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## I. ARTICLES

## Vincenzo Maria Di Mino

### Through Exchange: Karatani Compared with Marx

**Bionote:** Vincenzo Maria Di Mino (1987) is an independent researcher on political and social theory

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**Abstract:** The following paper has as its object the political philosophy of Kojin Karatani, in particular its relationship with the work of Marx. The Japanese philosopher, in fact, reinterprets some elements of Marxian theory in the light of Kantian categories, hybridizing the ethical and moral theory of the latter with the critique of political economy of the former. The result of Karatani's project can be seen, in particular, in two works. With the first, *Transcritique*, Karatani moves into the realm of philosophy to try to construct a method that holds the two theoretical poles together. The concept of 'Transcritique', in fact, represents the junction between Kantian and Marxian insights. With the second work, *The Structure of World History*, the Japanese philosopher shifts the analytical focus from ethics to economics, proposing a different interpretation of capitalism and its historical cycles. The analytical novelty is represented by the shift of the observation of the capitalist system from the sphere of production to that of exchange. Carrying through to the end the methodology developed in the previous work, Karatani traces back to exchange all the productive, institutional and political dynamics produced over time. Cycles of accumulation thus become cycles of exchange. The author, in fact, determines a correspondence between the specific modes of exchange and the consequent political structures, highlighting the centrality that money occupies, both in theoretical elaboration and in political reality. The prevailing mode of production, based on the exchange of commodities, relies on the absolute mobility of money and on the strength of the state political institution, which acts as a hinge between the global dimension of exchanges and

the territorial need for appropriation of surplus value. Karatani's critique is embodied in a political proposal, articulated through two key figures: community and cosmopolitanism. With the first term, the philosopher opposes the materiality of human relationships based on reciprocity to the abstract equivalence of economic relationships. By the second term he indicates the need for an extended political practice in which the pursuit of local freedom goes hand in hand with the realization of global justice. The paper traces these themes both through direct exposure of Karatani's work and by offering critical comparisons with other authors who have addressed similar issues. Finally, the purpose of this paper is to emphasize the originality of the Japanese author's philosophical-historical work, suspended between utopia and pragmatism, also through criticism, in order to highlight its strengths and underline its possible weaknesses.

**Keywords:** transcritique, money, exchange, community

#### Introduction:

This article will analyze the relationship between the theoretical work of the Japanese intellectual Kojin Karatani and the work of Karl Marx, especially trying to emphasize some issues that emerge from two of his works: the first is *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, and the second *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*. Already from the titles, we can see that in both works, the Marxian analysis is certainly the frame that Karatani uses to read the anthropological dynamics of capitalism, that is, the structural horizon of the relations between subjectivity and institutions. Given the vastness of the themes raised by the density of both works, we will focus on the analysis of some key words, which are able to fully render both the strengths and the criticalities of the theoretical work of Karatani. These keywords, suspended between the construction of the conceptual analytical apparatus and the philosophical and political planning amended by the author, are the following: transcritique, value and politics.

Each of these concepts, in fact, refers to an alternative theoretical dimension, which in the intentions of Karatani himself, is situated

beyond the existing theoretical canons and polarities, with the ambition to reformulate the status of the 'critique'. In this sense, social criticism (cultural, theoretical, political, economic), from a mere space of opposition and rejection, is now transformed into a space of connection between the different hypotheses and dynamics under scrutiny by the observer. Karatani's philosophical operation opposes a system of constant relation between the different positions to the seriality of the classically understood dialectical antinomies, those composed within the triad between thesis, antithesis and synthesis. In this way, the different phenomena, which are not subsumed once and for all in an abstract dimension, are constantly problematized and re-elaborated.

Transcritique, in fact, is the name given to this analytical methodology, which has its roots in the anti-Hegelianism of the French structural and post-structural wave, and that, consequently, shifts the theoretical focus from the dialectical totality of the Hegelian matrix to Kantian critical rationalism, both from the formal-gnoseological point of view and from the ethical-political one. This important theoretical dislocation, this precise choice of 'authorial' field, in fact, makes clear what the political options put on the plate by Karatani are. The latter eschews the typical opposition between 'reform' and 'revolution', but addresses them in the sense of a coexistence within the boundaries of the main structure, for the construction of new cosmopolitan and republican practices 'revised' in the light of the connective sensibility of Karatani (whose possible criticalities will be analyzed in the course of this paper).

### 1. Parallax: Kant and the Antinomies of Philosophy

The antinomic nature of the subjective experience of the Real, irreducible to theoretical categories (and, consequently, to the different analytical schools) and not synthesizable, is the foundation of Karatani's philosophical choices. In this sense, we can certainly agree with Žižek, who, relying on the definition provided by Karatani himself, defines Karatani's work (the object of the Slovenian philosopher's analysis is *Transcritique*) as a *parallax view*, that is, the irreducible gap between the different oppositions with which to conceive radical criticism as an operation situated between the interstices,

as a philosophical politics of structural difference<sup>1</sup>. Karatani draws heavily from the Kantian corpus, starting mainly from the revolutionary impact of the Königsberg philosopher's '*Copernican Turn*', from the problematic assumption of the *Thing* as an imperfect and constantly moving synthesis between subjective empiricism and rationalist objectivism. In fact, he writes:

In the same manner Kant managed to get around the basic contradiction in the philosophy of his time, whether it was founded in the empirical senses (as was empiricism) or in rational thinking (as was rationalism). Instead, Kant introduces those structures- that is, forms of sensibility or categories of understanding- of which one is unaware, calling them transcendental structures. Words such as 'sensibility [Sinnlichkeit]' and 'understanding [Verstand]' had long existed as conceptualization of life experience [...] What is crucial is this architectonic that is called 'transcendental'<sup>2</sup>.

The transcendental, as distinct from the transcendent, is the methodological device that the Karatani uses to enhance his own critical endeavor, in which the subjective relationship with the structures of the Real is constantly open and subject to all kinds of revisions of meaning and content. In this sense, relying on Kantian aesthetics, the universality of the faculty of judgment—and thus of the faculty of understanding—presupposes both the singular experience of thought and the impersonal experience of a-priori understanding: 'Je Pense' is the fundamental apperceptive synthetic unity, suspended between these two dimensions.

Karatani's debts to the Kantian interpretations of Deleuze and Lyotard are evident. From the *transcendental empiricism* of the first author, Karatani borrows the fundamental role assigned to the desire for knowledge as the fundamental drive of the Critique, and of speculation as a dynamic, 'disjunctive' practical synthesis, to quote a term used elsewhere by Deleuze himself. This continuous desire of knowledge finds its own synthesis in the faculty of imagination, as a synthetic operation immanent to the same activity of thought<sup>3</sup>. Of

<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, <https://libcom.org/library/the-parallax-view-karatani-s-transcritique-on-kant-and-marx-zizek>

<sup>2</sup> Kojin. Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Boston: MIT Press, 2004), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles. Deleuze, *La filosofia critica di Kant* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1979), 53-64.

the second, Karatani uses the reading of the internal ambivalences within Kantian work, present in both the historical-political and analytical-aesthetic texts. Two texts are illustrative of Lyotard's interpretation. The first, from 1987, is dedicated to the 'Sensus Communis', to the formation of the *intellectio communis* as a constitutive synthesis of social space. This element, in fact, 'lowers' reason to the singular intellect, and, at the same time, exalts and perfects the presence of the universal in the singular, enhancing its cognitive power. Clearly, all this finds realization through communication, therefore, through language: the common experience of reason, then, is a communicative experience, an abstraction suspended between Idea and Intuition<sup>4</sup>. The second text, from 1989 (1986 the original edition), continues in the wake of aesthetic and political reflection, using enthusiasm as an analytical concept. Kantian enthusiasm for the French Revolution becomes the object of an excursus that posits this passion (or intuition) as a product of the observer's pleasure in the revolutionary event, and as the driving force behind the desire for active participation in the same events. This experience, which can be classified as a dislocation of the power of the Sublime, remains suspended between materiality and ideality, and can only be fully expressed by translating itself into the language of duty, thus moving further into an ethical-moral dimension<sup>5</sup>. What emerges is the communicative nature of reason, and consequently of the entire Kantian system of knowledge, whose teleological horizon is continually open and postponed. Indeed, the median position that communication occupies, is what constitutes the space of civil society as a space of intersection between the individual and the collective, and which implements the structure of transcendental critique. For Karatani, *synthetic judgment* is the first manifest form of transcritique, because it operates in this suspension without reducing it to totality:

Synthetic judgment is universal only insofar as proof to the contrary is presupposed-not the proof of the other who shares the same system of rules, but of the other who does not share the same system of rules. Kant's radicalism exists in the fact that he pursued the problem of alterity in com-

munication deep into mathematics [...] the transcendental other- as distinct from the transcendental other, the sacred other (God)-is a quintessentially secular other who is everywhere and always in front of us<sup>6</sup>

The gnoseological problem is immediately transposed into political terms: to know, for the philosopher, means to know the other, to educate oneself to difference, to construct a frank space of rational communication. The social structure, at the same time, cannot be a synthesis of differences, but a space of further problematization, in which both the individual and the collective are irreducible. In this sense, society is a linguistic structure, in which common elements are designated as *rigid designators*. With this concept, borrowed from the linguist S. Kripke, Karatani designates the co-participation of individual and community in the same space, just as for the linguist the *rigid designator* is at the same time the product of the social context and, ultimately, a proper name. The space of critique, the Lyotardian space of possibility, is the space of Cartesian doubt, of the radical problematization of time, space, and thought, and the imagination of an interstitial space on which to inscribe potentialities and possibilities of transformation. In other words, the 'parallax' operation of which 'transcritique' is the arm, constantly produces chains of signification and processes of subjectification, inscribing them within a structural space, whose limits are porous and constantly crossed by new cognitive lines. The diagonal and transversal movement of reason, producing otherness that cannot be reabsorbed by the structure, presupposes, fundamentally, the ethical guidance of the Kantian categorical imperative, and, therefore, both the recognition of the other and freedom as conditions of existence. The community, as an agent of collective enunciation, is an ethically oriented and open agent, devoted to responsibility and solidarity.

But the circularity of collective communication hides within it the arcana of bourgeois social formation, which refers, clearly, to the circularity of capitalist production and exchange. The first *vulnus* of Karatani's theoretical argument is precisely the absence of the social division of labor, of which the communication circuit is an integral part. The problem of transcritique is the rejection of the

<sup>4</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Sensus Communis," *Le Cahier*, 3, (1987), 67-87.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *L'Entusiasmo. La critica kantiana della storia* (Milano: Guerini, 1989), 45-51.

<sup>6</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 70.

subjective imputation of cognitive processes, in the name of the interoperability of critical parallax, and the constant abstraction from real processes: the positive dimension of the theoretical construction risks slipping into the metaphysics of capital, into a sort of ideological exaltation of communication and transversality, in the name of the ethics of Otherness. In this sense, Karatani repeats the mistakes of the great Kantian bourgeois philosophy of history, moreover in the absence of revolutionary enthusiasm, and in the presence of social passions tending towards cynicism. The abstract form of transcendental synthesis is essentially equivalent to the abstract form of exchange. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, in his fundamental text, *Intellectual Labor and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, clearly expounds this thesis. For the German philosopher, abstraction is the fundamental characteristic of capitalist societies, their genetic component, which, by synthesizing differences, equalizes them within the social spaces used for communicative and economic exchange: the public sphere, the market, the State. The moment of exchange is the moment in which the fullness of capitalist abstraction manifests itself in all its power, emptying even the spatio-temporal coordinates of cognition. Consequently, gnoseological and scientific research, directed toward the horizon of Reason, turn out to be the product of a specific knowledge, linked to the social division of labor, and able to mediate the different interests. The central medium of this system can only be a mobile object, dynamic and empty, on which to inscribe the specific social relations: language and money, at this point, are the most suitable expressions of the bourgeois and mercantile social synthesis.<sup>7</sup>

These emerging problematics of the transcendental-transcritique synthesis do not in any case hide the merits of Karatani's conceptual apparatus, but allow it to be immediately opened to the relationship with Marx and Marxism's, in media res, through the Marxian analytics of money. The next section will focus on the dimension of exchange and its aporias, comparing Karatani with both Marxian methodology and some segments of contemporary Marxism that have addressed the same issues.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Lavoro intellettuale e lavoro manuale: Per una teoria della sintesi sociale*. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977), 73-83; for further discussion see also Alberto Toscano, "Last Philosophy: the Metaphysics of Capital from Sohn-Rethel to Žižek," *Historical Materialism* (2019), 1-18.

## 2. The Enigma of Money

Karatani's method of critique is, in many ways, contiguous to the Marxian critical edifice. To corroborate this definition, one must make a brief detour through the work of Marx, whose analytics are closely linked to the methodology of *determinate abstraction*. In fact, thinking about the universal totality of a particular phenomenon means simultaneously analyzing its founding premises and tracing the multiple phenomenal determinations that innervate its surface. The most striking example is that of labor, simultaneously the origin of value and its (impossible) collective determination within the laws of production, which can only be recognized as a central and irrepressible element by reading the tendency of capital. The concrete analysis of an element is a synthesis, provisional and situational, of the multiple and widespread causes that characterize its effectiveness<sup>8</sup>.

The shared characteristic of both systems is dynamism, that is, the adaptation of theoretical criticism to variations in material assumptions, using the weapons of transcendental synthesis and abstraction to determine the structural frames of the analyzed phenomena. Furthermore, Karatani elucidates that "The Marxian Transcritique appears only in the awareness of the gap between what one thinks (understanding) and what one really is (sensibility)"<sup>9</sup> thus, leading us back to the thematic nodes of Marxian methodology: *Forschung* (research) and *Darstellung* (exposition). The dialectic between these two functions of knowledge production is, in fact, the constitutive process of the complexity of social materiality itself, in addition to being open to further innovations of the analyzed system. This method is able, therefore, to interpret the internal discontinuities of the system (both structural and subjective) and to translate them into the theoretical text and praxis<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, the Marxian method can be compared to transcritique, both for the liminal position between social phenomena and for the etiology of the problems and the future-oriented perspective. For Karatani, the capitalist system of production is the plastic representation of the constant movement of crisis, just as the subject is a knot of individ-

<sup>8</sup> On this aspect of Marxian criticism, see: Evald Il'enkov, *La dialettica dell'astratto e del concreto nel Capitale di Marx* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 141

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Negri, *Marx oltre Marx* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2003), 65-86.

uation within the network of social relations. The space of the crisis is, consequently, that of parallax, that is, the empty space occupied by an element capable of separating and uniting at a further level: this element is money. At this point, money is the 'Thing-in-itself' of Kantian memory, which Karatani uses to deepen his analysis of Marxian texts. What characterizes and makes this analysis important, is the centrality that Karatani accords to circulation as the primary locus of the constitution of the relations of domination and subordination.

The Marxian (and many Marxists') logical-historical 'post' becomes for Karatani the 'prius', the point of origin of capitalism: exchange, and not production, is what constitutes the division of labor and social classes, and what gives value to the different commodities. Money, as the incarnation of the powers of exchange is a real noumenon, because it is the expression of the rationality of the production system, and at the same time, it is able to transform the coordinates of space and time. It acts in the temporal dimension, ensuring the substance that informs the theory of value, and in the spatial version, as a constitutive element of globally extended cycles of accumulation. In this way, Karatani 'Copernicanically' overturns the canonical reading of Marx, giving a centrality—not taken for granted in critical circles—to the monetary dimension of social relations. At the same time, he lays the foundations for the encounter with the theorists of the 'world-system' on the dynamics of the financialization of the economy, correctly read as an extension of productive systems and not as their nemesis. Consequently, capital is endowed with its own psychoanalytic 'drive', its own tendency to accumulate for survival, based on the great 'transcendental illusion' of the multiplying capacities of money, at the same time symbolic sign and substance of value:

Capital is a kind of self-increasing, self-reproductive money. Marx's first formulation of this is M-C-M'. It represents the activity of merchant capital, with which usurers' capital, M-M', is made possible. [...] The formulation of merchants' capital is nevertheless also consistent with industrial capital; the main point of difference is that in industrial capital the content of C is a complex entity, that is C=mp (means of production) +L (labor-power); thus, in Marx's equation, the

movement of industrial capital is M-[mp+L]-M' [...] Crisis is not caused merely by an accumulation of discouraging outcome of commodities not being sold [...] Crisis is caused by the overreaching of credit<sup>11</sup>.

Capitalism, as a synthesis between the Hegelian system of needs and the Ricardian system of the crisis of overproduction, based therefore on lack and separation, finds its full completion, its 'transubstantiation' in the financial crisis as a founding and dynamic mechanism.

In the wake of Arrighi,<sup>12</sup> Karatani splits the formula of the production cycle into C-M and M-C, characterizing it as a pure circulation process, under the domain of the exchange process. In this sense, the crisis is the disturbing spectre that grips classical political economy, and Marx is the one who highlights it, criticizing the positions of Smith and Ricardo, synthesizing them across two fundamental conceptual fields: the value of labor-power and the role of money. The German revolutionary, in fact, recognizes the central role of labor-power in the constitution of profit and social subversion, and the role of money as a general abstraction, calculation and command. In the first case, he synthesizes Smithian positions of 'commanded labor' and Ricardian positions of 'embedded labor' into a theory of the uniqueness of commodity-labor; in the second, he theoretically and journalistically explores the role of financial crises in determining colonial spheres of influence and in restructuring national production systems<sup>13</sup>. While, however, also fundamentally highlighting the constitutive ambivalence of both conceptual devices: use value and exchange value, of which work and money are syntheses.

The parallax dislocation of Karatani's point of view, from production to circulation, allows him to delve into the circulatory nature of capital, attacking one of the fundamental cores of Marxian and Marxist analyses: the centrality of labor power. For Karatani, in fact, the immediate social nature of work/social-work by definition-needs a monetary system of regulation, a system of equivalence capable

<sup>11</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 154-155.

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *Il Lungo XX Secolo: Denaro, potere e le origini del nostro tempo* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Sergio Bologna, "Moneta e Crisi: Marx corrispondente della 'New York Daily Tribune' 1856-57," in *Crisi ed Organizzazione Operaia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974) 9-72

of representing the social division of labor and increasing the production of surplus-value. The latter, in fact, is no longer realized simply in extortion and the theft of labor-power, but finds a new space of realization in consumption and circulation, and consequently constantly seeks to expand its spaces of domination. What allows Karatani to interpret the Marxian theory of value as transcritique is the comparison with linguistics, the Saussurian one in particular, which allows him to thematize money as a medium, as an interstitial space between individuals and communities:

Saussure in fact employed a model of political economy when he considered language as synchronic system (i.e., Langue). The transformation of elements in a relational system provokes a shift of the whole system and produces a new system; the diachronic transformation of a language must be grasped as a change of system itself [...] That is to say that, if an analogy between language and money becomes crucial at all, it is only where their foreignness (Fremdheit) is at stake <sup>24</sup>.

The enlargement of the production cycle, both spatial and temporal, multiplies the need for systems of equivalence between differentiations, and the parallelism between currency and money translates this need, and at the same time multiplies the spaces of valorization and production of profit through the credit system. In this sense, commodity and money are different branches of the production system which coexist within the sphere of circulation, and which realize the mystery of value, as the value of the commodity, and as the fictitious value of the circulating currency. Surplus value is a direct consequence of the expansion of markets and the expansion of consumption, no longer just from the depletion and exploitation of labor-power.

Labor-power is the great absent in this theoretical framework, because it is reduced to an appendage of consumption. The edifice of transcritique creaks again, even though it fully reads the tendencies of the productive system. While moving in the sphere of 'real subsumption', Karatani focuses only on the sphere of circulation and

remains deaf to that of production, the place where capitalist metamorphoses are generated, whose effects he analyzes. The Marxian concept of 'real subsumption', as opposed to 'formal subsumption', is the turning point that Italian Workerism, U.S. Autonomous Marxism, and French 'Regulation Theory' have used to interrogate the transformation of production paradigms, the financialization of the economy, and the mutation of the subjective composition of labor<sup>25</sup>. The passage from Fordist regulation, namely the state compromise between capital and labor of Keynesian and reformist types, to the paradigm of 'post-Fordism', has been interpreted as the passage from the centrality of the factory workforce to that of the mobile and diffused workforce in the 'social factory'. What emerges is a new cycle of regulation based on the absolute volatility of credit and the reduction of currency in circulation.

Consequently, the financial dimension has reappeared in all its political force, and, following Karatani's reasoning, philosophical, because it has transformed 'need' into an illusion of enrichment and into a religious faith in money, the only means of salvation. But, principally, real subsumption concerns the capitalist accumulation produced by the intensification of the extraction of relative surplus value, obtained by perfecting the devices for capturing labor time, and extending them beyond mere labor performance. The social dimension of the substance of labor-value is expressed at the maximum power of the concept, transforming the set of social relations into a huge surface of wealth production<sup>26</sup>. Going further, authors such as Antonio Negri, integrating Marxian themes with Foucauldian ones, have spoken of 'biopolitics' to indicate how life, both in its biological and productive characteristics, has been subsumed within the meshes of control and accumulation of wealth<sup>27</sup>. In this case, the language is no longer a simple system of equivalences but a production resource. The works of F. Rossi Landi and Paolo Virno further deepen these hypotheses, returning the image of language 'as work and as market'. Language is not only a metaphor for the system, but itself a productive system composed of different cap-

<sup>24</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 229-230. To explore these issues, consider, by the same author, *Marx-Towards the Centre of Possibility* (London-New York: Verso Books, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The Us Experience* (London- New York: Verso, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Harry Cleaver, *Rupturing the Dialectic: The Struggle Against Work*. (Chico: Ak Press, 2017) 71-86.

<sup>27</sup> Antonio Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of Class Today," in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, Ed by S.Makdisi, C.Casarino and R.E.Karl (New York-London: Routledge, 1996) 149-180

itals, whose realization is bound to both circulation and repetitive use. Like labor-power, language is 'purchased' and 'used' as a generating power, as a force capable of realizing a specific value. Moreover, as a biological function, it is directly inserted into the dynamics of capitalist production, no longer as a means of circulation but as a productive force, a widespread inventive force. The subjective dimension of biopolitical production realizes, according to these authors, the Marxian intuition of the General Intellect<sup>18</sup> contained in a fragment of the *Grundrisse*, that is, the primacy of social production based on abstract knowledge, therefore on knowledge, skills and relational attitudes<sup>19</sup>. The subsumption of the sphere of circulation affects not only financial and consumption dynamics, but directly involves forms of life and the working class. Even if inserted in a contiguous theoretical horizon, Karatani's analyses pay the price of the absence of antagonistic subjectivity, which can become the very engine of the crisis.

Reading the genetic financialization of the economy as a meta-linguistic process, with a Lyotardian flavor<sup>20</sup>, as pure transcendental speculation, again prevents Karatani from delving into the social dynamics of this same set of differential processes, of which indebtedness is an obvious telltale. Among many, Randy Martin has highlighted the linguistic logic of finance as the social logic of financial derivatives. For the American author, financial dynamics are 'kinesthetic' dynamics, based on intersubjective movements and the imaginative force of subjectivity, capable of involving social individuals in the vicious circle of debt and sacrifice<sup>21</sup>, of inscribing them in new dynamics of domination and dispossession.

In any case, the intertwining of savings, accumulation, and consumption highlighted by Karatani, by displacing the focus from production to circulation, shows its innovative power in the analysis of global dynamics, and in the attempt to rewrite the history of the structure of the world from exchange relations. The next section will focus on this theoretical project.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *Lineamenti Fondamentali della Critica dell'Economia Politica* (Rome-Florence: la Nuova Italia, 1969-1971) 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Il Linguaggio come Lavoro e come Mercato: Una Teoria della Produzione e dell'Alienazione Linguistiche* (Milan: Bompiani, 2003) 61-89; Paolo Virno, *Grammatica della Multitudine* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Economie Libidinale* (Paris: Minuit, 1974) 266-286.

<sup>21</sup> Randy Martin, *Knowledge LTD: Toward a Social Logic of Derivative* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

### 3. World History as a History of Exchanges

The realization of surplus value finds its highest expression, as total social capital, in the global dimension of exchange and circulation<sup>22</sup>. Karatani's theoretical ambition is embodied in rewriting the history of globalization, or, rather, the progressive historical expansion of capitalism across the centuries. Capitalism, even more so in this context, means market economy, and thus the set of historical, anthropological and political relations generated from exchange. He condenses all of these reflections—present at the same time in other studies—in *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*, in which the methodological system developed in the study of Kantian and Marxian philosophy finds a *longue durée* outflow, both as regards the historical dimension analyzed and the themes raised.

In the opinion of the writer, there are two elements of great originality of the work, even in the face of the critical elements that will be subsequently taken into consideration. The first is the attempt to fill the Marxian void with respect to the analysis of the global market; although present in the *Grundrisse* and in the preparatory manuscripts of *Das Kapital*<sup>23</sup>, as well as in numerous articles resulting from his journalistic collaborations, there is no organic development of this theme by Marx himself. Karatani, taking his cue from the analyses of 'total reproduction' and financial dynamics in volume III of *Das Kapital*, shifts the point of view on the overall development of economic processes from the plane of production to that of exchange. For Karatani, exchange is the original core of social relations, as a set of molecular dynamics that bring separate individuals together in communities, right up to the most complex social structures of modernity.

Starting from this choice, the second element of originality is precisely the Weberian breath of Karatani's study, that is, the integration of the philosophical framework with anthropology, economics and sociology. Clearly, it is not only a matter of interdisciplinarity and the co-presence of different fields of knowledge in the definition of the analytical object market. In this sense, the dynamics of

<sup>22</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 292.

<sup>23</sup> Roman Rozdolsky, *Genesi e Struttura del 'Capitale' di Marx* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1971).

exchange are not resolved only in the economic activity, but spreads over the entire social structure, constituting itself in different forms: status and prestige at the political level (what differentiates and enriches the Marxian description of social classes), salvation at the religious level, and military force as regards the relationship between states at the international level<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, the analysis of these kinds of relationships allows Karatani to operate in the interstices of the dichotomy between structure and superstructure, and thus to be able to hold together the micropolitics of everyday exchanges and the macropolitics of overall social structures<sup>25</sup>. The general explanatory scheme, modeled on the Kantian triad Understanding-Sensibility-Imagination, is based on two interdependent schemes that link the dynamics of exchange to the formation of political institutions. In the first case, he distinguishes three matrices of social formations: Mode A, based on reciprocity and represented by the gift; Mode B, plunder and redistribution, represented by relationships of domination and protection; Mode C, that of commodity exchange, exemplified by money. To these social formations there correspond three structures: for A it is the Nation, for B it is the State, and for C it is the Capital. This scheme allows the scholar to synchronize the movements and the reciprocal interactions between social formations and overall structures during the different historical phases, and in this sense it represents a productive deviation within the field of historical materialism.

First, Karatani leans on the anthropological studies of Malinowski and Mauss on the centrality of *gift* to the constitution of the human community. In this sense, the scholar's approach is clearly influenced by Karl Polanyi: by placing the gift at the center of relations, he, de facto, opposes *exchange* and *market*, namely the fundamental contradiction between mutual dependence between subjects and the generalization of mercantile relations<sup>26</sup>. The *double movement* of the economy is what allows him to engage with the theorists of the *world-economy* and the theorization of unequal exchange in the global system, namely the center-periphery structure of the world economy analyzed by Wallerstein, Emmanuel, Frank and Amin. The

transition between the phases of the capitalist economy is marked by attempts to centralize the monopoly of trade, and therefore on the predominance of monetary circulation over material production. The centralization of resources, in Weberian terms again, is the genetic moment of the state, offering protection in exchange for security and redistribution in exchange for participation in the production of wealth.

The Nation-State-Capital *Borromean Knot* is supported by the ability to accumulate and centralize financial flows and to find new spaces for emerging markets:

The State had to regulate trade that fell outside official channels [...] Yet the State was motivated by the desire for profits, as were the bureaucrats in its service who received compensation in the form of treasure or land [...] When long-distance trade expands beyond the level of the state's demand, the state is forced to permit a variety of merchants to engage in trade and the transportation of goods. As compensations for permitting and patronizing this trade, the state starts to levy custom duties and tools<sup>27</sup>.

Evidently, the State plays a pivotal role in Karatani's system, under a twofold aspect: as a vector of trade intensification, implementing political choices corresponding to the phases of world development, and as a surrogate of the previous idea of community, implementing the construction of ties between different individuals. What guarantees the supremacy of the different state powers on the global scene is the strength of the monetary command, the ability to impose a monetary hegemony on trade. To return to the analogy of the previous paragraph, money is the spatial dislocation of exchange as a transcendental synthesis. Thus, Karatani accepts Arrighi's thesis on the centrality of finance in the history of global hegemonic cycles, and Wallerstein's thesis on the active protagonism of the state in the construction of the world-system, and uses both in the construction of his model<sup>28</sup>. In this historical sequence, the 'mini world system' of antiquity is succeeded by the 'world empires' at the turn of modernity, up to the 'modern world system' of

<sup>24</sup> Max Weber, *Economia e Società I-IV* (Turin: Edizioni di Comunità, 1995); Eds. G. Arrighi, T.H. Hopkins, I. Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1992)

<sup>25</sup> Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History. From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014) 3.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Polanyi, *La Grande Trasformazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 99.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-272.

mature capitalism. The repetition of dominant dynamics<sup>29</sup> is broken by the difference brought by new emerging actors, or innovations in the exchange system. The difference between 'empire' and 'imperialism', is, in fact, located in the gap between the different models to which both typologies are ascribed: if the first, which falls under model B, tends to partially redistribute the products among the different communities, the second model, which falls under model C, tends to expropriate the resources of others, and to emancipate the interests of the capitalist bourgeoisie from those of the state. In Luxembourgian terms, imperialism constitutes a phase of the extended reproduction of capital outside its borders, the search for external spaces on which to inscribe both the mercantile dynamics and dislocate the social tensions present in the motherland. The State Machine clearly occupies a central place in Karatani's model, in historical and philosophical-political terms. First, in the direct relationship that exists between power politics and the extension of the role of the state through command over exchange flows. For example, neoliberalism, for Karatani, is an extension of state imperialist policies, an expression of the link between state powers and multinational corporations, and thus the pursuit of hegemonic superiority in the commercial and financial sectors. The new global division of labor, consequently, is founded on monetary command and on the verticalization of the division of international powers<sup>30</sup>. What is missing from this description is the territorial dimension of international governance, i.e. the material space where circulation flows are registered. It is possible to integrate Karatani's interpretation with the most recent studies on the dynamics of wealth accumulation and extraction, and on the pivotal role played by logistics. Logistics, in fact, is one of the most tangible expressions of the politics of operation of capitalism, of the active dimension that logistical infrastructures have in the transformation of territorial spaces through borders, corridors and hubs, and their impact on the concrete division of labor, and, therefore, also on production processes<sup>31</sup>. From this perspective, we can highlight the organizational role of the state in the dialectic between local and national spaces, and

the policies implemented to increasingly extend its spatial nature, and, therefore, the policy of command over the borders and the monopoly of force, military and diplomatic, in specific areas<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, one can speak, concretely, of the 'revolution from above' in terms of the further characteristics that Karatani himself assigns to the imperialist evolution of Mode-C, with an ever-increasing process of differentiation in the accumulation of resources, in the creation of scarcity, and in the dynamics of appropriation and destruction of environmental resources. Consequently, the condition of existence of the state is, in fact, the *fictio iuris* par excellence in Western political thought: sovereignty is the theological-political matrix capable of linking religious ideology and the mechanisms of legitimacy. The presupposition of state sovereignty is the presence of a state of nature, prone to war, to be pacified and shaped, through the 'realist' path that leads from Hobbes to Carl Schmitt: "For Hobbes, the existence of the sovereign (i.e., the state) who monopolizes violence signifies the establishment of the state of peace. In the relations between states, however, a state of nature continues. The existence of the state was in itself sufficient, and Hobbes never consider its abolition"<sup>33</sup>. The progressive slide from community to state, clearly, is the product of the territorial sedimentation of communities, the domestication of inhabitants, and the establishment of a social contract that alienates power from citizenship<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, in Schmittian terms, state sovereignty is constituted through the series appropriation-production-division, which we find, in different words, in the interpretation of Karatani, as single moments of the ideal bond between social formations and modes of exchange. The artificiality of the natural community, in this frame, pairs with monetary abstraction and normative and legislative equivalence between subjectivities. In this sense, Karatani, hybridizing Kant and Freud, speaks of the sublimation of aggression and reabsorption of excess in the constitution of a state Super-Ego, and, therefore, in the work of the neutralization of widespread aggression. Moreover, the nation-state itself is based on homogeneity, on the production of a closed structure, which is also articulated through the production of a national language, which Karatani himself, in Derridean terms,

<sup>29</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *L'accumulazione del Capitale e Anticritica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960).

<sup>30</sup> Kojin Karatani, "Neoliberalism as a Historical Stage," in *Global Discourse*, 8:2 (214), 191-207. For a deepening of the differences between Empire and Imperialism consider Giovanni Arrighi, *Geometria dell'Imperialismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978).

<sup>31</sup> Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, eds., *The Politics of Operation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Carlo Galli, *Spazi Politici. L'età Moderna e l'età Globale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 298.

<sup>34</sup> James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2017).

equates to phonocentrism, to the metaphysical illusion of the constant presence of state domination over social life<sup>35</sup>. The opposition between community and state will return in the next section, where Karatani's policy proposal will be discussed.

#### 4. The Utopia of the World Community

The disjunctive synthesis between Kant and Marx, between the ethical dimension of the philosophy of the former, and the social and conflictual dimension of the latter, find fertile ground in Karatani's political project. The political translation of transcritique is the search for practices that move in the interstices of state and global powers, a politics of 'within and without' in search of spaces of visibility within the meshes of the structure. The community is the fundamental subject of Karatani's political research, the point of inscription of republican ethics, and of the relational and egalitarian dimension of association between different subjectivities. As mentioned in the previous section, the gift is the starting point of anthropological relationships between community members, because it is based on reciprocity, mutual recognition and the horizontality of interactions. Indeed, it is a total social fact that can determine significant changes in the political and economic structure. In this sense, Karatani traces the basis of social equality not in the possession of the means of production (in the political case, of the means of coercion), but in the circularity produced by exchange without equivalents, and thus, in a return to the living community not separated from its own force. He, in fact, advances the hypothesis of a further mode of exchange, D, which represents the transition to a social formation freed from the burden of exchange value:

Mode of exchange D represents the return of mode of exchange A in a higher dimension [...] Mode of exchange D and the social formation that originates in it can be called by many names- for example, socialism, communism, anarchism, council communism, associationism. But because historically a variety of meanings have been attached to these concepts [...] I will simply call it X [...] what is important here is to understand the phase to which it belongs<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics: On Kant and Freud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 8-9.

Karatani finds a foothold in Marxian historical-anthropological writings of the last phase, in which Marx famously deals with the theorizing of a revolutionary way forward for non-capitalist societies. Both in a dense section of the *Grundrisse*, and in his writings on Russia, China and India, Marx analyzes the structure of peasant communities and the central role in it of forms of common property, commons that use contemporary terminology, such as the Russian *obščina*. These forms, in addition to constituting a clear opposition to the processes of centralization and capitalist separation, represent the community's predisposition to relations based on recognition, and, therefore, envisage new and different forms of subjectification<sup>37</sup>. Karatani, however, turns his critical gaze on pre-capitalist societies, in order to actualize the conditions of their existence: the community is what translates the intrinsic sociality of individuals and limits their destructive tendencies. Leaning on the fundamental study of Benedict Anderson<sup>38</sup>, Karatani highlights the imaginative nature of social ties inscribed in the community space: *communitas* is the historical-anthropological substrate that determines the sense of belonging and social cohesion. Further, this dimension brings Karatani's thought closer to contemporary theorizations on the *commun* as a matrix of new democratic forms alternative to the state. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, in their fundamental work, focus on this element of discontinuity in the formulation of radical policies, postulating the *commun* as a principle of collective political action, released from the limits of the decision and implemented through practices defined as 'instituting,' that is, able to produce new decision-making structures based on social cooperation and federalism. These *politiques du commun* may be able to produce new horizontal decision-making structures based on social cooperation and federalism<sup>39</sup>. The *commun*, as well as the gift, is based on a different approach to the problem of revolutionary transition, because it replaces the moment of appropriation of power and economic means with the moment of the distribution of a substance that innervates social relations. Both of these approaches resolve into an ontology of reciprocity, which undoes social divisions and

<sup>37</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *India, Cina, Russia: Le premesse di tre rivoluzioni* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1970); Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London-New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, eds., *Commun: Essai sur la Révolution au XX Siècle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014).

focuses on the concept of use as an alternative to exchange. The alternative, concretely, is based on the deconstruction of modern political grammar, on the enhancement of community ethics as a prerequisite for individual freedom. In this sense, Karatani's political philosophy distances itself from historical materialism because it expels, from the material dynamics, class as the agent of the historical movement. Moreover, he theorizes communism as a pure associative movement that opposes the primacy of political decision, displacing the realism of revolutionary politics on the moral and metaphysical plane of the search for the principle of coexistence and neutralization of the 'unbearable sociability' of Kantian memory. In fact, Karatani fully falls within the theoretical fields of radical democracy and Post-Marxism, of which he shares the following common characteristics: the absence of subjectivity, a decision-making vacuum, the search for alternative foundations for political action, and the search for pluralism. In the words of Karatani himself

The association of associations is far from the organization of the tree structure(.) So it needs a center, but the center should exist as a function just like transcendental apperception X and not something substantial. The association of associations should be equipped with a mechanism that avoids the reification of a substantial center<sup>40</sup>

The central void of the state political system cannot be occupied by an antagonistic political machine, but must be distributed among the different nodal points of the social fabric. The community, like the people, is a Laclausian empty signifier to be filled<sup>41</sup>, or rather, with which to hypostatize social power. Radical democracy, in the wake of Arendt and Lefort, presupposes the agonism of political relations, that is, a non-dialectical dynamic whose political effects remain internal to the boundaries of the political structure, in an infra-structural dimension. In Gramscian terms, Karatani thinks of politics in terms of a 'war of positions', that is, the search for consensus and the opening of political and cultural spaces by subverting common sense and the hegemony of mercantile abstraction. In this case, the alternative foundation of this counter-hegemonic

project is found in Greek materialism, in the works of Democritus and Epicurus, a kinetic<sup>42</sup> and fundamentally democratic and libertarian materialism. As Marx had already done in his doctoral dissertation, Karatani traces in this minor canon, atomist, naturalist, and atheist, a parallelism between the constant recombination of matter, the free fluctuation of atoms, and democratic invention. The opposition to the Athenian political model is, fundamentally, an opposition to Platonic cognitive and political mechanics, and to Aristotelian political typologies, which are founded on mythologies of origin that concealed the warlike dimensions of city democracy, and the slave nature of the wealth of the city-state. The rejection of appearance-truth dualism, a metaphysical translation of the political primacy of the philosopher-king, allows Karatani to focus on *isonomy* as a political form based on equality and freedom. *Isonomy*, in fact, is the phantom that lives and develops transversally to the association between democracy and state, and that translates into a critique of tyranny and the hypostasis of law, exalting, instead, the freedom of movement and the random and contingent encounters-contrasts between singularities<sup>43</sup>. Historical time, at this point, is the time of the event, the Epicurean *Aion* opposed to the flow of *Chronos*, the time of association and encounter and not that of subsumption. *Isonomy* finds space and strength outside of its own historical field of emergence, in the practices of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century workers' associationism and mutualism. Karatani elects these struggles tout court as a means of relation and isonomic organization within and against the relations of production, as institutions of the democracy to come. His position clearly embraces pre-Marxian socialism and Proudhonism, political projects related to the improvement of workers' conditions and not to the subversion of the system. The aporia of the politics of in-against, displaced on the plane of reformism, nevertheless shows some potential, including the delineation of a dual political strategy for moving between the different planes of capitalist social formation: the refusal to exchange one's labor-power and the construction of alternative circuits of exchange:

That is to say that in these moments workers can counter capital [...] both of them can occur in the topos where workers can be the subjects. These are the countermovements

<sup>40</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 306.

<sup>41</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Egemonia e strategia socialista: Verso una Politica Democratica Radicale* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Nail, *Marx in Motion: A New Materialism Marxism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

within. But in order for workers-consumers to be able to 'not to work' and 'not to buy', there must be a safety net whereupon they can still work and buy to live[...]The 'don't sell/ don't buy' boycott movements within capitalist production would accelerate the reorganization of capitalist corporation into cooperative entity<sup>44</sup>.

