marx's critiques developed in 1843: standing, not from the point of view of the State like Hegel, but from the point of view of the Society, like we say today, Marx notes that this State does not bring satisfaction: the Reason in action clashes with the dysfunctions that are misery and rebellions, and, to be a citizen, the real producer is no less unhappy. As for the reserves, one touches on the Hegelian prediction of the formation of nation-States that are increasingly powerful and decreasingly leading, by means of deadly wars, to the world State; so far deadly wars have reinforced the principle of the nation-State and multiplied its empirical realisations the form of the nation-State resists globalisation of civil society. The other is that contemporary technobureaucracy is supported, not by philosophical Reason as conceived by Hegel, but on Science and its development as a technique of appropriating nature and society: this has important consequences concerning the type of power exercised by the apparatuses of the State, therefore constitutive of civil society (cf. §1).

33. Translator's note: The term 'apparatus' is often used in translations of French philosophy from this period. It should be noted that Châtelet uses the term 'appareil' in his text. As such, we should not associate these apparatuses of power with the Foucauldian 'dispositif', which is sometimes translated as apparatus. It should be noted, however, that 'appareil' is the term used by Louis Althusser in his discussion of the Ideological State Apparatus. Later, Châtelet *does* employ the term dispositif in the context of institutions.

34. Translator's note: This is the first instance in the text where Châtelet uses the term 'ville' rather than 'cité' in referring to Athens. One should be mindful of this difference and infer that there is a difference between the 'Ville' and what is represented by the 'Cité'—even if both are referring to Athens.

35. cf. the interesting analyses of P. Legendre in *L'Amour du Censure*, Paris, 1974

36. Translator's note: The 'graphê paranomôn' refers to a trial for the offence of proposing a law that conflicts with the existing law in some way.

37. Translator's note: The French verb attaquer generally correlates to the word 'attack' in English. However, attaquer en justice, which would translate to 'attack in justice,' means to take legal action. Though the phrase does not appear in Châtelet's text, it can be presumed given the

focus on the tribunal found in this section.

38. Translator's note: The word *trou* has here been translated idiomatically rather than literally. Though the word *trou* corresponds to the English word 'hole', it is used in French to refer to a gap.

39. Translator's note: See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract," in *Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 147–50.

40. Translator's note: See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, vol. 1 (London, UK: Verso, 2004), 348–404.

41. Translator's note: The phrase '*sociétés actuelles*' is used in French to refer to current or present societies, in the sense of, societies that 'actually' exist. However, there is a potential connection here to the philosophical notion of actuality, which is present in Châtelet's work. Despite his criticisms of these societies, they are nonetheless an actualization of Hegelian philosophy.

42. One exception, of course: Pericles, renewed as the "general-in-chief" for ten years, was still brought to trial.

43. Translator's note: A standard translation here would be 'rulers'. I have opted for 'governors' to retain the connection to governing, as well as the wordplay found in the original text.

44. Translator's note: Commas added for clarity.

45. Translator's note: As is common with classical Greek philosophy, the meaning of these three terms is contingent upon how a specific author employs and understands them. We can understand these terms generally as referring to self-sufficiency, equality before the law, and equality of speech respectively.

46. Translator's note: The French term *petit paysan* could also be translated as 'small peasant.'

47. Translator's note: '*Manouvrier*' is a largely archaic term for someone who works with their hands. It might alternatively be translated as 'journeyman'.

48. Translator's note: As has been noted in translations of French psychoanalytic theory, there is no proper English equivalent to the word '*jouissance*', which is used to refer to the enjoyment of rights and property as well as sexual pleasure. As such, '*jouissance*' could be said to encapsulate both enjoyment and pleasure, or to be located somewhere in between them. See Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Allan Sheridan, vol. 11, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 281. While I do not wish to impose a Lacanian understanding of *jouissance* onto Châtelet's text, the definition that is here provided is useful for understanding the meaning of the original French term.

49. Translator's note: The use of 'and' twice in this sentence, which is considered a grammatical error, also appears in the original text. For this reason, it has been preserved for the sake of producing a faithful translation of Châtelet's original text.

50. Translator's note: There is no English equivalent to this term, as the *société anonyme* is not found within the common law system. It refers to a type of publicly traded company found in some countries that have adopted a system of civil law (mainly those which also happen to use a Romance language). Their name is derived from the fact that shareholders initially could remain anonymous, receiving dividends by exchanging a coupon attached to the certificate of their shares.

51. Translator's note: An influential French historian of Ancient Greece.

52. The Attico-Delian line corresponds to what is commonly known in English as the Delian League.

53. Translator's note: The word *étendue* could also be translated as 'extent' or 'scope.' The text is

not explicit regarding whether it refers to the nations' territory, population, power, or resources, and the exact meaning is therefore left to the interpretation of the reader.

54. Translator's note: 'Want' is the most logical translation. However, the word vouloir is sometimes used to refer to the act of willing (though this usage is less common). It is worth entertaining an alternative translation, which suggests it is possible for a society to will such an existence; that is, to create such an existence through its own self-determination and agency.

55. Lecture delivered at the French Cultural Center of Rome, January 25th, 1978.

**who is country?: a
hermeneutic strategy toward
philosophical responsiveness
in australia**

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INTRODUCTION

‘Wominjeka.’ This greeting is frequently found outside buildings and on road signs across Melbourne, Australia. It means ‘welcome’ in the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung languages of the Eastern Kulin Nation. When attending Welcome to Country ceremonies held by traditional owners to open formal events on Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung Country, we are told that *wominjeka* means, ‘come with purpose’.¹ How might non-Indigenous Melburnians respond to this invitation? What sort of philosophical activity might this conception of ‘Country’ invite, as it underpins traditions of Indigenous Australian thought, history, and

aspiration?

From school assemblies and sports events to Australia's federal parliament, the term 'Country' is used to recognise the prior and ongoing connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the many lands, waters, and skies now called Australia. In contrast to a Welcome to Country by the traditional owners of an area, an Acknowledgement of Country is a formal statement of awareness and respect performed to open many gatherings and events. In both welcome and acknowledgement ceremonies, the term 'Country' is used to affirm autonomous Indigenous identities that extend through the generations as ancestrally bestowed, calling attention to these connections which might otherwise go unnoticed within contemporary life.

While 'Country' as a signifier can encapsulate emplaced relations and the intricate connections of specific families and places, the term can also be deployed in an abstract fashion that threatens to shift attention away from particular and relational interactions of emplaced belonging. Equally displacing, acknowledgment of Country in some contexts might seem overly performative and politicised, falling flat as a perfunctory procedure. Acknowledgment might also elicit or reinforce unctuous receptivity to a perceived immanent *otherness* that bestows a sense of cultural competence.

How then might we hear 'Country' as a movement toward relational growth and responsibility among specific people and places, rather than as a valorisation of otherness or in unreflective abstraction? Can speaking 'Country' do more than mark general awareness of the unique connections to place maintained by many Indigenous Australians? In what follows, we seek to show how attending to particularised nuances of the concept 'Country' can open responsive and generative relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In the ways we seek to understand and grapple with 'Country', we hope to demonstrate a form of philosophical activity layered within, and intentionally engaged with, relations to and within Country.

SPEAKING COUNTRY, HEARING COUNTRY

Etymologies of Country

The Aboriginal English term ‘Country’ has become commonplace within Anglophone discourse. As a concept, *Country* distinguishes forms of being and knowing that are specific to the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups that have populated Australia for over 60,000 years. The term is used as a gloss for interdependencies of people, animals, ecology, and topography, which sustain diverse communities within a complex network of relations, and extends from cultures in which the use of toponyms reveals how ‘the conceptual boundaries between places, people, and things are fluid.’²

Both Pleshet and Goddard have traced adaptations of the term within non-Aboriginal English, from twentieth century Australian anthropology (W.E.H. Stanner) to literature (Xavier Herbert); through usage in native title and land rights claims during the 1970s and 1980s, to land management policy from the 1990s.³ One of the earliest recorded Aboriginal English uses of the term *Country* in published text is from the mid-1840s, when we read in Townsend that Maroot of the Kameygal/Gameygal people (Kamay/Botany Bay) tragically declared, “All black-fellow gone! All this my country!”⁴

While ubiquitous within Aboriginal English, the general term ‘Country’ is not necessarily found in Central Australian languages like Warlpiri or Anangu, nor traditionally used in relation to specific hereditary estates and their management. Anthropologist and Pitjantjatjara translator, Diana James, comments that the Australian Western Desert languages have no general term for Country in the sense of the ‘nation state’. More specifically,

In Pitjantjatjara, the concept of *ngura walytja* is used to refer to kin country, place, or places a person is related to by birth, or through patrilineal or matrilineal lines. Sometimes people refer to large estates of land as *ngura walytja*, but always country of extended kin group. When Anangu refer to

Australia as a country they use the term *manta*—literally, dirt, dry land. Concepts of belonging expand from self as Anangu Pitjantjatjara, to self as part of all people of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (the regional land title corporation), to self as an Indigenous Australian, to self as part of Indigenous peoples around the world.⁵

For Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu, a senior Warlpiri elder from the Tanami Desert, traditional educative processes of ceremony that are found across the continent can teach us how to ‘read Country’. This is a phrase he often uses in communicating with non-Indigenous Australians the importance of observing interactions of land, ecology, animals, and the movements of the seasons and stars.⁶ To ‘read Country’ is to perceive intricate relations that constitute life as a living text of ancestral creativity or Jukurrpa—the way things are, because of how they came to be.⁷ Knowing how to ‘read Country’ entails responsibility to follow ancestral laws that are inscribed in people and place, and which structure social belonging and purpose.

As Pawu explains, while the meaning of Country is always and already “written in creation,” we recognise the generative potential of Country as we seek to live within established relational patterns that constitute experience.⁸ Considering the key principles of an Aboriginal philosophy, Mary Graham writes of ‘reciprocity’ between diverse peoples and places as a “vital, creative element” which “creates a moral environment in which to live”; obligations “develop with particularised responsibilities according to locality.”⁹ These responsibilities are sustained “through the continual enactment of protocols, ritual, and ceremony.”¹⁰

Country is recognised through these living connections and responsibilities, which are embedded in traditional songs, dances, and narratives. By participating in ceremonial performances, a new generation is formed in partners of trade, kinship, land management, and processes of political negotiation and conflict resolution that sustain healthy communities.¹¹ For example, in being taught to paint the ancestral *kuruwarri* (ancestral pattern, mark) for the budgerigar,

Warlpiri learn about their flight paths and the location of remote waterholes; these in turn represent connections between different families who gather there. The budgerigar represents Pawu's mother and her homeland, and entails responsibility to care for this place and the people connected through it.

Use of 'Country' in mainstream cultural discourse may carry forward aspects of meaning and practice found in Indigenous Australian thought traditions, but it also fulfills a distinctly contemporary purpose: to speak 'Country' in public contexts is to sustain a political assertion of unceded Indigenous autonomy and agential occupation—a midden-like strata of history and relations buried underneath contemporary institutions. The term is therefore a modern one, in the sense that Stephen Muecke understands *indigeneity* as a response to colonisation, potentially creative in establishing a 'mode of relating' that clarifies difference *and* allows growth in-between distinct histories and identities.¹²

Within contemporary usage and primed with multiple registers of meaning, 'Country' is an expansive notion. As Pleshet argues—in the context of Aangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara culture and linguistic agency—it is precisely the 'semantic flexibility' and non-specificity of Country as idiom that is "key to understanding [the term's] meaning and efficacy."¹³

Speaking 'Country' with a capital-C

The complexities of concept and communication described above are signalled in the capitalisation of 'Country', whether written or spoken as such—a practice common across academic writing, journalism, policy, and education in Australia. Capitalisation marks 'Country' as a meta-concept that encapsulates and distinguishes diverse experiences and meanings. For Graham, this is "a redefining of the term to give back spiritual meaning to the Land"—where 'Land' with a capital 'l' likewise indicates "someone's responsibility and obligation."¹⁴ Speaking Country with a capital-C intentionally disrupts non-Indigenous Australian ways of talking about land and is politically and ethically loaded, a situation reflected

by the many style guides that instruct capitalisation of the term as a mark of respect.¹⁵ For many, this symbolic alteration is a small but significant way of redressing misrepresentation and the perceived invisibility of Indigenous ways of being to the colonial imagination.

Australians Together, an organisation that produces educative resources for schools, inform us that:

The term ‘Country’ is often used to describe a culturally defined area of land associated with a particular, culturally distinct group of people, clan or nation. Country can also refer to more than a physical place – it indicates cultural relationships and responsibilities associated with caring for land.

GUIDELINE:

- Use ‘Country’ to refer to a particular, culturally defined area of land.
- Always capitalise Country.¹⁶

Such recommendations seek not only to redress cultural ambivalences toward Indigenous experience, but also the historical and present shortcomings of legal frameworks in articulating, recognising, and verifying the substantive relationships of Aboriginal people to Country. For instance, land claim processes in Australia have looked to evidence of occupation and custodianship through physical modifications or improvements to the land.¹⁷ “Despite the recognition of native title,” writes Marcia Langton, the ‘absurd’ notion that “property has prescribed characteristics and that any property system not having these would therefore not constitute a property system [...] remains a powerful influence.”¹⁸ These characteristics are purportedly found on Country through *capitalisation* in another sense: as utilising, improving, and developing land—economically, agriculturally, residentially. Yet such approaches can miss the phenomenological and relational moorings of Country inherent in Indigenous Australian cultures. As Langton observes in the context of Aboriginal groups from Cape York, it is rather connections of kin and story that “inscribe the self in place and place in the

self,” that mark Indigenous Australian relations to land as distinct and ongoing.¹⁹

An important question arises here: How might we *hear* ‘Country’, not as a conceptual abstraction—that is, as a generalisation of ontological distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—but precisely through the nourishing and vitalising interactions of people and place from which the term emerges? If the capitalisation of Country can foster awareness of significant differences of thought and tradition, it also reveals an inherent conceptual limitation: ‘Country’ valorises otherness by marking separation, rather than relational engagement. Further, the profile of alterity which ‘Country’ invokes might be experienced as insurmountable and beyond the reach of non-Indigenous people and culture, perhaps out of fear of assuming knowledge without invitation.

This challenge can be heard in Pawu’s words which express the relational ethos of Warlpiri thought and performance, and illustrate his approach to collaborative research. Pawu’s words reflect a classical view of identity shared by Aboriginal groups across the continent, in understanding everyone within a region as intimately connected, while also marking complimentary distinctions between kin groups and their estates. These distinctions are essential to hospitality and welcome.

You know, Captain Cook came—we recognise foreigners. But I can’t even use that word, ‘foreigners’. I don’t want to. Because no one is a real foreigner. They are *ngajjarri*, which means ‘guest’. Everyone is a guest. And those guests can easily become family. We recognise your *ngurra* (home) is somewhere across the big water. But to bring you in here [to this place], with your *ngurra*, means accepting each other, adopting each other. So when you acknowledge those who are here, when you acknowledge Country, it’s more like Country is welcoming you—to claim you really, to give you a sense of belonging. (Pawu)²⁰

Who is country? A hermeneutic strategy

Having sketched a potted history of the term ‘Country’, we hope to leave off from any attempts at declarative definition. Attempting to spell out the numerous interactions enfolded into ‘Country’ as a meta-concept would only further abstract that concept from the nourishing and vitalising interactions of people and place which constitute its very meaning.²¹

How might we short-circuit such abstracting tendencies in speaking and hearing ‘Country’? Can this term be spoken in a way that equips others to engage with and learn from those relationships which are embedded in countless generations of Indigenous Australian history and culture? In what follows, we propose a hermeneutic strategy for thinking and speaking *country*, encapsulated in the question, ‘who is country?’. This question might be creatively deployed within our academic writing, education, and approach to hearing ‘Country’ within our gatherings._

We also deploy a linguistic short-circuit: where editorial guidelines request the capitalisation of ‘Country’, we refer in the following sections to lower-case ‘country’ in specific instances, to distinguish from more abstract or conjectural renderings. This is a reminder that (1) the term is in a sense a *stand in* or proxy for constellations of meaning which cannot sufficiently be encapsulated by the profile an uppercase ‘C’ lends; and (2) in the context of philosophical enquiry, this is an invitation to engage with meaning through a horizontal economy of symbolic interactions—the *rough ground* of material relations through which the meaning of country emerges. This pivot, from the conceptual to the lateral dimensions of meaning, is an attempt to dispel a misty unreflected abstraction without genuine philosophical impetus that more facile utterances of ‘Country’ can conjure, and generates space for ‘kin and story’ constellations of meaning to unfurl. Or, borrowing a metaphor from Peter Danaja, who likens toponyms in the Burarra language to ‘hyperlinks on a computer’, we might better understand Country by ‘clicking’ on the various names of Country to open a story.²²

Who?

Reflecting on his childhood in the late 1960s–70s, Pawu recalls how many in the Warlpiri community would greet each other with the phrase, “Good morning, Country!” or “Hello, Country!” However, rather than using the term ‘Country’ as he translates, the names of specific, ancestrally bestowed homelands were used, places from which different families trace their lineage and identity. In addressing people through the names of specific places, as in the ‘surname’, Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu—also known as Mt. Barkley—what was otherwise heard as a remote place becomes intimately configured within a network of living relations.²³ Writing from an anthropological perspective in relation to Pama society and property relations in Cape York Peninsula, Langton explains,

It is apparent that men and women speak about their hereditary estates in the context of immediate social relations that arise not only from their relations with other people, but also from the way they are embedded in places in consequence of their reverential regard for the sacred and historical resonances of those places.²⁴

This form of address engenders respect, not only in acknowledging the deeper connections that shape identity but in locating relationality within a constellation of narrative connections, as between people, place, history, performance, ecology, and cosmology. It also highlights our material responsibility to the land and environment, an accountability that is inseparable from ‘being-in-relation’, rather than accountability gauged through ethical precepts.²⁵

To greet someone metonymically *as* country is also an exchange through which people are ‘seen as their homeland’, recognising identities that precede us—Jukurrpa, or ancestral creativity that substantiates present experience. Pawu explains how the Warlpiri term for ‘ancestors’, *walya-jarra*, conveys a sense of complementary difference:

Walya-jarra is our word for ancestors. *Walya* means land, ground, or country; *jarra* means two, or a pair, like the day and night, or the ground

and sky. Even if you don't know those who have come before, they are still a part of you—still present. So, two homelands must become one homeland, *palka*, a 'body' made of different parts. That's the idea. *Walya-jarra* means two groundings become one grounding. That's what recognition and acknowledgement of country is doing. (Pawu)

Far from introducing a conceptual term that pulls away from relational specificity, to speak 'country' is to recognise a mutuality of people and place, past and present, mother and child, through which experience is constituted.²⁶ These interactions interweave through the generations and extend outwards, connecting different groups and places.

Pawu views any designation of singular identities—as in a chauvinistic Australian nationalism branded with the southern cross—as conceptually flawed: *nokuruwarri* (design, mark) or linguistic term ('Country') can encapsulate the dynamic reciprocity of difference. A term like 'Australia' only becomes meaningful through our relations, as we '*become Australia*'—discovering what it means to belong to this land through our relations with others who inhabit it.²⁷ In his teaching, Pawu therefore speaks to the curiosity of non-Indigenous people who seek to learn more about Warlpiri culture, not by playing along with an interrogative quest for determination: *what is that?* Rather, if, as Pawu teaches, 'you are your country', the relational dimensions of country are better expressed by the pronoun *who* and so, a relational ontology.

The question, *who is country?* is therefore a useful one to ask in our teaching, and which might also shape the directedness of our enquiries into purpose and belonging in Australia. This question not only underscores the personal and relational dimensions of Warlpiri knowledge, but extends an integral heuristic quality within Pawu's thinking, teaching, and cultural leadership—a quality that is *read* from the dynamic confluence of *pulyaranyi* (winds of change; explored further below). Asking 'who is country?' generates movement, sparking interest through dissonance, not to undercut or deconstruct inherited meanings but

rather to highlight the need to reconceptualise present forms of understanding through lateral interactivity. Rather than conceptualising difference by valorising otherness or through performative assertions of ‘Country’ as cultural separation, this approach is essential to figuring shared identities within relational difference.

Performing ceremony, cultivated by country

Within traditional forms of Warlpiri ceremony, the importance of attentiveness to relations as the basic orientation of Indigenous Australian epistemology becomes evident. The ceremonial ground, a ground of gathering that draws together people from many different families and homelands, is a place of individual and community formation: songs and narratives shape society by provoking the exploration of responsiveness and responsibility among those who are different. Indeed, the name Warlpiri, after *warlpa-wiri*, refers to the ‘big wind’ that was formed when different Warlpiri groups, represented by the four winds, came together.²⁸ Within Warlpiri society, a sense of responsibility begins through respectful attention to elders and the generations who have gone before, in learning hereditary rights and histories of custodianship of places, animals, stories, and songs. These responsibilities also entail obligations to live within law and right conduct among the other groups that make up society.

Themes of social responsiveness and responsibility have pervaded Pawu’s teaching, especially his utilisation of *ngurra-kurlu*, a philosophic principle that concerns the wellbeing of society through five interrelated elements: *walya* ‘land’, *kuruwarru* ‘law’, *manyuwana* ‘ceremony’, *jaru* ‘language’, and *warlalja* ‘kin.’²⁹ Healthy community depends on active engagement with and contribution to the vitalisation of these elements and, through the configuration of *ngurra-kurlu*, one comes to recognise ‘home’—a cultural identity and place distinct from but related to all others.³⁰

Through large ceremonial gatherings organised for important events throughout the year, Warlpiri learn about the distinct places, songs, stories, and names that

help them ‘navigate’ contemporary life: Pawu speaks of ‘tracking’ our connections through ceremonial narratives, which are like a ‘compass’ that helps us locate ourselves among the many responsibilities of society: “It’s not enough to know *about* your country; you have to understand how it fits in—how it’s located—as a place in the dreaming and in the songline.”³¹ Detailing various responsibilities of land management and the way these are expressed in ancestral narratives, Pawu and Holmes have articulated what they feel to be a more ‘acceptable’ translation of *country* as ‘a common sense of belonging’ that encompasses “the physical environment but also the various social, spiritual, and cultural relationships that transform an ecological landscape into a socio-cultural one.”³²

The transformation of physical environment into country is brought about through ceremonial education and performance, gatherings within which we ask questions of *who?*—of ancestral identities, purpose, and our place among others. Recognition of country emerges as the vitalising ground on which we gather, which nourishes us in our differences and, as in a phrase of Ngarinyin elder David Mowaljarlai’s, keeps ‘everything standing up alive.’³³ Pawu explains further:

You know the word *culture*, it’s something to do with gardening. We have to be good gardeners of the country. Well, maybe—or maybe it’s country that makes a garden out of us! This country is a real gardener; that’s the system we need to be in. This country is telling people how you must behave to each other. It’s written in the stars, that *kurawarri* [law].³⁴

Pulyaranyi (winds of change): becoming responsive and responsible

Pulyaranyi is a Warlpiri ceremonial narrative of which Pawu is the senior custodian. This is a story from his father’s country, Pawu, and the remote plain known as Kurlpurlurnu (Rain Dreaming). As the *milpirri* (thunder clouds) form when hot air rises and cold air falls, *pulyaranyi* is experienced as a cool change that suddenly ‘hits you in the face’ after the sweltering hot season—a bracing *yinapaka* slap or realisation (see below).³⁵ As an approach to pedagogy, *pulyaranyi* is about stirring

things up, provoking movement and interaction—learning and growing together through the generative interactions of difference.

Pawu's teaching and leadership can often be characterised as *pulyaranyi*. He typically teaches with questions that are provocative and open ended. In this, he seeks to shape self-sufficient learners who are attentive to their environment and can therefore *hunt* for themselves, who can recognise knowledge as that which can nourish and sustain, through the dynamic confluences of people and place. If our ideas and projects are formed only by reference to discrete places, histories, and selves, we are said to be 'windless', without purpose and 'stuck' in our tracks. The meeting of different winds and build-up of *milpirri*, which entails disturbance and even conflict, is necessary to producing lifegiving rains.

To ask *who is country?* is to seek to become *responsive* to others, whose varied perspectives 'stir things up' so that we do not become 'stuck in our differences'. Responsiveness is entwined with *responsibility*—what we do with knowledge, our stewardship of those things that come to us from the past. Responsibility also recognises the mutuality that knowledge entails; the identity of the listener/learner is always formed within community and entails obligations to contribute to the wellbeing of their community. Responsibility is the lifeblood of our connections, the veins that keep us alive, the passing of nutrients from one part of the body to another—the function of ceremony in gathering, sharing, feeding others with knowledge, to become a 'gift to one another.'³⁶

The *who?* of country is therefore never a singular, isolated identity but is always discovered in community. Asking *who is country?* can shift focus from seemingly insurmountable differences to the cultivation of relationships. The meeting of hot air from the earth and cool air from higher in the atmosphere can produce lifegiving rain in the desert. In the dynamic intermingling of old and new, mother and child, neighbour and foreigner, *pulyaranyi* is about potential.

Excursus: What's in a question?

The birds gathered at Yinapaka, which is also known as Lake Surprise, to discuss who was most agile in flight. The emu, the greatest teacher of all, came along but was rejected by the other birds, who laughed at him, a flightless bird. When the emu had left the gathering, the eagle told the other birds where he had learnt his superior hunting skills and ability of flight—from the emu. Only then did they wake up. This is the Yinapaka moment, the slap, the wakeup call. They realise that they have missed the opportunity to learn. That's what Yinapaka means—time to understand this story.³⁷

Who has seen an emu fly? Pawu's teaching often begins with just such a question, drawn from classical Warlpiri narratives. "In Yapa [Aboriginal] way, we teach by giving clues and riddles and all these metaphors: You gotta figure it out."³⁸ Questions which are intentionally open ended can shape, divert, and broaden lines of thought. An answer might seem initially definitive but eventually falls out of sync with the dynamics of time and context; a pertinent question can energise thought in a variety of contexts. Where the pronouncement of settled meaning might seek to circumscribe experience, questions allow experience itself to be recognised in new ways.

Emus don't fly. But might they? Where might we glimpse one airborne? To ask a question with humility and respect is to be open to formation, the possibility of seeing what is hidden in plain sight. Only through the intellectual hunt, might we come to a meaningful re-cognition of our experiences, our own Yinapaka moment. This is significant for the wellbeing of others: "I will not tell you the answer. You'll have to hunt for yourself. Sorry! If I do hunting for you, you're not a reliable person to live in my community. Everyone needs to know how to hunt" (Pawu).

Yitaki mani means 'hunting' or 'tracking', to bring back nourishing food for the community. It is a metaphor Warlpiri use to describe intellectual activity and the way that relational connections are 'tracked' through ancestral narratives. Like the hunter stalking game, knowledge grows through responsiveness, in attending

to the world around us and being ready to move, act, and exert effort. Digested in community, knowledge sustains emplaced being and our connections with one another.

Who is country? Good questions travel better than neat answers. While we seek to disrupt instantiated assumptions and patterns of thinking, this question is an invitation to engage with the people and stories embedded in the places we live. In asking, we invite collaborative effort and mutual formation, through the tangible interactions that country offers.

Theological responsiveness and responsibility on country

The basic challenge articulated in this article has been to make less abstract and more interconnected an understanding of country in contemporary Australia. We have asked ‘who is country?’ as a hermeneutic strategy inspired by Pawu’s own *pulyaranyi* pedagogy. We have approached an understanding of country heuristically, through the diverse relations that constitute purpose and place, rather than through conceptual abstraction or definitional circumscription.

In this final section, we look to the ways this engagement with ‘country’ might also be reflected in the contextual hermeneutics of Indigenous Australian theology, a discipline concerned with questions of belonging and purpose, albeit in forums perhaps beyond the radar of mainstream philosophy. We consider how the philosophical impetuses of localised theology provoke a similar concern with meaning as substantiated *on country*—through the vulnerabilities of human relationality and emplacement. The significance of this extends beyond Christian communities to wider Australian society, in considering pronouncements of recognition and reconciliation as meaningless if not accompanied by tangible change within everyday life.

The voice of theological enquiry within public discourse on issues of culture and identity in Australia, if previously tolerated in various forums, has become more pronounced in recent years, notably through the writings of Wiradjuri journalist

and political commentator, Stan Grant.³⁹ Grant considers questions of identity and belonging through various histories of western thought, as well as his extensive experience as a foreign correspondent reporting from the Middle East and China, with a view to the role of religious and cultural identities within state and society. His work prefaces a philosophical rather than pietistic or confessional intimation of country that considers its intellectual underpinnings.

Grant's writings and media appearances also clarify, on a national stage, a generous and capacious understanding of belonging that can also be found in the writing and advocacy of Aboriginal Christian leaders throughout Australian history, even as these individuals have remained clear eyed as to the fundamental injustices of history and challenges facing Aboriginal people on many fronts (such as in health, education, and aspirations toward cultural and political autonomy). These Christian leaders—through their words and practical ministries within Australian communities—have grappled with surrounding issues of reconciliation and recognition, issuing a call for Christians to understand their faith as emplaced *on country*. This call also offers, tacitly or explicitly, a challenge to abstract metaphysical projections onto country and, indeed, theistic intimations toward 'God' as transcendent abstract totality, through focus on the embodied love among neighbours that nurtures community.

How do Indigenous theologians approach complex questions of identity and belonging within institutions that have both colluded with *and* resisted state incursions on Indigenous sovereignty? What does it mean to hold together Christian belief, seemingly inextricably linked with colonising politics, and Indigenous identity as entwined in the very lifeblood of these lands? Expressing characteristic generosity in his approach to the complexities of faith, identity, and community, Rev. Graham Paulson, the first ordained Indigenous Baptist minister in Australia, sees beyond an either/or approach when he asks, "What kind of theology can hold together, with integrity, both Indigenous and Christian identity?"⁴⁰ Paulson recognises the fundamental role of cultural situatedness in Christian hermeneutics, challenging the notion that a purist or immediate grasp

of Christian scripture is possible:

People sometimes suggest that the Bible contains cultural husks and a theological kernel. The Christian's job is then to peel away what is culturally relative, leaving only what is theologically binding. Thus, one proposal for overcoming the imposition of Western culture in theology is to try and do away with culture altogether.⁴¹

But, in fact, as Paulson argues, no meaning can be conveyed apart from culture. His approach short-circuits the implications of a foundationalist reading whereby the goal is for one's own perspective is to match as closely as possible with the assumed (and abstract) 'true meaning' of the text. Engagement with scripture then, and by extension, with faith, is not about the superiority of particular beliefs but is about working together in collective responsibility for the wellbeing of community; this comes about through integral commitments to the sources of faith, which find expression within living, relational contexts.

Developing this ethos, community leader Mark-Yettica Paulson (Graham Paulson's son), imagines the process of working cross-culturally as an activity that takes place in the riverbed, the shared space in which we meet. The riverbed is positioned between two riverbanks, "where we perform activities that strengthen our sense of belonging and deepen our identity".⁴² The riverbank is a place of gathering, celebration, and forming new relationships, "where pragmatic and innovative collaboration happens."⁴³ Similarly, for Pawu, the riverbank is akin to the Warlpiri notion of *kirri* or 'encampment in the middle': "That's where we come together, makes up who we are. We are this community."⁴⁴ *Kirri* is "a permanent camp, country that is full of water, where people can come and live with confidence."⁴⁵

Through the Four Stones Leadership program of Australians Together, Pawu encourages Aboriginal Christian leaders from across the country to interpret ancestral narratives and law, as these help us understand Christian faith, and vice versa. "That's the fun side of learning—both sides, thinking about how it fits

together. To understand *kardiya* teaching through my *yapa* [Aboriginal] teaching; you have to learn to become this country [...] That's what the emu, the great teacher, is encouraging us to do, he's saying, "Come and eat and drink." There is another great teacher who says something similar." (Pawu)

To truly belong as a people in this land—to "locate yourself in others, in creation as a gift"—non-Indigenous Christians must learn to 'read country' and the ancestrally given *text* which sustains our communities of difference. In other words,

The church needs to learn about this country; it needs to learn to sing and dance this country. Songlines are saying that if you follow these sacred stories, you become home. You feed [on] all the knowledge. To feed on Australia, you become Australia.

Unless you start singing and dancing this country, you can't be Australia. Come to a ceremony, try singing a song. That makes me feel like I am feeding together with you.

If you don't, the worst thing is living in your home and not knowing anything about it. You will lose your identity. Whoever wants to become this country needs to become my brother or sister. (Pawu)

Of course, for many Aboriginal people across the continent, engaging with country through traditional culture and language is difficult, especially where these have been decimated by colonisation. "With the depopulation that resulted from the frontier violence and colonial and post-Federation removals of sometimes entire populations administered and segregated settlements"⁶; descent-based systems of land ownership and management have also been irreparably disrupted. However, Pawu maintains that these ways of life might be rediscovered: country is always there, waiting to be read and patiently awaiting our response: "Speak to the land and the land will speak back" (Pawu).

This resonates with the theological attentiveness to *anaditj* or ‘the way things are’ of Denise Champion, Theologian in Residence at the Adelaide College of Divinity.⁴⁷ Emphasising the complex relations that shape her identity, Champion introduces herself as “an Adnyamathanha daughter, mother, sister, aunty and grandmother from the Flinders Ranges in South Australia.”⁴⁸ Her theological writing seeks to problematise language that codifies an inside/outsider framework regarding cultural and institutional identities—a significant task when the experience of Aboriginal people has often been one of exclusion or separation within the church and its theological traditions.⁵² Articulating why ancestral beliefs and law are not otherwise to Christian identity, she writes, “Christ was creator present in our stories”; she associates the “Word” of John’s Prologue (Jn 1:1), translated as ‘*Ngalakhana Mada* (the Word) made flesh’, with wisdom (Prov. 8: 22–31) which was always there—*anaditj*—and which guides our living towards a fuller realisation of being.⁴⁹

Similarly, Trawlolway theologian Garry Deverell, Lecturer and Research Fellow in the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Divinity, asserts that there are already key points of theological connection between the Christian gospel and Australian Indigenous cultures, precisely because the gospel is already present in the land and its people:

If we cannot see or hear or smell the gospel, it is not because the gospel is not being faithfully enculturated, but because we have simply deactivated both our senses and our imaginations in order to protect ourselves from its prophetic call [...] [for Indigenous Christians] the gospel therefore cries aloud in the rituals of the dreaming as much as in the rituals of Europe.⁵⁰

This, in a context where too often, Indigenous people have been invited into church so long as they “leave culture [and language] at the door.”⁵¹ More than translating one culture into another—or adjudicating what aspects of Aboriginal culture might legitimately be brought *into* Christian faith—the question for Deverell is how we recognise the role of the other in who we are and who we are becoming.

Within differing contexts, these theological perspectives not only seek to challenge non-Indigenous Christians to a renewed form of listening to Indigenous people, history, and experience, but give impetus to relational growth in priority to configurations of religious or institutional identity.⁵² It is precisely in country as a *who*—permeable, iterative, relatable rather than definitive—that we might be nourished through our interactions with others, a notion which has traditionally been known as Christian community. These relational qualities further resonate with the imperative of the Christian story of incarnation in the radical ‘lowercasing’ of God, whose death on the cross is the ultimate *kuruwarri* (mark, symbol) of God’s identity as a *relational movement* which overcomes transcendence—a challenge that might be levelled not only to theistic intimations of divinity found in many religious sensibilities, but to the ways we conceptualise meaning and truth.⁵³ The constant challenge of theology is therefore that any talk or enquiry of God must, for that word to be meaningful, generate a specificity which leads to responsiveness and responsibility within the materiality of time and place.

We conclude with the words of Ray Minniecon, an Aboriginal Pastor at Scarred Tree Indigenous Ministries with roots in the Kabikabi and Gurang-Gurang nations, who reminds us that the *who* of country is also the heart of theology and the source of hope within human history. For Minniecon, abstraction readily diffuses into meaninglessness; what makes a difference—whether it pertains to theological belief or to the recognition of Indigenous legacies and presence—is the cultivation of relationships that hear, share, and respond to the everyday struggles, sufferings, and joys of those we encounter. This is often hard and costly work, and success is neither instant nor guaranteed. Likewise, being cultivated by country, whether we are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, is an ongoing process of becoming responsive to relations which shape belonging and purpose.

What are we listening to, in terms of our theology? Are we listening to the ones who are filling our jails? Are we listening to all the deaths in custody? What about that? And what of all those young children that make me weep everyday, who are being forcibly removed from their families as we speak

and taken into foster homes? Are we listening to their mothers who are just crying for and yearning to touch their children again? To hold them in their arms, and they can't get access to that? To me, that's God speaking to me. That's Jesus weeping at the graveside. And I need to hear him weeping otherwise he's useless to me. God is of no use to me if he's not weeping with me and crying with me, and to give some kind of definition to what hope might look like [...] That's where your *proof* of theology needs to be exhibited, in ways that it can help our people get over that loss and through their trauma.⁵⁴

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**artistic agency and the
painting of sensation: francis
bacon's challenge to the
standard theory of action**

sean bowden

The paintings of Francis Bacon are associated in the popular imagination with scenes of horror and violence: contorted or mutilated bodies, screaming heads, and so on. Critics have occasionally argued that these images are reflections of the violent times and experiences through which Bacon lived: not only the war, but also the artist's sexual experiences, personal relationships and personal tragedies.¹ To focus on this aspect of his work, however, is to ignore Bacon's claim that he was not trying to represent horrors of various kinds, or to say something about the human condition or his own experiences. His artistic aim was rather to render, in paint, the dimension of sensation. As Bacon puts it, "I have never tried to be

horrific.”² He claims he rather wants “to give the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance” (I 73–5).

This is a point emphasized by Deleuze in his monograph on Bacon.³ Deleuze maintains that Bacon was not overly interested in painting *sensational* things or states of affairs. Rather, he took upon himself a task inherited from Cézanne—to “paint the sensation” (FB 35). Of course, it is true that, for the most part, Bacon paints bodies: figures or persons. His main focus, however, is the ambiguous sensation through which the body—he ostensible subject of the painting—forms itself in aesthetic experience. As Deleuze puts it, “[s]ensation is what is painted. What is painted on the canvas is the body, not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining *this* sensation” (FB 35).

Importantly, for Bacon, sensation is not something that can be represented—or, as he prefers to put it, “illustrated”—in the same way that some already determinate object might be, whether physical or mental. This seems to be for two reasons, the first having to do with established painterly conventions in his chosen *medium* of communication, the second with the ambiguous nature of *what* he is trying to communicate in that medium. First, Bacon believes that most “illustrational painting” relies on conventional visual signs which “millions of art students all over the world can do” (I 147). Illustrational painting thus communicates only an intellectualised and “clichéd” way of representing bodies and their qualities and relations, obscuring the dimension of sensation through which bodies form themselves in aesthetic experience. As he puts it, he wants his paintings to come across “directly onto the nervous system,” as opposed to communicating a story “in a long diatribe through the brain” (I 18). Second, Bacon claims that what is being communicated—sensation, or the “fact” or “reality” of aesthetic experience—is in any case fundamentally ambiguous (I 66). In other words, sensation is not something determinate, possessing well-defined features that could subsequently be communicated in an illustrational manner. Consequently, Bacon believes, the direct communication of sensation in paint requires the experimental invention of a “non-illustrational” form that would be appropriate to the ambiguity of the

sensation to be captured.

In speaking of his particular painterly practice, Bacon claims that, in taking up his paints and approaching the canvas, he often knows *what* he wants to do, but does not know *how* to do it (I 116, 119, 155). As has already been indicated, this claim cannot mean that he wants to paint some precise image that he has in mind or some determinate object of experience before him, and that the painterly vocabulary or technical means required to render it currently elude his grasp. In fact, when he says he knows what he wants to do he seems to mean only that he has a vague sense of what he is trying to paint—such as “the strength of the sensation” that he has about two figures “in some form of sexual act of the bed” (I 119). As he puts it, “I don’t really think my pictures out ... I think of the disposition of the forms and then I watch the forms form themselves” (I 158). In other words, what Bacon wants to paint is not something he can clearly represent or picture to himself prior to the act of painting. How, then, can we make sense of Bacon’s claim that he does not know how to paint what he wants to paint when he cannot represent to himself what he wants to paint? It is to say that, distancing himself from illustrative clichés, he must experimentally *invent* some way to *see*, *discover* or *actualise* what he wants to paint, giving the initially indeterminate sensation the clarity of a form that was not foreseeable in advance.

This presents us with a problem. Bacon, it seems, can only get clearer about what he is trying to paint by successfully painting it. But what *counts* as success here cannot be specified prior to achieving it through some experimental invention. This is not to say, of course, that just any non-illustrational invention will successfully render what Bacon wants to paint. Indeed, Bacon is well known for destroying many of his paintings because he pushed them “too far” and lost something he was trying to capture (I 17–20). But again, against what criteria could Bacon judge one of his paintings to be a success or failure?

The task of this essay is to reconstruct Bacon’s understanding of the aims of his art, the nature of his artistic practice and his own agency, and then to examine the

implications of this account for what has become known as the “standard theory” in the philosophy of action. Drawing on Bacon’s interviews and developing several of Deleuze’s proposals in his monograph on Bacon, the article makes several claims. First, Bacon did not aim to represent or “illustrate” determinate objects of experience or intentional content, but rather to “actualise” sub-representational sensation. Second, the relation between Bacon’s paintings and what the paintings are paintings “of”—namely, sensation—should thus be understood, not in terms of representation, but rather *expression*: sensation is expressed in the production of a form that, as it were, makes it manifest by bringing it about or actualising it. Third, the expression of sub-representational sensation in Bacon’s paintings is inseparable from an experimental activity unfolding in a complex “expressive medium,” embracing the embodied, encultured and material dimensions of painterly practice. Fourth, because Bacon could not represent to himself the conditions of satisfaction constitutive of his artistic activity in advance of the act of painting, he understood these conditions to be progressively specified in and through what is a self-consciously experimental but situated process. Finally, I will conclude by considering the challenge that this account of artistic action and agency presents to standard theories in the philosophy of action and propose a way to meet that challenge.

SENSATION, FORCE AND THE FORMATION OF FORM

Sensation—or, as he sometimes refers to it, “feeling”—is not, for Bacon, something merely subjective that is provoked by or associated with the apprehension of a determinate object, whether physical or mental. While he sometimes appears to express himself in this way, talking of his feelings “about” a particular thing (I 186), a constant theme in his interviews with David Sylvester is that sensation cannot simply be added to or subtracted from the reality to be painted—because the reality to be painted does not exist independently of the dimension of sensation (see, for example, I 31, 76, 150, 193–8).

Drawing on Bacon’s interviews, as well as Maldiney’s and Merleau-Ponty’s

phenomenological treatments of sensation in Cézanne, Deleuze develops an account of the dimension of sensation in Bacon that consolidates and clarifies a large number of the artist's otherwise obscure remarks. Deleuze argues that, as in Cézanne, what Bacon means by sensation should be understood to implicate both the subject and the object of the aesthetic experience—both the sensing and the sensed, as it were—in a process that mutually transforms them. As Deleuze puts it,

Sensation has one face turned toward the subject ... and one face turned toward the object ... Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly, it is Being-in-the-World, as the phenomenologists say: at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation (FB 34–5).⁴

Deleuze's understanding of the relation between sensation and the emergence of new forms in, and of, experience, is detailed at greater length in his earlier work, *Difference and Repetition*. In this book, Deleuze elaborates what he calls a “transcendental empiricism,” which concerns the emergence of the conditions of experience *from* experience, or rather from certain kinds of experiences: those for which our ways of grasping the world, previously established in us, are inadequate.⁵ In outline, his argument unfolds as follows.⁶ Occasionally, we encounter things we cannot identify, that we had never imagined possible, that we have no prior experience of, that our habituated skills cannot cope with, and so on. An encounter with such a non-identifiable “difference” could only be described as a “shock”, and the encountered object's primary characteristic for us, Deleuze argues, is that it “can only be sensed.” We are troubled by such encounters, but *what* troubles us is not yet identifiable or determinate for us. Beginning with this “problematic” sensation, then, our various capacities—embodied and psychological habits, memory, imagination, the conceptual understanding, etc.—are forced beyond their prior limits and experimentally transformed in order to resolve the problem

presented to it. New habits and skills will need to be developed; memory will be forced to creatively synthesize past experiences in order to produce something that could help make sense of the present situation; the imagination will be constrained to phantasise about previously unimaginable connections between phenomena; conceptual thought will be compelled to devise new concepts that could be adequate to the novel event, and so on. As with the discussion of the dimension of sensation in Bacon, then, at one and the same time in this process the subject is transformed in the sensation and something happens through the sensation, “one through the other, one in the other”: that which can only be sensed transforms the apprehending subject and hence the determinate objects that this subject is capable of apprehending.

When Deleuze claims that Bacon paints sensation, then, he is not claiming that Bacon’s images somehow represent or are about his subjective feelings for things that exist independently of those feelings. He is rather claiming that the images Bacon paints—indeed, his very activity of painting—give expression to a process of emergent experience at the border between subject and object, or between sensing and what is sensed. To paint sensation, in other words, is to give painterly expression to the formation of novel forms in and of experience, and to do so by bringing about or actualising a novel form in a non-illustrational way, pushing beyond the limits of conventional painterly vocabularies. What, then, could it mean to say that Bacon wants to paint sensation as “accurately” as possible (I 94)? Deleuze would no doubt claim that, beneath the clichéd or habitual ways of grasping and presenting already formed bodies and their qualities and relations, there is an experiential reality consisting of the ongoing formation of new forms, and the task of the painter is to overcome the inadequacy of illustrational clichés and to make this reality manifest by actualising it in a particular way—participating in the formation of novel, non-illustrational forms in some local situation.

Deleuze attempts to further explain the aim of Bacon’s art with reference to a notion of force. It should be noted that while this notion and its various cognates play a large role in Deleuze’s wider processual philosophy, Bacon himself has very

little to say about it apart from occasional allusions to a person's "energy" (e.g., I 197). Be that as it may, the notion of force arguably helps us make sense both of what Bacon means by the sub-representational "violence of reality" that directly impacts the nervous system, and of his artistic attempts to "remake" that violence (I 94). Deleuze claims that, "for a sensation to exit, a force must be exerted on a body" (FB 56). Such a claim, however, needs to be understood in terms of Deleuze's differential and "energetic" conception of the world. For Deleuze, bodies of all kinds—subjects as well as objects—along with their generation, modification and dissolution, are the result of complex relations between internal and external forces of various types and at various levels. Moreover, forces themselves are irreducibly relational entities: a given force is what it is, or does what it does, only by virtue of its differential relation to other forces. Every force, and every body, already entails a complex of force relations. At the bottom, for Deleuze, reality simply is a differential field of forces and force relations which produce, alter and destroy organised bodies. Deleuze calls this field of forces the "body without organs"—emphasising its difference from and metaphysical priority with respect to the "organization or organs we call an organism"—and claims that it is Bacon's primary subject matter (FB 44–6). Or more precisely, while Bacon's ostensible subject matter is a given body—figure, person, organic form, etc.—Bacon's *real* subject matter is the plurality of forces that forms and deforms that body in experience. Or again, what amounts to the same thing, the real subject matter of Bacon's painting is a body experienced as sustaining a sensation under the impetus of a complex of forces (FB 35). While Bacon remains vague about what, for him, constitutes "reality", he clearly distinguishes between the ostensible subject matter of his painting and the reality it presupposes—a reality that is of a different nature to the ostensible subject matter, and that is the true subject of his painting (see, for example, I 202–4).

We will need to explore in more detail below Bacon's idiosyncratic method for accessing and painting the reality presupposed by his initial subject matter. For now, the claim is that Deleuze's work offers us a compelling account of this reality

in energetic terms, that is, in terms of differential force relations exerted on and transforming bodies in experience. These forces are responsible for the ongoing production of forms in and of experience and, considered from the perspective of their complex differential relations, outstrip all produced forms. The question that arises now, however, is how can Bacon make anything visibly intelligible, let alone an imperceptible energetic reality, in the absence of a conventional or illustrative painterly vocabulary?

EXPRESSION, NOT ILLUSTRATION

Bacon, as has already been indicated, distances himself from representational or illustrational painting for two reasons. He claims, firstly, that the reality he wants to paint—namely, sensation—is “ambiguous.” It does not possess determinate features and relations whose characteristics could be communicated by means of an intelligible system of visual signs. Secondly, he claims that illustrational painting tends to consist of a system of well-established visual signs that communicate only a “clichéd” manner of representing bodies and their qualities and relations, and so one that would fail to capture any aspects of the subject matter falling outside of its ambit. This is not to say, however, that Bacon abandons illustration altogether. Insofar as he is interested in painting the way that the bodies ordinarily depicted by illustrational painting are formed in and through sensation in experience, illustrational elements will be present in his work. As he puts it, referring to some of his portraits, “inevitably illustration has to come into it to make certain parts of the head and face which, if one left them out, one would then only be making an abstract design” (I 147). However, he cannot communicate the real subject of his painting—forces, sensation and the formation of form—by illustrational means. His painting must rather come across “directly onto the nervous system,” as opposed to telling a “story in a long diatribe through the brain” by means of already-established, and so easily comprehended, visual clichés (I 18).

How are we to make sense of the way Bacon’s paintings directly impact the nervous system, or open up sensation? How can one paint the “invisible” energetic reality

that Deleuze claims is Bacon's primary subject matter? Moreover, how can one paint energetic reality from within, given that the painter, and the very act of painting, cannot be separated out from that reality? Indeed, sensation and force here seem to be at work at several levels: not only is Bacon painting the reality of a body sustaining a sensation under the influence of forces, Bacon as a painter is sustaining a complex sensation as well—struck by the way that the ostensible subject matter of the painting (the person with all their “pulsations” [I 196]), along with the coloured experiment unfolding on the canvas, problematise the illustrational clichés Bacon has inherited and call for the formation of a new form. Consequently, far from attempting to illustrate an energetic reality as though from some external point of view, Bacon's paintings should be understood to participate *in* that energetic reality by giving active *expression* to it. As Bacon puts it, “I'm not really trying to *say* anything, I'm trying to *do* something” (I 222). In other words, Bacon's practice of painting, including the antagonistic relation this practice maintains with the history of visual culture, must itself be understood in terms of complexes of forces. Bacon's painting, from this perspective, should be considered as a form of forceful, experimental participation—informed by but also transforming the history and norms of his artistic medium—in an energetic, processual reality. But more than just participating in an energetic reality, Bacon's painting takes this reality as his subject matter *in* a given situation (the ostensible subject of the painting being a kind of “bait” for the energetic, processual reality that is painted [I 202–4]).

In the following section, we will examine Bacon's complex relation to his chosen medium. In this section, we will define the relation of expression that holds between Bacon's paintings and their subject matter. In general, expression is a relation between two things, two *relata*: an expression (that which does the expressing) and an expressed (that which the expression expresses), such that the expression makes manifest an otherwise unmanifested expressed. Indeed, it is in this way that we might say, for example, that emotions or attitudes are expressed in facial expressions and gestures, or that thoughts are expressed in words, or that

unconscious desires are expressed in overt behaviour, and so on. More rigorously, there are four characteristics of the expressive relation between expressions and expresseds:

1. *Ontological feature*: the expressed is ontologically inseparable from its expression—it exists in being expressed by its expressions, although it is not identical with them.
2. *Epistemological feature*: the expression communicates something about the expressed by virtue of the way that it “makes sense” (in both the passive and active senses of this phrase) within an expressive medium.
3. *Causal feature*: the expressed is to be considered the immanent cause of the expression, which is to say, a type of non-linear cause that is informed by the effects it produces over time.
4. *Productive feature*: the expressed is not something that is fully formed prior to its expression. The expression does something—it is a kind of dynamic “actualising” of the expressed.

A detailed account of the relation of expression is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice to indicate here that each of these features regularly appear, albeit emphasised in different ways, in accounts of the expressive relation that holds between various relata: the expression of emotions and attitudes in bodily gestures,⁷ the expression of emotion in art,⁸ the expression of thought in language,⁹ the expression of intentions in action,¹⁰ the expression of values in law,¹¹ and the expression of Being in beings.¹²

Turning back to Bacon, we can begin to appreciate how his art *expresses* rather than represents or illustrates its subject matter.

1. In terms of the expressive relation’s ontological aspect, as has already

been indicated, the energetic reality that Bacon aims to paint (the expressed) exists *in* the processes productive of novel forms (the expressions). Or, more fully, the reality to be painted by Bacon is the process through which sensation and its invisible conditioning forces give rise to new forms in and of experience in some local situation; and Bacon's practice of painting gives expression to this reality by participating in and embodying such a process, making it manifest (in a way we still need to explore) in the production of new forms.

2. In terms of expression's epistemological feature, Bacon's paintings communicate something about the reality of forces, sensation and the formation of forms by making that reality manifest in a particular way within the medium of painting. The question of how this expressive power of his painting is to be understood is addressed in more detail in the following section.
3. In terms of the expressive relation's causal feature, enough has already been said to indicate that the energetic reality which Bacon's paintings give expression to is causally responsible for the experimental production of his painterly forms (force as the condition of sensation). This causality, however, should be considered an immanent or non-linear cause, insofar cause and effect are not independent of one another. Bacon's forms are effects only in the sense that they actualise and transform the energetic reality they presuppose *from within*, which is to say that the cause is inseparable from, and informed and transformed by, the various effects it gives rise to over time.
4. Finally, it is clear that what is expressed by Bacon's paintings is not something that is fully formed prior to its expressions. The energetic reality of differential relations between forces that is the expressed

subject of Bacon's paintings exists in a state of potentiality that Bacon's paintings actualise and transform. It is in this sense that the expression of energetic reality in paint *does* something rather than says something, even if, as will be seen, Bacon's paintings still "communicate" something through what they do in their medium.

PAINTING AS AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM

What needs to be explained is how the activity of painting is capable of expressing sensation and the forces that condition it. Indeed, how is it that painting can make manifest or communicate something over and above the brute materiality of its components? Why is it that not every combination of paint on canvas is a painting of sensation in Bacon's sense? Why does Bacon claim that the painter's "instinct" must be rooted in cultivation, practice and knowledge, and that the instinctive art of children is ultimately unsatisfactory (I 112)? It will be useful, firstly, to distinguish the different basic elements of Bacon's paintings. Subsequently, we will need to understand what it is about the artistic medium of painting, and Bacon's particular relation to that medium, that allows him to communicate something through his art.

Arguably, we can analyse the majority of Bacon's works into five constitutive elements: (i) the form or figure; (ii) the more or less monochromatic background, characterised by a "shallow" depth; (iii) the variable contours that circumscribe the figure and connect foreground and background (which may appear as a ring, oval, square, box, pipe, rug, bed, etc.); (iv) the relations of colour in which the first three elements converge; and (v) local areas of "blurriness" established through the application of "free" marks or scrubbing. Deleuze provides us with an extended example that focuses on the first four elements in *Figure at a Washbasin* (1976):

There is a large, monochrome ochre *shore* as a background, which provides the armature. There is the contour as an autonomous power (the reef)—it is the crimson of the mattress or cushion on which the Figure is standing, a crimson that is combined with the black of the disk and contrasted

with the white of the crumpled newspaper. Finally, there is the Figure, like a *flow* of broken tones—ochres, reds, and blues. But there are still other elements. First, there is the black blind that seem to cut across the field of ochre; then the washbasin, itself a bluish broken tone; and the long curved pipe, a white marked with manual daubs of ochre, which surrounds the mattress, the Figure, and the washbasin, and which also cuts across the field ... The washbasin is like a second autonomous contour which surrounds the Figure's head, just as the first surrounded its foot. And the pipe is itself a third autonomous contour, whose upper half divides the field of colour in half. As for the blind, ... it falls between the field and the Figure, in such a way that it occupies the shallow depth that separates them and relates the entire painting to one and the same plane. It is a rich communication of colours. The Figure's broken tones incorporate not only the pure tone of the field but also the pure tone of the red cushion, adding to it bluish tones that resonate with the tone of the washbasin, a broken blue that contrasts with the pure red (FB 145–6).

