

Clouds And Fronts. Onto-Meteorology and the Philosophical Fantastic¹

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Bionote

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Legend

θ θέσις: thesis
ὕ υπόθεσις: hypothesis
ἐ ἐρώτημα: question
ν νόημα: concept
νέ νέφος: nebula

The Concept of Front. Front and War

The American mathematician Elias Loomis, who described the famous geomagnetic storm of the late summer of 1859 when there occurred an exceedingly brilliant display of the Northern Lights, first formulated the hypothesis of the existence of weather fronts as early as 1841. But it was not until 1919, after the First World War, that the Norwegian meteorological school adopted this term and concept, while the US National Weather Service began to mark fronts on weather maps only after the Second World War. It is hardly a coincidence that the history of the concept “front” unfolded directly in parallel to the two World Wars. The concept “front” presupposes, in the first place, a planetary, *global* scale of thought; on the other hand, it is inevitably associated with a clash, conflict, furious onslaught of air masses; but also with a complex strategy, codes subject to deductions, experimental hypotheses, and forecasts.

The mapping of weather fronts repeats, or at least is inspired by, that of military

¹ This text is part of Boyan Manchev's book *Clouds. Philosophy of the Free Body* (Sofia: Metheor, 2017) [Боян Манчев, *Облаци. Философия на свободното тяло* (София: Метеор, 2017)]. The English version, translated by Katerina Popova, is forthcoming in 2018.

fronts, borrowing its techniques of representation. The militarized imaginary of the front: dynamic forces, *polemos*, *agon*, clash. Battle scenes. In this way, the front is at once a loaded but also a symptomatic concept. The military concept of the front itself, associated with a frontal surface, with a dynamic curve representing the disposition and dynamic of forces, is in this sense adequate for our thesis on the ontological *polemos*. Another use of the concept of front, referring to a political movement, can also be understood in the same perspective: *Front de gauche*, *Front National*. Obviously, the political concept of front likewise presupposes not just organization based on substantial representation of a particular political identity, of a particular group: "party," but organization of (dynamic) forces. In the front burns the polemical Heraclitian fire.

The cloud: a celestial battle scene, clash, *agon*, revolution. The war of the clouds, the revolution of the storm.

The Erotic Front

The front: not just a battle scene but also an erogenous surface. Ares and Eros.

The front: an ontological erogenous surface. An erogenous surface of the event.

The element that envelops, that is, a front, not a resisting body but the very re-

sistance against the sensual pleasure that overwhelms, exposes, an ultra-erotic front of the total (and minimal - "incorporeal") caress.

The cloud as an incorporeal body-*front*.

The cloud is at once potentiality and actuality - that is why the cloud is inhabited by forms: it is the very metamorphicity of the form that carries a storm, that is, transition of the dynamic form into an *attacking* actuality.

Front - Attack. The attacking actuality as an alter-actualization of the front.

Representation of Force, Force of Representation

Thus, weather fronts are traditionally understood as dynamic formations, divisions of air masses which envelop the planet and to which we owe the phenomenon of "weather," its dynamic morphology and persistent change. Today meteorologists know well that the front is much more a representation of forces than an objective structure. Fronts are the result of the movements of the atmosphere, of its vertical dynamics. They are an effect of the vortical motion of fluids - *apeiron's* vortex rediscovered by modern thermodynamics. Fronts are the trace of the polemical contrasts that are cut into the vortex; that is why they are a representation of forces.

vÉ The front is, on the one hand, a representation/visualization of forces, and, on the other, their effect. On the one hand, it is a concept of dynamic, and, on the other, a dynamic of the concept.

Of course, the front is a representation, but it is also necessary to construct the immanent consistency of the conceptual front. The very question - the question *about* the front in this case - is an immanent consistency of the front of the concept, of the front that is dynamically figured/unfurled in this operation: a *conceptual nebula*.

Cloud, Lightning: Alter-Concepts

v The alter-concepts of *cloud* and *front* have a maximalist task: to allow thought not only to return to the Aristotelian dawn in order to extend it while avoiding scholastic reduction of matter and form, potentiality and energy, but also to confront the problem of the continuum, of continuity and of the possibility of rupture. Or, put most generally, the problem of change and event, of qualitative and quantitative change, of evolution and revolution.

This problem is a problem of continual change and its quasi-dialectical relation to the event.

vÉ Our purpose here, in this cloudy area, in this study of the misty, nebulous limits, is

not to introduce meta-figures in speaking of a particular epistemological order, be it that of thought on being, but to try to intensify the nebula from which concepts crystallize.

v My enigmatic, obsessive, implausible concepts - the alter-concepts *front* and *cloud* - do not just traverse the history of philosophy (Leibniz, Bergson, Bataille, Bachelard); they also reveal the constitutive significance of the problem of the continuity and rupture of the event to science, too.