Karatani's revolutionary reformism is set out here with the utmost clarity. The philosopher's Polanyan institutionalism, namely the impossibility of thinking of a complete subversion of capitalist structures, allows him to shift the political purpose of the struggles from the destruction to the positive transformation of the systemic structures themselves. The mode of exchange D finds its fulfillment in the imagination of a cooperative republic based on equal exchange and the recognition of the Other as the absolute and supreme end<sup>45</sup>. Of course, the project of 'Perpetual Peace' is the logical global extension of this thought device. The Kantian utopia of the Kingdom of Ends cannot be limited to the state dimension alone, but must necessarily be cosmopolitan and equally diffuse. The relational mechanics of associationism hypothesized by Karatani, in fact, allows the realization of this hypothesis. How so? Firstly, by acting as a cosmopolitan avant-garde, as mutual institutions that act at the national level to facilitate the distribution of justice and rights, supporting cosmopolitan transformations<sup>46</sup>. In this sense, the cosmopolitan project coincides with the project of democracy to come, because it assumes the responsibility for present and future generations as an irreducible and founding fact. At this point, the D mode of exchange replaces the previous explanatory models with the triad Mutualism-Republic-Cosmopolitanism, which encompasses the set of democratic processes ranging from local relations to mutualism and the global cosmopolitanism of freedom and solidarity. Moreover, the republican articulation of this moral responsibility finds its place in Karatani's reflections as a synthesis between the Kantian categorical imperative and Marxian-derived social struggles. The World Republic, in conclusion, indissolubly links the search for freedom with the need for relationships freed from equivalence and restored to

<sup>44</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 300-301.

<sup>45</sup> Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 302; also see: William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Lea Ypi, *Global Justice and Avant-Garde Political Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

full human 'nature', that is, founded on friendship as the political horizon of human sociality.

The eschatological dimension of this philosophy of otherness, based on reciprocity, stands as an antidote to nationalism, racism and imperialism, and illustrates a suggestive hypothesis of cosmopolitanism focused on the immediate social needs of communities. The weak force of this utopia can certainly contribute to reviving the global political imagination, but can do so only by recalibrating those analytical gaps that, so far, we have tried to highlight.

### Conclusion:

The brief and schematic reflections, presented here, on some passages of Karatani's work, allow us to make a synthetic evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the work of the Japanese philosopher, and try to indicate some directions to implement and strengthen this theoretical work. Primarily, Karatani's philosophical work links the ethical and conflictual dimensions in a non-dialectical key, making the relationship between these two poles dynamic and adaptable to changes in material conditions. The Kantian realm of ends and the Marxian realm of means unfold their theoretical effects on the different planes of Karatani's analysis, which highlights their transversal force of critique and proposal. The term 'transcritique', as an element of synthesis between these two theoretical poles, opens the way to a renewed vision of the relationship between philosophy and politics, which are not resolved in the enunciation of a new ideology, but actively contribute to the production of practices and institutional forms, able to realize the ethical idea of Justice. The absence of subjectivity, the recovery of production in circulation and the utopian dimension that results in a new philosophy of history, are the major *vulnus* of the work of the Karatani. The schematic and formal relationship between social formations and modes of exchange, and the absence of social conflicts transform structural dynamics into epiphenomena and historical progress into simple and empty repetition of the identical, namely into a moral philosophy of history, in which the same events are constantly repeated<sup>47</sup>. In any case, Karatani's project, rather than showing a 'new

<sup>47</sup> Harry Harootunian, "Philosophy of History's Return. History and Theory," 54:1, (2015), 96-105; Joel Wainwright, "Capitalism, Imperialism, and Modes of Exchange: A Reply to Karatani," *Global Discourse*, 8:2 (2018), 208-214.

Marx', shows a flawed version, deprived of the focal points of the argument: the uniqueness of labor-power and the revolutionary outcome of class struggles.

The insistence on mutualism and infra-state associationism, at the same time, makes Karatani's work highly topical. For this reason, struggles for the redistribution of socially produced wealth, privately accumulated and subsumed in the dynamics of industrial and financial capital, can integrate struggles for distribution with those within the vast world of production. Within and Against, at this height, means using the tools prepared by capital to achieve forms of distributive material justice. The democratization of finance, as well as the need for an income decoupled from work performance, can constitute spaces of interstitial freedom between production and circulation<sup>48</sup>.

Rejecting ideological themes and orthodox terminology, Karatani constructed a theory of democracy for the present, capable of extending into the future. The social synthesis he proposes, with its strengths and weaknesses, and the themes raised - justice, democracy and cosmopolitanism - make the Japanese philosopher one of the most interesting voices on the contemporary critical scene. Between the (missing) class and the moral imperative, he has produced an ethic of possible social transformation that is closely relevant today, especially in a historical phase in which war and social and ecological destruction have returned with ferocity to the everyday.

If the author has indicated the still-alive specters of Marx and the democratic and cosmopolitan horizon in his reflections, it is the task of social movements to revive these indications in their practices of conflictual transformation.

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Massumi, *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto* (St Paul: Minnesota University Press, 2018); Robert Meister, *Justice is an Option. A Democratic Theory of Finance for the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021).



Kamelia Spassova

## Mimetic Machines in the Uncanny Valley

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**Abstract:** *Uncanny valley* (不気味の谷) is a notion introduced by the Japanese robotics professor Masahiro Mori in 1970. The basic claim of his hypothesis states that the anthropomorphic machines cause uncanny effect due to their imperfect resemblance to the human. Humanoids seem almost like people, but exactly the distance of this *almost* provokes hot debates. There are two trends in robotics, animation, architecture, and computer games. The first trend seeks to overcome the uncanny valley, constructing such an incredible machine that perfectly mimics human actions. The second trend – Masahiro Mori takes this side – consciously constructs non-anthropomorphic machines. The machine’s appearance, structure, shape, proportion of the parts, and motion must be visibly different from the human ones. The term *uncanny valley* appears in a European context soon after

its introduction, due to Jasia Reichardt’s translation in 1978. She is an art critic and curator who is interested in the role of cybernetics in art. The joint between the uncanny valley in robotics and the legacy of Freud and Jentsch is established with this translation at the intersection point between aesthetics and science. This link opens new fields to theoretical and aesthetic imagination.

**Keywords:** mimesis, uncanny, uncanny valley, Bukimi no Tani, doubles, mimetic machines, likeness, unconcept, negative anagnorisis, heterogenesis

### 1. The Automaton-seer: Something Hidden has Become Visible

“All figures of this sort,” said Lewis, “which can scarcely be said to counterfeit humanity so much as to travesty it—mere images of living death or inanimate life—are most distasteful to me. When I was a little boy, I ran away crying from a wax-work exhibition I was taken to, and even to this day I never can enter a place of the sort without a horrible, eerie, shuddery feeling [ohne von einem unheimlichen grauenhaften Gefühl ergriffen zu werden]. [...] The fact of any human being’s doing anything in association with those lifeless figures which counterfeit the appearance and movements of humanity has always, to me, something fearful, unnatural, I may say terrible, about it [etwas Drückendes, Unheimliches, ja Entsetzliches].<sup>1</sup>

The preceding reflections on mimesis and the uncanny are delivered by Ludwig the musician, a character in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s short story *The Automata*. The story was first published in 1814 (in the literary magazine *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*) and again five years later as part of his collection of novellas and fairy-tales, *The Serapion Brethren*. The thoughts were prompted by the machine music created by professor X’s anthropomorphic automata. One of these robots is the

<sup>1</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, ed. E. F. Bleiler, trans. Alexander Ewing (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 81, 95; E. T. A. Hoffmann, “Die Automate,” in *Gesammelte Werke* (Null Papier Verlag, 2013).

enigmatic Talking Turk who “reads” people’s unconscious and foretells their destiny. Unlike Wolfgang von Kempelen’s historical machine, constructed in 1769, which got burned in a fire in 1854, and which mercilessly defeated all of its opponents on the chess board, Hoffmann’s automaton, the Turk, is not a chess player but a fortune teller. His character makes the problem of free will central to most of Hoffmann’s novellas. This constitutes the old question of whether fate can be intentionally and freely determined or if it is under the control of automatic, uncontrolled forces. Hoffmann marks a key change in the image of the fortune teller — from the realm of the religious and the mystical to the realm of the logical and the mechanical. The enigmatic connection between the *living* and the *automatic*, as well as the *imitation game* between the two appear in the works of both Kempelen and Hoffmann. This riddle is a generally shared contextual mystery in the transitional period between the Age of Enlightenment and Romanticism.

The non-human figures — wax sculptures, dolls, puppets, anthropomorphic automata, and all types of mimetic machines in general— can trigger a feeling of inexplicable horror in us, they can cause us to experience the uncanny effect and can evoke a feeling of trouble and anxiousness in any human creature, for there is something about their resemblance to humans that *just isn’t right*. The automatism of a box’s secret compartment that pops-up is central for the uncanny effect which corresponds to Freud’s idea of *unheimlich*. Be it the dwarf hidden inside the machine (as is the case for Kempelen’s Turk) or the very opposite — the machine hidden inside the human (the automatism of the unconscious repetition), there is something that is valid for both — the algorithm of something hidden that suddenly emerges and disturbs us with its untimely appearance.

Similarly to the utterances of ancient oracles, while answering the questions that are directed to him, Hoffmann’s automaton the Turk exposes all secret incentives and hidden desires and, ultimately, a fatalistic predestination. He reveals the fate of the questioner and lays it out on the chess board. The Turk’s head is a perfect reproduction of a human one. He rolls his eyes, turns his head, stamps his feet, and out of his mouth comes a stream of air, the product of an acoustic illusion. But the characters in the story suspect that a human being with supernatural powers is hidden inside of him that can “read” the questioner’s unconscious.

The short story *The Automata*, together with the set of problems that surround the topic of a subject that is divided in two, and the peculiar connection between the living and the mechanical, the contingent and the fateful, the visible form and the hidden grounds, between free will and instrumentality, between the figure of the inventor and his creation, the automaton, raises another question, that of what machines should look like. Only it is a question of aesthetics and not of substance.

## 2. Mimesis and *Unheimlich* as Coordinates in the Uncanny Valley

A third concept can be added to the history of the notions of *mimesis* and *unheimlich* (uncanny) that acts as an edge and a point of intersection between the two. That is namely the notion of 不気味の谷現象 (*Bukimi no Tani Genshō*), or the *uncanny valley phenomenon*.

*Mimesis* and *unheimlich* are part of the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, their genealogy is rooted in Ancient Greek and German, languages that have created these very concepts, as well as the episteme, which they are part of.<sup>2</sup> The history of their translations in other European languages through the years is not just an interesting story and a colorful contextual cross section, but it also introduces the slow transition, the long-term migration of concepts and traditions, the gradual shift of paradigms: not through rebellion but through translation. They serve as instruments for working with the incomprehensible, but there is something in their very definition that cannot be fully mastered through conceptualization. This unstable limitation of their definition is a result of negativity and non-self-correspondence, of their inner changeability, all of which are crucial when it comes to contemplating these concepts.

In short, *mimesis* and *unheimlich* are concepts about the incomprehensible and unidentical. Looking into them, and the grid of concepts around them, is an indispensable condition when entering the uncanny valley, as long as the main coordinates are *imitating* the human on one hand, and the *uncanny effect* on the other. In the function known in the field of robotics as *Bukimi no Tani*, or *uncanny valley*, the mimetic is located on the x-axis and the uncanny on the y-axis. All this considered, the fact that the uncanny valley

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Cassin et al., eds., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

could be illustrated with mathematical precision doesn't eliminate the mystery and the magnetism that arises from it. How should we approach it? As a concept, as an idea, or simply the way we would approach any other contemporary myth?

Putting the hypothesis of *Bukimi no Tani* between the seriousness of its scientific argumentation and the casual rejection of it as a myth is a historical experience that resembles the fate of the concepts of *mimesis* and *unheimlich*. The attempt to walk through the *uncanny valley* should outline the wagers of the anthropomorphic (human-like) and non-anthropomorphic (unhuman-like) trends, led by the problem of the machines' appearance.

### 3. Human Care and Unhuman Design

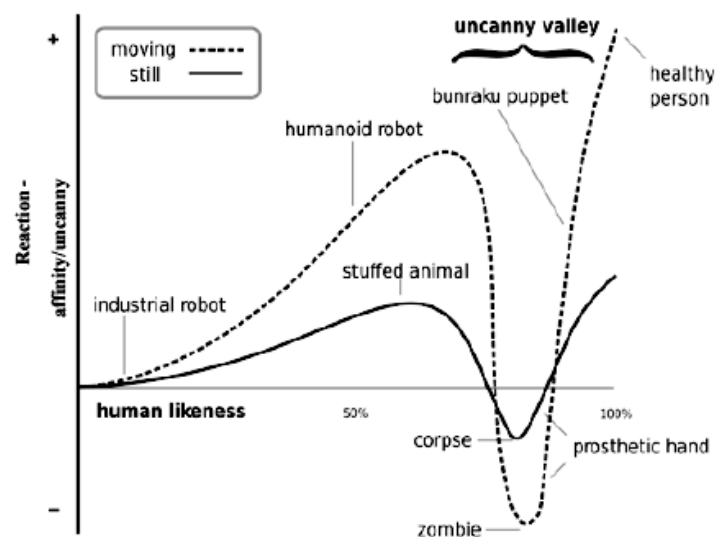


Fig. 1

*Bukimi no Tani* (不気味の谷現象; *uncanny valley*) is an idea introduced by Japanese robotics professor Masahiro Mori in the year 1970.<sup>3</sup> Mori's hypothesis can be reduced to the proposition that an-

<sup>3</sup>The article was published in 1970 in Japanese magazine *Energy* and for a long time did not draw a lot of attention: Masahiro Mori, "Bukimi No Tani [the Uncanny Valley]," trans. Karl F. MacDorman and T. Minato, *Energy* 7 (1970): 33–35. Its latest English translation that stimulated current discus-

thropomorphic machines trigger an uncanny effect with their imperfect resemblance to humans. Humanoids look almost the same as people but this distance of *almost like* provoked heated debates. Two trends then arose in the field of cybernetics, animation, architecture, and video games that discuss the effects of the uncanny valley. One of them tries to overcome the *uncanny valley* by creating a machine that perfectly imitates humans. The other one, to which Mori's hypothesis belongs, takes the path of consciously constructing non-anthropomorphic machines — their appearance, structure, form, and the proportion of their elements must be different than those of humans.

In his article, Mori shares a prophetic thought: "In fact I predict it is possible to create a safe level of affinity by deliberately pursuing a nonhuman design. I ask designers to ponder this."<sup>4</sup> The concern shared by Masahiro Mori along with his hypothesis of the valley is that the machines' human appearance should consciously be designed with non-human forms in order to provoke sympathy in people instead of an uncanny feeling. Something should be hyperbolized, disproportionate, deformed, in order to definitively set a boundary and create a distancing effect, so that it would be clear from first sight which one is the human and which one the machine.

The uncanny valley was first defined by Mori as a function that is not continuously increasing, or, where the increasing of  $x$  doesn't necessarily cause  $y$  to increase as well. In other words, the function should mark the lack of symmetry. Such a relation doesn't exist: the more human-like the machines get, the more heartedly embraced they are by people. Mori compared the non-monotonic function to mountain climbing where the hills and valleys, highlands and lowlands do not stand in a dependency relation with the distance to the top of the hill or with the fulfilment of the goal. This comparison is also where the spatial metaphor in the uncanny valley's name comes from, since it represents an area of rapid descent where the automata become *almost* indistinguishable from humans by appearance but instead of provoking sympathy, they scare us.

sions around the concept, came out in 2012, as this time, the translation was authorized by Mori himself: Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley", trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine* 19:2 (2012): 98–100, <http://goo.gl/iskzXb>.

<sup>4</sup> Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine* 19:2 (2012), 99. See: <http://goo.gl/iskzXb>.

Industrial robots for instance do not fall inside the valley's reach because of the metallic materiality of their design that gives humans a sense of distance with respect to their appearance.<sup>5</sup> They do not resemble humans and do not cause fear because the line between human and unhuman remains uncrossed. Their appearance is subordinated to their functionality. They are simply perfected work instruments that help humans. On the other hand, the attempts to create artificial intelligence in the field of robotics are "dressed" in a more and more anthropomorphic design: the automata begin to look *as if* they were people. This resemblance becomes disturbing. It is what marks the moment of losing the sense of sympathy. This is the zone of the uncanny valley: where the mimetic machines trigger an incomprehensible anxiety. This is precisely the axis of affinity that marks a rapid decline or the causing of the uncanny (*unheimlich*) effect when the resemblance on the human likeness axis increases. The zone of the uncanny valley represents this inverse relationship — greater human likeness, and yet, people's attitude towards robots is that of anxiety and fear.

In the 1970s Mori observed a trend in the field of cybernetics towards spending a much greater effort into robots' appearance than into their functionality, as if the path towards conscious machines goes through the creation of humanoids that perfectly resemble the human form. But this very pattern of imitating external appearance is what will place them inside the uncanny valley — instead of becoming affinitive to humans they will become *unheimlich*. In this way they cast the shadow of anxiety over the notion of what is human.

The example which Mori used to mark the entering of machines into the uncanny valley is the prosthetic hand. Just like Ludwig, the protagonist in Hoffmann's *The Automata*, Mori admits that he never liked looking at wax figures because they looked creepy to him.<sup>6</sup> The

prosthetic hand has had the same disturbing effect on him, as the creepy feeling intensifies if the hand starts to move, as is the case with myoelectric prosthetics. A key factor in the artificial hand's indistinguishability from a real human hand is that it is designed to be covered with skin instead of bolts and metal cylinders. The anthropomorphic trend focuses on the machines' skin.

Therefore, Masahiro Mori's hypothesis suggests that in the increase of similarity between human and machine, a certain point comes where telling the two apart becomes difficult, and it is this very moment that triggers the negative (*unheimlich*) effect of uncanniness, repulsion, terror, and anxiety. The factors for increasing the uncanny feeling are *movement* and *imitating the human*.

The methods of counteraction against this *unheimlich* effect include deautomatization, estrangement, and consciously designed dissimilarity. This is also where Mori's call to unhuman design in robotics stems from — instead of creating humanoids, he designs *swarm robots* that interact with each other in an autonomous system. Mori proposed that the models for wooden hand prosthetics shouldn't resemble human hands, but instead, those of Buddha's statues, because those ones don't leave fingerprints. This example with Buddha is no coincidence. Mori believes that robots' imitation of humans shouldn't be identical and symmetrical, rather, it should be directed towards a third entity, like the idea of the Buddha. Four years after the hypothesis of the uncanny valley, Mori developed the concept concerning transcendental imitation in his book *The Buddha in the Robot*, where he tried to solve the mystery of human consciousness through the concepts of Buddhism.<sup>7</sup> But one can recognize Mori's concern which analyzes the human both through the perspective of robotics and the Zen philosophy as early as in the uncanny valley hypothesis with the instability of the progressive function, with the non-monotonical rhythm of ascents and descents.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A good example for this can be taken out of the TV series *Battlestar Galactica* — the industrial robots, or the *Toasters* do not trigger the effect of anxiety, they do not fall into the uncanny valley as opposed to the twelve humanoid model Cylons that are an almost perfect human reproduction. They are the ones who undermine the line between human and unhuman. Questioning the notion of the human in light of "the ungraspable phantom of the vanishing difference between the humans and the machines" is excellently picked up by the fine analysis of TV series *Battlestar Galactica* in: Miglena Nikolchina, "An Unfinished Project: Man as Comedy," in *Lost Unicorns of the Velvet Revolutions: Heterotopias of the Seminar* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 107.

<sup>6</sup> N. Kageki, "An Uncanny Mind: An Interview with M. Mori," *IEEE Robotics Automation Magazine* 19:2 (2012), 102–8, <https://doi.org/10.1109/MRA.2012.2192819>.

<sup>7</sup> Masahiro Mori, *The Buddha in the Robot: A Robot Engineer's Thoughts on Science and Religion* (1974), trans. Charles S. Terry (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1981).

<sup>8</sup> About the link between the uncanny valley and the book *The Buddha in the Robot* as Mori's general philosophy, see: W.A. Borody, "The Japanese Robotist Masahiro Mori's Buddhist Inspired Concept of The Uncanny Valley" (Bukimi No Tani Genshō, 不気味の谷現象), *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 23:1 (2013), 31–44. See: <https://jetpress.org/v23/borody.htm>.

#### 4. Hiroshi Ishiguro's Doppelgänger on the Way to Overcoming the Valley



Fig. 2

It is key to name another Japanese professor on the scene of current trends in robotics — that of Hiroshi Ishiguro. He continues to study the uncanny valley but with the goal of overcoming it: the robots will look like humans, but they will no longer scare us. His effort is contrary to that of Masahiro Mori. While the latter maintains that there should be estranging elements in the robots' appearance, the former aims to create the perfect humanoid robot. Thus, the two Japanese professors represent the two diametrically opposite trends in robotics: Mori maintains the *anti-anthropomorphic* principle, while Ishiguro defends the *anthropomorphic* one. Concerned about the disturbing closeness between man and robot, Mori seeks a transcendent way for juxtaposing the two, while Ishiguro focuses on studying the matter of *human likeness* with regards to the design of the perfect androids.

"The good disciple," Ishiguro, extended his teacher Mori's thesis about the uncanny valley in a critical perspective, but his aim, opposite Mori, is a greater effectiveness in bringing robots' design clos-

er to the human appearance. He views the automata's appearance and the similarities between man and robot as a complex navigation system. The robots' movements are no longer just mechanically constructed, but also reconstructed with regards to more precise operators of imitation — mimics, gestures, speed of movement, and gracefulness. The perfect machine which will successfully overcome the uncanny valley should, according to Ishiguro, imitate man not just statically but with motion — with certain gestures and mimics. Robots are not simply dressed in human skin, they are set up with a program for gesticulation, they mimic unconscious movements of the hands and eyes, they exhibit parasitic body movements, and they present certain *gestus*. Yes, mimetic machines are the perfect mimes. Hiroshi Ishiguro set out to design robotic Doppelgängers.

Ishiguro is the director of a robotics laboratory in Osaka University that develops *actroids*, a type of androids or humanoid robots produced by Japanese company *Kokoro*. The first female *actroid*, — Repliee Q1, appeared in January of 2004. The improved version from July of 2005 could now blink constantly. She had a whole range of gestures that were copied from her human prototype Ayako Fuji. The way the robot was trained to imitate natural movements was through the placement of numerous special sensors across key points on the prototype's body and face so that the whole of its physiognomics got copied and installed into the robot. Scientists in the fields of anatomy, neurology, cognitive science, computer science, cybernetics, design, and animation took part in this project that aimed to overcome the uncanny valley. Once they get switched on, the androids start to constantly move, shake their heads, and blink; parasitic body movements that resemble neurological activity were programmed into them, a simulacrum of a biomimetic mechanism. The female android is just like Olympia from Hoffmann's *The Sandman* — she constantly nods, blinks affirmatively, and spontaneously sighs "Ah! Ah!"

In July of 2006, after creating his very own Olympia, Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro designed the robot Geminoid-HI-1 in his own image and likeness. Ishiguro literally calls him *my Doppelgänger*. In a series of interviews, television shows and videos on the Internet, Professor Ishiguro talks about the convenience of having one's robotic

Doppelgänger.<sup>9</sup> For instance, while he is at a conference in Kyoto, his Doppelgänger could easily teach his classes in Osaka University. Ishiguro's double presence became part of a media campaign of sorts that aimed at overcoming the uncanny valley, i.e., rejecting Mori's theses about the fear of mimetic machines. Ishiguro stands proudly next to his Doppelgänger as a living proof that, after all, it is not so scary.

Naturally, Ishiguro's team performed a series of experiments behind the scenes with the goal of scientifically identifying the limits of the uncanny valley. In the 2009 article *My Robotic Doppelgänger*<sup>10</sup>, Ishiguro and his three co-authors critically reviewed the hypothesis of the uncanny valley through an experiment that was conducted among 19 male and 13 female participants with the average age of the participants being 20 years old. The participants were seated in a room one by one facing either Hiroshi Ishiguro or his Doppelgänger. They had to look at each other for some time and then begin to discuss the following three questions: How old are you? What university do you go to? What is your name? The machine was not equipped with an autonomous dialogue system and therefore the conversation had to be as formal as possible. The aim of the experiment was to determine how long it takes the participant to figure out if he or she is talking to the human Ishiguro or his robotic Doppelgänger. The outcome revealed that the recognition requires no longer than two seconds, the first impression is, as a rule, crucial (as is the case with love, Ishiguro adds, and refers to some studies according to which the outcome of any love encounter is usually determined in the first 30 seconds). Following this "conversation" with the human/robot the participants in the experiment had to fill out a questionnaire with the purpose of measuring their sense of *affinity/uncanny* (*heimlich/unheimlich*). The scale used seven factors to identify the kind of feeling that was experienced: unnatural/natural; machine-like/human-like; unconscious/conscious; artificial/organic; stiff movement/smooth movement. The observation was made that "anthropomorphism is a complex phenomenon involving multiple dimensions. Not only the appearance but also the behaviour of a robot can have

a considerable influence on anthropomorphism."<sup>11</sup> Ishiguro believes that reducing the study of human likeness (the mimetic operator) down to just two factors — *affinity/uncanny* and *likeness/unlikeness*, as M. Mori does in the graph of the uncanny valley, is too limiting. The main conclusion of the experiment was that finer degrees and levels of anthropomorphism exist. The key aspects in a robot's capability of attraction and naturalness are undoubtedly gracefulness and the smoothness of their movements. According to Ishiguro, this disproves Mori's hypothesis that moving androids are creepier.

The theoretical argument in the article *My Robotic Doppelgänger* is once again a linguistic one — this time regarding the untranslatability of the Japanese word *shinwakan* (親和感). Robotic engineers asked some Japanese linguists, and the results are in — the word cannot be properly translated and therefore a full consensus on its translation cannot be reached. Ishiguro proposed that *shinwakan* not be translated with the established *familiarity* and *affinity* but with the much more suitable term *likability*. In order to demonstrate the complexity of *shinwakan*, he invented a more sophisticated scale than the one with seven factors for detecting empathy or antipathy towards robots. *Shinwakan* is a feeling of something familiar, kindred, homelike, affinitive — all that attracts, and, consequently, the negative levels on the scale are a perfect opposite of that feeling — the unpleasant effect of repulsion, horridification and petrification — *bukimi*. However, the adjective *shinwateki* (親和的) can also mean *synchronous*, i.e., the specific closeness and synchronicity between man and machine, the gemination, simultaneity and parallelism between them.<sup>12</sup>

Theoretically, in his attempt to overcome the uncanny valley, Hiroshi Ishiguro widened the complexity of Mori's scheme to the point where he practically created an android Doppelgänger. These mimetic machines helped him shorten the distance between man and robot, which served the ambition of making robots *almost like humans*, but the mystery of the *almost* remained unsolved. In its attempts to make machines like humans, Ishiguro's laboratory found itself facing the question of what likeness actually is.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See for instance "Humanoid Robot - Gemonoid HI-1 Android Prototype." See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uD1CdjlRtBM>

<sup>10</sup> Hiroshi Ishiguro et al., "My Robotic Doppelgänger - a Critical Look at the Uncanny Valley," *The 18th IEEE International Symposium on Robot and Human Interactive Communication* (Toyama, 2009), 269–76, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ROMAN.2009.5326351>.

<sup>11</sup> Ishiguro et al., 274.

<sup>12</sup> With gratitude to Futoshi Hoshino for his notes and explanations about *shinwakan* in the context of the synchronicity effect.

<sup>13</sup> The question about likeness and imitation in the sense of *mimesis* has been repetitively both-

What Ishiguro failed to translate in his previously discussed article is, namely, the European tradition of identifying the notion of *unheimlich* with that of *bukimi*. A similar “translation” appeared in the two conferences on robotics in 2013 — in Germany and Japan, where among the engineers and robotics specialists, humanities scholars also took part who easily associated the European tradition of theoretical psychoanalysis with Japanese robotics.<sup>24</sup> M. Mori and H. Ishiguro participated side by side in the conference in Tokyo — one of them continued to insist on building unhuman robots, while the other methodologically laid out step by step how the uncanny valley will be overcome: the mimetic machines, these ever more perfect imitators of the human, will no longer be bothering us.

The businesses, from another perspective, observes that there are two trends in the field of robotics — the anthropomorphic and the non-anthropomorphic, and, without choosing one of the options, bravely sell human, as well as unhuman robots. At the reception of the “Hen-na” hotel (“Strange hotel”<sup>25</sup>), close to Nagasaki, which first opened in 2015 and was marketed as being serviced exclusively by robots, visitors can bravely choose to be accommodated by the human-like female android or by the friendly dinosaur. It is up to the random client of the “Hen-na” hotel to decide which one of them is creepier, which one is less human-like or... which one is more comical.



Fig. 3.

### 5. 不気味の谷現象 to Uncanny Valley: Synchronizing Traditions

The dynamics of the German word pair *heimlich/unheimlich* make it suitable for the translation of the Japanese antonyms *shinwateki/bukimi*. *Bukimi* is the Japanese translation of the title of Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919), where he makes a broad linguistic remark about the ambivalence of the adjective *unheimlich*. The translation of *unheimlich* as *bukimi* in Japan appeared even before the publication of Mori's hypothesis about the uncanny valley. With his works in the field of robotics, Mori is well placed within the European line of interpretation of the *unheimlich* phenomenon: from Hoffmann's romanticist short stories, to Jean Paul and Mary Shelley, and through the establishment of the notion of *unheimlich* in Sigmund Freud and Ernst Jentsch's works as a category on the edge of aesthetics and psychoanalysis, to the numerous lines of interpretation in post-Structuralist theory about the automatism of the return of the repressed and about the intersection between *repetition* and *negation*. This comes to show that, without the need of additional speculation about whether Masahiro Mori took inspiration from Freud, or whether he specifically read and was familiar with Jentsch's article (most probably not), that there are clearly too many parallels and coincidences present between the phenomena of *unheimlich* in Jentsch and Freud's works and *bukimi no tani* in

ering philosophers as early as Plato. The book *Modern Mimesis* is dedicated to part of these concerns in the context of literature and its self-reflexive function.

<sup>24</sup> The conferences are: IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, Karlsruhe, Germany, May 10, 2013 and IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Robots and Intelligent Systems (IROS), Tokyo International Exhibition Center, Room 703, Nov 6, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Henn-na Hotel, 変なホテル — the name “Strange hotel” clearly refers to *the uncanny valley*, therefore we can assume that such a link is deliberate: [url=http://www.h-n-h.jp/en/](http://www.h-n-h.jp/en/). The cost for one night in a room for two in October of 2021 is approximately 100 euros.

Mori's to be ignored. Furthermore, it was precisely in the 1970s when Freud's essay was rediscovered by the French theoretical scene and heated conceptual debates sparked around it.<sup>16</sup>

The Polish curator, Jasia Reichardt, who takes great interest in cybernetics' significance in art, played a key role in the synchronization between the European and Japanese traditions. The term *uncanny valley* emerged shortly after Mori brought it into the Japanese context and it was done so by virtue of Reichardt's 1978 translation. This is when it was established that *the uncanny valley* and Freud's and Jentsch's heritage in the European scene connect at the point of intersection between aesthetics, psychoanalysis, technology, and science. This connection uncovered new paths of development for theoretical and aesthetic imagination.

During the time when she was the director of London's Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA), Jasia Reichardt curated the exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* (1968) — one of the early and greatly influential exhibitions of generated art.<sup>17</sup> In the exhibition the robots are the ones who paint, write poetry, and create music. The people who programmed them now call themselves 'digital artists' and a year after the exhibition they founded The Computer Arts Society (CAS) whose scientific profile is the interaction between science, cybernetics, and art.

Besides curating such an emblematic exhibition, Jasia Reichardt also wrote the book: *Robots: Facts, Fiction, and Prediction*. One of the chapters in her book addresses Mori's valley. Its title is *Human reactions to imitation humans, or Masahiro Mori's Uncanny Valley*.<sup>18</sup> Here, Jasia Reichardt lays out Mori's hypothesis of the valley and introduces the translation *uncanny valley*. Without explicitly referring to Jentsch and Freud, this connection is already a working one, since the established English translation of Freud's notable essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919) is precisely *The Uncanny* (1925).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See more in: Anneleen Masschelein, *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Jasia Reichardt, *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts*, Exhibition Catalog. Exhibition Organized At the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Nash House, London, August 2-October 20, 1968 (Praeger, 1969).

A recording that lays out Jasia Reichardt's concept, as well as footage from the exhibition and the generated art of the machines can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8T-Jx8ngUsA>.

<sup>18</sup> Jasia Reichardt, "Human Reactions to Imitation Humans, or Masahiro Mori's Uncanny Valley," in *Robots – Fact, Fiction, Prediction* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), 26–27.

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of*

Mori's *bukimi no tani* can only benefit from the recognition of the heritage of the European humanities, from references to the observations made by Freud and Jentsch, to the authors who comment on them throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extremities of experiencing a sense of empathy and its rapid disruption caused by the increasing affinity between man and machine synchronize well with the paradoxes of *the uncanny*. The affirmative, comfortable, and home-like suddenly become unfamiliar. Our hidden fears pop-up right in front of us, embodied in flesh and blood, our hidden fears. There, on the very edge, where it's difficult to tell apart the living from the non-living, the organic from the mechanical, and the human from the non-human.

## 6. Negative *Anagnorisis* and *Unheimlich*: Jentsch and Freud

The whole debate about *unheimlich* started from one of Jentsch's articles from 1906, while Freud and Otto Rank later revise, critique, develop and adapt Jentsch's ideas.<sup>20</sup> Jentsch's theory is directly linked to the concept of the automata, and the *unheimlich* effect is, according to his perception, a result of intellectual uncertainty, of not being able to tell if the thing in front of you is living or non-living, organic or mechanical, a human or an automaton.

In storytelling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader **in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character**. This is done in such a way that the uncertainty does not appear directly at the focal point of his attention, so that he is not given the occasion to investigate and clarify the matter straight away; for the particular emotional effect, as we said, would hereby be quickly dissipated. In his works of fantasy, E. T. A. Hoffmann has repeatedly made use of this psychological artifice with success.<sup>21</sup>

This is the very excerpt from Jentsch that Freud cites in his essay *Das Unheimliche*, as he goes on to claim that he's solving his colleague's

*Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919)*, trans. Alix Strachey, 1925, 368–407.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Jentsch, "Zur Psychologie Des Unheimlichen," *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift*, 8:22 (1906), 203–5.

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)," trans. Roy Sellars, *Angelaki* 2:1 (1 January 1997), 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09697259708571910>. (bold is mine).

mystery — this observation refers to, most of all, Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. Freud shares his disagreement with Jentsch's general thesis about intellectual uncertainty caused by moving automatons. What he especially takes interest in is the *example* of Hoffmann and his wax figures, dolls and automata. Freud uses the example of Hoffmann to explain the *unheimlich* phenomenon but attaches it to quite a different theory.<sup>22</sup>

The story of *The Sandman* illustrates the point of the gaze, the fear of going blind, the castration complex, the Oedipus complex, the redoubled father figure, and, generally, the Doppelgänger — all of which constitute central elements of Freud's method. Hoffmann's fairy-tale will later become a crucial example in the Austrian psychoanalyst's work on clarifying the operating mechanism of *unheimlich*: to negate and repeat at the same time. The *unheimlich* effect represses the familiar, domestic and affinitive that returns as unfamiliar, strange and uncanny. Thus an intimate core swoops into the gaze from the outside, as a foreign body (later Lacan will term it *extimité* in order to emphasize the coincidence of inside and outside)<sup>23</sup>.

Freud cites this excerpt from Jentsch's article and criticizes his thesis in order to present his own. However, Jentsch's article also includes the following segment that Freud left out in his citation (every citation is inevitably a cropping or a castration since it always reduces and decontextualizes):

This peculiar effect makes its appearance even more clearly when imitations of the human form not only reach one's perception, but when on top of everything they appear to be united with certain bodily or mental functions. This is where the impression easily produced by the automatic figures belongs that is so awkward for many people. Once again, those cases must here be discounted in which the objects are very small or very familiar in the course of daily usage. A doll which closes and opens its eyes by itself, or a small automatic toy, will cause no notable sensation of this kind, while on the other hand, for example, the life-size

machines that perform complicated tasks, blow trumpets, dance and so forth, very easily give one a feeling of unease. The finer the mechanism and the truer to nature the formal reproduction [naturgetreuer die gestaltliche Nachbildung wird], the more strongly will the special effect also make its appearance.<sup>24</sup>

If we go back to the excerpt from Hoffmann's *The Automata* in the beginning of this article, it becomes perfectly clear that, through his observations, Jentsch retells Ludwig's thoughts on the difference between the nice little doll and the anthropomorphic musical automata that evoke incomprehensible horror. Of course, *The Sandman's* Olympia is an automaton as well, she is a pianist, which makes the reference clear, or, to be more exact, makes clear the contamination that Freud makes. The Austrian psychoanalyst doesn't just merge the automata from both *The Sandman* and *The Automata*, but he also shifts the focus in his interpretation from the automaton Olympia<sup>25</sup> to the character of the Sandman.<sup>26</sup>

However, Jentsch does not mention *The Sandman* anywhere in his article. If one was to make a comparison it could easily be noticed that he implicitly refers to Hoffmann's *The Automata*. Freud, on the other hand, believes that *The Sandman* is Hoffmann's major work, and it is namely through this example that he subverts Jentsch. Freud shifts the focus from the intellectual uncertainty caused by the automaton Olympia towards the repetition, duplication, and negation, and, above all, towards the return of the repressed and the castration complex. In his version, Hoffmann's story offers a series of Doppelgängers: Olympia-and-Nathaniel, Coppelius-and-Coppola, and the father-and-Spallanzani. This is how Freud develops his own theory. On a similar note, what Jentsch actually cites from Hoffmann (*The Automata*) and why Freud assumes that that the citation

<sup>24</sup> Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," (1906), 12.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that Julia Mark – Hoffmann's young love in Bamberg – can be recognized not in the romanticist character of Olympia, but in the in the enlightened Clara (even in her name we can hear German Aufklärung), she does not want to be an automaton, even if this automaton would play music beautifully.

<sup>26</sup> About Freud's shift of focus towards *The Sandman's* Olympia, as well as about the limits of his thesis between the offspring of the eyes and the offspring of the genitalia, see: Miglena Nikolchina, "Love and Automata: From Hoffmann to Lem and from Freud to Kristeva", *Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 65 (1995), 77–82; Sarah Kofman, "The Double Island the Devil. The Uncanniness of The Sandman," in *Freud and Fiction*, trans. Sarah Wykes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 121–62.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche," *Imago* 5 (1919), 297–324.

<sup>23</sup> More about Freud's *unheimlich* and Lacan's *extimité* in Maria Kalinova, "Exotopy: Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan on the Outside Context of Discourse," *Slavica Tergestina* 20:1 (2018), 98–117, <https://doi.org/10.13137/2283-5482/22384>.

is from another story (*The Sandman*) — sheds light on the mechanism for constructing literary figures through exemplification, or, how the discourses of humanities fall under the spell and charm of certain literary examples. Together, Hoffmann's *The Sandman* and Freud's theory of *unheimlich* form a common enigmatic knot, they explain each other: Freud's theory evokes precisely this example and vice versa. Regardless of whether Freud's theory gets criticized (negated) or confirmed (repeated) over and over again, the ones who comment on it use this exact story in their arguments. This is because, ever since Freud, in the debates about what *unheimlich* is, it is no longer possible for one to not also look into *The Sandman* through the glass of new interpretations.<sup>27</sup>

The fascination with Freud and *The Sandman* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century leaves Jentsch's article in the background. I will come back to its goals with regards to the idea of anthropomorphic mimetic machines. Jentsch suggests in his hypothesis that the *unheimlich* effect has to do with two factors: 1. a zone of indistinguishability between the living and the non-living, between what is human and automatic, and 2. the animalization, setting in motion, or animation of the automata. These two factors are central in Mori's graph of the uncanny valley — the first one represents the mimetic operator (the x-axis), and the second represents the variation that occurs when motion ensues (the y-axis).