With regard to the local “blurriness” or, as Deleuze calls it, the “diagram”—whose role in Bacon's painterly practice will be examined in more detail below—we can understand this to function in two ways. First of all, insofar as the blurriness results from the application of free marks (flicked paint, scrubbing already applied paint, etc.) without foresight or control, it thwarts the artist's habitual reliance on those illustrative clichés that would prevent the emergence of a new form (FB 99–100).¹³ Secondly, the non-illustrative marks left on the canvas open up new “possibilities” for the formation of forms, by liberating colours and colour relations whose progressive modulation will constitute the pictorial whole (FB 101–102, 120–21). In an interesting exchange, Bacon lists three types of “accidents” that produce the blurry sections of his canvases, and describes the role they have in opening up various “possibilities of fact”:

One [such accident] would be when you were exasperated with what you had done and either with a cloth or with a brush freely scrubbed over it. A

second would be when you painted impatiently and make marks across the form in annoyance. A third might be when you painted absent-mindedly ... I think that you can make, very much as in abstract painting, involuntary marks on the canvas which may suggest much deeper ways by which you can trap the fact you are obsessed by ... [T]he marks are made, and you survey the thing like you would a sort of graph. And you see within this graph the possibilities of all types of fact being planted ... [F]or instance, if you think of a portrait, you maybe at one time have put the mouth somewhere, but you suddenly see through this graph that the mouth could go right across the face (I 60–5).

But now, how can the pushing of paint, as it were, be expressive of something beyond its mere material presence? How is it that what Bacon does with the elements of his paintings expresses or communicates something, namely, sensation, force relations and the formation of form? Bacon claims in an interview that “to be a painter now ... you have to know, even if only in a rudimentary way, the history of art from prehistoric times right up to today” (I 223). Bacon does not elaborate on why this is, except to say that his study of both historical and contemporary visual images has affected his whole attitude to visual things, “by showing the acuteness of the visual image that you have got to make” (I 224). By this, he appears to mean that the expressive power of his images is due to their relationship to a certain history of visual culture. But this simply pushes the question further back: how is it that artists and consumers of art, at any given moment in the history of the visual arts, can experience the distribution of coloured paint on a two-dimensional surface as expressive of something?

In a study of Deleuze’s work on Bacon, and with reference to several historians and philosophers of art including Riegl, Worringer and Maldiney, Ronald Bogue argues that, in Bacon’s works, there is a struggle to solve a number of problems that were also faced by painters in the past. These problems centre on the question of the relation between the hand and the eye, or between the tactile and the optical—both of which are factors in visual experience and the practice of painting. With

regard to visual perception, as Merleau-Ponty argues, vision is not pure. What we “see” is informed by, and cannot be abstracted out from, our embodied nature and embodied capacities such as touch.¹⁴ As Bogue elaborates, following the analyses of Riegl in *Late Roman Art Industry*:

Touch is superior to vision in providing information about the material impenetrability of objects, but vision surpasses touch in informing us about the height and width of objects, since it is able to synthesize multiple perceptions more quickly than touch. A sense of depth, however, comes only through touch, since the eye sees only planes. And a knowledge of objects as three-dimensional forms requires the subjective synthesis of multiple tactile and visual experiences of entities ... Hand and eye reinforce one another in a fundamental way, since our vision of objects as impenetrable, three-dimensional entities necessarily incorporates within it knowledge gained from tactile experience. Hence Riegl speaks of a tactile or *haptic* vision (from the Greek *hapto*, to touch), in which the contributing role of touch is emphasized.¹⁵

The problem for painters, then, is how to work with the contributions made by both touch and sight in the visual apprehension of their art. But this problem of the hand-eye relation in visual perception is mirrored in the problem of the relation between the hand and the eye in the act of painting itself. As Deleuze puts it, setting aside a popular image of the practice of painting, “it is obviously not enough to say that the eye judges and the hand executes,” as though the eye enjoyed a privileged relation to thought that is lacking in the subservient hand (FB 154). The relation between hand and eye is rather much more complex. There is a dynamic exchange between the two and, as such, presents the painter with a problem to solve in their practice. Consider, for example, the “solution” to this problem developed in the strongly “manual” techniques characteristic of expressionist painting, compared with the rather more precise and controlled brushwork found in highly “optical” Renaissance or Baroque painting, or even contemporary “photorealism.” Or again, as Bacon remarks in relation to his own

practice, which occupies a kind of middle ground between the two approaches:

With oil paint being so fluid, the image is changing all the time while you're working ... I don't think that generally people really understand how mysterious, in a way, the actual manipulation of oil paint is. Because moving ... the brush one way rather than the other will completely alter the implications of the image. But you could only see it if it happened before you ... It's really a continuous question of the fight between [manual] accident and [visual, intellectual] criticism (I 140).

The hand-eye relation is obviously central to the problematic relation between figure, ground, immediate sense experience and mediating thought in the aesthetic individuation of painterly forms, but also in question historically is the way that the painterly relation between figure and ground gives expression to various metaphysical concerns.¹⁶ The perception of an object as a three-dimensional form, as already indicated, requires a synthesis of multiple tactile and visual experiences of entities, but how is this to be achieved in relation to the flat surface of the canvas? What kind of geometry, what ordering of values or colours are needed for a figure to emerge from a background on what is manifestly a two-dimensional surface? And how can considerations bearing on the aesthetic emergence of form be reconciled with or give expression to background (philosophical, religious, etc.) beliefs regarding the production of forms more generally?

We need not claim that this exhausts the problems treated by painters in the history of visual culture. It is also not necessary to claim that all painters were aware of or consciously grappled with these particular problems. Nevertheless, it is plausible to claim that many of the different periods and innovations throughout the history of what we call painting can be grouped together insofar as they offer coloured solutions, as it were, to a series of overlapping and criss-crossing problems—a series in which the above mentioned problems would feature prominently. It might be objected, of course, that what is most prominent in the history of painting is representation or depiction—for example, the painterly depiction of

some object so that an audience might recognise it, or the artist's communication through paint of some determinate intentional content that the painting is about (even in "abstract" painting), etc. Be that as it may, it cannot be denied that the very capacity to produce representational paintings throughout history, and to have them understood as representing some thing or idea, *depends* on painters developing solutions to problems such as those mentioned above: the relation between hand and eye in both visual experience and the act of painting; the relation between figure, ground, sense experience and thought; and the relation between conceptions of aesthetic and metaphysical individuation. It will be argued here that, whatever else painting does or has done (such as represent things and ideas), paintings are inseparable from their problematic conditions and "make sense" as instances of solution to these problems. Painting, it is argued here, is an "expressive medium" to the extent that what painters do in this medium with the various elements of painting (line, colour, shape, etc.) communicates something by resolving or "actualising" painting's problematic conditions in a particular way. Moreover, when a given solution is maintained and replicated this gives rise to painterly conventions or norms which in turn inform the medium (recognisable painterly "styles"), such that paintings can "make sense" or be seen as meaningful, not only as solutions to the above-mentioned problems, but by instantiating or differing from painterly conventions in particular instances. In short, paintings express or communicate something over and above their mere material presence by "making sense" in both the passive and the active senses of this phrase: they can passively "make sense" in relation to a background of painterly norms or conventions (Bacon's illustrative "clichés") which allows certain aspects of the image to show up in meaningful ways, but they can also actively create meaning or "*make* sense" by shaping and reshaping these background norms through novel resolutions of painting's problematic conditions.

To more fully appreciate what it means to make a visual image in light of its problematic conditions, and more particularly, to thereby understand the "acuteness" of Bacon's own visual images, we can take up Bacon's suggestion

above and sketch a rudimentary outline of the history of the visual arts. A full treatment of this history clearly lies beyond the scope of this essay, so we will lean on Deleuze's account of Bacon's idiosyncratic "recapitulation" of several moments in the history of painting (see FB Ch.14–15). In so doing, we will briefly indicate the way a number of different periods and styles in the history of the visual arts express the problematic conditions mentioned above—from Egyptian bas-relief, to classical Greek painting, Byzantine mosaics and murals, Gothic ornament, modern abstract painting and modern "colourism." Clearly, as E. H. Gombrich has put it, such a history of the visual arts "is not a story of progress in technical proficiency" or the capacity to represent things in a realistic way, "but a story of changing ideas and requirements" that are related, as I have argued here, to painting's problematic conditions, embracing perceptual, aesthetic and metaphysical considerations.¹⁷

Following Riegl's analysis of ancient Egyptian bas-relief, Deleuze argues that the delineated figures of that period stand out from their ground insofar as they share one and the same "tactile" plane, over which the viewer's eye, informed by the sense of touch, can "feel" or "grasp" the contour that is their common limit (or, to put this in a slightly less ocularcentric way, perhaps it is less the eye that feels and more the hand or sense of touch that "sees" for us in such instances). Deleuze proceeds to argue that the strong geometric contours of bas-relief isolate the form as a material "essence" in the sense that they enclose and unify the form—that is, the body, whose rendering combines both profile and frontal views in order to show it in as much completeness as possible—emphasising for perception the figure's impenetrability and protecting it from change and becoming (FB 122–3). In relation to this last point, as Gombrich notes, Egyptian art was created for the purpose of ensuring that the dead would continue to live in the afterlife: they believed that the body must be preserved if the soul is to live on in the beyond.¹⁸ In other words, Egyptian bas-relief is informed by metaphysical ideas about the nature of bodies and their relation to time and the afterlife, and exploits the way that vision is inhabited by the sense of touch in order to present the material

essence and impenetrability of individual bodies in an easily perceptible form.

Bacon professed an admiration for Egyptian art, especially its sculpture, and the figure of the Sphinx appears in a number of his works (I 132, 198). Following Deleuze's analyses, the expressive power of his paintings can be understood in relation to some of the features of Egyptian art. In Bacon, figure and ground occupy, if not a single visual plane, then a foreground and background characterised by an extremely "shallow" depth that is a long way from the organization of perspectival depth in the optical space of classical representation (FB 136). Echoing the Egyptians, Bacon also declares a desire for durability, essence, or eternity, insofar as he aims to capture reality "raw and alive and ... finally fossilized" (I 76; FB 123). As opposed to Egyptian art's strong, geometrical delineation of a material essence, however, Bacon's figures are inseparable from "accidental" variations (FB 134–5). In fact, nowhere is this particular contrast more evident than in his *malerisch* treatment of the figure of the Sphinx in the 1950s.

Classical Greek (and later, Renaissance) painting also took the "accident" as its object: the irregular contours of organic and changing bodies seen at a particular moment and from a particular point of view, as well as the shifting visual phenomena of light and shadow. In contrast to Egyptian bas-relief, Greek painting distinguishes foreground and background planes and makes of the contour, no longer the common limit of figure and ground on a single plane, but the self-limitation of a form in the foreground. A perspective traverses the separated planes in depth, and the variable play of light and shadow is used to model the figure, suggest depth and volume in the space between the planes, and distinguish figure and ground. Following Worringer, Deleuze argues that the Greeks, aided by reason, subjected "accidental" visual phenomena to a form of well-founded optical organisation, making of the accident a manifestation of essence—not the essence of the object this time, but that of the human artist themselves, understood in terms of their organic vitality and activity, enjoying themselves and their own vital movements in an art that reflects life's variable, dynamic rhythms.¹⁹ As Worringer puts it, the Greek artist remoulds the phenomenal world of sense in accordance with the

image they have of themselves: “he no longer evades accidental appearance, but merely modifies it in consonance with ... his own sense of vitality, of which he has become joyfully conscious.”²⁰ In other words, in classical representation, what the painted figure or form is primarily “about” is not so much the thing whose outward appearance is to be depicted, but rather a “form of representation” whose rules would gradually be refined (especially during the Renaissance), and that expresses above all the organic life of the human being: at one with the organic world in which they joyfully participate, and of which they are in some sense the measure (FB 126).

The relation between hand and eye in Greek art clearly changes as well. Whereas in Egyptian bas-relief the eye assumes a “haptic” function in which the role of touch is prominent (one “sees” with one’s hand or sense of touch, as it were), in classical representation “tactile values” play a secondary, though still indispensable role. The modelling of the visual figure in the gradation of light obviously lends the figure a sculptural quality, giving the eye some visual referents with which to “feel” the organic contour in the complex play of shadow and light. As Deleuze argues, however, the sense of touch is here subordinated to the eye insofar as it is drawn upon only with the aim of perfecting the optical form (FB 127).²¹

Needless to say, Bacon’s treatment of accidental variation significantly departs from classical representation, insofar as he eschews the subjection of the accident both to a perspectival organisation and to the manifested essence of humanity revelling in its own vitality and the beauty of organic form. Indeed, to the extent that Bacon still speaks of the essence of his art, what is essential for him (what endures) is nothing over and above the accident: fortuitous encounters between forces, sensation and the ongoing formation of form—the violence of reality in which the artwork, its ostensible subject and the artist themselves are all immersed.

Following Deleuze’s potted history, after classical Greek painting, visual art develops in two different directions—towards the elaboration of an optical space

that is increasingly free of tactile values, represented in his account by Byzantine art, and towards the imposition of a manual space in which the artist's hand becomes expressionistic and assumes a certain independence with respect to the eye, such as in Gothic ornament (FB 127). Byzantine mosaics and murals, although clearly indebted to Greek painting, display a lack of concern with the observation of nature. Artists no longer measured their forms against reality, or set out to discover new ways to represent organic bodies, or created the illusion of depth in perspectival space.²² Their religiously inspired figures rather issue from a purely optical field of light and colour that engenders spatiality and form without relying on tactile values—such as the Christ Pantocrator in the Cefalù Cathedral which emerges from a bright gold background and seems to freely float in a space that extends out to embrace the viewer, who in turn clearly “sees” that they are in the realm of the sacred.²³ Random tiles of gold and silver were often placed in figures to enhance the play of light and faces were modelled with tiles of contrasting colours to create the illusion of chromatic modulation. As Deleuze summarizes it, Byzantine forms “depend increasingly on the alternation of light and dark, on the purely optical play of light and shadows. The tactile referents are annulled, and even the contour ceases to be a limit, and is now the result of shadow and light, or black shores and white surfaces” (FB 128). The way that the play of light and, more particularly, colour engenders spatiality and form is also central to Bacon's work. As Deleuze will argue, however, Bacon recovers a “haptic” treatment of colour that differs from its optical treatment in Byzantine art.

In the other direction, following Worringer, Deleuze argues that the complex lines of Gothic ornament represent a manual as opposed to optical departure from classical, organic representation. These ornamental lines of “super-organic expressiveness” no longer delineate precise figures, but are rather the abstract geometric lines of a “linear fantasy” that intertwine with one another, senselessly run back on themselves, or are checked and diverted into new complications of expression, forming a restless tumult which the eye can barely follow, and that seems to have a will of its own.²⁴ In this ceaseless linear play in which manual

expressiveness tends to free itself from the judging eye, not only does the Gothic line not outline anything, “the powers of the line and the plane tend to be equalized” and, consequently, the distinction between form and ground tends to disappear (FB 130). Plant and animal motifs do appear in Gothic ornamentation, but they are quickly absorbed within a maze of lines that is

common to different animals, to the human and the animal, and to pure abstraction ... [T]he accident is everywhere ... It is as if organisms were caught up in a whirling or serpentine movement that gives them a single “body” or unites them in a single “fact”, apart from any figurative or narrative connection (FB 130–31).

As Bogue rightly notes, the resonance with Bacon’s art here is clear: the Gothic line performs a similar function to Bacon’s local areas of “blurriness,” insofar as they are both apparently random, manual “catastrophes” that deform the illustrative image and subsume it within a field of nonorganic forces, while at the same time presenting a “graph” or “diagram” that opens up new possibilities for a figural becoming that expresses these forces.²⁵

It should also be noted, following Worringer, that the Gothic line has metaphysical significance. It involves a kind of “longing to be absorbed in an unnatural intensified activity of a non-sensuous, spiritual sort ... in order to get free, in this exaltation, from the pressing sense of the constraint of actuality.” This longing which created such ornament, moreover, “was what gave rise to the fervent sublimity of the Gothic cathedral, that transcendentalism in stone,” whose slender and complex structure of thin shafts and ribs seems to eliminate everything heavy and earthly.²⁶ Of course, while Bacon’s art similarly strives to break free from the constraints of actuality (conventional or illustrational ways of grasping reality), its metaphysical orientation seems to lie in the direction of the sensuous and chaotic world of impersonal forces that is responsible for the formation and deformation of forms, as opposed to a spiritual ascension.

Closer to Bacon's time, Deleuze suggests that the two kinds of break with classical representation found in optical Byzantine art and manual Gothic art are echoed, respectively, in the highly optical art of formal or geometric abstraction and the strongly manual art of abstract expressionism (FB 103–10). While Bacon shares with such movements a rejection of illustrative clichés, his antipathy to abstraction is well known from his interviews. On the one hand, Bacon claims, formal abstraction “is only interested in the beauty of its patterns or its shapes” in a purely optical space—patterns and shapes which, by means of a kind of symbolic code that addresses itself to the eye and the intellect, are supposed to catch emotions but are “too weak to convey anything” (I 67).²⁷ On the other hand, abstract expressionism is simply “thrown-about paint”: while action painting turns its back on representation by turning to a world of manual forces and rhythm, it remains too “chancy” to participate in the disciplined formation of new forms that is supposed to *ensue* from the application of free marks and corresponding disruption of illustrative clichés (I 106).

Bacon's complex relation to the history of the visual arts, as well as to the problematic conditions informing the medium more generally (embracing perceptual, aesthetic and metaphysical considerations), converge in what Deleuze calls Bacon's “colourism”—aspects of which he inherits from modern colourists such as Cézanne and Van Gogh, but also pre-modern painters such as Velásquez and Rembrandt, both of whom Bacon greatly admired. More particularly, it is argued here, Bacon's art “makes sense” (in the passive and active senses of phrase) as an expression of force, sensation and the formation of form, because of the way his particular modulation of colour both resolves painting's problematic conditions and shows up as meaningful in relation to previously established solutions to these same problematic conditions (“to be a painter now ... you have to know ... the history of art from prehistoric times right up to today”).

How does Bacon's treatment of colour and colour relations resolve painting's problematic conditions? Deleuze defines as “colourists” those who

substitute relations of tonality [i.e., hue] for relations of value [i.e., light and dark], and who “render” not only the form, but also shadow and light, and time, through these pure relations of colour ... “Colourism” means not only that relations are established between colours (as in every painting worthy of this name), but that colour itself is discovered to be the variable relation, the differential relation, on which everything else depends. The formula of the colourist is: if you push colour to its pure internal relations (hot-cold, expansion-contraction), then you have everything ... form and ground, light and shadow, bright and dark (FB 139).

In Bacon’s colourism, then, it is the differential play of colour between the bright or pure tones of the background, the “broken tones” of the figure and the “communicating” colours of the autonomous contours, that is responsible for the aesthetic individuation of form, and that “explains the unity of the whole, the distribution of each element, and the way each of them acts upon the others” (FB 145). Moreover, the emergence and continued communication of the figure in relation to the ground in immediate sense perception is due to an Egyptian-like “haptic vision” that Bacon revives through his modulation of colour. Here, the feeling we have for space and the volumes of the figures are created through the juxtaposition of tones arranged gradually over the flat surface of the canvas, as opposed to such spaces and spatial relations being “illustrated” according to formulae that are verified by the judging eye and measured against optical forms in external space (such as in the use of foreshortening or modelling in chiaroscuro to create the illusion of depth) (FB 133–4). In other words, it is the sense of touch inhabiting one’s vision, as opposed to intellectual judgement, that immediately apprehends the spatialising effects of colour relations in Bacon’s images (warm and cool, expansion and contraction, etc.).

It can be difficult, however, to apprehend a painting in this haptic manner, given the tendency of illustrative clichés to impose themselves on what we see. One tends not to grasp the coloured form-ing of a form in a gradual, haptic fashion; one rather tends to see only finished forms through the lens of our expectations

(to which they conform, or which they confound). This is why Deleuze argues that the haptic vision elicited by Bacon's use of colour is made possible only by a new type of manual intrusion—a new relation between hand and eye—in the act of painting itself (FB 137-8). As noted above, Bacon's canvases include visible areas of "blurriness" arising from flicked paint, scrubbing and the like, without foresight or control. For the painter, these visible, chancy acts wrest colours and colour relations from the control exercised by optical clichés and present—as in a "graph" (Bacon) or "diagram" (Deleuze)—various possibilities for the production of new, non-illustrational forms: forms that emerge through the progressive and experimental modulation of the liberated colour relations. Importantly, however, Bacon's novel forms do not efface the diagram from which they spring. The diagram remains an integral part of the image and imposes itself on the eye in a way that works against the grain of optical clichés. It draws the eye towards the canvas, awakens the sense of touch within vision and constrains sight to traverse the tactile surface of the image and grasp the emergence of a form through the modulation of colour relations in a haptic fashion. It is this haptic art, of course, that Bacon believes comes across "directly onto the nervous system," as opposed to communicating a story "in a long diatribe through the brain" by means of illustrative clichés.

Bacon's experimental haptic colourism is thus his solution to several of painting's problematic conditions, including the relation between hand and eye in both visual perception and the act of painting, as well as the relation between figure, ground, immediate sense perception and intellectual judgement in the aesthetic individuation of forms. It is this solution that allows us to see his canvases as something more than a two-dimensional coloured surface: it is what allows us to grasp a novel form. But now, what is it that makes the coloured emergence of form in Bacon's paintings a painting of sensation, their conditioning forces, and the formation of form? There seems to be a difference between a painting being an example of the production of a form by means of colour relations—indeed, even classical representational paintings would count as such—and that painting

thereby giving expression to (making manifest while also actualising) the reality of force relations responsible for the formation of forms in experience. Indeed, it seems entirely possible that a child could haphazardly apply colour to canvas in such a way as to awaken a viewer's haptic vision and make a strange figure emerge from a ground, but I think we would be reluctant to say that the production of such a form simultaneously makes manifest the metaphysics of forces it presupposes. For Bacon, we can recall, because the instinctive art of children is not rooted in "cultivation and practice and knowledge," it will ultimately be "unsatisfactory" (I 112). Arguably, then, a painting's expressive capacities depend, at least in part, on the particular manner in which the painting inherits and/or transforms the historical and encultured norms of the medium. In what follows, then, I will indicate how the expressed of Bacon's paintings is made manifest through a comparison and contrast with several moments in the history of the visual arts—moments which involve both particular approaches to the aesthetic individuation of form, and various metaphysical ideas to which these approaches give expression.

We have already seen how, as Deleuze puts it, "a new Egypt rises up" in Bacon's resuscitation of the haptic—one whose shallow depth and tactile surface is "composed uniquely of colour and by colour" (FB 134). However, the differences between the coloured formation of form in Bacon's work as it passes through the chancy "diagram," and Egyptian bas-relief's strong, geometrical delineation of a material essence immune from change and becoming, communicates something about what is essential in Bacon's work. In other words, by contrast with an Egyptian artform with which it nevertheless seems to share several features, the visible elaboration of the accident in the formation of Bacon's forms is what "shows up" as the only constant—the only thing that endures.

The accident, as noted above, was also the object of classical representational painting: the mutable, organic body in space, apprehended at a given moment and from a contingent point of view, and modelled by the optical play of light and shadow. With this focus on the accident, the geometric contour that once delineated a material essence and functioned as the common limit of figure and

ground on a single plane, becomes the organic contour or outline of the figure in the foreground of perspectival space. Bacon's contour, by contrast, is not the contour of the figure but an autonomous element of the image: the cube, pipe, rug, bed, etc. He claimed he used this device in order to "concentrate the image down ... [and] see it better" (I 23). Deleuze interprets such remarks through the lens of Bacon's haptic colourism, arguing that the contour acts as a kind of "membrane," itself constituted by colour relations, that ensures a double movement between the other two regimes of colour: a flat extension towards the monochromatic field (with its pure tones) and a voluminous contraction towards the body or figure (characterised by broken tones) (FB 120, 151–2). The "shallow" depth thereby established between foreground and background in Bacon's paintings thus stands opposed to the naturalistic and perspectival optical space of classical representation, and in doing so it manifests, in conjunction with the Bacon's use of the diagram, a second break with the essential: not only the immutable essence of the material body, but also the supposed essence of the human being, to whose everyday outlook and organising powers the accident had been subjected in the elaboration and perfection of an optical form. For Bacon, there are only accidents, "all the way down"—contingent encounters between corporeal forces, sensation, the ongoing formation of form and the mutual transformation of the apprehending subject and apprehended object.

Aspects of Byzantine and Gothic art, as we have noted, are also echoed in Bacon's art. The differences between them, moreover, help us understand the different metaphysical concerns expressed in them. The large, monochromatic backgrounds in Bacon's paintings share an affinity with the luminous backgrounds of Byzantine mosaics, and both artforms engender spatiality through the use of colour. As Deleuze argues, however, Byzantine art treats colour and the production of space by means of value relations (the optical play of light and dark colours) as opposed to tonal relations (the haptic modulation of hot and cold, or expanding and contracting colours). The treatment of light and relations of value in Byzantine art, as analysed above, cause an optical form to emerge out of the background

without the need for tactile referents, while at the same time drawing the viewer into a luminous, spiritual realm that transcends corporeal existence. As Deleuze puts it, the image here is not so much the appearance of the essential, “it is rather the apparition itself that creates essence and law: things rise up and ascend into the light” (FB 128). Bacon’s haptic treatment of colour in terms of tonal relations, by contrast, implicates the viewer in what we might call a *transdescendence*. If there is an overcoming of the mundane in Bacon, the first step in this movement is in the direction of the manual forces and accidental encounters upon which the world of constituted forms depends.

Finally, spiritual transcendence was also a concern of Gothic ornament. As has already been argued, the manual linear fantasies of Gothic ornament, like Bacon’s diagrams, deform illustration and present new possibilities for figural becomings. Moreover, both artforms share the aim of breaking free of the mundane. Gothic ornament, however, implicates the viewer in an intense, sublime experience that transcends the earthly but without harnessing these forces in the constitution of new forms. In this sense, Gothic ornament can be likened to abstract expressionism in their shared difference to Bacon’s art: while all three involve a chancy manual deformation and give rise to sensation, the former remain irredeemably “confused” and fail to actualise their diagrammatic potentialities in bringing about the new (FB 109).

We see, then, through the lens of both his experimental, haptic colourism and his particular relation to various developments in the history of his medium, that the metaphysical reality that is manifested and actualised in Bacon’s paintings is one of manual forces whose accidental encounters and subsequent experimental elaborations give rise to the formation of new forms in and of experience. In other words, we see how, by means of the chancy distortions and subsequent modulations of his coloured images, Bacon re-problematizes and re-solves the various perceptual, aesthetic and metaphysical considerations that have informed the visual arts throughout their history, and thereby causes his images to actively and passively “make sense” within that medium as expressions of sensation,

corporeal forces and the formation of form.

THE ACT OF PAINTING

But now, the final question to be answered is how we should conceptualise the type of intentional activity and agency that is involved in Bacon's practice of painting. It seems to present a problem case for the so-called "standard" or "causal theory" of action. According to the standard theory that has developed out of the work of Donald Davidson, an event is an action, as opposed to something that merely happens, if it has the right kind of causal history. More specifically, the standard theory posits the existence of mental states (belief-desire pairs, intentions, etc.) that (i) represent the conditions of satisfaction or success that the performance of an action must realise, and (ii) cause that action to be carried out in the manner specified by that representational content.²⁸ As John Searle puts it, intentions have a world to mind direction of fit, and a mind to world direction of causation: they cause what they represent to be realised in the world.²⁹ And this entails, of course, that the representational content of the relevant mental state must be specified *in advance* of the action it causes.

As we have seen, however, Bacon claims that he cannot represent to himself *what* he wants to paint prior to the act of painting. Of course, he might be able to specify *some* conditions of satisfaction that his painting would need to meet, but these would be so vague as to be incapable of guiding or controlling the realisation of a highly complex activity and a nuanced visual image. Bacon also claims that, in any case, whatever he wants to paint, he cannot represent to himself *how* to paint it prior to discovering or inventing a way. The "how" question here, of course, concerns the non-illustrational construction that will be required to actualise the vague sensation Bacon has of some person or image and their "energy", and not various trivial means to his end such as moving his hand up and down or side to side, which he clearly knows will be involved. Of course, Bacon's head is filled with representations of various kinds—of images from life and the history of visual culture that he already knows how to illustrate using conventional visual signs—

but none of these will serve as the prior conditions of satisfaction for the image of “ambiguous” reality he wants to make manifest and actualise. As Bacon pithily puts it, painting “will only catch the mystery of reality if the painter doesn’t know how to do it” (I 116).

It might be objected that the standard theory now tends to distinguish between prior or “distal” intentions and present-directed intentions or intentions-in-action. Searle holds, for example, that all intentional actions are caused and guided by an intention-in-action that is *contemporaneous* with the action itself, and that represents (or “presents”) the action’s conditions of satisfaction “on the fly.” The conditions of satisfaction specified by an intention-in-action are concerned with the local details of the bodily movements or states of the agent in the unfolding performance of their action, and reference to it helps to explain an agent’s ongoing control over their activity. An intention-in-action is often “triggered” by a prior intention, whose conditions of satisfaction represent more general or global goals and means. But Searle also holds that, while all intentional actions require an intention-in-action for their situated performance, many of our spontaneous everyday actions do not require *prior* intentions.³⁰ We can, however, question whether this last claim is true, and for two reasons. First, presuming Searle is operating with a linear notion of cause, if an intention-in-action is indeed the cause of a bodily movement or state that is its effect, it must temporally and logically precede that effect—it is not strictly contemporaneous with the unfolding action, even if the temporal distance separating them is small. Secondly, when we reflect on the phenomenology of our agency, while we certainly don’t plan out in advance the minutiae of our purposeful behaviour, we typically experience very few if any cases of completely spontaneous action that are altogether unrelated to our prior projects, dispositions, or, more generally, “what we are about.” Indeed, it would be difficult for us to recognise completely spontaneous actions as ours, or to feel that we were the author of them. Intentions-in-action, it would seem, must either involve or be integrated with prior information relevant to the unfolding action, as opposed to being simply concerned with, and strictly contemporaneous to, local

conditions of bodily movement.

In a more recent development of the causal and representational theory of action, Elizabeth Pacherie has developed a three-tiered, dynamic model of intentions and action specification and control.³¹ She distinguishes between distal or D-intentions (Searle's "prior" intentions), proximate or P-intentions (intentions-in-action), and motor or M-intentions, and models the dynamic, causal exchanges between them as they mutually constrain and inform one another. Importantly, on Pacherie's model, information from the world that the agent's action is transforming is also fed back into this system via "comparators"—mechanisms that compare the initial representations specified at a given level of intentionality with the actual states of affairs that are being brought about under the guidance and control of these representations. The error signals produced when the representation and the result fail to coincide, of course, contribute to the progressive specification or refinement of the agent's intention at various levels. In this way, then, the specification of the conditions of satisfaction constitutive of an agent's intentions occurs in a dynamic way up and down the various tiers, such that, for example, not only would D-intentions cause and constrain the specification of relevant P-intentions, but the lack of fit between the agent's P-intention and the effects produced by its execution in the situation of action might demand the refinement of the agent's D-intention. While Pacherie briefly contemplates the existence of spontaneous or routine actions that do not require the presence of distal intentions, we should not think that for her intentional action can be devoid of some kind of prior intentionality at one level or another.³² Moreover, the kind of non-linear causality that informs her modelling, along with the way she integrates the "intentional cascade" with other cognitive systems, would allow her to address the second objection I raised to Searle's treatment of intentions-in-action. What this means, for the purposes of the present argument, is that Pacherie's work at first glance appears capable of accounting for the dynamic processes underpinning the progressive specification of Bacon's artistic intentions—commencing with the "break" that a more or less chancy motor act establishes with prior illustrative

representations, and gradually, by means of feedback loops and the intentional cascade, leading to the kind of full-blooded artistic intention that Bacon comes to discover through the execution of his work and that we would ordinarily want to attribute to him to explain his agency.

Bacon, in fact, seems to affirm several elements of such an account of action and agency in his interviews. Consider the following exchange, which we will need to unpack:

DS Now, it's clear that in any art there's a mixture of intention and what takes the artist by surprise.

FB Yes. Without the intention, he's not going to start at all.

DS What you seem to say is that in your own case surprise takes over from intention quite early on.

FB You see, one has an intention, but what really happens comes about in working ... And the way it works is really by the things that happen. In working you are really following this kind of cloud of sensation in yourself, but you don't know what it really is. And it's called instinct. And one's instinct, whether right or wrong, fixes on certain things that have happened in that activity of applying the paint to the canvas. I think an awful lot of creation is made out of ... the self-criticism of an artist ...

DS And in the application of his critical sense, he has no defined criteria; it's a purely instinctive kind of criticism. Is that what you mean?

FB I do mean that; yes. And he will never know whether he was right or wrong to leave [this or that mark on the canvas], because, after all, it takes too long really to know whether things are any good or not (I 168–9).

We can note several things here, reading this exchange in light of our earlier analyses. First, the intention that Bacon claims he starts with is neither the high-level decision to apply random marks to his canvas, nor the motor intentionality guiding such application. It is rather a complex intention embracing three elements: (i) an intention to give visual expression to something whose image he can represent to himself only in exceedingly vague terms; (ii) representations, informed by a deep appreciation of his medium, as to how such an image could be squeezed into an illustrational form; (iii) an intention to bring the image about in a way that is adequate to the “ambiguous” nature of the reality to be captured, and so in a way that will avoid illustrational clichés. Taken together, these conditions of satisfaction or criteria of success clearly do not amount to a clear and adequately specified representation of *what* is to be painted and *how*.

Secondly, Bacon will apply random marks to his canvas such that “surprise takes over from intention quite early on.” There is obviously some type of decision to lash out at the canvas, and motor intentionality is certainly involved here in the appropriate gripping of the brush or rag and the movement towards or over the canvas, but the act itself is supposed to be devoid of higher-level foresight or control. “Free marks” are thus made and “surprise takes over” from the initial vague intention, by which Bacon appears to mean, as noted above, that the tendency to illustrate the form he is seeking has been stymied and he can now stand back and survey the canvas like a “graph” of various novel possibilities for the formation of a form (I 62–5). But now, how do the aesthetic effects produced by the free marks feed back into the system in such a way as to contribute to the progressive specification the artistic intention that will be realised in the work? We should not consider the contemplation of possibilities to function in the same way as the “error signals” in the feedback loops of Pacherie’s model, that contribute to the refinement or ongoing specification of the agent’s higher-order intention. Indeed, the initial intention is not sufficiently well specified to function as a point of comparison vis-à-vis the actual state of affairs on the canvas. Nothing has gone wrong, but something certainly has happened that can be worked upon.

Third, Bacon claims that his artistic intention—that is, the intention that animates “what really happens” in his practice—“comes about in the working.” In other words, Bacon must discover what he is trying to paint and how through a process of experimentation and invention that he hopes will culminate in a non-illustrational construction capable of giving his initially indeterminate sensation the clarity of a form. He works, so he claims, in a “cloud of sensation,” progressively fixing on things that happen on the canvas as constitutive elements of the form that will have been produced, and so gradually specifying the conditions of satisfaction that the final form will have met.

Fourth, however, Bacon claims that there are no pre-defined criteria informing his decision to fix on one thing or another. Perhaps the only criterion is that the marks made should be non-illustrational, but clearly not all non-illustrational marks will be selected for the final form. Perhaps it will be suggested that there are determinate prior criteria or representations informing the selections made, but these are “unconscious,” and an explanation that refers to these unconscious representations or intentions best translates Bacon’s talk of working in a “cloud of sensation” or from “instinct.”

Two considerations work against such a reading. First, Bacon claims that “the moment you know what to do, you’re making just another form of illustration” (I 67). Presumably, “knowing” here could cover both unconscious and conscious knowledge. Bacon clearly has an expert’s understanding of his medium, which would allow him to judge what is “illustrationally appropriate” without bringing the painterly norms informing such judgements to the level of explicit, conscious reflection. In other words, we could very well accept the claim that Bacon possesses unconscious knowledge—representations or criteria—regarding how to construct painterly forms. However, these are precisely the criteria that he is trying to overcome in his experimental practice “out there” in the world. It might be objected that this argument does not rule out the possibility that Bacon still possesses another, different set of unconscious norms, criteria or representations regarding what is appropriate in *his* artistic practice, and that this guides the

selections he comes to make. But how these unconscious entities come about prior to the practice that would establish them remains rather mysterious.

The second consideration working against the idea that Bacon possesses prior, unconscious representations that guide his activity is this: if an unconscious representation can be satisfied by something the agent brings about in the world, even if the content of that representation was not available to the agent prior to its realisation, we should still expect the moment of satisfaction to have some kind of experiential effect on the agent, such that, for example, the agent comes to see what they were after all along, or experiences an easing of psychological tension, etc. However, Bacon's interviews suggest that he never reaches such a point. He claims, for example, that he tends to "destroy all the better paintings." He cannot have done with them and continues to apply paint to canvas until "there's too much paint on it—just a technical thing, too much paint, and one just can't go on" (I 17–8). He then agrees with Sylvester that "if people didn't come and take them away from you, nothing would ever leave the studio; you'd go on till you'd destroy them all" (I 20). In short, Bacon tends to destroy the paintings that are "working" or that seem "on the way" to success, which strongly suggests the absence of pre-existing but unconscious conditions of satisfaction that he might subsequently realise. It appears, then, that whatever intentionality animates Bacon's painterly practice comes about "in the working," and for as long as that work can continue.

Bacon's challenge to the standard story of action is thus this: he presents us with a case of purposeful activity for which we cannot assign, as its prior cause, an appropriately specified set of represented conditions of satisfaction. Rather, Bacon gradually works out what he is trying to paint and how to paint it through the temporally extended and situated activity itself, without necessarily achieving a determinate intention that represents in sufficient detail what is to be realised in the world. As he puts it, "the excitement and the possibilities are in the working and obviously *can only come in working*" (I 177, emphasis added). This is not to say that this "activity" or "working out" involves no representations, or that it is not animated by a cause. It is rather to say, on the one hand, that the artistic intention

that animates Bacon's activity is a type of "immanent" or non-linear cause that remains inseparable from the effects produced by that activity. And on the other hand, it is to say that the specification of significant aspects of the action-guiding, representational content of the intention is an effect of, rather than precedes, the temporally extended activity.

How, then, might the philosophy of action meet the challenge of such an action case? An "expressivist" approach to action and agency, drawing on the notion of expression as analysed above, could prove fruitful. Let us recall the four features of expressive relations, treating the action as the expression and the intention as what is expressed in the action-expression.

1. *Ontological feature*: The expressed intention is ontologically inseparable from its expression in action—it exists *in* the temporally extended and situated action it animates, although it is not identical with that action. What is intended is not simply whatever happens. After all, if illustrational elements start to emerge on the canvas, and/or if Bacon cannot go on because the canvas becomes too clogged with paint, we would not want to say that he intended just this. As noted above, Bacon does hold a "vague" or under-specified intention that can fail to be realised in such situations. On the one hand, however, on the view presented here, what it is to *have* even a vague intention *is* to be acting on it. In other words, following Taylor, Ferrero, and others, there are no Davidsonian "pure intendings" that could exist apart from intentional actions; there are, at most, intentions that impose only very weak or general constraints on an agent's current activity.³³ On the other hand, given the continuity between intending and acting, it will be *in* the temporally extended and situated performance of the action, and for as long as it lasts, that the initially vague intention becomes progressively specified or concretely actualized.

2. *Epistemological feature:* The action-expression communicates something about the expressed intention by virtue of the way that the intentional action “makes sense” (in both the passive and active senses of this phrase) within an expressive medium. We examined Bacon’s relation to the complex expressive medium of painting at length in the previous section. The claim now is that what Bacon wants to paint and how it is to be painted—his artistic intention—is something that is progressively made manifest and specified through his unfolding activity such as it “shows up” in the expressive medium of painting, where Bacon’s experimental painterly practice “makes sense” in relation to the background norms of his medium that his activity simultaneously reshapes.
3. *Causal feature:* As has just been argued, the expressed intention should be considered as the immanent cause of the action, which is to say, a type of non-linear cause that is informed by the effects it produces over time.
4. *Productive feature:* Finally, it follows from the above that the expressed intention is not something that is fully formed prior to its expression in a temporally extended and situated action. The action, unfolding in its medium, does something—it is a kind of dynamic “actualising” and specification of the expressed intention.

It is beyond the scope of the present essay to give a full account and defence of the expressive conception of action and agency. Our purpose here is rather to show that a study of Bacon’s artistic practice both problematises the standard theory of action and motivates a turn to the expressive conception—the details of which have been, and continue to be, developed elsewhere in the literature.³⁴ After all, it is one thing to elaborate a compelling problem case that the standard theory of action has trouble explaining, and another to show that a different theory that

explains the problem case can also explain the cases of action typically treated by the standard theory.

To round out the present study, I will say a few words to bring together the two moments of expression analysed above: the expression in Bacon's paintings of force, sensation and the formation of form, and the expression in Bacon's practice of painting of his artistic intentions. Both moments, it can be argued, involve a manifestation and actualisation of force, sensation and the formation of new forms in and of experience. As noted above, not only is the real subject of Bacon's paintings the energetic reality responsible for the formation of novel forms, Bacon paints this reality "from within." Bacon's images, as well as his practice of painting, participate in energetic reality by giving active expression to it—making manifest the potentialities for transformation inherent in that reality and actualising them in novel ways, at the moving border between the apprehending subject and what this subject is capable of apprehending, in the world and about themselves.

On the one hand, we have seen how Bacon's experimental colourism involves an application of force both to his canvases (through the manual diagram) and to the medium whose norms he problematises through his actions. We have seen how his haptic colourist approach and use of the diagram re-problematises and resolves the various perceptual, aesthetic and metaphysical considerations that have informed the history of the visual arts (as well as our ordinary ways of seeing), and thereby causes his images to actively and passively "make sense" within that medium as expressions of sensation, corporeal forces and the formation of form. The progressive modulation of colour from out of Bacon's chancy manual interventions awakens the sense of touch within vision and constrains sight to traverse the tactile surface of the image and grasp the emergence of the form—the body, or ostensible subject of his painting, sustaining a sensation—in a haptic fashion.

On the other hand, not only do Bacon's paintings give expression to the reality of a body sustaining a sensation and forming itself in experience under the influence of

corporeal forces, Bacon as a painter is sustaining a complex sensation as well. He is struck, as it were, by the ostensible subject matter of the painting (a person, for example, to whose “pulsations” conventional ways of painting fail to do justice); but he is also struck by the surprising diagram and coloured experiment unfolding on the canvas. These two, forceful encounters problematise the illustrational clichés Bacon has inherited and call, not only for the formation of a new form that would be adequate to the energetic and processual reality to be painted, but also for the progressive specification of a new artistic goals and means—new conditions of satisfaction for a painterly act.

I conclude by clarifying these claims through an example. Let us return to *Figure at a Washbasin* (1976), whose particular colour relations were analysed above. The image arguably represents Bacon’s lover, George Dyer, attempting to regurgitate the alcohol and drugs that would soon take his life. Following the argument developed here, the painting is not simply a depiction of Dyer at a given moment, nor is it a painterly representation of Bacon’s feelings of grief and loss associated with the death of his lover. Rather, above all, the painting is an expression—achieved through the modulation of colour and colour relations – of sensation, force and the formation of form. On the one hand, there is the body of Dyer (the ostensible subject of the painting) which “sustains a sensation” under the impetus of forces (the real subject of the painting, here manifested as the visible corporeal “spasm” that results from the encounter between the invisible conative force of Dyer’s life, as it were, and the invisible force exercised by the consumed narcotics). But on the other hand, and inseparably, there is Bacon’s own experience as he progressively makes manifest and clarifies in an emergent form the vague sensation elicited by a conjunction of two encounters: the way Bacon is “struck” by an image of Dyer’s body under the influence of other forces—an image that is beyond the capacity of illustrational clichés to render; and the way Bacon, immersed in but also struggling against the norms of his chosen medium, is “struck” by the coloured experiment progressively unfolding on the canvas from out of the interruptive diagram. Bacon’s painting, as well as the artistic intention

animating its production, is in all these respects the rendering visible—that is, the expression, or manifestation and actualization—of troubling, invisible and sub-representational forces in a novel, emergent form.

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NOTES

1. See especially John Russell, *Francis Bacon*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993; and Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*. New York: Crown, 1993.
2. See David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2016, 53. Henceforth, this work will be referenced in the body of the text as “I” followed by the page number(s).
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. London and New York: Continuum, 2003. Henceforth, this work will be referenced in the body of the text as “FB” followed by the page number(s).
4. This “body” that, at the limit, is both subject and object is what Deleuze calls a “body without organs,” which is a differential field of forces. We examine this notion further below.
5. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. London: Athlone Press, 1994, 143.
6. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139–41, 143–6.
7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. D. A. Landes. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.
8. R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938.
9. Charles Taylor, “Language and Human Nature.” *Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press 1985, 215–47.
10. Charles Taylor, “Action as Expression.” *Intention and Intentionality: Essays in Honour of G.E.M. Anscombe*. Eds Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichmann. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, 73–89.
11. Elizabeth S. Anderson and Richard H. Pildes, “Expressive Theories of Law: A General Restatement.” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 148:5 (2000, 1503–75).
12. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Zone Books, 1990.
13. Bacon discusses this technique in his interviews: “I throw an awful lot of paint onto things, and I don’t know what is going to happen to it ... I throw it with my hand. I just squeeze it into my hand and throw it on ... I use anything. I use scrubbing brushes and sweeping brushes and any of those things that I think painters have used ... I impregnate rags with colour, and they leave this kinds of network of colour across the image. I use them nearly always” (I 104–5).
14. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*. Eds Leonard Lawlor and Ted Toadvine. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
15. See Ronald Bogue, “Colour.” *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003, 137–8.
16. See generally, Bogue, “Colour”, 131–60.
17. E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 16th Edition. London: Phaidon, 1995, 44.
18. See Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 55–62.
19. Bogue, “Colour”, 147.
20. Wilhelm Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic*. New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1920, 38.
21. See also on this Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. Trans. M. D. Hottinger. New York: Dover Publications, 1950, 21.
22. Gombrich, *Story of Art*, 136–8.
23. See Bogue, “Colour”, 143–4.
24. See generally, Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic*, 45–51.
25. Bogue, “Colour”, 149–50.
26. Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic*, 50–51. See also Gombrich’s discussion of Gothic

architecture in *The Story of Art*, 185–9.

27. On the notion of a “symbolic code” employed in abstract painting, whose function is to open up a type of “spiritual state” capable of saving the human being “from external tumult and manual chaos”, but which tends to simply re-code illustrative clichés, see FB 103–4, 9.

28. The *loci classici* for this view are, of course, Donald Davidson’s “Actions, Reasons, and Causes.” *Journal of Philosophy* 60:23 (1963, 685–700), and Michael Bratman’s, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987. The helpful vocabulary of conditions of “satisfaction” or “success” comes from John Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

29. See John Searle, “The Intentionality of Intention and Action.” *Cognitive Science* 4 (1980, 62).

30. See Searle, *Intentionality* and “The Intentionality of Intention and Action.”

31. See Elizabeth Pacherie, “The Phenomenology of Action: A Conceptual Framework.” *Cognition* 107:1 (2008, 179–217).

32. Pacherie, “The Phenomenology of Action”, 189.

33. See Taylor, “Action as Expression”, 86–7; Luca Ferrero, “Intending, acting and doing.” *Philosophical Explorations* 20:S2 (2017, 25–6). On the notion of pure intentions, see Donald Davidson, “Intending.” *Philosophy of History and Action*. Eds Yirmiahu Yovel and D. Reidel, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1978, 41–60.

34. See, for example, Taylor, “Action as Expression”; Charles Taylor, “Hegel and the Philosophy of Action.” *Hegel’s Philosophy of Action*. Eds L. S. Stepelevich and D. Lamb, Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1983, 1–18; Aaron Ridley, *The Deed is Everything: Nietzsche on Will and Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018; and Sean Bowden, “Assembling Agency: Expression, Action and Ethics in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*.” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 58:3 (2020, 383–400).

figures of the monstrous in nietzsche's the birth of tragedy

paulo lima

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay seeks to show that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche presents two conceptions of tragedy. The first is a static conception, which points to the essence of the tragic as an experience of the suffering that is inherent in human existence and as an exposure to the ambiguity of fortune in its connection to this suffering—i.e., to the possibility of it becoming either harmful (thus leading humans to suffer) or beneficial (thus leading them to prosper). The second conception is dynamic, in the sense that it involves a description of the history of tragedy. Here the history of tragedy emerges as a tragic narrative, whose heroine is tragedy (*die Tragödie*)

itself. The birth, decay and rebirth of tragic drama are stages of its tragic narrative in which it exposes itself to the ambiguity of fortune—either in the sense of disgrace or in the sense of prosperity. Since the first conception is the one usually discussed when *The Birth of Tragedy* is analysed, I concentrate on identifying the characteristics of the second, but not without considering the main traits of the first, for the proper determination of the second depends on this.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the second conception is a multiple one, for the process by which it is constituted involves a successive shift in the meaning of tragedy. It is a shift made possible by the ambiguity that the traditional notion of tragedy contains—i.e., by the idea of a change of fortune either in a positive or a negative direction. I try to show how this shift points to a multiplicity of meanings of tragedy and the way it represents a tragic narrative on the history of tragedy.

Paul Hammond analyses the deconstructive characteristics of tragic language—i.e., how it undergoes a constant shift of its meaning in the framework of tragic narratives—on the basis of tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare and Racine¹. I seek to carry out a deconstructive reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* along similar lines. However, Hammond does not consider *The Birth of Tragedy*, which is usually seen as a book *on* tragedy and not as a tragic book. By focusing on how Nietzsche deconstructs the notion of tragedy through his use of tragic language, I intend to determine a decisive aspect that makes *The Birth of Tragedy* a book of a tragic nature.

Hammond is inspired by Derrida's deconstructive thinking, more precisely by the idea that there is no 'transcendental signified' (*signifié transcendantal*) in human language and that the key concepts defining the human are 'under erasure' (*sous rature*) and no longer guarantee the coherence of thinking². I aim to show that a successive shift in the meaning of tragedy is present in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Unlike other deconstructive readings of *The Birth of Tragedy* (notably, de Man's)³, which highlight its inconsistencies and failures as a book project, I maintain that this shift represents a fruitful aspect, whose exploration reveals its implications in

terms of a politics of difference.

In my view, *The Birth of Tragedy* has a decisive political dimension, which has to do with the presence of the two types of tragedy whose experience and understanding can be a source of renewal of political structures and identities. In keeping with the deconstructive spirit of this essay, I intend to explore the textual structure of *The Birth of Tragedy*—namely, as a catalyst for a transformative politics.

I use the term ‘politics’ to refer to what concerns the co-existence of humans, the institutions in which their co-existence materialises (e.g., the State) and the way they acquire their identity and mode of life through the role they play—e.g., the class they belong to—in the hierarchical structure founded on those institutions⁴. *The Birth of Tragedy* has a political dimension in this sense, which is inseparable from its cultural one. It explores the idea of culture as a collective expression and representation of political structures and the role humans play in them. It is in this interaction between politics and culture (more specifically, art) that *The Birth of Tragedy*’s potential vis-à-vis a politics of difference becomes evident, where such politics is conceived as the production of effects of dissolution and renewal on political structures and the identities of humans living within them.

The Birth of Tragedy comes closer to a politics of difference in a deconstructive sense—a politics of *différance*—when the second conception of tragedy is at stake. This conception involves a deferral or destabilisation of the meaning of tragedy—i.e., the revelation of the *différance* operated in the course of the history of tragic drama as Nietzsche describes it—and can work as a basis for a deconstructive politics of tragedy: a kind of political action that consists in deconstructing the meaning of tragic drama through an analysis of its history.

As we shall see, the notions of a politics of difference and of *différance* are complementary, in the sense that the latter seeks to promote a politics of difference of a non-metaphysical nature—i.e., a transformation of political structures and identities that is not guided by a previously established and anticipatable meaning horizon.

In the course of this essay, I carry out an analysis of what Nietzsche calls ‘the monstrous’ (*das Ungeheure*), as it is a phenomenon with structural importance in the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy*. I try to show that the monstrous plays a key role in both conceptions of tragedy, as well as in the political issue raised in the text. It will become clear that the phenomenon of the monstrous represents a decisive element in the way *The Birth of Tragedy* encourages a politics of difference. In the second section, I intend to highlight that a political transformation inspired by Greek tragedy must involve a conjugation between the monstrous force of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. In section 3, I point out that this conjugation represents the model from which the political transformations depicted in *The Birth of Tragedy* should be understood, with a special focus on the relation between tragedy and the historical significance of Greek political organisation and on the rebirth of the tragic in modernity. Section 4 problematises the meaning of the monstrous, in order to emphasise that, despite its apparently metaphysical status, this phenomenon has a non-metaphysical dimension, on the basis of which it is possible to fully explore *The Birth of Tragedy* with regard to acknowledging the singularity of every political transformation.

2. THE FIRST CONCEPTION OF TRAGEDY

Although the first conception of tragedy is the one usually focused on, the research carried out in this respect disregards a key component in Nietzsche’s definition of the tragic, namely the monstrous. Throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* the term *das Ungeheure*, and others from the same semantic field, are constantly present. The consideration of such terms allows us to understand the essential role of the monstrous in determining the first conception of tragedy in its political dimension.

Nietzsche maintains that tragic drama corresponds to “the Apollonian embodiment of Dionysian insights and effects” and is distinguished from epic poetry “by a monstrous gulf” (BT 44, t.m.⁵). This gulf is ‘monstrous’ (*ungeheuer*) not simply because it is a considerable one, but mainly because it is one established through the

relation of tragic drama to the monstrous. Nietzsche reports that Oedipus spread around himself a magical and beneficent force “through his monstrous suffering” (BT 47, t.m.). His suffering is monstrous both in the sense that it is constituted by a relation to the monstrous and in the sense that it is this monstrous which, by its ambiguous nature, makes it possible for suffering to become beneficial. This suffering and the benefit coming from it result from Oedipus looking at “the inner, terrible depths of nature” (BT 46). ‘The terrible’ (*das Schreckliche*) belongs to the same semantic field as ‘the monstrous’ (*das Ungeheure*), which means that Oedipus’ suffering and its beneficial character are consequences of his contact with the monstrous conceived as an ambiguous element. That the monstrous is at the centre of the first conception of tragedy is confirmed by Nietzsche when, in “An Attempt at Self-Criticism” (in accordance with the doctrine in *The Birth of Tragedy*), he characterises the Dionysian—i.e., the tragic—as a “monstrous phenomenon” (ASC 4).