Here I will refer again to one of my closest fellow-travellers, one of the most original thinkers of the past century, the modern Hermes, Gaston Bachelard. His epistemological investigations logically led him to grapple with the problem of constant change (a problem which I have conceived of through the concept of *persistence*, and which Aristotle may have had in mind in introducing the enigmatic category *entelecheia*), and hence, with the tension between the *rupture* or the "vertical time" of the event and the *persistence* of change. Bachelard introduces the idea of a radically different type of time, thus approaching this problem from a perspective that is structurally close to us even though his premises and formulation of the problem are different. The typologically purest category that designates this type of time is the category "poetic time."

Bachelard introduces it in his short essay "Poetic Instant and Metaphysical Instant": "Flat horizontality suddenly vanishes. Time no longer flows. It spouts. [...] Vertical time rises. On occasion it plunges."²

The dichotomic temporal structure that Bachelard describes, contrasting two types of time, is the following: on the one hand, the *banal* time of experience, on the other, the *intense* time of experience that is defined by Bachelard as "poetic time" but which, as we understand, radically transcends the realm of "poetry." We see that for Bachelard, unlike for me, this *other* time is a phenomenological time of experience; despite this, Bachelard also intuitively that it corresponds to the ontological structures in which the imagination unfolds and modulates.

Potentiality, Time, Event

Unlike Bachelard, I do not think of the time of the event as vertical. Vertical time does not resolve the key question, posed by Bachelard himself, of the discontinuous dynamic that makes it possible to think both of the event and of change.

² Gaston Bachelard, "Instant poétique et instant métaphysique" (1939), included as an appendix in the 1966 edition of his book *L'intuition de l'instant* (1932). Cf. Gaston Bachelard, "Poetic Instant and Metaphysical Instant," in *Intuition of the Instant*, trans. by Eileen Rizo-Patron (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 60-1.

It is impossible to think of time, and hence also of the event, without thinking of potentiality. If potentiality (*δύναμις*) is a potential for change, then it is also a potential for an event.

The question, then, is how to distinguish the beginning of an event against the background of universal and comprehensive change, of the situation of change *qua* condition.

Cloud, Form and Force

What is the force of the cloud? The force of the cloud is change, that is, the coincidence of force and form. Change is a coincidence of force and form.

The force that distinguishes - alters - is the force that is immanent to potentiality itself, the immanent difference of potentiality, which differs from itself.

This force is the very dynamic of *δύναμις*, and we may define it as a force of *alter-actualization*. Before it leads to actualization, it alters the configuration of potentiality itself: the multitude of the conditions of becoming. The immanent change that is manifested as a change of the mode, a change of the conditions which is, in itself, a condition of change as such. Condition-change.

The Hypothesis of the Front:

A Complex Continuum

Ú Is rupture or disruption another type of continuity? Let us call this hypothetical continuity *intense* or *complex*.

É Regarding the relation between *continuum* and *figure*:

Is the cloud a multitude?

Is the cloud a figure?

Is the cloud a continuum?

This is precisely what the front suggests.

Θ *The front* is a cloudy extension of the idea of an opposition between potentiality as a substantial resource and form-energy governed by *entelecheia*.

Θ That is why the relation between *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια* must not be founded upon a relation of inside/outside positioning, that is, of three-dimensional centering, but of angular displacement, fractal relation and modal intensity.

Θ Thus, instead of an actualization vector, we will speak of an *intense situation*. We will call this situation a "cloud."

Cloud-Limit

From *L'altération du monde*:

Sensory experience always begins at the limit. This does not mean only that our senses have a limit; they *are* limits. The first experience is the experience at/of the limit, an experience, an experimentation of the limit *itself*: the first experience is a liminal experience. In other words, the continuum of alteration is not homogeneity, an indivisible flow; it is always realized at the limit. Continuity is, then, synco-pated, disrupted, discontinuous: discontinuous continuity. (At the level of experience this discontinuous continuity is defined by Bataille as *naked sacrifice* or *dismemberment*.)