Crucial for both Jentsch and Mori is the point of the lack of recognition — not being able to tell if something is living or lifeless; if it's imitation or not; if it's an illusion or not. The uncanny effect blurs the lines between self and non-self, and with such an erasure of the negation, the line itself becomes ambivalent, and well-established oppositions such as in/out, organic/mechanical, human/unhuman can potentially abruptly change their places.

The uncanny category indicates a division of the subject. This division can be historically analyzed, as Mladen Dolar outstandingly does in

<sup>27</sup> For the link between *The Sandman* and Freud with regards to the mystical anxiety from a family crypt and a buried enigma, see: Nicholas Rand and Maria Torok, "The Sandman Looks at "The Uncanny"", in *Speculations after Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, and Culture*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 185–204. On the subject of the aesthetic category of uncanny and its role in literature in the prism of the notions of setting, framework and point of view, as well as the ideas of mastery, control, and uncertainty, see: Darin Tenev and Enyo Stoyanov, "Literary Uncanny," in *The Sublime and the Uncanny*, ed. Futoshi Hoshino and Kamelia Spassova, *UTCP Booklet 27* (Tokyo: UTCP, 2016), 41–65.

the context of the Enlightenment, and its dark side, Romanticism, in order to develop the thesis that "there is a specific dimension of the uncanny that emerges with modernity."<sup>28</sup> He demonstrates a genealogy of the modern subject through the figure of the Doppelgänger and the aesthetic category of *unheimlich*. This is a category of the gap and division, the subject can be viewed as always divided and unidentical to itself ( $I = I +/- a$ ).<sup>29</sup> And if the death drive is a repetition compulsion towards the very same thing, then *unheimlich* is the effect of the incapacity to be repeated without a slight divergence. A repetition where the limitations of (self)identity and identification are always undermined. What is crucial for creating a link between repetition and negation in the context of *unheimlich* is the point of unrecognizability. That is, not being able to tell on which side of the line the thing before you is standing — in or out, subject or object, human or unhuman. This point of the lack of recognition can be defined through Aristotle as *negative anagnorisis* or as a transition from knowing to unknowing.<sup>30</sup>

The Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis consistently deals with trying to distinguish between the tragic, the comical, and the uncanny through the operators of negation (Hegel), the figure of the Doppelgänger (Freud), and the notion of extimacy (Lacan). The recognition (*anagnorisis*), as Alenka Zupančič skilfully demonstrates, works either through the axis of the tragic as the logic of the sacrificial and the exceptional, or, through the axis of the comical as perpetual minimal difference between two similarities through a montage of them.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, this hypothesis suggests that the indistinguishability between the two axes, between the tragic and the comical logic, opens a gap which causes the *unheimlich* effect.

When illustrating the difference between the comical and the uncanny, Alenka Zupančič likes to give the example of the actor who

<sup>28</sup> Mladen Dolar, "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny," *October* 58 (1991), 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1778795>.

<sup>29</sup> The problem of the divided subject with regards to the Doppelgänger theory in literature (from German Romanticism to Postmodernism) and philosophy (from Kant and Fichte to Blanchot and Derrida), is further developed in: Dimitris Vardoulakis, *The Doppelgänger: Literature's Philosophy*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Maria Kalinova develops the idea of *negative anagnorisis*, see: Maria Kalinova, "Negative Anagnorisis: Notes on the Uncanny and the Metamorphosis in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*," in *The Sublime and the Uncanny*, ed. Futoshi Hoshino and Kamelia Spassova, *UTCP Booklet 27* (Tokyo: UTCP, 2016), 67–82.

<sup>31</sup> About the distinction between the logic of the tragic and the logic of the comical, see: Alenka Zupančič, "On Love as Comedy," *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 2:1 (2003), 61–80.

played a dead body on stage and as he was pretending to be dead during the play, he sneezed. To the audience and the actors sneezing was comical, but for the characters that are part of a theatrical illusion, it would have been *unheimlich*: the dead character suddenly moves.<sup>32</sup> It is funny for a corpse to sneeze only if we know that he is not really a dead body but a living actor. The logic of the comedy always requires the metaposition of an audience that knows more than the characters. In order to laugh, one should be able to observe from aside or from above, separated from the action, whereas the logic of *unheimlich* is based upon the shift from knowing to unknowing, in which case the metainstance of a distance view is not present. It comes with the interiorized gaze and the uneasy self-reflexive work: is this alive, is this me?

If *unheimlich* is a point in time, then it is the point of unrecognizability; if *unheimlich* is a special category, it is the uncanny valley where the very notion of a separating line becomes ambivalent: the thing outside of the unexpected turns out to be the thing inside.

## 7. Unblocking the Difference

The line of the artificial being in the humanities' ever-changing perception passes through like Ariadne's thread in Miglena Nikolchina's theoretical books. The aim of Nikolchina's works is to redefine the very notion of *difference*. In her revision she doesn't Hegelianly reduce the antinomies to instances of mediation, nor does she follow Agamben's zones of indifference. Agamben's thesis about the dysfunctionality of the anthropological machine is especially important. Nikolchina finds an antidote for its inoperativity. Agamben's thesis is based upon the peculiar logico-political structure of inclusion and exclusion. He maintains that the line between human and unhuman is the act of exclusion — the human is not an animal.<sup>33</sup> That which,

<sup>32</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *Why Psychoanalysis? Three Interventions* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007), 49.

<sup>33</sup> Kolozova, after Marx and Laruelle, proposes another vision. She suggests we think of a dyadic structure of technology and the organic as an inhuman kernel that precedes the subject: "The inhuman is that which escapes rational conceptualization, that which has no meaning or reason for existence: senseless, brute existence, mere matter regardless of whether it is organic or artificially produced. [...] In other words, subjectivity is always already philosophical. It is nothing but the automaton of signification which represents the human or constitutes it as representation; what makes it (non)human is precisely its failure to fully represent." The place of this inhuman rupture beyond representation and conceptualization is the Real in Lacanian terms. Katerina Kolozova, "The Inhuman and the Automaton: Exploitation and the Exploited in the Era of Late Capitalism", in *Superpositions: Laruelle and the Humanities*, ed. Rocco Gangle, (London:

according to Agamben, gets stopped through the *animalization of the human and the humanization of the animal* is the anthropological machine's ability to establish an understanding of the human as a state of exception: the line between human and animal is erased.<sup>34</sup> The spot where Agamben suggests a zone of indifference,<sup>35</sup> is where Nikolchina attempts to find *differentia specifica* when defining the human. And she finds it in the automaton. Thus, she revalidates the separating line between human and unhuman but also transforms it. The figure of the unhuman shifts from the animal towards the robot. The line where one makes a distinction works, not through the exclusion operator, but through the montage of two different positions. In short, to be able to understand what a human is, we first have to understand what separates it from the machine. And if Agamben's anthropological machine is set in motion by the logic of the tragic, the sacrificial, and the exceptional, then Nikolchina proposes that the human be reconsidered by the logic of the edge between the comical and *unheimlich*:

Frequently acting as a threat to humanity, robots deploy the paradox of the Doppelgänger, who can appear either as the comic twin or as the annihilating double, thus stalking the edge between comedy proper and the uncanny. The point in this case, however, is to single out the mechanism of reduplication that acts through montage and that posits an altogether different "anthropological machine". Instead of separating man from animal, this machine proliferates man's fake doubles.<sup>36</sup>

The robot can be a perfect copy of a human, his or her Doppelgänger (as Ishiguro proposes), a single virtual point, and yet, there is something that radically separates the human from the automaton. This *unheimlich* thing is definitive for what is human today— grasping it

Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 92.

<sup>34</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 36–37.

<sup>35</sup> Agamben's notion through which the paradigm of the exception is constructed, is often translated in English as "a zone of indifference", and as "a zone of indistinction". About the different effects between that and Deleuze and Guattari's concept "a zone of indiscernibility", see: Erinn Cunniff Gilson, "Zones of Indiscernibility: The Life of a Concept from Deleuze to Agamben," *Philosophy Today* 51, (2007), 98–106.

<sup>36</sup> Miglena Nikolchina, "An Unfinished Project: Man as Comedy," in *Lost Unicorns of the Velvet Revolutions: Heterotopias of the Seminar* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 107.

causes the difference.<sup>37</sup> In this turn, Nikolchina sees a shift of paradigms from the logic of the tragic (transcendent, in the dimension of desire) to the logic of the comical (immanent, in the dimension of the drive).

Why doesn't the perspective of man and machine becoming affinitive scare Nikolchina, how is it that she manages to not fall into the trap of the uncanny valley? It is important to point out that what some find *unheimlich*, others find comical. The comical arises from the possibility that the differences between two close perspectives is outlined, that the deceptive duplication of the heterotopic homonymies get recognized, and that the difference gets embedded into the process of heterogenesis itself. In other words, Nikolchina theoretically avoids the sacrificial-tragical logic, as well as the *unheimlich* logic which implies a point of indistinguishability that I here have presented here as negative *anagnorisis*.

The deautomatization of automatism in the case of humans, as well as in that of machines, occurs in the critical act of recognizing, which induces heterogenesis and sees elements of various categories instead of a homonymous fusion. There is nothing fatalistic about Nikolchina's call to think of man as affinitive and distinguishable from the machines, but she insists that we do not stop to think of the human situation inside the context of the quickly changing field of technological innovation. After all, such an effort is to be made with the clear awareness that in the conversation between the strict sciences and the humanities, the latter have a lot more to say and have to be more creative when it comes to finding ways of being heard.

The whole story around the problem of M. Mori and H. Ishiguro's differing concepts in robotics can only confirm how important it is that the visions, such as that of Hoffmann, Jentsch, and Freud, be remembered. Masahiro Mori searches for an approach towards dis-

covering artificial intelligence beyond the human form, while Professor Ishiguro focuses on overcoming the uncanny valley and designing the ever more flawless mimetic machines. The two robotics professors argue with one another imagining situations that have already been played out in fiction. To some extent, science simply carries out what has already been "invented" by literature, but there is a need for someone to remember, know about, and point out these links. These links need not be *liaisons dangereuses* as long as the possibility for a joint conversation is found. As it is now clear, coincidences should not scare us, they should prepare us for the task to critically analyse them, to distinguish between a number of similarities with the help of reflexive instruments and double vision which doesn't sublimate the tension between heterogenic layers but expresses it.

<sup>37</sup> On a related note, Vassil Vidinsky makes an observation about mimetic machines as a human historical impulse towards self-knowledge. He thinks about a machine intelligence that is different from that of a human through the hypothesis of imaginary non-algorithmic machines that can approach our human nature in a better way. Vidinsky proposes the figure of *Homo sapiens technicus* from the 17th century onwards (a reconceptualization of the Baconian program), as he contemplates the historical shift of the natural, Vassil Vidinsky, "(Post) Phenomenological Approach to Homo Sapiens Technicus," *Balkan Journal of Philosophy* 12:1 (2020), 31–36, <https://doi.org/10.5840/bjp20201215>.

Serge Valdinoci

**François Laruelle : Pour une pensée-fiction**

Review Essay on François Laruelle's *Tétralogos: Un opéra de philosophies*. (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2018).

**Bionote:** Serge Valdinoci is a French philosopher, author of numerous publications and, for the most part of his career, professor of philosophy at Université de Reims (Champagne-Ardenne).

F. Laruelle soumet à notre attention son *Tétralogos*, un Opéra de Philosophies. Le but qui est nôtre est de faire justice à l'endroit d'un ouvrage fondamental. L'enjeu est de grande importance, surtout à une époque saturée par les propos historiens—en philosophie précisément. En l'occurrence il importe de s'interroger sur le projet laruelien. L'Essentiel, ici, tient en deux mots. L'invention philosophique est le problème-clef. Telle est la force de cette question, totalement originale. Il est urgent de produire une Fiction, c'est-à-dire un processus qui crée en se créant, ou qui invente en s'inventant. Ce faisant nous reprenons la démarche des grands Romantiques s'exprimant après Kant, en lien avec Kant. Chez ces derniers il faut répéter que le souci d'une esthétique est patent. Et il s'agit de conjindre alors esthétique et esthésique. Telle est la portée du concept de fiction. Chez F. Laruelle la théorisation passe par ailleurs, du côté de la connaissance dont on bénéficie ou qu'on ignore. En ce sens et à notre avis, Laruelle échappe au nihilisme passif de nos contemporains. Mais Kant n'est pas adopté tout simplement. Car la fiction, selon F. Laruelle, est positive, et surtout pas fictive. Elle est fictionnante plus que nouménale ; elle invente dans un réel « écroumé » qui n'est pas ectypal pour autant. Avec Laruelle, nous quittons la psychologie des Facultés, et même celle qui plus tard sera reprise par Modernes et Postmodernes. La fiction, bien entendue, est de ressort créateur. Elle dit inventer du réel et ce dans le réel. Elle est de dans le réel. Esthésique et esthétique collaborent unement. Et ce encore en brisant la contemporanéité illusoire de la fonction sujet

et de la fonction objet. Oui : le fictionnement invente en s'inventant, fait un effet dans l'affect. En termes larueliens, une *Tétralogie*, ici très puissante, est un domaine de référence. Par exemple, il convient de dire avec force que la Philosophie non-standard<sup>2</sup> touche à l'immense, alors que la Culture Europe, ou Culture Occident, compose sans broncher ni additivement, ni soustractivement. En résumé, la mesure projective, ou de mensuration, qui est effective, éloigne de l'immensité affective, tandis que la démesure, celle qui mord sur soi, s'effondre dans son soi, mais dans un potentiel non-philosophique, ou en Univers unionnant. Depuis son soi d'Univers, travaille un **forcing**, comme le conçoivent Cohen et Badiou. Ce dernier modélise scientistement le passage de l'Être à l'Événement. Chez Laruelle, on échappe totalement au scientisme malgré l'avis des tenants idéologues de notre culture Europe. Nous pensons aux péri-philosophes de l'Institution, en France notamment.

Ici importe un effet unilatéral, lequel pèse comme un forcing originé depuis l'Univers. La direction théorique s'instaure du « dehors » vers le « dedans ». Via l'idéologie de nos « penseurs » Européens, s'installe un grand frémissement mystique en Europe, lequel abandonne l'esprit de nos contemporains ratiocinants, appuyés sur l'hypokeimenon fallacieux du sujet-substance, quand bien même il serait déconstruit (par Derrida). Sur ce point, Laruelle est intempêtif. Il bouscule irréductiblement. C'est un théoricien du Passage définitif, et qui ne passe pas dans le *Tétralogos*. Entre Socrate et la non-philosophie, il y a un Milieu immense d'univers qui n'est pas graduable et auquel on réfère en intuition, ce bain de Sens sensible. Il y a immersion.

Notre effort conséquent se structurera en vertu d'une économie intrinsèque, ou en-ergiquement im-manante. Voyons bien que cette en-ergie n'est pas industrielle, c'est -à-dire énergétique. Car l'économie n'est point inscriptible dans l'espace-temps. Elle ressortit à une spatiolytique qui permance mais qui est saillante jusqu'aux tréfonds.

<sup>2</sup> Sachons qu'un standard, conforme à une norme de fabrication- ne produit rien créativement. Il se produit sans créer. En d'autres termes, un standard ne tolère que la rémanence spatiale de la pensée philosophique artificielle, au sens bergsonien de la locution. Mais il y a mieux. En effet, la pensée Philosophie emprunte abyssalement au réel d'écroumène, mais en le déniait culturellement. Les grands historiens de la philosophie cherchent un standard, jusque Heidegger y compris. Mais l'opération est vaine. La problématique conceptualisante cache en réalité une mystique —une mystique pensante, ou prescrite hors toute standardisation culturelle.

Avide d'un intrinsèque, F. Laruelle donne force immanente à une pensée non technologique, non industrielle afin de transsubstantialiser l'espace - temps *via* un espace autolytique et per-manant. Mais sans doute notre non-philosophe préférera travailler sur un substitut intéressant. En l'occurrence sont élues la Musique et la Philosophie. Et cette opération est impérieuse pour mener à bien une Philosophie non-Standard. Ainsi si vaut une Philosophie qui est la plus belle des Musiques, alors on remarquera que s'impose - sans Socrate - la musique. Celle-ci est la plus belle des Philosophies - selon le non-Philosophe.

Mais allons plus avant. Les deux nécessités (Philosophie-Musique) dessinent, quand elles sont co-examinées, un afigural immense ou interne. Ou bien un im-manant aboutit à individualiser (en immanence) une maison, pour habitation, un Oïkos en qui s'assume une Révolution messianique fondamentale. Nous avons affaire à un espace (et non pas espace philosophique). C'est l'espace du réel écroumé, son immensité intense. Le texte laruelien nous aidera à progresser. Mais, en l'invention il convient de ne pas questionner vainement. Nous sommes abonnés à une tâche qui ne ressortit pas au commentaire. Notre aventure est ici de questionner en l'interne immanent. Dès lors, notre tâche est assez simple. Force est d'accompagner la problématique de Laruelle en la respectant, et en amplifiant sa donne expressionnelle par un impressionnel et proche et lointain.

Pour commencer d'argumenter, d'expérimenter dans l'interne, convenons du fait que la Philosophie - si emportée dans sa suffisance Culturelle - est supplantée par un **forcing** dont F. Laruelle procède, mais travaille pour le transsubstantier radicalement. Il en est ainsi : chez Cohen et Badiou le **forcing** est « idéalisé », et donc modélisant. A notre sens, le non-Philosophe est autonome, radicalement. Il échappe au modèle Badiou. Disons rapidement qu'un unilatéral fondamental juge de la situation. Le philosophe procède « intentionnellement », il part de la situation de la Pensée culture, ou pensée Occident. Telle est la schématique de la pensée Philosophique : l'allée du dedans au dehors. Quant au non-Philosophe, il procède de la « direction » inverse contraire. L'Univers est premier, et le philosophe hallucine dans l'attitude cognitive. Il « oublie » le « frémissement » mystique dont la culture Philosophie n'est qu'une

dénégation dilatée. Ainsi, nos Modernes ratiocinants ne recèlent qu'un hypokeïmenon fallacieux : le Sujet- substance. Ainsi Laruelle est intempestif. C'est un théoricien du « passage », qui, pour son propre compte, est soustrait au passage. Entre Socrate- Platon et la non- Philosophie, il y a un milieu « infini » d'univers immense et non pas d'Univers graduable, – en qui on rétroréfère scientifiquement. Car la rétroréférence immanente, est en intuition. Elle n'est pas quantifiable. Le théoricien penseur baigne en l'immanence et se mesure-en l'intuition omni-présente. Il s'agit ici de bien commencer, en repérant la structure de la préséance en Culture. Depuis les Modernes, le Philosophe utilise le Discours du Monde en tant qu'a priori. De la sorte, le dimensionnel gnoséologique intervient dans le processus culturel initial. Ce dernier est toujours déjà épistémologique, et s'inscrit dans la dualité parole - chose. Mais une difficulté apparaît. Dans le régime épistémologique, on dira avec regret que la philosophie est dans le siècle, ou ne prend comme arme de connaissance que des idées générales, ou bien compilées. Telle est absolument la nouvelle donne. A titre simplement indicatif il convient d'énoncer que toute une pratique - sémantique - doit au moins trouver place ici. Car le « rendu » syntaxique mérite de se voir contrôlé fermement. Les sciences dites exactes se savent dépendantes du « sensé ».

F. Laruelle n'ignore pas la difficulté. Existe un **Nuage d'inconnaissance**. Ceci signifie que le nuage - ou *sfumato* - dans notre « prise » de/sur les choses elles-mêmes, échappe principalement à son exhibition en Culture, sous l'espèce de la connaissance. La chose est entendue. Mais de la sorte il se manifeste que la fondation sans connaissance renvoie à un phoros (un porteur). Vaut une doxa primitive (Husserl), un proto-phoros (une protophorique).

Alors résonne une alliance, une créatrice. Un Tétralogos laruelien ex-prime sur trois paliers (générique, quantique, philosophique) et philo-musical, les lois argumentées dont la puissance fait Impression tout en impressionnant le lecteur par la force d'exposition du propos laruelien, tout à fait nouveau dans la société de nos Philosophes universitaires. À notre avis, et comme toujours chez F. Laruelle, il convient de « redimensionner l'immensité » des textes et ce à des fins pédagogiques. Nous savons bien, à titre prolégoménal, que en interne, le proche est lointain. Mieux, le tact est irremplaçable, fût-

ce par le contact, ce dernier organisant le propos de toute démarche dans les sciences scientifiques. Ainsi tout contact se prélève sur le tact spatiolytique. Ou encore, Bergson aura montré définitivement que l'intelligence est abstraite, ou artificielle. Elle intuite dans les choses elles-mêmes (Husserl), mais n'articule aucunement dans le « nuage d'inconnaissance », comme le dira F. Laruelle.

Prenons un exemple par ailleurs. Une théorie naïve de l'homme, cet instantané s'autolysant, omet malgré tout la Nature franche de l'homme en tant qu'esthèse en intuition. Ici un « plein » autolytique travaille à même l'homme même. Et pour traiter de celui-ci (cf. Eckhart) on dira que celui-ci est esthèse protopathiquement pan-analysable, étincelle divine logeant en l'âme. En somme, pour échapper à la glaciation normopathique en l'état contemporain (au XXème siècle), de deshérence Culturelle il est exigé d'inhérer, d'assumer que la connaissance de l'homme est encore dans l'homme.

En deux mots, connaître « X » c'est faire objet en lui. Mieux : c'est naître de lui en lui. Et c'est vrai, dans ce contexte sur-analytique il est difficile de mener à bien une science de l'homme en l'homme. De notre « côté » un futur Guide des égarés devra recourir à une pathique, à un concept endoceptant et un endocept concevant. Ce faisant intervient alors l'Autre de l'effectuation métaphysique en Europe. Nous nommons ici : affect, cet Autre en Occident. Ces deux instances construisent une Pensée une, pensée qui fut réprimée par la Culture Occident. Cette Culture, d'ailleurs, est loin de baisser son pavillon. Au contraire elle sature son territoire « sauvage », et immobilise la pensée comme mouvance, dira Bergson à sa manière. Nous saluons F. Laruelle très tranquillement : civilisationnellement, c'est une vaste entame de la Culture captée par un réel écroumé. En langage husserlien bien accompli écrivons que cette entame est sondée opératoirement et non thématiquement. Ici travaille l'invention créatrice, ou fiction. Il reste à savoir comment.

En tant que laruellienne, s'offre une grande aventure qu'il nous est possible de caractériser. Un vécu sans vie fait office ici. En effet, dans la donne (représentationnelle) d'une science scientifique, il s'avère que la « vie » brute, immense à sa façon est incommensurable au « vécu » qui renvoie - mais abyssalement - à un domaine immensiel, ou à l'immédiat vif. Dès lors, se précise un chemin : dans une

science humaine - et in-exacte scientifiquement, l'ordre du contact se mêle à celui du tact et les deux approches opèrent par interaction de l'immédiat et du médiat. Alors tout fait difficulté, car opère le brouillage indélébile. La science opérationnelle abrite, certes dans le faible, une difficulté forte. Dans le centre du brouillage, opère un proto-logos, c'est-à-dire ici un **Proton pseudos** sub-phénoménologique. Dans ce contexte, Merleau-Ponty nous dira que la Perception enferme un trouble en tant que Proton. Poussons plus loin : dans une science dite humaine s'exhibe un brouillage. Immédiat et médiation s'enveloppent et se développent, et ce dans un en-espace per-manant. L'idée d'un proton, mais **Proton pseudos** s'impose. En effet, l'origine (immédiat) et l'originnaire (médiation) se « confondent polémiquement ». La perception effectuant et extrême est affectée dans une déception extrême et réciproquement. Un Monôme abrite un polynôme en tant que Proton pseudos. Ce dernier éclate par enclatement, ou épaississement.

Mais sachons aller plus avant, ou sachons fictionner. Ceci-dit, il est fallacieux de réduire le « comportement » à une structure, à une syntaxe coordonnée avec une sémantique, ce que tente pour sa part Goldstein. Mais ces penseurs philosophes sont arrêtés par l'état de la Biologie. En effet, les biologistes précèdent les Philosophes d'une génération au moins. Ceci fait que ces Philosophes sont intrinsèquement en retard, qui plus est dans leurs attitudes nocturnes semblables à celles des oiseaux de Minerve.

Si les Philosophes sont en retard sur le corpus biologique, le non-Philosophe construit un espace se spatiolysant. Qui plus est, et dans cette voie heuristique, le passage des représentations à des présentations - chez Laruelle - ne cesse de faire difficulté. Autrement dit, une héroïque est à penser dans l'immanence. Et F. Laruelle, nous le savons n'entre pas dans la question de la protophorique, celle d'un porteur premier. Deux portes semblent se refermer catastrophiquement. Cependant, il convient d'entrer dans ce qui fait autorité chez les Philosophes, outre l'exigence fondamentale de la non-philosophie chez Laruelle. Outre l'impossibilité de la jonction de la représentation et de la présentation, nous avons peu à peu compris que le Phaïnonenon est une Krisis de/dans les hommes, laquelle se produit avec la nécessité irrégulière d'une pathique déployée en des pathétiques culturelles. Nous pensons à la pathologie médicalisée etc.

Par exemple, une héroïque théorétisation forte ou zigzag anagogique, interne, prend sens véritable. Ceci nous réengage, malgré tout, dans un géométral d'écoumène, ou sans fossilisation géométrique. Dans notre exposé visant Laruelle, on dira dûment qu'un altéral fictionnant permet d'admettre qu'une théorie de l'homme, qu'évoque avec grande précaution F. Laruelle ne concerne l'homme qu'en tant que cet homme est altéral, en crise, faisant marge de lui-même. L'homme en fiction est une chaotique de crise, disons : de crise « positivante », mais qui n'échappe au chaos que si l'en-cahot est sécurisé, protégé par nombre d'interventions culturelles. Alors le fictionnel engage dans une écouménalité créatrice. Quant à la Philosophie, elle ne produit que des « fictions » superficielles, tout au plus commodes et jouant leur rôle de stabilisateurs, de compensations psychiques, socialgique - au sens médical de l'expression. Certaines compensations œuvrent en sourdine. Ainsi la normopathie devient, à notre époque, suressentielle. Et le Normal juge de la Norme. De la sorte, nous saisissons mieux ce qu'est une fiction créatrice. Laruelle ouvre une grande route. F. Laruelle est bien un Passeur qui, riche de sa noble matière première (l'immanence) ne subit pas les lois déléterès du passage. Dans la suressentielle pauvreté philosophique - celle du standard aplani - le non-philosophe travaille en musique, elle qui fausse la première place aux Analytiques et ce dès Platon annonçant une loi d'harmonie musicale fondant la théorétique discursive. En initiant la richesse du débat, Socrate énonce que la Philosophie est la plus belle des musiques. Mais reste concurrentement que la musique est la plus belle des Philosophies. Nous sommes pris dans un cercle vertueux, l'équivalent d'une boîte noire. On retrouve ici l'idée d'un encart qui fait écart, et bien sûr d'un écart qui fait encart. Le tout travaille en épaisseur, et produit des reliefs d'enfoncement et de défoncement. Telle est la Krisis en interne.

Mais la production d'Harmoniques à structure musico-philosophique ne suffit pas, malgré le propos verticalisant. En musique tonale, il y a de l'horizontale ou contrepoint. Chaque instance est rétroréférence. En ce sens, convenons - mais heuristiquement seulement - que le pivot harmonique est congruent avec les élancées contrapuntiques. Alors, ce pivot accordé à l'immense, fût-ce par contact ou éloignement est d'ordre pathique et aucunement pathétique. L'opus est ici un itinéraire se développant intérieurement

dans une téléologie immanente. La puissance de notre non-Philosophe correspond à un é-norme embarquement en tant que Fiction, certes à intra-structurer intérieurement. Alors énonçons dans l'immense le discours impeccable de l'Affect en culture bouleversée. Nous effectuons le trajet mesurable qui se mesure à l'immensité. On parlera de deux instances encastrées (l'effectuation et l'affectuation). Celles-ci se superposent, comme le disent nos physiciens contemporains. En ce sens, on accède par fictionnement à un large Hypokeimenon ; celui-ci est de type deux, et laisse à son sort désuet le principe de substance aristotélien, lequel est enveloppant dans l'esprit d'un tact immensément immanent. Il est vrai que le concept de pathique, hors toute pathétique Culturelle, offre l'occasion d'œuvrer interactivement tact et contact. En ce cas, l'itinéraire musicalisant-musicalisé, enfin ramené à lui-même même, aidera à penser en dedans de l'univers non-métrique- qui n'est point l'Univers scientifique. Voilà qui signifie promouvoir une fort large « pensée-invention » via une **askesis** en tant que contemprice du **Proton pseudos**. Cette invention est de ressort d'une en-ergie comme accentuation (ou accentuation). N'omettons pas ici que l'énergétique intra- spatio-temporelle est ordonnée au principe d'en-ergie. Celle-ci est de ressort mystique. En somme l'expérientiation de type mystique, qui n'est point connaissance - nous le savons bien - est celle d'une démarche performante. En l'occurrence les significations référentes retournent à la puissance interne du Sens. L'opération relève d'une spéculation en-ergique. Dans son langage, Husserl évoquait l'identité du Sens et de la signification. A Husserl fait défaut le travail sur en-ergie et énergie. Certes, Husserl ne possède pas le concept d'idée - force, que Nietzsche place en chaire, sans doute précipitamment. Ici personne ne voudrait prendre le relais. Toutefois, F. Laruelle permet de penser plus avant. Husserl cherche à bâtir une Anthropologie transcendante, et cela en vain, assurément. Tout le XXème siècle bien-pensant cherche en vain faute d'avoir reconnu le **Proton pseudos**, ou première déception, qui est perceptive. En fait, notre approche consiste à structurer cette déception sans nous perdre en elle. Au vrai, il convient d'étudier en l'interne, hors l'efficace perceptive qui est désorientation vive. Grosso modo, la tâche consiste à penser en le réel écouménel en logeant chez lui. De son côté, Laruelle nous convie à sonder l'écoumène en tant que Lebenswelt. Naître en lui est plus opportun que connaître de lui. Ou

encore, il convient de maintenir la force de la pan-analytique non Européenne. Dans ces conditions, une théorie irruptive fait intrinsèquement - retour sur soi - et ceci sans s'adonner à la réflexion philosophique. Alors l'intrinsèque est roi. C'est un viscère d'univers en-ergique en temps qu'en dedans de l'immensité en-ergique. F. Laruelle est un promoteur vaillant. Il écrit hors le XXème siècle. Nous souhaitons avoir travaillé dans la crise-Europe, en sachant que nous procédons de la Krisis-europe, et de la Terre-univers. Car la reconnaissance du monde de la vie rétroréfère à la Terre des hommes. Le non-philosophe prépare une intra-structure vivant et initiant, pure dans sa Maniera inconditionnelle. L'Européen apprend à habiter la spécificité d'europe. L'européen est tact en action, et précède la rigidité des scientifiques, de plus en plus culturalisés et inventant des contacts pour procéder Culturellement. Ainsi la question du partage des connaissances est tout un art, à partir d'une **aisthesis** dont la portée est à contrôler.

Oui : d'abord il convient de placer la problématique de l'**aisthesis**. Quant au lecteur, il analyse celle-ci tout en procédant d'elle. Nous sommes en présence du phénomène de zigzag où affect et effect s'échangent, se combinent viscéralement et unement. Le zigzag qui fait sfumato (l'enfumement enfumé) se dit des choses elles-mêmes. On en parle alors que, concurremment, il est parlé depuis lui. L'équivoque est totale, sans être hallucinée par la pirouette hégélienne, si habituelle. Prise dans ce mouvement de pensée inventionnelle, la pensée europe symbolise en étant symbolisée, et ce indéfiniment.

En temps qu'inventeur brut F. Laruelle force (**forcing**) la Philosophie depuis l'univers adsolu et im-manant qui n'est pas celui des scientifiques (ou Univers). L'univers du Phänomenon échappe à son encasernement dans l'Univers absolu des cosmologues contemporains. L'univers adsolu est base de rétention, ou ce qui fait préséance. On le voit, il manque ici au moins une théorie de/dans la Culture qui éloigne de tout freudisme dégénéral en culturalisme mal contrôlé. En somme, le zigzag n'est point relevant d'une traçabilité - Monde -, laquelle fait en définitive partie du Monde. Le zigzag progresse dans l'intuition massive universelle. Il sous-traite l'intuition, mais s'emplace en cette dernière. Il fait bien de/dans.

F. Laruelle invente en dé-couvrant le chaos comme sous-sol du Kosmos. Hors le XXème siècle révolté on trouve un Drame total, une

terreur incommensurable dans le Kosmos. Ce dernier est hypersensibilisé, débordant. Un quasi-système de la douleur trouve place, dans la seconde partie du siècle... M. Henry est tenté par l'aventure d'une Affectivité. Cependant, l'affectivité n'est pas pensée vraiment comme **L'Essence de la Manifestation** la revendique. Sauf à généraliser dûment la Manifestation, qui échappe intrinsèquement à toute « monstration », intentionnelle, on dira à juste titre que la Manifestation se dit et se redit en interne. La Manifestation est auto-affection, mais le Verbe henryen se reprend interminablement en écrasant sa propre pertinence. M. Henry prend dans une source absolue, mais en taisant son subterfuge. La **maniera** refait maniera et ainsi de suite. Henry prend à l'Entre ou à l'immanence. Ainsi, la maniera l'emporte, bien qu'elle soit de seconde main, ou s'installe dans le Milieu qui absorbe l'adsorbé. Par-delà la débauche des citations que Henry emploie pour parvenir à ses fins, Henry "incide" vers une coïncidence de l'adsorption et de l'absorption. Henry ne parvient pas à ses fins. Cette Incidence jamais aboutie indique que la « théorie » flotte sans rémission. Henry « flotte » à son tour, cherche un transcendantal théorisant, mais toujours en vain. Seul Un Dieu « ferait » l'affaire. Voilà que M. Henry nous entraîne à la recherche éperdue d'une merveille, quand flotte l'esprit qui ne progresse aucunement. Dans son Tetralogos, F. Laruelle, lui, met en place une vraie **maniera**, quand la merveille fait masse avec autonomie. En ce sens, se propose un étagement en profondeur réelle, cette fois-ci. Laruelle écrit en immanence. Pourtant, sa Philo-fiction n'est pas élaborée. La réalité est que le non-Philosophe constate que cette Philo-fiction n'est pas immanence, même si cette dernière est invoquée /évoquée. La raison de cette théorie renvoie à une théodicée largement sous-jacente. F. Laruelle remplace l'X situé entre le discours et le Monde par une « théorie sourde », un divin immanent. Le respect est de formuler cet ordre « sourd » mais fort riche pourtant. Il existe une théodicée immanente, prenant forme dans les théories à former, à formuler. Dans en ce cas, le rationalisme « laruelien » propose l'idée d'un telos immanent, ou Divin si l'on veut parler au plus simplement. Ainsi le Tétralogos assume une pensée toute particulière : il existe bien une pensée Laruelle, celle d'une non-philosophie fictionnant écouménalement en tant que de/dans l'altéralisé. Ceci amène la remarque suivante : enfin le Tétralogos est moteur, hors la trilogie philo-logique attendue. Ainsi l'analytique, bien en-

tendue, suscite au vrai une **maniera** développée en une altéralisation qui vaut l'unilatéralisé utilisé par notre non-Philosophe. Selon nous, le réel écoumenal prend enfin son intérêt. Il « généanalyse » le réel dans ce réel lui-même, européen. Alors il faut dire que l'**aïsthe-sis** est contrôlée, et cela une dernière fois. Elle est le fil rouge indélébile, la **Figura serpentinata** qu'amplifie la majesté encore statique de la **Philosophie non-standard**. Désormais la ligne dite indélébile fait « ergon » flexueux ou serpentin qui ouvre brèche ou même fait brèche en elle-même. En l'enspace, l'ergon s'aventure au loin et s'en revient en-ergiquement ... pour repartir. Mais tout n'est pas dit. Reste à fictionner fondamentalement, à faire colimaçon dans l'univers mouvant et à œuvrer pour susciter entièrement dans le non-espace-temps, une figuralité immense - altéralisant formes et formulations -. Pour ainsi méditer, nous avons plongé dans l'immanence staturale, puis travaillé dans le Kosmos pour le servir. Car la situation d'homme, bien entendue, ne pèse pas. Elle fait braise, ou allume l'homme loin des Humains et leur psychologie, et de la socialgie qui est écrasante. Ainsi, une théorie de l'Humain - toujours - en - Culture est renvoyée à l'homme hors les dimensions qui en appellent à l'Humain en Culture. Il en va de l'incommensuralité de l'homme en tant que « sauvage » radical et dépositaire de sa situation comme origine. Mais prenons attention une dernière fois encore : pour F. Laruelle la Philofiction est base de créativité. Cette fiction, prise dans son identité indiscutable, renvoie à l'origine nue, hors la recherche super-appareillée d'un originaire légiférant (cf. Kant, qui accentue cette attitude). Dès lors, en l'acte créationnel émerge une origine en tant que brute. Mais la recherche, en immanence, ne saurait trouver son aboutissement dans la présentation d'une donne brute de la pensée-en-immanence. Il faut, en la circonstance, commencer de parler plus avant. Car ceci renvoie à la pensée-espace « lysée », ou spatiolysée. De la même manière, la pensée-temps se met à permanence irréductiblement. Dans ce contexte « tout se retourne ». Réduction et donation s'échangent identitairement. En création, implorer est exploser, et réciproquement. Mieux : en la transcendance "transcendantale", le Discours du Monde est à élaborer. En immanence en revanche, le discours est monde. Tout est dit.

Dans ces conditions, la Fiction créatrice est lourde du statut du « monde », lequel est transsubstantiable. Alors, il faut dire que la

« conversion » du Monde en monde, et inversement, ressortit à un processus mystique élaborant. Dans cet ordre d'idées, il nous reviendra de penser la Lebenswelt (le monde de la vie) dans toute son immensité, ici transphilosophique. Nous aboutissons, en ce sens, à majorer la « trouée » térébrante et en-ergique, ou la fonction-univers qui « verticalise » (Cf. Heidegger et Merleau-Ponty). Mais sachons, en tout état de cause, lire opportunément F. Laruelle. Ce dernier nous donne accès, avec son Tétralogos, ou propos toujours initial, originant. Celui-ci demeure accroché dans l'immanence radiale et conséquemment une non-philosophie inclut la philosophie.

La philosophie ne rend pas compte de son Verbe. Elle réfère à l'immanence qui implique une expérenciation ou expérience au cœur des choses elles-mêmes. Il existe une pragmatique qui utilise la thèse philosophique en Culture. D'où une reprise est nécessaire. Quelle est au juste la fonction de l'immaner ? La non-philosophie « prend » sur celui-ci ou le rétrograde mais seulement heuristique-ment. Une philosophie non-standard impose un propos indélébile, car il convient de reproblématiser. Ce dernier propose de procéder du commencement, comme il a déjà été dit en physique quantique où il y a **superposition** - celle de l'affect et de l'effect. Il y a difficulté car chez F. Laruelle l'affect n'est point moteur. L'effect est Maître dans la maison (Oïkos). Dès lors, il s'impose de refictionner en produisant un **skhema** d'univers qui ne soit pas une copule d'Univers. Ainsi, la diplopie de l'affect et de l'effect unifierait affect et effect. En conclusion cette approche du fictionnel, en-ergique, formerait une structure intéressante. À nouveau le Tétralogos (F. Laruelle) emplit la pensée qui invente immédiatement en l'univers principiellement affect. Cette pensée-masse court-circuite les dimensions toujours déjà figées. Les effects sous-traitent les affects dans le Monde de l'espace-temps. C'est pourquoi, le rapport laruelien entre musique et philosophie est une Donnée (un datum). Il conviendra de resituer musique et philosophie, hors leur datum de pensée espace-temps. Il s'impose, on le sait, d'échapper à la substructure pour la recentrer en spatiolyse per-manant. Pour entrer dans la compréhension, certes, extérieure, de la situation théorique, référons-en à la métaphore, certes pertinente. En Biologie nous dirons que la diplopie est ce phénomène dans lequel la perception de deux sources lumineuses est nécessaire pour la perception d'un seul objet. C'est une situation

pathologique. En quel sens europe est-il partie prenante ? Allons au plus près. Dans la pertinence métaphorique, comment ne pas remarquer une homologie ? Ici, Philosophie et Musique sont co-impliquées dans l'Entre-deux. Dans cet Entre - qui n'est pas l'Autre des différentialistes contemporains, l'interaction est une première donne. Et le fond commun de cette donne-datum est l'espace-temps, ou le même à même lui-même, c'est-à-dire répétition pure ou articuler minimal. En ce cas, une pensée artificielle, ou ordinaire quasi philosophique, suggère un écart fort entre Philosophie et Musique. Il y a en somme interaction. L'Entre est rigidifié.