The presence of the monstrous in tragedy is notorious throughout its history. Tragedians such as Seneca, Shakespeare, and Hölderlin are evidence that it has been explored in the plot construction of tragic narratives. Aristotle realised that it occupies a decisive place in the formation of tragedy. In the *Poetics*, he indicates as key elements in the structure of tragedy ‘the terrible’ (τὸ δεινόν) and ‘the awesome’ (τὸ θαυμαστόν)⁶. What he does not emphasise is the ambiguity of the monstrous—i.e., the possibility of it becoming harmful or beneficial—this being a decisive aspect in some tragedies that are considered exemplary. By considering the Oedipus myth as depicted by Sophocles, one can verify that the events marking its protagonist’s life are terrible and awesome⁷, being at the centre of what Aristotle calls the ‘changing of fortune’ (μεταβάλλειν) either in a positive or a negative direction—i.e., the “transformation [...] from adversity to prosperity or prosperity to adversity”⁸. This myth is most important for Nietzsche and decisively influenced the content of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Certainly, it was also as a result of his interpretation of it that Nietzsche could understand the monstrous as something overwhelming, whose ambiguity makes it possible that tragic art turns

suffering into something beneficial (especially BT 47).

Most passages in *The Birth of Tragedy* with direct political implications can be found in the framework of the first conception of tragedy. The monstrous phenomenon of the Dionysian erases differences between humans by means of a renewal of ties between them that are deep, because founded on nature itself. This renewal is mediated by the common background of all natural beings. Humans, animals, plants and the earth itself are reunited in nature. As a result, “the slave [becomes] a free human, [...] all the rigid, hostile barriers [...] between humans break asunder” (BT 18, t.m.). When speaking of the dissolution of barriers between the slave and the free human, Nietzsche draws attention to the political nature of such barriers—i.e., to the fact that they are sanctioned by political institutions⁹. Such a reconciliation is conceived in *The Birth of Tragedy* in an absolute way. Nietzsche maintains that each human “feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him” (BT 18). By carrying out this unification, nature reveals itself as “the [...] primordial unity” (*das Ur-Eine*, KSA 1, 30; BT 18). In these moments, humans experience in themselves something going beyond the appearances of nature and underlying its appearances—“something supernatural” (*etwas Uebernaturliches*) or monstrous (KSA 1, 30; BT 18).

Nietzsche speaks of the cyclical occurrence of the Dionysian, which exerts its effects at unpredictable time intervals. The Dionysian is understood as an artistic power, whose activity is opposed to another artistic power, the Apollonian, against which it exerts a destructive effect. The Dionysian occurs as the cyclical destruction of Apollonian creations. Both the Dionysian and the Apollonian are artistic forces in nature, with their ability to create going beyond what is usually identified as art in the strict sense—notably, political phenomena. As will become clearer in what follows, the Apollonian represents a force that is responsible for the institution and preservation of political structures and identities, while the Dionysian acts as a force for the dissolution and renewal of such structures and identities.

Nietzsche shows that the political creations of the Apollonian mirror its artistic creations, especially sculptural ones. Such political creations correspond to “the noblest clay, the most precious marble” (BT 18). Through this comparison, he associates the political creations of the Apollonian with the rigidity and clarity of contours characterising sculptural productions. The Apollonian poetic manifestations which Nietzsche contrasts with the nature and effect of the dithyrambic chorus are epic poetry and Apollonian choral lyric. What characterises the rhapsode’s recitation of epic verses is that it preserves a distance between the former and the images conveyed by the verses. There is no identification between the rhapsode and the action depicted in his poetry (BT 43).

The Apollonian produces in artistic terms in the strict sense the same effects as it does as a natural power: effects with a political dimension. Nietzsche points to these effects when referring to Apollonian choral lyric, especially the hymns sung by virgins in religious processions honouring Apollo (BT 43). In general, Apollonian choral lyric emphasises the presence of the individual singer and does not have the potential for unification that Dionysian choral lyric does (BT 44). In addition, it imports political distinctions into its artistic expression, so it is characterised as a form of expression contributing to the preservation of these distinctions, being devoid of any potential for renewing political structures: “The virgins who walk solemnly to the temple of Apollo [...] remain who they are and retain their civic names” (BT 43).

Whereas the Apollonian has to do with the contemplative distance between individuals and between the artist and the work of art, the Dionysian is related to an experience of self-transformation: “The human is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art” (BT 18, t.m.). As Nietzsche maintains, “all nature’s artistic power reveals itself here, amidst shivers of intoxication, to the highest, most blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity” (BT 18). Instead of a contemplative experience, as in the Apollonian, a profound emotional experience is at stake, shaking the limits of the individual self and uniting humans in a “higher community” in the monstrous (BT 18). The Dionysian destruction is the starting point of its activity

of recreation and renewal—not only in artistic but also in political terms. The creations of the Apollonian are not merely annihilated but reworked in order to give rise to an artistically and politically renewed world. Nietzsche says: “Here the human [...] is kneaded and carved” (BT 18, t.m.).

The political dimension of the Dionysian has its exemplary expression in the tragic chorus, which has “purely religious origins” (BT 37) and corresponds to “the original formation of tragedy” (BT 37). It cannot be associated with any particular regime, not even with the paradigmatically Greek democratic one (BT 37). It does not represent “the people in contrast to the princely region of the stage” or “the immutable moral law of the democratic Athenians” (BT 36); nor does it correspond to “the premonition of a ‘constitutional popular assembly’”—but rather excludes “any kind of political-social sphere” (BT 37), although it is not devoid of any political dimension. When he says that it has religious origins, he is pointing to the fact that, as an expression of the Dionysian, it preserves its capacity to dissolve political differences and trigger an experience that can be the starting point of a new political order.

As Nietzsche indicates, “when faced with the chorus of satyrs, cultured Greeks felt themselves absorbed, elevated and extinguished” (BT 39). What is extinguished is the individual’s political identity, which reflects the structure of the community in which they live. Nietzsche states: “This is the first effect of Dionysian tragedy: state and society, indeed all divisions between one human and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity [...]” (BT 39, t.m.). Nietzsche associates this feeling of unity among the spectators of tragedy with “metaphysical solace” (BT 39). The effect is brought about in humans by their recognition of a shared condition, namely that of living, mortal beings; and this realisation provokes delight in the renewing power of life, despite the mortality of the individual. The indestructibility of life does not equal its unchangeability. Since it has a metaphysical connection with the dual—destructive and creative—power of the Dionysian, life is not characterised as a fixed substance behind the appearances of nature, but as an infinitely plastic substrate, whose activity is that of creation-

destruction-recreation of an infinite multiplicity of appearances, among which are the different civilisations and their histories.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, tragic myth is of great importance for determining tragic drama as a fully-formed whole, as it is where the artistic powers of the Dionysian and the Apollonian are combined. Only through tragic myth is it possible to understand the political dimension of tragic drama—the way it works as a representation of the dynamics between the dissolution of a political order and the establishment of a new one. It is remarkable that in this context Nietzsche chooses the example of the Titan Prometheus, that emblematic figure of progressive thinking so revered by Marx and Wagner¹⁰. Nietzsche argues that the Prometheus legend has an “un-Apollonian quality” (BT 50, t.m.). We recall that the Apollonian aims at the preservation of beings in their individuality and the establishment of boundaries between them. In fact, its imperatives of “self-knowledge and measure” (BT 50f.) are means of affirming the boundaries between individual beings as “the most sacred laws in the world” (BT 51). Prometheus, however, is depicted by Nietzsche as a figure who violates those laws by offering fire to humans and thus allowing them to resemble the gods in this respect. Nevertheless, Prometheus is not only a transgressive figure, but an eminently progressive and emancipatory one, for his offer to humans of the fire stolen from Zeus aimed at making humans more independent from the gods and less subjugated to them.

As a symbol of human aspiration to a divine condition, Prometheus represents the necessity of crime: “wrongdoing is of necessity imposed on the titanically striving individual” (BT 50f.). The logic behind this claim is that an act contravening the laws in force is necessarily a crime. Nietzsche shows the close connection between Prometheus and the Dionysian when he speaks of “the common feature shared by the Promethean and the Dionysian” (BT 51, t.m.), and the fact that “the Prometheus of Aeschylus is a Dionysian mask” (BT 51, t.m.). Prometheus is a particular manifestation of the cyclical occurrence of the Dionysian as a power that destroys the rigidity of the Apollonian, which threatens to stifle Greek life (BT 51).

However, Nietzsche also refers to “[t]he double essence of Aeschylus’ Prometheus” (BT 51)—“his simultaneously Apollonian and Dionysian nature” (BT 51, t.m.). He seems to have in mind another key aspect of the Prometheus story, namely the punishment Zeus inflicted on him for his crime¹¹. If Prometheus represents a break with the dominant political order, his myth as a whole draws attention to the fact that the state of affairs in which a political order is suspended cannot be perpetuated indefinitely. Nietzsche is pointing to the way tragic drama represents the dynamic of the suspension and re-establishment of political structures and identities.

The Prometheus legend shows that this re-establishment does not have to occur in a progressive direction, for a hardening of the law—i.e., a conservative re-establishment of traditional collective structures and forms of individual self-recognition—can also take place as a response to the suspension effect of the monstrous phenomenon of the Dionysian. The double essence of the Prometheus story “could [...] be expressed like this: ‘All that exists is just and unjust and is equally justified in both respects’” (BT 51). Nietzsche thereby indicates that the ambiguity of the monstrous lies in its potential to give rise to either politically progressive transformations in human communities or conservative retrenchments of traditional political structures. In terms of the political potential of the experience of the monstrous, both are equally possible. The dynamic inherent in tragic myth demonstrates that the success of the effort to renew political structures and identities (the politics of difference) depends on the specific character of the political project—i.e., on the specific expression of the Apollonian—that one seeks to bring into negotiation with the monstrous power of the Dionysian.

3. THE SECOND CONCEPTION OF TRAGEDY

Nietzsche’s sense of the tragic is clearly based on ancient Greek tragedy, but he is aware that the finished form of the latter is a consequence of a long process of transformation going back to a conflict between artistic forces inherent in nature and the way different cultures have established their connection with these forces.

If his definition of the tragic results in a static conception of tragedy, his analysis of the formation of Greek drama makes it clear that the evolution of artistic manifestations in Greece is dynamic.

Nietzsche characterises the opposition between the two artistic deities, Apollo and Dionysus, as a monstrous one (BT 14). This opposition is monstrous not only in the sense that it concerns two immeasurable and irreducible forces, but also in the sense that each of them is constituted by a relation to the monstrous. Moreover, both have in the monstrous the principle of the various forms of their conjugation with one another. This becomes clear in regard to the Dionysian when Nietzsche refers to the breaking of the principle of individuation as something causing a “monstrous *horror*” (BT 17, t.m.) and then relates such an experience to the Dionysian rapture (BT 17). It is also the monstrous that allows him to determine the difference between the Barbarian Dionysian and the Greek Dionysian. These manifestations of the Dionysian are separated by a “monstrous gulf” (BT 20, t.m.).

The Apollonian too is formed by a relation to the monstrous. Nietzsche clarifies this connection through an analysis of the appearance of an Olympian culture and its excessive protection against the monstrousness of the Barbarian Dionysian. He points to the “monstrous need” (BT 22) from which the community of the Olympian gods was born. This need had to do with a “monstrous distrust of the Titanic forces of nature” (BT 23, t.m.). The Greeks were well aware of the astonishing character of these powers and wanted to protect themselves from succumbing to their destructive effects (e.g., BT 23).

The forms of conjugation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian are also established by a connection with the monstrous. With respect to the role played by the monstrous at a key moment in the formation of Greek tragedy, such as the transition from pure musicality to image and discourse, Nietzsche argues that all that the lyric poet expresses through verbal language is already in music in the form of “the most monstrous generality and universal validity” (BT 36, t.m.). Although it is a passage in which he speaks of lyric poetry and not of tragedy, what

he refers to is also valid for tragedy, as can be shown by a passage in which he maintains that it is in tragedy that music finds its “highest form of expression in images” (BT 80). The degree of generality characterising the musical phenomenon is superlatively monstrous because music relates symbolically to the monstrous—specifically to “the original contradiction and original pain at the heart of the primordial unity” (BT 36).

It has now become clear that the formation of Greek drama corresponds to a historical process. It has the characteristics of a narrative and reveals a dynamic conception of tragedy. Such a process is not presented as an increasing and unimpeded improvement until the full and mature constitution of Greek tragedy. If one considers this evolution from the point of view of the relation to the monstrous, one finds that Olympian culture represented an almost complete annihilation of the latter (e.g., BT 24).

In his investigation of the successive forms of manifestation of tragic art after the formation of Greek drama, Nietzsche claims that, unlike other artistic genres, Greek tragedy died by suicide, because of an internal conflict—i.e., it died tragically (BT 54). He explicitly conceives the history of the tragic genre as having a tragic character. The “monstrous emptiness” (BT 54, t.m.) resulting from the suicide of Greek tragedy has in Euripides one of the two great culprits. The characteristics of Euripidean tragedy rest on what Nietzsche calls aesthetic Socratism, the principle that everything must be reasonable (especially, BT 62). He explains Euripides’ adherence to aesthetic Socratism by the position of the latter as a spectator of tragedy, who thought that there were “too many tropes and forms of monstrousness” (BT 59, t.m.) in the tragic plots of Aeschylus and Sophocles. With Socrates’ help, Euripides felt capable of embarking on “a monstrous campaign” against his predecessors (BT 59, t.m.). The monstrous character of this struggle is mainly connected with the fact that it is about the relation to the monstrous—one that ends up being blocked by the Euripidean practice of tragedy (see especially BT 59).

Another aspect of the monstrous becomes clear when Nietzsche considers Socrates. He speaks of the “monstrous scruple” (BT 66, t.m.) assailing one when one stands before the figure of Socrates. The scruple associated with Socrates derives from the fact that he denies the essence of the Greek world. Nietzsche suggests that what allowed Socrates to produce this denial was a “daemonic force” (BT 66)—precisely a force associated with that kind of anonymous ‘divinity’ (δαίμων) that frequently causes the misfortune of the tragic hero¹². Tragedy (*die Tragödie*) is thereby being elevated to the status of heroine—namely, of the tragic narrative that *The Birth of Tragedy* largely is.

The monstrous is no longer just that with which tragic art establishes an appropriate symbolic relation (in the case of pre-Euripidean tragedy) or a defective one (in the case of Euripidean tragedy and the aesthetic Socratism it helped to affirm). Monstrous is also what, as a result of the absence of such an appropriate relation, causes the degeneration of tragedy. Nietzsche characterises the Socratic inversion of the roles traditionally attributed to instinct and the intellect as a true “monstrousness *per defectum*” (*Monstrosität per defectum*, KSA 1, 90; BT 66, t.m.) or a “monstrous lack” (*monstroser defectus*, KSA 1, 90; BT 67). Because of the absence of the intellect’s connection with the monstrous, the monstrousness by defect characterising the Socratic inversion has to do with its destructive effect on the appropriate symbolic relation to the monstrous that pre-Euripidean tragedy represents. When tragedy, as heroine of Nietzsche’s tragic narrative, falls into disgrace or degenerates, the defect in relation to the monstrous is itself monstrous.

Thanks to Kant’s and Schopenhauer’s “monstrous courage and wisdom” (BT 87, t.m.) decisive steps towards the rebirth of the tragic and the victory over optimism were taken. By distinguishing between the true essence of things and mere appearance, these philosophers contributed decisively to the resurgence of tragic culture—i.e., to the reopening of the path towards a “heroic attraction to the monstrous” (BT 88, t.m.). Their bravery is connected with the fact that they reopened culture to the possibility of an art form capable of rescuing the subject from “gazing into the horrors of the night” (BT 93) and of saving it with “the

healing balm of appearance” (BT 93, t.m.).

As part of Nietzsche’s contribution to the rebirth of the tragic, he says that it is important to slip from a “tone of exhortation back into the mood which befits the contemplative spirit” (BT 98). One should look to the ancient Greeks in order to “learn” (BT 98) from them how the tragic should be reborn in modern times. He indicates that its rebirth brings with it the reactivation of its political effects. This is one of the reasons why the Greeks should be set as an example to him and his contemporaries. The politically exemplary character of the Greeks comes from the surprising way they were able to reconcile the powerful forces of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Nietzsche has in mind their wars against the Persians—i.e., wars that united the multitude of their cities against a foreign and oppressive power. Tragedy made possible the unity among them preceding the fights against the Persians and its regeneration after the destructive effects of these clashes. Drama has a deep connection with the “innermost vital ground of a people” (BT 98).

In order to understand the exemplarity of the political dimension of tragedy, it is important to formulate clearly the astonishment it causes Nietzsche. Two powerful forces are at stake here, each with its own political effects. On the one hand, there is the Dionysian, whose experience of rapture produces a “liberation from the shackles of the individual”—“a dwindling of the political instincts, to the point of indifference even or indeed hostility” towards any given political regime (BT 98). On the other, there is “the state-founding Apollo”, which Nietzsche calls “the genius of the *principium individuationis*”, for “the state and the sense of homeland cannot survive without the affirmation of the individual personality” (BT 98). The extraordinary effect of tragedy lies in the reconciliation it operates between these opposing forces, so that from them it is able to generate a “simplest political feeling”, “most natural instincts for the homeland” and a “lust for struggle” (BT 98).

How is it that the Dionysian, a force that does not respect any given political

regime and dissolves all differences between individuals, is combined with the Apollonian, a force that founds political regimes and establishes hierarchies among humans? What the example of the Persian wars indicates is that a force of transformation and liberation such as the Dionysian, combined with a force of order and constraint such as the Apollonian, generated a mobilisation for the defence of a pluralistic way of life against a strongly oppressive and centralised regime. Tragic drama was the occasion when the Greeks exposed themselves to a balanced conjugation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian—i.e., the dissolution of a given political order, as well as the subsequent need to affirm a new order or to reaffirm the old one. Given the Panhellenic nature of tragic representations, the Greeks experienced tragedy as an essential moment in the definition of their national identity.

These political features of Greek tragedy, which were already present in the first conception of tragedy, are now presented in their historical dimension, in accordance with the dynamic nature of the second one. Nietzsche argues that Greek tragedy occupies an intermediate place in political terms between Indian Buddhism and the Roman empire (BT 98f.). It is an intermediate position in a temporal and a conceptual sense. The ecstatic and orgiastic character of Indian Buddhism results in a “longing for nothingness” (BT 98), an “elevation above space, time and the individual” (BT 98). In other words, it corresponds to an extreme manifestation of the political effects of the monstrous phenomenon of the Dionysian in a given civilisation, whereas the Roman empire is where “the political impulses reign supreme” (BT 99) and “the most extreme worldlines” (BT 99) can be found—in short, it represents the monstrous and hypertrophied expression of the Apollonian and of Socratism in history (BT 98f.).

The decline of tragedy is due to a “tearing-apart of [the] two primal artistic drives” (BT 110) whose combination it made possible. Its decline is “consonant with the degeneration and transformation of the national character of the Greeks”, showing “how necessarily and closely intertwined are the foundations of art and nation, myth and morality, tragedy and state” (BT 110). With the fall of tragedy

and the resulting degeneration of the Greek people's character, "Alexandrian-Roman antiquity" (BT 111) is born and ends up dominating European culture. Alexandrian-Roman culture—or, as Nietzsche also puts it, "the [...] Socratic-Alexandrian type of culture" (BT 97)—forms the basis of modernity in his time (e.g., BT 111).

When he says that one should look to the Greeks as an example of a rebirth of the tragic, Nietzsche is speaking of the reversal of a trend in modern culture to embody artistic forms of expression that do not stimulate the constitution of a true political community. This corresponds to a community capable of finding a compromise between the Dionysian instinct to dissolve political regimes and the Apollonian instinct to establish a political order. While we should acknowledge the risk that the conjugation of the Dionysian and the Apollonian translates into political conservatism and a reinforcement of hierarchies among individuals, he emphasises the possibility of political liberation and pluralism resulting from the experience of tragedy.

The Greeks created a third way of founding a community, as an alternative to Indian Buddhism and the Roman Empire. They explored the political effects of tragedy, which made it possible "to avoid exhausting themselves either in ecstatic brooding or in a debilitating chase after worldly power and honour", for tragedy is "a mediator between [these] strongest and inherently most fateful qualities of a people" (BT 99). Tragedy has a "monstrous power" (BT 99, t.m.)—it is able "to stimulate [...] the entire life of the people" (BT 99) by establishing a community in the monstrous. Modernity can look to the Greeks as an example, in order to exert a monstrous effect on Alexandrian culture—i.e., modernity's rationalist and scientist side¹³. The ideal of Greek tragedy and its effects on the political community "survive for all time" (BT 99), which means that it awaits the opportunity to work as an example for a liberation of modernity from the shackles of rationalism and scientism. It is only when drama has been used in this way that modernity can say that it has understood "the supreme value of tragedy" (BT 99).

Situated by Nietzsche at the end of the progressive reawakening of the tragic in German music (notably BT 94), the emergence of Wagnerian opera is an exemplary moment when art re-establishes its appropriate symbolic relation to the monstrous. When referring to *Tristan and Isolde*, Nietzsche speaks of a “monstrous force of image, concept, ethical doctrine and sympathetic excitement” (BT 102, t.m.). Wagnerian opera expresses the power of liberation that modernity has in relation to Alexandrian culture (e.g., BT 95), above all because of its connection with the “monstrous Dionysian drive” (BT 105, t.m.). Wagner looks to the Greeks as an “example” (BT 95), emphasising the “analogies” (BT 95) between German and Greek culture with regard to their tragic nature, in order to contribute to a “*rebirth of tragedy*” (BT 95). Like Greek tragedy, Wagnerian opera has the capacity to dissolve the differences between humans and to generate a community among them in the monstrous “womb of the primordial unity” (BT 105, t.m.). Due to its use of tragic myth, “understood as the transformation of Dionysian wisdom into images by means of Apollonian artistry” (BT 105, t.m.), Wagner’s opera carries out the desirable compromise between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. In its Wagnerian expression, too, tragic myth encourages a dynamic and creative political life, based on the transformation and renewal of forms of political organisation—i.e., a transformation and renewal of a transitory world of appearances, which is what a given human community founded in the state is. In Nietzsche’s words, “even the state knows of no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical fundament” (BT 108).

The cyclical nature of the occurrence of the monstrous and the ambiguity of its political effects can also be seen in the history of tragedy, which Nietzsche does not conceive teleologically. In its course, there have been advances and setbacks concerning an appropriate symbolic relation to the monstrous and its liberating effect on the political rigidity of the Apollonian and of Socratism. The monstrous manifests itself cyclically, sometimes in the form of the Socratic monstrousness by defect, sometimes in the guise of the Dionysian monstrous and its rebirth in modernity. The ambiguity of these occurrences lies in the fact that the monstrous

leaves open the direction its concrete manifestations will take. This should be a concern for those looking in *The Birth of Tragedy* for an unambiguous source of inspiration for progressive and egalitarian political thinking. In accordance with Nietzsche's non-teleological view of the history of tragedy, the temporary rebirth of the tragic must be seen as non-definitive, for it is subject either to the failure of its realisation or to subsequent degeneration. The successful realisation of the politically transformative and revolutionary nature of Wagnerian opera depends on its effectiveness in triggering the experience of the monstrous Dionysian. On the one hand, it may exert its dissolving effect on the political order in the current state of the world of appearances and, on the other, a more progressive and egalitarian political organisation may take place through the renewal of those Apollonian appearances.

In the framework of the first conception of tragedy, above, it became clear that Greek tragedy, due to its connection with the monstrous phenomenon of the Dionysian, has the potential to mobilise for a politics of difference, conceived as a collective change of political structures and their modes of individual self-recognition, even if the monstrous Dionysian, by virtue of its ambiguity, leaves open the possibility of a re-establishment of traditional forms of political organisation.

The second conception of tragedy shows that the power of tragedy to promote a politics of difference has to do with its historical dimension. First of all, the balanced conjugation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, which allows tragedy to preserve its transformative capacity in political terms, can (and indeed does) suffer setbacks. Furthermore, the rebirth of tragedy, with its politically transformative potential, results from the resumption of artistic manifestations of the tragic in previous times. Finally, the attempt at such a rebirth is an historically situated one, for it tries to bridge the gap of an age still in force when there is no balanced conjugation of the Dionysian and the Apollonian and a deficit exists in the ability of artistic creations to stimulate a politics of difference.

The rebirth of tragedy seeks not only an appropriate combination of the Dionysian

and the Apollonian—i.e., the rejuvenation of the politically transformative power of artistic productions—but also the overcoming of a time when this is obliterated. The monstrous, on which tragedy’s capacity for political change is based, corresponds not only to the element that is both destructive and creative in conjugations of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, but also to the force that exerts the dissolving effect that the rebirth of the tragic is intended to have on the Alexandrian era.

4. A METAPHYSICS OF TRAGEDY?

What remains to be done is to clarify further the potential for a politics of difference inherent in the second conception of tragedy. We can do this by asking, polemically and provocatively, whether the monstrous might represent a metaphysical principle of cultural transformation. Metaphysical accounts of reality tend to emphasise ‘the Same’—i.e., to reduce the multiplicity of reality to the same fundamental meaning and to impose this meaning as universally true¹⁴. If the monstrous had a metaphysical character—i.e., if it was reducible to an essential meaning at the very core of nature—it would diminish the singularity of each historical transformation in *The Birth of Tragedy*. For the account of cultural transformations, even if it points to a multiplicity of manifestations of culture over time, does not in principle prevent this multiplicity from being reduced to the same meaning. Furthermore, different models of culture can be considered instances of ‘the Same’ if they correspond to models imposed on individuals as true and as conforming to an underlying reality. In that case, ‘the Same’ would amount to the persistence of the foundation of a cultural model in a metaphysical conception of reality. For this reason, it is important to ascertain whether the monstrous can be read as having a metaphysical character in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and whether it is possible to carry out a non-metaphysical interpretation of this phenomenon—i.e., one that does not reduce it to a single, repeatable meaning, thus freeing up the singularity of its occurrences.

Prima facie, it seems possible to interpret the monstrous in *The Birth of Tragedy*

in a metaphysical sense, since Nietzsche at times builds his historical narrative of tragedy on the monstrous as central to the primordial unity at the very core of nature. This is clear in the historical narrative of the artistic forms preceding Greek tragedy, in the account of Greek tragedy itself, as well as in the narrative of the decay and rebirth of the tragic. Observing the “monstrous struggles and transitions” (BT 75, t.m.) between Socratic optimism and tragic art, Nietzsche seeks to take part in these struggles (BT 76) and to contribute to the rebirth of the tragic by taking on the monstrous force at work in the history of culture. His analysis of the way this force determines the concrete manifestations or absence of the tragic in history seems to suggest something—in a metaphysical sense—monstrous in the advances and setbacks of the tragic.

Although in *The Birth of Tragedy*, traits can be identified that point to a metaphysical interpretation of the monstrous, there are aspects in it that undermine this. Even if Nietzsche at times limits the ambiguity of the metaphysical monstrous in history, *The Birth of Tragedy* betrays, in its language and discursivity, an ambiguity of the monstrous in the history of tragedy. Specifically, he employs a rhetoric of the monstrous transcending the metaphysical dimension apparently attributable to this phenomenon, a rhetoric made possible by the ambiguity with which the monstrous has been expressed in the tragic literary tradition since antiquity. Possibly due to the influence of this tradition on the collective unconscious of Western culture, the ambiguity of the monstrous insinuates itself in Western languages in a way that makes it irreducible to a metaphysical entity—i.e., one with a single meaning, unequivocal in its contribution to the affirmation of tragic culture. Ultimately, then, Nietzsche’s account of the history of tragedy shows that the monstrous is not reducible to a metaphysical principle. Having established the irreducibility of the monstrous to a metaphysical principle, it is possible to look anew at Nietzsche’s account of the history of tragedy. The reconsideration of this history on the basis of a non-metaphysical understanding of the monstrous proves especially fruitful from the perspective of a politics of difference.

In the context of Nietzsche’s history of tragedy, the event of the monstrous is

never just that to which each stage of Western culture establishes an appropriate or defective symbolic relation, but also that which has a destructive or dissolving effect on a given historical age. Although he never imports this meaning of the monstrous into his conception of the latter, it is present in *The Birth of Tragedy* and contributes decisively to the tragic nature of his historical narrative of tragedy.

If a metaphysical interpretation of the monstrous—as an insistence on the essence of the tragic repeatedly manifesting ‘the Same’ in the history of culture—prevents the full exploration of the potential of *The Birth of Tragedy* from the perspective of a politics of difference, the discovery of the non-metaphysical character of the monstrous has the opposite effect. The non-metaphysical monstrous has an authentically historical character, an ability to affirm ‘the Other’ in the history of culture—i.e., the singularity of each cultural transformation as a historically specific one, arising as an insurrection against the dominance of a given historical period, with uncontrollable and unpredictable consequences. Focusing on the non-metaphysical dimension of the monstrous is extremely fruitful in terms of a politics of difference. It allows one to detect a *différance*, a progressive shift in the meaning of the monstrous irreducible to a stable concept, related to the effects of the monstrous in history, which can favour the flourishing or the degeneration of the tragic. As we saw, Nietzsche’s narrative of the tragic stages a multiplication and destabilisation of the meaning of the monstrous as it manifests itself historically.

Given the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of the effects of the monstrous in history, the multiplicity of its meanings, as those of tragedy, can never be considered complete. Neither the monstrous nor tragedy, inasmuch as they bear a non-metaphysical character, can be subsumed under concepts that would enclose them within a delimitable semantic horizon. They are rather figures that refer to a dispersed multiplicity of meanings on the basis of different historical effects—whether effects of destruction or dissolution—without any claim to full transparency and without excluding the absolute otherness of their manifestations to come¹⁵.

On the basis of the non-metaphysical meaning of the monstrous and of tragedy, Nietzsche's narrative of the tragic is also a history of political transformations. If the monstrous and tragedy are understood in a non-metaphysical sense, not only the awakening and reawakening of the tragic, but also its degeneration and decay correspond to transformations of political structures and the modes of individual self-identification within them. The idea of a politics of difference, as applied in the context of the opposition between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, undergoes a broadening, for it can now refer to all kinds of political transformation. However, as demonstrated in section 2, above, in the framework of this opposition between natural forces—i.e., between the two forces lying at the core of nature—only the Dionysian can be interpreted as a progressive transformative force, whereas the Apollonian represents a force for the conservation of the *status quo*. This is because such a conservation does not belong to the scope of a politics of difference, but to that of a politics of 'the Same' and of the State, even though, within the framework of a non-metaphysical reading of political transformations, conservative political forces are also subject to a multiplication and destabilisation of meaning. In this sense, the re-establishment of a conservative political model, due to the fact that it is carried out in contrast to the regime previously in force, and in a historical context different from that in which it had existed in the past, corresponds to the affirmation of something that differs from itself and cannot be completely subsumed under the figure of 'the Same'.

Interpreted in this way, *The Birth of Tragedy* is able to inspire different politics of difference—or different programmes of political transformation—seeking a basis in a philosophy of history. Inasmuch as Nietzsche's narrative of tragedy depicts a history of political transformations, it stages a process corresponding to a succession of multiple politics of difference. Each stage in this narrative consists in a politics of difference, whose idea is therefore subject to a destabilisation and a confluence with both the figure of the monstrous and that of tragedy. To put it differently, *The Birth of Tragedy* describes a *différance* within the political transformations already underway in cultural history. The politics of difference,

to the extent that it is inspired by the series of transformations in the framework of the narrative on the tragic, then acquires the status of a politics of *différance*—i.e., a politics aware of the singularity of every political transformation and any attempt at a political transformation in view of something other than the already existing.

This should not be confused with a defence of change for the sake of change. Rather, it is about recognising the imperfect character of all political change and the somewhat imposing character of any existing political model based on identity. What is at stake is the acknowledgement of the provisional character of these models, as well as the inscription of the ‘to come’ (*à venir*) within them, however just they may seem to be¹⁶. Nevertheless, there is always a risk inherent in the figure of the monstrous, which concerns the ambiguity that lurks in each of its multiple occurrences in history, in each moment when its power of dissolution mobilises a historically-specific change. In each of these occurrences, as we saw in section 2, above, such a power can either lead to a progressive transformation or to a conservative retrenchment. Everything depends on how the monstrous power of dissolution is dealt with.

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NOTES

1. Hammond, 2009.
 2. Hammond, 2009, 8f.. Cf. Derrida, 1967a, 1967b.
 3. De Man, 1972.
 4. This definition of ‘politics’ is of Aristotelian inspiration, although it seeks to exclude the teleological implications of Aristotle’s definition and its connection with the idea of an intrinsic character of the human. There is no room here for a detailed discussion of how my definition of ‘politics’ is present in Aristotle’s *Politics*. As Rackham says in the “Introduction” to his edition of the *Politics*: “[*Politiké*] is the science of human affairs, of man’s happiness or good. This consists in a certain mode of life, and man’s life is shaped for him by his social environment, the laws, customs and institutions of the community to which he belongs. [...] The aim of *Politiké* is to discover first in what mode of life man’s happiness consists, then by what form of government and what social institutions that mode of life can be secured.” Aristotle, 1932, xvi-xvii. In this brief account, Rackham does not address the issue of the relation between a given constitution that underlies a political community and the hierarchical structure the latter implies.
 5. Translation modified hereafter t.m.
 6. E.g., Aristotle 1999, 1452a4-7, 1453a16-22.
 7. E.g., Sophocles *Oedipus the King*, 1327-8, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 141, 202, 1586, 1665.
 8. Aristotle 1999, 1451a6-15. The verb *μεταβάλλειν* is used in ancient Greek to refer to any kind of overthrow or change of direction, but in this Aristotelian passage it clearly points to the change in the tragic hero’s fortune.
 9. Cf. BT 37, where Nietzsche refers to the opposition between the prince and the people as belonging to the “political-social sphere” (*politisch-soziale Sphäre*, KSA 1, 52).
 10. Cf. Ruehl, 2004, 79f.
 11. An eagle sent by Zeus to eat Prometheus’ immortal liver every day, which then grew back every night.
 12. E.g., Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, 119; Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 828f.
 13. For a detailed account of the relation between, on the one hand, Alexandrianism and, on the other, Socratism and the decline of Greek tragic culture, cf. especially Porter, 2014, 42f.
 14. The figure of ‘the Same’ (*le Même*) is borrowed from Levinas, who opposes it to the figure of ‘the Other’ (*l’Autre*). Cf. notably, Levinas 1971, sec.1. The figure of ‘the Other’ refers to the acknowledgement of the singularity of each individual and to the acceptance of their identity as being outside the opposition between the universally true and the universally false.
 15. In his discussions of ‘the democracy to come’ (*la démocratie à venir*), Derrida maintains that the political sphere should be oriented by an openness to the future rather than by a fixed model of community. Cf. Derrida, 1993, 1994, 2003.
 16. Cf. Derrida, 2003, where he speaks of democracy’s ‘autoimmunity’ (*auto-immunité*)—i.e., its ability to self-destruct through its own internal contradictions.
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rancière and the question of crisis

seçkin göksoy

This article revolves around the question of crisis in terms of Jacques Rancière's idiosyncratic conception of politics, namely the politics of disagreement. Despite Rancière's thoroughly constructed set of concepts for politics, the question of crisis remains almost untouched. There are a few remarks where he critically articulates the political deployment of the term crisis, but those remarks fail to provide a thorough picture of the political problematization of the term. However, my endeavor in this article is not to employ a banal assessment of Rancière's treatise on politics by indicating how the concept of crisis is overlooked. Nor is it to engage in a precipitant critique to integrate the term crisis into the political

framework of Rancière. Instead, the foremost aim is to demonstrate that a certain theme of crisis is already and latently at work at the heart of Rancière's peculiar understanding of politics. To put it another way, what is primarily at stake in this article is the revealment of crisis as a core question characterizing Rancière's politics of disagreement by dint of the fundamental drama between the police and politics. In this vein, by formulating a line of inquiry starting from where Rancière vaguely mentions the concept of crisis and extending to the very dynamics of the politics of disagreement, I firstly propose to construe Rancière's critique towards the deployment of the term crisis as a standpoint fundamentally rooted in his critique of consensus-driven politics, namely the police. Secondly, I attempt to develop a novel approach of crisis in a manner different from Rancière's critical articulation yet still conforming with his dissensus-oriented politics. Accordingly, the fundamental strategy I pursue is to treat Rancière's set of concepts as a toolbox in order to come at the question of crisis in relation to politics from an as yet unscrutinized perspective.

In the interview published in 2009 in the French weekly *Siné Hebdo*, the interviewer asks Rancière his thoughts concerning the crisis in Guadeloupe at that time. However, Rancière provides a response in a way not limited to the crisis in Guadeloupe; his words rather glimpse at a certain political problematization of the term crisis:

I notice that the very term “crisis” remains a medical metaphor—as if only medicine dispensed by experts has any chance of being effective. Forms of industrial and financial crisis certainly do exist, but crisis as a global political situation does not. Crisis is a vision imposed by governments to maintain the control over the possible.¹¹

In this minor passage, there are two salient points whereby Rancière articulates the concept of crisis in a negative manner. Rancière, on the one hand, problematizes the political use of crisis in the medical sense as it connotes the necessity of expertise for healing or resolution; on the other, he describes crisis as an inflicted

perception by governments to secure the continuous control over the possible field of action. Why does Rancière refer to the medical signification of crisis and articulate it in a tacitly negative way? What kind of connection between the medico-metaphorical use of crisis and politics is then in question?

To provide preliminary insight as to why Rancière negatively takes on the medical use of crisis in politics, it would not be inconvenient to draw attention to a certain drama between the medical practitioner and the patient, namely the expert and the non-expert: a drama that lies in the apparent fact that the patient is utterly impuissant before the medical practitioner in the course of crisis. Obviously, what Rancière problematizes is not the actual drama between these two, but the crude application of which into critical matters concerning a community as though communal decisions cannot be taken, especially in times of crisis, without the expertise of those who are supposedly authority in these matters. In other words, there exists a perception that political crises must or should be intervened by expert practitioners as in medicine. However, such perception for Rancière could only be an ill-advised metaphor that is fundamentally formulated not only to rescue and preserve the exclusive position of political practitioners but also to keep those who must receive dreadful outcomes of crises unable to take effective action.

Indeed, Rancière's whole project strives for reversing any sort of politico-intellectual orthodoxy which systematically yields an asymmetrical partaking mode in communal matters by the division between those who are entitled to decide and who are not. In contradistinction to such division, Rancière's endeavor is to reinvigorate the question of equality; he contends for the radical reception of equality between any and every speaking being to be partaking in communal decision-making processes.² To that end, Rancière invokes political philosophy not to justify the rationality of political practitioners configuring the possible field of action in communal matters, but, by dint of the radical equality of speaking beings, to disagree with the very foundations of that rationality so that there could be made room for those who are not titled but, in effect, competent to take

part in such decisive processes. I will discuss Rancière's vehement insistence upon the equality of speaking beings in a more elaborate manner but, prior to that, I intend to delve deeper into Rancière's critique of political philosophy to be able to present a more reliable discussion on the theme of crisis.

At the level of the medical metaphor, the negativity of crisis rendered by Rancière implicates that the deployment of such metaphor in politics attempts to safeguard the status of those who allegedly possess the authority to intervene in the event of crisis in the name of a whole community; however, it remains limited in explicating a motive that impels him to construe crisis as a "vision imposed by governments to maintain the control over the possible".³ What kind of negativity concerning the term crisis is then at stake here? What sort of political vision is implied when it is used medico-metaphorically? What kind of governmental logic is at stake behind such imposition? Ultimately, what is precisely meant by remaining in control over the possible in virtue of the medico-metaphorical infliction of crisis? Accordingly, what I propose is a line of inquiry urged by these questions.

Rancière's philosophical enterprise comprises a multifaceted treatment of the question of politics whereby he painstakingly backtracks the foundational source of politics by tackling the lexicon of politics in the modality of anew. It is a peculiar mode in which certain concepts we are already conversant with are radically challenged such as *dissensus*, *consensus*, *police* and so on, but also new concepts are invented such as, most notably, *the partition of the sensible*. The unfolding of the negativity of crisis, for this reason, necessitates a certain engagement with the idiosyncratic manner of Rancière.

For Rancière, the foundational source of politics consists of a set of treatments proposed against a certain problem of beginning, an introduction of a system or organization for human bodies. There is correspondingly a particular concentration on the preliminary stage of politics characterized by these following questions: On what basis can an organization for the common good of human bodies be established? Or, depending on what principle can such order be better off?

What is most particularly demanded in line with these questions is nothing but an originary principle for the well-being of humans within order; yet, what Rancière identifies concerning the inauguration of order is thought-provoking. He points out a striking paradox worded as follows:

The foundation of politics is not in fact more a matter of convention than of nature: it is the lack of foundation, the sheer contingency of any social order. Politics exists simply because no social order is based on nature, no divine law regulates human society.⁴

What Rancière pinpoints here is that the very foundation of politics is actually the non-existence of any foundation to put human bodies in order; it is the absence of any originary principle for such regulation. This paradoxical formulation, however, does not refer to a lack of inspiration; that is, it is not an unsurpassable paradox because politics exists. To be more precise, whereas the lack of any foundation refers to the impossibility of any proper model for the ordering of bodies, the lack of any foundation as the foundation signifies the possibility of any model on the contingency of humans. Politics exists because the very lack of any proper beginning presents itself as the possibility of beginning that never lacks and, by extension, there is infinitely many ways to inaugurate order. The foundation of politics is thus none other than the fact that the possibility of order is contingent upon the impossibility of any proper principle for it.

The problem of beginning intrinsic to politics is then fundamentally and prospectively associated with a speculative activity over a coherent organization of human bodies; further, it is a speculation about the establishment of certain commonality in and through the absence of any regulative principle. Rancière, for this reason, describes politics as “a polemical configuration of the common world”.⁵ Indeed, what emerges from the question of beginning is a stage principally polemical, that is, pregnant with various engagements in controversial beliefs or disputes. What is at stake in the question of beginning is the disclosure of a period wherein important decisions must be made concerning the arrangement

of bodies within the commonality designated by the mutual sharing of space and time, which corresponds to a crisis of a certain kind.

Even though Rancière comes at the dynamics of this period from different angles, he never specifies it as a stage of crisis; however, it is my contention that there is a genuine sense of crisis in the problem arising out of the devoid of any proper foundation. This inevitably requires the rethinking of what crisis means as regards the question determined by the commencement of politics. At this point, it would be apt to resort to the etymology of the word crisis. Notwithstanding the variety of conceptions, I prefer to proceed with two influential ones: the medical and the juridical.

From the vantage point of medicine, also known as the Hippocratic-Galenic perspective, crisis, in its Classical Greek form *krisis*, marks a decisive moment in which actions taken for and on behalf of a patient would lead to a better or worse condition in the course of a disease. Law, on the other hand, is a discipline where the word *krisis* has a relatively more extensive sphere of meaning such as discord, decision, judgement, sentence, court of justice, lawsuit, event and so on. Juristically, the term *krisis*, in parallel to medicine, refers to a moment of cutting or deciding to bring resolution to whatever the issue at stake. In both lexicons, there is a common drama strictly tied to a stage in which making a decision or judgement becomes what is most particularly needed for recovery or resolution. In this respect, the Proto-Indo-European root, namely the verb *krei*, provides a more powerful sense to appreciate these different viewpoints evolving out of the word *krisis*. *Krei* means to sieve and thereby to discriminate, distinguish; later in Classical Greek, it corresponds to the verb *krinein* meaning to separate, decide, and judge.

The manner Rancière interprets the term crisis, especially in relation to its medico-metaphorical deployment in politics, evidently deviates from possible interpretations pertaining to the verb *krinein*; however, this does not necessarily mean that Rancière's political framework is completely irrelevant to the concept

of crisis when it becomes a matter in the sense of *krinein*. What Rancière discordantly approaches is actually the suffocating use of the term crisis in the field of conventional politics. What is at stake in this special use is the set of arguments and practices which consistently produce people who are bereaved of the capacity to decide and judge for their own sake. Crisis, in this way, is employed as a term which is utterly hostile or foreign to its original meaning, to *krinein*. In one of the interviews he gave, Rancière notes that:

To characterize the phenomena of our times we must, first of all, call into question the concept of crisis. One speaks of a crisis of society, a crisis of democracy, and so on. It is a way of blaming the current situation [the critical situation] on the victims. Now, this situation is not the result of a sickness of civilization but of the violence with which the masters of the world direct their offensive against the peoples. The great fault of the citizens continues to be that of always: that of allowing oneself to be dispossessed of one's power.⁶

As is evident from the passage, there is a critique of the reduced meaning of crisis, surely the reduction of *krinein*, in the domain of consensus-driven conventional politics. What paves the way for such reduction is the thinking of crisis as a mean not just to keep the people out from decision mechanisms concerning the common but also to hold those responsible if any intense difficulty comes into existence in and about the common. This absurd reformulation of the concept of crisis, in Rancière's framework, is nothing short of a result immanent to the supposed resolution of the problem of beginning, for which Rancière reinterprets the term the *police*.

Here, rather than immediately diving into the dynamics of Rancière's re-evaluation of the term police, I would like to urge upon the fact that the paradoxical formulation of politics as the devoid of any divine law to launch a community refers to a scene wherein what is called for is nothing but a certain modality of action so as to set a certain inter-relational commonality of human bodies, hopefully for their own

sake. To put it differently, the question described by the lack of foundation sets a critical stage in which a series of decisions and judgements must be made to put an organization in place. For this reason, the very contingency of any order as the primary question of politics is to affirm the exigency of a series of decisions, judgements and separations over possibilities, or impossibilities, to establish order; that is, the question of beginning sets the prime scene of politics as where the very modality of action is predominantly characterized by the verb *krinein*. Then, at the prime of politics, there lies a specific sense of crisis, for which I propose to reserve the term the *prime crisis of politics*. Therefore, what I mean by the prime crisis of politics is entirely bounded by a scene where possibilities for the establishment of order are sought out or invented to be judged and decided afterwards. The prime of politics is, in effect, a scene wherein two modalities of action are intertwined: invention and decision, fabrication and separation, investigation and judgement, speculation and discrimination, and thus *poiesis* and *krisis*.

As a matter of fact, certain classics of ancient Greek verify this intertwined modality of action in terms of *poiein* and *krinein*, or mythopoeic process of deciding, as a way to deal with the question stemming from the absolute contingency of any order. Perhaps, it would be relevant here to evoke the Greek cosmogonical thought concerning the quasi-dialectical relationship between the notions of *khaos* and the *kosmos*, which fundamentally shapes the perception of life of the ancients and eventually paves the way for the effectuation of the idea of city-state, namely the *polis*, as an organized collectivity of human bodies.⁷ Accordingly, I would like to draw particular attention to the cosmogonical accounts of Hesiod and Plato for the reason they are both in pursuit of order in terms of labor on the basis of cosmogonical speculations.

According to Hesiod, Chaos is a chasm, a pre-cosmic featureless state by way of which the genealogical evolution of the gods and thereby the evolution of the universe becomes possible. What is signified by the word *khaos* is correspondingly a pure gap, a featureless state. On the other hand, the *kosmos* refers to a progression towards the ultimate and perpetual state in which all the gods, including Chaos,

and the whole universe fall under the authority of Zeus and by that means are put in order. The manner Hesiod conceives of the cosmos, nonetheless, is not that of order pertaining to fulfilment of an individual teleology put forth by an artificer, but of order teleologically alluding to unpredictable productions of oppositional forces, which culminates in the hegemony of Zeus. Simply put, the reign of Zeus means order.

However, Plato's cosmogonical account in the *Timaeus* is a bit more sophisticated. Contrary to Hesiod, Plato amplifies that, before the ordering of the cosmos, there was chaos which corresponds to a non-progressive state, a deadlock; for this reason, no progress could be achieved without imposition of order on the impasse by an intelligent artificer. This is precisely the point where the *Demiurge* is invited to the cosmogonical stage as a craftsman god whose duty is to lead the primordial turmoil to the well-ordered *kosmos* by deriving inspiration from the eternal model that is prior to even the *Demiurge* himself. Therefore, unlike Hesiod, the mode in which the *kosmos* transpires for Plato is that of a progressive order strictly tied as well as oriented to a foreseeable, calculable and invariant teleology, which eliminates the possibility of any erratic and coincidental occurring.

Even if these narratives seemingly tackle the cosmogonical problem chiefly revolving around the variance between the *kosmos* and *khaos*, both narratives mark a transitional process from a state of disorder to a state of order and revere the sacredness of order. Both are designed to serve to the internalization and memorization of the sacred lead of the Gods, respectively Zeus and the *Demiurge*; what is primarily accentuated in these narratives is correspondingly the sacred order of things. Both narratives are nuancing that the sacred and the order of nature are not mutually exclusive: rather, they are one and the same. For this reason, they must be equally applicable to any order that can be constituted by human aggregates. In a sense, the *polis* is the likelihood of the *kosmos*. This is the argument which presumes that the *polis* would be better off insofar as it is assimilated into the order inherent in the *kosmos*. It is precisely the presumption conveyed through the word hierarchy when the social stratum within the *polis* is

arranged to be in harmonious with the sacred order. Hierarchy, as a matter of fact, is a combination of *hieros* and *arkhein*, where the former means sacred and the latter means to lead, rule. Thus, hierarchy signifies that a reliable starting point to organize, namely to separate and lead, human bodies is deducible from the order of the *kosmos*.

Another point worthy of attention common to both accounts is that the question of order is rendered as a matter of justice. Hesiod, in the *Theogony*, celebrates the triumph of Zeus over the gods and thereby his control over the universe. What is at stake here is the manifestation and dispensation of justice as Zeus manages to subdue violence swaying over life, namely *hybris*. That is why the primary responsibility one must take on is to reinforce the reign of justice by acting accordingly. To that end, in the *Works and Days*, Hesiod renders what is proper to justice as commitment to labor, which ultimately intimates the manner in which one should partake in the communal affairs of the *polis*.⁸

Similarly, in the *Timaeus*, there is a self-evident reference to the existence of order as a matter of justice since Plato construes the order imposed by the *Demiurge* as the constitution of acknowledgeable forms of what is essentially beautiful and good, and therefore principally just. However, in the *Republic*, Plato prominently presents this reference as an argument to institute a just order within the *polis*. Plato, in a way resembling Hesiod, interprets justice in relation to labor and holds the opinion that justice requires everyone to be occupied with a best fitted role and function in the *polis* so as not to abstain from violence but, first and foremost, to be subordinated by the highest principle of the *kosmos*, the good.⁹ The *Demiurge*'s function is correspondingly not only to craft the elements of *kosmos* and to bring order to it, but also to stimulate humans to imitate the order manifested in the *kosmos*.¹⁰

Both Hesiod and Plato, despite the difference in their motives, the one between the question of violence and good, have recourse to justice. They both narrate that justice is achievable on the condition that strict correspondences between

labor and bodies are actualized in line with the order available in the sacred work of the *kosmos*. The very deployment of justice here is linked to a certain promise; it promises a harmony analogous to that of the *kosmos*. This promise evinces the tantalizing aura stemming from the lack of foundation. The argument of justice, in this respect, is presented as the best possible solution towards the radical contingency of any order. The signification of justice is then to be well-ordered and thereby well-founded. It is the overcoming of the primordial turmoil and the affirmation of the *kosmos* as the overarching principle; naturally, the *polis* as well must be subsumed under this principle. The organization of the *polis*, for this reason, is tantamount to an attempt to suppress the initial trauma emanating from the sheer absence of any *arkhē*. In this sense, the disorder of *khaos* and the prime crisis of politics are referential to each other just as the order of the *kosmos* and the *polis* are. What is commanded in this referential structure is that just as Zeus and the *Demiurge* act in the modality of *poiesis* for the ordering of the *kosmos*, there is a need to think and act in the same modality for the formulation of a parallel narrative through which an ideal order for the *polis* can be sieved and decided among possibilities.¹¹ Therefore, the central task in the prime scene of politics is to be engaged simultaneously with the acts of *poiein* and *krinein* so as to put an end to disorder.

The prime crisis of politics then corresponds to a particular state of in-between embedded in the stark opposition between the chaos of uncultivated nature and the cosmos of cultivated nature. Both Hesiod and Plato principally confirm this in-between situation by thinking more highly of the *kosmos*; further, the political manifestation of this confirmation is fundamentally linked with the organization of the *polis*. Especially with Plato's endeavor, the *polis* becomes a question of order wherein the harmony of the *kosmos* must prevail against the abyss of *khaos*.

In this regard, Plato's cosmogonical account, if there is to be value of it, ought to be regarded as a sort of fabrication which ultimately enables his ethico-political project to underpin the rationale of the ideal *polis*, the *kallipolis*. This leads Rancière to problematize Plato's ethico-political project by coining the term *archipolitics*:

The good city is one in which the order of the *cosmos* [...] that rules the movement of the divine stars, manifests itself as the temperament of a social body, in which the citizen acts not according to the law but according to the spirit of the law, the vital breath that gives it life. It is a city in which the citizen is won over by a story rather than restrained by a law, in which the legislator writing the laws is able to tightly work into them the admonitions necessary to citizens as well as ‘his opinion of what is beautiful and what is ugly.’ [...] Archipolitics is the complete achievement of *phusis* as *nomos*, community law’s complete and tangible coming into being.¹²

Archipolitics, as the rationale of the ideal police, hints at the idea that human bodies must constitute entirety within which they are ordered with respect to the law inherent in the *kosmos*. In this regard, Plato fills in the gap arising out of the lack of *arkhē* to form a community by ascribing the status of law to the narrative of the *kosmos*. In this way, the *kosmos* becomes the law through which individual and collective modes of action in the community, namely the *ethos* of the community, is determined. In other words, Plato’s attempt is the absolute reduction of communal matters, in fact political matters, into ethical matters that are insistently appointed by the question of conformability to the *kosmos* narrative.

The merging of the question of conformability and the *polis*, for Rancière, is tied to a specific logic that “requires everyone to be in their proper place, partaking in their proper affairs”.¹³ It is what Rancière calls *the logic of the proper*. The logic of the proper alludes to a division between the pre-designation of what is proper and improper via the archaic claim pivoted on the antagonism between the *kosmos* and *khaos*, and the transference of this pre-designative schema into practice in the *polis*. This naturally bears on a split in the meaning of *arkhē* as that which inaugurates an organization and commands to abide by that. More precisely, the logic of the proper, on the one hand, operates as an originary concept which identifies the dispersal of the proper and improper for the right ordering of bodies; on the other hand, it functions as an imperative concept which calls on bodies to comply

with that pre-proposed order. This double movement intrinsic to archipolitics is ostensibly what disposes of the prime crisis of politics. The former move is what paves the way for the production of identities between the proper and bodies; the latter is what ensures that each and every body acts in accordance with those assigned identities.

Therefore, the term *police* in Rancière's political parlance stands for neither a state apparatus aimed at the prevention and investigation of crimes to free public space from disorder, nor an engagement in the institution of disciplinary techniques for the monitoring of society; instead, it is a particular configuration of bodies which, as Rancière puts, "defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task".¹⁴ The police is a system which divides people to affix by name its bodies to best fitting places and functions so that the narrative of the proper, or the *ethos* of the community, can be effectuated; that is, each and every body in the police, both collectively and individually, is obliged to inhabit the common area in highly determined manners.¹⁵ Another articulation of the double gesture of *arkhē* is then the division of the community; yet, the police logic still discerns the conduction of bodies as "a totality comprised of groups performing specific functions and occupying determined spaces".¹⁶ The policing is the calculation of bodies as *one*, despite dividing up.