But the limit is not negativity; it is neither the end nor the exhaustion of a fact or of a positive operation. The limit is precisely the point where the potential for alteration becomes *effective* (Hegel, *Wirklichkeit*) - it is the very site of alteration: that is where the alteration takes place. The limit, then, may be described less as an end or terminus, as a fixed point in an Euclidean space, than as a dynamic limit, as a dynamic front that contracts

and relaxes, a plastic edge, a Möbius strip that constantly twists back on/away from itself; a dynamic front that *condenses*, intensifies, alters. Its *illustration* - or *alter-concept* - is the weather front.³

*But the first form of solar love is a cloud raised up over the liquid element. The erotic cloud sometimes becomes a storm and falls back to earth in the form of rain, while lightning staves in the layers of the atmosphere.*⁴

⊖ The limit is immanent to potentiality, it is a curved line.

⊖ The limit is a dynamic continuum. It is this limitation of the continuous by the continuous that we will define as change.

The Aristotelian topology must be rethought, while understanding at the same time what "limit" or "boundary" (ὄρος; ὀρίζω: horizon) meant to the Greeks.

The front: the curved line or sinusoidal curve as a limit. The discontinuously-continu-

³ Boyan Manchev, *L'altération du monde. Pour une esthétique radicale* (Paris: Lignes, 2009), 73-4.

⁴ Georges Bataille, "The Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. and trans. by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 7.

ous, periodic, self-like, fractal order of/at the limit.

The Cloudy Edge

The cloudy edge is fringed with gold, with topaz, with silver thread; no, it is not a landscape by Claude Lorrain or Jacob van Ruisdael. And yet it is there.

Does the cloud have an edge? What is a cloudy edge? How could these swirling balls, these wispy whorls, these eerie whirls, these feathery curls be an edge? Is not the edge a limit/boundary?

No, the edge is a place where spaces, times and modes meet.

The edge is a knot that does not bind but frees, it is not a monolithic immanent technique entangling an encountered body, it is a crossing of the external surface like a body of encounter: dimensions, modes.

The Front-Edge. On Celestial *Distortions*

⊖ *The front is an edge at which actuality and potentiality come into contact.*

Here, however, we are not speaking of contact on a two-dimensional surface, nor even of a section of planes or intersection of surfaces, but of the relation of the two sides of a complex surface. A Möbius strip, a Möbius front.

Thus, the alter-concept of the front is in opposition to the dichotomic view of potentiality as a substantial resource and of form-energy governed by *entelecheia*, which “sublates” potentiality.

⊖ *The edge* is the topological expression of *effectiveness* - the mode of *alter-actualization*. What we call *effectiveness* is an alternative process of actualization that does not reduce but expands potentiality.

At *the edge*, potentiality transforms itself, increasing its power and, in this way, expanding the horizon of the actual.

⊖ *Effectiveness: an alternative process of actualization that does not reduce but expands potentiality.*

The Event-Cloud

⊖ The event is the sudden expansion of the horizon of the actual: the transformation of the expansion from a quantitative into a qualitative mode. A qualitative expansion of the horizon of the actual.

⊖ Horizon of the event; a meteor (that crosses it); an event as cloud/a cloud of the event.

The cloud: a nebula of the event.

The front: an erogenous surface of the event.

⊖ The effectiveness of time is an event-potentiality, an edge of actuality.

⊖ We shall call *front* “the site” of effectiveness.

⊖ Front, persistence of change.

Ontology of the Front

The front is a sedimentation of forms which, being past, possesses both potentiality and actuality. They are deposited in time as sediments, as matter of forms which is itself formed, folded into reliefs - forms. But sedimented time is not exhausted time; it is sedimented insofar as its potentiality is the potential of a returning or re-actualizing actuality; a possibility which is not guaranteed *a priori*, but which is active in the retrojection of the very moment of actualization, a possibility whose vector always propels and intensifies its own potentiality. Thus, the sedimentation of forms is also an active front that draws the celestial and terrestrial relief of the present, the saturated, neither empty nor full space of the transparent air.

⊖ The cloud: anachronism/hetero-simultaneity of form. Its complex temporality.

The Sedimentation of the Cloud

At this moment, after the afternoon pump of sleep, the sudden awakening in the other space-time, the banal after the extraordinary, but also vice versa, Città looks like a lair of clouds, like a landscape of cloudy forms, like compression of time. The hill of the ancient town on which clouds recline, over which they watch or pass or linger, as if the hill itself, overgrown with buildings, proliferation, extension, historical sedimentation of life, mineralization of collective human time, has become a landscape, plane, relief of the subject of the cloud, its shadow, support, accomplice; as if fast connections and slow time are on the same wavelengths, are *the same*. The clouds think the hill or imagine it; they certainly dream it, they certainly make it stand. The clouds stand as a form of thought on the hill, reasonable chaos, disastrous beauty, our stellar affect.

Translated from the Bulgarian by
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