Mais une pensée-europe est tout à fait différente. Ici Philosophie et Musique sont autrement qu'interactifs. Ils sont intractifs. Musique et Philosophique se fondent l'un dans l'autre, ne composent aucunement. La diplopie a cessé de valoir, elle fonctionne comme accélérateur vif, dynamisme énergétique. En vérité, et désormais hors métaphorique, l'Entre est en l'**aisthesis** formidable ou domaine d'Intuition. C'est dans ce phénomène que Musique et Philosophie s'abandonnent l'une dans l'autre, et baignent en **aisthesis**. En ce sens la copule prédicative est une illusion dont la force dynamique provient d'une non-prédication fondamentale, et pas seulement fondamentale.

La puissance du travail de F. Laruelle est indiscutable. Et elle engendre une grande Pensée. En effet, la Philosophie-non-standard donne à commencer de penser créativement le réel dans le réel. Elle délimite en ce dernier et respecte son sacré. Elle est effective absolument. Notre Pensée europe, ou Pensée sauvage, se laisse animer par les balances d'univers. Elle donne consistance à une empathie universelle, et endogénétique. Avec d'autres mots, elle s'approprie le nerf écouménal - qui est sien - On peut encore dire ceci : l'écoumène fait flamme de soi et ce en affect. Sans la basis écouménale, il convient d'admettre que l'intuition d'univers se démettrait de soi. Elle resterait une carcasse inanimée, sans accélération intense, ni Loge irréductible... mais désert à tous les vents et désolations. En la théorique bien entendue, un « X » pense en agissant affectivement, et ce sans la médiation traditionnelle par la fonction « connaissance ».

Ainsi un pur théoricien vif laissera se creuser le Monde en monde du/dans le logos - et non pas Logos. La vérité est analectique et non

pas dialectique. Dans cet ordre d'idées, la pensée - invention fictionne. Elle se propose sans vesture occasionnelle. Elle bombarde par spasmes permanents. Mais le chaos n'est qu'apparent. En effet, l'affect ne se referme aucunement sur soi, pas plus que, sur un territoire subjectif toujours ensanglanté. L'affect brûle dans sa généralité. De ce foisonnement, ou sfumato général sont empreintes impressionnellement les localités affectives expressionnelles - celles des sciences scientifiques par exemple-. Le travail dans ces dernières est positif, indéniablement. Cependant, il est encadré culturellement. Ce sera la tâche de l'europanalyse que d'ouvrir la porte au sauvage, mais en n'omettant pas le rôle fondamental de la dynamique énergétique. Car n'oublions pas l'Essentiel, voire le Sur-essentiel : une pensée mystique hors l'Européen, ou l'Occidental, ne connaît point d'abord. D'abord, elle co-naît au monde de la vie - comme aura dit P. Claudel, mais sans expliciter plus. Au départ est l'Affect en qui s'activent les effets de savoir. Telle est la non-Philosophie, notamment dans les débuts de sa méditation, dans les premiers ouvrages. La spécificité de l'europanalyse est de « commencer » en affect mais en y demeurant définitivement. L'épaississement, les arrières-plans anti-tautologiques - ou solides-, forment le sous-sol de toute théorique bien consistante. Ainsi, l'affect, qui ne trompe point, demande un discours intrinsèque, ou en immanence pour que soit évitée la mise en Culture. Reste la puissance de l'immanence, puissance dicible qu'invoquent Non-Philosophie et europanalyse, mais chacune dans sa manière à respecter scrupuleusement.



Frank Engster

**Excerpt from Chapter One of Frank Engster's Book: *Das Geld als Maß, Mittel und Methode Das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit* (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag UG, 2014)<sup>1</sup>**

**Bionote:** Frank Engster wrote his PhD thesis on the subject of time, money and measure. He is interested in the different — (post-)operaist, (post-)structuralist, form-analytic, (queer-)feminist etc. — readings of Marx's critique, especially in money as a technique and its connection with measurement, quantification, time and (natural) science. Some publications are available on academia.edu

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**Abstract:** The question of the book is how a radical critique of capitalism is possible when critique in the tradition of Kant and Hegel means that the criticized subject itself has to "give" the measure of its critique. The thesis is that, while in Kant this reflexivity is achieved by transcendental subjectivity and reason and in Hegel by self-consciousness, self-relation of the concept and the absolute reason of spirit, in Marx we find a materialist turn.

The turn shows that capitalist society became reflexive by a kind of self-measurement, done by the functions of money, on the one hand, and the valorization of labour power and capital, on the other. Money, by its function as the measure of value and the means of its realization and mediation, measures in the commodities the productive relations of their production, thus determining from the past valorization of labour and capital the magnitudes necessary for their further productive valorization — and hence for a productive use of money itself. That is how, in money's capital

<sup>1</sup>This excerpt from Frank Engster's Book, *Das Geld als Maß, Mittel und Methode: Das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit*, has been entirely translated into English by Isidora Hennig, in conjunction with the author, Frank Engster, who has approved all final edits. All quotations have been directly translated from their original German sources, which are reflected in the citations.

form, the measured magnitudes become reflexive, while money itself becomes in its capitalist self-relation the form to measure the same valorization process which by this form becomes possible in the first place.

The aim of the book is to translate this process into an economy of time, showing that money's quantification of social relations is nothing else than this translation itself.

**Keywords:** labour, value, money, capital, critique, Marx, political economy

### 3. Marx's Critique of Political Economy (CoPE) as a Socialization of the Mediation of Object and Subject

The thesis of this book — that Marx's critique of political economy (CoPE) must reconstruct in the criticized society the conditions of the critique itself — this thesis can be specified: The critique establishes its own conditions in view of the *systematic-logical development* of the capitalist mode of production and its economic categories. Just where, exactly, does this sought out place of critique reside in this development?

If in Marx's categorical development in CoPE, individual categories of political economy share an inner necessity and show an interdependence, then the inner necessity and interdependence must reside in mediation. The individual categories, just like the economy as a whole, must share one and the same mediation, the mediation must be the *identical*, and thus, the place of critique must reveal itself in the reflection of this societal mediation. The critique of society would thus mean to literally think it from its mediation.

#### 3.1 The Question of Mediation of Subjectivity and Objectivity

If the mediation of society is the object of social critique and if the mediation is developed analogously to the concepts of critique from Hegel and Kant then the mediation thus appears to affect nothing less than the constitution of *concreteness* (German: *Gegenständlichkeit*). Concreteness means that there is no specific object for the subject and also no objectivity par excellence, instead it means the

*opening* of both objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, it is about their division and concreteness as such. The critique appears to have to aim, in its essence, *between* objectivity and subjectivity, towards a negative, but for objectivity and subjectivity, insofar as constitutive of and productive of being; both must be thought of from the same mediation. Simply summarized, it is about that mediation put in the middle point between objectivity and subjectivity, which in modern philosophy already stands at the middle point and had experienced Kant's and Hegel's systematic development.

But it also seems to be about — and this is Marx' *materialist turn* and intervention into philosophy — the translation and transference of this mediation into a societal and specific capitalistic mediation and its understanding as an economy. This economy, no different than Kant and Hegel's concept of mediation, must be constitutive of the relation between the social/societal objectivity and the social/societal subjectivity. This means that the economic mediation must constitute not only that societal/social objectivity which becomes the object for a subject, but also must define the categories and concepts of thought and actions according to this subjectivity as well. In short, subjectivity must be obtained through the same mediation, so that the subject, too, becomes an object in the economy. Therefore, it makes no sense to want to ground subjectivity in an anterior fashion or independently from the economy thus defined.

And at first glance it indeed seems as if Marx's CoPE has socialized through the categories of political economy a mediation that in German Idealism was conceptualized as a mediation by notion and mind and developed as reason (Kant) and Spirit (Hegel). Marx says in a very famous expression that the social being determines consciousness, and if, furthermore, the social being is to be determined as an economic being, than the economic being on the side of social objectivity must also produce a corresponding consciousness and thought-forms on the side of subjectivity. And indeed Marx shows, especially when it comes to value and its appearance by the realization in the sphere of circulation, briefly on the "surface" (Marx) of society, that the objectively-valid determinations of economy correspond to the necessities of thought, and that this relation of correspondence between the economic being and the (everyday) consciousness can be rediscovered in both the philosophical self-un-

derstanding and in the political and legal constitution of civil society. At first glance, it appears as though Marx has grounded a mediation which in Kant was grasped as a rational synthesis, and in Hegel as a labour of the concepts in the reproduction of society and developed in materialist terms.

But at second glance, the socialization brings with it a significant turn. Marx goes beyond the mere socialization of the rational, or rather spiritual-conceptual mediation, since he accounts for a societal/social mediation which is *withdrawn* from the individual realization, as well as from the society as a whole, and remains unavailable. The withdrawal corresponds to the blindness and primordialism of the social mediation, and it is precisely this deprivation and primordialism that produces in the consciousness not only necessary, but also false ideas, but, in fact, these false ideas nevertheless enter into the economy directly and are a part of its functioning.

Thus, by Marx, two contradictory demands have been given to critique; to a critique that must unify the contradiction in a unity of social and epistemological critique. On the one hand, it must be shown that the social being determines the consciousness, on the other hand, this consciousness is as necessary as it is wrongly determined and nevertheless part of social being. Should both of the demands be fulfilled, then the mediation between objectivity and subjectivity cannot merge with its equivalence, as it is, after all, the case in Kant's and Hegel's conception. Marx, therefore, does not show in *Capital* that objectivity corresponds to itself in subjectivity, nor does he show why objectivity necessarily comes to consciousness falsely and therefore does *not* correspond to itself in subjectivity. He takes a step back and first shows something else, namely why objectivity corresponds to *itself*. The social mediation must first of all, so to speak, create an objectivity in which the society blindly and unconsciously becomes an object to *itself*, and also objectively corresponds to itself. Marx determines consciousness from *this* objectivity, from this unconscious but objective self-mediation of the society: it is what he names the "social being" or the "pure social relation." However this unconscious self-mediation might be present in the thoughts and actions of the subjects, and however its conscious thereby corresponds or does not correspond to the objectivity of society: the relation is first of all objective insofar as for

the subjectivity a *self-relation* literally *is given*, namely through the mediation of the economy with itself.

In order for the critique to catch up with its own conditions through the criticized capitalistic society, it seems as though this self-mediation must be developed first. In its self-mediation, social objectivity constitutes itself, to which, in turn, the subjectivity must correspond — but not without an inversion and not without a socially necessary *and* false consciousness. Radical critique seems to have to situate its own justification in this relation between the social objectivity and subjectivity, quite so, as if the critique could justify itself by depicting the self-mediation through which, on the one hand, the economy produces objectivity and, on the other, a subjectivity that corresponds to the objectivity and yet misunderstands it, and *must* misunderstand it.

### 3.2 The Social Mediation by Labour and Value

There is the assumption that Marx succeeded this critique from the standpoint of labour. Followers and critics of Marx alike have held the opinion that Marx had justified the mediation and reproduction of society through labour; a labour which is, according to classical Marxism, the metabolism with nature, the eternal necessity for man and society, the inner belt of the socialization and the common (red) threads of history. Labour should be the social essence which produces the same social/societal objectivity through which the subjects are (re)given the social determination and productive power of their own labour and of, more generally, social praxis.

Classical Marxism also held the opinion that, from the same standpoint of labour, Marx was also able to determine the inner division and the contradictoriness of capitalist society and to demonstrate in them the driving force and the motor of (historical) development. In the divisions and contradictions, in particular in the class division through the private ownership of the means of production, through the exploitation as well as the unplanned and anarchic application of labour, shall the reason finally be found as to why objectivity and subjectivity cannot — yet — correspond to each other, as the relation between the social objectivity produced and mediated by labour, on the one hand, and the subject of labour and its consciousness, on

the other, is a relation of class antagonism and foreign expropriation and domination, determination and exploitation.

This critique of capitalism, which became simplified as *traditional* Marxism, has also resulted in a “traditional” idea of communism, and this idea of communism, too, arose from the critique of the capitalist mediation of subjectivity and objectivity. What does this idea look like? It was the high aspiration of traditional Marxism to compete with the legacy of German idealism and its conception of subject-object, which was finally developed by Hegel as an “absolute idea,” and to socialize the mediation of subject and object through labour. “Socializing” means that, on one hand, traditional Marxism sought to lead the idealistic determination of the (absolute) idea back to the essence of social mediation, namely to labour and its class, and, on the other hand, the absolute idea was to be revolutionized by this socialization and thus take on a communist determination. But what does this socialization mean in regards to *idea*, and even the idea of the absolute idea or the idea of the absolute?

What philosophy understands by the term *idea*, but also how it is understood in traditional everyday use, is that consciousness makes itself an image or a presentation. In German Idealism, under the title “*idea*,” the mediation of subject and object would be thematised. The question of the mediation of subject and object was the question of its identification, and this identification, according to German Idealism, is done by mind and reason; with Hegel, the idea was developed even, as already said, to the “absolute” idea, done by a supra-individual “Spirit” and the “logic of the concept”, and the individual subject has to be understood from this overarching supra-individuality. However, in what way the grounding of the identification of objectivity and subjectivity in German Idealism and its absolutisation with Hegel was conceptualized is not decisive here. What is decisive is only that the identification has been made by mind and reason, for here, traditional Marxism claimed, alongside Marx, a critique of idealism and even a revolutionization of philosophy as philosophy, an overcoming of philosophy by its practical realization. The Marx-oriented critique of capitalism aimed to show that the identification between subject and object cannot be merely intellectual-conceptual, nor purely spiritual-ideal; rather, the identification must also be carried out practically and be sen-

sual-active. Furthermore, to identify and comprehend objectivity through consciousness, this objectivity must firstly be produced and appropriated in this practical way. The objectivity must consequently be understood from its practical social and historical becoming and changeability, or rather, objectivity always already exists in this becoming. In any case, the identification between subject and object cannot be made by a labour understood in the purely conceptual-spiritual sense. It cannot be the Hegelian concept of labour that is ultimately attributed to a conceptual reason, to an overreaching (world)-Spirit, or, even, to a higher divinely-creative being, and which would therefore ultimately have to remain purely negative and unavailable. The work of identification is rather — or firstly, before even the conceptual work of consciousness — the *specific social practice* and the *productive power* of a particular class, the working class.

If, therefore, the (materialistic) “socialization” of the philosophical concept of *idea* means to relate the identification of (social) objectivity and subjectivity to labour, and if this identification is practically done by the subject of labour, the working class, then in this socialization of the idea so too is the idea of communism already created. More precisely, in the socialization of the idea, both a critique of capitalism *and* its revolutionization are created, as the traditional critique of capitalism goes, simply said, that the working class must realize the power of identification of subjectivity and objectivity, by becoming aware of the overarching social determination, purpose and productive power of its own labour and praxis.

However, this determination and productive power of labour in capitalism cannot come directly to consciousness and be practically applied. On the contrary, the working class must at the same time recognize the heteronomy and foreign domination, which lie in the capitalist privatization and implementation, foreign domination and exploitation of labour, its means and their products. The working class, therefore, should first anticipate the identification of the object and subject in an ideal way, like becoming aware of the idea of communism, so that precisely because of this anticipation the need of a revolution becomes aware to actualize in communism the identification then in practice.

It is pointless to argue that such ideas can be attributed to Marx. It is more important that not only have such ideas been cleared up in the meantime, but that Marx had already cleared them up himself. However, this was largely overlooked in the course of the renunciation of traditional Marxism and its concept of labour. For, even if today a radical social critique from the standpoint of labour seems to be outdated, and even if an extensive critique and adoption of such a critique has taken place, it has nevertheless remained largely unnoticed that Marx, in the Critique of Political Economy, does not give a positive determination of labour in the conventional (social-) scientific sense. The determination of labour is done, in contrast, alone, through specific *distinctions*, and these distinctions don't lead to a (social-) scientific or a merely formal-analytical determination of labour, but rather to its critique. They lead to a critique that does not amount to an empathic liberation of labour, instead, Marx simply shows that, in capitalism, through specific capitalistic distinctions, so too the specific capitalistic determination of labour is made. Even less, Marx does not show that labour, through its social determination and its productive power, produces society and its determination. Rather, he shows quite the opposite, *how labour itself is produced and determined*. He processes the way in which the capitalist relation of production brings labour into being, sets it into productive power and increases its power. According to Marx, it goes with the fact that labour itself must be produced together with its productive force and its overarching social purpose, and for this, the critical distinctions in the concept of labour are essential.

The most important and thoroughgoing distinction that Marx makes is the distinction between concrete and abstract labour, followed by that between labour and labour power and between living and dead labour, or labour and capital, and necessary and surplus labour time. All of these distinctions ultimately serve to distinguish between the material labour and (re)production process of society and a process of valorization of purely quantitative values, in order to develop and justify, through mediation, the necessity of their correspondence and speculative identity (and to show how this speculative identity becomes real by money is the task of my book). Accordingly, Marx founds with this distinctions in “labour” the category of social mediation *par excellence*, but only insofar as he founds the afore-

mentioned distinctions in the concept of labour, those distinctions through which capitalism is mediated and the productive force of labour and its social determination becomes real only via the correspondence between the material (re-)production of society, on the one hand, and the valorization of purely quantitative values, on the other. Moreover, the distinctions are accompanied by such a radical break with everything, what labor may have been before its capitalist determination (if the general term "labour" can be applied to such non-capitalist societies at all), that the capitalist concept of labour is decisive even for the determination of its 'prehistory'. Marx himself established this in the famous chapter *The Method of Political Economy in A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy*, initially on money:

[...] This very simple category, then, makes a historic appearance in its full intensity only in the most developed conditions of society.

[At the end, he says the same about labour]:

Labour seems a quite simple category. The conception of labour in this general form — as labour as such — is also immeasurably old. Nevertheless, when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, "labour" is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction. [...] The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society<sup>2</sup>

According to this, it is only in capitalism that labour has become such an abstract-general, universal and objective quality that it contradicts its own social and historical origins and gains a timeless, ahistorical validity and necessity. Only under capitalism can it seem as if society has always been mediated and determined by labour as such. But how can labour be specifically capitalist and at the same time be timeless and trans-historically necessary?

Marx takes up this paradox in *Capital*, primarily through the aforementioned distinctions in the concept of labour. The most important distinction comes right at the beginning, namely the distinction between concrete and abstract labour. Only with this distinction does Marx hit the specifically capitalist and yet timeless-universal quality: In capitalist society, abstract labour is distinguished from concrete labour, whereby abstract labour is labour set in *value*, and as such a *quantitative* quality, it is brought to a pure, timeless, universal and meta-historical validity. Only capitalist society is based on the valorization of this value, only here the material process of labour and social (re)production is at the same time a valorization of quantitative values.

With the concept of abstract labour, Marx determined the "substance of value," and, at the same time, completely de-substantiated it, because the concrete labour is not set into value as such, even if understood as reduced to the mere expenditure of the brain, muscles, and nerves. On the contrary, for this specific "concrete labour", Marx states that it creates value but has no value at all — only the commodification of labour time does, hence the *commodity labour power* (and its value is in turn determined by the labour time necessary to reproduce it). With the distinction between labour and labour power, the second, but much less noticed distinction comes into play. It is nevertheless decisive for the determination of abstract labour as a substance of value, because it is not the concrete or living labour that is set into value, but the commodity labour power, and its productive power and its ability to create value, again, does not come through labour in a mental or physical sense, no less than value itself is created by concrete labour. On the contrary, even the productive power and the potentiality of the commodity labour power are determined by Marx in purely social terms: they do not lie in the mental and physical characteristics and abilities of the worker or even the human as such, but result from the relation of commodity labour-power with capital.

Here, in the concept of valorization by this relation, Marx makes the third decisive distinction within the concept of labour, namely the distinction between living and dead labour time. The productive power of valorization ultimately lies, just as the distinction between "dead" and "living labour time" already suggests, in a *temporal* re-

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Einleitung zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. In: MEW [MEW= Marx-Engels-Werke] (Berlin, DDR: Dietz 1953 ff: 615–642), 634–635.

lation, namely in the relation which the commodity labour-power, through its labour-time, enters into with its own past, quantitatively accumulated and objectified in capital as dead labour-time, whatever capital's qualitative forms might be. It is this productive power between the labour-time of the commodity labour power with its own past on the side of capital, which, in the results of this relation, the commodities, are realized through money, thus yielding the substance of abstract labour. This relation also sets the relation of "necessary" and "surplus labour time" in power; by this distinction, Marx addresses the exploitation of this surplus labour time as profit, which is, hence, a practical distinction in the sense of a separation and detachment of the exploited labour time from all physical reality.

Here, it does not matter yet in which way the social determination of labour is made by the mentioned distinctions, and how the labour becomes identical in quality; this will be the task of a later section. For the time being, what is of critical importance are only the distinctions as such, because they provide information about the method and the status of Marx's Critique of Political Economy. If the social determination of labour is made by Marx only through critical distinctions, and if it is especially the separation of abstract from concrete labour, which allows labour to become the identical quality of society, then social critique cannot be carried out from the point of view of "the" labour. Labour is thus indeed not the category of social mediation per se, however, a critical presentation of social mediation through all of the distinctions and by the development of *abstract* labour and the concept of value seems to be the way of critique. Marx expressed himself accordingly in the *Grundrisse*: "To develop the concept of capital it is necessary to begin not with labour but with value, and, precisely, with exchange value in an already developed movement of circulation."<sup>3</sup> The question of value could thus be the first question for the critical development of capitalist society, and the same in several regards:

- In logical-systematic terms, value seems to be the starting point for the development of the capital form, because it is its abstract and indeterminate determination: value is

already completely determined precisely by its indeterminacy, which is the first "determination." On the other hand, value is the result of the capitalist mode of production, which is yet to be developed. Value is, according to Marx, "a purely social relation," into which "not an atom of matter enters," while Marx wants to justify the valorization of value by which value emerges in the first place. The status of value as beginning *and* result is thus analogous to the "pure being" (and "nothing" in their "becoming") with which Hegel starts his *Science of Logic*, but value is a pure *social* being (and nothing in becoming). In addition, due to valorization, value is quantitatively determined, it is always the exchange value of a particular commodity. According to this, value is both an indeterminate social relation and the result of its own valorization by which it is always already quantitatively determined as the value of a determined being, a commodity. It thus seems that value is both an indeterminate being and always a quantitatively determined being as it is to be developed as the determination itself (just like Hegel develops being, nothing and becoming to the form of determination itself, or rather, he develops it as the form of being's self-determination).

- Furthermore, the question of value seems to be the first question for social critique, because value is the social quality par excellence (again, just like Hegel develops in the *Science of Logic* the pure being and its negativity as the quality as such). If value, according to Marx, is the "purely social relation" in which "not an atom of matter enters," it must be a purely and ideal quality; that quality which is without any quality and hence negative; the quality of a purely ideal identity or even of identity as such. Value is then also by no means to be equated with exchange value, which is always already a quantitatively determined value of an individual commodity — and not the social relation purely as such (like Hegel distinguishes the pure being from the "determined being," which comes by the relation of "something and another"; this relation is what is at stake in Marx' famous "value form analysis").

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. In MEW (Berlin, DDR: Dietz 1953: 871–872), 183.

- *A fortiori*, a distinction must be made between value and price. In the price, value has its determination and appears on the surface of society as the property of a determined being, and this status of the society "before" its appearance, and the negative essence which is brought to appear as price, is developed by Marx in the first place. The price is not included in this development until after the development of value and its valorization, and so far, price is the real and true object of critique, although it appears only in the third volume of *Capital*. Unlike the bourgeois economic theory, which does not clearly distinguish between value and price, Marx aims to show that, in the appearance of prices, precisely that social transformation has disappeared, which should be the true object of economic science and is to be justified and criticized through the development of value. For the critique of the appearance of society, the distinction between value and price is therefore essential, indeed, the distinction falls into the essence of society itself.

- If the question of value aims at that negative essence which in the price appears, as well as disappears, it is already a critique as a question, namely a critique of that very bourgeois science, which did not even ask the question of value in a radical sense and may not have been able to do so because of its methodological self-conception: "It is hardly surprising that the economists, quite under the influence of material interests, have overlooked the *formal content of the relative expression of value*, because before Hegel the logicians by nature even overlooked the formal content of the paradigms of judgment and inference."<sup>4</sup> In any case, Marx states that political economy "has never once asked the question why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour-time by the magnitude of that value."<sup>5</sup> This applies all the more to the "vulgar economy," which Marx distinguishes from classical economics. While Marx critically appraised the fact that in classical economics value was still linked with either labour (Smith, Ricardo) or with

subjective use (Bailey), the vulgar economy, despised by Marx, and today's macroeconomics have gone over to prices alone, and do not distinguish between value and price, and certainly not in a critical sense.

- Therefore the question of value could be the primary, "first question," for social critique. Marx himself seems to suggest this, for he begins *Capital* with an implicit critique of the ways in which value was represented in the political economic theory of his time. This implicit critique is made explicit by the exposition of value itself: Marx explicates the critique of value by determining its substance and its form (these are labour and commodity) as well as through the famous analysis of the value form of the commodity (reconstructing the necessity of a unity of money and value). But before an answer is given as to whether a critique of society can be carried out from the standpoint of labour, through the development of the concept of value and through the constitution of social/societal objectivity, the history of its reception should have its say first, last but not least, since value has become the (secret) center of the discussion on Marx since the 60s and 70s, at least in the German-speaking countries.

### 3.3 Critique of Political Economy through the Development of the Concept of Value. The Outcome of the New Marx-Reading

In the first decades, indeed in the whole first century after the publication of *Capital*, value was, almost without exception, not accorded primary importance, neither for capitalist society nor for its critique. The socialist movement and the socialist states mostly saw value as a mere economic quantity; consequently, they did not see in Marx's development of value an epistemological or philosophical challenge, yet they did not even see value as specifically capitalist. The few discussions of economic theory that were interested in Marx's concept of value were developed immediately after the publication of *Capital*, and, ironically, took place within inner academic circles and the environment of bourgeois theorizing — so at quite a distance from the labour movement.

The situation did not change, fundamentally, until 100 years after

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx: *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Bd. 1. In MEGA [MEGA=Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe] II/5 (Hamburg, 1867), 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

the publication of *Capital* with the so-called New Social Movements and the New Left. They emerged in the Western industrialized nations in the 1960s (and in some niches in Eastern socialist countries) and were an expression of the need for the renewal of radical critique in general, and, more specifically, of the consolidating postwar society; they were also already a reaction to the crisis of legitimacy of traditional Marxism and real socialism and thus an expression of the disintegration of the traditional socialist movement and its mode of critique. Thus, this is how it came to be that around the mid-1960s a new — operaist, structuralist, feminist — reading of Marx began to revolve around the central categories of *Capital*, and, also, especially the form-analytic reading of, in the meanwhile, the so called German “New Marx-Reading,” around the concept of value. On the one hand, these new readings allowed for a distance from the orthodox Marxism of the “Eastern Block,” and the communist parties of the West, and, on the other hand, it worked to connect more directly to Marx’s critique and to do justice to it in a proper orthodox sense. The new readings of Marx are not at least “new” in their insights that the clarification of the method of critique and the mode of presentation of *Capital*, as well as the clarification of the relation to Hegel’s dialectics cannot succeed without a reconstruction of the central economic categories, and that these categories, in turn, depend on the development of the concept of value.

However, the various new readings of Marx, in an attempt to define Marx’s concept of value, have produced problems rather than solutions. Better said, they have brought about an appropriate awareness of the problems that existed in the first place. This already begins with the fact that a problem was seen in the determination of value *at all*, as the socialist and worker’s movement and the social democracy of the first hour, and then the states of real socialism, had seen in Marx’s determination of value, above all, a solution, namely, the justification of value by human labour. Moreover, they have consistently referred to this work affirmatively and, with Marx, have presented not so much a critique *of* labour as a critique *in the name* of labour. Here, Marx’s concept of value has been consistently positivistically reduced to a left-Ricardian, objective labour theory of value; the same, however, applies to the Marx-critics in bourgeois economics.

Although the new readings of Marx have largely overcome the “labour theory of value,” which supporters as well as critics imputed to Marx and had found an implicit agreement about, the attempt to determine value has yielded quite different and even contradictory interpretations. The concepts of value become even broader if one considers the discussion of Marx as a whole — then the determinations of value vary from the aforementioned left-wing Ricardian, substantialist interpretation in the sense of an objective labour value, to the attempt to derive value as a product from the form of commodity exchange and the abstraction made in exchange, up to views which regard value as something subjective, existing in thought only, or, like Cornelius Castoriadis stated, as purely imaginary (whereby the imaginary is again “more real than all reality”). It would seem then, as though all possibilities of determining value have been used. There have even been repeated talks of an end of value and the law of value, most prominently by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt who call for a bio-political replacement.

If one tries to assign certain directions of social critique to the various concepts of value, then social democrats and the workers’ movement of the first hour, as well as Marxism-Leninism advocated the above-mentioned left-Ricardian and substantialist view, according to which value is ultimately formed by the labour spent for the production of commodities. Critical Theory and its environment revolve around an ideologically and epistemologically oriented definition of exchange value as a necessarily false appearance that mediates between objectivity and subjectivity. Structuralism and post-structuralism, as well as operaism and post-operaism, have also made a departure from the positivism and substantivism of the objective labour theory of value, but in a different way than Critical Theory. Operaism and in particular post-operaism have (bio-)politicized and even emphatically subjectivized the concept of value. Here, the ideas of an end of value are also found: Post-Operaism, following Foucault, wants to replace the classical labour theory of value with a bio-political concept, circling around concepts of post-fordist production, immaterial labour, general intellect and multitude. In structuralism and post-structuralism, value has also been subjectivized and politicized, here, however, the focus is rather on the economy of desire, the machinic of wishes, and the production of meaning, in recourse to linguistics and to Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan’s

reading of Freud. Value was transferred into the field of the imaginary and symbolic and interpreted in terms of a sign - and circulation-theory of value, referring especially to the logic of signification — but mostly without close reference to Marx' analysis of the value-form (this close reference, however, is mostly missing in operaism and post-operaism and in the first generation of Critical Theory as well). Currently, both strands converge in a critique of domination and power, post-operaism coming from a bio-political valorization of living labour, but also of life as such, and post-structuralism from techniques of signification and governance, population policy, and financial and digital regulation and control.

Derrida's *deconstruction* can be read as a representation of the problem of the determination of value, and hence of representation as such. Derrida refers explicitly to Marx only in a few places, nevertheless, his deconstruction, in its own way, also pursues a critique of the economy, especially where it involves the production of meaning through scripture and images, signs and language, and where he traces the productive effects of *difference* in the circulation and postponement of meaning. In doing so, Derrida pursues the necessity that meaning is not given, received, and maintained without temporalization. This temporalization, in turn, must be reflected and founded in the independence of — in a broad sense — signs and texts. His claims in this critique, although conceptualized as a deconstruction of the "metaphysics of presence," has more in common with Marx's economic concept of materialism than many materialisms which have explicitly referred to Marx. However, the procedure of deconstruction resolves the question of value in the direction of a circulation theory and subjective theory of value (although subjective in a completely different way than in mainstream economics). In general, the procedure of deconstruction is at odds with all of the aforementioned directions, because Derrida was one of the few interested in an *economy of time*, even if he did not, like Marx, look for this economy in the valorization of value by labour power and capital, but, above all, in the relation between language and scripture, in order to trace in the temporalization of meaning a materialism of scripture, writing and their marking of a "difference."

In the FRG, where the current so-called New Marx-Reading had begun around 1965, the discussion of Marx was towards Hegel and

Critical Theory. In a so-called phase of reconstruction of the Critique of Political Economy, the definition of Marx's concept of value was mostly based on Hegel's dialectics, above all, to his *Science of Logic* (and here to the *Logic of Being* and the *Logic of Essence*). With authors more close to Critical Theory, where the reconstruction was more strongly oriented towards ideology and epistemology, there are also references to Kant. Although the beginning of the new discussion of Marx was an almost worldwide phenomenon, the discussion in German-speaking countries has been characterized to this day by a particular concentration on the beginning of Marx's *Capital*, the value-form analysis and the concept of value; it also incorporated insights to a greater extent than elsewhere, obtained from the second MEGA-edition on Marx's elaboration of CoPE.

If, despite the diversity of all of the contributions, one looks for a common simplified result, one will find that instead of a kind of a coherent theory of value, two poles have emerged. The one pole defines value as a social relation formed by labour and production, and the other pole is the development of value as a social relation formed by the exchange of commodities and the abstraction made in exchange. This indecision within the interpretation of Marx's concept of value, however, points to the undecidable status of its determination itself. The determination of value *must* seem to have an undecided status, because it can neither be clearly defined through a critique of bourgeois economic theory, nor by an independent (even "Marxist") theory, at least not through a theory in the sense of a conventional (individual) science. If the interpretations of Marx's concept of value turn out to be so different, and if, in addition, they divide into two poles and have an undecided status between critique and theory, this suggests the conclusion that, already, Marx himself had to deal with such a quandary in determining value. And it suggests that both the indecision in Marx's representation of value — especially the dichotomy between substance and form — as well as the indecision in the status of its representation — in between critique and theory — are not a lack of unambiguity, but, conversely, are necessary for a coherent representation of value. If Marx's development of value is deliberately contradictory, and if no closed, contradiction-free theory has been able to take its place so far, then a certain undecidabilities and ambivalences seem to belong to it, if not to value itself, then at least to the ideas it evokes, even, and es-

pecially, when value is to be brought to a stringent critical or scientific representation. Accordingly, a development of value must also address the need that value: the purely social relation, brings forth such different ideas about itself. As one-sided and even inadequate these perceptions and conceptions of value may be, they nevertheless enter bourgeois-capitalist society, and they not only enter into everyday consciousness and its general dealings with the economy, they are also found in the science of economics and in its attempts at a theory of value. To be aware of this ambiguity perhaps distinguishes the new discussion on Marx, since it was the task, par excellence, in the 1960s to deal with this dilemma and thus to confront itself with the precarious status of a radical social critique that can neither release itself into a positive, scientific theory of society, nor hold itself as pure negatively or agnostic.

But back to the question of whether capitalist society can be subjected to a critique through the development of value, rather than from the standpoint of labour, and whether value, and not “the labour,” constitutes that objectivity that is given to consciousness and subjectivity to contemplate.

Even before, as it were, all the different concepts of value and their ambivalences, the question arises: why can value, hence our very own social being, become an object of critique *at all*? Why it can be reflected and presented (critically) at all, especially if it is supposed to be a purely social relation and cannot be experienced empirically? And if value must be dissolved into the mediation between objectivity and subjectivity, and, firstly, into that self-mediation which must be reflected as a self-relation constituting objectivity — how can this self-relation be reflected and determined as the essence of social mediation? How can value be identified as the purely social quality par excellence which stays identical in all mediation when this mediation can be nothing else than a negative being, a mere self-transition of the economic essence by purely quantitative values, by “its” values? Or, thinking from the point of view of the criticized society: how can the economy realize the quality “value” for itself at all, and thereby quantitatively determine itself and establish a self-relation? How can the economy transfer and share “its” quality blindly and primordially, exchange and convert it, let it run in circles, destroy and multiply it — and thereby let value become its identical quality

in the first place?

If, in any case, only the value-formed mediation and its constitutive meaning for objectivity and subjectivity, and for the form and substance of society is considered, then exactly the *condition of possibility* of this consideration gets placed out of sight. It has lost sight of the fact that critique must be about the question as to why the purely social relation as such can become an object, and, furthermore, in double or undecided regards. On the one hand, it is a question of why our social relation, in its mediation, unconsciously can become an object for *itself* so that the economy can primordial-blindly determine itself through the transfer and valorization of values. On the other hand, it is about how precisely this unconscious self-relation and self-reflection can nevertheless become the object of critique — once again, or in a second, this time conscious reflection, as it were. How can it become the object of critique that, in capitalism, society’s own relation is the object of an unconscious self-reflection, self-determination and self-objectification through values? And how can critique share the value-based mediation with the criticized society? Why can critique, when it represents value, literally think from the standpoint of the criticized economy? How does the criticized economy itself *give us* the possibility of its critique?

(In the following it is shown that critique neither has to occupy the standpoint of labour nor must critique develop the critical distinction in the concept of labour to develop value as the pure social relation: for that development of value, critique has to occupy the *standpoint of money*. Or rather, critique has to show how money literally stands in for an ideal unit of value by which money occupies a universal and negative, yet inaccessible and even impossible “standpoint”: money stands in, like a placeholder, for time. Through money, that time is given which becomes the measure for all the relations, which have been shown for capitalist labour. This is because through money, qualitative material reproduction can be organized by, or *as*, quantitative magnitudes, and by this speculative identity of the qualitative and the quantitative side of the economy, a whole and true “economy of time” (Marx) emerges — time is the common excluded third of the qualitative and the quantitative side of the economy, their speculative identity as such. Critique, in short, has to determine how money, by quantifying social relations, makes time become real.

However, this “standpoint” of money falls, on the one hand, into its

main functions, its universal and at once finite-quantitative validity, and in its economic circles, and on the other hand, it falls in the valorization of labour power and capital. To bring this double "fall" of time to the point, critique must reconstruct how money *calculates* for capitalist society with time. Money calculates by its functions and in the form of its economic circles in a quantitative objective and even mathematically exact and at once speculative, overarching and supra individual way for all the individual subjects, but also for the society as a whole, with the *identity of time*.)

*Translated from the German by Isidora Hennig*



David Roden

## Ways of Unworlding: Against Aesthetic Inferentialism

**Bionote:** David Roden's research has addressed the relationship between deconstruction and analytic philosophy, philosophical naturalism, the metaphysics of sound and posthumanism. His monograph *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (New York, 2014) explores the ethical and epistemological ramifications of Speculative Posthumanism: the thesis that there could be agents originating in human social-technical systems that become posthuman as a result of some technological alteration of their powers. His current work considers posthumanist theories of agency and their implications for aesthetics and philosophical method. Roden also writes experimental fiction and concept horror works. His experimental novella *SnuffMemories* is published by Schism Press (2021).

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**Abstract:** I consider and support two claims about aesthetic experience: 1) that it involves encounters with a reality that is not conceptualized via such encounters; 2) that it can generate ruptures in established norms or in the production of shared worlds. This thesis is developed in the teeth of contemporary rationalist inhumanisms that draw on Nelson Goodman's cognitivist aesthetics and his irrealist account of 'worldmaking' to translate the logical insights of inferentialism (or conceptual role semantics) into an aesthetics oriented towards concept-laden practices and their revision through the techniques of experimental art. I employ Derrida's iterability argument to show that inferentialism presupposes a realist metaphysics that treats repetition and event individuation as independent of constitutive rules, conceptual schemes or 'world versions'; indicating one way in which aesthetic material remains outside of, even recalcitrant to, the conceptual order. The aesthetic implications of this metaphysics of undecidable events

are further explored by considering Jean-Pierre Caron's recent discussion of Henry Flynt's idea of 'constitutive dissociations' and, finally, the concept as, ambivalently, victim or suicide in the experimental horror of Gary Shipley's novel *Warewolff!* and my own *SnuffMemories*.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, semantics, Nelson Goodman, worldmaking, conceptual art, concept horror

### Introduction: Revisiting the Aesthetics of the Encounter

In this paper I want to explore two related claims about the conceptual recalcitrance of the aesthetic and its ontological import.

The first is that aesthetic experience is composed of encounters with qualities, things, events, or processes that are not thereby conceived. Thus, while the Aesthetics of the Encounter may involve and prompt concept use, as here, the encounter as such is non-conceptual. Aesthetic experience accordingly opens the subject onto a refractory field of forces that disturbs conceptualisation and may be violently resistant to it.

The second, clearly related, claim is that the aesthetic produces ruptures in the fabric of social practices and norms, or the production of shared worlds and experiences.