What the police organization offers is then a particular logic in the form of narrative for the well-ordered and thus well-founded regulation of bodies. Rancière points out that the very operativity of the police is conditional upon those who believe in the logos of the order as well as perceive the actuality thereof:

The logos must be presented as a story. And the story, Plato says, has to be believed. [...] Obviously, Plato does not demand that the workers have the inner conviction that a deity truly mixed iron in their soul and gold in the soul of the rulers. It is enough that they *sense* it: that is, that they use their arms, their eyes, and their minds *as if* it were true. And they do so even

more so as this lie about ‘fitting’ actually fits the reality of their condition. The ordering of social ‘occupations’ works out in the mode of this *as if* which ties it to a ‘belief’.¹⁷

What is at stake in this *as if* modality is a particular mode of belief that which is destined to bring off what is supposed to be believed in its very materiality through multiple projections that incorporate bodies into certain occupations in the fabric of the community. In this vein, the police, as Rancière delicately encapsulates, is “a matrix that defines a set of relations between sense and sense: that is, between a form of sensory experience and an interpretation which makes sense of it”.¹⁸ The police, in a sense, is a space wherein the field of sensory experiences are predicated upon the logos of the order. Whereas the former alludes to a system in which the boundaries of sensible experiences of those who are allocated with certain occupations are delineated, the latter is what provides a set of arguments in the narrative form which accounts for why this system is better for the participation of those bodies. Thus, the logos of the order refers to a fiction that comprises, as Rancière notes, “a set of imaginary constructions allowing a system to a function” and the very of outcome of this functioning is a certain spatial and temporal particularization of bodies, for which Rancière inaugurates the term *the partition (or the distribution) of the sensible*.¹⁹

The partition of the sensible primarily refers to the configuration of sensible experiences within the police; in a sense, it is a concept which, first and foremost, draws attention to the *aisthēsis* of the collective and individual *ethos* enacted by means of the assignation of bodies into certain places and functions.²⁰ Rancière, precisely for this reason, portrays the police as a decisive process wherein the partition of sensible experiences of those who are properly distributed to particular spatio-temporalities refers to an injection of specific senses between what is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible, doable and undoable within the order; this is ultimately what demarcates the sensible boundaries between what is possible and impossible to be experienced both individually and collectively within the *common sensorium* constituted by the

ordering of bodies. In doing so, the police logic ensures that each and every part of the order is well-partitioned and well-placed. What is at stake here is the division of the common place hypothetically consonant with the common good, which in turn permits bodies to take place and role in the nexus of relations. That is why Rancière suggests that the partition of the sensible must be apprehended in the double sense: “on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation”.²¹ Therefore, the manner the police logic configures the field of sensible is constantly engaged with procedures of division and inclusion, separation and integration, segregation and aggregation so as to set and hold the modes of perception as well as the range of sensible experience.

Furthermore, the police logic is consistently disposed to execute these inherently spatio-temporal procedures to such an extent that “there can be no time out, no empty space in the fabric of the community”.²² Rancière, in his seventh thesis on politics, addresses the fully condensed realm of the sensible throughout the police in a more distinctive manner:

The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement: society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places. In this matching of functions, places and ways of being, there is no place for any void. It is this exclusion of what ‘is not’ that constitutes the police-principle at the core of statist practices.²³

The police, from the outset, is capable of ordering its bodies insofar as it is strictly tied to an incessant allergy towards any void or gap within the order. It is the order whose actualization is almost entirely indebted to a certain hostile stance towards what might be inefficacious or improper in the organizational fabric. Then, as Rancière points out, there is a certain principle of *saturation* at the heart of the police, which renders the partition of the sensible as “a mode [...] that recognizes neither lack nor supplement”.²⁴ The principle of saturation embedded

in the narrative of the proper is precisely what lays the way in which the common realm of the sensible is partitioned and distributed by dint of inclusionary and exclusionary practices over bodies; what is achieved as well as secured in return is the void-free partition of the sensible and thereby the stability thereof.

Accordingly, Rancière problematizes the police as the impossibility of politics; in other words, the problematique inherent in the archipolitics is the reduction of politics to the police. What is at stake in this reduction is the enforcement of bodies to partake in the sensible order as a natural result of “an immediate identity between the political constitution of the community and the physical and moral [ethical] constitution of a population”.²⁵ That is why the police logic, both hypothetically and practically, cannot compromise with the fact that there might be misplaced and misfunctioned parts within the sensible realm it configures. It constantly and incessantly marks the absence of void and the impossibility of supplementation concerning its order; there cannot be any residual and peripheral subject of its right calculation. This is the point where Rancière readjusts the political meaning of consensus in a way which radically differs from either one referring to a peaceful atmosphere for conciliatory discussions or one referring to an activity of raising plausible arguments to eschew any kind of conflict or conflict-based violence:²⁶

Consensus means the sharing of a common and non-litigious experience: its essence is the affirmation of the preconditions that determine political choice as objective and univocal. ‘Consensus discourse’ in political thought asserts that political action is circumscribed by a series of large-scale economic, financial, demographic, and geostrategic equivalences. Under this rubric, politics—conceived as the action of governments—consists in the adoption of the constraints of these large equivalences along with an attitude of arbitration directed at the residual and marginal possibilities left behind. [...] The ideal of consensus affirms that what is essential to a life in common depends on objective equilibriums toward which we may all orient ourselves.²⁷

The fundamental proclivity of consensual politics is thus towards the construction and maintenance of a specific state of equilibrium within which each and every part of the order deploys its role and function in line with the equivalences between the proper and bodies. The police is an organization which insists upon a consensus over its distribution of places and roles as well as its narrative as what justifies that distribution; it demands agreement on the common sensory experiences of bodies who are objectified and stratified in accordance with a fiction. Consensus is the affirmation of a predesignated *topos* which constitutes the embodiment of the police's distribution of the sensible; it is the validity of a particular regime of the sensible defined by the assimilation of politics to the point where it is identical to the police.

It is now relatively more convenient to situate the political significance of crisis regarding the perspective of Rancière, which is fundamentally ill-disposed as is articulated to a certain extent before. Indeed, Rancière's relentless struggle with what he calls archipolitics provides a possibility to clarify more his negative attitude towards the effectuation of crisis in the field of conventional politics. In this vein, I would like to examine the effectivity of the term crisis in the police order in two fundamental aspects.

Firstly, the police logic is radically inclined to render the existence of any crisis within its order as, to speak medico-metaphorically, a sort of malady for which there is no cure except its obliteration. It is because any crisis concerning the ordering of the police is essentially a call for re-ordering; it blurs the right ordering of bodies as well as interferes with the univocal functioning of the order. It basically jeopardizes the police order. Also, the police logic strictly assumes that the proper order of bodies has already been accomplished. This is the assumption that the initial crisis stemming from the contingency of any proper *arkhē*, thus of any order, has already been reached to resolution once and for all. The signification of crisis for the police logic is the reintroduction of chaos, namely disorder. Mythically, any crisis resets an in-between stage where the *kosmos* and *khaos* confrontationally exists. For this reason, the police logic constantly tends to equate the meaning

of crisis with chaos, as though crisis is an event in which there is no possibility to derive order; however, this is bare and intentional neglect, or abuse, of the genuine meaning of crisis because crisis, in point of fact, is an event wherein the very convertibility of what seems impossible into possible is still contained.

At bottom, the very modality in which the police is suggested is linked with a certain mode of crisis. It is suggested as the best possible way out of the impossibility of any proper *arkhē*; nonetheless, its logic paradoxically insists upon the obfuscation of the fact that it is order that arises out of the prime crisis of politics. Since any crisis concerning the order carries potentiality for the re-speculation of its properness, the police logic commands to efface any possible effectivity of which and, for this reason, vulgarly reduces crisis to a mere disease or a state of disequilibrium. Though the event of crisis characteristically signifies the possibility to make a new beginning, it is compelled to become an event predestined to a particular banality within the police; it is the banality in the sense of the lack of originality, of impossibility to begin afresh, of the lack of *arkhē*. Crisis, in the eyes of the police logic, is an impossible event; it is an event already precluded in the prime scene of politics. The police logic is allergic to any possible return of the prime crisis as it might pave the way for further speculations, supplementations or polemics concerning its organization; it is an organization on the ground of the impossibility of supplementation and lack. As Rancière writes, the police is “the dismissal of politics as a polemical configuration of the common world”.²⁸ What is at stake here is the presumption that the police is a well-saturated configuration such that there is no gap for any further decision concerning the common; by extension, it proposes the redundancy of any other simultaneous performance of *poiein* and *krinein* for such performance must be left to those who are privileged to act and decide on behalf and instead of others. In this way, the police logic alludes to inequality between those who are privileged, allegedly expert, to distribute roles and functions and those who are supposed to do nothing but fulfil their duty in this distribution. Those who constitute the police logic, precisely via this inegalitarian logic, remain in control over not only the possible but also the

impossible; thus, what is imposed as a vision in relation to any crisis that marks a wrong in the order is its impossibility.

The other aspect is the inculpatory and intimidatory meaning of crisis attributed by the police logic. The source of such attribution resides in the principle of exclusion operated throughout the police. The very functioning of this principle is to keep out what is excessive to the order. The existence of any crisis in and about the functioning of the order is already an excess as it is already an impossible disclosure of a certain wrong in the distribution of roles and functions. The wrong here is employed by those who enunciate a misplacement and demand a better placement within the order. Then, the occurrence of such crisis sets a paradoxical stage in which the impossibility of the improper is presented as a sheer lie. It is a failure of the narrative of the proper, a void within the void-free partition of the sensible, an abyss dividing the unity of the order, an instability within the stable order or a nullification of the consensus over the distribution of roles for a particular problem. It is an event wherein the seemingly unshakeable foundation of the police is forced to be dislodged and, by that means, the reliability of its claims is tested.

On the other hand, the best effective tool possessed by the police logic against such crises is the principle of exclusion which is always and already at work in the partition of the sensible. It is the principle which decides not only those who must stay out of the decision-making mechanism concerning the common but also those who must be excluded from the organization as a mere dysfunction. Whereas the former signifies the implicit exclusion of those who are dispossessed of the possibility to decide for themselves while remaining a part of the order, the latter is what makes explicit this implicit exclusion and signifies the exclusion of the included. Rancière, for the exclusion of the included, occasionally uses the term the *part that has no part*. It is the part which deploys a wrong concerning its share in the partition; it is an impossible part. It is, by definition, a paradoxical part but the implication of this paradoxicality also subsumes the ones previously defined in relation to the prime crisis of politics. The part having no part is what

leads to crisis in and about the police; thus, it is the primary actor of crisis which inaugurates the improper and requests for the correction of what is wrong. Yet, it is the part culpable for revealing its position as a misplacement or miscalculation and contaminating the pure functioning of the proper; it is an excess that needs to be eliminated from the police to perpetuate the solid distribution. The very signification of crisis in this regard is inculpatory to conceal the fact that those who give rise to crisis within the order are actually victims. The police logic, through this inculpatory effectivity, deploys the term crisis as a mean to intimidate those who are implicitly or explicitly excluded. It points out that whomever excessive to the distribution is regarded as an outsider and consequently cannot claim a share; in this way, the term crisis becomes a tool for blackmailing at the hands of the police logic.

Although Rancière tackles the signification of crisis as a term whose meaning constantly generated by the police logic, he shows almost no interest in thinking of crisis anew; however, it is my contention that Rancière's peculiar understanding of politics is already convenient to derive a novel approach of the term crisis. Specifically, I argue that politics for Rancière, in fact, is a certain event which already insists upon a certain theme of crisis.

The aim now is to hold a befitting grasp of politics with regard to the question of crisis in a Rancièrian manner. To that end, it would be suitable to draw attention to Rancière's idiosyncratic diagnosis about the existence of order:

There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you.²⁹

In this vital passage, Rancière identifies that ordering of any kind is contingent upon the presupposition of equality between those who command and those

understand that and obey; otherwise, any ordering cannot become operative. Then, the crisis at the prime of politics is surmounted precisely because of this presuppositional equality; that is, any ordering is contingent insofar as the equal capacity of speaking beings is presupposed to form an organization wherein some of them command and the rest obeys.

Rancière carefully distinguishes the police from politics in terms of the deployment of this principal equality. The police logic is not utterly ignorant to the principle of equality; rather, it deliberately suspends the effectivity of which to a great extent once the order is established through the mechanism of commanding and obey. It suspends because its narrative emphasizes the adequacy of equal speaking beings in a way limited to the understanding of the order and the need thereof. It precludes further possibilities of ordering and debars those who obey from the possibility of commanding for themselves. The police, for this reason, is also a distribution of speaking bodies on the presupposition of the principal equality; however, this initial equality converts into a non-egalitarian logic due to the production of people who are dispossessed of the possibility of making another decision concerning their part in the distribution and reconfiguring their individual and collective experiences in the common sensible area.³⁰ That is why Rancière argues the problem of equality depending on the fact that “policy [the police] *wrongs* equality” rather than that “policy *denies* equality”.³¹

Rancière notes that the political takes place where “the verification of equality is obliged to turn into the handling of a wrong”.³² In other words, politics exists insofar as those who obey deploy their equal capacity with those who order so as to undo a particular wrong concerning their part in the distribution. Politics is an emancipatory process where the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being is authenticated to form and reform order.³³ For this reason, politics, first and foremost, must ensure the undoing of the wrong that is done to equality. This specific modality of undoing requires “an enunciative and demonstrative capacity to reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies”.³⁴ For Rancière, this is also the

modality of political subjectivity which suspends the non-egalitarian logic of the police and creates a supplementary part excessive to any consensual calculation of the parts of the community, the part of those having no part. This is surely antithetical to the narrative of the proper that recognizes neither a wrong nor a supplement, and what makes politics quarrelling and emancipatory.

Politics is then essentially what disrupts a series of assignations of bodies employed in line with the logic of the proper. It disturbs the ordering of bodies within the police. The political, as a contrary logic to the police, is an activity engaged in, as Rancière points out, “seeking a way of doing what we are not supposed to do, to be where we are not supposed to be”.³⁵ It is the setting of a stage wherein a certain contest between the proper and the improper occurs. The political is thus what confuses the fictive properness of the police by contentiously introducing the improper: the improper as a counter-narrative that speculates ways in which a set of relations that ties bodies to certain occupations can be established different than the ones designated by the police. Further, the political marks a new beginning that could be generalized as a point in which one no longer believes in the narrative of the proper and consequently refuses to act in alignment with it; in a sense, it is the rejection of what is injected by the logic of the proper.

In this respect, Rancière’s understanding of politics appears to be haunted by the structural analogy between the *kosmos* and the *polis* speculated by Plato. What is political for Rancière correspondingly pertains to creating a possible way out of the effectivity of this analogy: a breach of the purportedly harmonious relation between the *kosmos* and the *polis*. As Rancière puts it:

It [politics] is the introduction of an incommensurable [improper] at the heart of the distribution of speaking bodies. This incommensurable breaks not only with the equality of profits and losses; it also ruins in advance the project of the city ordered according to the proportion of the *cosmos* and based of the *archē* of the community.³⁶

If politics is to deviate from the measure of the *kosmos*, then it marks a void within the void-free partition of bodies, a paradoxical rupture within the continuity of the police, an unsaturated residual place in conflict with the narrative of the proper, a state of disequilibrium. If politics is to dissent from archaic claims that fundamentally shape the police, then it is the reaffirmation of the sheer absence of any regulative *archē* for the reconfiguration of the sensible. By extension, politics, as Rancière writes, is an “intervention that reassert decision making over public affairs as anyone’s concern, and as the expression of anyone’s equal capacity”.³⁷ What characterizes such an intervention is then the simultaneous reperformance of *poiein* and *krinein* within the void where the power of those who are allegedly privileged to order is neutralized by the power of the one more, of anyone, of those who are dispossessed of the power of speaking and deciding for and on behalf of themselves. It is in this sense that politics is not only “witnessing to the exclusion of the included” but also “claiming for the inclusion of the excluded”.³⁸

In this respect, the political for Rancière is an event where the prime crisis of politics is verified as that which returns. What is at stake in this specific modality of return is nothing short of the reintroduction of the sheer absence of *archē*. In other words, politics occurs when the problem of beginning unexpectedly and intrudingly arrives on the consensual scene of the police order. This opens the police order to polemics once again, thus brings about a split within the order. Accordingly, I propose to characterize Rancière’s politics of disagreement on the ground of the *return of the prime crisis of politics*.³⁹

However, it should be noted that the return of the prime crisis does not mean a total collapse of the police order; rather, it refers to a local collapse that invalidates the narrative of the proper and reveals a specific misplacement within the order. It is the return due to the emergence of a paradoxical part, the part that has no part. In this respect, the part having no part does not constitute an absolute gap as it is still a part. Nor does it concordantly participate in the purported harmony of the police as it has no part. It stages an in-between scene in a way falling in line with the very notion of crisis. What is at stake here is not only the in-between status of

the part having no part but also the in-between status of the community due to the disclosure thereof. This happens through the enunciative and demonstrative activity of those who are misplaced, which eventually turns on the initial equality of speaking beings and claims an equal part in the poietic process of deciding with ones already privileged according to the mythopoeic solution of archipolitics.

In relation to the in-between status of politics, Rancière defines the political community as “a community of interruptions, fractures, irregular and local, through which egalitarian logic comes and divides the police community”.⁴⁰ It is in this manner that the return of the prime crisis ruptures the validity of identities between the proper and bodies by signifying an unsaturated place within the *topos* of relations designated by words. The elaboration of the political community of Rancière thus continues: “It is a community of worlds in community that are intervals of subjectification: intervals constructed between identities, between spaces and places. Political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds [...] between several names, several identities.”⁴¹

What returns in politics as a matter of crisis is then the in-between stage at the prime of politics. What arrives as a matter of crisis is the necessity of making a new beginning. The genuine exigency of such crises is, in general terms, the designation of a new part for those who are misplaced in the order. For this reason, politics is what embraces possible returns of the prime crisis in its ever-changing local forms. It is to build a critical scene upon which those who are dispossessed of the possibility to speak and decide for themselves may hold a claim to speak and decide for themselves to reset the coordinates of their spatio-temporal experiences, to redesignate the limits between the visible and the sayable, namely the relation between words and bodies. If it is borne in mind that crisis is an event where the very convertibility of what is impossible to possible is pursued for recovery and resolution, then politics is ultimately an event of crisis for what is impossible to be experienced within the strict configuration of the sensible is converted into possible. That is why the genuine political significance of crisis is neither a bare impasse in which no progress is possible nor a sheer withdrawal

from the issue at stake; instead, it signifies a political event in which there is *still* possibility to undertake an action. In this sense, Rancière proposes a specific form of critical activity that is definitely not foreign to the genuine meaning of crisis: a poietic process of deciding where bodies who are subjected to a wrong in the police engage simultaneously in the acts of *poiein* and *krinein* for the restructuring of the sensible fabric, hopefully without a wrong.

In the contemporary realm of politics, the use of the term crisis sharply deviates from those that can be conceived in the plane spanned by the acts of *poiein* and *krinein*. What we have got instead is the reduced meaning of crisis in a way especially pertaining to chaos in the sense of complete disorder. This underpins the perception of politics as an activity oriented towards the development and employment of techniques through which genuine exigencies of crises could be concealed. It is in this sense that there exist political technicians whose ultimate duty is to eliminate crises and keep the order as it is. This, as might be expected, paves the way for the negligence of genuine needs and demands of crises when they arise through the enunciative and demonstrative activity of those who are subjected to a wrong within the structure of the community. Therefore, Rancière's critical stance towards the term crisis stems from its oppressive deployment in alignment with the police logic.

The remaining question is, however, whether or not we truly think of crisis as a matter of politics. Even if Rancière shows us how the police logic fails to acknowledge the necessity of such thinking, he does not specifically frame the question of crisis in a manner compatible with his political framework. In fact, his peculiar understanding of politics on the basis of disagreement and equality is already available to derive a line of thinking by dint of which politics may become an activity specifically responsive to genuine needs and demands of crises. In this way, the political significance of crisis corresponds to a climacteric in which the people decide their future without any suppressive political expertise. If politics is to be an emancipatory project, the unbinding of the term crisis from its constraints established through the social edifice of policing perhaps requires the utmost attention.

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NOTES

- .1. Jacques Rancière, *Moments Politiques: Interventions 1977-2009*. Trans. Mary Foster. New York and Oakland: Seven Stories Press, 2014, 186-187.
2. Rancière, starting from his early works and also with augmenting sophistication, places the question of equality into the heart of his contemplation on politics. In this respect, the *Althusser's Lessons* perhaps provides a striking emphasis on equality. In this work, Rancière, as a dissenting disciple of Louis Althusser, proclaims that the manner Althusser conceives of politics is not that of equality but of inequality. The reason is that Althusser's project proposes a type of politics built upon a deceitful assumption about those who strive for the transformation of their working conditions; that is, it assumes that workers are in need of the accumulated knowledge of intellectuals, namely political practitioners, to alter their conditions. This ultimately yields a sort of politics which consolidates the status of those making decisions in the name and on behalf of workers. It also deliberately neglects the capacity of workers to be emancipated from their existing conditions. Rancière, in this vein, publishes *Proletarian Nights* to restore the neglected capacity of workers against the overwhelming status of political practitioners. In an analogical way, Rancière, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, for instance, discusses the pedagogical drama between the schoolmaster and his disciples, and thereby draws attention to the underestimated capacity of disciples. Accordingly, Rancière is strictly committed to the presupposition of equality, of speaking beings or of intelligences, as a principle which enables people to engage with emancipatory practices as he notes in the preface of *Althusser's Lessons*: "All revolutionary thought must be founded on the inverse presupposition [the equality of speaking beings], that of the capacity of the dominated". See Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lessons*. Trans. Emiliano Battista. London and New York: Continuum, 2011; and Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*. Trans. by John Drury. London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2012; and Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Trans. Kristin Ross. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991.
3. Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, 187.
4. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 16.
5. Jacques Rancière, "Comment and Responses." *Theory & Event* 6, no. 4 (2003). doi:10.1353/tae.2003.0017.
6. Jacques Rancière, "Democracy is not, to begin with, a form of State," interviewed by Paula Corroto. *Cunning Hired Knives*, (2012). Accessed June 22, 2021. <https://hiredknives.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/jacques-ranciere-interview-democracy-is-not-t/>
7. It must be noted that there are different variations on the interpretation of chaos and the cosmos which survive from the world of the ancients. Due to these variations, it seems not possible to precisely determine what the ancient Greeks believed in this context; yet, for the sake of this article, I prefer to pay attention to the ones belonging to Hesiod and Plato as they are crucial to accentuate the fundamental difference with regard to the ambiguous deployment of *muthos* and *logos*. Hesiod's *Theogony* provides perhaps the earliest systematic treatment of the drama between chaos and the cosmos, which is speculated by the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle and many others later on primarily in terms of the philosophy of nature. *Theogony* literally means 'the birth of the gods'; however, it also bears on cosmogony, meaning 'the birth of the universe', by which the interplay between chaos and the cosmos is unfolded because the question concerning the creation of the universe for Hesiod is hinged upon the genealogy of the gods. In the *Theogony*,

Chaos is the first of the primordial gods that emerges as an abyss or opening which makes the universe possible. Accordingly, the Greek word *khaos*, from the mythological point of view of Hesiod, refers to neither a muddle of unformed matter nor a kind of impasse; instead, it refers to a gap to which no property can be attributed. Furthermore, for Hesiod, while the reign of Chaos marks the primordial stage of the evolution of the universe, in Greek the *kosmos*, the sovereignty of Zeus, after a series of conflicts and struggles among the gods lasting throughout the generations, marks the stage wherein the universe has finally been evolved into its immutable and everlasting order. Plato's *Timaeus* also constitutes a prominent place in the Greek cosmogonical thought after Hesiod. What is striking in the *Timaeus* is the arrival of the *Demiurge*, which literally means 'craftsman', on the cosmogonical scene. This radically transforms the way *khaos* and the *kosmos* is conceived in the *Theogony*. In the *Timaeus*, the *Demiurge* is the supreme god who is essentially good and just, and entirely outside the domain of the gods designated by *muthos* in that the manner in which the *Demiurge* acts, unlike the gods appearing in the *Theogony*, is solely based on rational principles, ones compatible with mathematics, geometry and harmony. Moreover, for Plato, the *Demiurge* is the god who intervenes in the evolutionary process of the *kosmos* to not only bring order to it but also craft components of it; accordingly, before this intervention, there was *khaos* as a state wherein there is no possibility of progress, a kind of impasse, unlike the signification of *khaos* in Hesiod's *Theogony*. See Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*. Trans. Glenn W. Most. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006; and Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*. Trans. Robin Waterfield. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

8. See Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*.

9. See especially Book III and IV in Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. Tom Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

10. Plato also preserves the authenticity in the meaning of the word *demiurge*; it means 'a skilled man working for people' for it is combined by the word *dēmos*, meaning common people, and *ergos*, meaning work. Accordingly, in Plato's framework, there is, on the one hand, a divine duty attributed to the *Demiurge* concerning the *kosmos*, on the other, a public duty concerning the *polis*.

11. Perhaps, it ought to be noted that Hesiod's Zeus and Plato's *Demiurge* share the same epithet *poiētēs*, meaning maker, as they are both engaged with the act of *poiesis* while bringing order to the universe.

12. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 68.

13. Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia, "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière." *Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (2000): 113-126, 115. doi:10.1353/dia.2000.0016.

14. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29.

15. It ought to be noted that Plato supplements the transferal of the *kosmos* to the *polis* with another narrative which speculates how bodies must be detailed to particular tasks. Each person in the *polis*, for Plato, must be engaged with an occupation suitable to his soul; to that end, he invents a tripartite schema which rigidly stratifies the community. According to that, those who have gold in their souls are fitting to rule, those whose souls blended by silver are fitting to auxiliary roles, and those whose souls blended by bronze or iron are fitting to produce and supply the needs of the *polis*. Furthermore, Plato specifies this fictive arrangement as a useful lie for the betterment of the order. See especially Book III in Plato, *The Republic*.

16. Rancière and Panagia, "Dissenting Words," 124.

17. Jacques Rancière, "Afterword/The Method of Equality: An Answer to Some Questions," in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*. Eds. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009, 276.

18. Rancière, "Afterword/The Method of Equality," 275.
19. Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, 128.
20. It should be noted that Rancière deploys the term aesthetics in a way compatible with its etymological source *aisthēsis* which enables the articulation of either 'perceiving by the senses' or 'perceptible'; however, in the aesthetico-political framework of Rancière, this generality rooted in the term aesthetics culminates in *the distribution of the sensible* as that which refers to individual and collective forms of what is perceptible proceeded from the (re-)ordering of bodies within the police.
21. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Ed. and Trans. Steven Corcoran. London and New York: Continuum, 2010, 36.
22. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 68.
23. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 36.
24. Rancière and Panagia, "Dissenting Words," 124.
25. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 100.
26. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 42.
27. Rancière and Panagia, "Dissenting Words," 123.
28. Rancière, "Comment and Responses."
29. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.
30. Rancière, "Comment and Responses."
31. Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization." *October* 61 (1992): 58-64, 59. doi:10.2307/778785.
32. Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 59.
33. Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 59.
34. Rancière and Panagia, "Dissenting Words," 115.
35. Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, 187.
36. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 19.
37. Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, 158.
38. Jacques Rancière, "Comment and Responses."
39. What I mean by the *return of the prime crisis of politics* should not be confused with the *return of politics* which Rancière criticizes his 10th thesis on politics. Rancière criticizes the return of politics as an argument that marks a return to the ordinary state of things formulated through the police logic. Rancière, through the homonymy of the word 'end', argues that the very end of such return is to put an end to polemics concerning the sensible configuration and thus to politics. In this way, he equates the *return of politics* with the *end of politics*. On the other hand, I deploy the *return of the prime crisis of politics* as diametrically opposed to the elimination of such a polemical space. See Rancière, *Dissensus*, 42-44; and Rancière, *Disagreement*, 61-93.
40. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 137.
41. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 137.

**paradoxes of equality-
jacques ranciere's politics
and nonhumans**

iwona janicka

There is a curious tension at the heart of Jacques Rancière's work. It concerns his conceptualization of equality. On the one hand, we are presented with equality in the sphere of human action, where equality is presupposed by the oppressed group, asserted and verified in a political action. On the other hand, there is equality in the realm of literature, where mute matter is deciphered and made to speak. This doubling of equality in Rancière—a human-centred equality in his early work on social movements and a matter-centred equality in his later work on literature—is thought-provoking because it captures the difficulty of thinking matter politically, in the same way as one would think proletarians politically. Rancière admits that

the equality found in literature is not ‘homologous with [equality] which brings about a political action’ but he does not provide much explanation on the precise difference between the two types of equality.¹ Is the only possible intuitive response that matter has no *logos*, hence it cannot presuppose equality, hence it cannot be a political subject? And is an ability to speak the defining point where the ontological equality of matter differs from the active equality of proletarians?

The tension between the two equalities sends ripples right across Rancière’s philosophy. It translates into a fundamental discrepancy between his ‘human politics’ and his ‘politics of literature’. Even though the definition of politics as aesthetics is the feature which connects the two, there is an internal contradiction in Rancière regarding the question of who is allowed to become a political subject. Rancière’s politics of literature challenges his human politics and, in this article, I would like to explore the implications of this challenge for thinking politics in the context of nonhumans. It is worth mentioning that several scholars and interlocutors have pinpointed, in brief, a potential affinity between Rancière’s ideas and those of neomaterialist and posthumanities scholars with regard to nonhumans.² However, Rancière flatly refuses any possible extension of political subjectivation to nonhumans or any inclusion of nonhumans into his concept of politics.³ Even though his reasons might be understandable, it seems that they stem from ideological commitments and his own biographical trajectory rather than from the internal logic of Rancière’s philosophy. Therefore, despite Rancière’s explicit reservations about the political potential of nonhumans, I wish to argue in this article that the unacknowledged doubling of his concept of politics has the potential for thinking nonhumans politically. Rancière relegates matter to a different sphere—that of literature—and there he engages with it politically. This is because he assumes that the conceptual framework that he uses to consider proletarians does not allow him to expand this thinking to include nonhumans as well. Yet, as I will show, this shift to a different way of knowing (i.e. literature) to include nonhumans in politics is problematic, contradictory, and perhaps even unnecessary. My key thesis is that Rancière’s human politics could actually tackle

the inclusion of nonhumans, *pace* Rancière. One could even risk a claim that it *needs* to do so, for his conceptualization of politics to remain internally coherent.

The article will demonstrate how Rancière sketches the contours of two different equalities, one in human politics and the other in literature, and how these equalities exponentially multiply and contradict each other. First, the article will focus on the diverse meanings and paradoxes of equality in Rancière's writing on human politics. Importantly, it will point out a paradox with regard to Rancière's interpretation of Aristotelian *logos*. Second, the article will demonstrate that Rancière's turn to literature to deal with a 'politics of matter', whilst understandable, was not strictly necessary, if we consider the parameters of his philosophical work. I will argue that, if we take his human politics to its logical conclusion, we have to include nonhumans too. I will also show how the internal tensions between various paradigms of equality can be productively explored for nonhumans and politics. The main claim of this article is that Rancière's philosophy, with its tacit assumptions and internal logic, can be made to think nonhuman politics without a detour into literature.

TWO EQUALITIES: POLITICS AND THE ARTS

Rancière places the concept of equality at the very heart of politics. He first engages with equality in a political context in his early writings on the proletariat and, in later years, he increasingly reflects on the question of equality in the arts. Equality guides his engagement with various objects of study—historical and contemporary events, art works, films, novels, poems—and allows him to propose a compelling link between aesthetics and politics. Yet, the more Rancière engages with aesthetic equality, the more complicated equality as a concept becomes: it multiplies its meanings and modes of operation in a way that seems, at times, incongruous. As he himself admits: 'The more I work on aesthetic equality, the more the relationship between aesthetic equality and political equality becomes problematic.'⁴ On the one hand, equality works as an 'empty' operator combining all objects of Rancière's analyses, a concept that spans the entirety of his work and

determines his approach to particular objects of study. This aspect can be traced back to Rancière's Althusserian legacy.⁵ On the other hand, equality is radically heterogeneous: it mutates considerably according to, and between, the changing environments and objects that Rancière analyses. It lacks stable foundations and is undetermined in its content. The tension between equality as a formal operator and, alternatively, as its circulation as a family resemblance, in its various guises and incarnations, allows us to pinpoint precisely the challenges of thinking politics and nonhumans together.

Rancière identifies at least two ways of thinking about equality. First, he considers it in the political realm in terms of the intellectual emancipation of the *sans part*, who assume their equality and verify it in practice. The *sans part* in Rancière's thinking are those who do not count, who have no part in the social order, such as the plebeians in Ancient Rome, the nineteenth-century proletariat, or women throughout history. Second, he considers equality in terms of an 'indifferentiation of a collective speech, a great anonymous voice' that is found in nineteenth-century literature and in the sciences (PAI 203). It is 'the idea that speech is everywhere, that there is speech written on things, some voice of reality itself which speaks better than any uttered word' (PAI 203). Rancière diagnoses a problem that fundamentally undercuts his initial definition of equality which was first developed for social movements, one which haunts his writing on equality in politics and art:

The obvious problem is that these two paradigms, these two ways of thinking the equality of the nameless, which are opposed in theory, keep mixing in practice, so that discourses of emancipation continually interweave the ability to speak demonstrated by anyone at all together with the silent power of the collective. (PAI 203)

As we can see, Rancière is aware of the contradictions between the different types of equality. He tries to come to terms with them in a productive way. This endeavour, however, is not always successful. In what follows, I will trace the consequences

of this conceptual hybridity in equality. However, the aim here is not simply to point out inconsistencies in Rancière's philosophy, but instead to reflect on how the identified paradoxes offer us ways to think about politics and nonhumans. In the next section, we will begin this work by briefly analysing three important paradoxes at the heart of equality in human politics that Rancière identifies which are constitutive of his concept of equality. I will point out a different, fourth, paradox—which Rancière does not identify but that follows from the internal logic of his conceptualization—and argue that this paradox challenges how Rancière conceives politics as an exclusively human affair. One could say that searching for productive paradoxes in historical situations make up Rancière's *method* in his early writing on social movements.⁶ This is because he always pinpoints the discrepancy between what the established order says and what it produces as a result of a distribution of social roles. Let us first start with political equality and its contradictions and then move on to its tensions within literature.

HUMAN POLITICS

For Rancière, 'Politics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable' (DIS 37). His politics differs from traditional politics, understood as governance of people and resources, by its radical reorganization of how we perceive the world around us. Politics is a rupture in the status quo that reveals a new world and a new logic. The concept of equality is important for Rancière's politics in a number of ways, not least because it serves him as a kind of failsafe: the stipulation of equality's radical openness pre-empts, and proactively counteracts, any right-wing misappropriation of his politics. The main thrust is that equality is meant to foreclose any form of exclusion from politics based on an essence inherent to an entity, for instance, race or gender. Therefore, a complete rupture with the status quo is not sufficient as a definition of Rancière's politics; a continuous openness towards accommodating new beings as possible political subjects is also fundamental.

Rancière defines equality as a presupposition. This means that equality is not an

ontological foundation or a human predisposition but rather ‘a condition that only functions when it is put into action’ (PA 48), that means when it is verified by the ones who claim it. Equality is the very condition for entities to become political subjects. As such, however, equality is neither peculiar to politics nor political in itself (D 31): it ‘only generates politics when it is implemented in the specific form of a particular case of dissensus’ (PA 49). And it can take effect in situations that do not have anything political about them *per se*: for instance, when two people speaking to each other are able to understand what the other says (PA 48). This counts for Rancière as a basic case of equality because, without equality, it is impossible to transmit any knowledge nor have an order executed. What is more, Rancière identifies this phenomenon as a paradox and claims that it lies at the very foundation of social order. The paradox is that, even in an unequal society, the equality of those who have to follow orders is automatically assumed. This is because it is taken for granted that those who obey an order are able to understand what is being asked of them. As Rancière argues:

in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order. [...] In the final analysis, inequality is only possible through equality. (D 17)

This paradox is fundamental to Rancière’s thinking because it shows a double logic at the heart of social order and points to the inherent potential for dissensus in hierarchical societies.

The second paradox that we need to consider, and that Rancière points out, is to be found in the process of the verification of equality in historical contexts. Equality creates politics when it is enacted and verified. Something needs to happen, a sort of event—in Alain Badiou’s sense—for politics to emerge out of the egalitarian presupposition. Equality necessitates a clash between two worlds. Rancière traces with precision the historical instances in which such radical confrontations take

place. One example he gives is of the nineteenth-century French feminist and socialist Jeanne Derooin, who in 1849 presented herself as a candidate for legislative office, thereby becoming the first woman in France to stand in a national election. Had she won, Derooin would not have been permitted to take up the office due to her gender. Through the action of running for office, Derooin revealed a contradiction at the heart of ‘universal suffrage’, a right from which her sex was excluded. She showed that women were necessarily included in the category of French people, being equal before the law as they could be charged and sentenced for infractions, yet at the same time they were radically excluded by neither being allowed to vote nor take a seat in the parliament if elected (cf. D 41). A paradox like this shows a logical gap that points to social bias and sets the stage for a dispute (PIS 60). The gap is demonstrated well by a nonsensical question that Rancière provocatively formulates: ‘Do French women belong to the category of Frenchmen?’ (PIS 60). Such a paradox forces an identity out of the alleged obviousness of what is meant to be, for instance, a ‘woman’ and points towards a gap between the acknowledged part that she plays in the society (as a neutral, gender-less subject with full rights) and the instances where she has no part (*sans part*) due to her gender (like elections and political office) (D 36). Finding and analyzing such concrete historical moments of paradox is fundamental to Rancière’s method.

Finally, the third paradox that Rancière identifies at the heart of equality in human politics relates to the issue of scaling equality up. Equality is not an aim to be achieved but a dynamic: as a group, ‘[o]ne does not gather to realize equality. One realizes a certain type of equality by gathering’ (M 207).⁷ For Rancière, one should assume equality as a starting point for any collective or individual action and ‘work towards expanding it indefinitely.’⁸ Expansion of this kind means both keeping constantly open the scope of entities that could be included in politics and scaling up the operation of equality. Rancière claims that, even though equality is the founding presupposition of any community, it cannot be a principle of a society. This is because a continuous process of verification cannot be fixed in a social institution. It has to emerge on a case-by-case basis: ‘No matter how many

individuals become emancipated, society can never be emancipated. Equality may be the law of the community, but society inevitably remains in thrall to inequality' (SP 84). That is also the reason that a community of equals cannot coexist with a society built on inequality but, at the same time, one cannot exist without the other: 'They are as mutually exclusive in their principles as they are mutually reinforcing in their existence' (SP 84). For this reason, a 'community of equals is an insubstantial community of individuals engaged in the ongoing creation of equality' (SP 84) that presupposes and acts on equality but does not aim for it. It constantly creates equality but does not make it permanent by establishing institutional structures that would automatically reproduce it. In Rancière's philosophy, therefore, equality is 'fundamental and absent, current and untimely [*actuelle et intempestive*]' (AWPP 223). It is about a constant practice of verification that has to be re-enacted anew every time, but which can never operate according to a set of predefined rules.

The three paradoxes described above are constitutive of Rancière's concept of equality. They also account well for the dynamic of social movements in the past. Let us now turn to a further paradox of equality—one that Rancière does not consider himself—but which is nevertheless fundamental to the concept of equality in his human politics. The problem with this particular contradiction, I contend, is that, in contrast to the previous three paradoxes, it runs the risk of rendering Rancière's philosophy incongruous. Whereas the other paradoxes contributed constructively to Rancière's conceptualization of equality, and constituted, as it were, the building blocks upon which Rancière's conceptual edifice is constructed, the fourth paradox undermines, to some extent, the egalitarian gesture at the heart of his philosophy. What is at issue concerns those who possess *logos*.

As mentioned above, Rancière describes equality in human politics by looking at concrete historical examples of its verification and the dissensus that this verification produces. The secession of the plebeians at the Aventine Hill in the 5th century BC that Rancière describes in his *Disagreement* (1995/1999) serves as a paradigmatic example. The plebeians leave Rome for the Aventine Hill as a protest

against the concentration of power in the hands of higher-status patricians. What Rancière finds interesting in the story is that the plebeians presuppose their equality with the patricians in the negotiations. Before this moment, the plebeians were considered incapable of politics because they were considered as beings who were devoid of *logos*, that is, as entities who emitted noise rather than meaningful speech. As Rancière points out, this reasoning overlaps with Aristotle's famous distinction between humans and animals in *Politics*. Humans are animals capable of *logos* (reason, speech), while nonhuman animals are capable only of *phōnē* (mere voice), which is equivalent to noise. According to Aristotle's definition, only entities capable of *logos* can be truly political beings. Rancière identifies 'a primary contradiction' in the Aristotelian *logos* and this serves as one of the central arguments in his conceptualization of politics. As Rancière explains:

Man, said Aristotle, is political because he possesses speech, a capacity to place the just and the unjust in common, whereas all the animal has is a voice to signal pleasure and pain. *But the whole question, then, is to know who possesses speech and who merely possesses voice.* For all time, the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded by means of a refusal to hear the words exiting their mouths as discourse. (AD 24, my emphasis)

Here Rancière identifies as the key problem of politics the question of who counts as a political subject. The fundamental conflict over political subjectivation refers to a disagreement about the basic assumptions made of an entity that is meant not only to understand but also to possess speech. Rancière picks up on this issue in the context of specific human beings that can be admitted into the realm of politics. He challenges Aristotle's categorization by pointing to the dissensual nature of *logos*. He shows how the category of human who, it would seem, is by definition capable of *logos*, is further restricted to a particular type of a human being, in this case a patrician. In contrast, plebeians are beings 'deprived of *logos*', they are 'nameless beings': 'The order that structures patrician domination recognizes no *logos* capable of being articulated by beings deprived of *logos*, no *speech* [*parole*] capable of being proffered by nameless beings, beings of no *ac/count* [*compte*]' (D

24). In this version of a world and its social order, plebeians are intelligible only as entities akin to beasts, rather than humans.

According to Rancière, a true political act on the plebeians' part is when they challenge the distribution of the sensible that does not recognize them as political beings. By distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*)—which in French means both a *division* and a *sharing*—Rancière understands a system of self-evident facts structuring the common world. It is a configuration of the perceptible world: a set of coordinates concerning whether and how particular entities are perceived, recognized, acknowledged, understood, and engaged with. In this historical context, plebeians challenge the distribution of the sensible when they behave as if they were equal to the patricians, even though they are not acknowledged as such. They do this by establishing another order, another distribution of the sensible, in which they do not act as enslaved people—in this situation, simply by building a camp and fighting—but as entities that share the same properties as the patricians and act as the patricians would in this situation. They constitute themselves not as 'warriors equal to other warriors but as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them these' (D 24). What they then do is to 'execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians [...] they delegate one of their number to go and consult *their* oracles; they give themselves representatives [...]. In a word, they conduct themselves like beings with names' (D 24). Owing to these acts, 'they find that they too, just like speaking beings, are endowed with speech that does not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence' (D 24-25). In this historical example, Rancière demonstrates how entities, who previously were considered incapable of *logos*, rupture the established distribution of the sensible. A situation is engendered in which such beings introduce themselves into the community, thereby radically changing its parameters. They stage an event in which equality is enacted: presupposed, demonstrated, and verified in a concrete case. The operation of politics is then 'to make the invisible visible, to give a name to the anonymous and to make words audible where only noise was perceptible before' (SP 85).

What matters here are the consequences of this polemical situation:

When oppressed groups set out to cope with a wrong, they may appeal to Man or Human Being. But the universality is not in those concepts; it is in the way of demonstrating the consequences that follow from this—from the worker being a citizen, the black being a human being, and so on. [...] The universality is not enclosed in *citizen* or *human being*: it is involved in the ‘what follows’, in its discursive and practical enactment. (PIS 60)

We should emphasize here that, for Rancière, equality and politics are not necessarily bound to specific categories such as human being, citizen, worker, or proletarian. Instead, they are deeply connected to the profound transformations that political entities bring about in the distribution of the sensible, the ‘what follows’. Equality and politics are about a new regime of intelligibility that the previously ‘invisibilized’ entities create. In reference to Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the Aristotelian distinction between political (*bios*) and non-political life (*zoe*), Rancière comments that ‘politics exists at precisely the point at which this division is put into question’ (DIS 214). Politics comes into being with the dissensus about who or what counts as a political subject: ‘The question of politics begins when the status of the subject able and ready to concern itself with the community becomes an issue’ (DIS 93). Rancière radically breaks with the idea that a specific disposition or set of capacities exist to enact politics: ‘Politics [...] has no proper place nor any natural subjects’ (DIS 39). Such a definition of politics potentially opens up the concept of a political subject to include a wide variety of entities:

A political subject is not a group of interests or of ideas, but the operator of a particular *dispositif* of subjectivation and litigation through which politics comes into existence. A political demonstration is therefore always of the moment and its subjects are always precarious. (DIS 39)

In this context, we could think about nonhumans as such ‘invisibilized’ entities and their categorical exclusion from politics.

As mentioned at the start of this article, when Rancière is asked directly whether nonhumans could be considered to be political subjects, he denies the possibility point blank. He proclaims, in response to a suggested affinity with some of Bruno Latour's ideas concerning nonhumans:

There is a decisive point of difference for me. Politics has always been defined in terms of a polemic about the human, about the distribution of human groups, the capacities they're acknowledged to have, about the capacity for speech they're granted. Politics for me has always played out around these questions: are these humans true humans, do they belong to humanity, or are they semi-human or falsely human? (ME 162)

What is striking in this passage is the presence of a certain double logic at work. Here, Rancière questions the limit imposed by Aristotle. He shows how at some points in history certain beings—plebeians, women, the enslaved, proletarians—were not recognized as possessing *logos* and hence did not count as fully human. This lack of *logos* excluded them from politics. Despite this contention, Rancière moves this limit slightly further. He claims, as in the citation above, that politics is restricted to humans *only* and not to Latour's nonhumans. This is because nonhumans do not have *logos* and so cannot be political beings. He phrases it in terms of an incapacity for 'self-declaration' (*autodéclaration*) (cf. M 162-164). Yet, as Rancière argues throughout his work, politics is *precisely* about a dissensual redistribution of who is capable of *logos* and who is capable of mere noise. As he himself asserts:

If there is someone you do not wish to recognise as a political being, you begin by not seeing him as the bearer of signs of politicity, by not understanding what he says, by not hearing what issues from his mouth as discourse. (DIS 38)

And yet, Rancière refuses to grant the capacity for politics to Latour's nonhumans. He draws a hard line between beings of *logos* (humans) and beings of no *logos*

(nonhumans). This is paradoxical if we consider that the main aim of Rancière's early philosophical investigations was to expose such categorical rejections from politics.

My claim is that what allows Rancière to make his argument work with regard to Aristotle's 'tainted' *logos* is a curious sleight of hand. It is one of temporality. Rancière is extremely attentive to the specific time and place in which politics emerges. His readings are polemical interventions in selected historical moments, where he sets up contradictions that bring to the fore the rare moments when politics happens (cf. AFR). What allows him to identify such moments is, most frequently, a distance in time that also implies a difference in distribution of the sensible. Rancière instantiates clashes between two distributions of the sensible in a concrete historical situation: for instance, the dissensus between patricians of Ancient Rome, who considered plebeians incapable of *logos*, and plebeians, who acted as if they were beings in possession of *logos*. Simultaneously, he tacitly stages a confrontation between the historical moment on the Aventine Hill and his own *here and now*. We could say that in Rancière there is always a form of triangulation at play, a third perspective that implicitly maps onto the two distributions of the sensible which he identifies in history. This third perspective is the distribution of the sensible that is tied to Rancière's, and our own, historical moment. In *our* twenty-first distribution of the sensible, we recognize that, even though in Ancient Rome plebeians were considered incapable of *logos*, and hence were equal to nonhumans and so beyond the realm of politics, they 'actually' possessed *logos*. I say 'actually' because, viewed from the perspective of our present distribution of the sensible, plebeians have *always already* been in the possession of *logos*. Yet the obviousness of plebeians as political subjects comes from our own present-day temporality. This is what allows Rancière to put forward the argument about Aristotle's tainted *logos* and deftly leverage it to make a valuable point about equality.

Yet, a significant problem arises if we want to think about the *sans part* from within our own twenty-first century temporality and are thus not in a position to

use this triangulation. How can we think about politics with regard to entities that are considered incapable of *logos* from within our own distribution of the sensible? This means not only ‘semi-humans’ or ‘falsely humans’ but also entities such as animals, plants, the environment, the planet, AI, etc.? What are the conditions of possibility to allow us to think that animals, plants, and other nonhumans possess *logos* as well? And to what extent does Rancière’s contemporality with these types of nonhumans prevents him from recognizing that they could be political beings? Rancière’s concept of politics is explicitly restricted to human beings and, in that sense, he only slightly shifts the limit that Aristotle initially imposed. He imposes it again with respect to ‘our’ twenty-first century nonhumans because they represent a certain excess that he is not able to incorporate into his human politics. The question of *logos* is the ultimate frontier that yet again marks the difference between humans and nonhumans. Even in Rancière, who questioned this exact point in Aristotle, *logos* is a trump card that is used as a minimal condition for an entity to count as a political being. Can we successfully navigate this question of *logos* with respect to nonhumans? In other words, how can we think about them as being capable of politics? It is necessary to note that the question is not so much about a limitless expansion of the category of the human to include all living beings. Such a homogenous set would be problematic in multiple ways. Nor is it about human essence or human identity, but rather the part nonhumans play in politics. Here we can see that, at the level of human politics, the excess of nonhumans is contained by Rancière’s explicit rejection of these entities as political beings. This excluded group, however, invades Rancière’s work on the politics of literature.

POLITICS IN LITERATURE

Let us now turn to literature. Strikingly, nonhumans as political entities reappear with full force and cause disarray in Rancière’s conceptualization of equality and politics. Here, the paradox of equality is, however, of a different nature to the one evident in human politics, and Rancière is keenly aware of the ensuing problems. The contradiction comes from a constant tension between, at least, two

types of equality that Rancière develops through a close reading of nineteenth-century novels, particularly works by Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert. It is encapsulated by the phrase ‘mute speech’ or ‘mute *logos*’ (*la parole muette*), that is, a form of speech that is simultaneously silent and chatty (AU 32). Rancière focuses on the nineteenth-century novel because it allows him to theorize an aesthetic regime of art, and with it a specific politics of literature.

In brief, the aesthetic regime of art that was constituted in the nineteenth century, according to Rancière, radically breaks with the codified ways of expressing feeling and thinking in works of art, which was emblematic of the earlier, representative regime. The representative regime, Rancière argues, was characterized by a system of genres with a clear hierarchy of subjects and social functions, and which established formal conventions for literary works. In the aesthetic regime, there is neither a hierarchy of subjects—noble or vulgar—nor any separation between ‘important narrative episodes and accessory descriptive ones’ (AU 36). ‘Everything is on an equal footing, equally important, equally significant’ and every element bears ‘the signifying power of the entire work’ (AU 36). The aesthetic regime of art is ‘a way in which things themselves speak and are silent’ (FI 13). For Rancière, literature was first formed in the nineteenth century as part of the aesthetic regime, and this happened only by literature establishing ‘its own proper equality’ (PA 49). Literature asserted its radical difference in its vision and execution from previous works of art. It established its own rules and modes of operation. It demonstrated a radical openness towards those that could become the hero of a story (not only a prince but a farmer’s daughter) and towards the topics of a piece of art (a farmer’s daughter’s private life rather than the struggle for the throne). Rancière’s thesis is that, with this shift, the question of literary style became increasingly important.

What, then, does the paradoxical doubling of mute *logos* in literature precisely mean? Rancière identifies two meanings of mute speech: on the one hand, the deciphering of hieroglyphs written on the bodies of things and, on the other, the uncontrolled and unintelligible chatter of matter. Let us focus on the former first.

Mute speech as a ‘material hieroglyph’ is ‘an order of truth written on things themselves’ (PL 157). It is ‘the capacity to exhibit signs written on a body, the marks directly imprinted by its history, which are more truthful than any discourse proffered by a mouth’ (FI 13). This means that anything from a sewer, a building’s façade, or a glove ‘speaks more eloquently than any speech, because it isn’t trying to say anything, because it can’t lie, because it is the pure writing on things of their own specific history’ (PL 157). Rancière summarizes this capacity for signification, the fact that ‘everything speaks’, by reference to the ‘poet-mineralogist’ Novalis (AU 34, PM 185 n.11). Literature is a way of deciphering and rewriting a world where, as demonstrated in Novalis’s work, ‘[e]verything is trace, vestige, or fossil. Every sensible form, beginning from the stone to the shell, tells a story’ (AU 34). A novelist has therefore a function to fulfil not unlike that of a scientist: she makes matter speak. ‘The writer is the archaeologist or geologist who gets the mute witnesses of common history to speak’ (PL 15) and who explores the labyrinths of human and more-than-human worlds. As Rancière claims:

[I]n the age of archaeology, paleontology and philology, stones, too, speak. They don’t have voices like princes, generals or orators. But they only speak all the better as a result. They bear on their bodies the testimony of their history. And this testimony is more reliable than any speech offered by human mouth. It is the truth of things as opposed to the chatter and lies of orators. (PL 14)

The engineers of the Saint-Simonian utopia, in turn, by building and shaping matter around them, are capable of writing on the body of things. Through this ‘poetics of writing on the surface of things’, they undertake a specific ‘politics’ (PM 105). In the context of material writing on things, Rancière underlines his point by referring to the main female character of Balzac’s *Le curé de village* (*The Village Rector*) who decides to repent for her acts by transforming the landscape of her village. She says that her influence ‘is *written* [*écrit*] on those fertile fields, in the prosperous village, in the rivulets brought from the mountains to water the plain once barren and fruitless, now green and fertile’⁹. The decoding and

shaping of matter by writers, scientists, and engineers is both part of wrestling with mute matter and a form of specific politics that can be found in literature and the sciences. Both literature and the sciences operate like ‘a machine for making life talk’ (PL 14). There is a curious parallel between the novelist’s and the scientist’s task to ‘get lifeless debris to talk’ (PL 16). Both literature and the sciences are modes of truth-telling that allow us to engage with nonhumans in a way that gives them access to *logos*. The sciences, in particular, offer a means to make nonhumans talk in an ordered way. Rancière was highly skeptical of Latour’s nonhumans. And yet, this deep interconnection of matter and *logos* seems to be present *in nuce* in Rancière’s writing on literature. Indeed, this politics found in literature could be tentatively considered as a kind of ‘politics of matter’.

As Rancière himself points out, the flipside of ‘everything speaks’ is that ‘everything talks equally’ (PL 157) and so meaning is lost in the complete undifferentiation of matter. ‘No one thing talks more than any other thing’ (PL 157). Here, matter is at the same time uncontrollably noisy and stubbornly silent. It is noisy in the way that it produces only sounds of atoms:

The abundant difference of signs is [...] lost in the equal insignificance of states of things. The written sign turns into any old bit of garbage or into sheer difference in intensity—to the point where nothing more can be read except the indifferent vibration of atoms in their random variations. (PL 157)

At the same time, it is silent because it is incapable of adequately transferring signification (FI 14). With reference to Balzac and Flaubert, Rancière claims that ‘literature is this new regime of the art of writing in which the writer is anyone at all and the reader anyone at all. In this respect, the sentences of those novelists could be compared to mute stones’ (PL 12). This means that, by exiting the world of the hierarchized and ordered discourses of the representative regime in which the relationship between things and words was clear, and by entering the aesthetic regime, mute speech becomes a soliloquy, ‘speaking to no one and saying

nothing but the impersonal and unconscious conditions of speech itself' (AU 39). In his analysis of Flaubert and his writing style, Rancière notes in particular how style is 'the very rhythm of things dissolving, yielding to the lack of reason, their baselessness' (PL 158). And this dissolving can only be heard rather than seen:

The noise of the equal insignificance of all these words that compose one and the same piece of music. The word written everywhere is answered by the word that no longer says anything, that no longer transmits anything but the rhythm of things without rhyme or reason. The journey of literary hermeneutics is this trajectory that takes the hieroglyphics of sense to the noise of non-sense. (PL 158)

As we can see here, there is a tension between mute speech that needs to be 'restored to a linguistic signification' by the work of decoding and 'the voiceless speech of a nameless power' that is inherent in all matter, that all matter screams (AU 41). The struggle between 'the word written everywhere' and 'the word that no longer says anything' (PL 158), between 'the hieroglyphics of sense' and 'the noise of non-sense' (PL 158) comes, for Rancière, from the same principle of a 'disjunction between meaning and intention'. Whereas in the representative regime there was one expression of will with one addressee, literature in the aesthetic regime disrupts the connection between words and actions. 'The essential word then becomes the word that doesn't *intend* to say anything, the mute word, manifested in the very flesh of the real or picked up in the indifference of its noise' (PL 158). With the aesthetic regime, command over meaning ceases: 'it is the will's descent into the underworld' (PL 159). Literature in the nineteenth century becomes a new ordering (cf. PL 153), a new structure of rationality and, we could also say, a new *mode* of operation. Rancière points to a sort of excess that literature emphasizes, which, in turn, points to an excess in things and an excess in people. This excess, however, 'has nothing to do with the many but with a splitting of the count. It consists in introducing another count that spoils the fit between bodies and meanings' (PL 41). It is these excessive entities that constantly defy a certain distribution of the sensible. A politics of literature is a politics of things

that do not fit, the excess of matter that invades and changes the way matter itself is experienced and described, by '*telling all*, telling in excess' (PL 38). As we can see, nonhumans acting as initiators of a new distribution of the sensible are much more present in Rancière's writing when he analyses literature. Nonhumans are acknowledged as the very tissue of politics, as entities that orient, or perhaps even determine, the structures of rationality and whose significance is recognized far more clearly than in Rancière's human politics.

As Rancière admits, political and aesthetic equality are not equivalent (PA 49). Literary equality is 'a certain way in which equality can function that can tend to distance it from any form of political equality' (PA 49). He gives the example of Flaubert and shows how several kinds of equality are at play in his work: the 'molecular equality of affects' that Flaubert instantiates with his writing style and which stands in direct opposition to 'the molar equality of subjects constructing a democratic political scene' (PA 52). The two are, in turn, not the same as a 'universal exchangeability of commodities' or equality as a lifestyle (PA 50). These equalities, instead of being analogous to each other, are in a constant conflict within a literary work and outside of it (cf. PA 51): 'equality of style aims at revealing an immanent equality, a passive equality of all things that stand in obvious contrast with the political subjectivization of equality in all its forms' (PA 49). The wild proliferation of equalities in Rancière's later work, mainly catalyzed by his writing on literature, is striking. On the one hand, we have a concept of equality which, to begin with, was relatively well defined as a localized case of dissensus in social movements. On the other hand, we end up with an extremely broad, almost all-inclusive and constantly paradoxical collection of various operations in literature. We can see how the nonhumans of literary equality invade and challenge Rancière's thinking on political equality. Equality in literature becomes so expansive in its scope, so paradoxical and diverse, that it seems barely to have anything to do with equality as we know it, and especially with Rancière's political equality. One could even claim that there is only a nominal connection between all these equalities. The problems inherent in thinking politics with nonhumans are inadvertently captured here, in

the problems that Rancière encounters with these different forms of equality.

What is more, it seems difficult to engage with such a hybrid concept of equality in any meaningful way on the level of concrete political practice. Rancière is aware of this problem and that might be one of the reasons that he rejects the inclusion of nonhumans in his human politics. However, I wish to argue that the problem, perhaps, has little to do with a radical opening towards nonhumans in politics. Instead, the key challenge revolves around the formulation of concrete theoretical tools to integrate nonhuman entities in a meaningful way into familiar political practices. Equality does not seem to be the most fruitful way to think about nonhumans politically. The question to be posed, then, is whether speaking in terms of *modes* in this context—and more precisely in terms of *modes of existence*—would be a more apt way to appreciate the different forms in which literature, politics and the sciences operate. Here we could name such thinkers of modes as Etienne Souriau, Gilbert Simondon and, more recently in this context, Bruno Latour and his *Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2012/2013).¹⁰ Perhaps the task is less about forcing a link based on equality between all these different spheres in which equality is perceptible but, instead, about considering these spheres as coherent systems with their own ways of establishing truths and verifying their claims. As a result, we would avoid ending up with a myriad of equalities that are unproductively contradictory, paradoxical and conflictual, but, instead, we would talk about a term, such as equality, in a specific system such as literature, politics, or economics, and consider it from within its own mode of operation. This would mean that we would not necessarily try to reach a meta-level of bringing all of these different equalities together. Instead, there would be a new question—that of *translation* between different modes—and how we could move and communicate between them.

Pursuing a *modal* understanding of equality might offer promising theoretical prospects. This could be compatible with Rancière's work to the extent that he speaks about distributions of the sensible as types of worlds, types of logic that operate according to their own internal rules. Politics is then a way of creating

a new world within an old one, generating a new political subject that does not have a part in the old distribution of the sensible. Even though Rancière does not properly develop *modes*, apart from speaking about ‘modes of subjectivation’ in his works, this approach could accommodate the paradoxes of equality in different spheres and would allow us to take his concept of politics further. After all, a vital aspect in both Rancière’s politics of literature and his human politics is not necessarily the question of who the agent of political action is—in a way, who the hero of the story is—but rather how a new structure of rationality emerges together with a litigious *sans part* and how this rationality concretely operates.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I traced the tensions between different paradigms of equality that can be found in Rancière’s work. I argued that, despite Rancière’s powerful reading of Aristotle in favour of unintelligible entities, we can nevertheless see that in his human politics it is entities who, in a way, *always already had logos*—if considered from within *our* contemporary distribution of the sensible—that have been granted *logos* in his framework. Rancière never questions the strict distinction between beings of *logos* and beings of no *logos* in contemporary society, in contrast to the rigour with which he conducts his historical analyses. This points to a problematic hard line that Rancière erects between beings of *logos* (exclusively humans) and beings of no *logos* (all nonhumans). Rancière’s shortcomings on this front open up a space for reflection on entities that are considered incapable of *logos* from within *our* twenty-first century distribution of the sensible, compelling us to recognize our unexamined biases in terms of who or what we consider to be capable of political subjectivation. The incorporation of nonhumans in Rancière’s politics means taking his politics to its logical conclusion: allowing the category of the political subject to remain open towards new entities, ‘newcomers’ that still lack a name in our distribution of the sensible. That is also why, despite his flat rejection of this possibility, Rancière’s philosophy is both compatible with, and even necessitates, the accommodation of nonhumans in human politics.

One may ask, why insist upon the inclusion of nonhumans in Rancière's conceptualization of politics if Rancière himself is explicitly opposed to it? Notwithstanding its limitations, Rancière's conceptualization of politics is valuable: it allows us to theorize on a structural level political subjects that have not yet emerged. It gives us tools to identify, and to measure the effects of, the political intervention of entities in a given distribution of the sensible. Importantly, it is a radical left-wing form of politics. And this left-wing vision of politics needs to be developed further as the Left still lacks an appropriate conceptualization of the challenges that we face today as a result of technological and environmental developments.¹¹ In one of his articles, Rancière poses an important question: 'How are we to reinvent politics?' (PIS 64). One way to do this would be, perhaps, to open up Rancière's politics to include nonhumans.¹²

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NOTES

1. 'Le triomphe du roman comme genre littéraire par excellence est le triomphe de cette égalité qui n'est pas pour autant homologué à celle que met en jeu l'action politique' (TP 562, my translation). Rancière's works are abbreviated in the following way: AD—*Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Jacques Rancière. *Aesthetics and its Discontents*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); AFR— 'A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière' (Jacques Rancière. 'A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière'. *Parallax* 15.3 (2009): 114-123); AU—*Aesthetic Unconscious* (Jacques Rancière. *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. Trans. Debra Keats and James Swenson. Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2010); AWPP—'Afterword to the English-language edition' (Jacques Rancière. 'Afterword to the English-language edition (2002)' in Jacques Rancière. *The Philosopher and His Poor*. Ed. Andrew Parker. Trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster and Andrew Parker. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, 219-227); BF—*Bords de la fiction* (Jacques Rancière. *Les Bords de la fiction*. Paris: Seuil, 2017); D—*Disagreement* (Jacques Rancière. *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); DIS—*Dissensus* (Jacques Rancière. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Ed. and Trans. Steve Corcoran. London and New York: Continuum, 2010); FI—*Future of the Image* (Jacques Rancière. *The Future of the Image*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London and New York: Verso, 2007); LP—*Le Philosophe et ses pauvres* (Jacques Rancière. *Le Philosophe et ses pauvres*. Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2007); M—*La Méthode de l'égalité* (Jacques Rancière. *La Méthode de l'égalité. Entretien avec Laurent Jeanpierre et Dork Zabunyan*. Montrouge: Bayard Editions, 2012); ME—*Method of Equality* (Jacques Rancière. *The Method of Equality: Interviews with Laurent Jeanpierre and Dork Zabunyan*. Trans. Julie Rose. Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2016); MS—*Méthode de la scène* (Jacques Rancière and Adnen Jdey. *La Méthode de la scène*. Paris: Lignes, 2018); PA—*Politics of Aesthetics* (Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Ed. and Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); PAI—'Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview' (Jacques Rancière. 'Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 8.2 (2003): 191-211); PIS—'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization' (Jacques Rancière. 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization', *October*, Vol. 61, The Identity in Question (Summer, 1992), pp. 58-64); PL—*Politics of Literature* (Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Literature*. Trans. Julie Rose. Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2011); PM—*Mute Speech* (Jacques Rancière. *Mute Speech*. Trans. James Swenson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); SP—*On the Shores of Politics* (Jacques Rancière. *On the Shores of Politics*. Trans. Liz Heron, Verso: London and New York, 2007); TP—*Et tant pis pour les gens fatigués* (Jacques Rancière. *Et tant pis pour les gens fatigués. Entretiens*. Paris : Editions Amsterdam, 2009).
2. See Arne De Boever. 'The Politics of Realism in Rancière and Houellebecq.' *Rancière and Literature*. Eds. Grace Hellyer and Julian Murphet. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016, 243-4; Jane Bennett. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 105-8.
3. See Rancière's negative answer to Jane Bennett's question whether nonhumans can be considered as political subjects (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 106) and also in an interview (M 282-85).
4. '[P]lus je travaille dessus [l'égalité esthétique], plus le rapport entre égalité esthétique et égalité politique devient problématique' (MS 138, my translation).
5. For this interpretation see Jean-Philippe Deranty. 'Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society' in Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth. *Recognition or Disagreement. A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*.

- Eds. Katia Genel and Jean-Philippe Deranty. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 67.
6. On Rancière's 'method' see AFR.
7. '[L]'égalité [est] une dynamique et non un but. On ne se rassemble pas pour réaliser l'égalité, on réalise un certain type d'égalité en s'assemblant' (M 207, my translation).
8. 'Qui part de l'inégalité est sûr de la retrouver à l'arrivée. Il faut partir de l'égalité, partir de ce minimum d'égalité sans lequel aucun savoir ne se transmet, aucun commandement ne s'exécute, et travailler à l'élargir indéfiniment' (LP xi, my translation).
9. Honoré de Balzac. *The Village Rector*. Trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley. Ed. John Bickers et al. Project Gutenberg Ebook, 2016, 617, my emphasis.
10. See Etienne Souriau. *The Different Modes of Existence*. Trans. Erik Beranek and Tim Howles. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2015; Gilbert Simondon. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Trans. Cécile Malaspina and John Rogove. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2017; Bruno Latour. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013
11. See, notably, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work*. London: Verso, 2016.
12. The present article elucidates in depth the theoretical paradigm utilized in my article 'Who Can Speak? Rancière, Latour and the Question of Articulation.' *Humanities* 9.4 (2020): 123. For reasons of space, such material could not be fully explored in the previous publication.

**waltende souveränität:
prevailing, swaying,
sovereignty. heidegger,
heraclitus, derrida**

gabriel wartinger

*Vom Walten der Physis
Prevailing, Swaying, Physis
Heidegger and Sovereignty*

I believe you are all [...] relatives and fellow citizens by nature [φύσις], not by law; for by nature like is akin to like, but law is a tyrant of mankind and forces many things contrary to nature. Now, it would be shameful in us to know the nature of things and yet [...] (Plato, *Protagoras*, 337d-c)

nature [φύσις] loves to hide (Heraclitus, *Fragments*, XD. 123, M. 8)

INTRODUCTION

The following pages call for an interrogation of the status of sovereignty as it appears (albeit implicitly) in Heidegger's metaphysical lectures¹. This appearance marks a historical event in Heidegger's thinking, one that implicates a subtle destabilization of ontological difference. In the wake of ungovernable difference, Heidegger establishes the figure or the modality of sovereignty. Perhaps more critically, this marks a transition in ontological grounding: while initially rooted in Aristotelian notions of time and *physis*, it now gravitates towards Heraclitus' concept of *polemos*. These vacillations can be traced to the 1929/30 lecture: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*), and the 1935 lecture: *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (*Introduction to Metaphysics*), supplemented by 1957's *Identität und Differenz* (*Identity and Difference*). While the existing literature² has covered most of these elements in isolation, work is yet to be done in drawing these elements together across the historical trajectory of Heidegger's lectures. To this end, I focus on the notion of *Walten* which becomes particularly prevalent in Heidegger's most extensive reflections on metaphysics. *Walten*, translated as "prevailing" or "holding sway", circumscribes conflictual and violent movement, shaping existence or rather, *physis* itself. *Walten* prevails in Heidegger's contemplation of originary (*ursprüngliche*) ontological modalities. Considering the decisive legacy of his own *Destruktion*, this kind of metaphysical inquiry might seem anachronous. However, it is precisely Heidegger's theoretical insistence that cautions us against a hasty vindication of the metaphysical register³.

Heidegger's discussion of metaphysics gestures towards the conceptual dominance of something we could provisionally assess as proto-sovereignty, or rather, its modality. Heidegger's lectures on metaphysics confront the reader with an originary iteration of the metaphysical sovereign (or the sovereign status of metaphysics). *The task suggested here is to attempt to philosophize against sovereignty, from within its own metaphysical entanglements*⁴. Formulated differently: the ontological difference, the *causa prima* of Heidegger's philosophy, seems to favour

conflictual deferral. However, such deferral is ultimately curtailed by a relatively vulgar frame of power. What then is it that establishes a conceptual connection between difference, sovereignty and violence?

As a prelude, I will attend to *Walten's* lexical status and some brief comments on translation. The first section addresses the notional development of Heidegger's *Walten* and develops its conceptual tie to ontological difference. As I suggest, *Walten* does not only enclose or vindicate the differential relation between Being and beings, but also seems to occupy a privileged position regarding the question of ontological or structural origination. Furthermore, Heidegger's *Walten* illustrates the originating *sway* of *physis* which henceforth can no longer be accurately translated as "nature" but as *growth*. However, a *prevailing* of *physis* cannot but summon the undertones of a dominant, violent modality. This modality indicates the form of a relatively vulgar notion of the sovereign. Thus Heidegger's *Walten* should not be perceived as an way to think about the vicissitudes of sovereignty per se. The first section of this paper thus closes with an outline of the conceptual dimensions of a sovereign modality. In section two I reconstruct Heidegger's more general metaphysical trajectory, as constituted by the discrepancies and shared terrain of Heraclitus and Aristotle. As these lectures progress, it becomes clear that the divergence between pre- and post-Socratic ontology informs Heidegger's ontological assessment of *Walten*. Heraclitus's emphasis on *polemos* now appears, in light of Heidegger, to elaborate a *conflictual aperture of the ontological*. Discontented with the conflictual sway of an originary force, Aristotle seeks to accommodate it within the authoritative command of a unified metaphysical agency, expressed via the prime mover. Heraclitus, however, is not himself conceptually obliged to resort to a moving agent for his account of an originary, not-yet metaphysical, tension. In an ontological connection of matter and motion that formally parallels a dissolving of ontological difference, Heraclitus finally prevails over Aristotle. Nevertheless, despite this shift, Heidegger's *Walten* remains informed by both tendencies and cannot be aligned neatly with either. *Walten* attests to a much broader metaphysical idea of sovereignty than either position can concede. This

insistence seems to vindicate transcendently the conflictual within existence. While Being becomes synonymous with a conflictual aperture or dispersal, beings are still thrown [*geworfen*] into a conflictual horizon. As the final section concludes then, Heidegger not only accepts the Heraclitean *polemos* as an incipient ontological event, but ascribes an ontological *telos*—which is not to be found among the pre-Socratics. This article argues that Heidegger’s discussion of metaphysics, with or without an explicit rendering of the metapolitical, ontologically employs *Walten* qua *Gewalt*. This theoretical approach hints at the conceptual dominance of what might tentatively be identified as proto-sovereignty, or more specifically, an originary ontological modality proclaimed as sovereignty.

LEXICAL PRELUDE

The *Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon* defines *prevailing* (*Walten*), as:

the self-moving power bestowed by being onto entities. Through the power of this prevailing, entities are able to come to be as themselves. As the force which takes hold between being [Being] and entities [beings], prevailing thus serves as a significant element in Heidegger’s later conception of ontological difference.”⁵

While it seems counterintuitive to assess the philosopher of *Destruktion* within a lexicological system, I will, for the sake of exposition, provisionally accept this definition of prevailing (*Walten*). As with many attempts at definition, such an assessment fails to grasp the metonymic breadth of a term that a philosophy, stressing its refusal to regard language as a mere *logical* vehicle, has to consider. Yet, as the *Lexicon* entry suggests, one common interpretation designates *Walten* as a “significant element in Heidegger’s later conception of ontological difference.” However, let us first consider another aspect.

Upon initial observation, the “self-moving power” of an entity echoes what

is typically understood as sovereign agency: acting unimpeded or undirected by externalities. *Energeia* (actuality) and *dynamis* (potentiality), if we define sovereignty via an Aristotelian dictum, must always already be unified within an entelechy. Self-referential governance moves within its own remit, “decides” for itself⁶. Within a more politico-theoretical frame, this assessment seems to accord with a received understanding of sovereign imposition. The sovereign does not need to consult anything or anyone, and it is (if we listen to Carl Schmitt) the status of the exception that founds, magnifies or propels self-sufficiency⁷. Heidegger’s *Walten* will inscribe such a(n) (exceptionally) sovereign sway within *physis* itself. And as I will later discuss, he will assess *physis* (φύσις) as the “self-forming prevailing of beings as a whole” [*das Walten des Seienden im Ganzen*]⁸. His conceptual choice strays from the usual translation of φύσις as nature. Unlike the substantiating, and thus more static, notion of the “natural”, Heidegger proposes to read it as *growth*⁹. This growth is later associated with the differential assessment of Being and beings. As we shall see it is the “governance” (or rather, the primacy) of this growth that will, among other things, be associated with what is yet to be introduced as *Walten*, prevailing, holding sway.

Preceding the notional separation of *physis/tékhne/nomos*, Heidegger’s use of *Walten* ontologically circumscribes sovereign privilege. Despite its critical potential, *Walten* becomes a substantiating notional placeholder, retroactively paving the way for everything that is to follow conceptually. To think with and through *Walten* therefore implies a modality which precedes (ontological) divisibility itself. *Walten* might still fall under the remit of differentiation, but it nevertheless obliges us to think a condition which anticipates difference.

THE SWAY OF BEING AND BEINGS AND THE PREVALENCE OF A SOVEREIGN DICTUM

Before attending more closely to Heidegger’s text, it is important to provide a brief terminological analysis of the German *Walten*. This term finds itself unsurprisingly close to *Gewalt* (violence). What is sometimes acerbically translated as “governing”,

“ruling”, or “power” tout court tends to diminish its violent connotations. In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida underlines the recurring insistence of *Walten* in Heidegger’s oeuvre, while simultaneously criticising the French translations, which he argues “abandon” the term to “neutrality” and “non-violence”¹⁰. An exemplary section from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* elucidates how similar obstacles arise in the shift from German to English.

*Wie soll der Mensch das ihn Durchwaltende, auf Grund dessen er selbst als Mensch überhaupt sein kann, je erfinden?*¹¹

How could man ever have invented the power which pervades him, which alone enables him to *be* a man?¹²

How is humanity ever supposed to have invented that which pervades it in its sway, due to which humanity itself can *be* as humanity in the first place?¹³

The first translation, aside from its reductive translation of the collective *Mensch* (human), chooses “power”, power which pervades. The second, more recent citation favours *sway* as a more adequate translation of (*Durch-*)*Walten*. Upon closer inspection, “holding sway” seems to recuperate some of the German inflections of *Walten*. Power alone, by contrast, is misleading: all the more so since the German provides several substantives to designate power—*Macht*, *Vermögen*, *Kraft*, to name but a few. We are therefore left to contend with the *sway*. *Holding sway* seems partially adequate. However, the movement, the pendular swing, which it entails indicates a minimal notion of repetition, which counteracts the singularity of *Walten*. *Prevailing*, and its tie to the Latin *valere*, allows for a subtler emphasis of power. Moreover, *prae-valere*, implies a certain temporal primacy, anticipating the metaphysical subtleties of Heidegger’s account of *Walten*. Reading Aquinas, or Kierkegaard, an unassuming reader might, at times, be impressed by another prevalence within the register of *Walten*—the emphasis of love, holding

sway¹⁴. All these connotations underscore the need to acknowledge the polysemic instability of *Walten*. Bearing these complexities in mind, we can return to the second translation of Heidegger's text:

How is humanity ever supposed to have invented that which pervades it in its sway, due to which humanity itself can *be* as humanity in the first place?¹⁵

Rearticulated with the present query in mind, Heidegger's question¹⁶ could be read as 'how are we to understand a reference to sovereignty which itself lacks a referent?' For Heidegger, *Walten* suggests two paths. First, a form of prevailing which concerns beings:

In the age of the first and definitive unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when questioning about beings¹⁷ as such and as a whole received its true inception, beings were called *physis* [*physis*, φύσις]. This fundamental Greek word for beings is usually translated as "nature." [...] Now what does the word *physis* say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance—in short, the emerging-abiding sway.¹⁸

As already mentioned, this passage proposes a decisive re-reading of φύσις. No longer translated as nature, *physis* is now to be grasped as growth¹⁹. The "first and definitive unfolding" is, according to Heidegger, situated in the pre-Socratic register. Growth, as *physis*, is not solely the transitive, or intermediary stage of a process that is yet to reach its finality, the emphasis lies rather on the procedural dimension itself. *Physis* encompasses all of this in the form of an "emerging-abiding sway"²⁰ [*"aufgehend-verweilende[s] Walten"*]²¹. *Physis* refers to the prevailing of this

process. Via its prevalence—its process of “pure” emerging—everything appears and “is” through or within this appearance. *Physis* can, henceforth, no longer solely be read as the potential hypostasis that “nature” implies. This is what Heidegger’s reluctance, concerning its translation, calls on: to recalibrate and to focus on growth, *Wachstum*, to consider a certain equation between growth and φύσις. *Walten* itself is still schematically associated with this process of processes, this proto-procedure.

Now, we might need to inquire what it is that constitutes the difference along the sequence from proto-, to pre-, to the procedure itself. So far, *physis* has become a procedural nexus of growth, something we could coin the ecstatic horizon of beings. Beings are to be found within it, are brought forth by it. If we conditionally accept the proposed reading, what does this imply for Heidegger’s elusive notion(s) of Being?

We shall now translate φύσις more clearly and closer to the originally intended sense [*ursprünglich gemeinter Sinn*] not so much by growth, but by the ‘self-forming prevailing of beings as a whole [*sich selbst bildendes Walten des Seienden im Ganzen*]’. [...] We must bring this quite broad concept of φύσις closer to us in order to understand this word in that meaning in which the philosophers of antiquity used it, who are wrongly called ‘philosophers of nature’. [...] that which prevails, beings, beings as a whole. I emphasize once more that φύσις as beings as a whole is not meant in the modern, late sense of nature, as the conceptual counterpart to history for instance. Rather it is intended more originally than both of these concepts [*ursprünglicher als beide Begriffe*], in an originary meaning [*ursprüngliche Bedeutung*] which, prior to nature and history, encompasses both, and even in a certain way includes divine beings.²²

As Derrida remarks, φύσις is “not yet objective nature”²³. The passage through Latin (*physis* becoming *natura*), denounced by Heidegger, has inevitably appeared in the succeeding translations, and hence inflects the understandings of the

term. However, if φύσις persists within the opaque terrain of incessant growth and movement, its “originary meaning” seems to be comprised of nothing but its constant flux. Such conceptual fluidity implies a toll, for it only results from the absolute primacy, the “originary” quality of φύσις. In the cited passage, Heidegger insists –three separate times– on such origination, such *Ursprünglichkeit*.²⁴

What is the metaphysical context²⁵? Heidegger implicitly stresses his well-known alliance with the pre-Socratics; they shall not be designated as “philosophers of nature”. Processes of nature and φύσις are not equivocal. Attempting to place them within the same modality would be false. This drastic recalibration of “nature” aside, how does φύσις prevail?

But phusis [φύσις], the emerging sway [*das aufgehende Walten*], is not synonymous with these processes, which we still today count as part of ‘nature.’ This emerging and standing-out-in-itself-from-itself may not be taken as just one process [*Vorgang*] among others that we observe in beings. Phusis is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable.²⁶

Walten and, Being as φύσις, become identified with one another: φύσις wields some undeniable primacy for Heidegger. What we observe in “nature” is, presumably, detrimental to our understanding of *Walten*. Ontologically, we are not solely dealing with one “process among others”. But this *Vor-gang* (process), I might need to caution, seems to insist on its prefix²⁷. It is a step before others, a step before further movement sets in²⁸. The procedurality of emergence prevails and, according to Heidegger, it constitutively shapes the terrain of the observable. Hence, we cannot regard it as a circular movement where the procedure would proceed from itself, rather, Being (via beings) manifests its procedural horizon.

So far, both Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* and his *Fundamental Concepts* engage in a similar exposition of the extent to which φύσις is to be conceptually privileged. First, it is φύσις as the totality of beings and, secondly, φύσις as Being

itself or rather (accepting Heidegger's scruple to approach Being "directly"), φύσις as the essentiality (Wesenheit) of Being, its οὐσία (ousia). In both lectures, Heidegger's *Walten* illustrates the singular character of all ontological processes. Simultaneously, *Walten* expresses the swaying violence of emergence. Nominally, *Walten* concerns the resistance against an objectifiable telos, while formally it shapes governance. Metaphysically, Heidegger's *Walten* implies a *Vorgang* without *Vorgänger*, but also without *Vorgehendes* (a process without a predecessor and without preceding; a process without anything but its procedurality). Within a more sober dictum: *Walten* or prevailing are liminally equated with physis. Physis contains the differential, and hence seems to enclose but also to curtail difference.

The procedural character of φύσις evades its own governance. Growth therefore becomes a performance that itself is not governed by any performative iteration. The "emerging-abiding sway"²⁹ is that which allows us to read, to inscribe, and to cite in the first place. Without it not only legibility would be in question but much more fundamentally beings themselves. However, and it is important to insist on this, there is no agency which precedes such procedurality of emergence. Heidegger does not recapitulate an Idea or a positive infinity beyond our sensual grasp. Heidegger's physis does not point towards the divine. As a result, *Walten* attempts to frame that which emerges from itself while simultaneously containing such self-emergence within the register of its own sway. And so, we seem to conceptually pivot around the point at which ontological difference sets forth.

Several years after the lectures on metaphysics, Heidegger insisted in *Identity and Difference* that the differential itself cannot be questioned as it always already differentiates. It would thus be in to ask for difference. In light of this, the reader might feel compelled to question what it is that governs such a claim? Where is it that such an ontological premise, concerning origination, is to be situated? In turn, what is it that gives rise to its possibility in the first place? Until now, we have been confronted with a modality and a performance which governs without being governed: a meta-sovereign moment³⁰ which concerns both, the "structural dispersal"³¹ of being into beings and the "hermeneutic dissipation"³² shaping our

horizon. Thus Heidegger's notion of *Walten* needs to be apprehended as a spatial and temporal starting point. To recapitulate: the ontological fundament not only privileges difference but inscribes it within a violent sway. In Heidegger's *Fundamental Terms of Metaphysics*, he reserves a parenthesis to outline that "initially" metaphysics denotes the entirety of ontology, which is simultaneously theology³³. In *Identity and Difference* he illustrates the different orders of (ontological) origination more thoroughly:

Because Being appears as ground, beings are what is grounded; the highest being, however, is what accounts in the sense of giving the first cause. When metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such, then it is logic as onto-logic. When metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole [*Seiendes als solches im Ganzen*], that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything, then it is logic as theo-logic. Because the thinking of metaphysics remains involved in the difference which as such is unthought, metaphysics is both ontology and theology in a unified way, by virtue of the unifying unity of perdurance [*Austrag*, also translated as "disposition"³⁴]. The onto-theological constitution of metaphysics stems from the prevalence of that difference [*dem Walten der Differenz*]³⁵.

Apart from a contextualization of metaphysics itself, Heidegger asks us to perceive the modality of *Walten* with "respect to the ground that is common to all beings". Similarly, we shall question how a notion holds sway that: "with respect to the highest being [...] accounts for everything". The "prevalence [*Walten*] of that difference" is the ground/terrain of/for the "onto-theological constitution of metaphysics". Metaphysics, at this stage, is, concurrently, "logic as onto-logic" and "logic as theo-logic".

Years after the lectures on metaphysics, the *Austrag*, the 'perdurance' or 'disposition,' is one way that enables us to think this "*Vorort*" of difference³⁶. However, as Derrida asks, what does a notion of *Walten* imply, "which is, as if all

at once, the event, the origin, the power, the force, the source, the movement, the process, the meaning [...] of the ontological difference, the becoming-ontological-difference of the ontological difference”³⁷? Bearing this question in mind, let me focus more on this exemplary moment: the disposition (*Austrag*) of ontological difference.

The perdurance [*Austrag*, disposition] results in and gives Being as the generative ground. This ground itself needs to be properly accounted for by that for which it accounts, that is, by the causation through the supremely original matter - [*ursprünglichste Sache*] and that is the cause as *causa sui*. This is the right name for the god of philosophy. Man [*Mensch*] can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god.³⁸

What is exchanged for the divine is the notion of “*causa sui*”, a motive which can only collapse into—and grow out of—itself. Such a cause is presumably removed from anything that is relatable to faith. While this might seem like a considerable shift, the *causa-sui* responds to Heidegger’s earlier metaphysical query on physis. The *causa-sui*, we could say, is deployed to ontologically assess that which “prior to nature and history, encompasses both, and even in a certain way includes divine beings”³⁹. Heidegger’s (implicit) position is that the fundament of metaphysics is grounded in a question of priority or origination. As Paul North reminds us, we are confronted with the existential issue of a “rather than”, “something rather than nothing”⁴⁰, Heidegger’s ontological questioning concerns the *apriori*⁴¹. How such a query can unfold without anticipating its ontological response is a question that *Walten* (partially) answers at the cost of its violent dominance.

As I move to consider *Walten* in the context of Heraclitus and Aristotle, we need to first address where Heidegger’s *Walten* is ontologically situated:

The interweaving of the distinctions themselves, and the way in which this interweaving oppresses and sustains us, is, as this prevailing, the primordial [*ist als dieses Walten die Urgesetzlichkeit*] lawfulness out of which

we first comprehend the specific constitution of being pertaining to those beings standing before us or even those beings that have been made the object of scientific theory. [...] The ontological difference is that distinction that concerns the being of beings, or more precisely the distinction within which everything ontological moves and which it presupposes, as it were, for its own possibility. [...] We have seen that this distinction is never at hand, but refers to something that occurs.⁴²

For Heidegger, ontological difference holds sway. Only within the prevailing of such difference can we apprehend the elusive dimension of Being as it pertains to beings; while remembering that, within the Heideggerian corpus, such an assertion would already be unacceptable. Being never *is*, it pertains to nothing. Being can only be studied through the conditionality of the subject or event. This is why it does not seem to be misleading to speak of *Walten* as a (proto-)modality. It concerns both “structural dispersal” and “hermeneutic dissipation”⁴³, without hypostatizing their procedural character.

Ontology presupposes static Being, while remaining, according to Heidegger, most often incapable of overcoming its negligence towards Being. The distinction, opened via the ontological difference, is “never at hand but refers to something that occurs”. The specific prerogative bestowed on/through this difference is itself that which does not cease to hold sway: “The interweaving of the distinctions themselves [...] is, as this prevailing, the primordial lawfulness”. The initial “definition” of prevailing already pointed towards the connection of *Walten*, and the ontological difference. By now it has become increasingly difficult to disentangle one from the other. Ontological difference itself seems to prevail. If we were to accept such prevalence, we would need to ask what the consequences for Heidegger’s entire project are. Obviously such a question exceeds the confines of this article.

To reiterate where we have come to: after recapitulating how the sway of *Walten*

delineates both Being and beings, I have signalled the conceptual repercussions of associating such prevalence with a foundational notion of sovereignty. . This underscored Heidegger's emphasis on the non-presence of the swaying register of difference. However, it proved necessary to concede the difficulty of accepting his emphasis while being confronted with what he frames as a "primordial lawfulness". Such primordially, Heidegger's "*Urgesetzlichkeit*", sets—governs or regulates (*verwaltet*)—the conditions for ontological progression. It thus seems appropriate to assess Heidegger's persistent use of *Walten* as formally indicative of a sovereign modality, situated at the outset of his ontology. In the following section of the paper, I develop the metaphysical context of Heidegger's *Walten* and underline its connection to such a modality.

CONFLICTUAL MATTER, (PRIME-) MOVEMENT

Having indicated the conceptual link that informs *Walten* and the ontological difference, I will now endeavour to clarify how Heidegger's *Walten* draws from a sovereign register. As noted above, φύσις can be read as growth, meaning that it implies the simultaneity of matter and movement. *Walten* prevails in growth. In the next section I briefly consider Aristotle's and Heraclitus's metaphysics in order to contextualize Heidegger's *Walten*, showing how it is informed by both thinkers' ontological premises. Here both matter and movement are shown as ontologically primary. These originary notions are then mobilized to theorize an ontological origin, a notion of *physis*, which dominates through its conflictual sway.

The backdrop to this juxtaposition is a larger ontological schism that Heidegger does not mention. In the context of the pre-Socratics, as Kōjin Karatani reminds us, matter and movement are still theorized in unison⁴⁴. Thus, Heraclitus is not conceptually required to resort to a moving agent for his account of an originary tension. By contrast, Aristotle, even if he—unlike Plato—refuses to radically divest matter of its implicit flux, insists on the agency of a prime mover to animate the material world. While the pre-Socratics accept matter's self-movement without the need for a telos, Aristotle, through his theory of causes, introduces

such an end. Thus, it appears as if Aristotle's amendment could be considered as an attempt to curtail the seemingly ungovernable proliferation of movement. Heidegger's *Walten* is informed by both tendencies, and cannot be aligned neatly with either one. *Walten* attests to a much broader metaphysical idea of sovereignty than either position acknowledges. Such an insistence seems to transcendently vindicate the conflictual within existence.

Heidegger's lectures fluctuate between Aristotle and Heraclitus. The following passage, taken from the *Fundamental Concepts*, describes the scope of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* –

Questions are asked concerning what life itself is, what the soul is [...] what movement, position, and time are, what the emptiness is in which that which is moved moves, what that which moves itself [das Sichbewegende] is as a whole and what the Prime Mover is. [...] The questioning proper to these sciences dealing with φύσις is the supreme question of the Prime Mover [die höchste Frage nach dem Ersten Beweger], of what this whole of φύσις is in itself as this whole. Aristotle designates this ultimate determinant [...] as the divine, without yet associating this with any particular religious view [bestimmte religiöse Auffassung]. [...] Insofar as the fundamental character of these beings and their being is movement, the original question concerning them goes back to the first mover⁴⁵.

“The questioning proper” of metaphysics is the question of the “Prime Mover”. Before looking to Heidegger's summary of Aristotle's metaphysical efforts, a comment is required on the relation of growth, *Walten* (φύσις) and prime movement. As a process, growth might be theorized as autonomous, while simultaneously being situated in a relational nexus. Indeed, it is arguable that it constitutes this nexus. As growth holds sway, it defies impulses that seek to stop or modulate its movement. Certainly, if violence prevails, modulations can occur,

both in relation to concepts and to beings. The processivity of growth can be read through its unity of movement and matter. Aristotle's prime movement partially defies such unity, as it is that which moves the (un-) movable. Conceptually then prime movement stalls the autonomy of growth. The notion of the prime mover marks a specific difference in relation to the pre-Socratics, who are, according to Heidegger, wrongly perceived as "philosophers of nature"⁴⁶.

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle insists that: "the science of the natural philosophers deals with the things that have in themselves a principle of movement."⁴⁷ But what is it that results from the separation of matter and movement? Such separation obliges us to think of an agent or an agency that propels movement⁴⁸. Heidegger's passage cited above already demonstrates the extent to which Aristotle "designates this ultimate determinant [...] as the divine". According to the *Fundamental Concepts*, this shall not be read in association "with any particular religious view"⁴⁹. A causa-sui is nothing that one can pray to⁵⁰ but rather forms part of the metaphysical terrain of which it is composed; namely, it is both theo-logic and onto-logic⁵¹. However, this causa-sui constitutes a decisive *Vor-gang*⁵² (proto-procedure) and, as signalled above, it is not inaccurate to define such primacy using a vocabulary related to sovereignty.

The self-referential character of a sovereign act commonly seeks to define itself through the constitutive absence of external interference⁵³. One could theorize such a premise via Schmitt's exception⁵⁴. However, in the light of the present purpose, it seems equally legitimate to defer such a comparison. As already noted, within a more metaphysical frame, and an even more archaic dictum, it is not ambiguous to theorize sovereignty as the promise of a frictionless actualization (*energeia*) of the potential (*dynamis*). If a sovereign act is to hold sway, it needs to prevail without any consultation: it must solely rely on its movement. The prime mover and the sovereign share the conceptual emphasis of the "ultimate determinant [*Letztbestimmendes*]"⁵⁵.

In the first section of this paper, I illustrated how *Walten* sways through and via

beings, showing how Being, as inflected through φύσις, becomes the generative ground on and through which existence is theorized. What thus becomes apparent is that both the ontological foundation and the epistemological frame—two horizons that Heidegger would hardly want to separate—prevail, govern (*verwalten*) over thought. The prevalence or the violent governance of *Walten* can hardly be discounted in such a consideration (not only, but also, considering the “metapolitical” context of the time⁵⁶). The lectures on *Identity and Difference* do not necessarily change such an outlook. Being, as the generative ground, grounding beings is still held sway by difference (“*dem Walten der Differenz*”). Indeed, why would Heidegger have abandoned the prevalence of ontological difference? However, at present, it is not so much a question of asserting the continuity of said difference but of insisting on the conceptual dominance, the sovereign sway, that it instates and on which it relies ontologically. We are yet to encounter, however, how a subtle instability of the ontological difference announces itself. To develop this, I need to return to the metaphysical background.

In regard to “ultimate determination” (*Letztbestimmung*) and prime movement, let us ask how *Walten*, as φύσις, circumscribes both becoming and Being:

This emerging, abiding sway includes both ‘becoming’ as well as ‘Being’ [*In diesem aufgehend verweilenden Walten liegen ‘Werden’ sowohl wie ‘Sein’*] [...] In opposition to becoming, it [*Walten*] shows itself as constancy, constant presence.⁵⁷

Becoming (*Werden*) is for Heidegger always constituted by the simultaneity of “coming-into-presence and going-out of it”⁵⁸. This simultaneity prevails, i.e., it is *Walten*. Unlike the process of becoming, *Walten* is present. It is here that Heidegger bestows his notion of *Walten* with an ominous emphasis of presence. In a way, he seems to provisionally accord (an accordance refused at other stages) with the Aristotelian understanding of time, propounded in his *Physics*. Here,

the now forms the (present) vantage point from which the movement of time is to be determined. Simultaneously, the position of the finite being, “witnessing” time, is removed from the temporal flux⁵⁹. Otherwise, the passage (one now, to the other) could not be analysed. Rather it would constitute an indecipherable passage. Hence, Heidegger grants that the movement of becoming, is inscribed within the wider (constant) presence of *Walten*. While we are never confronted with the ontological difference (nor the now), difference already holds sway. What is the status of Aristotle’s prime movement in this sway of becoming?

the things that are nearer the first mover are prior [...] and the prime mover also is a beginning absolutely. [...] if the prior does not set in motion the other does not move⁶⁰.

Following Aristotle, we rely on the constitutive movement of the prime mover. Not only is prime movement originary, but there is also a hierarchy of origination, determined by the distance to the prime mover. Prime movement itself is removed from time. This is how Heidegger’s concession of presence, located in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (where commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* shifts to a reading of Heraclitus’s *Fragments*) can be understood. Without it, prime movement would have to be renounced as it relies on presence, outside time. *Walten, anders als Werden und Sein, ist anwesend*—*Walten*, unlike becoming and Being, is present⁶¹. I hasten to add that such a comment requires a much larger assessment of how *Walten* shapes our being-in-the-world, our ecstatic horizon. Since such a task exceeds the present limitations, we return to Aristotle and Heraclitus.

It is as yet unclear how Aristotle transforms the pre-Socratic uniformity of matter and motion. According to Karatani, Aristotle accepted that motion is immanent in matter but introduces the causes to assess such immanence. Material and efficient cause, which are both to be found in the pre-Socratics, are complemented with

the formal and the final cause. As it posits a *telos* (purpose/end) of movement, it is especially decisive,⁶². These comments contextualize Aristotle's claim that: "if the prior does not set in motion the other does not move". Nevertheless, prime movement still appears to be commensurable with the "Heraclitean doctrine", which asserts:

that all sensible things are ever passing away, so that if knowledge or thought is to have an object, there must be some other and permanent entities, apart from those which are sensible; for there can be no knowledge of things which are in a state of flux.⁶³

Both, Aristotle and Heraclitus articulate the need for an immovable entity to render movement intelligible. However, as remains to be seen Heraclitus, unlike Aristotle, proposes a conflicting *kosmos* which frames movement and matter. Heidegger submits a reading of φύσις via Heraclitus' *kosmos*⁶⁴. While Heidegger's translation of *Fragment 30* might be disputable, its relation to the proposed notion of φύσις as the sovereign modality of growth, remains to be further developed:

This *kosmos* [...] is always the same throughout everything, and neither a god nor any human being created it, rather this φύσις always was, always is, and always will be an ever-flaming fire, flaring up according to measure and extinguishing according to measure [Maß, metron, μέτρα].⁶⁵

Be it perpetual fire, as in Heraclitus' case, or Aristotle's prime mover moving the unmovable, both originary causes identify, and account for, the same structural necessity. Heidegger inscribes *Walten* somewhere between these procedural notions of origination. In Heidegger's translation, the *metron* becomes decisive as he identifies within it the sway of *physis*⁶⁶. I mention these perspectives in an attempt to demonstrate how Heidegger proposes the violent sway of an originary ontological frame, thereby closing the possibility of theorizing the prevalence of growth along a less governable (*verwaltete*) axis. Heidegger, derives the "constant

presence” (*Anwesenheit*) of φύσις from Heraclitus’ notion of the kosmos⁶⁷. The kosmos sways metrically, not inconstant:

‘everything flows’. If this saying stems from Heraclitus at all, then it does not mean that everything is mere change that runs on and runs astray, pure inconstancy [*reine Unständigkeit*], but instead it means: the whole of beings in its Being is always thrown from one opposite to the other, thrown over here and over there– Being is the gatheredness of this conflicting unrest.⁶⁸

Heidegger seems to advance a notion of Heraclitus which favours the Aristotelian imposition of causes. Prime movement has already been decisively associated with a notion of *Walten*, and yet, we should not solely read *Walten*’s sovereign modality as akin to that of Aristotle’s prime mover. As Heidegger proposes, Being itself collects, gathering this swaying tendency through which beings are thrown “from one opposite to the other”⁶⁹. This is another one of Heidegger’s Aristotelian refractions of Heraclitus. Heidegger seems to keep “pure inconstancy” in check. Such a regulatory (*verwaltender*) impulse even drives the concession of the “constant presence”⁷⁰ of *Walten*. The sway of *physis* is undeniable, but it must be consolidated via a minimal *telos*. Hence, this is where the “pure inconstancy” of a differentiating ontological opening is abandoned for the violent gathering, dominated by Being, or rather, φύσις. As noted already, a problematic sovereign resonance arises through that operation. This resonance relates to principles of sovereign movement. Such movement is self-propelled and falls exclusively under the remit of its own sway. Heidegger’s onto-logic underscores the regulatory *telos* of Aristotle’s prime mover. Likewise, Heidegger prefers the Heraclitean emphasis of a “conflicting unrest”⁷¹. While Heraclitus’s *kosmos* emphasizes the fluidity of growth, Heidegger’s translation aims to restrain it. Looking to this impasse by way of conclusion, I want to suggest that growth might itself be further removed from *Walten*’s sovereign imposition than Heidegger’s conceptual insistence seems to imply.

In the quote above, the swaying of φύσις flares up, and extinguishes, according to

“measure”. Where is this *metron* derived from? To answer this, we have to consider what Heraclitus indicates by *polemos* (strife⁷²/confrontation). As Heidegger recapitulates in the *Introduction*, an initial separation, which, differentiates “gods” from “human beings”⁷³, results of the “irruption [disjunction, *Auseinandertreten*] of Being itself” which is to be situated “in the *polemos* [Πόλεμος]”⁷⁴. Heidegger reads Heraclitus’s *polemos* as a differentiating struggle, a setting-apart⁷⁵, or a confrontation [*Aus-einander-setzung*]:

Con-frontation [setting-apart; *Aus-einander-setzung*]*—that is not mere quarrelling and feuding [Gezänk und Hader], but the strife of the striving [...] [that] makes them manifest.*⁷⁶

Like the disposition (*Austrag*) propounded in *Identity and Difference*, *polemos* performs as an additional modality of disjunction which assists in the assessment of ontological difference⁷⁷. *Polemos* accounts for both, a structural dispersal and a hermeneutic horizon. Hence, the disposition is another prevailing modality which should not be considered without having *Walten*’s sovereign connotations in mind. Heidegger’s notion of an ontological origination—as prevailing in and via our existence—moves closer towards Heraclitus’ understanding of an originating conflict, shaping physis, growth, or Being. That being said, the Aristotelian *telos* of prime movement is not abandoned altogether. How does Heidegger outline the relation of *polemos* and *Walten*?

In this sway [*dieses Walten*], rest and movement are closed and opened up from an originary unity. This sway is the overwhelming coming-to-presence that has not yet been surmounted in thinking, and within which that which comes to presence essentially unfolds as being. But this sway first steps forth from concealment— that is, in Greek, *alethēia* [ἀλήθεια] (unconcealment) happens— insofar as the sway struggles itself forth as a world. [...] Confrontation is indeed for all (that comes to presence) the sire

(who lets emerge), but (also) for all the preserver that holds sway [*waltender Bewahrer*]. [...] The polemos [Πόλεμος] named here is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense.⁷⁸

Walten “has not yet been surmounted in thinking”. Of course, if we read *Walten* as a metonym of ontological difference, it proves to be insurmountable. Difference itself, according to *Identity and Difference*, cannot be thought but is only ever to be encountered differentially. What would it mean to regard the *ontological difference* as a *prevalent modality*? Arguably, Heidegger seeks a way to “think about transcendence within existence” without operating via the conceptual need for a “beyond”⁷⁹. Hence, the sway of the differential is inscribed within existence. Thus, existence as necessarily situated within the *prevalence* of physis, relies on the conflictual and violent dimension of this *polemic sway*, shaping the ontological grounding. In both of Heidegger’s metaphysical lectures, being or φύσις disperses itself and commands over a violent sway. What will later be called *Austrag*, is the regulatory frame, the ontological apriori, which operates along the terminology of *Walten*. As developed in section two, Heidegger not only borrows Heraclitus’s polemos but simultaneously resorts to the telos of the prime mover to contain its potentially chaotic sway. *Walten*’s metonymy with sovereignty as self-movement, prime-movement, or procedural exceptionality is present in Heidegger. Polemos as the prevalent ground of difference, is the ontological frame in which difference holds sway and from which its onset is to be read⁸⁰.

CONCLUSIVE AND PROSPECTIVE REMARKS

Adopting the language of Heidegger’s *Identity and Difference*, the disposition (*Austrag*) is not solely⁸¹ the circular movement of Being and beings. It also gives rise to this movement or sway. At the same time, such flux is not solely conflictual but also governed by a sovereign telos. Both, Heidegger’s “structural dispersal” and the “hermeneutic dissipation”⁸² are inscribed in (and according to Heidegger, necessarily inscribed by), the dominance of *Walten*. The question of an apriori,

in this case, of an originary outset (outset and out-setting) has to remain self-identical if it is to retain its sovereignty and thus its conceptual coherence. It is, at the same time, to be perceived as a fluctuating primal outset. For now, it remains uncertain if we can avoid this conceptual circularity that seems to prevail in Heidegger's writings⁸³.

Walten propels differential growth, setting the condition of such difference. It also harbours primacy, and thus, pre-vails. As we have witnessed, Heidegger circumscribes his notion of *Walten* through a reading of Heraclitus and Aristotle. *Walten* serves to metaphysically assess the conundrum of growth. The growth of *physis*, from within a Heraclitean perspective, resists control, by only unfolding according to its "own measure"⁸⁴. Heidegger seems eager to conceive of such a measure along an Aristotelian line. In accordance with the concept of prime movement, *Walten* has a minimal *telos*. It assures a differential (and violent) economy. Of course, by accepting Heidegger's insistence, such an economy is not directly considered through the question of Being but only thought in its light. *Walten* could then be read as ontological difference. Deciding to read it in this way implies that the metaphysical assessment of ontological difference is something which is itself governed: whether by a notion of a conflicting unrest or by the *telos* of prime movement. Via *Walten*, Heidegger theorizes an "ontological fundament"⁸⁵, from which we are dispersed, violently thrown into *Dasein*. Hence, *physis* forces itself into existence, into the presence of its there (*da*). Such an understanding of ontological difference conceptually advances conflictual deferral. However, such deferral is ultimately curtailed by a relatively vulgar frame of power: the differentiated renders something conceivable that moves without being moved⁸⁶.

Conclusively, we can assert that Heidegger's conceptual rupture, his move towards the pre-Socratics, remains defined by an Aristotelian tendency. To conceive of *Walten* as causally determined movement, implies the problematic spectre of a sovereign modality that precedes difference. *Walten* might be read as the primary origin (*Urgrund*), the primary leap (*Ursprung*) of sovereignty. The uniformity of matter and movement and thus a reading which sways towards Heraclitus, instead

of Aristotle, also advances a notion of sovereignty which destabilizes the primacy of the Aristotelian inflected notion.

If one desires to mobilize such ontological predicaments against sovereignty, it is crucial to contemplate the ungovernable dimension of growth, which Heidegger ignores. Such a prospective critique would need to focus on pre-difference which otherwise risks becoming in-difference to, metaphysically secured, sovereign imposition⁸⁷. The nexus of growth could thus be mobilized against its own sway. Relying on (pre-) determination and vacillation, any procedure of growth follows its exceptional configuration while providing the potential to supersede such determination. Heidegger's *Walten* might also concern this interplay. Positioned at the outset of ontological difference, *Walten* governs (*ver-waltet*) its own unfolding. Metaphysics, presumably pure in its distance from the political⁸⁸, is held sway by a notion of the sovereign. However, and this is what should eventually be attended to: growth or φύσις might prevail—but it might equally well outgrow its prevalence.

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NOTES

1. In a 1934 note from the black notebooks, Heidegger sketched the obligation of working towards the finalization—the end—of philosophy in pursuit of what he termed “metapolitics”. Considering that he did little to curtail the NS-resonances of his work, such a metapolitical announcement seems all-too ominous. Heidegger’s containment efforts only marginally increased after his resignation from the Freiburg rectorate position and thus the end of his role as a representative of the German state. Certainly, the emphasis shifted. Volk, a privileged form of Mitsein in Sein und Zeit, was now to be defined via other means. And yet, despite such a cautionary preamble, this article will not examine Heidegger’s affiliation with the Nazis and ponder the stale question if such a thinker deserves to occupy a privileged position. „Das Ende der ‚Philosophie‘—Wir müssen sie zum Ende bringen und damit das völlig Andere—Metapolitik—vorbereiten. Demgemäß auch der Wandel der Wissenschaft.“ „The end of ‚philosophy‘—We must bring it to an end and thereby prepare what is wholly other— metapolitics. Accordingly also the transformation of science.“. Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe. IV. Abteilung: Hinweise und Aufzeichnungen. Band 94. Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938). Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2014, 115. Martin Heidegger, Ponderings II-VI. Black Notebooks 1931-1938. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016, 85.
2. Derrida’s final lecture, The Beast and the Sovereign, lends recurring attention to Heidegger’s Walten, likening it to sovereignty: “Walten is dominant, governing power, as self-formed sovereignty, as autonomous, autarcic force, commanding and forming itself”. Said power permeates, according to Derrida’s reading of Heidegger, through beings who are: “seized, gripped, durchwalte[t] by the Gewalt [violence] of this Walten”. Furthermore, and this is a thread that my reading will follow, Derrida likens Walten to the ontological difference. Gregory Fried’s Polemos and Heraclitus: From Being to Politics reads Heidegger’s interpretation of Heraclitus’ polemos as indicative of a larger ontological conception, shaping Heidegger’s work. As Fried argues, Heidegger’s confrontation (Fried’s translation of Heidegger’s Aus-einander-setzung), must be understood as: “an interpretative struggle with the meaning of the world— and with the meaning of Being itself.”. The hermeneutic constitution of the human being is defined by a call to confront the own history. Such a confrontation, shaped by polemos, is obliged to operate through a reconstruction and a deconstruction. Only such a dual strategy resists “nihilistic destructiveness” as Fried insists. Paul North’s: Dissipation–Power–Transcendence focuses on Heidegger’s dissipation or Zerstreuung which, according to his analysis, functions as the “fundament of fundamental ontology”. Being disperses itself as time, and it becomes the obligation of Heidegger’s philosophy to inform a reorientation towards this initiating dispersal. Hence, similar to this article’s understanding of Walten, North perceives Zerstreuung as a “structural dispersal” and a “hermeneutic dissipation”. Jacques Derrida, The Beast & the Sovereign. Volume II. Eds. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017, 39f; 256; 288. Gregory Fried, Heidegger’s Polemos: From Being to Politics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 4; 42; 246. Paul North, Dissipation–Power–Transcendence. In: The Problem of Distraction. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012, 112; 121.
3. Heidegger’s comments on metaphysics will, in the coming pages, be regarded as metaphysical commentary. Thus, this article does not anticipate the purview of a metaphysical critique, which, via its “Destruktion”, establishes a non-metaphysical dictum.
4. Arguably, this is an operation that deconstruction has long been confronted with.