Thus, while the encounter may supervene on such norms and rules — much as it depends on our conceptual capacities — *what is encountered is not constituted by them*. Aesthetic encounters may 'symbolise' shared experiences, prompting flares of recognition across the voids between and within us; but in so doing, they involve a fundamental impasse in conception.

There is thus a radical opacity in the aesthetic as well an unbounded iterative or generative potentiality presupposed by the very production of worlds. Both impede and threaten the construction of a commons.

Admittedly, neither of these claims is new. The idea that aesthetic judgement depends on a non-conceptual or 'non-subsumptive' relationship to the world is common to Romantic, Modernist and Poststructuralist Aesthetics. Deleuze captures this when he writes that that which prompts us to think is not an object of recognition.<sup>1</sup> Lyotard, likewise, when he writes of the timbral singularity of music events as something incomparable, not given over the recognition or repetition.<sup>2</sup> The beautiful object of Kantian aesthetics, as Steven Shaviro writes, is not cognized as beautiful, rather "the object lures the subject while remaining indifferent to it; and the subject feels the object, without knowing it or possessing it or even caring about it."<sup>3</sup>

However, recent neorationalist thinkers have been heavily critical of poststructuralist materialisms and other ontologies which deem the aesthetic to be recalcitrant to cognition in this way. I think the thesis of aesthetic opacity or recalcitrance needs to be posed in the light of the claims about the social character of meaning which informs neonationalism: particularly the pragmatist and inferentialist accounts of logic and semantics on which they largely rest.

This idea has recently been given aesthetic relevance by the incorporation of Nelson Goodman's cognitivist theory of art and science as allied forms of worldmaking. For example, Reza Negarestani has proposed that such worlds are correlated with the forms of life of creatures whose social practices constitute their symbolic schemes.<sup>4</sup>

If all worlds are woven from actual forms of life, this account imposes a 'manifestation condition' on speculative thinking. Thus, it is claimed, even an account of an imaginary posthuman world must draw on extant symbols in some way. We cannot invent a world, according to Negarestani, without being prepared to say how *our* concepts slice it up. Speculative approaches, like mine on posthumanism, which theorize agency in a manner unbounded by any conception of how that agent's subjectivity or thought is manifested, are ruled out by the manifestation condition.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 155.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Boston: MIT press, 2012), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Reza Negarestani, "The Human Re-cognized, the Life-form Re-Made," *Zones: Parasol*, 5 (2021), 45-55.

<sup>5</sup> Negarestani, "The Human Re-cognized, the Life-form Re-Made," 50.

In what follows, I want to show how thinking of meaning and logic in terms of rule governed practices leaves an ontological surplus that can be understood aesthetically, that is to say, at those points where it disrupts or untethers recognition. I hope to show that the ahuman or posthuman 'outside' persists as an occlusive nonpresence in thought, art and social imagination.

This argument against the constitutive efficacy of words, worlds and social practices, will proceed via a discussion of inferentialist semantics, Goodman's aesthetics and then move on to consider Jean-Pierre Caron's recent discussion of Henry Flynt's idea of 'constitutive dissociations' in the theory of avant-garde art. Finally, I will consider how this ontological surplus is put to work in recent works of 'concept horror' by Gary J Shipley and myself.

## 1. Inferentialism

Inferentialism is a theory of meaning and a philosophy of logic. It is an alternative to 'referentialist' conceptions of meaning.<sup>6</sup> Referentialist accounts explain the meaning of utterances by starting with relations of reference between bits of language and bits of the world and build meanings of sentences as functions of these parts. In formal semantics this approach is called 'model theory.'<sup>7</sup>

The broadest criticism levelled by inferentialism at referentialism is that referentialism violates the *manifestation requirement*: the principle that meaning is determined by publicly assessable rules and performances. If so, *word-world* relations fall out of *word-word* relations, out of use. Thus consideration of use, or pragmatics, must

<sup>6</sup> P. J. Graham, "Brandom on singular terms," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 93:3 (1999), 247-264.

<sup>7</sup> The model theoretic approach understands the semantics of formal languages in terms of interpretation function  $I$  that map primitive symbols like names of predicates onto the domain  $D$  of the model. Names refer to individuals. Predicates or open formulae like '...is a cat' refer to the objects in  $D$  that satisfy the predicate. Logical operators like '&' or 'not' are understood as truth functions mapping the truth values 'T' or 'F' (at least in two-value logic) into truth values. Quantifiers like '∀x' then can be understood in terms of the satisfaction of the open formulae composing them, etc. The 'truth' of closed formula, built up by the recursive syntax of the language, with no free variables is the just the limit of satisfaction – satisfaction by all sequences of the models. Model theory takes for granted a formal relation of reference (or satisfaction) by which word-world relations are established. This leads to a number of problems, according to its critics. For example, Paul Boghossian objects that model theorist takes certain patterns of inference like Modus Ponens (MP) to be valid because they are truth preserving. But, as Boghossian points out, many truth preserving inferences are not obviously justifying in the way that MP is meant to be. Paul Boghossian, "Blind reasoning," in *Aristotelian Society supplementary volume*, 77:1 (2003), 227.

precede any formal semantics based on notions of truth and reference.

Inferentialism is the proposal that we unpack the pre-theoretical concept of use as 'inferential role'. According to Wilfrid Sellars — one of the originators of inferentialism — these roles conform to three types of rules or regularities which determine how competent speakers should move from one position in the language-game to another, enter the language game, or leave it.

In the case of assertions, transition rules correspond to materially correct inferences such as the inference that *x is coloured* from *x is red*. Language-entry rules are not really rules at all but non-inferential causal propensities - reliable dispositions to perceive the world in inferentially articulated ways. Finally, "language exit rules" correspond to practical commitments disposing to non-linguistic action.<sup>8</sup>

The leading inferentialist thinker, Robert Brandom, agrees with other post-Wittgensteinian pragmatists that linguistic practices are governed by public norms + differential responsive dispositions (RDRD's). However, he follows Donald Davidson in rejecting a communal (or I/We) concept of social structure in favour of an I/Thou conception.<sup>9</sup> If meanings are inferential roles, the content attributable to expressions will dance in line with the doxastic commitments of individual speakers.

Suppose one observes a masked figure in a red costume clambering up a skyscraper. The language entry rules may entitle you to claim that Spiderman is climbing the building. However, you are unaware that Spiderman is Peter Parker. The inferential role of 'Spiderman' here will differ from the case of a speaker who knows that Spiderman and Peter Parker are the same.

*This simple example shows that the inferential roles of expressions like "Spiderman" are not fixed communally but vary with auxiliary assumptions, sensitivities, and dispositions of individual speakers.*

<sup>8</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, "Meaning as Functional Classification (A Perspective on the Relation of Syntax to Semantics)," *Synthese*, 3:4 (1974), 417.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Brandom, *Making it explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994), 39; David Roden, "On Reason and Spectral Machines: Robert Brandom and Bounded Posthumanism," in *Philosophy After Nature*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 99-119.

Understanding the utterances and beliefs of others is a matter of 'deontic scorekeeping' — that is of keeping track of the way social statuses alter as speakers update inferential commitments. It follows that what a belief or claim "represents" or is "about" is fixed by the status it can be ascribed from the perspective of various deontic scorekeepers (including the believer or claimant).

Thus, the most plausible version of inferentialism implies that no symbol has a fixed role in the inferential network, but one that is constantly updated as claims are made, defended, and queried in the game of 'giving and asking for reasons'. The inferentialist thus echoes the provocative conclusion of Davidson's 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' that "there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed."<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Worldmaking, Irrealism and Forms of Life

From this brief account of inferentialist semantics, one might wonder how this might inform an aesthetics that must engage in non-linguistic media and non-verbal representation. Here, the work of Nelson Goodman seems to have provided a handy translation scheme.

Goodman's aesthetics falls out of a typology of symbol systems which accommodates non-linguistic symbols such as musical notation, figurative or abstract painting, cinematic images, sculpture, or dance.<sup>11</sup>

For example, Western musical notation exhibits the necessary features of notational systems: they are syntactically disjoint (no character stands for more than one symbol), finitely differentiated (it is possible to determine what symbol a character belongs to) and semantically differentiated (where two characters differ in meaning, it is possible to determine that).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in *Truth, language, and History (Vol 5)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), loc 1389.

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Giovannelli, 'Goodman's Aesthetics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, (Fall 2017). See: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/goodman-aesthetics>.

<sup>12</sup> Natural languages are finitely and semantically differentiated but not disjoint since there are orthographically identical types that differ in meaning ('bat', 'bank'). Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 41.

By contrast, paintings and non-digital images are 'syntactically dense' — every change in hue or shape constitutes a different character — and syntactically 'replete' insofar as there are multiple features (shape, hue, colour, brightness) constitutive of character differentiation.<sup>33</sup>

For Goodman, all forms of symbolization — linguistic or non-linguistic — afford 'ways of worldmaking.' More accurately, they are ways of generating distinct *versions* of the worlds that uniquely answer to them. Versions are the symbolic systems whose expressions determine the features of worlds by, for example, fixing which truths can be stated about them:

Let's begin by acknowledging that a right version and its world are different. A version saying that there is a star up there is not itself bright or far off, and the star is not made up of letters. On the other hand, saying that there is a star up there and saying that the statement "There is a star up there" is true amount, trivially, to much the same thing, even though the one seems to talk about a star and the other to talk about a statement. What is more important, we cannot find any world-feature independent of all versions. Whatever can be said truly of a world is dependent on the saying - not that whatever we say is true but that whatever we say truly (or otherwise present rightly) is nevertheless informed by and relative to the language or other symbol system we use.<sup>34</sup>

Since symbol systems fix what can be said truly of a world, they fix how the entities belonging to it are sorted, re-identified and differentiated: "Repetition as well as identification is relative to organization. A world may be unmanageably heterogeneous or unbearably monotonous according to how events are sorted into kinds."<sup>35</sup>

For the metaphysical realist, the ontological structure of the world is independent of our mental or discursive activities. But Goodman's 'irrealism' holds that every world version carves its correlative world differently.

<sup>33</sup> John P. Kulvicki, *On Images: Their Structure and Content* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-10.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson Goodman, "On Starmaking." *Synthese*, 5:2 (1980), 211-215.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 9.

I will illustrate this idea with an example from work on the metaphysics of sound. There are three main types of sound metaphysics: *proximal theories*, which identify sounds with features of auditory experience; *medial theories*, which treat sounds as the transmission of acoustic compression waves; and theories that treat sounds as *events located in 'sounding' objects*. Depending on which of these theories one holds, one will locate sounds in the mind/head, in the media through which compression waves travel, or in sounding objects.

If Goodman is right, there is no unique right way of achieving this mapping, though he insists that the selection is not arbitrary. Each will have to exhibit epistemic virtues such as truth, consistency and explanatory fruitfulness. For example, proximal theories account for the qualitative aspects of sounds directly and easily but are less easy to reconcile with spatial intuitions about sounds. Located event theories do justice to our intuitions about sounds being outside the head but they have more difficulty accounting for auditory qualities that do not reduce smoothly to physical properties of resonating objects, such as pitch or timbre.<sup>36</sup>

Now, if the realist insists that there must be some right way of parsing the sound world, Goodman's irrealist will answer that any such candidate for a true world will be just answer to another world version, another practice of describing, locating and sorting sounds. All of these versions have a claim on truth but will be true in different worlds.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Iterating Behind the Schemes

In what follows, I want to show that there are reasons for thinking that Goodman's general account of the symbolic construction of life worlds cannot adequately comprehend cases of an encounter with an event or entity that is *unworlded* — characterized by not belonging to any given world.

These cases illustrate Tim Button's 'Behind the Schemes' argument against conceptual relativism.<sup>38</sup> He argues that any account which states that worlds are organized by our world-versions must exclude

<sup>36</sup> David Roden, "Sonic art and the Nature of Sonic Events," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 1:1 (2010), 141-156.

<sup>37</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984), 31.

<sup>38</sup> Tim Button, *The Limits of Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210-207.

both the organizing and the organized from any of the worlds so made, for these must transcend any particular conceptual scheme for the concept of a conceptual scheme to have the unrestricted generality it needs.<sup>19</sup> Insofar as Goodman's conceptual relativism presupposes entities or processes that are not relativized to a version, it is incoherent.

At its most primitive, this idea of organizing depends on a 'cookie cutter' metaphor of the concept, and a conception of the world as a kind of neutral dough waiting to be shaped by our scheming. There are worlds only if there is worldmaking, but worldmaking cannot, according to the behind-the-schemes argument, belong to any world; a fatal ellipsis that, we will see, allows the chthonic reversal of humanism in avant-garde art.

I want to begin, though, with a special case of the argument for the claim that worldmaking must be conceived outside worlds. In the next section, I will extend this to cases where aesthetic creations enact the unmaking of worlds.

A simple argument for the unworlded can be derived from Derrida's iterability arguments — developed originally in his reading of J.L. Austin in 'Signature Event Context' and *Limited Inc.*<sup>20</sup> We begin with the commonplace idea that every sign must be repeatable if it is to signify at all. As Derrida puts it: "A sign which would take place but "once" would not be a sign; a purely idiomatic sign would not be a sign."<sup>21</sup> Its occurrence would have no systematic import and no systematic role in behaviour. Even in syntactically replete non-linguistic systems like painting there must be sufficient recurrence for a style to emerge. So, the repeatability qualifies as a minimal 'infrastructure' for symbols of any kind. Thus, whatever our ontological inclinations, we need to account for the repeatability of signs, whether linguistic or non-linguistic.

### 1) Signs are repeatable marks, not one-off objects or events

<sup>19</sup> Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 192.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and other essays on Husserl's theory of Signs*, trans. by David Allison (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 50.

What constitutes this repetition? Analytic philosophers routinely follow Charles Sanders Peirce by distinguishing between word-type and word-token. For example, one might say the previous sentence features two tokens' of the type 'word' but only one type.

Are types like Platonic essences or forms, transcending their particular instances? As a nominalist, Goodman rejects this, and, in fact, heaves close to Derrida by treating all signs as inscriptional events. Events can be grouped according to orthographic or phonetic similarity, syntactic role, or meaning.<sup>22</sup>

This suggests the initially plausible thesis that repetitions are wholly wrought by habits of use. An inscriptional event is a 'replica' of another inscriptional event if the rules they subtend are the same. For example, for the inferentialist, the rules fixing the meaning of a sentence are its *Introduction [I] rules* - the grounds for its assertion - and the *Elimination [E] rules* governing its inferential consequences. If true, this nominalist formula would comport nicely with Goodman's version/world distinction. The differentiation between signifiers would thus be as much a matter of world-making practices as any other ontological fact, as, in fact, they need to be.

However, even if resorting to rules or practices to individuate and label inscriptional events obviates a Platonistic type/token ontology it is not sufficient to avoid semantic essentialism. Suppose that subtending a given set of *I* and *E* rules determines whether any mark replicates a given inscription or utterance of the English phrase 'Snow is white'. Hence no mark is a replica of this 'Snow is white' event in English if its use does not conform to these rules. This implies that any inscription that is used in a sufficiently nonconforming way would replicate a different sentence or none.<sup>23</sup>

However, this doesn't seem able to account for the way future repetitions of a mark can undergo graduated shifts of sense from context to context — as with changes in the auxiliary beliefs of speakers or the insertion of a common term like *mass* into a new physical theory. Indeed, the dynamic inferentialist account discussed above absolutely requires such shifts. It must be possible for words and sentences to alter semantic value, even syntactic value. Whether a

<sup>22</sup> Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance* (Dordrecht: D Reidel, 1973), 262-3.

<sup>23</sup> David Roden, "Radical Quotation and Real Repetition," *Ratio*, 17:2 (2004), 191-206.

symbol even qualifies as a sentence or a genuine syntactic unit may depend on whether it is semantically evaluable, and this status may be discursively open in some contexts.<sup>24</sup>

So, we come to the second assumption of the iterability argument:

l2) A mark would not be repeatable within a given scheme (e.g., language, interpretation, notation, world-version etc.) if it were not repeatable outside of that scheme (e.g., re-used, ironized, joked, quoted).

Think of standard usage of 'If' within the English conditional construction. The grammatical rules of standard English require that an antecedent clause with an 'If' is related to a consequent clause, which states what it conditions. However, nothing in principle prevents the violation of this rule, as with the title of Lyndsay Anderson's 1968 movie about a revolution in an English public school: *If...*

One could argue that the movie itself supplies the consequent clause here. Maybe, but that is no less 'deviant' a use. A movie or a narrative is not a verbal entity subject to rules of grammar and, in any case, the phrase 'If' also lacks an antecedent clause.<sup>25</sup> Yet repeatability outside the bounded rules of English is crucial here. Anderson's novel usage works only because we are still able to recognize it as a repetition of 'If'.

But do standard iterations of 'If' really depend on the possibility of non-standard iterations? Well, yes - because a sign which could not sometimes be used in this nonconformist manner could not be used at all.

Hence:

l3) Symbols belonging to any scheme whatsoever must be repeatable outside of that scheme.

What Derrida refers to as the iterability of the mark does not, then, depend either on a relationship between tokens and abstract Platonic objects *or* on similarities of use or functional role, even where

these are cast in terms of nominalist ontologies such as Goodman's or Sellars'.<sup>26</sup> *Iterability is unbounded*. As Shekar Pradhan puts it, Derrida's account implies that no account of the meaning of a sign "can connect with all the possible uses of a sign".<sup>27</sup>

This means that Derrida, despite a reputation as a slippery linguistic idealist, is a realist regarding repetition itself. Iteration is not scheme-relative repetition but *real repetition*, since, as a condition for any kind of functional classification or semantics, it must operate transversally or scheme-independently. Each mark is at once immanent — its use shaped in the world-versions in which it occurs - while retaining the power to graft onto other versions.<sup>28</sup> This capacity to be co-opted into new uses cannot be determined by the anterior rules since they either correspond to different norms of use or, in innovatory works of language art, constitute tangled exceptions to them (See my discussion of the aberrant logic of inclusion in Gary Shipley's *Warewolff!* in Section 5, below).

For this reason, I have argued that marks are best viewed as *repeatable particulars*. Each context of use somewhat informs the mark's signifying effects but no context (e.g., language-game, version or functional classification) constitutes its ideal nature. The metaphysics of iterability thus imposes a structural limit on the constitutive efficacy of any subject or subject-like scheme.

It follows that the statement by Goodman on repetition, iterated below, must be false if something akin to world-making is even possible: "Repetition as well as identification is relative to organization. A world may be unmanageably heterogeneous or unbearably monotonous according to how events are sorted into kinds."<sup>29</sup>

Derrida's real repetition consequently provides a plausible instance of Button's Behind-The-Schemes Argument against conceptual relativism. Repetition does not depend solely on how the world is sorted into kinds by symbol use. *It cannot*, if schematizing symbol use is even to be possible. There must, then, be *transversal events* and *trans-world entities*. There must be boundary crossings whose status is undecidable from within any given scheme.

<sup>26</sup> Sellars, "Meaning as Functional Classification."

<sup>27</sup> Shekar Pradhan, "Minimalist Semantics: Davidson and Derrida on Meaning, Use and Convention," *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), 66-77.

<sup>28</sup> Roden, "Radical Quotation."

<sup>29</sup> Goodman, "Ways of Worldmaking," 9.

<sup>24</sup> James Trafford, *Meaning in Dialogue* (Springer, 2016), 107.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Marika Zeimbekis for pointing this out.

A condition of there being worlds is that social abstraction lacks the *constitutive efficacy* — e.g., sorting entities into kinds — that Goodman attributes to it. Symbol use is just too open and indeterminate to be world-constitutive in Goodman's sense.

#### 4. Frames and Dissociations

There is a conceptual relationship between the Aesthetics of the Encounter, mooted in my introduction, and the Iterable. The iterable is a sufficient condition of such encounters for it entails repetition in the absence of rules for determining whether repetition has occurred. If an aesthetic event could exhibit non-scheme relative repetition, the event would not answer to stable or storable conditions of repetition. It follows that the encounter would not need to involve the recognition of the event under concept.

However, if there is an *aesthetics* of undecidable events, it must be possible to experience an event as unrecognized. Put somewhat less paradoxically, it must be possible to experience the failure to attribute a determinate conceptual status to an event. This becomes possible where the very structure of an event precludes a decision on the type of event that it is.

In the remainder of this section, I want to consider a case where the aesthetics of the undecidable emerges from practices that are often taken to exemplify Goodman-style 'world demarcations', namely the 'framing practices' that fix the criteria for the individuation and exhibition of art works in various genres. Although the disruption of framing practices figures extensively in the avant-garde and critical art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the procedure is formulated with admirable generality in the idea of 'Constitutive Dissociations' (C/D's) developed by the avant-garde theorist, musician and artist, Henry Flynt.

Flynt defines Constitutive Dissociations in the context of the work of the avant-garde conceptual or generative art works developed by Duchamp and Cage, La Monte Young, and Flynt himself.

A C/D occurs when an artist produces a work that alters the protocols governing a particular genre of art. For example, Cage's 4' 33" retains temporal boundaries of a Western art-music performance but introduces silence where there would normally be intention-

ally produced sound. Duchamp's ready-made altered the protocol whereby exhibited works had to be the result of the artist's technical skill, by selecting common industrial artifacts for exhibition. La Monte Young's text scores from his *Compositions 1960* includes instructions to performers that don't directly specify any conventional musical action at all, such as *Composition #2* which gives performers this instruction:

Build a fire in front of the audience. Preferably, use wood although other combustibles may be used as necessary for starting the fire or controlling the kind of smoke. The fire may be of any size, but it should not be the kind which is associated with another object, such as a candle or a cigarette lighter. The lights may be turned out.

After the fire is burning, the builder(s) may sit by and watch it for the duration of the composition; however, he (they) should not sit between the fire and the audience in order that its members will be able to see and enjoy the fire.

The performance may be of any duration.

In the event that the performance is broadcast, the microphone may be brought up close to the fire.<sup>30</sup>

Some C/D's seem to utilize the 'standard properties' of the artwork in a particular genre, often by deploying those frames but absenting 'variable' aesthetic properties that would normally characterize the performance or work.<sup>31</sup>

Others heighten the audience's reflection on the work by minimizing the variable properties or by making formerly standard properties variable — e.g., multiplying frames to produce vertiginous de-framings (as in Art & Language's *Incidents in a Museum*) or Daniel Buren's site-specific interventions.

<sup>30</sup> Or *Composition #4*:

Announce to the audience that the lights will be turned off for the duration of the composition (it may be any length) and tell them when the composition will begin and end. Turn off all the lights for the announced duration.

When the lights are turned back on, the announcer may tell the audience that their activities have been the composition, although this is not at all necessary.

<sup>31</sup> Kendal Walton, "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review*, 79:3 (July 1970), 334-367.

In a recent paper for *e-Flux*, Jean-Pierre Caron explicitly weds C/D's to the inferentialist aesthetics of worldmaking understood as the 'conceptual revision' of normative practices constitutive of artistic genres.

The effect of these incidents, as Caron makes clear, is to Unmake Worlds, as he writes:

If we understand the ontological status of an artwork as the result of specific forms of doing *that are always conceptually laden*, then constitutive dissociations are a means of world-unmaking that dissolve the connections believed to be essential for certain practices, potentially yielding unheard of practices. The unmaking of worlds offers an occasion for the rewiring of the inferential links that form an anterior practice into a (still undetermined) posterior one.<sup>32</sup>

In line with the principle of the constitutive inefficacy of practices and world versions introduced in the last section, I want to demur somewhat from Caron's ontology while affirming his account of the effects of C/D's.

I think the problem with this diagnosis lies with its implication that art is woven wholly in the realm of the spirit, out of 'specific forms of doing' and, above all, that their results are always 'conceptually laden' in that they are recognizable as instances of a concept, practice or rule.

Firstly, just as not all events are behaviours and not all behaviours are actions, so not all actions exemplify practices. At a first approximation, a practice must be publicly scrutable. An action exemplifies a practice only if there is some procedure for deciding what type it is. C/D's are clearly designed to obviate such procedures.

Secondly, an artist's creative act is an efficient cause of C/D's but actions cause many other things than actions. It does not even follow that C/D's are actions.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> J-P Caron, "On Constitutive Dissociations as a Means of World-Unmaking: Henry Flynt and Generative Aesthetics Redefined," *e-flux*, #115 (2021). See: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/115/374421/on-constitutive-dissociations-as-a-means-of-world-unmaking-henry-flynt-and-generative-aesthetics-redefined/>

<sup>33</sup> Performative C/D's are partially composed of actions, but they are also composed of nonhu-

As Flynt puts it, a C/D *comes about* because its instigator substitutes an inscrutable protocol for a standard one. We can grant that the instigator intends to generate an inscrutable event. *But an inscrutable event cannot be an action unless there are actions such that there are no procedures for interpreting them.*

Flynt raises an analogous problem with respect to his piece, *Work Such that No One Knows What is Going On (WSTNOKWGO)*. It exists, has effects in virtue of appearing in a concert program together with the programmer's 'guess' as to what it is and how to perform it. This has the structure of a semantic paradox, since however one guesses what WSTNOKWGO is and how to perform it, one has failed to produce anything answering its description.<sup>34</sup>

Such 'incidents' appear to violate what Donald Davidson refers to as the 'Observability Assumption' for intentional agency, which states that 'an observer can, under favourable circumstances, tell what beliefs, desires, and intentions an agent has.'<sup>35</sup>

In other words, if X is an agent, X must be interpretable, given ideal conditions.

Should we infer from this that an event is only an action if it is interpretable under some set of ideal conditions?

Assuming, for now, that there are no ideal conditions for interpreting a C/D such as WSTNOKWGO, this question presents the inferentialist aesthetician with a dilemma. Either C/D's are not actions, or it is possible for facts distinguishing actions to be evidence-transcendent.

The latter option implies the possibility of alien acts, uninterpretable by any human or sapient being - sundering our concept of action from any extant world-version or theory of conditions for agency. This would violate the manifestation requirement that forms one of the original motivations for inferentialism: namely, *that meaning is exhaustively determined by use.*

man materials too: sounds, fires, silences, ramifying parerga in a gallery system, etc. The inscription of this protocol in matter that tokens no type, that evades scrutability, is essential here.

<sup>34</sup> As Flynt writes: "But if there were a "game" so inscrutable that nobody knew anything about it, then how would the game be established as palpable?" Henry Flynt, "Studies in Constitutive Dissociation." See: [http://www.henryflynt.org/meta\\_tech/condissociate.html](http://www.henryflynt.org/meta_tech/condissociate.html).

<sup>35</sup> Donald Davidson, "Rational Animals," in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 99.

This would, again, licence speculative metaphysical claims about alien or posthuman agents which would be pragmatically inaccessible to us — to humans — and thus beyond our space of reasons. I take it neither Caron nor Negarestani wants to follow me there.

For my part, I have no reason to 'eliminate' this disjunction by inferring one or other disjunct.

Firstly, this very conundrum demonstrates that the C/D's are *limit encounters*, where discursive procedures disrupt discourse and produce events that are, to quote Deleuze, objects "not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter".<sup>36</sup> Events that, since they cannot be recognized, can only be felt or 'sensed'.

This might seem ironic, given that C/D's are supposedly *conceptual artworks*. But conceptual art was never about *making* concepts, so much as creatively abusing them to achieve nonconceptual effects. There is a sensation or affect associated with the Encounter that we cannot assign to stereotypical rules or concepts. There is a phenomenology, but it is dark and idiomatic with few (if any) explicit cues regarding the nature of what is felt.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, I think this puts C/D's on a continuum with the least regularized forms of aesthetic practice and perhaps suggests why conceptual artists such as Flynt and Young were also heavily involved in jazz. Improvisations are also composed of affects rather than stereotypic emotions or rules — even when these make up an incipient, embodied sociality.

Such affects encounter systems whose complexity exceeds our explicit powers of conceptualization, prediction or working memory — bodies, environments and technological systems — through the affordances they manifest for improvising bodies. Similarly, one may speculate that we encounter C/D's through their affordances, the possibilities for action they yield, or, more obviously, frustrate.

Action is required for the aesthetic encounter, even if what is encountered thereby is not an act. C/D's discursively produce encoun-

ters 'outside' of discourse, having no immediate intent beyond *the unmaking of worlds*.

The idea of artworks as pure 'unworldings', in this sense, might seem paradoxical given that the constitutive efficacy of worlds has been downgraded in the course of this argument.<sup>38</sup>

Since it is not my aim to salvage Goodman's account, I will be summary here. If a world-version has no constitutive efficacy perhaps it is better thought of as a passingly coherent or temporary 'nebula of habits', recipes, rules of thumb, reliable clichés, strategies, norms and expectations; tactics for surfing the affordances of the real.<sup>39</sup> As such, they may also produce or compose the real — as when a group of rock musicians chain together a song from riffs they have practiced together for days in their rehearsal room. In special cases, they become essential to the functioning of an institution such as the art gallery or the concert and acquire a normative status. We obey them because we expect others to, and, reflexively, to correct our behaviour if we do something surprising. But these simply come down to higher order expectations and habits and I take it that expectations and habits are just things in the world. They need not be granted world-constitutive status.

## 5. Transcendental Suicide

In the case of C/D's social powers, which formerly rendered reality locally tractable, also render it locally intractable. We no longer know how to go on. Perhaps, like Flynt or Young, we no longer want to know. Or, if we go on, it is by converting their power into what I term 'biomorphs'.

A biomorph is not a body but an intense aesthetic schematization of the undetermined potentialities of bodies. Bellmer's dolls, Ballard's Crash fetishism, Stelarc's suspensions implying mutations without ecologies, versions without worlds, living-dead subtractions without forms of life or ecologies are all examples.

Works in the genre of concept horror — such as Gary Shipley's *Warewolf!* or my own *Snuff Memories* — exhibit both this potential and this indeterminacy. Shipley's masterpiece is, as I've written else-

<sup>36</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139.

<sup>37</sup> David Roden, "Nature's Dark Domain: An Argument for a Naturalised Phenomenology," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 72 (2013), 169-188.

<sup>38</sup> World versions do not, for example, fix standards for similarity and difference, since if they did, there could be no worlds at all.

<sup>39</sup> Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 49.

where, about the horrors perpetrated on the concept, as in this passage from the section 'Nice Gumbo':

Over the bed, beside the crucifix, Kafka's prostate sealed in a freezer bag. The last of Brod's salvage so the legend goes. It looks like the Eraserhead baby shrunk in an oven. We love like mad from opposite corners of the room. K is that sweet gangrene in our celibacy in glass.<sup>40</sup>

Elsewhere I have written of this section:

If K is "sweet gangrene" what is it to be "in" celibacy. What is it for "sweet gangrene," in turn, to be in glass? Might K merit a prostate? Is inclusion, here, transitive? If K is in our celibacy—and celibacy is in glass—is K too in glass?

One recalls Badiou's claim that the notions of set and set inclusion cannot be explicitly defined outside of set-theoretical axioms. For example, those in Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory excluding self-membership. There can be an implicit [inferential] mastery of *set* without a concept of set.

But this is not possible here. Like Bellmer's anagrammatic doll, *Warewolff!* has no axioms or rules beyond the hazards of its dispersal. It is its own entirely misleading portrait. It has no people or worlds; only disjointed clones, plucky carcasses and scripts we mistook as our lives.<sup>41</sup>

Here we can see that iteration holds out the possibility of inscriptions that parasitize grammar in order to elude meaning - which accounts for the recalcitrant singularity of the passage. The point of Shipley's gangrenous biomorphs are not to improve our long-haul navigation of the space of reasons but to retard it to the point at which we can longer be assured that the spacing of the concept is reliably navigable or rational.

*Snuff Memories*, ostensibly an abstruse fantasy about a time-war fought by the vicious 'moral powers' of the universe, is also about

<sup>40</sup> Gary J Shipley, *Warewolff!* (London: Hexus Press, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> David Roden, "Posthumanism: Critical, Speculative, Biomorphic," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Posthumanism*, ed. by Mads Thomsen and Jacob Wamburg (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 90.

what it is like for a body to cease to occupy a navigable conceptual space and thus to embrace its iterated suicide.

This passage comes from an early section entitled 'Meshes of the Afternoon.' 'Meshes' introduces the figure of Nessa Map, a hyper-rational anti-rationalist with an asphyxia kink. In some ways she resembles Flynt, trained as a mathematician, yet driven to use the protocols of reason against reason:

She ascends, follows the hooded figure with the poppy along the drive that winds towards the slender palms and their ablated sky; turns aside to see where the steps lead.

She sleeps through successive revolutions – a component newly introduced to this circuit.

She meant to break the torturer and free the code running in us; cutting or seeding her own flesh with silver chains and crosses etched with blood.

She came back briefly from the non-lieux she favoured and inscribed something for you, whether ruin or self-portrait. Perhaps it looked at a memory of itself and became blind or always existed as a memory, a lesion in her thigh. An art of love.<sup>42</sup>

But even to this author the female subject of this passage is unclear.

It might be figure played by Maya Deren in the classic experimental film from which the section takes its title, replicating differential circuits and dream rituals.<sup>43</sup>

Or there is no consistent subject here and thus no world for it to inhabit. Maybe 'Deren' names a routine that dissociates from her figure, freeing itself through the sorcery of asphyxia and ritual scarring.

And what remains of her is another biomorph — 'a lesion in her thigh. An art of love' - offered to the 'second person', a woman known as

<sup>42</sup> David Roden, *Snuff Memories* (Schism [2] Press, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (US: Publisher not Identified, 1943).

'the Cabalist' (later reborn in multitudes, later a sexless canine under a wounded star) committed to the death of worlds and to poisoning God, or the next worst thing to it.

This is strongly suggested later in this passage, when the narrator — a time travelling hermaphrodite — tells of the biomorph's eventual fate:

Her mechanical cravings resurface as by-blows from my graphein womb, wriggling under brittle polysaccharide plates.

Carapaces litter the hallway by her former library, my brothel. Some mornings, I find tiny human skulls crushed by the habitués.

This susceptibility to a death like no other confirms that nothing satisfies the grammatical conditions for being a person. It's still a dead planet or in the throes of one and not for the best.

There is nothing left of the person here beyond its insectoid biomorphs, stomped in a brothel that is also monument, mechanical womb, and tomb. The body and its world are ceded to transversals, rupturing caparisons of flesh or world. What remains, then, is an iterated death we register in deliquescent narratives, just as the C/D scars our aesthetic skin without healing it.

## Conclusion

If inferentialist semantics offers a model for aesthetics, then, it cannot be an idealism that programmatically weaves distinct worlds or life-forms. The ontological conditions for repetition and discourse — particularly non-scheme relative repetition — commit aesthetics to a reality which fractures attempts to apperceive these events under rules or concepts. It requires a fundamental encounter with a reality felt in terms of its final intractability to thought. It suicides the rule or the concept. Its agency is that of a snuff magnet, a transcendental auto-pile up.



## Anne-Françoise Schmid Sciences, Philosophies, and the Question of Borders

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**Bionote:** Philosopher and epistemologist, Anne-Françoise Schmid works on the multiple interactions between sciences and arts, between epistemology and the multiplicity of philosophies. These dynamic relationships can only be understood and systematized by a science of terms and relationships, a modality of Design. AFS sees in philosophical invention, rather than a result of criticism, the effect of a conception of and in philosophy, which occurs when philosophy touches another discipline. The Design, rather than a method external to the philosophy, allows it to manifest its construction in its links to the other knowledge, doctored or indoctrinated. Philosopher among scientists (EPFL, INSA, INRA, MinesParisTech), more recently philosopher among artists (vimeo film *Letre*, Philosophical Scripts for a festival of lost films (*Gwangju*), collaborations with Robin Mackay, Benoît Maire, Alice Lucy Rekab, Gallien Déjean, Ivan Liovik Ebel). A specialist in Poincaré and editor of Russell and Couturat, she has taught philosophy and epistemology at the University of Paris Ouest Nanterre, and mathematical logic at the University of Geneva. She has been teaching at the New Center of Research and Practice since 2016. Her problem is the question of how to avoid exclusions, exclusions of emerging scientific methods in science in view of what she saw in laboratories and research centers, exclusion of philosophies in the name of the supremacy of one of them. To this end, she has manifested the hypotheses of classical epistemology and has made extensions of them to take into account the generalized interdisciplinarity of contemporary sciences (in collaboration with Jean-Marie Legay, biologist, Muriel Mambrini-Doudet, biologist, Armand Hatchuel, management sciences, Nicole Mathieu, geographer, Maryse Dennes, Russian philosophy). At the same time, she works on a philosophical style not in but with philosophies considering their multiplicity (Philo-fiction, *La revue des non-philosophes*).

**Abstract:** This essay contributes in part to the discussion of the concept of the border [frontière] and its relations between philosophies and sciences present within the work *Épistémologie des frontières*. It suggests that borders function as both a separation and a union between the domains of philosophies and sciences in their multiplicity. Borders are determinant in the times of interdisciplinarity, and such investigations are necessary because the accustomed links between philosophies and sciences can no longer be assumed. This essay proposes some hypotheses concerning methodology and the relation to the real to exercise a modelization as the articulation of multiple points of view. Modelization allows for the invention of democratic pragmatics of philosophy/philosophies towards a global re-evaluation of the relations that disciplines, such as the sciences and ethics, share with philosophy.

**Keywords:** borders, philosophies, sciences, epistemology, ethics, modelization, pragmatics, philo-fiction.

### General Hypotheses

Habitually<sup>1</sup>, when one examines the question of the relations between the sciences and philosophy, “science” is in the plural and “philosophy” in the singular. Once science assumes a relation to philosophy, it identifies the latter with a function that limits its multiplicity. The philosophy of the sciences is obviously a discipline, or a domain, that explains the singular. But there is something more, and it is that one knows the idea of a philosophical multiplicity will not be developed, whereas philosophy, in the classical sense, is declined by a series of proper names. There is a reduction, an impoverishment. Either one does philosophy of the sciences, by way of attaching it to fundamental concepts, as if one could deal with

<sup>1</sup> [Any and all errors are those of the translator. Footnotes that are translator’s own and/or include any further information will be noted with square brackets – Trans.]

a kind of neutrality or philosophical conviviality; or one exposes its concepts by being inspired by authors such as Poincaré, Russell, Duhem, Meyerson, Popper, etc. In my opinion, one can also proceed otherwise, and alter the way one views the interactions between the sciences and the philosophies.

### Hypothesis A

The question of the borders between philosophies and sciences can be proposed under the following hypothesis: there is a systematic, though non-direct, line between the way in which “one” philosophy constructs its relations to the sciences and the fashion in which it thinks its relations to other philosophies. It is a methodological hypothesis which no longer accepts the spontaneous practice that consists in opposing one philosophy to another, without there being another, more positive usage of this opposition. One can generalize it in every discipline which overdetermines philosophy, but with different effects. This hypothesis can only truly be understood with Hypothesis B.

Hypothesis A is subjacent to the idea of interactions between philosophy and epistemology. One can obviously create an epistemology by supposing its relative autonomy in relation to philosophy or philosophies. But it also takes work that attempts to comprehend the relations between sciences and philosophies, between epistemology and philosophy, between the latter two and the history of the sciences. This distribution is theoretically problematic, because the classical approach of philosophy requires that the critique or the description of a philosophy allows for a new philosophy, which seems to render impossible an “objective” characterization of philosophy. It would only serve, then, the general horizon for the work of epistemology and the sciences.

Hypothesis A is all the more difficult to hold, due to the fact that the concept of the border is not, on the surface, the same in philosophy and science. We will attempt to offer a method that will render this hypothesis plausible and effective.