5. Adam Knowles, *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*. Ed. Mark Wrathall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 163.
6. Such a decision seems to precede what we understand as a decision. The frictionless link between *energeia* and *dynamis* would not need to resort to it. The *entelechy* has an intrinsic end, preceding the need to decide. If actuality and potentiality are not in unison, unified via their “soul”, we are confronted with something “equivocal”. Aristotle, *On the Soul*. *Parva Naturalia*. *On Breath*. With an English Translation by W.S. Hett. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/William Heinemann LTD. 1986, 212b.
7. Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot. 2015, 13f.
8. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. World, Finitude, Solitude. Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, 25. Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit. Frankfurt/Main: Rote Reihe. Klostermann. 2018, 38.
9. As a dear friend would have it: “At the edge of the ontological difference as that being for whom its being is an issue for itself, *Dasein* has an undecidable horizon of inexhaustible *Seinkönnen*, and this finitude in the context of decision and being-guilty, is related to the ripening of growing fruit”.
10. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Volume II, 21.
11. Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1998, 120.
12. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, 156.
13. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Gregory Fried, Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 167.
14. It is perhaps not surprising that such a “rule of love” prevails within the confines of faith. Moreover, I leave it to the reader to decide if a notion of the “rule of love” is not similarly informed by violence, albeit, of another kind. Thomas Aquinas, *Die katholische Wahrheit oder die theologische Summa*. Trans. Schneider. Regensburg: Verlags-Anstalt, 1885, XLVI; Sören Kierkegaard, *Leben und Walten der Liebe*. Trans. Dorner. Leipzig: Franz Richter, 1890.
15. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 167.
16. In 1946, Heidegger will borrow Rilke’s *Urgrund* to speak of such an originary, or originating, cause. Martin Heidegger, *Wozu Dichter?* Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914-1970. Band 5. Holzwege. Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2003.
17. The 1976 translation follows the older transfer of *Seiendes* as *essent* (meanwhile, *Seiendes* is often translated as *entity/entities/existent/s*, *Sein* as *being*, without capitalization; I will choose *Being-Sein*, *beings-Seiendes*). In addition, it neglects the direct reference of *Walten*. Both ignore Heidegger’s reluctance to translate *φύσις*. On the ensuing pages, I shall limit myself to the direct citation of one source, but will, sometimes, point out the problems that I encounter.
18. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 14f.
19. Strictly considered, the translation of growth, *phuein*, refers to the verbal noun, while *physis* itself might be considered the horizon of such growth. Heidegger speaks of “Aufgehen”, “emerging“, and “aufgehendes Walten“, “emerging sway“, Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 11; Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 15.
20. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 14f.
21. Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 10f.
22. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 25f; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der*

Metaphysik, 38f.

23. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Volume II, 12.

24. His primal leap, or *Ur-sprung*, is itself a dubious occurrence, as it tends to discount contingency for the sake of mystified determination.

25. Metaphysics, according to the “originary meaning” summoned by Heidegger, has to examine physis. As a result, the metaphysical register also labours a pre-differential domain. Pre-difference is contained in that which gives rise to difference. The “self-forming prevailing of beings as a whole” is not solely the totality of different processes of form-giving, and growth, but there also seems to be the spectre of something which unites, and regulates, these tendencies in a larger sway. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 25f; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 38f.

26. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 15; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 11.

27. The catachresis, indicated by the hyphenation of *Vor-gang*, illustrate Heidegger’s insistence on the study of originary moments. Physis might be considered a proto-procedural ontological horizon.

28. As Derrida cautions, physis prevails and thus depends, “as *Walten*, only on itself”, it “forms itself sovereignly [...] receiving its image, its figure of domination, from itself”. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Volume II, 39.

29. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 14f.

30. If prevailing, as Heidegger insists, wields sovereign privilege, can we then still hope to eventually overcome such ontological primacy? Heidegger’s persistence is performative on more than one account. Foremost, the terminological insistence does not solely rely on a constative dimension. As portrayed before, the terminology of *Walten*, and its associated translations, implicitly mobilizes several (violent) connotations. Furthermore, the conception(s) mobilize a performative function within the edifice of Heidegger’s theory. His notion of ontological difference prevails. (Ver-) *Waltung* operates through a swaying metonymical register.

31. North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 121.

32. cf. *ibid.*

33. At this stage, we cannot elaborate how Heidegger perceives his effort as one of overcoming the onto-theological tendency that effaces difference. It suffices to assert that this “overcoming” does not curtail the problematic status of *Walten*. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 41; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 63.

34. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York/Evanston/London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969, 70f.

35. Martin, Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*. Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976. Band 11. *Identität und Differenz*. Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006, 76.

36. “perdurance is a circling, the circling of Being and beings around each other [...] of which we think at first as the approach to the active nature of the difference between Being and beings [den wir zunächst als den Vorort des Wesens der Differenz von Sein und Seiendem denken]”, Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 69ff; Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, 75ff.

37. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Volume II, 256.

38. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Volume II, 215.

39. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 25f.

40. North develops this in the context of Heidegger’s assessment of Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason. North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 138f.

41. cf. *ibid.*
42. “without heeding the difference as difference [ohne auf die Differenz als Differenz zu achten]”. “Whenever we come to the place [Wir treffen dort] to which we were supposedly first bringing difference along as an alleged contribution, we always find that Being and beings in their difference are already there.” Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 70; 62; Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, 70; 69.
43. North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 138f.
44. Kōjin Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2017, 59.
45. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 32f; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 49.
46. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 34.
47. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XI (K) 1064a28-1681.
48. Karatani, *Isonomia*, 59
49. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 32f; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 49.
50. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 77; Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, 77.
51. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 70f; Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, 76.
52. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 15; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 11.
53. Certainly, via such a definition, one enters into an aporetic realm. After all, it is often the outside that prompts the presumed need for a sovereign act. The search for an originary moment of sovereignty then becomes a tautological pursuit. Arguably, the same verdict could be applied to any such quest.
54. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, 13f.
55. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 32f; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 49.
56. This is not a pledge for a historicizing contextualization but a response to Heidegger’s own insistence, regarding the need for a philosophy responding to its time.
57. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 132; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 96.
58. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 121.
59. Aristotle, *Physics*. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1991, IV, § 11f
60. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V (Δ) 1018b9-1018b29.
61. Thus, we can speak of a substantiation of Walten. The modality is turned into something akin to a governing force.
62. Karatani, *Isonomia*, 59.
63. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XIII (M) 1078b32-1705.
64. Capobianco, in a more recent discussion of Heidegger’s Heraclitus, follows the following syntagmatic chain: “Being as physis as kosmos”, leaving polemos’ conflictual tendency behind. Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger on Heraclitus: Kosmos/World as Being Itself*. In: *Epoché*, Volume 20, Issue 2, 2016, 475.
65. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 31; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 47.
66. In his lectures on metaphysics, it is not entirely obvious if Heidegger privileges Heraclitus or Aristotle, or if his readings transform both. He seems to advance a notion of Heraclitus which still favours the Aristotelian imposition of causes.

67. Through Karatani, we already developed how the notion of the kosmos does not allow the conceptual separation of matter and motion. “For Heraclitus, the One [kosmos] does not exist beyond materiality and motion but comes to be realized through motion.” Karatani, *Isonomia*, 84.
68. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 142.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 132; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 96.
71. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 142; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 102.
72. εἶς
73. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 149.
74. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 149; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 107.
75. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 113f.
76. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 120; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 87. In Heidegger’s *Polemos*, Fried reads the “Auseinandersetzung” as indicative of Heidegger’s method: “Not only does polemos set forth beings into the ‘boundaries’ of their Being so that Dasein can make sense of them, it also governs what looks almost like the beginnings of an ethic for interpreting the thinking of other Dasein.” Fried, *Heidegger’s Polemos: From Being to Politics*, 39.
77. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 64f; Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 47.
78. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 69ff; Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, 75ff.
79. North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 138f.
80. “One can talk endlessly about its possibility without ever coming close to the thing itself in its coming. It may be, then, that the order is other—it may well be—and that only the coming of the event allows, after the event [après coup], perhaps, what will previously have made possible to be thought.” Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*. Translated by George Collins. London/ New York: Verso, 2020, 18.
81. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 31; Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 47.
82. North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 121.
83. Such (im-) possibility cannot be conclusively proposed. Rather, we should probably conceive this as a call to think (with and against) this repetitive—albeit always singular—procedurality within the sovereign sway.
84. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 287.
85. North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 111, 121.
86. In the light of such premises, we can either accept Heidegger’s sovereign decision on ontological origination, or we have to depart from it. Such a predicament applies to any ontological foundation.
87. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Volume II, 191.
88. This is a distance that Heidegger’s 1934 note undermines.

from heidegger to marx- rethinking philosophical humility

james gilbert-walsh

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* opens with the line: "All humans by nature desire to know."

This desire, and the striving that responds to it, are what I want to take up here, with an eye to one point in particular: only by acknowledging a certain lack in ourselves, our perplexity about a topic—that is to say, only on the basis of a certain *humility*—are we at all capable of such desire and such striving. Only through humility do philosophical questions, or indeed any earnest questions, arise.

One puzzling thing about philosophy is that we find ourselves doing it—asking earnest questions about what perplexes us—before we grasp precisely what it is we

are doing or the humility that characterizes our own practice. Indeed, questions such as “what is philosophy?” and “what is philosophical humility?” appear only after the fact, arising from a philosophical practice—and a humility—already in play. Answering such questions thus involves taking up something with which we are already operatively familiar and rendering it explicitly clear to ourselves.

This—*our own philosophical practice*—is something about which we ought be particularly and vigilantly humble, particularly cautious. As the very *way* we find ourselves striving to respond to perplexity, it carries within itself the various entrenched interpretive lenses and habits that, before we’ve even thought about them explicitly, delimit and structure in advance both our questions and our responses to them. Clearly, this already operative practice, whatever its strengths and weaknesses, bears directly on whatever knowledge we might hope to obtain—and indeed on what we take “knowledge” to mean. Our initial ignorance about it should push us to understand it more clearly, so that we engage in it more effectively.

This is precisely Socrates’ focus at the outset of Plato’s *Apology*. Perplexed by the Delphic Oracle’s pronouncement concerning his wisdom, Socrates turns to his own philosophical practice, bringing it to reflect on itself. As he interrogates various purportedly wise citizens of Athens, he gradually discovers that his own proper “wisdom” is precisely his resistance to—and interruption of—misplaced confidence. In other words, he discovers his own philosophical practice to be characterized by a certain humility, by the vigilant acknowledgment of a limit: *the limit separating what he knows from what he doesn’t know*.² Indeed, Socrates’ questions arise out of and would be impossible without this humility.

And yet, assuming there is some merit to what Socrates indicates here, and assuming we should all strive towards this humility, what might this mean concretely? How does one go about acknowledging this limit successfully? How does one know when one has achieved this? And what would it mean to sustain philosophical humility?

I want to suggest that: 1. implicit in the work of Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger are insightful—and surprisingly complementary—responses to these questions; and 2. while there have been, since Herbert Marcuse’s 1928 “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism,”³ several attempts to fuse Marxism and Heideggerian phenomenology, these attempts fall short insofar as they fail to investigate the kind of humility at work in Marx’s and Heidegger’s respective philosophical practice. Since associating “humility” with either of these thinkers will surely raise some eyebrows, I should clarify: my focus in this essay is not humility in the broad sense but solely that quite specific mode of humility requisite for rigorous philosophical inquiry.

My goal here is modest: drawing on an earlier piece in which I discuss Heidegger’s oddly reflexive analysis in *Being and Time*, I will flag some crucial but typically overlooked parallels between Heidegger and Marx; on the basis of these parallels, I will then sketch, at least in a preliminary fashion, an approach to reading Marx that should help us avoid an obstacle plaguing contemporary Marxism. Due in part to an ambiguity in Marx’s work, Marxists have struggled to provide a clear, non-dogmatic response to the question: “precisely what is the ultimate evidential basis for Marx’s claims? why ought I take these claims seriously?”⁴ While I won’t pretend to resolve this question fully here, I will suggest a way to do so, a way that requires reconsidering what Marx is doing philosophically—and what philosophical humility is.

First, though, I want to touch briefly on another effort to maintain philosophical humility: that of *modern empiricism*. As we will see, though Marx and Heidegger seem to stand on opposite sides of the fence where empiricism is concerned, one embracing at least a certain iteration of it, the other critically challenging it, matters are not so simple.

EMPIRICISM’S HUMILITY

What would it mean for a modern empiricist⁵—David Hume, for instance—to

maintain Socratic humility, to acknowledge the difference between what we know and don't know?

For Hume, respecting this limit means allowing our interpretations of the world to be shaped by the phenomena we encounter, *precisely as we encounter them*. More specifically: we must let what we say be shaped by the immediate *sense impressions* we actually have. Thus:

1. Regarding our *vocabulary*: since sense impressions, for Hume, constitute the origin of any idea we could possibly have, “[when] we entertain... any suspicion, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?*”⁶ By way of this litmus test, we can jettison those allegedly philosophical terms that are in fact empty, meaningless.
2. Regarding our *propositions*: any proposition that is not merely a trivial “relation of ideas” (e.g., a triangle is a 3-sided figure, a bachelor is an unmarried man), any proposition that actually *says* something about the world—any “*matter of fact*”—must be based on the “present [or past] testimony of our senses,”⁷ i.e., on *sense impressions*.

Consider this example, with which Hume was likely familiar: the accepted Aristotelian view, in Galileo's day, was that all heavenly bodies were perfect spheres. But Galileo insisted, on the basis of empirical evidence, that we modify this view. Specifically, observing the moon through the recently invented telescope, he noticed that there were irregularities on the moon's surface. Some of his contemporaries were so wedded to the accepted view that they challenged him to disprove the existence of an invisible, crystalline substance filling in the irregularities, producing a perfect sphere. In response, Galileo allegedly replied, mockingly, that they, in turn, couldn't prove there weren't transparent, crystalline mountains on top of their “perfect crystalline sphere.”⁸

Whatever else it is, rigorous empiricism is an example of philosophical practice reflecting humbly—critically—on itself and its most entrenched convictions. Its Socratic hope is that, on the basis of this reflection, we might be able to engage in philosophical practice more rigorously, more effectively, “[limiting]... our inquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding.”⁹ Hume concludes that we respect this limit when, in our epistemic claims, we put forth only those matter-of-fact propositions that are:

1. *meaningful* (e.g., containing only meaningful vocabulary derived from sense impressions)
2. *true* (corresponding with actual states of affairs)
3. *justified* (backed up by the testimony of our senses, i.e., *shown* to be true)

And yet, to embrace even this conclusion with dogmatic confidence would be to misunderstand the self-critical spirit of Hume’s decidedly *skeptical* mode of empiricism.¹⁰ He was well aware that even empiricism’s most painstaking effort to understand itself can stray off-course. Case in point: though he picks up the empiricist baton passed down to him by Locke and Berkeley, following through on their careful attempts to ground matter-of-fact claims on immediate sensation, he does so precisely by critically interrupting and modifying their efforts, holding them accountable to the phenomena (e.g., he jettisons Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary properties¹¹ and Berkeley’s conception of “mind” or “spirit”¹²). In short, Hume’s philosophical practice *is* empiricism scrutinizing itself critically—a precarious and tentative activity that never reaches a secure terminus but rather exercises “a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which... ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner.”¹³ His mode of skepticism is no “state” at which we arrive but rather an incessant restlessness of reason, “even with regard to that skepticism [itself].”¹⁴

We will come back to this.

HEIDEGGER'S HUMILITY

Like Socrates and Hume, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* turns his attention reflexively towards his own philosophical practice and scrutinizes it; and he appears, like Hume, to offer an interpretation of what it would mean to maintain Socratic humility. Heidegger names this reflexive philosophical practice *hermeneutic phenomenology* and expresses its guiding principle midway through *Being and Time*:

...[Our] constant task is never to allow our [interpretive fore-structures] to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures *in terms of the things themselves*.¹⁵ [my emphasis]

Heidegger's odd vocabulary and mode of expression aside, this principle seems, at least in key respects, very close to that of empiricism. The expression "the things themselves" [*den Sachen selbst*] signifies "phenomena;"¹⁶ and Heidegger insists, as would Hume, that we let our interpretations of the world be shaped by the phenomena we encounter, *precisely as we encounter them*. Only in this way can we avoid transgressing the Socratic limit. To be sure, Heidegger's use of "phenomenon" is unconventional: in order to avoid the ambiguity plaguing our contemporary use of the term, he employs the original Greek "φαίνόμενον," i.e., "that which shows itself, the manifest."¹⁷ But an empiricist would likely be fine with this expression, at least initially. Indeed, one could imagine Hume asking: what could "what shows itself" signify, if not sense impressions?

This principle fleshes out a phenomenological requirement emphasized by Heidegger early in the text: our interpretations must, in each case, let the phenomenon "be seen from itself in the very way it shows itself from itself."¹⁸ Failure to achieve this results in dissimulative, *semblant* [*scheinbar*] interpretations, ones that let the phenomenon be seen from itself only "as it is not."¹⁹ This, for Heidegger, is what it means to fail to acknowledge the difference between what

we know and don't know.

And yet, if both Hume and Heidegger strive for philosophical humility by way of the same guiding principle, what constitutes Heidegger's critical distance from empiricism? If they both insist on letting encountered phenomena reshape our interpretations, wherein lies the tension between them?

First, just to be clear: that Heidegger critically challenges modern empiricism does *not* mean he undermines the legitimacy of the vast number of concrete empirical claims that scientists (and the rest of us) regularly put forth about the world. Rather, he challenges the *way* empiricism reflects on and interprets what these claims are—and aren't—ultimately doing and what their ultimate basis is. More specifically, by pushing empiricism to reflect critically on its own entrenched interpretive lenses and habits—precisely as Hume insists we do—Heidegger gradually shows that we aren't justified taking the phenomena, precisely *as we encounter them*, to be sense impressions: phenomena must be conceived otherwise.

Heidegger would certainly acknowledge that, in our experience, we *sometimes* encounter what might legitimately be called “sense impressions;” that is to say, our relation to phenomena can be passive or receptive in a certain way. But precisely how does this happen? And when? And in relation to what other, prior encounters?

Granted, striving for rigorous—humble—philosophical practice means finding myself having already set my sights on being a disinterested observer, someone who, in a hands-off theoretical manner, seeks the truth (and who else but a “disinterested observer” could successfully acknowledge the difference between what we know and don't know?). Such comportment obviously needs to be passive or receptive in some sense, given that acknowledging what is true involves *submitting* to what we encounter, allowing it to shape our views. Heidegger, like anyone doing philosophy, finds himself committed to this in some sense. And yet, according to Heidegger, when, in our attempt to be disinterested observers, we *rigorously*—Socratically—turn our gaze towards the very philosophical practice

in which we are engaged, this practice, this seemingly disinterested observation—“theory” in the broad sense—reveals itself to be quite different from what we initially took it to be; *and we are thus obliged to modify our interpretation of it.*

Heidegger’s phenomenological description of philosophical practice is sometimes confusing and difficult to follow, employing odd terminology in unusual ways. But there is good reason for this: he is trying to interrupt the entrenched and misleading interpretations we find ourselves already employing so that we start to notice things we should have been noticing all along. I have discussed this in detail elsewhere.²⁰ Here, I will restrict myself to five broad points that should be uncontroversial to those familiar with Heidegger—followed by my primary, more controversial point about Heidegger’s philosophical practice.

First, Heidegger shows that, when we attempt theoretically to “just look at” phenomena—as philosophers tend to do—we have in fact already modified the everyday way in which we actually encounter them. That is to say, in theoretical observation we no longer interpret the phenomena *precisely as we encounter them*. Indeed, our primary way of relating to things in the world

is not just a fixed staring at something that is purely present-at-hand.... If [theoretical] knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a *deficiency* in our having to do with the world concernfully [*besorgenden*] [i.e., practically].²¹

What we tend to think of as disinterested theoretical knowing is no immediate relation to phenomena but rather a *deficiency* in—a *modification* of—the relationship to phenomena that we already have, a relationship that precedes and underlies any mere observation. More specifically:

When [our practical] concern holds back from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole remaining mode of [comportment], the mode of just tarrying alongside.... This kind of

Being towards the world is one which lets us encounter entities within-the-world purely in the *way they look* (εἶδος) (ibid.).²²

Things encountered in this derivative, modified way are what Heidegger refers to as the “present-at-hand” [*das Vorhandene*].

Secondly, in contrast to this derivative, modified relation to phenomena, our predominant everyday encounter with them happens in our *practical* engagement with what Heidegger calls ready-to-hand “equipment” [*das Zeug*]: my encounter with doorknobs, shoes, pens, steering wheels, etc., takes place not by way of “observing” them but via *using* them. And, in this usage, I encounter these phenomena not one at a time, as discrete things; rather, I encounter them, in the first instance, as *interconnected*, as a *coherent totality* or backdrop-context with which I am already familiar:

Equipment...always is *in terms of* its belonging to other equipment: ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room. These ‘Things’ never show themselves as they are for themselves so as to add up to a sum of *realia* and fill up a room. What we encounter as closest to us...is the room....Out of this the ‘arrangement’ emerges, and it is in this that any ‘individual’ item of equipment shows itself. Before it does so, a totality of equipment has already been discovered.²³

Consider, for instance, what it means for someone to know their way around their workshop: as I pursue some determinate practical goal (e.g., gluing a broken chair), it is on the basis of my tacit familiarity with the interconnected, already organized totality of available equipment that I am able to restrict my focus to this or that “ready-to-hand” [*zuhandene*] tool such that it stands out explicitly against the backdrop, as I reach out and grab *it* rather than something else. And indeed, just as I explicitly encounter any particular, discrete tool only in terms of and on the basis of my prior familiarity with some practical context, likewise, and more broadly, an explicit comportment towards *any* particular, discrete entity within

the world is possible only on the basis of my prior familiarity with some ready-to-hand totality.

Thirdly, this practical engagement whereby I encounter phenomena is in each case *interpretive* (according to Heidegger's broad, unconventional use of the term "interpretation"[*Auslegung*]).

In any given equipmental totality with which we're already familiar—within which we know our way around—we don't typically encounter ourselves "prior to taking action," gazing disinterestedly at the available practical possibilities in front of us (hammer, saw, screwdriver, wrench, etc.); rather, we find ourselves as already actively engaged, in the swim of things, e.g., reaching out for *this* hammer, in order to fasten *this* board to *this* wall, for the sake of *this* shed we are building. In short: I *interpret* this hammer—I zero in on it—as something within my equipmental totality with which to achieve this practical goal. In each case, interpretation restricts its focus and activity to some specific possibility against and on the basis of a backdrop that we already understand, a totality that makes such zeroing in possible. In each case, our interpretive comportment exhibits this "from... towards" structure: it has already set out *from* a familiar holistic context *towards* this or that concrete possibility within it (e.g., grabbing this steering wheel, listening to this song on the radio, walking through this door, speaking about this phenomenologist, etc.).

Finally, this interpretation, this zeroing-in, is *not* an optional activity we engage in here or there, from time to time. That we exist *is*, in each case, to find ourselves always already interpreting.²⁴

Fourthly, Philosophy's very attempt to "talk about the world" humbly—disinterestedly—by putting forth true propositions about it, is itself irreducibly *interpretive* in the above-mentioned sense. This requires that we radically rethink what such talk is—and isn't—doing.

When Hume discusses "judgments," or when contemporary philosophers

discuss “propositions”, they focus primarily not on the activity—the gesture—of assertion but rather on what they take such gestures to be *putting forth*: something present-at-hand that can be considered and discussed theoretically, something that has a “truth value.” Heidegger would insist that such a focus is premature if it misinterprets 1) the assertoric gestures that puts forth such propositions or 2) the relation between the gesture and what is put forth. And indeed, for Heidegger, “assertion” [*Aussage*] is precisely a mode of interpretive comportment: it is a way of zeroing in on specific, concrete possibilities within and against a backdrop that we already comprehend.²⁵

To be sure, the act of asserting certainly *produces* something that can then subsequently be taken up and looked at as something present-at-hand. If I were to say to you “there are blackberries behind the barn!” you might well respond (for instance, if you were a logician): “‘There are blackberries behind the barn’ is an atomic proposition.” And yet, apart from whatever present-at-hand thing it puts forth, an assertoric gesture is itself an action, an interpretive pointing out: the way it zeroes in on specific possibilities is not to “build a shed” but to *show* something, to draw others’ attention to it. For instance, my literally pointing to the clock on the wall, ostensibly, is a way for me, in the midst of all the equipment in the room, to direct your interpretive attention solely to this piece, such that everything else fades into the background; likewise, my *saying* “the clock on the wall is five minutes fast”—my assertoric gesture—is a discursive mode of precisely the same interpretive pointing out. In contrast, what we call “propositions” are merely what is left in the wake of such gestures; they are what we encounter when, after the fact, we take up the product—the “husks”—of these gestures as something present-at-hand.

One key point emphasized by Heidegger is that this assertoric mode of interpretive zeroing in is extremely narrow: unlike our non-discursive modes of interpretation that still keep in view the backdrop in terms of which they zero in on this or that concrete possibility (grabbing this hammer, that screwdriver, etc.), the tendency of assertion—of discursive pointing out—is to “dim down” this backdrop and

focus solely on what can be isolated in the foreground as something present-at-hand.²⁶

At any rate, assertion is, as Heidegger emphasizes in §7 of *Being and Time*, the predominant way in which philosophy shows things. And so, philosophy cannot fully—and humbly—comprehend its own practice if it fails to reflect on and comprehend this mode of showing.

Fifthly and finally: because we exist in a world with others, in a world that is historical, our interpretive habits and structures—both the nondiscursive and discursive *ways* we zero in on phenomena—are passed down and become entrenched: for the most part, as I comport myself towards this or that specific concrete possibility, I tend to do so *in precisely the way I have encountered most people doing so*. Thus, I tend to build my shed the same way my neighbours built theirs, using the kind of tools they used; I tend to interpret the shape of the heavenly spheres the same way the scholars who preceded me interpreted them; and I tend to take up and interpret notions like “sense impression” in the very way they’ve been interpretively handed down to me.

Heidegger refers to the entrenched habits, structures and vocabulary into which we find ourselves historically thrown as our “*facticity*” [*Faktizität*]; and it is against this that humble philosophical practice is always obliged to struggle (which is why, for Heidegger, philosophical practice is irreducibly *historical*).²⁷ Again: “[Our] constant task is never to allow our [interpretive fore-structures] to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.”²⁸

* * *

How, then, *do* we encounter “sense impressions”? And when? And in relation to what else?

For Heidegger, “sense impressions” are indeed something we encounter—but only when we have already modified our interpretive relation to phenomena, narrowly comporting ourselves towards what is “present-at-hand in the ready-to-hand.”²⁹ Only by “dimming down” the relation we already have to ready-to-hand phenomena can we isolate this or that abstract “sense impression.” For instance, while our primary way of interpreting a hammer is to pick it up and use it, it is also possible to disengage from such usage and “just look at it”—or just “make assertions about it”—as something present-at-hand. Only once we’ve opted for this narrow interpretive comportment can we then narrow our focus further, isolating and talking about the present-at-hand sense impressions we encounter *in* our “just looking at the present-at-hand hammer”:

It requires a very artificial; and complicated frame of mind to ‘hear’ a ‘pure noise’. The fact that motor-cycles and wagons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case [we]... already [dwell] alongside what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; [we] certainly [do] not dwell proximally alongside ‘sensations.’³⁰

But note, Heidegger is not suggesting that assertions about the present-at-hand (e.g., our assertions about “sense impressions”) are simply “false”; indeed, we can—and should—make assertions about such things. But these assertions are truncated, one-sided and *semblant*, if they fail to acknowledge the various backdrop phenomena—the “things themselves”—that underlie and render possible presence-at-hand. As I mentioned in my *fourth* point above, any attempt to “talk about things,” i.e., any body of assertions, is always directed interpretively towards the present-at-hand in a way that dims down all else. This is one reason philosophers have such a difficult time successfully acknowledging backdrop phenomena by way of their assertions; and it is one of the reasons my *fifth* point, above, is such a crucial feature of hermeneutic phenomenology: only by taking up and modifying our own entrenched interpretive habits—in this case, only by somehow taking up and pushing back against this problematic assertoric tendency—can we hope to let backdrop phenomena be encountered precisely in

the *way* they show themselves from themselves.

The irreducibly *responsive*, factually situated nature of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology should make it clear why his relation to empiricism is neither a simple endorsement nor a rejection of it: he starts out from empiricism's guiding principle; but he applies this principle, reflexively, to empiricism's *own* operative notions of "sense impression" and "judgment" (i.e., proposition). In short, Heidegger brings empiricism—*on its own terms*, as it strives to acknowledge the difference between what it knows and doesn't know—to modify its interpretations such that they better let the phenomena be encountered precisely as we encounter them, including the phenomenon of its own philosophical practice. As far as Heidegger is concerned, empiricism isn't *replaced* by hermeneutic phenomenology; rather, when carried through rigorously, humbly, empiricism *becomes* hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is less a method Heidegger introduces than a name for what all rigorous philosophy—including Hume's tentative, vigilantly self-scrutinous skepticism—moves toward, whether it realizes this explicitly or not.

Before turning to Marx, we need to consider, at least briefly, my primary, controversial point about Heidegger's philosophical practice, a point concerning an often overlooked complication at the heart of his hermeneutic phenomenology.

Thus far, my synopsis suggests that Heidegger presents an account of philosophical practice—and of philosophical humility—that functions as a kind of "correction" of the empiricist account. This isn't really what is going on. To be sure, he does present an account of sorts (*Being and Time* is, after all, largely a collection of assertions); but it is plagued with a problem. *On the one hand*, Heidegger states explicitly that: 1) philosophy shows primarily by way of theoretical assertions;³¹ and 2) theoretical assertions are capable of zeroing in solely on what is present-at-hand.³² And yet, *on the other hand*, the primary phenomena that philosophy is most obliged to show, i.e., to interpret rigorously by way of its responsibly modified assertions, are *not* present-at-hand phenomena but rather what I referred to

above as “backdrop” phenomena (e.g., the ready-to-hand, worldhood, Dasein’s “there”[*Da*], Being, temporality, etc.). Thus, it would seem that, due to the very nature of theoretical assertion, philosophy is *incapable* of letting the most basic phenomena be encountered precisely as we encounter them, i.e., without dissimulation. Indeed, Hume would likely insist, skeptically, that such alleged phenomena lie beyond the limit of the knowable.

I take this to be a fraught issue in *Being and Time* that Heidegger does not—at least in the published portion of the text—address sufficiently. Nevertheless, on my reading, he provides the tools necessary for resolving this problem. The key point to keep in view is that assertoric gestures can successfully show things in *two* distinct ways:

1. Assertions about present-at-hand *phenomena*—precisely in their capacity as *successful assertions*—can reveal these phenomena, without dissimulation. That is to say, the present-at-hand is precisely what these assertions, in the *way* they zero in interpretively, are capable of pointing out successfully.
2. In contrast, *philosophical* assertions—assertions about more elusive, backdrop phenomena—are capable of pointing out these phenomena successfully only insofar as they *fail as assertions*. There are some cases where letting our interpretations of the world be shaped by phenomena precisely as we encounter them requires *interrupting* the body of assertions about them that has been handed down to us, “clearing the ground,” as it were, so that the phenomena in question are no longer dissimulated as something merely “present-at-hand.”³³

Consider this concrete example: “*there is a difference between present-at-hand and ready-to-hand phenomena.*” On the one hand, this assertion—which summarizes one of Heidegger’s key points in *Being and Time*—certainly attempts to point out a crucial backdrop phenomenon (the ready-to-hand). On the other hand, the

assertion itself, in its capacity as a theoretical assertion, *fails*: while it strives to point out—without dissimulation—the difference between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand, the very fact that it is a theoretical assertion means it reduces readiness-to-hand to a present-at-hand thing, thereby dissimulating the very difference it strives to point out. And yet, it is through its explicit failure as an assertion—through its assertoric self-interruption—that the interpretive gesture nevertheless *succeeds* in a different way, letting the phenomenon “be seen from itself in the very way it shows itself from itself”:³⁴ in this gesture, the backdrop phenomenon is successfully “lit up” for us, pointed out as precisely that which withdraws or “withholds itself” [*Ansichhaltens*] from all the present-at-hand things that assertion is able to point out.³⁵ Only here do we overcome the dissimulation operative in the way we normally talk about such phenomena, finally attaining “knowledge of the things themselves”—albeit, in an utterly counterintuitive way that forces us to rethink, quite radically, what philosophical showing—and philosophical knowledge—are.

So we see that, notwithstanding its insistence on a restless skepticism “even with regard to... skepticism,” Hume’s analysis leaves a key assumption uninvestigated: it takes for granted that the limit dividing the known from the unknown is equivalent to the limit circumscribing true, justified—*successful*—propositions. It fails to consider the possibility, exhibited by Heidegger, that the most radically important phenomena might be successfully pointed out, philosophically, only via assertoric self-interruption.

To recap: on my reading, Heidegger offers us no proper stance, no terminal, uninterrupted “account,” nothing secure to hold on to. Philosophical humility, for him, is in each case carried out via an arc of inquiry that must be repeated over and over, starting out from the concrete discursive and nondiscursive circumstances into which we find ourselves factually thrown, and culminating in an *interruption* that successfully points out the “backdrop” phenomenon we have been striving to reveal:

1. We cannot but start out from the entrenched interpretations and vocabulary in which we find ourselves situated;
2. We bring these interpretations—on their own terms—to modify themselves into a new account that better points out the phenomenon; and yet, inevitably,
3. This account reaches a point where it can successfully point out the phenomenon only when—at a decisive juncture that implicates the whole account—it interrupts itself as a coherent collection of theoretical assertions.

Incidentally, while Levinas is certainly right that there is a “totalizing” aspect to Heidegger’s (and indeed to every) philosophical effort,³⁶ he misses that this marks a *penultimate* step for Heidegger, one that gives way to a mode of showing that interrupts any possible totalization, any graspable whole.

As I’ve indicated, this is but a rough synopsis of a highly complex issue. It would take too much to clarify the implications my reading has for the whole arc of Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis, for assessing the relationship between *Being and Time* and Heidegger’s subsequent work, or for rethinking philosophical showing as such. In any case, as I’ve argued elsewhere,³⁷ reading Heidegger in this way helps us make sense of some of his most perplexing claims—this one, for instance: “There is no Heideggerian philosophy; and, if there were one, it wouldn’t interest me.”³⁸

MARX’S HUMILITY

While Marx clearly holds himself at arm’s length from the philosophical tradition in certain respects, the nature of his critical distance is ambiguous. That he grappled with so many different kinds and registers of issues leaves us with an incomplete and disjointed—and in no way systematic—body of work. Some

key segments, often precisely where one would like to have seen much more philosophical elaboration and clarification, leave us with unanswered and often undeveloped questions, making it difficult to produce a coherent account of what he is doing as a whole, of how his approach and views shift over time, of his precise relation to other philosophical lines of inquiry, etc.³⁹ To whatever extent Marx himself explicitly worked out the philosophical implications of his own insights (very much an open question), his writing leaves us many dots to connect.

Keeping this ambiguity in mind, perhaps we ought begin by asking: is anything like “philosophical humility” even on Marx’s radar? There are passages that might make one wonder.

Most famously, for instance, we have the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, where Marx appears to distinguish himself from what philosophers do, humbly or otherwise: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”⁴⁰ And *The German Ideology* opens with Marx’s and Engel’s scathing critique of their contemporaries who, naively committed to liberating people by way of philosophical reflection, only ever end up “fighting against ‘*phrases*’”⁴¹—and do so only by way of yet more phrases. As Marx and Engels put it: “It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings.”⁴² As they emphasize, later in the text: “The real, practical dissolution of these phrases, the removal of these notions from the consciousness of men, will... be effected by altered circumstances, not by theoretical deductions.”⁴³ These are just a few of the spots where Marx indicates that: 1) philosophical discourse arises from and is shaped by underlying material conditions about which it is largely blind; and 2) changing the world—revolutionary practice—is not a matter of subordinating collective action to some abstract philosophical vision.

And yet, whatever distance Marx takes from the philosophical tradition, he obviously strives to move past ideological dissimulation and “get to the bottom of things” about the material world; and, though he seeks truth not for its own sake

but ultimately for the sake of revolutionary practice, that he is nevertheless seeking it requires a certain *humility*. Moreover, realizing that the only theoretical tools and materials at his disposal come from the philosophical tradition (e.g., from Hegel), Marx, like Hume and Heidegger, turns his own inquiry back on itself, pushing it to understand itself better in the way it arises from and responds to the philosophy that precedes it—and pushing it to modify itself accordingly, so that it seeks truth more effectively. Thus does Marx investigate: 1) philosophy's emergence from the concrete "division of material and mental labour;"⁴⁴ 2) the historical-material conditions underlying—and radically limiting—philosophy's attempts to "produce a correct consciousness about an *existing* fact;"⁴⁵ and 3) the way philosophical ideas and views arise out of and function to sustain ruling class interests.⁴⁶

But if Marx strives to comport himself towards both the material world and his own inquiry in a philosophically humble manner, what shape does this humility take, concretely, in his work?

We find a clue in his various appeals to *empirical evidence*. For instance, in *The German Ideology*:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live....These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.⁴⁷

In this text, Marx refers repeatedly to this empirical basis. For instance: "Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production."⁴⁸ Indeed, he goes so far as to say that, when we conceive things "as they really are and happened, every profound philosophical problem is resolved...into an empirical fact."⁴⁹ So here we seem to have Marx's response to the question: "what is the ultimate basis for your claims? why ought we take your claims seriously?"

Granted, Marx doesn't go into further detail in these passages: precisely what he means by "empirical" is left unclear. And obviously, not every appeal to empirical evidence indicates an "empiricism" (e.g., Kant—by no means an empiricist—employs both empirical *and* a priori modes of evidence). Moreover, Marx takes pains to distinguish himself from the "abstract" modern empiricists.⁵⁰ Finally, Marx's self-professed "dialectical method,"⁵¹ inasmuch as it appeals to a totality exceeding and situating any discretely encountered empirical datum, would seem irreducible to empiricism (we will come back to this). But the extent to which Marx prioritizes empirical evidence here, claiming that his premises are verified in a *purely* empirical way, shows that he is an empiricist of some sort—at least in the broadest sense of the term.⁵²

So what can we glean from Marx's elliptical remarks about empirical verification? Is his empiricism consistent with Hume's? Would it immediately fall under Heidegger's critical scrutiny as something requiring interruption?

It is important to keep in mind, first of all, that Marx's empiricism functions as an interruption of the idealism to which he critically responds:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking...is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.⁵³

Marx wants to curtail the excesses of Hegelian idealism by bringing it back to Earth, by rendering it thoroughly materialist—which requires grounding our claims in the empirical register.

However, closer attention reveals something surprising. While it might seem to go without saying that empirical evidence always involves, at the very least, an appeal to passively received sense impressions, certain passages suggest that, for Marx, this

appeal is misguided. For instance, concerning one of his materialist contemporaries, he writes: “Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking* [e.g., Hegelian idealism], appeals to *sensuous contemplation*; but he does not conceive sensuousness as *practical*, human-sensuous activity”.⁵⁴ To be sure, one *might* interpret Marx’s claim here to concern not the nature of “empirical evidence” as such but rather the fact that Feuerbach ought have directed his empirical attention more narrowly towards “human activity” specifically. But this interpretation would miss Marx’s quite radical point:

The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of *the object or of contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectivity....Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. Hence, in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude [rather than the practical] as the only genuinely human attitude...⁵⁵

Here, Marx stresses that the problem is Feuerbach’s *own* theoretical comportment, i.e., the attitude whereby, in a hands-off way, the thinker just looks at the world contemplatively and thereby believes he gains access to the evidence received via the senses. Granted, Marx, in keeping with empiricism, still prioritizes “sensuousness;” but, by insisting that the most immediately sensuous is “practical human *activity*,” he turns the notion of “passively received sense impression” on its head. For Marx, Feuerbach’s attitude misinterprets the most basic phenomena to which we have access: what we encounter not when we step back and observe some present-at-hand given but when we ourselves are *practically engaged*.

This, our most immediate active engagement—rather than passively received sense data—is the “empirical” evidence to which Marx appeals, the evidence that ultimately verifies his premises. Indeed, this activity is the very “matter” of his materialism.

Marx underscores this by emphasizing that, on the one hand, when we observe and talk about humans as objects, we find that they “can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like.” In contrast, “[*they*] *themselves* begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce.... As individuals express their life, so they are.”[my emphasis]⁵⁶ It is on this activity, this praxis in which we find ourselves already engaged, that we must focus; *this* is the phenomenon we must investigate, if we are to be rigorously empiricist in Marx’s sense.

The proximity to Heidegger should be clear: just as Heidegger brings empiricism to transform itself into hermeneutic phenomenology, Marx pushes it to transform itself into historical materialism. Thus does Marx distinguish himself from “the [modern] empiricists (themselves still abstract),” for whom history is but a “collection of dead facts.”⁵⁷ Moreover, like Heidegger, Marx insists that theoretical comportment can understand itself only if it traces its origin back to the practical register:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process....Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.⁵⁸

And note that for Marx, as for Heidegger, this empirical “earth” from which we set out (i.e., the concrete phenomena which ought shape our interpretations) is no jumbled manifold but the internally differentiated and dynamic social *whole* of practical engagement in which we find ourselves immersed.⁵⁹ Thus, Karel Kosík⁶⁰ is right to dismiss Karl Popper’s critique of Marx: Popper misses the mark from the start inasmuch as he dogmatically employs an unclarified—and unjustified—*atomistic* conception of empirical evidence,⁶¹ thereby failing to acknowledge the

interconnected, holistic character of “the things themselves.”

And finally, again like Heidegger, Marx 1. consciously takes up and starts out from precisely the interpretive vocabulary, habits and structures he finds handed down to him and 2. pushes these interpretations to modify themselves—on their own terms—such that they better point out the phenomena we encounter. For instance, with respect to the political economy of his day (e.g., Adam Smith, Ricardo, etc.), Marx writes in his *Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844*:

We have proceeded from the premises of political economy. We have accepted its language and its laws....On the basis of political economy itself, *in its own words*, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities.⁶² [my emphasis]

I suggest, contra Novak and Althusser, that what Marx describes himself as doing here with political economy he *also* does with empiricism, employing “its own words” not in order to oppose it but in order to help it more effectively—more rigorously—do the very thing it is already striving to do.

So, here is my closing question—and it is an earnest question, not at all rhetorical: given Marx’s ambiguity concerning what he is doing philosophically; given his commitment to philosophical humility—coupled with a seemingly paradoxical commitment to *break* from philosophy (e.g., the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach); given that, like Heidegger, Marx strives to acknowledge a register of underlying “practical” phenomena inevitably dissimulated by theoretical observation (e.g., Feuerbach); and given that, again very much like Heidegger, Marx consciously takes up and starts out from the interpretive vocabulary, habits and structures which he finds handed down to him, factically, in order to modify these interpretations, on their own terms, such that they better point out phenomena—*given all these things, might it be worth considering whether Marx’s philosophical humility follows a path that is ultimately, like Heidegger’s, self-interruptive in certain key respects?*

More specifically, is it possible that Marx 1) consciously starts out from the entrenched

interpretations in which he finds himself situated, 2) strives to transform these entrenched interpretations—on their own terms—into an account that is shaped by the phenomena *precisely as we encounter them*, but 3) reaches a point where—at least with respect to certain basic phenomena—successfully pointing out these phenomena is achieved only by way of the account’s self-interruption? In other words, might there be a sense in which, just as there is ultimately no over-arching Heideggerian account that escapes self-interruption, no “Heideggerian philosophy”, there is also no “Marxist philosophy”?

Perhaps Derrida was right to wonder whether “the idea of Marxism—the self-identity of a Marxist discourse or system or even a science or philosophy—is not in principle incompatible with the event Marx.”⁶³

One might object that such interruption would undermine Marx’s most important work, torpedoing his empirically concrete political economical and historical materialist accounts; but this misunderstands the register at issue here. As we see in Plato’s “Good,” Kant’s “unconditioned,” etc., our assertoric showing becomes problematic only where our line of inquiry runs up against the question of *ultimate* foundations—and no concrete account of the world can avoid this question.⁶⁴ What I’m suggesting is no nihilistic destruction of “the empirical details” but rather a re-evaluation of the explicitly *philosophical* junctures in our accounts, those spots where these accounts themselves oblige us to *show* the ultimate evidential basis for our various concrete claims.

Of course, Marx’s primary concern is liberation through collective revolutionary action—not theory. Nevertheless, such action is inextricably connected to the pursuit of truth. One advantage of interpreting Marx’s philosophical practice as self-interruptive: it helps us reconcile our obligation to talk about phenomena *precisely as we encounter them* with the famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”⁶⁵ While one *could* view this thesis as an exhortation to “break free from philosophy,” i.e., to set it aside and instead engage in revolutionary practice purged of theoretical

concerns, this fails to acknowledge the philosophical humility that, as we have seen, is very much alive in Marx's work. On the other hand, if we view this passage as an exhortation "for philosophy to break free from itself" at decisive junctures, i.e., to push certain entrenched interpretations to the point where they interrupt themselves, and if—contra Hume—we stop assuming that successful philosophical showing happens only via successful assertions, it would then seem that philosophy can: 1) help us better point out phenomena *precisely as we encounter them*, thereby fulfilling its own humble task, while 2) helping in its own small way to clear away the dissimulative—ideological—obstacles undermining the revolutionary efforts of organized labour.

As indicated at the outset, my goal here is modest: I've proposed an approach to reading Marx, in light of Heidegger's early work, that might help Marxists clarify how his claims are justified and how his thought connects with the philosophical tradition. In my outline of this approach, I've sidestepped multiple questions that such a reading would have to take up explicitly—first and foremost: the question of *dialectical method*. A developed reading of Marx would, at the very least, need to address these two issues in detail:

1. Marx's reference to "purely empirical" verification notwithstanding, his primary interlocutor in the philosophical tradition is not Hume but *Hegel*, whose method Marx claims to be the "direct opposite" of his own. But precisely what does this mean? What does Marx—rightly or wrongly—take Hegel's dialectical method to be? What, in it, is he striving to preserve? And what is he modifying, reversing? Clearly, Marx agrees with Hegel that, in some respect, "[the] true is the whole"⁶⁶ and that dialectical method cannot but engage this whole; but Marx also takes Hegel to have greatly exaggerated the role "the Idea," consciousness, and self-consciousness play in this irreducibly *material* whole—and in the acknowledgment of it. Precisely how Marx takes up and modifies Hegel's whole, dialectically, the extent to which his approach dovetails with Heidegger's interruptive acknowledgment of "holistic" backdrop

phenomena, and whether the very terms “whole” and “totality” ultimately require interruption of some sort, warrant thorough investigation.

2. While Marx’s claims about his own dialectical method are sketchy, some of them seem, at first glance, to be incongruous with the kind of interruptive showing I’m proposing here. Specifically, Marx indicates that, while we must certainly set out from empirical phenomena, “immediate being,” taken by itself, is but a “pure semblance,” i.e., “*the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it*”⁶⁷ (for example, the immediately observable circulation of commodities in the marketplace is possible only on the basis of underlying features of the concrete whole that are *not* immediately observable). In other words, whereas Heidegger speaks of the most elusive, primal phenomena as having nothing behind or beneath them, Marx appears to be striving for an account that moves *beneath* one-sided, surface phenomena in order to grasp the dynamic, internally differentiated concrete whole situating them and making them possible: he seems to want an adequate—uninterrupted—assertoric account. In his *Grundrisse*, for instance, Marx indicates that a rigorous theoretical account is something we *produce*, a “working up of observation and conception into concepts” such that, by way of careful abstraction, we achieve a “*reproduction* of the concrete [whole] by way of thought... as the concrete of the mind.” [my emphasis]⁶⁸ This, too, is obviously a major issue requiring careful consideration. Here I will just make two tentative points: a) when Marx refers here to the “pure semblance” of immediately grasped phenomenon, he is referring not to the “phenomenon” in Heidegger’s sense of the term but rather to what Heidegger calls “semblance” [*Scheinen, der Schein*], whereby the phenomenon is taken up by us *not* in the very way it shows itself but rather in a dissimulated mode, “as it is not;”⁶⁹ I would suggest that, since both thinkers insist we strive to produce an account that moves past semblance, there is no real tension between them here. Moreover, b)

since, in the *penultimate* step of his philosophical showing, Heidegger *also* strives to reproduce the concrete whole “in thought,” i.e., in an assertoric account, our question should be whether, for Marx, such an account reaches a point, as it does for Heidegger, where it successfully points out the most crucial phenomenon it has in view—i.e., *the material world as such*—only by interrupting itself.⁷⁰ Recall that, in keeping with Hegel,⁷¹ Marx repeatedly acknowledges a kind of dissimulation resulting not from ideological forces but from the very nature of conceptual abstraction, which fails to capture the elusively dynamic, fluid character of phenomena.⁷² Granted, such abstraction and the assertoric accounts we produce by way of it are indispensable for Marx; but he takes pains to emphasize that, viewed apart from the dynamic phenomena of “real history,” of “the actual life-process and the activity of... individuals,” “these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever.”⁷³ Our question then: while striving for a rigorous assertoric account is necessary for successfully pointing out primal phenomena, what shape does this success ultimately take for Marx? Is it merely a matter of correction, of interrupting a one-sided concatenation of phrases with a more appropriate one? Or is it something other than an account, something other than “[phrases] opposing other phrases”?⁷⁴ Is it perhaps a matter of bringing *phrases as such* to interrupt themselves so that “German reality”⁷⁵ can finally be seen from itself in the very way it shows itself from itself?

Of course, to my proposed approach to reading Marx, one might respond skeptically: *Speculation about what Marx meant by “empiricism” is pretty far removed from concrete political engagement. How does such esoteric reflection help show that Marx still has concrete significance for us today? And, even assuming Marx still is significant, what relevance does this alleged “self-interruptive showing” have for the revolutionary struggle that is his primary focus?*

These are fair questions. We need to keep in mind, first of all, that only close, careful

engagement with what Marx actually says, coupled with scrutiny of our concrete historical material circumstances, will ever tell us precisely how and to what extent he still has concrete significance for us today; but a crucial *part* of this engagement involves anticipating and being ready to respond adequately to questions like “precisely what does Marx mean by that?”, “why should I take Marx seriously on this point?”, “what ultimately justifies what Marx is claiming here?”, etc.

To be sure, investigating what Marx means by “empiricism” has only an *indirect* bearing on concrete political struggle—but it is an important bearing none the less, one that is not at all esoteric. Whether our goal is to endorse or dismiss Marx’s work, we need to ensure we have generously interpreted and fully understood what we’re endorsing or dismissing; we need to ensure we’re not simply building up or knocking down a caricature of Marx—something that happens all too often.

In the midst of political struggle, we need to ensure that we resist becoming dogmatists, that we maintain a modicum of self-critical humility. There is no other way to unmask ideology.

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NOTES

1. Aristotle, "Metaphysics." Trans. W.D. Ross. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 980a21.
2. Plato, "Apology." Trans. G.M.A. Grube. *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997, 21d.
3. *Tēlos* 4 (1969, 3-34). Cf. the work of Karel Kosík, Paul Piccone, Bernard Waldenfels, and, more recently, Andrew Feenberg and Laurence Hemming.
4. See, for instance, Richard Wolff's and Stephen Resnick's ambiguous and philosophically thin response to this question in the closing chapter of their *Economics: Marxian versus Neoclassical* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and in their "Althusser's Liberation of Marxism" (*The Althusserian Legacy*. Eds. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker. New York: Verso, 1993, 60-72). In the interview "Politics and Friendship" (*The Althusserian Legacy*, 183-231), Derrida laments the philosophical shortcomings of both Althusserian and "dogmatic" Marxism, where this question is concerned (e.g., 195-7, 208-9).
5. I focus here on *modern* empiricism not because I take it to be empiricism's most coherent or comprehensive iteration but because it is the primary mode to which Marx and Heidegger respond.
6. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977, 13.
7. Hume, *Enquiry*, 16.
8. Irving Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*. 8th ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990, 93.
9. Hume, *Enquiry*, 112.
10. Hume, *Enquiry*, section XII.
11. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001, 99-100.
12. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1906, 92-6.
13. Hume, *Enquiry*, 111.
14. Hume, *Enquiry*, 108-9.
15. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. 16th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemayer Verlag, 1986, 153.
16. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 27-8.
17. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 28.
18. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 34.
19. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 28-9, 33.
20. Gilbert-Walsh, "Following the Movement of a Showing: Heidegger's Ladder" (*Angelaki* 29:5 [forthcoming]).
21. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 61.
22. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 61.
23. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 68-9.
24. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §32.
25. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §33.
26. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 158.
27. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §29; cf. §74.
28. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 153.
29. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 158.

30. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 164.
31. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 32ff.
32. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 157-8.
33. As I argue in "Following the Movement of a Showing: Heidegger's Ladder," the function of philosophical assertions is analogous to that of the "broken tools" discussed by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, §16. More specifically, such "broken" assertions are precisely "signs" [*Zeichen*], as described in §17.
34. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 34.
35. Ibid., 75. One crucial distinction to keep in view, in order to avoid confusion: a failed assertion is not simply a self-contradictory proposition: an assertion is an interpretive gesture that *points out*, that *does* something, performatively; in contrast, a proposition is the present-at-hand product of the assertoric gesture, something left in its wake.
36. E.g., Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, 42ff.
37. Gilbert-Walsh, "Heidegger's Ladder."
38. Janicaud, D., *Heidegger en France*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2001, 154.
39. See, for instance, Maurice Blanchot's "Marx's Three Voices." Trans. Thomas Keenan. *New Political Science* 7:1 (1986, 17-20).
40. Karl Marx (with Friedrich Engels), *The German Ideology*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998, 571.
41. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 36.
42. Marx, *The German Ideology*.
43. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 64.
44. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 50.
45. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 65.
46. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 67-8.
47. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 36-7.
48. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 41.
49. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 45.
50. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 43.
51. E.g., Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1. 3rd German ed. Ed. Friedrich Engels. Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: International Publishers, 1967, 29.
52. While sharply distinguishing Marx from the modern empiricists is certainly justified, both George Novak and Louis Althusser mistakenly oppose Marx's dialectical materialism to *all* empiricism; and they do so without ever taking up and explicating precisely what Marx does—and doesn't—mean by "sensation," "empirical evidence," etc.; moreover, neither of them adequately addresses Marx's blunt appeals to "purely empirical" verification. See, for instance, Novak's *Empiricism and Its Evolution: A Marxist View* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1968, 96ff.) and Althusser's and Etienne Balibar's *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970, 35ff.).
53. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 29.
54. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 570.
55. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 569.
56. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 37.
57. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 43.
58. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 42.
59. See, for instance, Marx's *Grundrisse* (Trans. Martin Nicolaus. New York: Penguin Books, 1973,

- 100ff., 278). Cf. György Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* (Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971) and Karel Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete* (Trans. Karel Kovanda and James Schmidt. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1976), especially chapter 1.
60. Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, 18-19, 22-4.
61. Karl Popper, "The Poverty of Historicism II," *Economica* 11:43 (1944, 119-137; here 126ff.).
62. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." Trans. Martin Milligan. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978, 70.
63. Derrida, "Politics and Friendship," 221. Incidentally, Derrida was prepared to call his own work "materialism"—but only on the condition that "matter" remain an "irreducible heterogeneity," i.e., that we interrupt any account permitting it to function as a "transcendental signified" (Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 60, 64-5). Cf. Blanchot, "Marx's Three Voices," 19.
64. Some pretend that philosophy can simply side-step questions about ultimate foundations (e.g., Wolff's and Resnick's "nonabsolute epistemology," *Economics: Marxian versus Neoclassical*, 264ff.); however, as Kant shows, while such questions might not be answerable, neither are they philosophically avoidable (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Alan Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, Avii.).
65. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 574.
66. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977, 11.
67. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 255.
68. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 101.
69. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 28-9, 33.
70. What I am proposing calls into question Derrida's charge that Marx is in a key respect "pre-deconstructive," i.e., that he "[wants] to ground his critique... of the spectral simulacrum on an ontology" (*Specters of Marx*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994, 170). To be sure, inasmuch as he strives to produce an account, there is a sense in which Marx—like Heidegger, like Derrida—"wants" this; but if, as I've suggested, such an account is already in Marx the *penultimate* step towards self-interruption, Marx perhaps acknowledges the "non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present" (Derrida, *Specters*, xix) more effectively than Derrida suggests.
71. E.g., G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1969, 90-91. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 13, 23, 38.
72. E.g., Marx, *Grundrisse*, 817.
73. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 43.
74. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 36.
75. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 36.

a cartesian ethical narrative

andreea mihali

The strategy employed by many commentators of Descartes' practical philosophy consists of bringing to light similarities between Descartes' positions and already recognized ethical views, tracing the history of some of Descartes' ethical claims.¹ Lisa Shapiro, for instance, argues that Descartes is a virtue ethicist since he takes the supreme good to be a Stoic-inspired but less demanding notion of virtue,² while John Marshall's close analysis of Descartes' *morale par provision* and *The Passions of the Soul*³ concludes that Descartes proposes a version of Neo-Stoicism that is worth more consideration than it has so far received.⁴ Donald Rutherford brings to light both the similarities and the differences between Descartes' and

the Stoics' ethical views, contending that "[a]lthough Descartes disagrees with the Stoics on key points of doctrine, his broader understanding of the structure of ethical theory and its relation to metaphysics and natural philosophy mirrors that of the Stoics."⁵ Noa Naaman-Zauderer, by contrast, stresses that it is reasons and our attitudes toward reasons that matter, not consequences, in proposing a deontological reading of Descartes' theoretical and practical rationality that reads Descartes' notion of "supreme good" as amounting to the right use of the will.⁶ Deborah Brown sees Descartes' ethics as recommending minimizing regret and maximizing legitimate self-esteem,⁷ while for J.B. Schneewind Descartes holds that "[s]elf-perfection, either through increased knowledge or, lacking that, through constant will, is the key to all of morality. And only seeing for ourselves will give us the knowledge we need."⁸

Despite bringing to our attention important facets of Descartes' ethical thought⁹, these interpretations are, in my view, incomplete because they focus selectively on one or a few moral elements to the detriment of other remarks that Descartes also makes. Indeed, given Descartes' emphasis on unity throughout his work (be it the unity of knowledge,¹⁰ of virtue,¹¹ of prior planning,¹² or of legislative authority, for instance),¹³ we should look for a way of interpreting Descartes' practical philosophy which encompasses his apparently disparate ethical remarks and fits them into one, coherent picture. Informed by Donald Rutherford's claim that Descartes' "ethics" is about living well,¹⁴ and by an understanding of "morality" as "that constellation of beliefs, values, and ideals to which one defers at the most basic level, both in guiding one's choices—choices of individual actions, specific plans, policies, and even styles of life—and in justifying these choices, both to oneself and, where called upon, to others,"¹⁵ this paper goes beyond the strategy adopted by many Descartes scholars to show that it is the *narrative ethics* proposed by Robert Roberts' that provides the framework for a *unified, coherent* approach to Descartes' ethics.

With a focus on ethics' recent emphasis on character, virtues and vices, Roberts spells out the notion of narrative ethics as philosophical analysis of ethical

concepts combined with using stories to illustrate and render ethical concepts more concrete.¹⁶ ‘Narrative’ here refers to illustrating virtues and vices via literary means, thus rendering them more transparent as well as easier for the reader to relate to. Roberts views the combination of ethics so conceived (as providing the subject-matter) and narratives (as supplying the means) as a particularly fruitful one since virtues and vices are dispositions rather than events and, as such, are in need of diachronically-extended descriptions and illustrations. Narratives, on the other hand, are very suitable for describing sequences of connected events. (Virtue) ethics and stories represent, therefore, a perfect match.

There are three main reasons for applying narrative ethics to Descartes’ views, reasons independent of whether one agrees with interpretations of Descartes as a virtue ethicist. Descartes stresses not only the inspiring and motivating aspects of stories, but also their selective and misleadingly idealizing approach thus 1) theorizing (AT VI, 5-8; CSM I, 113-114) and 2) applying the connection between stories and ethics in a way similar to Roberts (AT IV, 221; CSMK 251). Furthermore, 3) expanding on Descartes’ insights on these points is supported by explicit remarks Descartes makes and provides increased clarification of his ethical positions. By drawing on Descartes’ use of stories (e.g. relating Descartes’ attraction to cross-eyed women [AT V, 57; CSMK 322], the story of the voyageur from the *Discourse* [AT VI, 24-25; CSM I, 123], and so on) and using philosophical analysis to supplement the limitations of stories Descartes identifies, I reconstruct his ethical views as treating of childhood, youth and maturity. The connections between these three stages trace the role of emotions, reason and will. This unified Cartesian ethical narrative helps us recover in Descartes’ ethics the unity that he praised in other contexts and remedies the restricted character of many of the already available interpretations of Descartes’ practical philosophy.

This paper is structured in four parts. Parts I-III investigate Descartes’ thinking about moral matters by tracking three stages in the moral development of a fictionalized character modeled on Descartes himself.¹⁷ The character whose development we will follow in this paper is ‘fictionalized’ since the sources

I will draw on below include elements from Descartes' actual life, without being restricted to them.¹⁸ In the opening parts of the *Discourse* Descartes uses autobiographical details but also poetic license.¹⁹ His extended correspondence, upon inspection, offers an image of Descartes closer to the fictionalized portraits of the narrators of the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* than we first expect. This is not surprising in light of the 17th century conventions of epistolary decorum and politesse, conventions including artifice, invention and hyperbole. During the early modern period, in the process of writing letters, one was actively creating a (more or less) public persona.²⁰

The *Discourse* and the *Principles* describe our protagonist's childhood as a time when he receives an education and is trained to obey his teachers.²¹ The *Discourse* follows him during youth when he travels the world, gets acquainted with other peoples and customs, applies himself at getting rid of errors and prejudices and in this way works at establishing the reliability of his reason (AT VI, 1-31; CSM I, 111-126). To facilitate his project of theoretical and scientific inquiry, he also decides to try to get his desires under control (AT VI, 25-27; CSM I, 123-124). Finally, in the 1645-1646 *Correspondence with Elizabeth* and in *The Passions of the Soul*, moral maturity culminates in a harmonious emotional constitution and the corresponding legitimate self-esteem. At this stage, our hero's composure and tranquility are challenged by ongoing accusations of atheism which could end in condemnation and even imprisonment.²² Nonetheless, as indicated by his comments to Mesland that he could live "quite peacefully and happily even if the verdict of the entire learned world were against [him]" (AT IV, 217; CSMK 249), he strives assiduously to acquire and maintain Cartesian generosity.²³

Part IV summarizes the main points of the paper and concludes by stressing the richness of Descartes' views when considered in relation to both his philosophical predecessors and successors.

I. MORALITY FOR CHILDREN

We were all children before being men and had to be governed for some time by our appetites and our teachers, which were often opposed to each other and neither of which, perhaps, always gave us the best advice.... (AT VI, 13; CSM I, 117).

Although Descartes employs the masculine noun “hommes/men,” this passage refers to all human beings, regardless of gender, since Descartes holds that we all are substantial unions of non-gendered immaterial minds²⁴ and material bodies (AT VII, 81; CSM II, 56); (PA, 7, 17). Descartes describes young children as influenced by their mothers’ experiences during pregnancy, affected by early age traumatic events they may not even remember (PA, 133-134) and as having temperaments predisposing them to certain types of emotions (such as anger [PA, 136]). The early stages of a human being’s life involve being physically small, relying on instincts (AT II, 599; CSMK, 140)²⁵ and being dependent on others for survival and instruction.

In our early childhood the mind was so closely tied to the body that it had no leisure for any thoughts except those by means of which it had sensory awareness of what was happening to the body.... It ... merely felt pain when something harmful was happening to the body and felt pleasure when something beneficial occurred (AT VIII A, 35; CSM I, 218, a. 71).

In the *Passions*, feeling pain is described as a passion in the broad sense (PA, 17) and then further specified as a natural appetite (PA, 24). Alongside pleasure, pain is also the cause of the passions of sadness and joy, respectively (PA, 137). Young children’s lives are determined and completely governed by passions. They live in the realm of immediacy and take everything at face value thus acquiring preconceived opinions about external objects. Descartes identifies two stages of children’s relation with the world starting with no distinction between in (sensations) and out (things). Then comes a vague distinction due to automatically pursuing the beneficial and attributing to the outside world characteristics of their own thoughts and sensations. Taking these objects’ secondary properties

to be primary properties, children are “materialists” (AT VIII A, 32; CSM I, 216, a. 66); (AT VIII A, 35; CSM I, 218, a. 71) and Aristotelians²⁶ in the way they grasp and relate to the external world. In the practical sphere, young children simply react to stimuli in the same way animals do. Even though Descartes notices the soul’s consent as the main difference between human passions and the correspondent animal movements (PA, 138), children cannot be seen as genuinely capable of consent since they don’t have the full use of their reason (AT VII, 439; CSM II, 296). We will return to this problem below.

As Byron Williston remarks, “[a] narrowly self-preservative ‘ethic’ can be deduced fairly easily from this picture.”²⁷ This ‘ethic’ is similar in content to elements of Academic Skeptical practical views as described by John Marshall. Marshall mentions Arcesilaus (head of the Platonic Academy from 264 B.C.) who enjoins acting on the basis of “reasonable impressions.” Marshall notes that these recommendations amount to reducing human to animal conduct since impressions and impulses “disconnected from even the barest hint of the thought that the act is appropriate, or probably appropriate or has a good chance of being so” provide all the motivation for action. This, Marshall continues, represents a throwback to the “Pyrrhonian position of simply having a motivational impetus to move in this, that or the other way.”²⁸

Both the Academic Skeptic and very young children react to impressions, impulses and stimuli, but they differ greatly in the way they came to hold this ‘morality.’ The Academic Skeptic endeavored to doubt everything, completely giving up beliefs, including those about good and evil. Young children, on the other hand, are governed by the body’s self-regulatory system which, as Amelie Rorty observes, “operates without long-range memory: its responses are relatively immediate, directed by and to its present condition.”²⁹ Children lack beliefs if we take “belief” to be the equivalent of Descartes’ judgment. Judging is an act of the will (AT VIII A, 18; CSM I, 204, a. 34) but in children, who only gradually get to exercise their abilities,³⁰ the will is activated but the children themselves are not active.

Initially, children act on impulse and even if their behavior is regulated in this way, if we called this regulation of behavior a morality, we would have to extend it to animals. This, in turn, would be unacceptable for Descartes (PA 50; AT IV, 573-576; CSMK 302-304). Nonetheless, the position defended in this paper does not entail such a problematic extension since only very young children are confined to simply reacting to their environment. As they grow up, a commonsense morality is passed on to them by their parents and educators. It is by learning to deliberate and to act appropriately to circumstances that they get close to the Pyrrhonian provisional morality which, as Marshall notes, acknowledges law and custom as binding moral rules.³¹

We can conclude that practical Skepticism (as characterized above) and Descartes' children's guide to behavior are alike in being action-guiding, leading to outwardly similar-looking actions and not being based on belief. Since we are willing to call the former a "morality" we can also extend to the latter the same label. The fact that only practical Skepticism is the result of doubt is a relevant dissimilarity but it is mitigated by the formative role of the views children acquire during childhood and by the continuity between Descartes' children's guide to behavior and his morality for youth (the provisional code). Given these mitigating factors, the dissimilarity does not outweigh the relevant similarities and, as a result, calling Descartes' children's guide to behavior a "morality" is not improper. This conclusion is made possible by our interpreting Descartes' ethical views as amounting to a story covering the whole human life span. By accounting for both commonalities *and* changes the present Cartesian ethical narrative provides a coherent, unified account of Descartes' ethical statements. As a result, new light is shed on Descartes' views and Roberts' requirement of moral clarification is met.

Despite the fact that the very next stage of Descartes' life is marked by a repudiation of information coming from the senses as well as rejection of uncritically following tradition and authority (AT VII, 17-23; CSM II, 12-17), we have good reasons to think that Descartes would *recommend* that every child follow the promptings of their senses and passions together with the advice of their teachers. According

to Descartes, relying on our senses is inevitable during our early years because, as embodied beings, our survival depends on our bodies functioning properly. In order to progress toward an intellect-based cognition we must first make the best use possible of a time during which our senses and passions, as well as our parents and teachers rule us. In the *Discourse*, this recommendation is offered indirectly by means of a personal narrative.

Descartes repeatedly stresses the importance of a good upbringing and education. In the *Discourse*, we learn that it was only luck that made it the case that Descartes received a good education³² and became acquainted with a diversity of views (some of which opposed each other) responsible for opening his eyes to the precarious status of knowledge. This, in turn, prompted him to look for a way to improve his epistemic situation (AT VI, 4-11; CSM I, 112-116) and, subsequently, to find his method (AT VI, 15-17; CSM I, 118-119). In *The Passions*, a good upbringing is characterized as able to compensate for defects and shortcomings of birth (PA, 161). Given these remarks, Descartes would probably also stress the importance of our parents and teachers' endorsing and practicing the recommendations of Descartes' later moralities (which will be discussed below). In this way, adults would increase their chances of nourishing their children on more than letters (AT VI, 4; CSM I, 112-113) and views revealing themselves questionable when scrutinized. Instead, parents and teachers versed in Cartesianism could pass onto their children moral rules and values less in need of revision than those Descartes had received, despite his attending "one of the most famous schools in Europe" (AT VI, 5; CSM I, 113).

II. MORALITY FOR YOUTH

[A]s soon as I was old enough to emerge from the control of my teachers, I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spend the rest of my youth traveling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering

various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it (AT VI, 9; CSM I, 115).³³

In describing childhood Descartes wants to provide his readers with enough context to justify the urgent need for epistemic reform. Senses are deceptive and relying heavily on them, as children are bound to do, can only lead one astray (AT VIII A, 35; CSM I, 218, a. 71). Upon close inspection, the views Descartes had been taught at school came in conflict with one another and were thus invalidated (AT VI, 5-9; CSM I, 113-115). Later, Descartes will identify sensory information as the root cause of many of these erroneous views (AT VI, 31-32; CSM I, 126-127). For these reasons, a more reliable method is needed to deal with the problem of proper knowledge-acquisition and it becomes necessary to engage in a difficult and protracted process of doubt.

But regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason. (AT VI, 13-14; CSM I, 117)

An important difference between the Skeptic's doubt and Descartes' consists in the fact that Descartes' only goal is to attain certainty and doubt, presented in an autobiographical manner³⁴ is only an instrument in this pursuit of certainty (AT VI, 29; CSM I, 125). Absent, as we noted, from Descartes' "morality for children," doubt is now intended as a gradual and lengthy process, requiring biological development and careful preparation.³⁵ This preparation took the form of the itinerant process of ridding his mind of error while seemingly engaged only in leading a pleasant, blameless life (AT VI, 30; CSM I, 125-126).

With respect to the practical realm, the *Discourse* indicates that the two bases of Descartes' morality for children (reliance on instincts and obedience to teachers)

come under attack. A clash of contrary positions (which later Descartes will trace to an over-reliance on sensory information) and travel-based moral relativity arguments undermine the morality that he had been brought up with (AT VI, 16; CSM I, 118-119). Because some of the physiological processes that cause sensations are also reflected in the soul as feelings and passions, when the young Descartes (he is twenty-three by the time the events recounted in the first parts of the *Discourse* unfold) becomes aware of sensations as occasions for error and therefore in need of scrutiny, he includes in the same category appetites and passions (AT VI, 54-56; CSM II, 138-139). Sensations, appetites and passions occasion not only theoretical doubt but also the need for moral reform. Furthermore, reading and traveling make Descartes realize that the morals and customs of other countries are as effective at supplying the inhabitants of those respective lands with orderly and socially stable lives as the morals and customs he had been brought up to respect. His acquaintance with foreign laws and customs makes him question the adequacy of the French ones, if this adequacy was based only on “example and custom” (AT VI, 10; CSM I, 116).

This, together with his commitment to engage in theoretical doubt,³⁶ forces Descartes to adopt a provisional morality in which appetites (passions in a broad sense) lose their guiding role without disappearing completely. However, for the sake of making progress in the theoretical sphere, Descartes is willing to make compromises in the practical sphere by relying for the time being on other people’s opinions. He is also investing in the future (by curtailing his desires now in hopes of reaping greater rewards later) and hedging his bets (by choosing the most moderate of the available moral positions and examples [AT VI, 27-28; CSM I, 124-125]). To avoid inactivity while engaged in theoretical doubt,³⁷ he formulates a provisional morality preserving aspects of the commonsense morality that he was inculcated with since childhood (AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122).³⁸

Descartes’ provisional moral code was not uncritically or arbitrarily devised. Descartes had a goal (to live happily during theoretical inquiry), was forced to figure things out for himself,³⁹ and thus proceeded to put to use elements he had at

his disposal. He had some acquaintance with prior ethical views (such as ancient ethics and the virtues the ancients praised). These views turned out to be flawed when scrutinized carefully. In the process of making up his own mind about how to live well, Descartes is still drawing on these prior views and using components of some theories to complete and/or correct the gaps and flaws of other theories.⁴⁰ That is why the provisional moral code (and by extension the rules of the final morality) are a collage of diverse elements (Skeptical, Stoic, etc.). In other words, he is not starting from the foundation in ethics since he must live and act while starting from the foundation in theoretical matters. He is also convinced that a better ethics will follow once metaphysics and science are properly grounded and established. Since he is already holding the architectural model of knowledge (AT VI, 14; CSM I, 117) and is optimistic about his chances of gaining true knowledge, he can afford for the time being to make due with an “imperfect” moral code (AT IX B, 15; CSM I, 186-187).

The first maxim of this moral code is to respect the laws and customs of his country and to guide himself by the opinions of the most sensible persons. The second refers to acting resolutely on the basis of the best available opinions, even if these opinions are only probable. The third rule concerns the control and change of his own desires, while the fourth presents Descartes’ decision to continue his quest for truth. The first rule marks the continuity between Descartes’ childhood morality and his current one. It provides Descartes with examples and recipes of right conduct to be applied to particular situations of his everyday life. The fourth rule gives the general context of Descartes’ life at this time (a scholar faces very different challenges than a soldier or a farmer). In turn, the second and third of the four rules composing the Cartesian provisional morality provide the connection between this stage of Descartes’ moral life and the next one, with the final morality intended for mature adults.

In the second moral rule of the *Discourse* Descartes states that if we cannot find what is certain in a given practical situation we have to make do with the most probable (AT VI, 25; CSM I, 123). The same idea is reiterated in the *Principles*:

As far as ordinary life is concerned, the chance for action would frequently pass us by if we waited until we could free ourselves from our doubts and so we are often compelled to accept what is merely probable (AT VIII A, 5; CSM I, 193, a. 3).

Marshall calls Descartes' provisional morality a *probabilism* and identifies similarities with the Academic Skeptical tradition of provisional moralities, specifically with the views of Philo of Larissa (head of the Academy between 110-84 BCE).⁴¹ Although Philo departed from the strict skeptical stance of his Academic predecessors in moving toward a mitigated skepticism in which provisional beliefs which made no claims to certainty were allowed, and although he was viewed by some (such as Sextus) as having sold out to the dogmatists, since he requires less than full-blown cognitive assent for practical matters,⁴² Philo can still claim to be a skeptic.⁴³

If Descartes' provisional morality is not to collapse into Pyrrhonism, the moral agent has to have more than a simple propensity to act in a certain way and must do more than simply react to stimuli. Yet, because of the doubt, he lacks an appropriate moral criterion. Descartes' solution seems to consist in allowing the propensity for action to probably "track the truth." This leaves Descartes open to arguments from moral relativity but he was confident that his morality had at least some antecedent probability of being true. He was convinced that we can make up for our lack of practical certainty, not by suspending belief (as per the Skeptics), but through "robust belief,"⁴⁴ which he will later characterize as an act of will. Indeed, robust belief is exactly what the final part of the second Rule recommends. The second Rule ("when truth cannot be found accept what is probable and act resolutely on the resulting opinion as if it were the most certain"), is an interesting mix of Skeptical-Academic, probabilistic elements and revised Stoic elements.⁴⁵ Combining moral elements from several traditions is an aspect of Descartes' moral philosophy that remains prevalent throughout his entire creative life.

We cannot always find certainty because of the "pressure of things to be done"

(AT VII, 90; CSM II, 62) and of the conflicting reports we get from our senses and our passions. In conditions of uncertainty, passions give us some directions and point the way at least approximately, thus preventing us from being completely incapable of acting. Passions are value-pointers but can also be very unreliable. That is why Descartes' third Rule recommends changing our desires rather than the order of the world. In *The Passions*, it is the passion of desire that leads to action (other passions lead to desire and desire initiates bodily motion (PA, 143-144). When what we are pursuing is in fact beyond our reach (because circumstances make it impossible for us to actually achieve our goal), by desiring and pursuing that goal we are wasting our resources. So, by keeping our desires in check, we prevent such waste from occurring.

This will also, for Descartes, prevent the passions of remorse and regret from affecting us (AT VI, 25; CSM I, 123). In *The Passions*, Descartes will characterize these emotions as species of sadness. They are "bitter" (PA, 59; 60; 67; 209) and thus incompatible with contentment and the happiness he was seeking in 1637 and throughout his whole life (PA, 190). In the *Discourse*, Descartes does not mention that irresolution, remorse and regret are passions but he comes to realize both the breadth and the importance of this problem later on.⁴⁶ At the end of his discussion of Rule four, Descartes notes that the contentment he gets from practicing his method and making new discoveries is so great that any other affections fail to get any grip on him (AT VI, 27; CSM I, 124). Satiety, experiencing a fullness of positive emotions (contentment, proper desires and so on) will appear again in *The Passions* (PA, 144).

Descartes recommends his provisional morality to others seeking the truth and attempting to cultivate their reason. After noting in the *Preface to the French Principles* that the searcher after truth must devise for oneself an imperfect moral code (AT IX B, 13; CSM I, 186), he gives the example of the provisional moral code from the *Discourse* (AT IX B, 15; CSM I, 186). Although the formulation "an imperfect moral code" leaves open the possibility that there may be more than one suitable for the task (a possibility further buttressed by Descartes' mentioning

that truth is one [AT VI, 21; CSM I, 121], while error comes in multiple forms), Marshall's comments that Descartes' *morale par provision* had an antecedent probability for the latter of being true, support the claim that Descartes would have recommended to others the moral code of the *Discourse*, imperfect as it was.

Further support comes from Paul Trainor's argument about the role of autobiography in Descartes. According to Trainor, philosophers such as (Plato's) Socrates, Descartes and Collingwood use autobiography as a special type of philosophical argument, neither deductive nor inductive, but "rhetorical" (since its aim is to persuade the reader) and "performative" (since it reports the actual creation of a new type of agent and the reader is encouraged to follow in the author's footsteps).⁴⁷ Descartes presents himself as an example to be followed starting with the trials and tribulations stemming from following a mistaken method for knowledge-acquisition, through the eye-opening experience of the *cogito* and leading to Descartes' new, intellect-based method.⁴⁸ The autobiographical form of Descartes' message, Trainor continues, depicts Descartes as a "concrete value" for the purpose of persuading the reader that he is dealing with an example worth following.⁴⁹ To that end, the autobiography is carefully balanced, being 'thick' enough for the reader to be able to grasp both the situation and its severity, but at the same time 'thin' enough for the reader to be able to place himself in the picture, to substitute himself for the protagonist.⁵⁰

Descartes also presents himself as guide in the *Meditations* which are intended for those readers who are able and willing to meditate seriously with the text's narrator (AT VII, 9; CSM II, 8). Similarly, the "history or ... fable" of Descartes' progress towards the truth encourages readers to follow those parts of the *Discourse* that they consider worthwhile (AT VI, 4; CSM I, 112). In Part VI,⁵¹ Descartes reports feeling obligated to share his results in order to assist others:

[S]o long as the only fruits I gathered from the method I use were my own satisfaction regarding certain difficulties in the speculative sciences, or else my attempts to govern my own conduct by the principles I learned

from it, I did not think I was obliged to write anything about it. ... *But as soon as I had acquired some general notions in physics and had noticed, as I began to test them in various particular problems, where they could lead and how much they differ from the principles used up to now, I believed I could not keep them secret without sinning gravely against the law which obliges us to do all in our power to secure the general welfare of mankind.* (AT VI, 61; CSM I, 142; emphasis added)

The same concern for helping others is found in *The Passions* where absolute mastery over the passions is thought achievable by everyone if “we” took care to instruct and train them (PA, 50). The narrative about moral stages we are piecing together in this paper brings to light another way in which Descartes could be conceived as engaging in instructing and training his readers.

The starting point of our ethical story in this paper has been Descartes’ own epistemic and ethical story of *Discourse*, Parts I-III. As we have seen, the *Discourse* covers youth explicitly and childhood implicitly. In both stages, “living well” is emphasized (happiness, for youth and self-preservation ^[AT VIII A, 36; CSM I, 219 a. 71], later coupled with obedience to authority figures such as parent and teachers, for childhood ^[AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122]). Since happiness is also valued during maturity (PA, 148) and there are other common elements as well (for example, ‘acting resolutely’ appears both in the *Discourse* and in the 1645-1646 *Correspondence* and the *Passions*), we are justified in adding a third stage to our Cartesian ethical story.

III. MORALITY FOR MATURE ADULTS

At the end of the *Discourse* (published in 1637), Descartes promised to continue his scientific work and requested financial support for his experiments and studies.

Intending as I did to devote my life to the pursuit of such indispensable knowledge [knowledge of the causes of innumerable diseases and of all the remedies that nature has provided], I discovered a path that would, I thought, inevitably lead one to it, unless prevented by the brevity of life or

the lack of observations. (AT VI, 63; CSM I, 143)

As a result of his subsequent publications, accusations of atheism are brought against Descartes at Utrecht in 1642 (AT III, 821-824); (AT IV, 750-753).⁵² To deal with the problems he is encountering, he updates his moral code. Descartes stated that he accepted his provisional moral code which relied on other people's views only for the time being, intending to review it when the time was right (AT VI, 27-28; CSM I, 124-125). The commonalities but also the differences between the *morale* of the *Discourse* and the comments that Descartes makes to Elizabeth in 1645-1646 show that he kept his word and scrutinized his initial moral maxims. These revisions reflect the new status of reason (by this time more developed and securely validated due to completion of the meditating process outlined in the *Meditations* [AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43]),⁵³ as well as the more prominent role he assigns to the passions and the will in practical matters.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH ELIZABETH 1645-1646

The content of the new moral code changes from Descartes' 1645-1646 epistolary exchange with Elizabeth to the publication in 1649 of *The Passions of the Soul*. In the 1645-1646 letters we find rules similar to the ones from the *Discourse*. Descartes notes this connection⁵⁴ without drawing attention explicitly either to the changes in the order of specific requirements or to the different weights given to these requirements by comparison with the provisional moral code. The moral rules of the correspondence can be summarized as follows: 'Use your mind as well as you can' is listed first, stressing the role and importance of reason.⁵⁵ 'Act resolutely' comes second, and 'change your desires' is listed third (AT IV, 265-266; CSMK 257-258). Rule one from the *Discourse*, 'Follow the most moderate examples ...; obey the laws ...' is mentioned only in a latter letter and is given a less prominent role (AT IV, 295; CSMK 267). In 1645, Descartes emphasizes the importance of using one's own discernment to critically assess examples of moderate behavior and moderate advice and thus corroborate them (AT IV, 295; CSMK 267); AT IV, 272; CSMK 259). The probabilism of Rule two of the *morale par provision* is also

mentioned only in passing (AT IV, 295; CSMK 267). A new element appears in the letter of 4 August 1645 where Descartes explicitly links his three moral rules to the passions in general:⁵⁶ “The second [condition for making oneself content by oneself without any external assistance] is that he should have a firm and constant resolution to carry out whatever reason recommends *without being diverted by his passions or appetites*” (AT IV, 266; CSMK 257-258; emphasis added).⁵⁷ Moral matters are closely connected with our passions which are obscure and confused ideas and can only be rendered sufficiently clear for practical purposes but not for metaphysical ones (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61; PA 28). The passions now become the focus of Descartes’ natural philosophical (i.e. scientific) and more broadly philosophical analysis as well as of his moral recommendations. During the 1645-1646 period, while writing to Elizabeth, Descartes is also working on putting together a complete treatment of the passions, the result of these efforts being the treatise *The Passions of the Soul*. He attempts to define the passions (AT IV, 310-313; CSMK 270-271) and acknowledges that, although “[he] was [planning to add a detailed explanation of all the passions], “[he] found it difficult to list them,”⁵⁸ (AT IV, 313; CSMK 272).⁵⁹ Some of the remedies against the disorders of the passions (such as waiting until they subside, then considering positions opposed to the one presented by the passion [AT IV, 295; 220; 237; CSMK 267; 250; 253]) are also touched on in these letters. Descartes distances himself from the Stoics by stressing that our goal should be bringing the passions under the rule of reason, not their eradication. Aristotle’s reliance on the mean is also implicitly opposed when Descartes states that “once [passions] are thus tamed they are sometimes the more useful the more they tend to excess” (AT IV, 287; CSMK 265).⁶⁰

In these letters Descartes points out that passions are obstacles to our obeying the three moral rules. Passions cloud our judgment by presenting things in a far brighter light than they really are, so they interfere with ‘using our minds as well as we can’ (the first Rule). To meet the requirements of this rule the agent must curb the idealizing tendency of some of his passions, specifically those emotions which make their objects appear far more valuable or pleasurable than they

actually are.⁶¹ Passions can influence the will and prevent us from accomplishing what reason tells us is best under the circumstances, thus making us irresolute (in contravention to Rule two). To control the passions we need to gain as much knowledge as possible about them. Since Descartes' correspondent, Princess Elizabeth, was a very educated person who kept current on a variety of subjects, the moral code outlined in their 1645-1646 epistolary exchange appears addressed to searchers after truth, to those committed to cultivating their reason. Even if this commitment is not presupposed, it is arrived at by following the three new rules since the search after truth is singled out as the best way to satisfy the rules.⁶²

THE PASSIONS OF THE SOUL (1649)

The three rules appear in the *Passions* but, by contrast with both the *Discourse* and the letters of 1645-1646 to Elizabeth, they are not listed together. Instead, the three rules are scattered throughout the treatise. 'Judge as well as you can' appears in article 138. 'Act resolutely' is implicitly referred to in article 170.⁶³ 'Change your desire rather than the order of the world and reflect on divine Providence when things don't turn out the way you wanted' are treated in articles 145 and 146. Descartes' main emphasis is on defining the passions, classifying them, identifying their causes as well as their external signs and supplying recipes for controlling them (PA, 211). The one overarching recommendation of this work can be understood as harmonizing one's passions so as to enjoy "the sweetest pleasures of this life" (PA, 212). Moral maturity takes the form of self-creation.⁶⁴

The first Rule's requirement to 'judge as well as you can' is met by using

the forethought and diligence through which we can correct our natural faults by striving to separate within ourselves the movements of the blood and spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined. But I must admit that there are few people who have sufficiently prepared themselves in this way for all the contingencies of life. (PA, 211)

Using "forethought and diligence" means getting one's value hierarchy in order

(settling on true judgments about good and evil [PA, 48-49]), acquiring actionable information (joining desire to assent [PA, 144]) and putting oneself in a situation of action preparedness by rewiring one's brain [PA 211, 50, 203]). Among the most important pieces of information the agent acquires is the superlative perfection of one's free will, that "nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions." To the extent to which he is successful at inducing in himself a feeling of "firm and constant resolution to use [this freedom] well" (PA, 153), he is in the process of acquiring generosity, the key to all the other virtues and a general remedy against the disturbances of the passions (PA, 161).

Conformity to the second rule of 'acting resolutely' presupposes a coherent identity because action, as contradistinguished from events and "mere behavior" (which includes reflex motions as well as instinctive reactions), has to spring from the identity of an agent seeing that action as up to him, not as just something that happens to him.⁶⁵ First, by means of 'forethought and diligence' irresolution is warded off since the agent has no doubt about what goal is worth pursuing in a given situation (PA, 170). This prevents passional tugs-of-war as the one described in article 48 where ambition and fear pull the agent in different directions making him unable to engage in any action. With vacillation ruled out, desire may then be generated and action becomes possible (PA, 47). To 'act' one must 'regulate one's desires' because only in this way will the body move in a deliberately goal-directed way as opposed to aimlessly or automatically (PA, 144). The morally mature agent is one who self-motivates and is able to sustain his motivation over the long term.

A mature moral agent encodes true moral judgments in his brain (by connecting certain movements of animal spirits, tiny particles rushing through our veins and arteries, with certain thoughts)⁶⁶ and subsequently externalizes these brain-encoded judgments into efficient and effective external actions. A precursor to this prophylactic strategy for controlling the passions is the notion of practical judgment mentioned in the *Correspondence*. Practical judgments are true judgments about good and evil which have become ingrained via habituation accomplished by means of repeated meditation (AT IV, 295-296; CSMK, 267). To

this *The Passions* adds an account of the physiological bases of habituation (animal spirits moving through the same channels [PA, 34-46]), a physiological feedback mechanism (animal spirits forming loops which ensure the continuity of motion while also signaling to the agent how well or poorly his attempts to move his body or control the passions are going [PA, 106]) as well as an early version of the theory of conditioned response. The latter constitutes “the perspective of the behavioural and physiological scientist who is able to investigate the physical causes of our emotional patterns of response, and in time learn to manipulate and ‘reprogram them.’”⁶⁷

Then, to ensure the ‘resolute’ quality of action, we must limit our desires to what is in our power, thus channeling (rather than dispersing) our energy and resources. The success we will have when pursuing achievable goals will fill us with a satisfaction that will not leave room for wayward desires to be formed (PA, 144). Moral maturity involves enhancing the benefits of our emotions, harnessing their motivational force for the purpose of achieving worthy goals. The sustainability of motivation is also connected with a self-reward system being in place and working reliably in the case of the morally mature agent (PA, 144).⁶⁸ Additionally, since desire comes in so many varieties (hope, anxiety, jealousy, confidence, despair, irresolution, courage, boldness, emulation, timidity, terror, remorse [PA, 57-60]), by regulating its various species we actually shape ourselves as persons, we self-create.

Self-creation captures the fact that the morally mature agent is proactive rather than reactive with respect to his passions.⁶⁹ Being proactive, by using “forethought and diligence,” amounts to being constructive, deliberately arousing passions in oneself, rather than restrictive, setting bounds to already formed passions that come over one (e.g. focusing on training oneself to desire virtue rather than on stopping oneself from desiring riches, fame, and so on). To be proactive and constructive, the agent must put in place an overarching policy for generating self-perfecting, pleasurable passions (rather than proceeding only on a case-by-case basis, for instance by “considering and following reasons which are opposed

to those presented by the passion, even if they appear less strong” [PA, 211]). To be generous is to have a self-devised master plan, to have “prepared themselves in this way for all the contingencies of life.”⁷⁰ The master plan that the Cartesian agent works to establish with regard to his passions constitutes what Byron Williston has called an “*affective repertoire*”, “that set of desires and emotional dispositions that pattern the agent’s moral attention in specific ways”⁷¹ The generous person described in the *Passions* is the example of the most successful such endeavor.⁷²

The *affective repertoire* of Descartes’ generous person includes a stable idea of his self-worth (PA, 159), no contempt for anyone (PA, 155) and viewing everyone as equally endowed with free will (PA, 156). By means of a true judgment of value related to himself (the realization that his greatest perfection is the correct exercise of his free will [AT V, 85; CSMK, 326) and a strong argument from analogy (extending this realization to other people), Rule one (‘Judge as well as you can’) is satisfied. The generous person also knows what resources he has at his disposal and only undertakes those actions of whose results he is defeasibly certain while managing to accomplish “great deeds” (PA, 156). Correctly assessing one’s resources amounts to judging accurately what one can and cannot do and being ready to act on it.

The generous one also desires with passion only what depends on himself (PA, 146), experiences neither the improper type of jealousy (PA, 156) nor envy of the improper kind (PA, 156). These are species of desire that have now been properly regulated. The generous agent acts and does so energetically since he has no doubts about what is worth pursuing under the circumstances (PA, 170), is not conflicted about what means to use (PA, 59), is not stunned by surprise (PA, 73) and is not afraid (PA, 156). Fear is a combination of timidity (“cowardice,” which is a type of desire [PA, 59]), wonder and anxiety (another species of desire [PA, 176]). These aspects of generosity cover Rules two and three from the 1645-1646 letters.

Having an altruistic mind set, disregarding one’s own self-interest (echoing the commitment to benefiting others in Part VI of the *Discourse*) and being always

polite and obliging are also features of the generous person (PA, 156). Furthermore, he does not hate other people (PA, 156), is free from anger (PA, 156), feeling “contempt, or at the most indignation, for the wrongs at which others usually take offence” (PA, 203).⁷³ Compassion (PA, 185; 187), cheerfulness (which is a sign of virtue [PA, 180]) and a sound psychic equilibrium resulting in tranquility (both a virtue and a passion [PA, 190]) round up the portrait of Descartes’ generous person. Tranquility and self-satisfaction are the successors of the contentment mentioned in Rule four of the *Discourse* and singled out as the goal of the three rules of the 1645-1646 letters.

Generosity, unpacked above as a stable psychic order translating into deliberate and efficient actions, depends on identifying with one’s free will (PA, 153). This makes prominent another element only implicitly present in the 1637 provisional code. Since 1637, the will’s role in the theoretical sphere was dealt with in the *Meditations*⁷⁴ and the Latin *Principles*.⁷⁵ The *Dedicatory Letter* of the Latin *Principles* included references to the will’s function in the practical sphere (AT VIII A, 3-4; CSM I, 191-192). There, having a powerful resolve is mentioned first (as in the *Discourse*), but it is a resolve “always to use his reasoning powers correctly, as far as he can,” followed by “to carry out whatever he knows to be best” (AT VIII A, 2; CSM I, 191). Later in this letter, the resolve in question is connected with the will (AT VIII A, 3; CSM I, 191). The 1645-1646 correspondence also contains discussions of free will and its relation to divine omnipotence (AT IV, 314; 332-333; 353; CSMK, 272; 277; 282), but also its connections with virtue and achieving happiness (AT IV, 267; CSMK, 258). In the *Passions*, willing well in practical matters is explicitly stressed and recommended to all readers in the form of generosity.

Descartes’ notion of generosity bears similarities to Aristotelian *megalopsychia* (‘great soulness’), although Descartes contrasts the elitist, hereditary bent of the Aristotelian notion with the egalitarian strand of his concept (PA, 161).⁷⁶ A common element of Stoic *apatheia* and Cartesian generosity consists in rising above hardships (as Descartes mentions in the *Discourse*, in the 1644 *Dedicatory Letter* and articles 147-148 of the *Passions*). Deborah Brown notes the connection

between heroic virtues (such as Machiavelli's *virtu*)⁷⁷ and Descartes' insistence on "swift and ardent action" (AT IV, 411; CSMK, 287). Charron's *preud'homme*⁷⁸ and Balzac's and Corneille's *gloire*⁷⁹ are also similar to generosity, although, as Shapiro notes, there is no evidence that Descartes and Corneille would have read each other's works.⁸⁰

In this section we saw that Descartes proposes a morality of self-creation since the rules composing his final morality are internalized by the agent and their requirements are automatically met when the more immediate goal of harmonizing the passions is attained. Descartes' moral theory combines an internalist theory of motivation (since the agent apprehends the good as *his* good by way of what he can control) with an objectivist view of moral value (because the agent's good depends on God-instituted natural facts and is thus prior to the agent's desires and preferences). The examples of generous persons Descartes gives (Guez de Balzac,⁸¹ Elizabeth,⁸² Christina of Sweden,⁸³ and others) demonstrate that many harmonious emotional compositions are possible depending on one's natural endowment, education, circumstances, and so on.

Alongside expository components (perspicuous in the treatment of the physiological underpinning of the passions, for instance), Descartes' final morality includes invitational and advisory elements⁸⁴ as well as autobiographical ones. The recommendations from the *Passions* are addressed to everyone who wants to make themselves happy by using tools exclusively in their power, reason and free will. Descartes advises *all* his readers to control and harmonize their emotions in order to live tranquil, content and happy lives.⁸⁵ He also mentions that the generous person esteems everyone who possesses a free will, the implication being that all possessors of free will have a right to such esteem (PA, 154).

Aiming to draw the readers in, to enlist their engagement, Descartes' final morality, read as a morality of self-creation, meets Roberts' condition of moral edification and eliciting motivation.⁸⁶ One of Descartes strategies for enlisting the readers' engagement is the use of self-observation and autobiographical details.

Descartes notes that “everyone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations regarding their nature” (PA, 1). He also writes Elizabeth:

And I have no doubt that the distractions of study, which would be quite arduous for other people, might sometimes provide her [Highness] with relaxation. I should count myself extremely fortunate if I could help facilitate her studies; and I would much rather go to The Hague to learn about the power of the waters at the Spa than gain knowledge here about the plants in my garden – the more so because I do not care what happens at Groningen or Utrecht, whether to my advantage or not. (AT IV, 238; CSMK, 254)

In this passage Descartes describes himself as possessing several traits pertaining to generosity. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Descartes, in accordance with the 17th century rules of epistolary decorum, was presenting himself to Elizabeth in a positive light while also “render[ing] to [the Princess] all the honor and respect due to [Her] position and authority in the world” (PA, 164).

He tells Elizabeth he is diligently pursuing his scientific work (which at the time involves experiments with plants),⁸⁷ despite the accusations of atheism and the legal proceedings against him happening at Groningen and Utrecht. Toward those slandering and persecuting him Descartes seems to display the same lack of feelings expressed earlier (in May 1645) to Mesland. By contrast, he is taking a keen interest in Elizabeth’s troubles. Showing deep concern for her ill health, he is trying to help Elizabeth overcome it by keeping their correspondence going and discussing with her Seneca’s philosophical views. Commitment to doing his duty, ability to distinguish between wrong-doings and wrong-doers coupled with refrain from hating the latter, willingness to help his friends and even sacrifice for them are features that come through in the above lines. They are also part of being a generous person.

Cartesian generosity is difficult to achieve and difficult to maintain (AT IV, 411; CSMK, 287). At the end of *The Passions*, we read:

persons whom the passions can move most deeply are capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life. It is true that they may also experience the most bitterness when they do not know how to put these passions to good use and when fortune works against them. (PA, 212)

In 1650, Descartes seems to be experiencing “fortune working against [him]” and he writes Brégy from Sweden:

I have not made any other visits, nor have I heard about any. This makes me think that during the winter men’s thoughts are frozen here, like the water. ... I fear only that if I am still here when [M. Salvius] comes, he will find me very different from the man you described that he will be able to see my faults more easily. But I swear to you that my desire to return to my solitude grows stronger with each passing day, and indeed I do not know whether I can wait here until you return. ... I am not in my element here. I desire only peace and quiet, which are benefits that the most powerful kings on earth cannot give to those who are unable to acquire them for themselves. (AT V, 467; CSMK, 383-384)

We have no other letters to inform us whether Descartes was able to recover the inner balance and the accompanying peace and quiet he was seeking. Less than a month after writing the above lines, he died of a flu-like infection.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that Descartes’ ethical views evolve over time (from the *Discourse*, through the *Principles* to the 1645-1646 *Correspondence* and *The Passions*) and deal with all stages of human life from childhood, through youth to maturity. The goal pursued remains the same (living well, leading a comfortable and happy life) while the means considered appropriate for reaching it vary. Following the

role and importance Descartes gives to the passions during his creative life, we divided his moral views into three stages and witnessed the Cartesian concept of morality evolving from an instinctual guide to behavior (not spelled out and not theoretically justified during childhood) through a clearly delimited morality having as its declared goal ensuring the smoothness of everyday life during theoretical inquiry (during youth), to a morality for mature adults, a morality that would still guide behavior but emphasize the coherence of one's selfhood.

A Cartesian morality for children is close in content to Pyrrhonism and, as children grow up, evolves toward obedience to parents and teachers. The Cartesian morality for youth is a combination of Academic Skeptical, Stoic but also Epicurean elements (such as the stress on contentment which later Descartes himself identifies as Epicurean [AT IV, 276-281; CSMK, 261-262]) and Aristotelian ones (for instance, following a moderate position rather than extreme ones [AT VI, 23; CSM I, 122-123]). The Cartesian morality for mature adults stresses the harmony of the passions, culminates in generosity and lends itself well to interpretation in terms of self-creation.

In light of the narrative ethics approach to Descartes' ethics proposed in this paper, what original contributions can we say Descartes made to ethics? After all, a first-person account was used long before Descartes, most notably by Marcus Aurelius and Augustine. Furthermore, the scheme of moral development from infancy and childhood to youth and adult life, which I associated with Descartes' autobiographical narrative, parallels prior Stoic developmental remarks (for instance in Cicero and Seneca). In my view, standing at a crossroads between the old and the new not only in metaphysics and epistemology but also in ethics, Descartes is both eclectic and visionary. His views count as visionary because his considered ethical standpoints are seminal, containing aspects that will be fully spelled out by later thinkers.⁸⁸ His eclecticism is key to the wide applicability and adaptability of his ethical views. And this, in turn, was usefully illuminated by the unifying story put together in this paper.

Descartes' ethical position is eclectic since from different, already established moral views he chooses certain elements, adjusts them for his own purposes and fits them into combinations that suit his own theoretical as well as practical needs. Such procedures are well represented not only in his provisional moral code but also in instances where Descartes avails himself of Galenic positions,⁸⁹ combined with Aristotelian⁹⁰ and Epicurean⁹¹ ones. Rather than a sign of disparate, incoherent and insufficiently digested viewpoints, we should view this combinatory stance as an example of Descartes' applying his own advice to Elizabeth regarding putting our own mark on the views of our predecessors, thus making it more likely that we will follow these pronouncements (AT IV, 252; CSMK, 256).

The unifying story pieced together in this paper aimed at convincing Descartes' readers not so much to follow a particular set of recommendations (the provisional moral code or Descartes' morality of self-creation, for instance), but rather that there are good reasons for attentively looking to Descartes' writings for moral guidance in the first place. Descartes' ethical views conceived as a unified life narrative are multifaceted enough to offer something for everyone whether young or old, engaged in doubt or trusting one's senses, high or low born, intellectually very gifted or only moderately so, and so on. Barring extraordinary bad luck (which could diminish one's chances),⁹² Descartes assures us that every one of us is able to live happily. The first step of doing so in a Cartesian fashion consists in identifying under which category we fit (children, youth or adults), followed by applying Descartes' recommendations for that category. This also means that a disconnect between one's biological age and one's 'moral' category is possible and that some of us will not make it to the youth or mature moral stage. There is no linear progression and one will not advance to the next moral level simply in virtue of aging biologically.

Being governed by parents and teachers (as in Descartes' morality for children) is preferable to relying exclusively on instincts as animals do, because parents and teachers can supplement and correct the shortcomings of information coming from sensations and passions and steer us clear of acting in sub-optimal ways (PA,

134). As we grow up, instinct alone would not be enough for smooth and peaceful coexistence in communities (AT IV, 316-317; CSMK, 273). The social aspect of human life adds further support to the superiority of a morality of obedience.

Someone finding himself in the grips of very strong and continuously shifting passions, maybe during adolescence, fits well Descartes' description of weak souls, enslaved and miserable. Once the strong passions tormenting him subside (adolescence comes to an end due to our bodies' achieving hormonal balance), such a person could go back to being ruled by teachers (or pastors, gurus, influencers, and so on). Alternatively, since instinct and obedience to others have a high susceptibility to error and abuse, he could seek a better way to guide himself. Descartes' provisional morality proposes such a way.

Even someone who has no interest (or no means to engage) in inquiry could still avail himself of at least some of the maxims of the provisional moral code. He would still follow a morality of obedience, obeying more abstract entities (such as laws and customs) as opposed to individual authorities (parents, teachers, and others).⁹³ He would also find it useful to try to get his desires in check. This is in keeping with his more developed reason (he is biologically older and, barring impediments preventing the full use of his reason, he reasons more and maybe better). The provisional moral code, in other words, can be beneficial to a larger number of people than intellectuals (for example, academics so caught up in their research that they view anything else as secondary).

Those who come to notice the limitations of social conformism, of piecemeal desire regulation or both, have the option of going through the other steps Descartes mentions in *The Passions*. They could use some passions (for example, that of pride) to keep other passions (such as fear) in check, or they could use a judgment-based method for controlling the passions. The latter may be rule-based ('judge as well as you can', 'act resolutely', and so on) or be self-creative in nature, aimed, as I've argued, at acquiring Cartesian generosity.⁹⁴

Generosity counts as moral maturity since it involves being inclusive (rather than repressive), prophylactic rather than reactive toward one's emotions. Adopting such a stance also allows and even calls for appropriating the available moral recommendations by adapting⁹⁵ and modifying them to suit one's personality and circumstances. In *The Passions*, Descartes does not explicitly discuss the main truths which in the 1645-1646 correspondence he had indicated we need to know in order to lead happy lives.⁹⁶ These truths do appear in this work (PA, 145-146; 207) but their necessity for achieving contentment is not emphasized to the same extent as in the prior letters. Instead, Descartes notes only the need for true and determinate judgments. This leaves it up to the agent which judgments he forms, meditates on, inscribes on his brain and trains oneself to follow. This goes hand in hand with assuming personal responsibility for one's value judgments, actions as well as for oneself as a person.

Even agents who reject some of the necessary truths on Descartes' list (atheists or physicalists or both) could still benefit from applying some of his moral recommendations. Atheists would lack a source of consolation in the form of reflection on divine providence when things do not go the way they hoped and physicalists would need to establish and justify their own hierarchies of values. Nevertheless, Descartes' views could still contain valuable moral advice (for example, 'get your desires under control', 'use positive emotions to fight off negative ones', 'harmonize your emotional constitution', and so on).⁹⁷

I conclude that Descartes is instructing us to come up with our own life story following the template he has provided for us. The possible sources of diversity and agent-specific differences mentioned in the previous section of the paper are indications that we should follow Descartes' example by customizing his recipe for controlling the passions so that it fits our own situation and personality. So the end of the story we found in Descartes could be seen as an injunction to start our own moral story⁹⁸ (leaving open the possibility that it might not include all three chapters starting with childhood, through youth, followed by maturity.⁹⁹

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NOTES

1. Parenthetical references to Descartes' collected works in what follows use the following abbreviations:

Oeuvres de Descartes. Eds. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. 2nd ed., 11 vols. Paris: Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1974-86. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (AT volume number, page number).

The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. 2 vols. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-85. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (CSM volume number, page number). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 3. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Anthony Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (CSMK, page number).

2. Lisa Shapiro, "Descartes's Ethics". *A Companion to Descartes*. Eds. Janet Broughton, John Carriero. Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2011, 445.

3. René Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. I. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 325-404. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (PA, article number).

4. John Marshall, *Descartes' Moral Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 8.

5. Donald Rutherford "On the Happy Life: Descartes vis-à-vis Seneca." *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations*. Eds. Steven K. Strange, Jack Zupko. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 189.

6. Noa Naaman-Zauderer, *Descartes' Deontological Turn Reason, Will and Virtue in the Later Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 185.

7. Deborah Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 165-209. The expression "maximization of self-esteem" is mine but I think it aptly captures Brown's intentions.

8. Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 193.

9. In this paper, for stylistic reasons, I will use interchangeably the terms "ethical" and "moral" in order to avoid over repeating Descartes' own notions, "moral" and "morality".

10. AT X, 360-361; CSM I, 9-10.

11. AT IX B, 14; CSM I, 186.

12. AT VI, 11-12; CSM I, 116

13. AT VI, 12-14; CSM I, 117.

14. Rutherford, "On the Happy Life".

15. Marshall, *Descartes' Moral Theory*, 16.

16. Robert Roberts, "Narrative Ethics." *Philosophy Compass* 7:3 (March 2012, 174-182).

17. Since the character whose development we will follow in this paper is modeled on Descartes himself the masculine pronouns he/his/him are used throughout the paper. As noted later in the paper, Descartes conceived of the mind as non-gendered and directed his ethical recommendations to everyone.