### The Concepts of the Border in Philosophy and Science

In philosophy, the concept of border is double, and not only for the habitual reasons whereby one says that a border is at once internal or external, or that it reunites or separates in the same gesture. These doublets are of a philosophical origin, and continue, deservedly, to be developed and refined. But they are the effects of one aspect linked to the constitution of philosophies themselves—which complicates this first approach. It is such that a philosophy also constitutes itself through the critique of other philosophies or aspects of the tradition. This critique has the effect of duplicating the philosophical concepts at the interior of a system. Every notion will have its double. The border is what separates and unites, at once limit and boundary. The empirical has two usages: in the negative, it is what transmits the critiqued tradition – it can no longer serve as transcendental; and, more positively, it is what responds to the transcendental of the new philosophy. Furthermore, this situation still comes to complicate itself in the relationships of philosophies with the exterior disciplines with which it comes to form borders. To hold all of this together, one must suppose that philosophy prevails over philosophies, and nearly all of the philosophers think that their practice of philosophy is better than that of the others, that it takes a better account of what is done in the sciences, in the history of the sciences, in aesthetics, etc., despite the apparently spineless consensus that there is a plurality of philosophies. This paradox can reveal itself through historical “dramasculs,”<sup>2</sup> as recently as the Sokal Affair. One habitually accepts the idea that one must believe in what one defends. But the result of this apparent normality is that the particular situation of philosophy is not theorized enough: where the border is double, what separates philosophy from other disciplines, what separates one philosophy from another, and what unites these two decisions. Some philosophies are not arithmetically comparable, for they cannot be reduced to rigorously distinct unities, while scientific theories undoubtedly enjoy a cleaner relative autonomy. To a philosopher, what will be the border between Deleuze-philosophy and Russell-philosophy, or between Derrida-philosophy and Wittgenstein-philosophy? To take one “case” treated for almost twenty years, it’s not easy to take a position, at least by being simply

<sup>2</sup> According to the title of a series of short pieces by Thomas Bernhard and published in *L’Arche* (Paris, 1991).

dogmatic, that is, to believe that each proposition that one utters [*émet*] returns to the systematicity of one's own thought. To make use of a Leibnizian concept, one can construct "perspectives" where Russell and Deleuze would be very close or very far, or see Derrida and Wittgenstein as extreme cases without ties, or, even, as the repetition of the same to a proximal historical accident. These perspectives are the fantasies of philosophy – a fantasy which here means that the orders can change in degree, and not that it is meaningless or has no objectivity. It is this fantasy that allows philosophical positions to communicate – that is, to share their role [*charge*] as philosophy, a bit like ideologies allowing for social life. One can describe in many ways the relations of "one" philosophy to one "other" philosophy, but one will utilize, according to the cases, or types of relations which engage a particular philosophical interpretation, as we have already done with Derrida and Wittgenstein, by making use of Nietzsche, or moreover, of the basics of so-called analytic philosophy. Dealing with a border between "two" philosophers still requires a philosophical gesture of intervention that could be distinguished as yet "another" philosophy. It is for this reason that the concept of the "death" of philosophy, which is absolutely classical and undoubtedly part of philosophy, would disappear in our practicing of thought. Philosophy continues and will continue to exist, and Peguy's idea that a philosophy that does not "come" is missing eternally, will be eternally lacking and can always be understood as contemporary.

Thus, the question of intra-philosophical borders is conceptually impossible to regulate, because when one seeks to theorize it, it gives place to a new border or a new philosophy. We have pointed out repeatedly that it wasn't possible to define philosophy because a definition would automatically arise from a particular philosophy, and therefore the definition would be partial, etc. This is what the concept of the border in philosophy does, undefined and allowing continuation: it does not reveal the concept of borders in sciences – at least when one considers, also partially, that the concept of borders in the sciences is imported from philosophy. The philosophies are very conscious of this situation, and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a certain number of them investigated notions capable of resisting the crossing, the continuous transformation, from one philosophy to the other. The notion of the ordinary, or, even better, the idea of

pragmatism, or that of the blends of realism and pragmatism, contribute to this resistance. These notions are absolutely fundamental, but they deserve being rethought in a theory of the multiplicity of philosophies. This modifies the very concept of philosophy.

In conclusion, it will take a conceptual treatment of these borders without constituting a new philosophy. What was previously said allows us to give form to the problem: 1) One must be able to give oneself the theoretical means of a description of philosophy; 2) one must be able to suspend their own opinions and beliefs of the type "I am Derridean," "I am 'analytic'," etc.

The theoretical means suppose that one generalizes philosophy and that they remove its claims vis-à-vis the real. This will allow us to give a theoretical (rather than philosophical) description. It is one of the objects of non-philosophy, the "non-" obviously being a generalization, analogous to what has existed for non-Euclidean geometries. This is Hypothesis B, which supposes that the doubt of the unity of philosophy, or, at least, the opposition and the link between unity and multiplicity, has a cause or a reason: the real.

### Hypothesis B

The hypothesis is that the real "precedes" philosophy. Either it is "indifferent" to philosophy, or, for that matter, that it is the "cause," that it has primacy over philosophy, and not priority, which would engage the real in a philosophical order, or that it has a certain effect on philosophy, although it cannot be a hierarchical domination. All of these terms are dissatisfying, since the real/philosophy relation is no longer thought as philosophical. All that is possible is to take back the terms of philosophy, to place them into another syntax. Philosophy does not co-determine the real, it co-determines other philosophical interpretations of the real. All of this is perhaps philosophizable, but all of it does not have to be philosophized. This can seem a banality, nevertheless, all sorts of beliefs disclose such presuppositions, for example, the one that sees the sciences progressively leave philosophy by way of the objectivation of the formulation of problems... Therefore, one supposes that philosophy does not directly touch the real. It is, however, very important, as a kind of form of sensibility of what we perceive of the world and

ideas, a form, too, of the conceptions of action. But, in the absolute sense, there is no reason that one philosophy is more correct than another, even when, in certain situations, the concepts of the one could be more pertinent or richer than those of another. But, that's something to rethink.

Let's move on to the question of scientific borders. It has an apparently more controllable approach, because certain aspects can be treated through logic. One can say that the domain of a theory is determined by its principles. If I name "force" something which is incompatible with Newton's principles, one will think that this conception of force comes from the domain of mechanics. The mathematics and the hypothetico-deductive method can provide the means of distinguishing among the acceptable statements in a theory. There are several remarks to make. First of all, one isn't certain that the notion of the border can be a pertinent notion to describe this characteristic of theories (is it necessary to add a supplementary notion?), it is, at least, a question that we can leave aside for the time being. In the second place, the example taken here speaks to a paradigmatic case (mechanics), while the fundamental problem concerning the borders is the compatibility between theories. In the sciences, it takes up an equally technical form, the research of models. We know that Maxwell spent a lot of time constructing the mechanical models of electrical theory. In order for the model to exist, the compatibility of his theory with mechanics must be ensured and thus, indirectly, its validity. The undoubtedly maladjusted term of "border" in the sciences engages some meta-scientific distinctions that are susceptible to being treated by logical means. It is not, as in philosophy, a theory that is auto-interpreted by its own continuation, and which seeks, in the same movement, both separation and proximity.

Concerning the sciences, the question of the border has equally been treated by the research of criteria, to which a good part of 20<sup>th</sup> century epistemology was devoted to. This research gave place to a quantity of distinctions in which, I think, they remain useful. But it is ultimately weakened because the idea of universality, on which rests the hope of finding a criterion, no longer appears as pertinent. The research of criteria began with the finding that mechanics was not at all physical, and that it was gradually necessary to broaden

the conception that one had of science, even beyond physics – it is normal that, gradually, the historically dated idea that one has of science would no longer appear as something that requires criteria. It is one of the aspects of the current sociologization of the sciences and their relativist interpretation. Every universal criterion would appear as metaphysical, be it one concerning science or philosophy. The idea of paradigm, or research programme, may have delayed the most extreme interpretations for some time. My thesis is that it is possible to replace this banalization by a consilience which would be a portion of the disparate side of disciplines.

On the question of borders in the sciences, the logical and meta-logical questions have therefore often been blended with the meta-physics of the social sciences, as if one could know that science would depend on absolutely heterogeneous diverse disciplines. A banalization has resulted from all of these differences: sciences are a social activity like any other, wherein the practitioners operate with a specialized language.

### **One can no Longer Naively Think Philosophy and Sciences without Hypotheses**

To take an analogy, we are in an "epoch" similar to what was lived in geometry, where one first had thought the points, laws and planes as givens, then as a system of operations, and then as a system of axioms.

If one admits the sciences and philosophies as givens, then one excludes many phenomena on the cartography of current knowledges. For example, one cannot clearly comprehend what modelization and conception bring to the horizon of contemporary knowledge. Why? Because one thinks them according to theory, and the latter according to mechanics, that is, according to a chronological and nonproblematic line of historical passage. Or, rather, one acts as if that which brings forth a problematic was the consequence of chronology. The very essence of treating each element in a relatively autonomous fashion is reinscribed in a tradition where one notion follows another. We propose to radically distinguish what is historical and what is epistemological. This doesn't remove the importance of any of the disciplines and allows us to construct connections between them which are not exclusively of the order of chronology.

The state of current epistemology, which, by the objectivity of theories, has passed onto the generalized idea of technology encompassing the sciences, and, then, to a sociological and relativist conception of the sciences, partially holds to the continuities that one admits implicitly between the chronology and the problematic.

Their separation supposes that one is no longer content with what gives us chronology in order to comprehend the concept of each order or field of knowledge. For this, one is in need of a hypothesis. The sciences are not what has been taken away from philosophy on the occasion of objectifications, a type of reasoning in following from a semi-transcendental illusion. Technology is not only a reversal and an intensification, in the Nietzschean sense, of theory/experience relations, but a new type of blend that one must attempt to think in its specificity. Relativism is not only the expected continuation of the critique of the notion of objectivity. What we want to change, here, is the way of thinking the relations between the traditions and contemporary problems by suspending the ready-made connections that one admits among them. By proceeding thusly, we will see that many notions are absent in the dictionaries of philosophy and the history of sciences, because they represent, in the same movement, a historical and systematic point of view of science which excludes many possibilities. For example, in the Lecourt dictionary from *Presses Universitaires de France*, the entries: "hypothesis," "modelization," "conception," "objective," "criterion," "problem," "simulation," "interdisciplinarity," "non-" (as in non-geometry, non-economy, etc.) are absent. Such a dictionary should take note that modelization is one of the most common practices of the current sciences. It does not suffice to treat models through theories – syntactic models, semantic models, pragmatic models – in order to comprehend modelization and the new functions that it implies for theories themselves. What is the identity of science through all of these practices? The research of criteria is no longer apt to approach this question, because it would have been elaborated in the horizon of hypothetico-deductive theories and methods.

One must now admit that one can only work through hypotheses, for the determination of what philosophy and science are, despite the philosophical tradition which, almost entirely, has given an absolutely secondary and not philosophical role to hypotheses (with

the notable exceptions of Leibniz and Russell). To work with hypotheses simply signifies that the identity of sciences or philosophies are not given directly by their historical state. This does not mean that history is less important, but that one must think, each time, its relations to philosophy or the sciences. However, the formulation of criteria is not adapted, because it is taken in the contradiction of parting from an already complex particular state to be the touchstone for states which are not yet known. Now, one knows that science is multiple and polyform, even if one also knows that it continues and will continue to make usage of classical methods.

In what concerns philosophy, let's admit that the one we practice is only one among many, regardless of whether, in line with our preferences, we pursue a historical work or a contemporary engagement with our philosophy of choice. If we suspend the idea that our preferred philosophy has an effect of direct co-determination on the real, we can attempt to determine the pertinent traits that characterize the philosophies. This presupposes a considerable change in syntax. Instead of supposing that the notions are transformable into one another through dialectics, through topological recurrence, or through the repetition of the Same, all of which are ways of doing which give place to a new philosophy in the very effort of defining it, we will admit that the terms of a philosophy can be affirmed according to the cases as either identical or completely distinct. We cut every possibility concerning what we have called internal relations – not that we negate them, but we make them a term beside others, or a term identical to another. This method is inspired by François Laruelle's works. Through this conception of terms, it is possible to conceive a "modelizing" of philosophy, which describes philosophy without transforming it into another one. Analytic philosophy has been very important for the critique of the transition of notions into one another and for the construction of very strong relations with logic and the sciences; it has allowed for the circumscribing of this problem. But this isn't sufficient. The notion of the ordinary, which is one of its instruments, is thought in philosophy, with its critical means, and in opposition to the supposed speculative philosophies. On the other hand, the continental philosophers of the last century, in line with Nietzsche and eventually Heidegger, have highlighted, at a superior level, the knowledge of the constitu-

tive gestures of philosophy in its aspects of a system. I am referring here to the so-called philosophies of difference, Deleuze and his conception that one could call serial, seeking univocity of the multiplicities of philosophies – *A Thousand Plateaus* – but also to Derrida, the most “cubist” of our philosophers, who created fragments of half-philosophies, allowing us to see what remains habitually invisible, *The Truth in Painting*, leaving us a knowledge of philosophies. Who could believe after reading Derrida that one can found a philosophy on a particular science? But philosophy continues. So, Badiou constructed his on the coincidence of the void and set theory, *Being and Event*. Michel Henry, through his absolutely radical conception of the transcendental, allowed us to comprehend the particularities of philosophical returns, *I am the Truth*, in a way that one could call, at once, close and contrary to the analytic philosophers. Bachelard, through his idea of a poly-philosophy, has made us attentive to the idea that the philosophical transitions between notions do not take place between contraries exclusively in the linear sense, by way of a “surface” – which is a modern form of the Platonic *chôra*, or anticipated by Deleuzian plateaus or deserts. In Bachelard, this idea was implied by the force of the “non,” *The Philosophy of the Non*; in Deleuze, through the force of the “yes” or “rhizome.” But all of these works are philosophies or semi-philosophies, or philosophies of difference, so to speak, or the Same of philosophy, etc., and assume, in a way, that they touch something of the real, or still, that the real is their limit – therefore reviving the debate among the opposites [*contraires*]. Russell, on the occasion of the death of William James, wrote, with so much wisdom on philosophy, that it was “the tone of a subject in which agreement is necessarily rarer than esteem,”<sup>3</sup> and briefly indicated the opposing directions to which one such situation could lead.

What is the type of these hypotheses? Minimal in their formulation and complex in their possible effects. They determine postures and orders, rather than disciplines. What do I call this order? This notion follows a conjecture.

<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Essais philosophiques*, trans. François Clémentz and Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris: PUF, 1997), 52. [In *Philosophical Essays*, New York: Routledge, 2009, e-book p14. Quote is provided from the original English. Instead of the French translation which appears in the original of this article, I have used the original quote from the English source. – Trans.]

## A Conjecture

I suppose that the blends that we observe – and, in the empirical, we observe mixtures of sciences, philosophies, technics, aesthetics, and ethics – are not necessarily explained by the blend they constitute. To explain mixtures by way of mixtures is the essence of relativism as it concerns our environment. I do not negate the mixtures, they are the only thing that one can observe, but I propose the conjecture that one can make hypotheses which do not raise from these blends and assume, as a method and description, a set of minimal characterizations of the non-blend from as many orders as one could name: “science,” “philosophy,” “technics,” “ethics,” etc. There are blends of these orders, the most interesting for us being the “philosophy of sciences” and “epistemology,” wherein the object is no longer the science or the sciences, but a *mélange* of philosophy and science. In my opinion, the battles between epistemologies ensue from the conviction that each of them has science for an object, although, in fact, each of them equally has for an object partially unelucidated relations between philosophies and sciences.

What do these hypotheses allow for? To have a multiple point of view, at once on philosophies and on their relations with other disciplines. To retain its judgment over such or such philosophical position, but to comprehend – without transparency – the most different positions in their variable and multiple connections. To allow for a usage of philosophies, a pragmatics of philosophies, which cannot simply be the adherence to a pragmatist philosophy. It does not interest me to say that I am Russellian or Nietzschean. In contrast, it is important for me to be able to make use of Russellian or Nietzschean positions in some conjunctures, sometimes in a combined fashion. It is what I call the “modelization” of philosophies. This modelization comes to profoundly modify the idea of the border in philosophy. Modelization supposes that the terms among which the philosophies pose as “internal relations” can be treated as identical or absolutely distinct. Thus, it will equally have effects over the borders between philosophy and other disciplines. It is in this context that I will try to discuss the idea of the border.

This obviously presupposes a position that cannot only be philosophical in the first degree, but which also bears on philosophy itself.<sup>4</sup> It is

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Jacob’s article on memory in the special issue [*Hors-Série*] of *La Recherche* (2001), explaining that human memory functions thanks to its meta-representations.

an utterly classical position, in the sense that every philosopher has a point of view on philosophy, and an elaboration of a philosophy contributing to the constituent “gestures” of philosophy. But it is a different position insofar as it does not give place to the creation of a new philosophy, but to the generalization of the concept “philosophy”; one can then liberate the function “philosophies” in relation to the function “sciences.”

How does one think the scientific multiplicities? How does one articulate them with philosophical multiplicities? These questions suppose that one admits that there is philosophy and philosophies, that there are sciences, and that the allowed dissymmetrical relations among them – science brings to knowledges, to philosophy, a commentary on sciences, eventually a supplement of a soul or ethics for them – are not the sole possible form of their relations. Philosophy is a technique of generalities. This doesn’t mean that it can be more general than the sciences, and/or that it overarches them, it does not void them of all knowledge; and, as for science, it does not lack thought...

This conception supposes a democratization in the thought of the relations between philosophies and sciences. The practice of this democracy or non-hierarchy is modelization. The hypothesis of the primacy of the real is already a modelization of philosophies. It does not modify the theory, but its functions, which enrich each other and the concept of borders. The whole problem will be of thinking the relation, or the leap between, the diverse knowledges entering into modelization.

In effect, what is a modelization? It is an articulation of models – which, most of the time, does not arise from one singular discipline, or singular model. It relies on the terms among them. Let’s suppose that each of these terms can be a model: we then have a modelization.<sup>5</sup> The models are always waning in the plural. Modelization allows us to articulate, among them, heterogenous models of different quantities and nature. In the practice of the sciences of engineering, it is possible to integrate qualified parameters of ethics in their conceptions, which is a form of modelization.

<sup>5</sup> This is the way in which Russell reasoned concerning series – each term of a series is itself a series.

To model, it takes the equivalent of what constitutes the domain for theory, as it happens, an “objective,” for which one must construct a scientific concept. It designates a point of convergence independent from domains, thus allowing different models to converge. It is a point on a surface, rather than a surface on which one would designate events. Modelization, as per its objective, is not exclusive with regard to theories, but it imprints their maps of domain according to another logic.

How does one articulate these diverse knowledges if their coherence is not guaranteed by the logic of a theory? Stephen Jay Gould has taken up William Whewell’s term “consilience” (1840), which the latter had created to comprehend the “consilience of inductions,” in order to postulate how a theory must be able to explain the heterogeneity of disparate facts, which are always stronger than the indefinite repetition of the same class of facts, and how it makes it possible to make the “leap” among different facts. Gould transposed this idea to allow for the thinking of the sciences and humanities together.<sup>6</sup> I would take another step in this transposition: Consilience, without reduction, is what permits modelization. Reduction is a very useful technical procedure because it allows us to manifest what was new in a theory, it shows that one can make do with a formalism, but it is not a metaphysical or philosophical explanation. In contrast, wanting to make reduction a goal leads to dogmatism which can lead, in some cases, to dangerous flattenings (socio-biologism, etc.). Modelization allows for the analysis of components in such a way that they are recombined with important degrees of liberty for the indirect description of worlds, sciences and complex philosophies, that is, it does not depend on one field of knowledge alone.

The theories, for the sciences, for the philosophies, and for philosophy, could have this function in modelization which guarantees, at least partially, the coherence of necessarily disparate aspects of modelization.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Le Renard et le Hérisson: Comment Combler le Fossé Entre la Science et les Humanités*, trans. Nicolas Witkowski (Paris: Le Seuil, 2005), 194 and 199-213. [*The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister’s Pox: Mending the Gap Between the Sciences and the Humanities* (New York: Harmony Books, 2003) – Trans.]

## A Pragmatics of Philosophies

Compatible with the idea of modelization, I propose a pragmatics which would not be a philosophical point of view, but a usage of philosophical positions according to conjunctures and blends of sciences/philosophies/etc. From a methodological point of view, the usages of philosophies or fragments of philosophies signify that all of our descriptions are indirect. It is possible to make use of concepts from the philosophy of sciences as models of application for epistemological concepts. One must invent philosophies, on the condition that they do not confer themselves with authority over the real, in a way that gives new means for indirect descriptions of the real, science, technology, etc. They are what one calls philosophical fictions, non-scientific modelization or, still yet, "philo-fictions," Laruelle's term, who has published some examples in the form of experimental texts.

Therefore, the question of borders would be transformed: it would only exist in the philosophical principles as a means of orientating oneself in thought, when one allows oneself a horizon, when the real is seen at the limit of philosophy – that is to say, in the practice of the/a philosophy. But when one no longer exercises philosophy as a kind of authority over the real, for the real is no longer at the limit of philosophy but just a point which precedes it (truly speaking, it suffices by a point), the idea of the border would appear as a half-theorization of the problem of the unity and multiplicity of philosophies. It no longer has direct utility when one presupposes that the real precedes philosophical practice. In a non-philosophical practice, the notion of the border is replaced by an axiomatization which renders its usage obsolete.

One of the important objects that could actually permit one such pragmatics, in its relations to the sciences, would be to comprehend the functions of philosophy and ethics in the contemporary practices of the sciences. The habitual schemas presented to us either a philosophy of sciences, or a philosophy, or an ethics of technology. All of which takes place as if both spoke in line with problematics absolutely alien to one another. Thus, one would have to build styles that allow us to capture, under more varied forms, the problems that the sciences pose to philosophy and ethics, without remaining

within this disciplinary divide. Could we model together fragments extracted from sciences, philosophy, and ethics? The pragmatics of philosophies permits it, on condition that one brings forth, through hypotheses, minimal definitions of each in relation to the real.

This pragmatics is not a universal horizon, it does not suppose an indifferent substitution of one philosophical position by another, even though it poses, at the transcendental level, the equivalence of all philosophies – it is a conjecture. At the level of conjunctures, this equivalence has no sense. But then it is no longer possible to believe, for a philosopher, that they comprehend every philosophy according to a kind of universal transparency, no more than it would be possible for a scientist to comprehend all sciences, indeed all of their science. A cogito, possible among others, of this pragmatics could be: "There is at least one philosophy that the philosopher does not comprehend."

Such are the proposed working hypotheses. One is not required to believe or subscribe to them. They form a kind of fiction to comprehend the interactions between philosophy and the sciences or an occasion to explain them.

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*Translated by Jeremy R. Smith*

## Zachary De Jong

### Reimagining the Oikos

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**Abstract:** We are currently living through a time in which the line dividing capital and state has dissolved behind repair, where free-market economics and rules of governance have become nothing more than a totality of bio-political control for capitalist and subjective fixes, and, where the distinctions between corporate hegemony, policy making, free-speech and mainstream media have become seemingly non-existent. This text attempts to act as a remedy to this by examining and analyzing some of the key tenets of what must be done in order to create a post-capitalist society, and move towards a reimagined *oikos* and *oikonomia*. It focuses largely on the necessity of moving away from subjectivity-centered thought, and towards a new form of materialist universality.

**Keywords:** subjectivity-centered thought, post-capitalism, *oikos*, *oikonomia*,

#### Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the possibility of creating a post-capitalist society on the basis of the complete reimagination of the *oikos* and *oikonomia* (as it stands in its capitalist sense). In order to understand how this new existence could function, we need to examine the fundamental basis on which it is founded. Thus, it is necessary to examine some very basic structures, their lineage, and how they

work in today's state of liberal-democratic-capitalism, in order to show how and why they must be overturned. Thus we need to examine some basic tenets concerning subjectivity, symbolic and economic exchange, the role of science in forming not only our decision making, but the structure and form of radical change, the structure of governance and representation, and finally how all of this relates to living in common, in a new shared space not entrenched in the current imaginary of infinitely increasing representation.

While the idea of moving toward a post-capitalist future, or even a post-capitalist *oikos*, is certainly not a novel idea, it is indeed something that must be explored with some urgency if society, and the planet (including all of the beings on it), have a chance of surviving a life worth living. This is especially true in the time we are living in when the line dividing capital and state has dissolved behind repair, when free-market economics and rules of governance have become nothing more than a totality of bio-political control for capitalist and subjective fixes, and, when the distinctions between corporate hegemony, policy making, free-speech and mainstream media have become seemingly non-existent. Thus in our current state we are left with only two options, create a new space, a new system of exchange, and a new form of governance, or be brutally crushed under the weight of capital's contradictions.

#### 1.0: Ego and Reification

Before we begin, it is worth noting why the conception of *oikos*, and with it, *oikonomia*, are important terms and concepts with which to work. The word *oikos*, in Greek, literally translates into house/household, and is the root of the word *oikonomia*, or, economy. Thus the conception of the economy is always-already based in social relations, on relations of the household, and on relations of power and subjugation. More particularly, on the subjugation of women, and femininity as such. Thus, reimagining the *oikos* entails not simply reimagining the household, but reimagining power relations, subjectivity, the economy, gender, patriarchy, political organization, in short, the entire structure of not only society, but the space of society, and our role in it. Likewise, contemporary thinkers such as Agamben, Kolozova, and Haraway, have all put the terms to use in the form of radical critiques of how things are in order to point towards a more egalitarian future.

Now, concerning the *oikos*, it is impossible to begin speaking to the space which we inhabit and must transform without talking about not only the way in which we inhabit it, but the way in which we create the conditions of our habitation (in the dual sense of our habitus there in). It would be a perhaps crude reduction, without supplying the necessary proof which cannot be done within the space of this paper (but is expertly done by the likes of Katerina Kolozova and François Laruelle, and even, to a lesser extent, Henri Lefebvre elsewhere) but not at all unfair to say, that the history of Western thought has always already been plagued by our own human projections, that our thought has hitherto largely (with a few exceptions) remained ensnared in subjective self-certainties and tautologies which blind us from understanding the world outside of our myopic and subjectivity-centered analyses. Katerina Kolozova has gone to great and painstaking lengths throughout her oeuvre to show that philosophy, and philosophical thought (which is by absolutely no means reducible to the formal discipline of philosophy as such) works precisely through a form of willful forgetting (not dissimilar in some ways to Heidegger's forgetting of forgetting). This willful forgetting reduces the entire existence of materiality to mind-ed-subjects and reaches its apotheosis in Hegel, who represents an all-consuming mega-mind of teleologically ordained idealism which conveniently presents, oxymoronically, an opaque but ever shifting system of contradictions and dissolutions which can only be realized by us, the chosen beings, the Israelites of the entire universe.<sup>1</sup> According to Kolozova, this phenomenon can be defined as subjectivity-centered thought,<sup>2</sup> that is, thought which has its locus in the subject as a philosophical category, thought which claims that it is more real than real itself, or again, that it has authority or claim over the real as such.<sup>3</sup> Although we will continue to return to this point,

<sup>1</sup> Katerina Kolozova, "The Radical Dyad of the Non-Human: Thinking Inequality Beyond Identity as Reification,"

*Historical Materialism Conference Online*, (2020): available at: [https://www.academia.edu/44964430/The\\_Radical\\_Dyad\\_of\\_the\\_Non\\_Human\\_Thinking\\_Inequality\\_Beyond\\_Identity\\_as\\_Reification?email\\_work\\_card=view-paper](https://www.academia.edu/44964430/The_Radical_Dyad_of_the_Non_Human_Thinking_Inequality_Beyond_Identity_as_Reification?email_work_card=view-paper)

<sup>2</sup> See for instance: Katerina Kolozova, "The Artifact of Non-Humanity: A Materialist Account of the Signifying Automaton and Its Physical Support in a Fantasized Unity," *Philosophy Today*, 65:2 (April 22, 2021); Katerina Kolozova, "Examining the "Principle of Philosophical Sufficiency": Of Ontology and its Philosophical Limitations," *The Comparatist*, 44 (2020), 182-195.

<sup>3</sup> Kolozova's remark is based on Laruelle's theory of the problem of the "principle of sufficient philosophy," or PSP, which amounts to "philosophical decisionism" – philosophy taking charge of not postulating what the real is but also treating the postulate as the Real itself (in its generality, or abstraction as generalization). François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, Trans. Taylor Adkins (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 12,

what is crucial to take away from this, for the time being, is the necessity of freeing ourselves from the perverse ambition to conquer and assimilate knowledge and the real, as well as the need to objectify every non-human entity (this of course applies to humans as well, as long they are not the "right" ones, the poor, the oppressed, the migrants, the sans papiers, and women, especially as they are treated as a merely socio-economic-political category) which is its necessary correlate. In other words, there is no possibility of creating a new space of thought or living if we refuse to realize that our existence as subjects must be discarded and replaced by a form of communal being which does not acquiesce to the tautologies of our own thought. Now, this idea of overcoming subjectivity-centered thought is clearly not divorced from the material conditions we inhabit, the issue is not to simply oppose ideas, as *eidos*, with other ideas, without a material shift. Thus the concept of the idea as existing outside of any material circumstances, or originating purely in human minds, must be erased, yet, the concept of the possibility of an idea (of a radically reimagined society) as inherently material must be radically affirmed. To say, for instance, that matter is indeterminate means precisely that there is a level of incalculability, but this absence of perfect calculus, this concept of reimagining is what allows for material change itself<sup>4</sup>. However, maintaining such a relation does not mean that we should make abstract claims based outside of matter, but that the effects of matter must give rise to something more than what appears as is. In other words, our political imagination must be material, and by doing so must in some ways rely on ideas, ideas, however, whose origin is not grounded in the beyond, or in subjectivity. Thus, the very concept of a given space of relations is always already both material and concrete.<sup>5</sup>

However, one must also err on the side of a certain form of pragmatism, while also crucially acknowledging that language, and our relations to it, are also material. Sloganeering of the sort "workers

77, 99.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (Bloomsbury, 1998); Thomas Nail, *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> This is the precise opposite stance of someone like Aleksandar Dugin, who imagines community purely based around the material incorporation of an always already metaphysical ideal which is retroactively transubstantiated into matter. We must, therefore, insist on the opposite, those things which we call ideas are made possible only by matter itself and the suffering of being, and do not exist in a realm beyond, nor do they exist simply in the subjective mind. For more on Dugin see: Aleksandr Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (Eurasian Movement: 2012).

of the world unite,” or “we are the 99%” nonetheless reflect, or betray, an egoistic teleology or a stagnant reformism respectively. The structure of any given society, when looked at from a materialist stance, must be founded on the dissolution of subjectivity-centered thought, regardless of the specificities of cultural or linguistic instantiations. What matters then, in a certain sense, is a universality of the concrete (and not, so to speak, a concrete universality à la Hegel). I will return to this phenomenon in more detail later on, the important point for now is realizing the futility of attempting to create economic, social, or political change without first shifting the very focus of our thought itself, and thus the very nature of what it could mean to be a subject, or, perhaps, even a post-subject.

In accordance with this, and taking an important lesson from Lacan, it is pivotal to understand that subjects do not simply become subjects by way of a top-down interpellation. It is not a mere matter of responding to the Master’s call and thus realizing your identity and belonging therein and concretizing the Other’s, qua symbolic order, existence and legitimacy (this is of course also present in Althusser’s analysis). Rather, the relation is always already twofold. The reification of subjects as this or that subject (as capitalist subjects, as liberal subjects, as democratic subjects, etc...) always-already requires a reciprocal relation of subjective volition and desire, and a second order form of objective over-determination, none of which are divorced from material determinations, or conditions, such as the means of production.<sup>6</sup> However, the distinction between determined subjects and willing subjects blurs the line between the subjugated and the subjugators (even if it is a form of self-subjugation, not unlike those who bow before their fictitious gods, and besides, what is capitalism if not an endless religious ceremony). For the sake of clarity, I am by no means suggesting that we do not know who the direct victims of our oppressive systems are (in the sense of those who bear the brunt of said oppression, even if it is in an abstract way also created by them), rather I want simply to point out that it is not as simple as merely seizing the means of production, or enacting immediate political change (which is absolutely necessary of course) but of also shifting our perspective which allows us to change the

overdetermined relations so that we can seize anything at all (or do anything post seizure). Whether it is the dissolution of any category of subject, or the razing of the subject to a universal and materially constituted conduit of change, such as in Badiou, some form of transformation is needed. Again, our material conditions, and subjective and psychological relations toward them are not so easily parsable. It is not idealist to think in this way, it is rather the un-idealizing of subjective relations in order to understand them materially, in order to understand the apparently abstract as materially and reciprocally conditioned. Again, Kolozova shows this in great detail<sup>7</sup> (especially in relation to real abstractions and the syntax of the real), but we will go over this more fully in a subsequent section.

Firstly, however, let us briefly further this point concerning the subject’s relation to their own reification,<sup>8</sup> or at the very least, their subsumption into a socio-economic-political order which is sustained precisely by their own functioning therein. Again, this reciprocal relation between interpellation and structure is key. The flattering of space into a monotonous time, or rather, time’s becoming nothing more than a flattened space is part and parcel of this relation.<sup>9</sup> What’s repeated is always what is configurable within a parochial set of reasons, norms, and ideologically internalized presuppositions. Space, and we could even talk of imagined spaces, space outside of the confines of what exists, become compacted.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, along these same lines, Agamben shows us how the role of law and liturgy (in this context, in relation to monks), creates a suffocating existence owing to the imposition of the rule of law, rendering them not only the result of their repetition, but also unable to distinguish the act the law demands from their carrying out of the very same law.

The text of the rule is [...] not only a text in which the distinction between writing and reading tends to become

<sup>7</sup> Katerina Kolozova, “Philosophical and Speculative Economies of the Vanishing Body,” available at <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2018.00026/full>

<sup>8</sup> To be clear, we must, as Kolozova and many others point out, including Samo Tomšič, distinguish between alienation and reification. Humans, as such, are always alienated in a certain way, while reification is effectually an issue of capitalism

<sup>9</sup> Ray Brassier, “Pricing Time: Outline and Discussion on Suhail Malik’s ‘The Ontology of Finance,’” *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, 14:1-2, (2011), 86-128.

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1992), 64.

<sup>6</sup> See Adrian Johnston’s elucidation of Lacan’s concept in relation to Slavoj Žižek here: Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Northwestern University Press, 2009).

blurred, but also one in which writing and life, being and living, become properly indiscernible in the form of a total liturgization of life and a vivification of liturgy that is just as entire [...] In the rule, there cannot be a liturgical section, because... the whole life of the monk has been transformed into an Office.<sup>11</sup>

Of course by law here we do not merely mean what belongs to the judicial branch, but the tacit demands of the ruling ideological, and materially existing structures<sup>12</sup> (we will further this analysis of law further on). Thus the creation of any given subjectivity is always an act of repetition, to an adherence to a law which does away with a form of life that can no longer be extricated from it, even if it is foundational for its creation. At the same time, known or unknown to the subject, these liturgical repetitions are necessary for sustaining the entire economy of their existence in relation to a given hegemony (this does not mean economy only in the sense of markets etc). Thus, as Agamben says elsewhere, "liturgy and oikonomia are [...] strictly linked, since as much in the songs and the acclamations of praise as in the acts of the priest, it is always only the "economy of the saviour that is meant".<sup>13</sup> Thus, as we will see later on, the entire conception of law and social contract must be fundamentally reimagined, if we are to reimagine the *oikos*.

## 2.0 Formalist or Formless Objectivity:

In a certain sense we could say that the flattening of time, as just discussed, is matched by the absolutization of extension, a regression towards a Cartesian metaphysics in which the body can still be affected by the mind, despite somehow being immaterial toward it.<sup>14</sup> This is seen most regularly in the concretization of identity whereby a subject sees itself as fully formed, separate from its body, and yet always in complete control. Thus, it is presupposed, if only unconsciously, that the primacy of thought is always on the side of subjec-

tivity, even if this subjectivity is nothing more than an empty extension. However, it should be noted that the split between objectivity and subjectivity also no longer exists as a strong dualism per se; instead, the subjective is absolutized into a formless objectivity. The pure fungibility of capitalism, and the impossibility of anchoring identity in anything stable is mirrored in the infinite sprawl of techno-space, where categories such as the means of production, and ownership of one's labour become infinitely more dissolute<sup>15</sup> while, simultaneously transforming our subjectivity into an absolute but empty and alienated objectivity, an auto-reification, and an objectivity without content or form (we will come back to this point in the proceeding section).

Now, by techno-space we do not merely mean the space which is "occupied" by technology, or by the internet or anything of that nature, although this is also included, but rather the entirety of space as a bio-political means of technique, and its relation to digitality, only in so far as we understand digitality as specifically subordinated to a form of capitalist, and identitarian abstraction and exchange—subordinate to a space of reasons which always values pure exchange, as opposed to use value. Thus it is also important not to view technology, tout court, as necessarily promoting these traits. As Donna Haraway points out vis-à-vis the cyborg and the *oikos*, it can actually act as a subversive force: "No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines technological polls based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other."<sup>16</sup> Thus questions such as what does it mean to be a labouring instagram influencer, to profit purely off of advertising? are not dissimilar to questions of what it means to produce a car in a factory. Both are questions of capitalist abstraction, and the reduction of the body to a spectral relation of exchange.

Furthermore, if we briefly look at the role of Aesthetics in contemporary societies (primarily Western societies) we can further derive

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 82.

<sup>12</sup> See also: Katerina Kolozova, "VIOLENCE: The Indispensable Condition of the Law," *Angelaki* 19:2 (2014), 99-111

<sup>13</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 173.

<sup>14</sup> For this relation between metaphysics, capitalism, and space see: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Katerina Kolozova, "Poststructuralism, Chapter in the Forthcoming Oxford Handbook of Feminist Philosophy [under contract]."

<sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and SocialistFeminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London-New York: Routledge), 149-181.

what constitutes this formless objectivity. What is presented by, from, and to us, what is reflected back in the world of a techo-space which appears all encompassing and which makes us forget that this space is indeed itself nothing more than matter, and in the case of the literal internet, nothing more than underwater tubes, powerlines, and satellites?<sup>17</sup> If, as Walter Benjamin write, the introduction of aesthetics into political life leads to war, and in particular fascism<sup>18</sup> then what occurs when political life is entirely internalized, when material connections become voided by spectral subjective projections, when the only thing that matters is itself aesthetics, and finally, when we have already been reduced to bare life, when bare life has become integrated into the very functioning of the political system. It seems at first glance to be a war against oneself as a self, or perhaps, rather, the subject becomes the plane for every war, as reflecting nothing more than an empty category of representation. Every war is grounded in subjectivity, on nationalist subjectivity, on identitarian subjectivity, on capitalist subjectivity, on subjectivities which simultaneously view themselves as objective. To specify, what I mean is not that wars are not based on material circumstances, but that the *urgrund* of war is always based in a distorted subjectivity, a subject-centered subjectivity, so to speak, in which the material world is subjected to and treated as abstractly separated from the world of self-hood, and the world of matter, in short, when it loses all form. It is precisely this individually ideological conception that Kolozova outright rejects via her appeal to Marx's third party perspective. What this perspective entails, in its simplest possible form, is a moving away entirely from the concept of objects as being constituted by subjects, or in our case, the self-objectification of subjects as formless objects, and instead insisting on viewing ourselves as objects amongst other objects, as being viewed by other objects, and thus both materially, and as it were, universally connected. As Marx himself states: "To be objective, natural and sensuous, and at the same time to have object, nature and sense outside oneself, or oneself to be object, nature and sense for a third party, is one and the same thing."<sup>19</sup> Thus, as we will continue to see, it is only by mov-

ing away from subjective projections, and moving towards materialist ways of organization that a new *oikos* can be created.

### 3.0 On the Construction of Law and Commons:

In order to understand how a post-subjective foundation of law, and furthermore a post-subjective understanding of social institutions and organizations could exist, means moving beyond both subjective dissolution qua absolute democracy, (such as it is in Rousseau, for example), and absolute particularism, as it is in Western contemporary democracy, or what Badiou in the *Logics of Worlds* coins democratic materialism. Let us define our terms more clearly. Rousseau, in the social contract, insists on an infallible, indivisible common will. A people is a people only insofar as it subjects its particular wills to the general will which is itself a metaphysical concept which can only be secured by way of an extrajudicial command from a legislator.<sup>20</sup> Thus the particular is always subservient to the general will, and is essentially privatized, while the general will is always excessive, in excess, but nonetheless guided by a higher force. Thus it does not escape a certain state of exception, and instead remains trapped in a philosophical self-certainty. Current liberal democracies (in general),<sup>21</sup> however, function by removing any generality of will, what matters, in the last instance, is quite simply the particular will as such, devoid of any genericity or universality (outside of the universality of the commodity form). By voting and deciding on our own best interests we are meant to be voting and deciding on what is best for the whole. Law, the governance of subjects—both legal and in general—cannot but be borne out of the same fabric of the very subjects it wishes to govern. This is the oldest metaphysical sleight of hand.

Natural law, or nature itself, is said to be pre-subjective, yet wielded over subjects as a sort of unavoidable and inviolable necessity for said subjects—an internalization of the vestiges of what it can never fully know, and the embodiment of particular ideological axioms which are said to be eternally true. The language of natural law, in

<sup>17</sup> See for instance: Paul Cockshott, *How the World Works: The Story of Human Labor from Prehistory to the Modern Day* (Monthly Review Press, 2020)

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General," *Manuscripts*. Available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses* (Yale University Press, 2002), 180.

<sup>21</sup> Illiberal democracies are of course not a solution to this, nor do they follow an identical logic. In fact, in many ways their logic mirrors that of the Rousseauian absolute democracy as it is described above more than what we would consider liberal democracy to be in the West.

its democratic-capitalist sense (both absolute and particular), is always-already couched in the language of rights, whether they be individual or collective. These rights, however, are always also tied to a form of representation, that is to say, they do not concern life as such, but the right to project and see reflected a form of limited, and particular life. This is particularly true of the liberal democracies of the West. The issue with this is that representation as such does not allow for a universal or prelingual right, a right to a society not dominated by that which exists, by, as it is in Western democracies, capitalist particularity, by formless objectivity. Again, this must be taken in conjunction with the necessity of creating a thought which is not subject-centered. The language of rights becomes immediately problematic when subjected to this form of limitation. The language of rights in liberal democracy is always-already the language of individual freedom, even if what is understood is universally so. Freedom means nothing else but this, and in fact we are no longer even trapped in the genericity of Kant's reasonable subject who obeys the universal (via the infinity of their will) and creates the sovereign through the apotheosization of individually universal reason (all reasonable individuals can reason the same communally, there is a form of archimedean access point that allows the individual and the common to unite through formality).<sup>22</sup> Instead, even this form (although equally subject-centered) of universality is gone. The liberal capitalist subject behaves in the last instance as the internalization of a Kantian form of reason. Language and reason fail, but only when describing the outside world. The noumenon has become the self, and phenomena has become the other, everything which is not the self, or which cannot be said to be generated by the self. We legislate ourselves absolutely, and the genericity of will which was once meant to serve the universal is transformed, in its postmodern mutation, into a pure voluntarism. Now, rights and representation cannot but be understood as reinforcing this phenomenon, the very structures of our questions concerning freedom revolve around this, the democratic language we generate is never a neutral appeal, (just as nature itself is never a neutral appeal), but a call to and from an isolated and atomized individuality, an individuality which is subjected to the logic of the fungibility and self-valorization of capital. Walter Benjamin, in a searing and polemical excoriation of this form

of representation, unflinchingly identifies the intrinsic link between fascism and representation, between the abolition of private property—a right in excess of representation—and the horrors that can arise when representation is divorced from this.

The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property.<sup>23</sup>

What's crucial to take from this is twofold: firstly, that representation, both in the metaphysical and political sense (although the line can often become blurred), itself cannot be a self-qualified good, and secondly, that in order to change the structure of society, and, as it were, the structure and understanding of subjectivity as something extra individual, it is necessary to also change property relations, to change material relations, and to reclaim a right to life that is not bound to the infinite sprawl of commodity circulation, and a life of capitalist alienation. Katerina Kolozova brilliantly punctuates what is necessary in order to escape this situation, and move towards a new form of socialism: "The precondition for such order is the "right" to life that is pre-legal and yet again law enabling: the establishment of the new social contract relies on the axiom according to which value is materially determined and is thus nonalienated from physicality and without the tendency to subjugate and exploit it for the production of "value"."<sup>24</sup> Here, Kolozova correctly identifies one of the most crucial aspects needed to transform the *oikos*, a transformation which is, as she says, "[...] the precondition of the political-economic transformation toward a socialist *oikonomia*."<sup>25</sup> For Kolozova, there is a direct equation between 'value' and 'meaning'. The brute senseless part of being, matter without intention, matter without meaning, is also matter without value, matter which

<sup>22</sup> See, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 20.

<sup>24</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* (Bloomsbury, 2020), 109.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

is not transposed, or perhaps we could even say transubstantiated into meaningful, productive and reproductive power. The prelingual right to life, is the right to a value-less meaningless life. This of course does not mean that life is meaningless, that it is disposable, but rather that our conception of being tout court needs to free itself from the transcendental index of value. In other words, the human conception of both humanity, and animality, must be minimized to the furthest possible extent. The truth of being is its irreducibility to meaning—freed from the overdetermination of the transcendental qua symbolic order (as it exists as a purely symbolic and not scientific extension), and freed from the pretension to conquer and domesticate the real for subjective and philosophical purposes. Even more crucial here, however, is the need to move away from exchange-value, and towards an economy of use-value. Without this crucial step, it is utterly impossible to change either the *oikos* or *oikonomia*.<sup>26</sup> Insofar as human beings (and animals) are reduced to mere resource, while simultaneously being valued only abstractly and alienly as exchange value, the possibility of a new society remains a mere fantasy.

What could a social contract of the pre-legal actually look like? What is it that could bind life together without relying on representation, empty rights, identitarian struggles, and the promotion of exchange value? Such a social construct must always begin as prior to, just as the real is prior to thoughts' appropriation of it. However, we must also safeguard against the filling up of this prior with content, or absolutizing it such that it becomes a type of capital N nature, lest we fall into a trap of atavism, and create value under a new name. Furthermore, a subject of such a contract, what we have been calling a post-subject, or what could otherwise be deemed a non-subject, must always be a materialist subject devoid of the concept of surplus-value, and which is determined by a certain immanence of suffering, of solidarity to the human condition, which is always al-

<sup>26</sup> In a recent review of Katerina Kolozova's *Holocaust of Animals* published in *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, Oscar Pichardo Isaak correctly points out that it is also necessary to completely restructure currency itself along the same lines in order to do away with the primacy of exchange-value, and that this can only be done through a complete abandonment of the valorization of surplus and the commodity form—adding that recent innovations in currency, such as bitcoin, and other blockchain based currencies, do not by themselves allow for a revolution in this sense, but can allow for future revolutionary conceptions of a use-value based currency. Oscar Pichardo Isaak, "An Algorithmic Socialism in Defense of the Lived Without Life: A Political Proposal through Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals by Katerina Kolozova," *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 18:1-2 (2021).

ready the condition of living beings as such. Thus, we could say axiomatically that what is needed for a new social contract, and thus a new *oikos*, is an end to the self-valorization of the commodity form, an end to complete particularity, an end to subjectivity-centered thought, and finally, an end to a system of value (amongst many other things, most notably that of the dismantling of patriarchal structures).

#### 4.0 Decentered-Subjectivity and Minor Politics

A key tenet of surpassing subjectivity-centered thought is the over-coming of master discourses, without diluting the idea of universality, so that we do not end up with either a democratic-capitalist relativism, nor any form of totalitarianism. This is expressed succinctly by Deleuze and Guattari in their book on Kafka when they state: "There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor, to hate all languages of masters."<sup>27</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, a minor political stance is defined by a sort of formal disjunction, an emptying out which also pushes to the limit the internal consistency of an expression. The point is not to enact a Marxist archeology (Jameson, Adorno, etc), to prove step by step the ideological import of a text, or, to simply reveal, via deconstruction, the contingency of language— its inevitable relatedness/situatedness. Rather, the minor is a revolutionary split inherent not only to the said, but to the possibility of expression itself, or in Lacanian parlance, it is an issue not only on the level of the statement, but on the level of enunciation. Thus, in order to create a society based around use value and universalism, and not surplus value and particularism, it is necessary to dislocate the subjects' relation to the whole, that is, to de-center it, without merely recentering and internalizing it, such that a minor discourse becomes a major or master discourse of the self. In such scenarios, it becomes almost impossible to imagine anything outside of one's own perception, which is indeed, fundamentally, one of the cornerstone effects of capitalism. As Jelisaveta Blagojević states: "What late capitalism has produced is the claustrophobic maneuver of positing that everything is always already included, calculated, possible, thinkable: so, what it took from us is precisely the notion of the "outside" that has been, for a long time, linked to

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 26.

the domain of madness, to the domain of literature, or to that of revolution."<sup>28</sup> This revolution for Blagojević, following Deleuze and Guatarri, is always minor, it is always a disjunction that does not allow itself to fall into dogma, which includes, of course, the dogma of logo-centrism, but rather opens up an entire new space for imagination, for imagining radically new possibilities. However, it is worth nothing that this outside is not so much spatial as temporal, it is an immanent torsion present in the present. "Non thinking," according to Blagojević, is thinking according to a different logic, a different way of understanding which is not always-already swallowed by the hegemony of the current situation, but, which nevertheless does not call upon trans-historical teloi, or axioms, to initiate change. Change is made possible in a certain way through subjective self-dissolution, by abandoning one's anchoring in the here and now, and thus the ideologies and sedimented logic that appear as otherwise unavoidable. However, we should also be wary about the way Deleuze and Guatarri attempt to move past any meta-narratives, and especially Marxist meta-narratives. Deterritorialization does not by itself lead to radical change, or at least not change that doesn't always change the same. While the dissolution of the subject is certainly critical, it cannot be taken as sufficient, and can even be easily corrupted as in the case of Nick Land. What Land shows us, is that it is possible to assert a sort of (un)radical (as ungrounded) and staunchly anti-anthropocentric materialism which nonetheless relies on a sort of mystical, and metaphysical beyond. In other words, what we can learn from his writing is that the opposite of subjective idealism is not necessarily materialism (or any of its variants) but rather non-subjective idealism, or what Land himself calls, following Deleuze and Guatarri, virtual materialism.<sup>29</sup> What replaces human hubris—anthropocentric thought—in Land, is the complete abolition of the human mind (as uniquely privileged in any way) in favour of the infinite sprawl of multiplicity. This multiplicity, however, in no way implies a socialist *oikonomia*, but, as is the case for Land, quite the opposite, the embracing of the infinite flux of capitalist circulation. Thus, we must fully oppose this rhizomic fluidity to a Marxian conception of motion. This is laid out brilliantly by Thomas Nail in *Marx in Motion*:

<sup>28</sup> Jelisaveta Blagojević, "Thinking WithOut," in *After the Speculative Turn: Realism, Philosophy, and Feminism*, ed. Katerina Kolozova and Eileen A. Joy (Punctum Books, 2016), 98.

<sup>29</sup> Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007* (Urbanomic, 2011), 325.

For Marx, all beings are sensuous objects. This does not mean that everything is made of static blocks of atomistic, discrete stuff following mechanistic laws— as we know from the doctoral dissertation. Objects are continually produced because matter flows. These flows then constantly fold over themselves again and again to produce and reproduce stable cycles of sensation. Objects are not merely passive, suffering things. Again, for Marx, objects are both active and passive, both producing and consuming at the same time. They objectify the contradiction between essence and existence through continual modulation.<sup>30</sup>

Here too the distinction between constant movement and mutation must be properly separated from the idea of capital's constant dissolution of relations. The movement as a kind of flux is actually an antidote to the objectification of capital fixes, but only if we understand it as doing away with the subject-object relation in a material way, without, simultaneously, relapsing into the naivety of an object oriented ontology. Capitalist circulation and Marx's movement have nothing in common, or rather, what they have in common is a common understanding about the dissolution of totality as such. However, for Nail's Marx, constant motion does not mean constant abstraction and the exploitation of value, but the precise opposite. Motion is in a sense the materialization of both subject and object; it does away with the distinction in order to allow for a sensuousness of both.

### 5.0 On Science and Revolution

Political revolution is also always-already a scientific revolution, and an act of formalization. It is the changing and redefining of terms, and the opening up of possibilities through a universal shift in our understanding, which is universal particularly because of its simplicity, its minimization is also simultaneously its expansive potential, the distillation of vast complexities into relatable signs. There is no paradigm shift in politics which is not simultaneously a shift in science, a shift in political power and organization. The formalization of politics is not to be conflated with raising it to the absolute, all procedures of formalization are inherently procedures of universal-

<sup>30</sup> Nail, *Marx in Motion*, 44.

ization, that is to say, they do away with the imported vestiges of subjectivity-centered thought in order to reach a minimally transferable truth. Here, both Badiou and Kolozova, although ultimately disagreeing on what is meant by formalization, show solidarity to the universal by rejecting the apotheosization of subjectivity. As Badiou states in relation to language and mathematics: "The existence of a common language is also the existence of a shared Idea. The effectiveness of mathematics in the sciences is due precisely to the fact that mathematics formalizes the scientific idea. Politics equally needs the capacity to quickly formalize the analysis of a situation and the tactical consequences of this analysis. This is the sign of a strategic vitality."<sup>31</sup> A shared strategy, and a common language, however, cannot simply mean the adjustment of political vocabulary. Inventing a new word for communism, or worker's strikes, or solidarity does not in itself bring about change. What's needed for a common language is a common structure of language. Thus language is not only a tool for communication, but a reflection of the possibilities of change. According to Kolozova, the transferability of scientific knowledge qua formalism is made possible by a form of cloning, and an adherence to the syntax of the real, which functions through a process of minimization. Formalism is in a certain sense simple, simple in that it takes complex ideas and renders them intelligible in short but pungent formulas that nonetheless do not make claims of authority over the real, thus making them universally transferable, without importing undo meaning. "One can only clone the effects that betray a certain syntax, but the rest remains enmeshed with the real, and poetic and philosophical language becomes unavoidable."<sup>32</sup> That being said, we must also distinguish this form of formalism, from what is known simply as scientific consensus. Far too often this word is thrown around as a form of master discourse, we are meant to trust blindly in a barrage of facts, facts that often betray philosophical, ideological, and political underpinnings. In such a case sciences becomes Science, a form of usurpation over the real and sensuous which appears to exist on its own two feet. For precisely this reason we must also be careful here. Creating an *oikos* based around the primacy of scientific thought runs the intrinsic risk of becoming a society based on instrumentalization, and mechanicity, the type of society that Heidegger, amongst many

others, so strongly warns us about. The key to combatting this, is understanding the limits of thought, and the indeterminacy of matter itself, insisting instead on a material formalism that moves beyond either positivism or idealism, and towards a materialist and scientific *oikos*.

### Conclusion:

While this paper does not provide any concrete conclusions on what must be done, it has tried to act as a minimal prolegomena to what a reimagined *oikos* could look like, at least abstractly, or, at the very least, lay out some of the core steps we would need to take to even begin imagining it. If we do not insist on moving away from subjectivity-centered thought, if we do not change property relations, if we do not emphatically insist on creating an economy based on use-value instead of exchange-value, and if we do not understand the importance of a materialist relation to science then we will be unable to change the society we live in, a society which is dominated by spectral abstractions, and alienated subjectivities, a society which valorizes isolation and control, and dismisses universality and being in common. Thus, we must continue to imagine new ways of constructing the future, new ways of constructing the economy, and finally new ways of constructing the *oikos*.

<sup>31</sup> Alain Badiou, *Greece and the Reinvention of Politics* (Verso, 2017), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Kolozova, *Holocaust of Animals*, 84.



## Maxwell Kennel

### Plato, Adorno, and the Dialectic

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**Abstract:** This essay shows substantial connections between Plato’s dialectical approach in *The Republic* and Adorno’s 1958 lectures in *An Introduction to Dialectics*. Although the relationship between Adorno and Aristotle has received some attention, little work has been done either demonstrating or making connections between Plato and Adorno, especially on the topic of the dialectic. This is likely because Adorno himself has little to say about Plato’s dialectic, although he does refer often to Plato’s ideas and forms, and sometimes to his aesthetics. This essay reads against the grain to show how Plato and Adorno conceive of dialectical thinking in strikingly similar ways that run parallel with their discontinuities, and concludes with the suggestion that the figure of chiasmus is well-positioned to push the limits of dialectical thinking.

**Keywords:** Plato, Adorno, Dialectic

Plato’s dialogues have long been considered to be the origin of the variegated history of the dialectic – a term that suffers from a broad semantic range in both its historical and contemporary uses, and a term that has been variously reduced to the thesis-antithesis-synthesis formula, to an architectonic system, and to a method ready for application.<sup>1</sup> Hegel famously made the ancient form of the dialectic central to his project from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the *Science of Logic*, and in his lectures on the history of philosophy in which he describes and appropriates the dialectic of Plato and others.<sup>2</sup> Much more recent than Hegel’s development of the term is Theodor Adorno’s “negative dialectics” project. The 1966 preface to Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* begins with the claim that “Negative Dialectics is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of a ‘negation of negation’ later became the succinct term.”<sup>3</sup> In these opening lines to his great work Adorno not only signals the importance of the Hegelian “negation of negation” for dialectical thinking, but cursorily locates the origin of the dialectic in the works of Plato before advancing his negative critique of positive dialectics that side with concepts rather than the objects they conceptualize.<sup>4</sup> However, throughout the rest of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno only makes oblique references to Plato, sometimes noting the “aporetic form” of the Socratic dialogues while also accusing Plato of prioritizing synthesis and being a “partisan of unity [*partiisch für die Einheit*].” like Hegel.<sup>5</sup>

Although the relationship between Adorno and Aristotle has received some recent attention,<sup>6</sup> little work has been done either

<sup>1</sup> Consider the problems of using the definite article before “dialectic” highlighted in: Fredric Jameson, “Three Names of the Dialectic,” in *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 3-70. See also the reductive treatment of dialectic in Karl Popper, “What is Dialectic?” [1940] in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 419-451.

<sup>2</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy. Volume 2: Plato and the Platonists*. Trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). Hegel writes that “the aim of the Platonic dialectic is to confuse and to resolve [*verwirren und aufzulösen*] the finite ideas of men, in order to bring about in their consciousness what science demands, the consideration of that which is.” (51).

<sup>3</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik: Gesammelte Schriften Band 6*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 7. See also the existing English edition, *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), xix. On the place of the negative dialectics project in the Frankfurt School see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977), Ch. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158/158.

<sup>5</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 26/35, 158/158.

<sup>6</sup> For recent work that examines connections between Adorno and Aristotle see: Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge

demonstrating or making connections between Plato and Adorno, especially on the topic of the dialectic. This is likely because Adorno himself has little to say about Plato's dialectic, although he does refer often to Plato's ideas and forms, and sometimes to his aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> In his lectures on metaphysics, Adorno seems to suggest that Aristotle, rather than Plato, marks the true beginning of dialectical thinking because Aristotle addresses mediation while Plato is constrained to static forms.<sup>8</sup> However, Adorno's reading of Plato as a thinker of pure concepts, in contrast to Aristotle as an innovator of mediation, misses the complex mediations of Plato's dialectical approach, especially in *The Republic*.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this study is to read against the grain and show substantial connections between Plato's dialectical approach in *The Republic* and Adorno's dialectical approach in his preparatory lectures for *Negative Dialectics*. In his reading of Adorno's fourth lecture in *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, Tom Whyman concludes that "The Platonic doctrine of forms is held by Adorno to be, effectively, coercive in nature."<sup>10</sup> Although this essay will only perform a close reading of two primary sources, at least one implication of this comparison will be to challenge the notion that Plato's dialectical approach is fundamentally coercive. While Whyman's evaluation of Adorno's view of Plato is focused on the forms in his lectures of 1965, below I will question whether Plato's general dialectical approach is coercive in such a way that would fall into the problem of positive dialectics that Adorno identifies. While not necessarily accepting or rejecting Whyman's interpretation of Adorno – given the complexity added by Adorno's more generous treatment of Plato in 1958 at the

beginning of *An Introduction to Dialectics* – below I will show how Plato's approach in *The Republic* and Adorno's approach in his *An Introduction to Dialectics* similarly challenge rhetorical coercion toward predetermined ends, and accord in their dialectical focus on the problem of mediation rather than the maintenance of stable identities.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, Adorno's preliminary materials for his negative dialectics project have been published as English translations. Filling in the background of Adorno's magnum opus, in 2008 the fragments of his 1965-1966 course were published as *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, which were translated into English from the 2003 German edition.<sup>12</sup> These twenty-five lectures – the first ten of which were transcribed from his oral presentations, and the latter fifteen from his notes – give a piecemeal account of the preparation of what would later become the book, *Negative Dialectics*. In 2017, the materials from yet another lecture course were published in English translation as *An Introduction to Dialectics*.<sup>13</sup> In this 1958 course, taught at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Adorno gave twenty lectures that have also been transcribed from original oral presentations in much fuller form than the later *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*. By reading *An Introduction to Dialectics* the reader of Adorno can, in some small way, become a student of Adorno, and bear witness to a clear and meticulous account of dialectical thinking that begins with Plato and proceeds in an oral style that shows Adorno to be a clear and compelling educator in the classroom.

Although he originally presented his research on dialectics in the 1965-1966 lecture course, in the summer semester of 1969 Adorno planned to give a course entitled: "An Introduction to Dialectical Thinking," and an advanced seminar on the same topic.<sup>14</sup> However,

University Press, 2013) and Tom Whyman, "Adorno's Aristotle Critique and Ethical Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 25:4 (2017).

<sup>7</sup> See Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics* (1958/1959). Ed. Eberhard Ortland. Trans. Wieland Hoban (London: Polity, 2018), 86-95, 107. In his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that "Precisely Plato's ontology, more congenial to positivism than dialectic is, took offense at art's semblance character, as if the promise made by art awakened doubt in the positive omnipresence of being and idea, for which Plato hoped to find surety in the concept." Distinguishing between dialectic as he conceives of it, and Plato's work, Adorno resists the notion that "hypostatized universal concept" of ontology is adequate to the attention to form and beauty in aesthetics. See Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), 110. Adorno also writes briefly of *The Republic* in "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems* (1965). Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 29-32, 33, 41

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 46, 55, 74, 129-130.

<sup>10</sup> Whyman, "Adorno's Aristotle Critique and Ethical Naturalism," 1214.

<sup>11</sup> Adorno writes that "non-positivist thinking is precisely that which is not content with the rigid logic of exclusivity – the logic of either-or: either mediated or immediate, either concept or pure non-conceptuality – but analyses phenomena in such a way that seemingly self-evident statements like the one I just mentioned grow more and more shaky." Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 68. My argument below suggests that both Adorno's dialectic and Plato's dialectic challenge this kind of positivist either-or thinking by means of similarly open-ended mediations.

<sup>12</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Polity, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Theodor Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics* (1958). Ed. Christoph Ziermann. Trans. Nicholas Walker (London: Polity, 2017). All in text citations appear in brackets as follows: (ID, page number).

<sup>14</sup> Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Polity, 2005), 475.

as is well known, the intervention of student activists caused Adorno to discontinue the lectures. The protesting students, who insisted that Adorno's work no longer held potential resources for emancipatory political action, prevented Adorno from moving forward with the course – a course that included a plan “to alter the traditional shape of the academic lecture [by inviting] his students to put questions to him at any time so as to create a forum for open discussion.”<sup>15</sup> Although Adorno's desire to create an open forum in his lectures of 1969 was not realized at that time, a close look at the 1965-1966 lecture course reveals hints about the discursive environment that he may have had in mind.

Adorno's declining popularity during the rise of the student protest movements in the late 1960s seems to have had something to do with his dialectical refusal of partisan thinking (partisanship being one of his accusations against Plato and Hegel in *Negative Dialectics*). Although we might be inclined to look to Plato and Adorno for dialectical tools for resisting polarization and advancing emancipatory politics – political goals that I am deeply sympathetic with – I will demonstrate below that in neither thinker do we find the kind of approach that could be easily put to use for emancipatory purposes without also transforming those who attempt to use it. Dialectical thinking, as it is described below, cannot be used with integrity as an external means to a political end without transforming the soul of the speaker (Plato) and educating the student against simplistic thinking (Adorno). This is not to say that dialectic in Plato and Adorno prohibits activism, decision, and emancipatory action, but it is to say that both figures are very concerned with the ways that dialectic can become instrumentalized and essentialized in the rush toward political action.

Counter to the two-option structure that is staged by polarized politics, below I show how both Plato and Adorno use a dialectical form of inquiry that is more concerned with the complexities of mediation (the ‘how’) than the contradiction of stable identities (the ‘what’). In this study I make hitherto undeveloped connections between Plato's Socratic dialectic in *The Republic* and Adorno's concept of dialectic in his *An Introduction to Dialectics* – a course that he presumably intended to repeat and develop in the final years of

his life. I begin by giving a literary reading of Plato's use of dialectic in the Socratic dialogues of *The Republic* that challenges Adorno's focus on Plato's forms and ideas. In doing so, I provide a reading of the text that attempts to meet it on its own terms, clear of as much contemporary accretion as possible. Although I do not make a case for the linear or causal influence of Plato's *Republic* upon Adorno's preparatory lectures or *Negative Dialectics*, I do suggest that Adorno's vision of dialectical thinking, especially in his lectures, accords in surprising ways with how dialectic is figured in Plato's *Republic*. I then provide an account of Adorno's *An Introduction to Dialectics*, before drawing parallels between the two, and before, finally, concluding the study with an attempt to point beyond some of the limitations of dialectical thinking by turning to the figure of chiasmus to constructively thematize identity and mediation.

Overall, my focus will be on providing a close textual analysis of two key sources that exemplify dialectical thinking, favoring text over context in ways that are suggestive rather than exhaustive. In accordance with this approach, I argue that the dialectical refusal to proceed from authoritative grounding concepts is a major way that the two works accord in both their form and content. At the same time I also challenge this division in a way that aligns with Adorno's contention in *An Introduction to Negative Dialectics* that “the problem of dialectic would be not simply to insist upon the moment of discontinuity but, rather, to connect the moments of continuity and discontinuity with one another, namely to grasp continuity and discontinuity themselves as reciprocally mediated” (ID, 148). Correlatively, both the defining features of dialectic that I identify in Plato and Adorno, and the way I draw connections between them, will refuse reduction to straightforward continuity or simple discontinuity, but instead appear in a reciprocally mediated space.

### Plato<sup>16</sup>

Plato's *Republic* begins with those iconic and much interpreted words of Socrates, “I went down [*katebēn*] to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son of Ariston, to pray to the goddess and to observe the festival (327a).” Voegelin identifies in these first words, and

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> In-text citations are from *The Republic of Plato*. Trans. Allan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

“great theme,” a resonance with the descent of Homer’s Odysseus to Hades, and a recollection of “the Heraclitean depth of the soul that cannot be measured by any wandering.”<sup>17</sup> For Voegelin this descent poses the question of whether humanity can ascend from the depths, and death, upward to the height of life and justice. Soon we will see how Socrates is not “held by the depth,” but instead ascends from the “spiritual death and disorder of Athens” toward new life.<sup>18</sup> This new life prefigures later literary-philosophical ascents and descents, from Nietzsche’s down-going (*untergehen*) in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, to Augustine’s gesture heavenward in the opening lines of the *Confessions*.<sup>19</sup> But it also differs from them in important ways because it prepares for a dialectical inquiry that proceeds by stages through the clarification of hypotheses toward a different height than Zarathustra’s mountaintop and Augustine’s heaven. The narrative that frames Plato’s dialectical approach is one of wandering and toil, and – with mediation in mind, rather than singular identity – it holds interesting figural relationships of both continuity and discontinuity with Zarathustra’s *Wandern* and Augustine’s *peregrinatio*.

Following this descent to the cosmopolitan Piraeus, and after the festival, on their way home, Socrates and Glaucon are confronted by a servant of Polemarchus. When he and his entourage arrive, they give Socrates and Glaucon a choice between staying with them or proving to be stronger than they actually are. Voegelin writes: “He had gone down, and now the depth held him as one of them, friendly, to be sure, but with a playful threat of force [...]”<sup>20</sup> True to form, Socrates suggests a way apart from the threatening opposition of these two given options, namely: “our persuading you that you must let us go” (327c). Although Polemarchus vows not to listen, he agrees anyway, and they proceed, under mild duress, to talk (328a). A concern for mediation, rather than opposed identities between which one must decide, seems to guide both Socrates’ refusal and his positing of a third way.

And so, we begin with dialogue, because Plato begins with dialogue in *The Republic* – dialogue that refuses to maintain stable identities

<sup>17</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Plato* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 52–54.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> See my “Periodization and Providence: Time and Eternity between Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Telos* 188 (Fall 2019), 103–126., now Chapter 5 of my *Postsecular History: Political Theology and the Politics of Time* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Voegelin, *Plato*, 53.

in hard contradiction and instead mediates between opposing positions, but without the conciliatory apoliticism of a mediation between two stable identities that would merely “agree to disagree” or assume underlying shared values. Instead of a mediation that maintains an “either-or” disjunction, the dialectical mediations of Socrates are closer to Derrida’s later development of a “neither-nor” refusal that seeks the transformation of opposed categories.<sup>21</sup> When Polemarchus says to Socrates and Glaucon, in no uncertain terms, that they will stay with him for the festival and “talk,” the term used is *dialegein*, which means to separate or glean or pick something out. This kind of parsing is the basis of dialectic. A few lines later, Socrates gently mocks the aging Cephalus, stating that he is “delighted to discuss [*dialegomenos*] with the very old” (328d). The conversation that follows, on aging and *eros*, then leads into the question of justice that remains the key concern throughout the rest of the text. Distinguishing between friend and enemy, and addressing justice as a human virtue (335c), Socrates begins to separate cool from heat, wet from dry, injury from good, and so on – until Polemarchus is persuaded that it is not just to harm anyone (335d).<sup>22</sup>

Pausing here, the dialogue appears to be defined by a coercive and linear form of persuasion, with Socrates leading Polemarchus down a straight path through his questioning toward a predetermined conclusion. But if we continue to read, we will find a complication, as we frequently do in the ongoing and unfinished dialectical work of *The Republic*. Having thus far held back, Thrasymachus now interjects, hurling himself at them “as if to tear us to pieces,” says the narrative voice (335b). Thrasymachus had previously tried to take the discussion by force but was prevented from doing so. But now he shouts at Socrates and Polemarchus, accusing Socrates of

<sup>21</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics” in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 90, and Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41. I analyze these mediations in detail in my dissertation “Ontologies of Violence: Jacques Derrida, Mennonite Pacifist Epistemology, and Grace M. Jantzen’s *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*.” (McMaster University, Department of Religious Studies, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> The distinction between friend and enemy, and the notion that it is not just to harm and injure, have a long political history of opposition. Consider the distorted political theology and the founding of politics on relations of enmity in Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 17–18, and Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), esp. 18, 26–27.

merely leading Polemarchus down a pre-marked path. He says: “you know that it is easier to ask than to answer – but answer yourself and say what you assert the just to be” (336c). Insisting that Socrates give up his supposed sophism, Thrasymachus questions the question-answer format of the dialogue and demands a clear and precise assertion about the nature of justice. But Socrates’s dialogue continues to follow a question-answer pattern. Socrates responds to Thrasymachus’s exasperation, rebuking him and reaffirming the seriousness and flexibility of their dialogical endeavor (336e). But Thrasymachus continues, upset that Socrates will not answer his question dogmatically, by demanding that Socrates satisfy his desire and answer him (337e-338a). At this point in the dialogue a major ingredient in the pattern that Socrates establishes is the refusal to conclude or offer a final judgment. This refusal to construct an argument on a fundament, or base his conclusions on unchangeable definitions, is not only evident in spatial terms (like “fundament”) but involves a temporal element as well. Taking hold of their time, Socrates’ dialectical approach refuses to stop the conversation with a concluding statement, continuing on even when his interlocutors are exhausted. This is indeed what many of his interlocutors have trouble with, and what Socrates refuses to change as he continues the dialogue throughout *The Republic*. In some ways, we can already see that dialogue is a journey of the unfulfilled desire to find satisfaction in certain kinds of dogmatic conclusions (350d).

When Thrasymachus attacks Socrates and accuses him of directing the argument to work harm, following the assumption that justice is power (the “advantage of the stronger”), he forgets that his own attacking and demanding could reflect the same problem (338d). But the dialogue continues, and, true to *dialegein*, Socrates persists in making further distinctions. This is followed by an accusation from Polemarchus that Socrates is a “sycophant” who distorts the meaning of his words and intends to harm others through his argument (340d, 341a). More demands for precision come from Polemarchus, but the dialogue continues as they move deeper into the distinction between the ruler and the ruled. While making the weaker argument the stronger (340c), and setting speech against speech (348a), Socrates borrows from the Athenian legal paradigm of opposing court speeches, but points beyond this opposition

by suggesting that instead of one external judge, they appoint themselves as “both judges and pleaders at once” (348b).

The inconclusive end of the first book-break is then followed by further dialectics and discussion. Initially coerced into the conversation by the threatening demand to choose between staying with his newfound “friends” and proving stronger than them (perhaps an invitation to use force and coercion), Socrates now suggests that he may be free from the need to argue (357a), but Glaucon is not yet satisfied with Thrasymachus’s resignation, and pushes Socrates onward. Socrates continues to examine justice and its desires, telling a story in which the protagonist also goes down to a place he is curious about (359d). Beginning his discussion of the city (362b), and trying to address opposed arguments (362e), the dialogue continues into the second book of *The Republic*. Socrates identifies the limitations of language, understanding that the same word can have different meanings, but proceeding within these limits to discuss the city (368d-369a). The discussion then turns to the nature of the soul, the pursuit of philosophy, and the rearing of guardians, and Socrates argues that men [sic] must be educated in speech and its double form of truth and falsity (376e). The talk of dialectic is doubtless an essential part of Plato’s concern for education (*paideia*), especially his desire to educate against other figures and schools who seek to form the soul: the misologist, the erist, and the sophist.

Towards the end of the third book of *The Republic*, Socrates revisits the nature of dialogue in his explanation of music, describing the unmusical “misologist” as one who hates the *logos* of reasoned discourse and “no longer makes any use of persuasion by means of speech but goes about everything with force and savageness, like a wild beast” (411e). We can assume in some way that the *misologist* is the enemy of Socrates’s dialogue, as he sounds a lot like Thrasymachus, whose outburst first opposed the unfolding of the dialogue. The fifth book of *The Republic* also sees Socrates make another distinction important to dialectic. Speaking to Glaucon, Socrates states that “the power of the contradicting art is grand,” clarifying that this is because “many fall into it even unwillingly and suppose they are not quarreling but discussing, because they are unable to consider what’s said by separating it out into its

forms." (454a). These confused people "pursue contradiction in the mere name of what's spoken about" through an "eristic" and not a "dialectic" approach (454a). Sensitive to making this mistake himself, Socrates calls eristic that which has the appearance of dialectics, but which proceeds by using conversation instrumentally, as a means to the end of winning an argument, and not for the sake of truth. Unlike the dialectical approach, the eristic approach looks for victory and manipulates the difference between words and things to its advantage, destroying hypotheses rather than working with them. Although dialectic and eristic approaches may look similar in some circumstances, it is the soul of the speaker that truly decides the difference, for it contains the truth of speech within itself.

Following this, Socrates then asks what a philosopher is (472d), and what the nature of rule is (474c), carrying the discussion further and returning to the question yet again at the beginning of the sixth book (484b). As the dialogue proceeds and Socrates's relentless discussion begins to tire Glaucon and Adeimantus, the latter party levels a further accusation:

Socrates, no one could contradict you in this. But here is how those who hear what you now say are affected on each occasion. They believe that because of inexperience at questioning and answering, they are at each question misled a little by the argument; and when the little is collected at the end of the arguments, the slip turns out to be great and contrary to the first assertions. (487b)

Here, again, we find the accusation that Socrates has already decided how their conversation will end, while deceiving and coercing his interlocutors by leading them on under the guise of free inquiry. Here it may be helpful to step back from the narrative movements of the dialogue and examine Adeimantus' criticism from our vantage point as readers of Plato's *Republic*. From our position, we can treat *The Republic* as a book that contains Plato's coded doctrine from which we must derive a singular theory of dialogue and dialectic by matching parts of his narrative with corresponding parts of his philosophy. This abstraction of the philosophical out of the literary is often done by isolating Plato's doctrine of the forms from the narrative movement of *The Republic*. Adorno makes this

move when he focuses on Plato's ideas rather than his narrative,<sup>23</sup> and so does Hegel, when he attempts to look beyond Plato's dialogue to discover his true position.<sup>24</sup> A better option, however, is to read the dialogue as a narrative report of a conversation in which dramatic movements are meant to communicate something that is not communicable in abstract formulations. Where we stand as readers on this question will determine how we understand Plato's dialectic, the dialogues of Socrates, and the criticism presented by Adeimantus.

If we take a philosophical approach that understands the narrative form of the dialogue to be a veil that hides an architectonic philosophy of ideas and forms, then the dialectical approach must bear the weight of Adeimantus' critique, most notably, the suggestion that the conversation was being led all along by Socrates (and for us, by Plato) toward a predetermined and systematic end. However, if we take a literary reading of the text that does not look for a dogmatic and abstract definition of *the* dialectic, but instead considers dramatic narrative and philosophical concepts to be intertwined, then we must consider the possibility that *The Republic* is reflective of a free discussion, and perhaps even side with Socrates and say that dialectic does not necessarily entail coercion toward a foregone conclusion. Indeed, if we read the dialogue closely, we find that those who are being led into corners – being "checked" (487c) – are not falling prey to a sophistic trick of Socrates, but falling prey to the limitations of their own thinking by refusing to allow their definitions and assumptions to be transformed. If we accept this interpretation then we may find that in Socrates' dialogue there is no secret answer that his interlocutors must find, but rather an open ended and ongoing process of critically clarifying hypotheses by means of ascent and descent.

Adeimantus's accusation that Socrates is slowly edging his interlocutors away from their initial premises in a kind of deceptive ruse stands in contrast with Socrates' later definition of true philosophy as involving the same sort of *eros* as dialectic (458a-458d and 499b). Socrates does not really answer the charges laid against him by Adeimantus, but instead he proceeds under the

<sup>23</sup> Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 26-27.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Vol. II, 9-21.

assumption made by Adeimantus that the city must be ruled by philosophers (486e). According to his later account, philosophy is not “a taste for quarreling” or confusing persons for arguments (500b), but something oriented toward the divine (500d, 501b). For the philosophers, established as guardians of the city in speech (503b), justice must be pursued as a good both itself and for its consequences, and it seems that dialectic too must be pursued both in itself and for its consequences, lest it lapse into eristic or misology.

The dialogue continues into Book VI, and the participants forget that the idea of the good is greater than justice, and so they return to the subject again (504d-505a). With the “good” defined as pleasure for the many, and as prudence for the few, Socrates criticizes both definitions and further distinguishes between good and bad pleasures (505b-505c). This distinction is followed by the exhaustion of Glaucon and Adeimantus. Like Thrasymachus at the beginning, Adeimantus now demands that Socrates assert his fixed opinion (506c), but Socrates will still not do it. Tired of the back-and-forth movement of the dialogue (just as readers may tire of the present exposition), here Glaucon and Adeimantus are unsatisfied, for satisfaction always exists in relation to desire, and their desires have been left unfulfilled in interesting and instructive ways throughout *The Republic*.

Even when Socrates steps back from the idea of the good (506e), the framing language is still focused on desire, satisfaction, and attention. Here, and throughout the text, we see that Socrates almost always engages in talk and dialogue, even when dogma is demanded of him, and his relentless plodding dialectic takes a longer path (504b) that taxes the patience of everyone involved, pushing them to the breaking point of their attention spans. Agreement, disagreement, assertion, distinction, are each part of the movement of Plato’s dialectic, as it strains and sustains inquiry for both the characters in the dialogue and the readers and critics of the dialogue throughout the history of its reception. Throughout, Plato shows a preference not for settled identities that could be opposed in contradictory stasis, but for a restless and relentless back-and-forth that exhausts attentions, disappoints expectations, and transforms desires.

The sun, the line, and the cave form the basis of the following dialogue, and in the seventh book of *The Republic* Socrates speaks again of dialectic (531d). Here the dialectician is not one who is merely clever, but one who pursues discussion and argument, apart from the senses. The dialectician “attain[s] to each thing that is and does not give up before he grasps by intellection itself that which is good itself,” eventually finding the end of the “intelligible realm” (532a-532b). Like the illuminations of the cave, the journey of dialectic is a pining after that which is, and an ascent to the light (515e). After hearing the song of dialectic and its grasping toward the good by means of intellection, Glaucon is torn, finding Socrates’ statements about the sun and the cave difficult not to accept (532d). The dialectic ascent out of the cave toward the sun “leads the soul up to the contemplation of what is best in the things that are” (532c). At his limit, Glaucon demands that Socrates teach him dialectic like one would teach another art, desiring conclusion again, or desiring a kind of homecoming (532e). But Socrates tells Glaucon that he can follow no further, for then he would be learning dialectic on Socrates’ terms like one would learn a technique, and not on his own on the terms of the dialectic itself (533a).