18. See Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997 and Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

19. In a Letter of 1628 Guez de Balzac urges Descartes to write his life story showcasing his battles against "the giants of the Schools" (AT I, 570-571). Although Balzac was notorious for the use of hyperbole and irony, the *Discourse* which does recount "the history of [Descartes'] mind" has, like stories of Christian salvation and quest romances, something paradigmatic and heroic

- about it. It describes a character type engaged in an exemplary type of epistemic and practical pursuit. See Thomas Pavel, "Literature and the Arts," *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. David Weissman, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, 349-370.
20. See Gabriela Del Lungo Camiciotti, "Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern Culture: An Introduction". *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 3, (2014 17–35) and Lawrence D. Green, "French Letters and English Anxiety in the Seventeenth Century". *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66: ¾ (2003). For a close analysis of one of Descartes' letters see Jean-Vincent Blanchard, "De quoi donner une jaunisse à Richelieu. Autour d'une lettre de Descartes à Guez de Balzac". *Littératures classiques* 82 (2013/3). For Stoic antecedents of Early Modern letter-writing see Catherine Edwards, "Self-Scrutiny and Self-Transformation in Seneca's Letters", *Greece & Rome*, 44: 1 (Apr., 1997).
21. Descartes says very little about the role of parents. *Meditation III* notes that parents implant certain dispositions in the matter that will become their children's bodies but they have no role in the creation of their children's immaterial minds (AT VII, 50-51; CSM II, 35). Descartes' remarks about education mention "teachers" and in his 1644 letters to Jesuits (while seeking their endorsement of the *Principles*) he thanks Grandamy (AT IV, 121) and Charlet (AT IV, 140) for the time spent at La Flèche when the seeds of what he later came to know were implanted in him.
22. For treatments of the Utrecht crisis, see Theo Verbeek, "Descartes and the Problem of Atheism: the Utrecht Crisis," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History*, 71:2 (1991, 211-223) and Andrea Strazzoni, *Dutch Cartesianism and the Birth of Philosophy of Science: From Regius to 's Gravesande*. Boston: de Gruyter, 2019.
23. For treatments of Cartesian generosity along narrative ethics lines (without the label), see Lisa Shapiro, "Cartesian Generosity," *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 64 (1999: 249-276) and Andreea Mihali, "Descartes's Ethics: Generosity in the Flesh," *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 271 (2022: 51-95).
24. Darren Gobert, *The Mind-Body Stage: Passion and Interaction in the Cartesian Theater*. Stanford University Press, 2013, 18.
25. In this letter Descartes distinguishes between two kinds of instinct: the light of nature (which should always be followed) and an impulse towards the preservation of the body and enjoyment of bodily pleasures (which should not always be trusted). It is the latter type of instinct which governs a child's life, at least in its early stages.
26. Since children later come to (mistakenly) hold that nothing is in the intellect that has not first been in the senses (AT VII, 75-76; CSM II, 52).
27. Byron Williston, "The Cartesian Sage and the Problem of Evil." *Passion and Virtue in Descartes*. Eds. Byron Williston, André Gombay. Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003, 304.
28. John Marshall, "Descartes's Provisional Morality". *Passion and Virtue in Descartes*. Eds. Byron Williston, André Gombay. Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003, 200. p 138-484) and Devin Sanchez Curry, "Cabbage à la Descartes". *Ergo* 3: 24, 2016.
29. Amelie Rorty, "Cartesian Passions and the Union of Mind and Body." *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*. Ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 522.
30. "[H]ence I thought it virtually impossible that our judgments should be as unclouded and firm as they would have been if we had had the full use of our reason from the moment of our birth, and if we had always been guided by it alone" (AT VI, 13; CSM I, 117).
31. Marshall, "Descartes's Provisional Morality", 198.
32. Although Descartes criticizes what he learned at La Fleche and concludes that "there was no knowledge in the world such as I had previously led to hope for" (AT VI, 5; CSM I, 113), his criticisms are directed at the disciplinary boundaries that formed the foundation of the whole

educational system of the period. For details, see Denis Kambouchner's *Descartes n'a pas dit*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2015 and *Le Style de Descartes*, Paris: Manucius, 2013.

33. For discussion see Dan Arbib, "Le moi cartésien comme troisième livre. Note sur Montaigne et la première partie du Discours de la méthode". *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 74:2 (2012, 161-180).

34. "For I had begun at this time to count my own opinions worthless, because I wished to submit them all to examination" (AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122).

35. "And since this is the most important task of all, and the one in which precipitate conclusions and preconceptions are the most to be feared, I thought that I ought not try to accomplish it until I had reached a more mature age than twenty-three, as I then was, and until I had spent a long time in preparing myself for it" (AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122).

36. Whether we are talking about methodical doubt or doubt resulting from the traditional Skeptical arguments, is not important for my argument here.

37. For Descartes, inactivity refers to time spent in deliberation instead of in action, where the latter would have been appropriate (AT VIII A, 5; CSM I, 193, a.3).

38. Marshall, "Descartes's Provisional Morality", 220.

39. "I was, then, unable to choose anyone whose opinion struck me as preferable to those of all others, and I found myself as it were forced to become my own guide" (AT VI, 16; CSM I, 119).

40. In one of the letters to Elizabeth, Aristotelian, Stoic and Epicurean views are mentioned and Descartes states that all these views "can ... be accepted as true and as consistent with each other, provided they are interpreted favorably" (AT IV, 276-277; CSMK, 261-262).

41. The similarities Marshall identifies are: commitment to a correspondence theory of truth, vulnerability to the objection against a subjective moral criterion that is supposedly connected to objective truth, etc. We will return to the objectivity of the true and the good in the next part of this paper.

42. Marshall, "Descartes's Provisional Morality", 206.

43. Marshall, "Descartes's Provisional Morality", 205.

44. Marshall, "Descartes's Provisional Morality", 226. See also AT VIII A, 3; CSM I, 191.

45. "revised" since the Stoics recommend resoluteness only with respect to guaranteed truths

46. Irresolution (PA, 170); desire (PA, 141-146); remorse (PA, 177) and regret (PA, 209).

47. Paul Trainor, "Autobiography as Philosophical Argument: Socrates, Descartes and Collingwood." *Thought* 63:251 (December, 1988, 381). For a discussion of philosophical autobiographies, see *Autobiography as Philosophy: The philosophical uses of self-presentation*. Eds. Thomas Mathien, D. G. Wright. London: Routledge, 2006.

48. Trainor, "Autobiography", 388-389.

49. Trainor, "Autobiography", 381-384; 395.

50. Trainor, "Autobiography", 385; 392-393.

51. An objector might point out the different tone and attitude by comparison with the *morale* of Part III. There Descartes appeared to recommend acceptance and resignation ('change your desires rather than the order of the world') while here he seems to champion technological innovation and development in the service of bringing about progress. In answer to this objection, Cottingham aptly notes that in Part VI Descartes is still recommending the acceptance of what we cannot alter but is convinced that, due to technological developments, that sphere has shrunk and will continue to do so. John Cottingham "Cartesian ethics: reason and the passions", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 50:195 (1996, 1).

52. Verbeek, "Descartes"; Strazzoni, *Dutch Cartesianism*.

53. Although the certainty achievable in matters related to the conduct of life is only moral, not metaphysical (AT VIII A, 327; CSM I, 289-290, a. 205).
54. "It seems to me that each person can make himself content by himself without any external assistance, provided he respect three conditions, which are related to the three rules of morality which I put forward in the *Discourse on the Method*" (AT IV, 265; CSMK, 257).
55. The French term Descartes uses is "esprit" (mind) which in the *Discourse* was used alongside "raison" (reason). For the distinction between these terms in the *Discourse*, see Roger Ariew, "The Nature of Cartesian Logic." *Perspectives on Science* 29:3 (2021, 275-291). In the very next lines of this letter, when dealing with Rule two ('Act resolutely') Descartes mentions "reason."
56. Not just to specific ones (irresolution, remorse, regret and desire, for example), as was the case in the *Discourse*, Part III.
57. See also (AT IV, 267; CSMK, 258).
58. In 1649, in the *Passions*, Part II, Descartes lists forty passions (PA, 53-68).
59. "These last few days I have been thinking about the number and order of all the passions, in order to examine their nature in detail. but I have not yet sufficiently digested my opinions on this topic to date to tell them to your highness, I shall not fail to do so as soon as I can" (AT IV, 332; CSMK 277).
60. Prompted by Elizabeth's comments, in a subsequent letter Descartes will draw a distinction between excess that changes the type of action (e.g. from brave to reckless) and excess that remains within the limits of the virtuous (e.g. an action that remains brave while displaying an excess of lack of irresolution and fear) (AT IV, 332; CSMK, 276-277).
61. "The same is true of the other passions. They all represent the goods to which they tend with greater splendour than they deserve, and they make us imagine pleasures to be much greater, before we possess them, than our subsequent experiences show them to be" (AT IV, 285; CSMK 263). See also (PA, 138).
62. "So we must conclude that the greatest felicity of man depends on the right use of reason; and consequently the study which leads to its acquisition is the most useful occupation one can take up. Certainly it is the most agreeable and delightful" (AT IV, 267; CSMK 258).
63. "But when it [the soul's remaining balanced, as it were, between several actions] lasts longer than it ought, making us spend in deliberation the time required for action, [irresolution] is extremely bad" (PA 170).
64. See Mihali, "Descartes's Ethics" for a comparison of Descartes' generosity with Nietzsche's notion of self-creation.
65. See Kristine Korsgaard, "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant". *Journal of Ethics* 3:1 (1999, 1-29) and Kenneth Baynes, "Self, Narrative and Self-Constitution: Revisiting Taylor's 'Self-Interpreting Animals'. *The Philosophical Forum*, 41:4 (2010, 441-457).
66. "[A]lthough nature seems to have joined every movement of the gland to certain of our thoughts from the beginning of life, yet we may join them to others through habit. [...] It is also useful to note that although the movement (both of the gland and of the spirits and the brain) which represent certain objects to the soul are naturally joined to the movements which produce certain passions in it, yet through habit the former can be separated from the latter and joined to others which are very different" (PA, 50).
67. Cottingham, "Cartesian ethics", 209.
68. "But the fresh satisfaction we gain when we have just performed an action we think good is a passion – a kind of joy which I consider to be the sweetest of all joys, because its cause depends only on ourselves" (PA, 190).

69. That Descartes envisages moving from a reactive to a proactive stance toward the passions, from reacting to passions already underway to proactively arousing passions in ourselves, becomes clear in articles 48 and 49 of the first part of the *Passions* where a ranking from low to high is provided. Souls led around by their passions are described as enslaved and as miserable. Then come souls who enlist the help of previous passions that proved effective in order to control present passions. Finally, Descartes mentions strong souls guided by true judgments about good and evil (PA, 48-49).
70. In a 1646 letter to Elizabeth, Descartes had qualified this by saying that it is enough “to have imagined circumstances more distressing than one’s own and to be prepared to bear them” (AT IV, 411; CSMK, 287).
71. Williston, “The Cartesian Sage”, 304.
72. For a detailed treatment of the emotional make-up of the generous person, see Mihali, “Descartes’s Ethics”.
73. Contempt is a species of wonder involving brain states (PA, 70-71) and an accurate judgment about the gravity of a certain evil or vice (PA, 198). Both indignation and anger are species of hatred (PA, 195; 199) but anger is more violent, involving more agitation of the blood as a result of combining desire for revenge with self-love (PA, 199). This means that the person who trains himself to experience contempt or indignation rather than anger will be affected by different physiological processes, including brain states, due to the different trajectories followed by the animal spirits coursing through his body. The more certain trajectories are used, the more likely it is that they will be used again in the future (PA, 42), thus turning contempt or indignation into a habit.
74. Especially in *Meditation IV* (AT VII, 53-62; CSM II, 37-43).
75. Especially articles 32-45 (AT VIIIA, 17-22; CSM I, 204-207).
76. See also James Stover and Ronald Polansky, “Moral Virtue and Megalopsychia,” *Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2003, 351-359) and Alexander Sarch, “What’s Wrong with Megalopsychia?” *Philosophy* 83:324 (April 2008).
77. Brown, *Descartes*, 191-197.
78. Marshall, “Descartes’s Provisional Morality”, 216-219.
79. As Williston (“The Cartesian Sage”, 302-303) notes in passing.
80. Shapiro, “Cartesian Generosity”, 271fn3.
81. In a letter from 1631 and addressed to Guez de Balzac, Descartes characterizes Balzac as “generous” (AT I, 202; see also the discussion in Blanchard, “De quoi donner”). In another letter from 1628 Descartes praises Balzac for having found the proper way to criticize those in power without fear of reprisals but also without the resentment preventing one from noticing any virtues whatsoever (AT I, 7-11). Lack of servility, courage, a balanced, open-minded attitude combined with commitment to the truth are facets of Balzac’s generosity.
82. In the 1644 *Dedicatory Letter*, Elizabeth is described as having proven able to rise above hardships and reversals of fortune without becoming embittered or broken (AT VIII A, 4; CSM I, 192). The 1645-1646 exchange links altruism and esteeming oneself at one’s proper value to nobility of spirit (AT IV, 317; 308; CSMK, 273; 269). Additionally, a letter from 18 May 1645 to Elizabeth (AT IV, 200-204) contains a description of noble souls along lines and even using formulations that will later be applied to generosity and used again in *The Passions*.
83. See Mihali, “Descartes’s Ethics”.
84. Throughout his creative life, Descartes had a circumspect attitude regarding moral commands and who has the authority to issue them (AT VI, 14-15; CSM I, 118; AT V, 86-87; CSMK 326). For this reason, in this paper I refer to his moral claims as recommendations, injunctions, and pieces of advice while also acknowledging the fact that it is likely that in the *Passions* Descartes thought he

had provided sufficient grounding for claiming that the use of our will is the only thing for which we can be justifiably praised or blamed (PA, 152).

85. “These things [i.e. how even animals devoid of reason can be trained] are worth noting in order to encourage *each of us* to make a point of controlling the passions” (PA, 50; emphasis added).

86. Roberts, “Narrative Ethics”, 179.

87. Another letter from the same period (AT IV, 204-205) mentions chemical experiments on liquids.

88. Kantian respect (André Gombay, *Descartes*, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), psychoanalysis techniques ([AT V, 57; CSMK 322] and André Gombay, “Sigmund Descartes?” *Philosophy* 83:325 [Jul., 2008]), self-creation ethics (Mihali, “Descartes’s Ethics” and Baynes, “Self, Narrative and Self-Constitution), regret minimizing decision theories (Brown, *Descartes*), etc.

89. For discussion of how Descartes reworked aspects of Galen’s theory of the four humors into his own doctrine of “animal spirits,” see Carole Talon-Hugon, *Les Passions Rêvées par la Raison*. Paris: Vrin, 2002.

90. See Descartes’ (PA, 211) recommendations for considering things diametrically opposed to the current passion in hopes of countering it.

91. See Descartes’ (AT IV, 277; CSMK, 261-262) emphasis on the importance of satisfaction and contentment.

92. Such as not having the full use of one’s reason due to some illness (AT IV, 281-283; CSMK, 262-263) or maybe being born in a country that lacks a system of education (AT VI, 16; CSM I, 118-119).

93. In the 17th century, the ultimate source of law in many European countries was an absolutist monarch so an agent obeying the law of such countries would ultimately be obeying the king or queen qua head of state.

94. As argued in Mihali, “Descartes’s Ethics”, for present-day readers seeking to acquire Cartesian generosity, Nietzsche’s comments about Goethe who harmonized the different aspects of his personality, “reason, sensibility, emotion, will” can be both illuminating and inspiring. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, and the Anti-Christ*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, IX §49.

95. Adaptability was singled out by Descartes as a sign of rationality in Part V of the *Discourse* (AT VI, 57-59; CSM I, 140-141).

96. These truths were: there is an omnipotent God, our souls are immaterial, the universe is vast, we are part of communities (AT IV, 291-295; CSMK, 265-267). .

97. For the potential limitations of Descartes’ notion of generosity see Williston, “The Cartesian Sage” and Brown, *Descartes*, 188-209.

98. This may bring to mind contemporary views of the self as narrative. On this point I follow Robert Roberts who argues that “my identity has a ‘narrative structure’, not in the sense that it is itself a narrative, but in the sense that it is in part a history that can be properly displayed only in narrative” (Roberts, “Narrative Ethics”, 175-176). For other treatments of the narrative self, see Attila Németh, “Seneca and the narrative self”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 31:5 (2023, 845-865) and Samantha Vice, “Literature and the Narrative Self”. *Philosophy* 78:1 (January 2003, 93-108).

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**a philosophy that keeps
mattering**

**bodies that still matter:
resonances of the work of
judith butler , (eds.) annemie
halsema, katja kwastek
and roel van den oever
(amsterdam university press,
2021)**

kurt borg

This volume, *Bodies That Still Matter: Resonances of the Work of Judith Butler* (2021), is a welcome addition to scholarship about the work of Judith Butler, as well as extensions and applications of their work across various disciplines. Most of the contributions to this volume originated from a conference that was held on 5-7 April 2017 at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, titled *Critical Theory in the Humanities: Resonances of the Work of Judith Butler*. The title of this volume is the title of Butler's keynote lecture on that occasion, and is both a nod to the title of Butler's 1993 *Bodies That Matter*, as well as a re-animation of the concern that Butler's work has with bodies, lives and identities that are rendered as not mattering. The 'still'

in the title can be read both as a suggestion that bodies will persist in calling our attention to critical issues that matter, as well as a reminder that while some bodies still matter, other bodies have fallen out of the scheme of mattering. This volume does not consist of commentaries that seek to establish a coherence or continuity in the ideas found in Butler's works—a task that Butler often resists when speaking in interviews¹—but rather seeks to move Butler's work into new domains, namely, for the purposes of this volume, the arts, ethics, the study of identity and the social sciences. As the editors of the volume—Annemie Halsema, Katja Kwastek and Roel van den Oever—highlight in their introduction, some of the chapters critique or engage with aspects of Butler's thinking, while others use Butler's work as a springboard to novel thinking. The outcome of these different resonances with Butler's corpus is “multidisciplinary, intergenerational, and methodologically diverse, a testament to Butler's broad and continuing appeal.”² The editors note that, despite their variety, the volume's contributions reveal a core theme in Butler's thinking, which is an interest in bodies. As a result, they group the chapters into four themes: “*performativity* (bodies that are performatively gendered), *speech* (bodies addressed and sometimes injured by language), *precarity* (bodies that are vulnerable to different degrees), and *assembly* (bodies that assemble and demonstrate)” (11; emphasis in original). This essay will review each chapter in the volume, outlining the authors' engagement and use of Butler's work. Moreover, in the final section, a more detailed engagement with Butler's own essay in this volume, and the contextualisation of this essay within their more recent work, will be pursued.

PERFORMATIVITY

Adriana Zaharijević's chapter on Butler's theory of agency opens the first section of this volume, titled 'Performativity'. Zaharijević suggests that while in both the 'analytic' and 'continental' traditions, the notion of agency has been used to reify a subject of mastery and autonomy, Butler moves beyond this impasse by emphasising that agency is always embodied and social. In this way, it echoes Simone de Beauvoir's notions of 'situation' and 'project' which, as Zaharijević

highlights, are notions with which Butler has engaged even in the pre-*Gender Trouble* articles.³ It is out of these existential and phenomenological reflections that Butler developed a performative account of gender that is simultaneously a matter of choice and cultural construction; or, rather, as being *neither* free choice nor absolute determination. For Butler, such an approach to agency necessitated an account of gender as “an incessant project, a daily act of reconstitution and interpretation.”⁴ Zaharijević shows that Butler’s more recent work turns to Hannah Arendt’s understanding of agency as being amid constraints and the unexpected. For Zaharijević, Butler’s views on agency emphasise the role of unfixedness, historicity, im/probability, im/possibility, susceptibility to reiterative and transformative articulation, inability to predict in advance, living with and in ambivalence. Zaharijević importantly clarifies that, contrary to what some critics have implied,⁵ “there is nothing light-hearted or gamesome in this play[;] ... none of these are matters of carefree play” (27). Ultimately, Zaharijević’s point is that Butler’s philosophy proposes a theory of agency that aims for beginning to think “of a radically democratic world where all bodies matter and all lives are livable” (28). Seeing how the notion of agency spans Butler’s work from the 1980s till today, Zaharijević is right to regard it as key to the architectonics of Butler’s work.

Eyo Ewara’s chapter engages with Butler’s use of the notion of abjection in thinking about race and racism in their earlier work.⁶ Abjection is defined by Julia Kristeva as “the splitting off and repelling of some part of the self that cannot be then acknowledged, accepted or touched without bringing that self’s constitution as subject in question” (32). Ewara notes that Butler was not the first to use Kristeva’s notion of abjection for the purposes of social theorising. Indeed, Butler draws on Iris Marion Young’s appropriation of Kristeva, whereby Young explained the ‘expulsion’ followed by a ‘repulsion’ at work in the social exclusion and domination of sexed and racialised others. Ewara highlights how Butler re-reads the ‘language of interior/exterior’ found in Kristeva and Young through a deconstructive lens and re-articulates it through the language of performativity. However, Ewara notes that in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler leaves the

notion of abjection behind and turns to another psychoanalytic term, this time of *foreclosure*, to explain the *disavowal* through which whiteness is constituted. This leaves ‘black’ to be seen as ‘contagion’, threat, the excremental other. Ewara’s contention with Butler’s account of racialisation is that it does not speak about the psychic life of those cast in the place of the abject and, instead, focuses on the constitution of ‘proper’ subjects. The excluded are presented as “rejection, privation, non-life” (33). Thus, Ewara argues that in Butler’s account it is hard to see the abjected as anything more than an anti-subject whose experiences are imagined as simply the byproducts of white anxieties. Ewara’s critique is that Butler does not address how people of colour come to see and relate to themselves through white abjection; or how the abjected others respond, take up or resist the ways in which they are formed as abject. Ewara importantly highlights that Butler may have theoretical and strategic reasons for being hesitant to develop descriptions of abjected and racialised senses of self, namely because Butler’s philosophy has always been attentive to the ways in which identity categories can become normalising instruments of regulatory regimes. It has always been Butler’s project to open up the realms of political and existential possibility, rather than pin people down to accounts that could risk misidentifying or constraining them.

This section closes with a short essay by the late Jean-Luc Nancy, titled ‘Beyond Gender(s)’. The piece resonates with Butler’s work insofar as it problematises the relation between sex and gender. “Sex is the play of genders,” (44) holds Nancy, beyond preset poles, psychosocial types or configurations. For Nancy, the play of genders reveals itself in the engagement of “every kind—or genre—of disposition, tendency, leaning, and taste: masculine/feminine, homo/hetero, mono/trans, active/passive, dominating/dominated, arousing/aroused, erectile/malleable, dry/wet, soft/hard, genital/anal (oral, and so forth), feverish/indolent, mute/chattering, brief/stretched out, gentle/rough...” (44). This set of relations, which Nancy terms *sexistence*, “occupies the place or the role of an essential being-in-relation, which is constitutive of this animal” (45) that is the human. Like language, sex “is

completely in its difference from itself or within itself,” moving Nancy to ask: “[w]hat would be left untinged by sex?” (45).

SPEECH

Julia Peetz’s chapter initiates this volume’s second section, titled ‘Speech’, with a reflection on the performative dimension of populist politicians in the United States. Peetz notes that in standard accounts of speech acts, such as those proposed by J.L. Austin and Pierre Bourdieu, a speech act is felicitous if it affirms a pre-existing authority. Those who operate outside the boundaries of ritual, convention and pre-established authority, therefore, should not be able to make felicitous utterances. Yet, Peetz’s claim in this chapter is that utterances by contemporary populist politicians are troubling this relationship between authority and speech acts, revealing a paradoxical performativity of populism. Peetz argues that anti-establishment performatives seem to be successful *in spite of* the fact that they work through the disavowal of authority, rather than an affirmation of it. Following Austin’s and Bourdieu’s logic, politicians seeking election would attempt to court institutional affiliation and authority. However, according to Peetz, events such as the 2016 US presidential election suggest that this same proximity to established power has become a liability (not an asset) to politicians seeking election. Peetz draws on Butler’s discussion of speech acts in *Excitable Speech* which emphasises that conventional formulae can be rehearsed in non-conventional ways, provoking a shift in the terms of legitimacy, and breaking open the possibility of future social and institutional forms. This chapter by Peetz is an interesting contribution to the flourishing field of ‘populism studies’, in which Butler’s ideas can fruitfully be drawn upon.⁷

Tingting Hui’s chapter reflects on how speech ‘accent’ presumes unstated norms of non-accented speech, which may result in acts of hostility and violence against the accented speaker. Taking her cue from Butler’s notion of subversive resignification, Hui asks: is it possible to *talk back* with an accented foreign tongue? Hui notes that, for Butler, in linguistic vulnerability resides a potentiality for

resistance and openness for re-signification. Hui refers to Butler's characterisation of Bourdieu's account of speech acts as a conservative one since he overlooks instances when interpellation misses its target and may fail. In the case of hate speech, for example, the link between the hateful linguistic utterances, their target and their hurtful intentions is not a seamless one; the linguistic travel may be derailed, become confounded or even reversed. Hui suggests that, for Butler, the possibility of subversive resignification rests on an *excess* that is found within linguistic operations; a possibility which censorship and legislation risk blocking, despite their good intentions, by limiting the free openness of language and by over-estimating the success rate of hateful speech acts (while not downplaying the actual numerous instances where such speech acts are indeed hurtful). However, Hui is not completely convinced of this radical potential within language. She raises questions on how one can respond to the violence that exploits precisely the incongruity between body and speech in such a way that that incongruity is not a source of hope but of a heightened susceptibility to marginalisation. In such instances, vocalised speech is what places the speaker in a subaltern position, impacting their *survivability* and ability to feel 'at home' in the language and that society. Whereas Butler's analysis aims to deconstruct the presumed sovereignty of the speaker, Hui is highlighting the accentuation of the linguistic vulnerability of the accented speaker for whom the 'openness' of speech is not a source of possible resistance, but is yet another site of heightened oppression. For Hui, Butler disregards the fact that not everyone has equal access to any and all language; not everyone is socially and politically recognised as being 'entitled' to that language. This rich chapter may have been further illuminated by a discussion of Butler's conversation with Spivak in *Who Sings the Nation-State?* particularly the points made there on who has the right to sing the nation state, how, in what context and *in which accent*.⁸ That 'case study' also highlighted the power of resignification possessed even by people marginalised, among other factors, on the basis of accent and language spoken.

Roel van den Oever's chapter takes its cue from Butler's views on language

and signification to provide a critical reading of the film *Private Romeo*, a 2011 reenactment of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that puts at its centre a romantic relationship between two military cadets. The author's claims in this chapter are threefold. Firstly, despite the 'authorial intentions' of the film's creators, that is, of responding to the historical context (the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' legislation in the US military), no character in the film utters the word 'homosexuality'; thus, ultimately and unwittingly, fulfilling the aims of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'. Secondly, the visual narrative of the film is superseded by the primacy of the Shakespearean characters and their heterosexual romance. And, thirdly, taking *Private Romeo* as a homosexual representation is only possible by assuming a homophobic context and a heteronormative one, as per the original drama. According to van den Oever, *Private Romeo* ultimately fails to achieve its intended effects of presenting an affirmative gay love affair that is free from homophobic tones. Van den Oever refers to Butler's analysis of the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' legislation in *Excitable Speech* as showing that in order to install the homophobic injunction, the military had to speak the word itself. Moreover, the military conflates the stating of homosexuality with homosexual conduct and acts. Thus, the speech utterance becomes a sexual act, or is treated as such: "The statement, then, 'I am a homosexual,' is fabulously misconstrued as, 'I want you sexually'" (82), thus also evoking connotations of AIDS and the homophobic discourse of contagion. The author also points out strategic errors made by the film's creators, namely, why choose to recite a gay romance through a text "about a forbidden love that is doomed from the start?" (86). While van den Oever draws on Butler's analysis of how authorial intentions may fail, his analysis goes counter to some of the 'intentions' (if one may speak in this way) of Butler's analysis. This is because while it is true that *Excitable Speech* does highlight the possible thwarting of authorial intentions, Butler sought to exploit this ineffectuality in order to challenge power, particularly its harmful effects on oppressed groups. On the other hand, van den Oever's critique of *Private Romeo* seems to be emphasising its ineffectuality as a possible act of resistance. Such a reading may be interpreted as implying that power is even stronger than it may seem, echoing rigid interpretations of the Foucaultian view that strategies of

resistance can be recuperated or co-opted by power which may strip them of their subversive potential. This (im)balance between subversive resistance and the risk of co-optation by power could also have been explored in relation to a similar discussion that Butler puts forward in *Bodies That Matter* regarding drag practices in the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*.

PRECARITY

Carmen Schuhmann's chapter, initiating the volume's third section titled 'Precarity', reflects on how Butler's ideas can inform the practice of criminal justice counseling. Schuhmann shows how Butler's views on relationality and subjectivity present a critique that may re-orient current hegemonic practices in counseling. For Schuhmann, although the humanist tradition that underpins many counseling practices has noble intentions insofar as it challenges reductionism and recognises the uniqueness of each person, it is open to critique, particularly as it reinforces a 'walled' conception of the self that regards its relationships as secondary to its unitary configuration. Schuhmann turns to *Giving an Account of Oneself* to show how Butler's notion of subjectivity—critical as it is of humanist connotations of self-transparency—can illuminate counseling.⁹ Schuhmann refers to Butler's claim that the posture of invulnerability actually amounts to 'becoming inhuman'. Contrary to this, 'becoming human' stands for a "willingness to become undone in relation to others,"¹⁰ which can also be equated with a nonviolent disposition: "What might it mean to undergo violence, to insist upon *not* resolving grief and staunching vulnerability too quickly through a turn to violence, and to practice, as an experiment in living otherwise, nonviolence in an empathically nonreciprocal response?"¹¹ Through the reference to violence in this quotation from *Giving an Account of Oneself*, a thematic link with Butler's 2020 monograph, *The Force of Nonviolence*, can be seen. In fact, it would not be outrageous to suggest that the theme of violence and possibilities of nonviolent responses is a thread that runs through all of Butler's work. Schuhmann raises an important point when she asks how we can distinguish between the sort of injury that is constitutive of relationality, and injury that ought to be rejected

as intolerable. Linking this discussion with ethical issues that arise in criminal justice, the author notes that, in her own counseling practice, it can be observed that the divide between perpetrators and victims of crime may be murkier and more complicated than what the dominant paradigms in criminal justice imply. More of this work connecting theoretical exposition with empirical research is needed since while analyses such as Butler's are crucial in problematising and elaborating complex theoretical notions, it may not always be obvious or easy to determine how exactly these critiques can inform practitioners in their work.¹²

Simon van der Weele's chapter stages a dialogue between Eva Kittay's and Butler's work. Both philosophers have formulated an ethics centred around concepts of dependency and vulnerability, yet they take these concepts into different normative directions. Van der Weele argues that while Kittay takes the person with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities (such as her daughter Seshā) as the 'paradigm case' for dependency, Butler seems to take the refugee as theirs. This choice, then, goes on to determine their respective attitudes towards dependency and its overcoming. Van der Weele highlights that although both Kittay and Butler employ vocabularies of dependency to problematise the liberal-philosophical notions of equality, dependency plays a different role in their respective accounts of ethics. For Kittay, dependencies are principally rooted in human corporeality, and from this premise, she normatively concludes that dependents require care. On the other hand, Butler is reluctant to formulate an ethics in terms of a normative program or a set of virtues, even though it is not controversial to suggest that Butler's work is normatively inflected in a quite unambiguous way. Simply put, for Butler it is wrong that some lives are violently rendered unlivable. Rather than the presence or otherwise of any normative trace, what Butler's work draws our attention to is the tone and confidence we place in our normative commitments, with Butler's tone being hesitant, proceeding cautiously and ambivalently. Van der Weele's chapter opens up an important discussion on Butler's account of ethics, namely that any normative consequences found in Butler's account of ethics are not guaranteed, and dependency can easily be met with violence rather than care.

As Butler writes in *Frames of War*: “The postulation of a generalized precariousness that calls into question the ontology of individualism implies, although does not directly entail, certain normative consequences. It does not suffice to say that since life is precarious, therefore it must be preserved”.¹³ For Butler, therefore, neither vulnerability nor precariousness can serve as a foundation for thinking about ethics (an issue to which I return below). It is for this reason that Butler has never really embraced a feminist ethics of care or an ethico-politics of vulnerability.¹⁴ Van der Weele’s chapter interestingly articulates the theoretical differences between Kittay and Butler, and connects this implicit dialogue between these two philosophers with findings from his empirical studies. His conclusion highlights that the complexity of experiences of dependency hints at the philosophical limitations of thinking through a single paradigm case.

Noa Roei’s chapter presents a reading of *Archive* (2014), an hour-long performance by Israeli dancer and choreographer Arkadi Zaidés. In this performance, the artist conducts a corporeal dialogue with audio-visual documentation of human rights violations occurring in the Palestinian territories, videos of which were caught on cameras by Palestinian residents. The chapter analyses this performance through Butler’s notions of risk, opaque subjectivity, complicity, the impossibility of forgiveness and the basis of collective ethical responsibility. Roei draws on Butler’s foregrounding of vulnerability as a possible basis of claims for non-military political solutions, contrary to violent responses that reinforce fantasies of mastery. The author highlights how vulnerability allows one to be undone by others, throwing one into an opaqueness that opens up spaces of collective responsibility beyond notions of responsibility built on conceptions of sovereign subjects. In his performance, Zaidés first adopts a position of spectator to the projected clips, but slowly becomes more absorbed and seamlessly blends into the movements on screen. Roei argues that there is an initial *disidentification* between the seer and the seen, with the artist being implicated by the footage yet also distanced from it. By showing only Israeli protagonists on screen, the footage highlights the politics of spectatorship, foregrounding Palestinians’ *right to look* in

an attempt to transform the relations of the visible and the sayable. Roei considers these videos as a *countervisual* practice which (like counternarratives) opposes “the authority of a specific (always and already politically inflected) presentation and interpretation of the visual” (121n.8). Roei highlights how Zaides’ *Archive* performance—an image from which serves as the cover illustration for this volume—is an emphatically corporeal response that offers an alternate, entangled mode of image consumption, not through the eye but through the body; through re-enactment not representation. This implies an opening up to alterity, not in order to redistribute blame, but to give an account of oneself from a position that is not comfortably located on a stable moral ground. In this gesture, there is a refusal to resolve vulnerability too quickly into violence and a refusal to locate violence as foreign to one’s self, thus transforming one’s outlook on *forgiveness*. This is not forgiveness as absolution, but as an act of acceptance of one’s opaque, relational and collectively-formed identity. As Butler puts it in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: “If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven”.¹⁵

Friederike Sigler’s chapter takes its cue from a 2000 exhibition by the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. For this exhibition, the artist recruited asylum seekers who were willing to sit inside closed cardboard boxes for four hours a day during the six-week exhibition period, paying them at a minimum wage. Some participants were ‘workers who cannot be paid’ (128) since their legal status did not allow them to work, and a violation of this law could result in deportation. Sigler indicates that the aim of the artist was not of representing but rather of *demonstrating precarity*.¹⁶ The artistic strategy adopted was not without its critics, some of whom were skeptical of the opportunities for resistance that this exhibition opens up, seeing the exhibition as controversial, if not exploitative. Sigler notes that Sierra places labor and working conditions of the 21st century at the forefront, whereby the artist (as employer/exploited) *delegated* the work and artistic production. The art space itself becomes implicated in the exhibition, no longer being merely the site of artistic work, but becoming part of the global machinery of neoliberal

capitalism. Sigler reflects on how the exhibition attempts to make the audience feel complicit yet, at the same time, helpless; a feeling exacerbated by the frames of the artistic institution, which left the audience unable to intervene in the face of this ethically intolerable position on display. This apparent impossibility of the audience to improve the situation of the workers is provoked in order to invite them to seek ways to intervene, at least by forming psychological alliances with workers on a global scale. It is in this regard that Sigler reads this artistic exhibition as entailing possibilities of resistance.

ASSEMBLY

The final section of this volume, titled ‘Assembly’, opens with a chapter by Adriana Cavarero.¹⁷ The works of Cavarero and Butler have long had great affinity with each other, and this chapter is a further addition to the important ongoing conversation between these two thinkers.¹⁸ In this chapter, Cavarero takes her cue from Butler’s reflections in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* on public assemblies and demonstrations (such as the ones in the Arab Springs, Gezi Park, Tahrir Square and the Occupy movements) to highlight that “by acting in concert, bodies enter a political space of appearance primarily constituted by their corporeal condition of plurality” (142). Cavarero follows Butler in widening the Arendtian vocabulary by insisting on the political centrality of bodily needs, such as “food, shelter, protection from injury and violence” (144). This emphasis is crucial in light of how Arendt (in)famously disregards these needs as not occupying the true realm of politics; these matters, for her, are “pre- and un-political” (144-145). Cavarero regards the uniqueness of the sound of one’s voice as indicative of Arendt’s notions of plurality and uniqueness. Cavarero notes that Arendt follows Aristotle in privileging speech as a defining characteristic of the human, yet, indicates that Butler further radicalises this notion by highlighting that speech itself is a bodily act; “vocalization requires a larynx”.¹⁹ Cavarero builds further on this vocal dimension of assembled pluralities in terms of what she regards as the politics of voices.²⁰ To be clear, Cavarero, like Arendt and Butler, does not simply place her blind faith in the power of crowds; after all, a crowd (or a ‘mass’) can

be a sign of conformity or an imposed homogeneity that prevents plurality from exhibiting itself. Cavarero points out that the disquieting dimension of assemblies is the “desire for blending into an amorphous collective body which expresses its unity with a single voice” (147). Cavarero notes that theorists that have explored the phenomenon of crowds, such as Sigmund Freud and Gustave Le Bon, have often emphasised this potentially dangerous aspect of plurality-gone-wrong. But Cavarero prefers to draw on two other writers to highlight other dimensions of crowds, namely the description of the soundscape of the masses in Elias Canetti’s 1960 book *Crowds and Power* and a description of the sounds of a group of schoolchildren in Canetti’s autobiographical novel *The Voices of Marrakesh*, as well as Roland Barthes’ description in his 1984 *The Rustle of Language* of the depiction in a film of a group of children reading aloud from different books. For Cavarero, that the examples brought by both writers concern children is not incidental, and may help us to reimagine the *germinal* status of radical democracy as a site of *plurality* (rather than a single unity), *pluriphony* (rather than symphony, mere polyphony or cacophony) and *public happiness*.²¹ A further commonality between the theme of this chapter and Butler’s work can be found in the latter’s dialogue with Spivak on *Who Sings the Nation State?* where, as summarised by Fiona Jenkins: “Singing as a plural act, merging voices that remain different, ruptures the mono-lingualism of the nation, putting in motion the task of translation”.²²

The chapter by Erika Fischer-Lichte draws on Butler’s concepts of *assembly*, *appearance* and *precarity* to argue that aesthetic assembly in theatre is closely related to various forms of political assemblies. The author uses three periods in German theatre history as points of reference to read the power of assembly: 18th century theatre of the educated middle class; 1920s (Weimar Republic) workers’ mass spectacles; and 1990s choric theatre and some of Christoph Schlingensiefel’s productions. The author chooses these three exemplars to make the point that, in their different ways and in response to different historical contexts, they encourage a self-empowerment of its spectators. With regard to the first point of reference, the author refers to how theatrical performances in

18th century Germany promoted middle class values, leading the spectacle to have a transformative force that enabled this sector of society to experience their *togetherness* as an emotional community. Regarding the second point of reference, Fischer-Lichte refers to the early 20th century theatre works, such as those of Max Reinhard, which included mass spectacles (*Voltstheater*) held in open spaces drawing spectators from all social classes. Fischer-Lichte refers to the comments of one critic at the time, who said that “to become aware of themselves, large communities continuously require common rallies, joint celebrations, expressions of joy, sorrow, determination, of attack and defence with regard to things that affect all members of the community” (163). Fischer-Lichte notes that while the 18th century theatre enabled the middle class to set itself apart from the ruling class, in the 1920s the proletarian spectators reiterated their common hatred of class enemy and their will to change society. Theatre, therefore, was one of the weapons through which class consciousness and identity were articulated and expressed. With regard to the third point of reference, Fischer-Lichte argues that since the 1990s, German theatre was informed by social realities in such a way that productions confronted spectators with actors (though these did not necessarily ‘play a part’, but would be ‘playing themselves’) who usually remain invisible, such as the unemployed, the asylum seeker, the disabled or the ill. Thus, *appearance* understood in this sense means that “bodies must be viewed and their vocalized sounds must be heard: the body must enter the visual and audible field”.²³ This concern with appearance raises questions on whether an exoticising attitude is being invited in the gaze of spectators; or whether this visibility grants agency and power to the actors, and whether spectators are able to ‘include the others’ in the assembly. What this chapter ultimately seeks to demonstrate is that the aesthetic assembly in and as theatre has the potential to turn into a political assembly that might lead to social changes. Thus, the chapter ends with a link back to the Occupy movement, with which the chapter opens. Political assemblies (such as, Fischer-Lichte argues, ‘Silent Standstill’ in Egypt in 2010 and ‘Human Mic’ in New York in 2011) make ample use of aesthetic devices that developed in performance art.

BUTLER ON 'BODIES THAT STILL MATTER'

The volume concludes with the eponymous essay by Judith Butler, “Bodies That Still Matter”.²⁴ In one sense, this essay brings together some of the strands of Butler’s thinking in this last decade, from the thematics opened up in *Dispossession*, the 2013 dialogue with Athena Athanasiou²⁵ to Butler’s 2020 *The Force of Nonviolence*²⁶ through the 2015 *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*.²⁷ It is also worth mentioning a number of essays and lectures Butler delivered in 2014 on the theme of vulnerability and resistance,²⁸ which later featured in the 2016 co-edited collection *Vulnerability in Resistance*. In another sense, this essay also connects ideas that Butler has been elaborating since the 2004 publication of *Precarious Life* and the 2009 *Frames of War*. An argument can be made, in fact, that these two books and *The Force of Nonviolence* constitute a trilogy of sorts that develops a philosophical vocabulary (rather than a unitary theoretical framework) revolving around notions of precariousness, vulnerability, relationality, interdependence, grievability, equality and nonviolence.²⁹ It could be said that such conceptual architecture has been developed through a spiral return by Butler to this constellation of concepts in their various works, each time introducing a new emphasis which further extends the remit and domain of the theorising. In yet another sense, it could also be argued that the development of this philosophical vocabulary can also be traced further back to a key concern of Butler’s early works on gender, that is, the power (oftentimes violent) of norms to determine the intelligibility of identities and subjects or to reduce them to the abjected pits of unlivability. Although Butler is not fond of attempts that seek to trace a unifying thread in their works, one can refer to the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* to show how *livability* has been a guiding concern of Butler’s corpus. There, Butler writes that a motivation for writing is “increasing the *possibilities for a livable life* for those who live, or try to live, on the sexual margins”.³⁰

More proximately, it suffices to say—as Butler does in the opening footnote to this essay—that the “Bodies That Still Matter” essay that features in this volume draws

from material that appeared in *The Force of Nonviolence*, specifically its Chapter 1 (on the relational body), Chapter 3 (on the biopolitics of grievability) and the Postscript³¹ (on the critique of political discourses of ‘vulnerable groups’ and the ambivalence at the heart of social bonds). Butler’s poignant essay opens with an arresting phrase: “We are living in a time of numerous atrocities and senseless death” (178). From there, Butler proceeds with a reflection on the politics of vulnerability, writing that it is an error to posit too quickly ‘care’ or ‘vulnerability’ as foundations for political discourses and practices. Of course, Butler’s hesitance in this regard is not opposition to procedures that seek to identify and protect vulnerable groups. Rather, Butler’s point is to note a number of problems that can exist in the framework of vulnerability; for example, its paternalistic overtones in positing a seemingly ‘invulnerable’ ‘strong’ agent coming to the aid of the ‘vulnerable’ and the ‘helpless’ who lack agency. Butler’s past work has invited a rethinking of the relationship between agency, vulnerability and resistance, a conversation continued in this essay when arguing that “perhaps we have to rethink the act of demonstrating, and the logic of demonstration itself” (183). As Butler highlights in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, a group of people protesting on the streets (for example, the ‘standing man’ in Taksim Square or the refugees in Würzburg who stitched their mouths shut in protest) do not necessarily signify an overcoming of vulnerability; to the contrary, through their precarious embodiment, they *demonstrate vulnerability as a mode of protest*.

Yet Butler is making a further critical point on discourses of vulnerability, namely that how we name the vulnerable matters; *discourse matters*. Butler argues that when we ascribe vulnerability uncritically, “we occlude the constellation of vulnerability, rage, persistence, and resistance that emerges under these same historical conditions” (181). Butler here is referring to the resilience (for want of a better word) that manifests itself in conditions of constrained agency and destitution, referring to the “efforts at action, forms of solidarity, networks of support, and means of resistance” (181) that risk being effaced in the dominant thinking about ‘vulnerable groups’. Similarly, Butler contests the use of language

such as ‘bare life’ to describe the condition of those in precarious survival; “we do not recognize their suffering by further depriving them of all capacity” (182). Butler’s reference to the work of Giorgio Agamben here is oblique; but it is more explicit in other works. In *The Force of Nonviolence*, for example, when discussing the same topic, Butler notes that “[t]hose amassed along the borders of Europe are not precisely what political philosopher Giorgio Agamben referred to as ‘bare life’”,³² and that such terminology cannot articulate the efforts and micro-practices of developing networks, communicating timetable, plotting routes, squatting in vacated places, improvising forms of sociality, and so on. One of Butler’s earliest engagements with Agamben is in *Precarious Life*, where Butler draws on his (and Michel Foucault’s) notions of sovereign power, governmentality and biopower in order to study cases of indefinite detention in the context of Guantanamo Bay. But even there, Butler already points out insufficiencies in Agamben’s account, noting that:

“bare life” underwrites the actual political arrangements in which we live, posing as a contingency into which any political arrangement might dissolve. Yet such general claims do not yet tell us how this power functions differentially, to target and manage certain populations, to derealize the humanity of subjects who might potentially belong to a community bound by commonly recognized laws.³³

In the second half of the essay, Butler turns to a discussion of what they term the *biopolitics of grievability*, calling our attention to the status of some lives as more or less ‘killable’ (179), such as cases of femicide and the institutional failures to respond to such cases. By connecting Foucault’s notion of biopolitics as death-dealing with Achille Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics, Butler outlines an ethico-politics of grievability. The central idea in this framework is that “some lives are regarded as if the prospective loss of that life would be a serious loss; they are the grievable. Others are regarded as if their loss would be no loss, or not much of a loss; they are in the category of the ungrievable” (185). While this emphasis on the political role of grief and mourning has been present in a number of Butler’s

works, what is more explicit in Butler's recent work is the framing of the discussion in terms of radical equality, which is a crucial component of Butler's account of nonviolence. The links between grievability, equality and violence reveal the racist, misogynistic and transphobic character of the power that determines which lives matter and qualify as a life. Interestingly, Butler maintains that this discussion of grievability carries with it a committed normative dimension; namely, that what is at stake is not a descriptive statement that every life is grievable, but rather "we should perhaps go frankly normative, without shame or hesitation, and say that every life ought to be grievable, thus positing a utopic horizon within which theory and description is obliged to work" (187).³⁴ It is in this way that Butler's efforts are not to establish a foundation for ethico-political thinking, but instead posits a critical and utopic (future-driven) ideal of equal grievability. The consequences of such a claim are two-pronged: a *deconstructive* gesture that calls out measures and practices that are rendering lives ungrievable, and a *reconstructive* attempt to reimagine sociality and collectivities within the horizon of radical equality and democracy.

In the last part of the essay, Butler offers a powerful description of relationality upon which "the future of resistance movements" (190) should be built. Butler's reflections here rest on the idea that "no one body is self-subsisting" (191). Within such a formulation lies an implicit critique of liberal notions of distinct and bounded individuality. Butler instead insists on the materialist point that the possibility of life cannot be separated from the infrastructural conditions (physical, social, affective, etc.) that enable it to thrive. This condition of life captures within it an element of unchosen vulnerability and dependencies that cannot simply be ignored or disavowed, which is what the "liberal conceit" (191) does; to the contrary, these are the basis upon which we need to reimagine social bonds, and to evaluate the life-enabling nature of current political and economic structures. Thus, in Butler's essay we can see that the apprehension of life as precarious and vulnerable can powerfully result in direct calls for policy and institutional changes to foster "an infrastructure of sustenance" (192). In this way, as the title of this edited volume

demonstrates, Butler's philosophy is a crucial voice that persists in animating contemporary urgent questions on "whose bodies matter, and why" (192).

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NOTES

1. For example, in an interview where Butler is asked to explain how the ideas expressed in *Gender Trouble* reverberate in the more recent work, Butler replies: “I do not try to connect the earlier work with the more recent work. I accept that there are connections, and it seems that you just found one. I tend to start again and again, which does not mean that each time, I start *de novo*. Maybe the same issues get raised in different contexts—gender, war, precarity, censorship—and they get folded into new contexts. But it was never my intention to produce a systematic or internally coherent system of thought. I continue to think with the resources I have”. See Adriana Zaharijević, “In conversation with Judith Butler: Binds yet to be settled,” *Filozofija i Društvo* vol. 27, no. 1 (2016): 106.
2. Annemie Halsema, Katja Kwastek and Roel van den Oever, *Bodies That Still Matter: Resonances of the Work of Judith Butler* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 10. All parenthetical references in the text are to this volume.
3. On Butler’s early articles, see Jules Gleeson, “Judith Butler: The Early Years,” *JSTOR Daily*, June 19, 2019, <daily.jstor.org/judith-butler-the-early-years/>
4. Judith Butler, “Variations on Sex and Gender in Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault,” *Praxis International* 5:4 (January 1986): 508, cited in *ibid*.
5. For such criticisms of Butler’s work, see Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Professor of Parody: The hip defeatism of Judith Butler,” *The New Republic*, February 22, 1999, <newrepublic.com/article/150687/professor-parody> and Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Points against Postmodernism,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 75, no. 3 (2000): 687-712.
6. For more on Butler and race, see Charlotte Chadderton, *Judith Butler, Race and Education* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
7. For more by Butler on populism, see Massimo Filippi and Enrico Monacelli, “Populisms not Populism: A Conversation with Judith Butler,” *Scenari: Rivista Semestrale di Filosofia Contemporanea* 11 (2019): 315-326.
8. See Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007).
9. For more on how Butler’s work, particularly on self-narration and selfhood, can inform a critique of hegemonic practices in the psychological sciences with regard to trauma survivors, see Kurt Borg, “Narrating Trauma: Judith Butler on Narrative Coherence and the Politics of Self-Narration,” *Life Writing* 15, no. 3 (2018): 447-465.
10. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 136.
11. *Ibid.*, 100.
12. For a book-length analysis that complements some of the intentions of this chapter, but that adopts a feminist Foucaultian outlook to study therapeutic practices as swaying between practices of normalising self-policing and self-creative practices of the self, see Helen O’Grady, *Woman’s Relationship with Herself: Gender, Foucault, and Therapy* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).
13. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 33.
14. For more on the blooming literature on the ethics and politics of care and vulnerability, see Victoria Browne, Jason Danelly, and Doerthe Rosenow (eds.), *Vulnerability and the Politics of Care: Transdisciplinary Dialogues* (New York: Routledge, 2021), Estelle Ferrarese, *The Politics of Vulnerability* (New York: Routledge, 2018), Erinn C. Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2014) and Maurice Hamington and Michael Flower (eds.), *Care Ethics in the Age of Precarity* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota

Press, 2021).

15. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 136, cited in this volume, 114.

16. This is the title of an interview Butler gave in 2015, recapping the themes found in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. See Judith Butler, “Demonstrating Precarity: Vulnerability, Embodiment, and Resistance,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 23, 2015 <lareviewofbooks.org/av/demonstrating-precarity-vulnerability-embodiment-resistance/>

17. A book-length engagement with some of the themes explored in this chapter, centering on Arendt’s political thought, is found in Cavarero’s latest monograph. See Adriana Cavarero, *Surging Democracy: Notes on Hannah Arendt’s Political Thought*, trans. Matthew Gervase (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021 [2019]).

18. For Butler’s direct engagement with Cavarero, see Butler, ““Who Are You?”” in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 30-40 and especially Judith Butler, “Leaning Out, Caught in the Fall: Interdependency and Ethics in Cavarero,” in *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence: Adriana Cavarero, with Judith Butler, Bonnie Honig, and Other Voices*, eds. Timothy J. Huzar and Clare Woodford (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 46-62. For Cavarero on Butler, see Adriana Cavarero, “The Vulnerability of the Helpless,” in *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009 [2007]), 20-24 and Adriana Cavarero, “Judith Butler and the Belligerent Subject,” trans. Anne Tordi, *Annali d’Italianistica* 29 (2011): 163-170. For scholarship on the relation between Butler and Cavarero, see Olivia Guaraldo, “Thinkers that Matter: On the Thought of Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero,” *AG About Gender: International Journal of Gender Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 92-117, Paul A. Kottman, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000 [1997]), vii-xxxi, Tuija Pulkkinen, “Judith Butler’s Politics of Philosophy in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*: Arendt, Cavarero, and Human ‘Appearing’ and ‘Plurality,’” *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 21, 2 (2018): 128-147 and Tuija Pulkkinen, “Vulnerability and the Human in Judith Butler’s and Adriana Cavarero’s Feminist Thought: A Politics of Philosophy Point of View,” *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 23, 2 (2020): 151-164.

19. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 207, cited in this volume, 145.

20. For more by Cavarero on voice, see Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005 [2003]).

21. For more on the notion of public happiness, see Lynne Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (London and New York: Verso, 2017).

22. Fiona Jenkins, “Sensate Democracy and Grievable Life,” in *Butler and Ethics*, ed. Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 118-140.

23. Butler, *Notes*, 86, cited in this volume, 168.

24. Apart from the one in this volume, Butler has published an essay with this title in *Vulnerability and the Politics of Care*. Moreover, this essay has also appeared in French as “Ces corps qui comptent encore,” *Raisons Politiques* 76, 4 (2019): 15-26.

25. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

26. Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020). This book is adapted from Butler’s 2016 Tanner lectures, 2018 Gifford Lectures and 2019 Cuming Lectures, among other sources.

27. This book is based on Butler's 2011 Mary Flexner Lectures.
28. See Judith Butler, "Vulnerability and Resistance," *MLA Profession Journal*, March 2014 <<https://profession.mla.org/vulnerability-and-resistance/>>, Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," Madrid, June 2014 <<http://bibacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Rethinking-Vulnerability-and-Resistance-Judith-Butler.pdf>> and Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, eds. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 12-27.
29. An early synopsis from the publisher, in fact, suggested a continuity between these three books, as it described *The Force of Nonviolence* as being geared "[t]owards a form of aggressive non-violence—following on from Butler's *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*." <www.giffordlectures.org/news/books/force-non-violence-ethico-political-bind> Another commonality between the three books is their publisher, Verso.
30. Judith Butler, "Preface (1999)," in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), xxvi [emphasis added].
31. This postscript appeared as an online blog post at the end the book was published. See "Judith Butler on Rethinking Vulnerability, Violence, Resistance," *Verso blog*, March 6, 2020 <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4583-judith-butler-on-rethinking-vulnerability-violence-resistance>>. This postscript draws on (and cites) some of the 'vulnerability and resistance' material which Butler had been exploring in 2014, cited above.
32. Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 193.
33. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 68. In a number of publications and lectures over the years, Butler has expressed further disagreements with Agamben's theorising, especially with his notion of 'bare life' to describe people living in destitution and in extreme precarity. See Butler, *Frames of War*, 29, Butler, "Vulnerability and Resistance" and Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," 26. For more discussions on Butler's disagreements with Agamben, see Elena Loizidou, *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 109, Ariadni Polychroniou, "Towards a Critical Reconstruction of Modern Refugee Subjectivity: Overcoming the Threat-Victim Bipolarity with Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben," *Open Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2021): 252-268, Birgit Schippers, *The Political Philosophy of Judith Butler* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 114 and James Stanescu, "Species Trouble: Judith Butler, Mourning, and the Precarious Lives of Animals," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (2012): 567-582. For an essay that refers to how Butler and Spivak articulate their disagreements with Agamben's notions of bare life and sovereignty, see Thomas F. Thierney, "Book Review: *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak," *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 30, no. 2 (2008): 269-278. Stephen Ross' 2017 article is a notable exception in this literature, since rather than a disagreement between Butler's notions and Agamben's, it bewilderingly claims that the notions of precarity and dispossession that Butler develops with Athanasiou in their dialogue "[emerge] directly out of" and "are firmly anchored in Agamben's account of *homo sacer*." See Stephen Ross, "The Secret Agency of Dispossession," *Études britanniques contemporaines* (online), 53 (2017) <journals.openedition.org/ebc/3739>.
34. Butler had made a similar argument on precariousness in *Frames of War*: "Normatively construed, I am arguing that there ought to be a more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognizing precariousness, and that this should take form as concrete social policy regarding such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care, and legal status." See Butler, *Frames of War*, 13.