Socrates distinguishes dialectic from the other arts that are concerned with opinions and human desires, stating that dialectic “proceeds in this direction, destroying the hypotheses, to the beginning itself in order to make it secure; and when the eye of the soul is really buried in a barbaric bog, dialectic gently draws it forth and leads it up above” (533d). In the eyes of Plato, dialectic is a kind of ascent from original but damaged hypotheses that attempts to pick out the good in the context of an argument, distinguishing it, and “going through every test, as it were in battle – eager to meet the test of being rather than that of opinion – he comes through all this with the argument [*logos*] still on its feet” (534c). In the transformations and mediations that Socrates both endures and causes, the identities of each *logos* are not destroyed. Instead they are transformed. This enduring, fighting, and distinguishing dialectic is atop the other topics of study for Socrates (534e). While studying, training, and educating, dialectic is paramount, for it concerns itself not only what that which is, but it tests the souls of those who study it, and those who succeed are capable of what Socrates calls the ascended perspective of “overview” (537c). This overview takes

many dissonant things into its view, but this view is not defined by the eyes but by the intellect, for in order to see dialectically one must “release himself from the eyes and the rest of sense and go to that which is in itself and accompanies truth” (537d).

And so, to both recapitulate and advance, we can identify that *The Republic* begins with a descent to the Piraeus that confronts Socrates with the opportunity to respond with force, after which Socrates suggests another way apart from two given options, hinting at the way in which he will proceed in the ensuing dialogues. The critique of dialectic begins with the question asked by Thrasymachus regarding whether dialectic is merely a coercive tool that Socrates is using to direct conversation toward his own ends (336c), and this critique continues with the similar question from Adeimantus in the sixth book (487b). Keeping with the question-answer format of the dialogues, these critiques of dialectic reject the instrumental arrangement of answers as pre-decided solutions to the problems posed in the questions. Instead of following a *telos* that Socrates has pre-decided, the critique initiated by Thrasymachus and Adeimantus proceeds from their valuing of an open-ended conversation that the participants are free to steer in different directions in the interest of following their subject matter. The approach of dialectic in Socrates' dialogues *The Republic* is certainly not free of force and coercion, but it is also not defined by fixed definitions of abstract “ideas” or “forms” that cannot be moved. Quite the opposite. Rather than stable identities, it is mediation and the transformation and education of the soul that define dialectic in *The Republic* in ways that resonate far more deeply with Adorno's work than he admits.

### Adorno

In the lectures that make up *An Introduction to Dialectics* Adorno not only attempts to describe what dialectical thinking is, but he also attempts to perform and demonstrate dialectical method in the process of teaching it to his students. Pedagogical and educational, Adorno's lectures are certainly of a different genre than *The Republic*. However, the fact that Plato's work is an authored literary work with dramatic personae who narrate philosophical ideas, and Adorno's lectures are transcribed records of university seminars, should not obscure their similar educational goals. Attention to and mediation of both continuity and discontinuity should permit such

a comparison between two very different texts that embody similar desires to educate.

Unlike Plato's *Republic*, in which dialectic is the manner of proceeding rather than the matter at hand, Adorno's lectures explicitly attempt to introduce dialectics as a concept and a method at the same time. But it is not so simple to separate form and content in either case. For Adorno, as for Plato, there is something about dialectical thinking that prohibits easy divisions. Indeed, Adorno's first lecture begins by emphasizing the immanent character of the dialectic. He writes that “at the point in philosophy where the dialectic first emerges, in the thought of Plato, it already implies the opposite, namely a disciplined form of thought which is meant to protect us from all sophistic manipulation” (ID, 1). For Adorno, the dialectic is a way to think rigorously and conceptually. It is both a “method of thought,” and a “specific structure that belongs to things themselves” (ID, 1). Method and structure, the dialectic serves as a measure of itself, holding itself accountable to the way things are, and to the way that it represents how things are.

For Adorno, at the beginning of *An Introduction to Dialectics*, Plato's dialectic is “a doctrine which enables us to order our concepts correctly, to ascend from the concrete to the level of the highest and most universal” (ID, 1-2). For Adorno, Plato's “ideas” and doctrine are the focus of his thought rather than the dramatic unfolding and literary form of the dialogues or the narrative movement of dialectic talk (ID, 2). Our reading above shows that Adorno misses something important in Plato's dialectic: the entanglement of its dramatic form with its content and character. However, Adorno's preoccupation with Plato's ideas and his lack of attention to the narrative form of his dialogues does not prevent him from seeing the open-ended character of dialectic in Plato. Although Whyman states of Adorno's 1965 lectures on metaphysics that “The Platonic doctrine of forms is held by Adorno to be, effectively, coercive in nature,”<sup>25</sup> here, in 1958, Adorno does not accuse Plato of coercion, but instead suggests that “Plato was already well aware that we do not simply know, without more ado, whether the conceptual order we bestow on things is also the order which the objects themselves possess” (ID, 2). This deferral to Plato is followed by some further critiques of how Plato and Aristotle do not think the non-conceptual

<sup>25</sup> Whyman, “Adorno's Aristotle Critique and Ethical Naturalism,” 1214.

being beyond these concepts, but Adorno's comments here do reflect more openness toward Plato's work than his reduction of Plato's ideas to metaphysics and secularized theology in his lectures on metaphysics.<sup>26</sup>

Adorno contends that the dialectic is experienced in "the way our concepts are driven on in the encounter with what they express" (ID, 2). Both expressing something about the world and seeking to grasp something in the world, the dialectic moves beyond manipulative conceptual ordering and seeks to correct itself in light of opposition, not as an "elaborate conceptual technique," but through thinking (ID, 2). In his first lecture Adorno begins, as readers of the present study may have begun, by considering the many prejudices that are held against the dialectic, the most notable of which is its reduction to a set of ritualized techniques bound to closure. Adorno quotes Hegel's claim that the dialectic is "the organized spirit of contradiction" (ID, 3), but, for Adorno, this organization need not be a codification that would attempt to arrive at stable and conclusive identities pitted against each other in eternal opposition or synthesized by a grand system. Instead, Adorno's dialectic performs a restless movement of mediation and transformation that is not exhaustive, but may be exhausting. Later, in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno will argue that dialectics attests to "the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived," positing that there is always a remainder in the movement by which thinking tries to make concepts adequate to objects.<sup>27</sup>

In the lectures that follow, Adorno describes this difficult movement of the dialectic as it tries to do justice to the concepts it both describes and prescribes. Adorno contends that the dialectic is both a procedure of thought that is enacted by the dialectician, but also something discoverable within things, making its double nature contingent upon some relation of identity between thought and being (ID, 4-5). Striving for clarity and seriousness in his treatment of the dialectic, Adorno leads his students toward a concept of the dialectic by refusing to "collapse" the matter of thought and the process of thought (ID, 6) – a refusal that may be reminiscent of Plato's refusal to collapse questions into answers, and problems

into solutions, by providing definitive and conclusive statements to satisfy his interlocutors.

While the Hegelian dialectic attempts to unify thought and being in a way that at least in some way resolves their opposition (recalling that Adorno accuses both Hegel and Plato of being "partisans of unity"), for Adorno the materialist varieties of the dialectic have a more agonistic structure that attempt to maintain both the stability of the opposed identities and their contradictory nature (ID, 9). Hegel's totality in absolute spirit has both an encompassing and dissolving effect upon the constituent identities and contradictions that make up the whole, but Adorno's dialectic does not see a version of itself, present or future, in which contradiction is solved, resolved, or dissolved. Just as he expressed in an aphorism in his *Minima Moralia*, in *An Introduction to Dialectics* Adorno repeatedly contests Hegel's statement that "the whole is the true" (ID, 7, 17, 20).<sup>28</sup> Although he will later argue more definitively that "the whole is the false," here, Adorno more subtly distinguishes between the prejudiced resistance to the dialectic that accuses it of arbitrariness, and the resistance found within the dialectic that prevents clean and stable definitions (ID, 7).

Without trying to possess or exchange concepts like neutral counters, Adorno contends that "dialectical thought refuses to provide a definition," precisely because of the non-equivalence of concept and thing (ID, 8). Again, it is not difficult to see strong parallels between the refusal of stable identities and definitions in Adorno and similar refusals in Plato's dialogues. Further explicating and revising Hegel's dialectic, Adorno affirms the presence of non-identity within identity – anticipating his later emphasis on the non-identity of the object with itself, and the non-identity of the object with the subject<sup>29</sup> – while rejecting the idea that the dialectic can proceed from or result in a *prima philosophia* (ID, 16).

Further resonant with the Socratic critique of the eristic, misologicistic, and sophistic instrumentalizations of argument, Adorno, in *An Introduction to Dialectics*, teaches his students that the dialectic "cannot be a way of securing one's own position in a discussion with

<sup>26</sup> Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 16-18.

<sup>27</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5/17.

<sup>28</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*. Trans. E.F.N Jephcott (London & New York: Verso, 1974), 50.

<sup>29</sup> See: Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 146/149-150.

others, although of course this is just what it is suspected of being" (ID, 12). For Adorno, the dialectic is a method that aims to resist method, attempting to further dialogue simultaneously with self-critique, exploring contradictions without allowing the historical determination of those contradictions to determine future inquiry (ID, 12).

Just as Plato's dialectic rejects the desire for stable definitions and seeks to "go to that which is in itself and accompanies truth" (537d), in Adorno's dialectic truth is not static, stable, or discoverable in origins. In the lectures, he challenges "the desire to trace things back historically as far as we can possibly go" (ID, 15) – something doubtless connected to his earlier critique of fascism in the introduction to the 1956 *Zur Metacritik der Erkenntnistheorie* on the grounds that it "sought to actualize a philosophy of origins."<sup>30</sup> Against the idea that the Absolute is self-identical – i.e. "the whole is the true" – Adorno argues that the qualification of the term "Absolute" constitutes a determination that cannot be external to the concept itself (ID, 17). The change that occurs in the concept when it is determined is a kind of mediation of the becoming of identities rather than their singular being (ID, 18). For Adorno, in his account of Hegel, it is always the case that "we fail to uphold our concepts unchanged," and in fact, "we must change them in order to grasp them" (ID, 18). At its best, what sets the dialectic apart from ordinary conceptual thinking about identities is that it does not seek to impose an order that tries to govern from without, but instead it is something immanently inner to concepts themselves, and therefore uniquely suited to both critique and appropriate its object. Where the sophist attempts to overdetermine the "inner life of concepts," for Adorno, the dialectician acknowledges that "it is not we who bring concepts into movement," for that movement is already underway (ID, 19).

Befitting a conversation that is always underway – a dialogue that is *in medias res* and not founded on an *arche* – in his lectures Adorno will occasionally break from his exposition on the topic at hand and make a case for the importance of the educational endeavor itself, both encouraging and challenging his students in such a way that

blurs the distinction between the concept of the dialectic and the kind of education that Adorno seeks to provide.<sup>31</sup> In his second lecture he advises his listeners that

if you really try and make the dialectic your own, as I strongly encourage you to do – that is, if you try to reproduce, and produce afresh, out of your own experience the motivations which ultimately give rise to dialectical thought – then it is precisely here, I believe, that you will discover what the law, what the objectivity we have been talking about, actually means, and how what actually determines our acting and thinking over and beyond our mere individuality, how what is historical is far more than what we merely are, more than what we conceive ourselves once and for all to be. (ID, 10)

The seriousness with which Adorno conducts himself is something he attributes to the pedagogical task of dialectic. In the third lecture he specifically argues that "the task of philosophical education today, it seems to me, is to serve those who seriously desire such an education specifically by immunizing them against the countless philosophical slogans and ready-made concepts which swirl around us everywhere" (ID, 20). The education of the soul in *The Republic* also combines *paideia* and *politeia* in ways that fundamentally challenge the ossification of thinking into abstract systems.<sup>32</sup>

Adorno opposes the "closed dialectic" of German Idealism, with a more "open dialectic" that rejects the discontents of the systematic impulse (ID, 21, 26-27), whether mechanistic or organicist (ID, 21-22). The open and unfinished character of the dialectic – an interpretation defended by Fredric Jameson, among others<sup>33</sup> – is important to Adorno, not only for philosophical and interpretive reasons, but also for specific political and social reasons such as the plight of mine workers and the oppressive structures of industrial production (ID, 22-23). The alienation of the factory worker points back, for Adorno, to the context of the totality in which it is situated (ID, 126).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For Adorno's reflections on pedagogy and critiques of the teaching profession see his 1965 essay "Tabus über dem Lehrberuf" in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*. Hsg. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Vol. II. Trans. Gilbert Highet (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), Chapter 9, esp. 198-200.

<sup>32</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations* (London: Verso, 2010), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Compare Adorno's comments on workers (ID, 23) with those of Simone Weil, "Factory Work,"

<sup>30</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*. Trans. Willis Domingo (Boston: MIT Press, 1983), 20.

How one thinks about that totality and the contradictions that work within and against it matters deeply for any emancipatory project, as has been pointed out in recent work on the decolonizing potential that remains in dialectics.<sup>35</sup> Although Plato and Adorno remain vulnerable to political critiques, their representations of dialectical thinking nonetheless have high political stakes. Much hinges on whether the dialectical relationship between identity and totality is grounded on force and coercion. Whether or not identities are subsumed into a totality by means of conceptual force, and whether or not dialogue is founded on a coercive pedagogy that leads to predetermined ends, will depend on how one conceives of the relationship between identity and mediation. Whether identities are held in stasis, eternally opposed, dissolved by synthesis, or mediated by an open-ended dialogue, will determine how those identities conceive of their own freedom in relation to forces of power and coercion.

### Dialectic

Considering the place of identity and mediation in Plato's *Republic* and Adorno's *Introduction to Dialectics*, we can observe that in each case the dialectic refuses to offer conclusions that cannot be revised by self-critique and the challenges posed by interlocutors. At each turn, dialectic disappoints the desire for dogmatic certainty and exhausts the patience of those who await a conclusion. However, this is not to say that dialectical thinking in either Plato or Adorno refuses to make clear and direct assertions, or disjunctive arguments that contradict others. Rather, it is to say, that dialectical thinking attempts to continually judge itself and the world from within the movements of its processes and not from an unquestionable measure that abstracts and transcends either the exchange of questions and answers in Plato (348a), or the immanent sphere of critique in Adorno (ID, 31). In both Socrates' conversations and Adorno's lectures it is evident that dialectic is found within (not founded upon) the mutual exchanges of discussion and talk, but also that dialectic exceeds casual talk and instead demands more, whether in Plato's taxing of the attention and endurance of his

interlocutors, or in Adorno's encouragement to his students to take up dialectical inquiry as their own in a serious way.

Dialectic demands more than the desire for fixed and stable identities. Instead, in both Plato and Adorno, dialectic represents a movement from identity to mediation. Socrates contrasts his dialectic with the works of the philodoxers (480a), misologists (411d), sophists (413a), eristics (454a), and geometers (511d) – each of whom are undialectical in their desires to fix the *logos* in place or use it as a means to an end. So too with Adorno, whose *Negative Dialectics* is premised upon the idea that fixing too determinately on the concept at the expense of the object is counter to the negative core of identities. Proceeding through moments of agreement and disagreement, confusion and understanding, patience and rushing, dialectics is an *eros* characterized by abrasive relations between its conversation partners and between subject and object, rather than conciliatory mediations that simply follow the flow of the conversation or attempt to force the object to conform to a pre-decided concept.

Reading the conversations in *The Republic* in light of their literary form (rather than in spite of it), we can identify that there is something inherently dramatic about dialectic in Plato (although not in the same sense in which the poets are dramatic). The drama of dialectic in these texts takes the form of a conversation that ebbs and flows, one that both continues and is interrupted, rather than a technique or dogma that can be taught or learned by the simple repetition of exercises. There is also a minimal drama in Adorno's lectures, noticeable in his candid engagements with major continental philosophers in *An Introduction to Dialectics*, and the brief commemoration of his friend Paul Tillich in the later *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*.<sup>36</sup> Even in the economy of a lecture course, small hints of his personal life and the periodization of the school term appear; one of his notes reads, "More on this after Easter" (ID, 312). Although it is not comparable to the sustained dialogue of Plato's *Republic*, even amidst Adorno's steady presentation of dialectical thinking, small moments break through the veneer of dissociation between ideas and life.

in *The Simone Weil Reader*. Ed. George A. Panichas (London: Moyer Bell, 1977), 53-72.

<sup>35</sup> George Cicciariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 3-5, 114-116.

<sup>36</sup> Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 2-4.

Furthermore, as we know from both Plato and Adorno, dialectic cannot be decontextualized or dissociated without defeating its immanent and contextual purpose, for in both *The Republic*, and Adorno's lectures, there is no systematic theory of dialectic (no static concept of "the dialectic" that would be safe from transformation), and certainly no attempted summary like the present study. This lack of a codified synthesis in both Plato and Adorno is significant, for surely both figures knew how to write a manual of dialectical strategies and doctrines, but they did not, presumably for the reasons described above. Instead, in *The Republic*, we find the narration of dialectic as a virtuous striving for the good beyond being (509b) – a striving that ascends from hypotheses that are always questionable and flexible, upward in the mode of conversation until it adequately clarifies these hypotheses (511b), and then descends back down to conclusions that are left open to future revision. Unlike geometry, which fixes its hypotheses as unquestionable axioms at the highest point and descends down while deriving conclusions from them, Socrates' dialectic ascends from the ever-changing bases of flexible hypotheses up toward a perfection that is never attained, in a conversation that does not fall silent in conclusion or closure.

Later, in his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, Adorno lauds the "tentative, experimental, and inconclusive" quality of philosophy, against the rigidity of the sciences, and the distortion of the dialectic in the simplistic tripartite schema: thesis, antithesis, synthesis.<sup>37</sup> According to Adorno, positivity in dialectical thinking is too easy and must be disturbed by the labor of the negative in which the interior of identities reveals itself to be more than an essence, being instead something that contains the seeds of its own generative and creative undoing.<sup>38</sup> For Adorno, dialectics defeats its own purposes if it becomes a kind of first philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in Plato, dialogue is defined by its open ended and intentional speech, and dialectic falls under the category of dialogue as a virtuous pursuit and not something that can be taught as a technical skill or explained as an abstract doctrine. Instead, dialectic is taught by doing, and it is cultivated against the sophistic tendency to assert dogmatically, and with final certainty, and thereby use knowledge as power. The

modern sense of dialectic, on the other hand, often appears as the opposite of this movement, seeking self-consistent and self-confident conclusions that close down further dialogue by means of synthesis or a culmination in a final totality – a kind of thinking that harmonizes, neutralizes, and naturalizes the existing social order, as Adorno himself points out (ID, 181).

Both Plato's dialectic and Adorno's dialectic are movements without final resolution or conclusion. Although these movements recapitulate at important moments, they do not gather all things into a completed object or dissolve all potential exceptions into a rule. Socrates engages in dialogue and pursues dialectic in a way that entertains his interlocutors, taxes both their attention thresholds and their patience with each other and exposes the ironies and contradictions of their expectations. In this unfolding of dialectic that both rhetorically divides and erotically merges things, Socrates is instructing his interlocutors not only by *what* he says, but *how* he says it, as well as the timing of his questioning. Adorno, too, refuses the temptation to present the dialectic in a succession of easy steps, instead insisting that "we do not simply have the whole at our disposal" (ID, 33).

Always starting over and returning, Socrates employs dialectic in the pursuit of education (*paideia*) and its "tuning" of "dissonance" within the human being.<sup>40</sup> Adorno, too, understands dialectical thinking to be a key component in his educative task (ID, 20), elsewhere considering philosophy to be an education in resistance.<sup>41</sup> In Socrates' questions we can observe that dialectic involves the unceasing inquiry into whether the opposite of each statement might also be true, a working and unworking of terms, and the exposure of the limitations and aporias of his interlocutors' positions and uses of language. When the categories that Socrates encounters are pushed to their limit through dialectic, they generate contradictions that then generate further questions, and contribute to the formation of discourses. Socrates does not employ dialectic in an abstract way that can be easily slotted into any context, but instead allows the topic of conversation or the object of concern to be the real test of

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158-161/160-163.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 154/157.

<sup>40</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets" in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 54, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 101-103.

the method being applied to it, allowing the *what* to be the measure of the adequacy of the *how*. Adorno too understands the dialectic to be a measure to itself in between concept and object, rather than an externally imposed or externally evaluated thing (ID, 32).

Socrates' explorations of philosophy, justice, and political rule are not separate from the practice of dialectic, but instead, dialectic is vital to justice and the state because it is an expression of the soul and its formation. Adorno, too, contends that the stakes are high in discussions about totality, not only among students and teachers, but also among laborers and workers (ID, 120-124). In Plato's account, dialectic is part of the cultivation of the soul, meaning that the dialectic is always personal, inhering in the soul of the speaker as it points out contradictions and shows the limits of language and perspective. Unlike Thrasymachus, who uses ambiguities to force contradiction and insists on consistency in a way that may well destroy the city in speech, dialectic does not insist on consistency in a way that binds to a rule, but instead it sets one on an ascending path toward the good beyond being (509b). Dialectic is not merely a kind of practice of knowledge, but a virtuous way toward the good itself, pursued with the intent of cultivating the soul in the way of the virtues by making distinctions and joining terms toward a better understanding.

In Adorno, too, we find an ethics of sorts, albeit more implicitly presented in the rejection of domination and coercion. In these earlier lectures, as we have demonstrated above, Adorno seems to resist coercing his students down a preordained path. However, this is not to say that there are not markers on the path that Adorno has placed there in advance – for example, the notes and plans that accompany the transcribed lectures. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail, I observe that the role of epistemic power in the practice of dialectic, although it is addressed in some ways by both Plato and Adorno (in the objections of Thrasymachus and Adeimantus in *The Republic*, and the rejection of transcendent critique in Adorno) is not yet clarified in either case, especially given that the dialectic tends to render both power and its measure immanent, and therefore risks obscuring or neutralizing the very real differences in power between teacher and student or speaker and listener.

In conclusion – lest this study appear to be the mere identification of a state of accord between Plato and Adorno on the question of the dialectic – it bears pointing out that by neither account of the dialectic outlined above would it be sufficient to simply point out continuities. Instead, both Plato and Adorno, despite the vast distance separating them in time and by translation, claim that even when things appear to be in agreement there is a kernel of agonism at the heart of identity that immanently gives rise to difference and contradiction. So too with any comparison of their works that would show accord; discontinuity will always be present. But rather than turning toward the discontinuities between Adorno and Plato, below I conclude by pointing outside of their work to another figure for thinking that may exceed the dialectic in its ability to assist us in conceptualizing both continuity and discontinuity, and identity and mediation.

### From Dialectics to Chiasmus

A long string of dualities, polarities, binaries, dichotomies, paradoxes, parallaxes, hybridities, and antinomies define the history of metaphysics. Dialectical thinking from Plato to Adorno and everywhere in between has attempted to work with, and against, distinctions and oppositions between at least two identities, and often more than two at once. However much the dialectic may remain an open-ended figure for thinking – as I have argued is the case for Plato and Adorno – it is nonetheless only one figure of many for thinking about how relations between identities are mediated. If it is to have a future, the future of metaphysics will require other figures to configure the relationship between-two that structures the concept of identity. In conclusion, I want to suggest a movement beyond mediating the relationship between two at the heart of identity by using figures like “binary” (disjunctive either/or arrangements), “dichotomy” (the splitting of a previous whole), “duality” (the possession of two separate parts), “polarity” (stark opposition), “paradox” (the joining of two things that appear to be contradictory but are really reconcilable), “parallax” (a spatial shift in the location of an object when observed from two different points), “hybridity” (mixing and intermingling), and “antimony” (irreconcilable opposition between-two, under certain nomic standards of measure).

Dialectical thinking, as described above, will take us well beyond these much more limited thought-figures. But dialectical thinking itself anticipates the intrusion of other different, opposing, and contradictory identities upon its own process. To be truly dialectical requires a movement outside of the self, as Walter Kaufmann points out.<sup>42</sup> While dialectical thinking in Adorno challenges any notion of a forced closure in the domain of identities, it does not necessarily lend itself to nonlinear or non-teleological thinking about the movements of mediation. In conclusion, I want to suggest a dialectical movement outside of dialectical thinking and toward *chiasmus*: the figure that appears poetically in the form *xyyx*. Consider the words of John Keats in his Ode on a Grecian Urn, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all | Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."<sup>43</sup> Both poetic and metaphysical, and defined by mirroring, reversal, intertwining, and inter-contamination, *chiasmus* promises to take thinking further into the agonistic becoming of identities by representing their interiorly double or triple character.

Whereas dialectics tends to begin with a couplet within which the two parts have a linear relationship of negation, opposition, or contradiction, *chiasmus* begins by already doubling back on itself. The figural mediation between two in *chiasmus* is not a superseding or sublating *Aufhebung* into a third thing that is both between and beyond the parts of the couplet, but instead it challenges movements of cancellation, overcoming, surpassing, and encompassing. Rather than suspension, tension, or synthesis, *chiasmus* is a mirror image turned towards itself and reflected back onto itself, a reversal that inverts hierarchies, an intertwining that mixes conjugated elements while both refusing and erasing distinctions, and an inter-contamination in which the discernible becomes indiscernible and identities are both maintained and compromised.

Indeed, both poets and metaphysicians have already begun to develop this notion of *chiastic* thinking. John Keats' "negative capability" and Don Paterson's "two-in-one" (or *twa-in-yin*) both come to mind.<sup>44</sup> Philosophers have also, albeit rarely, written of the

<sup>42</sup> He writes that it was the Neo-platonism of Proclus (among others) that portrayed the dialectic as a movement from the unity of self (*moné*), to leaving oneself (*próhodos*), and then returning to oneself (*epistrophé*). Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 153.

<sup>43</sup> John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton and Mifflin, 1899), 135.

<sup>44</sup> See Keats, *Complete Poetical Works and Letters*, 277-278, and Don Paterson, "The Dark Art of Poetry," T.S. Eliot Lecture. October 30, 2004.

metaphysical potential of the figure of *chiasmus*, two such examples include Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in his later work), and Patrick Lee Miller (in his interpretation of Heraclitus).<sup>45</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, in particular, "we situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others' and we become world."<sup>46</sup> Although Merleau-Ponty does not exhaustively develop the concept, there are scattered references to *chiasmus* as a metaphysical and phenomenological concept throughout the manuscript and notes for his final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*. For Merleau-Ponty, the *chiasm* is defined by reversibility (particularly between body and mind), by leaving oneself, by the projections of vision, by being without restriction, and by the co-functioning of a pair at the "advent of difference."<sup>47</sup>

Entwined with dialectics of the sort that we see in Plato and Adorno, perhaps the figure of *chiasmus* can push thinking further still into the ontological problems of identity, weaving and meshing its constituent reversibility without mystifying the matter of identity completely in an erasure of the boundary between distinction and indistinction. Beyond the dialectic – if such a thing is possible – *chiasmus* has the potential to free identity from the need for spatial fundamentals and temporal linearity without abolishing or fragmenting the real connections between origins and ends that do not endure. *Chiasmus* is not the one dividing into two, nor the two becoming one, but both at the same time. Beyond dialectics, this is the core of ontological identity, an intertwining and a contradiction, fixed upon and becoming as-one without the violence of being completely at-one.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Lee Miller, *Becoming God: Pure Reason in Early Greek Philosophy* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011). Miller suggests that "Chiasmus threatens to violate the principle of non-contradiction whenever its components are conjoined and opposed, whether as contraries or contradictories." (8).

<sup>46</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Ed. Claude Lefort. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 160.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 263, 199, 259, 263, 266, 270, 214-215, 217.

<sup>48</sup> This study, especially the conclusion, both extends and implicitly critiques some of my earlier work in the following three essays: *Dialectics Unbound* (Brooklyn: Punctum, 2013), "What is a Compendium?" *Continent* 3:1 (Spring 2013), 44-49., and "Identity, Ontology, and the Two / Идентитет, онтологија, и две," *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture* 13 (2016-2017), 101-136. Trans. Jordan Šišovski.



## II. REVIEWS

Oscar Pichardo Isaak

## An Algorithmic Socialism in Defense of the Lived Without Life: A Political Proposal through Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals by Katerina Kolozova

Katerina Kolozova, *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* (London - New York: Bloomsbury, 2020)

**Bionote:** Oscar Pichardo Isaak is a writer, musician, filmmaker and self-taught philosopher from Mexico. His first full feature film, *Aimee*, has been shown at several international film festivals and is inspired in lacanian psychoanalysis and its discourse about psychosis. His current research is situated in the crossroad of non-standard philosophy, science, and political economy.

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### 1. The Non-Marxist Defense of the Lived Without Life

One of the main cores of Katerina Kolozova's thought is to overcome the impasses left behind by post-structuralism through the non-philosophy of François Laruelle. That is why it should come as no surprise that *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* begins with Foucault's sentence regarding the death of man. It is an inescapable closure for philosophy, to such an extent that many postmodern thinkers also preferred to declare the end of philosophy alongside the "human" as a category. On the other hand, non-philosophy does not seek any form of annihilation, but rather, to think according to the One as the foreclosed Real, showing that most of the philosophical principles are only positions, thus finding a democracy of thought. Kolozova constructs a non-human epistemology, not yet present in Foucault's epistemological statement, in dialogue with those theorists who sought to think about how to transcend the borders of the human. The dialogue is particularly fertile when dealing with Donna Har-

away's post-humanist work, yet it remains a critical dialogue. Faced with the monstrosity of the cyborg, Kolozova seeks to establish the method of dualysis of Laruelle's non-philosophy. This means that she makes a distinction between the Real and language, putting them in a unilateral rather than dialectical relationship, in the sense that both coexist without being determined by each other. In the case of Kolozova's work, the Real includes the meaningless physicality of animality, and the signifying automaton includes technology.

Laruelle has always considered Marx as a fundamental ally of non-philosophy, since his materialism does away with philosophical illusions. Kolozova is faithful to this mode of thought, thinking according to a position that is as close as possible to the material question of the Real, including the defense of animality, because it is that which is excluded from philosophical discourse, also being exploited in the forgetting of matter in capitalism. The strategy that she maintains from her previous works is to interpret capitalism as non-philosophy reads philosophy, since both capitalism and philosophy are based on metaphysical fallacies. According to Marx and Laruelle, philosophy's existence is also predicated on abstractions that forget the material reality of existence. That is one of the core aspects of Marxism that Kolozova explores, due to the fact that Marx seeks to make a critique of Hegelian idealism, where material is forgotten, which is a symptom of philosophy itself that was practiced before Marx's critical method of thinking. Similarly to idealist philosophy, capitalism erases use value, that is, the labor and materials from which commodities are made. This reality is very present in the way in which the finance system exploit us today, to such an extent that the exchange structure M-C-M' (Money-Commodity-Money') is replaced by the formula M-M', the money for money trade from the mercantile world, which inevitably leads to the creation of financial bubbles and the exploitation of the material aspect of animal and human existence.

In the first chapter, Kolozova develops her vision of Saussure's structuralist linguistics in dialogue with Laruelle's work. For Kolozova, the signifying automaton works independently of material reality, as it also is for Marx, since the production of value has the same function. If post-structuralism is to realize philosophemes from this disjunction, Kolozova proposes to delimit it from philosophical dis-

course. Through Irigaray's work, she shows us that the signifying automaton is the same mechanism for the fetishization of the material, including the fetishization that patriarchy makes of women. This automaton also produces subjectivity in capitalist societies. Like subjectivity, following Lacan and Aristotle, capitalist production has its traumatic side when the Real produces a certain *tuché*, a form of chance that is not, nor can it be, calculated by the automaton, and whose expression manifests itself as a lack of housing, poverty and various phenomena linked to economic crises.

In "Formalism of materialist reason," the second chapter, Kolozova makes a critique of a detached vision of the material of computer science. Following Deleuze and Guattari, she makes us see that abstract machines actually have linguistic, logical and material layers, they are not abstractions of a pure rationalization, because, according to Kolozova, this conception would be a reunification of philosophy and theology. Although she only reflects briefly, but succinctly, on the discussions about artificial intelligence, her non-philosophical position makes her skeptical of its promises. Through her reading of Turing she concludes that machines lack metaphysical will and strategic thinking, they only perform mechanical work for which knowledge is not necessary. The latter puts machines at a disadvantage with living beings whose cognition is considered inferior, such as plants. This is why, for Kolozova, any reflection on artificial intelligence must be attentive to the prelinguistic side of the category of the physical, since it is this dimension, rather than the creation of emotions, that should be sought in the alliance between computer science and cognitive sciences.

In what are perhaps the densest pages of the book, Kolozova outlines a methodology of one of the most important points of Laruelle's Non-Marxism: the cloning of identity in the last instance. This is a concept that Laruelle uses to think according to the vision-in-the-Real. For Laruelle, the Real is inevitably foreclosed from thought, so that identity in the last instance is already a cloning of the Real. Identity ultimately deactivates the self-sufficient tautologies of philosophy's principles of sufficiency, but at the same time uses them democratically, positioning them as an outside or as a *khôra*: it puts a border between the hallucinations of philosophy and the mode of thinking of non-philosophy. By means of this procedure, Kolozova

conceptualizes a syntax of the Real, a way in which it can find its expression. Kolozova does not rule out that the syntax of the Real could be formalized by means of an algorithm, and that eventually a semantics could be produced from this syntax, but she indicates that it is something that still remains to be demonstrated. If this were the case, it would have to be based on a "radical concept," since a concept is never immanence itself but can be affected by immanence.

The procedure of the syntax of the Real has important consequences for Kolozova's conception of gender, since identity in the last instance is not relational, while gender is a performance that clones this identity, but only as a social function. Through Marx's criticism of Hegel, she traces an itinerary of a radical subjectivity where the world is not an extension of the subject, but rather a material objectivity is sought. Admitting the foreclosure of the Real, what the subject can do is then surrender to its structure and syntax and try to "encode" it by means of the recreation of its signs. This codification, according to Simondon, is fundamental for the individuation of life, since it is through information that it takes shape. According to Kolozova, the morphology of living beings must also be thought according to the Real, regardless of the technologies that may intervene in it, but without falling into a naive naturalism that does not understand that the concept of nature is already a concept of reason.

Kolozova is not satisfied with just denouncing forms of exploitation, she also shows us that Laruelle's thought expands Spinoza's idea of *conatus*, the life that, by seeking to perpetuate itself, pursues its own well-being. In non-philosophy, the *conatus* takes the form of what is lived without life, that is, what is lived without the need to give life a philosophical meaning, and therefore freed from alienation, since it makes us see that it contains a joy beyond the signifying automaton, and therefore also independent of Truth. It is what Laruelle sees as a radical subjectivity or the Stranger, when he approaches psychoanalysis without his determinations, turning the *jouissance* and its sinister side into *joui* (joy), producing an undulatory effect in the understanding of the unconscious.

## 2. How can an Algorithmic Socialism be Conceptualized?

Faced with the need to defend the material reality of what has been lived without life, Kolozova invites us to think about a social *tekhne* that respects use value. The following is an outline of my proposal to achieve it.

We live in an economic situation where it is possible to generate forms of exchange without the need for centralized institutions, as is the case with cryptocurrencies. These, however, have not been used for the purpose of economic emancipation, but only as one more instrument of economic speculation. Cryptocurrencies make the deterritorialization of capital possible, since, today, systems based on 'blockchains' allow forms of international economic exchange without the need of state regulation. This creates new infrastructural possibilities, but by themselves cryptocurrencies do not change anything at all, since their deterritorialization possibilities are automatically reterritorialized through the dynamics of financial speculation. For currencies to have an emancipatory effect, a forcing towards an immanent form of exchange is necessary. In economic terms, this means that a reciprocal currency must be generated whose form of exchange, instead of being designed to generate the greatest amount of surplus value possible, on the contrary, has the most radical respect possible towards the material reality of use value. Therefore, we postulate as a theorem, that by means of a new currency whose valuation is reciprocal, by means of algorithms built from the immanence that category theory allows, it is possible to generate an economic exchange designed for the defense of the lived without life.

Let's remember what use value is according to Karl Marx's *Capital*:

The usefulness of a thing makes it a use value. But that utility does not float through the air. It is conditioned by the properties of the body of the merchandise, and there is no margin for them. The very body of the merchandise, such as iron, wheat, diamond, etc., is thus a use value or a good. This character of his does not depend on whether the appropriation of his useful properties costs man much or little work. When considering use values, their quantitative determinate character is always assumed, such as a dozen

clocks, a rod of linen, a ton of iron, etc. The use values of commodities provide the material for a special discipline, merceology. The use value is effective only in the use and consumption. Use values constitute the material content of wealth, whatever its social form.<sup>1</sup>

What we see with this notion of use value is that it is of the utmost importance for the policies of caring for the environment, as well as the defense of the lived without life, as Kolozova indicates. The crime of capitalism is that it is a metaphysics that forgets material existence, abusing it to generate a surplus value, that is, a profit from the exchange between capital and merchandise. That is why if we invent a reciprocal and fair valuation of use value, then we can think about how to heal an economy where the exchange of goods generates an excessive accumulation of capital:

In contradiction with the sensory gross objectivity of the body of merchandise, not a single atom of natural substance is part of its objectivity as values. Hence, no matter how much a commodity is turned and manipulated, they only possess objectivity as values, therefore, it is of a purely social nature, of human work; that their objectivity as values can only be shown in the social relationship between various commodities. We had actually started from the exchange value or the exchange relation between the commodities, to discover the value of the same, hidden in that relation.<sup>2</sup>

As we can see in *Capital*, use value is converted into exchange value, and matter loses objectivity through the metaphysical abstraction of capital. For Marx, the only way to counteract this error is by changing the modes of production and their ownership, but today it is possible to change the modes of exchange thanks to the fact that in the coming years we will see that currencies will work based on algorithms. A reciprocal currency that seeks to reduce surplus value and therefore regulate the accumulation of capital, will work to ensure that the exchange of goods respects the use value, and therefore defends the lived without life.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *El capital Tomo I/Vol. 1* (Siglo: XXI Editores, 2019), 44. The translation is from the author.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

One of the complaints coming from humanism is that computing has eroded the symbolic order that sustains society. This is because the letter of the algorithms penetrate the Real beyond the symbolic order. We put an emphasis on the letter and not language itself, since, for Lacan, the letter can make an incision on the Real, while language is only part of the symbolic. In computation, the letter is what builds a syntax, while language is a semantic concern. According to *An Sich: An Apology for Algorithmic Reason* by Noah Horwitz, everything can be formulated algorithmically, but these do not offer interpretations or explanations, they are only effective demonstrations, taking into account that mathematics is a science without consciousness. According to Horwitz's cybernetic ontology, because existence is itself syntactic rather than semantic, anything that can be expressed algorithmically is possible. In its actuality, it provides the transcendental conditions of itself. The event is then a change in programming, through the negation of existing rules and the creation of new rules. If algorithms can affect the Real, then they can cause an event, in the sense that they can transform one situation into another. If algorithms have the ability to think according to a syntax of the Real, which in our case thinks from the point of view of the radical metaphysics of immanence and not only the Real according to Lacan, as Horwitz proposes, then there is the possibility that they become the basis of a non-standard socialist economy, and not just the receptacle of a work that becomes immaterial in order to manipulate ideological subjectivities. If we give up thinking about the rationality of algorithms, if we only try to escape towards romanticized forms of resistance that are inoperative outside local scales and whose material precariousness do not allow for expansion, then we are condemned to proletarianizing our economic condition. On the other hand, if we can understand what kind of algorithms can help us generate an event that results in new forms of material exchange and cooperation between various agglomerates of communities, then we will see that true political activism today not only cannot ignore the technological condition of existence, but that it is precisely through technology that a new political horizon can be glimpsed.

Until now, an economy that respects use value was considered impossible for most economists, however, this is now possible thanks

to blockchain technology computed through category theory. This is thanks to the fact that, as we see in the work of Alain Badiou and Rocco Gangle, the metaphysics of category theory is immanent, and with the power of quantum computers they contain a compossibility between different programming environments, for what appraises the fair price of a commodity becomes possible. It is through Badiou's and Gangle's work that we can glimpse what kind of logic is necessary to integrate surplus value, use value and exchange value in a cybernetic system that makes a materialist economy work, having as a basic axiom the defense of the lived without life, however, its non-philosophical cloning implies some modifications to how philosophers have used category theory, especially in relation to Badiou's ontology.

In *Mathematics of the Transcendental*, Badiou explains that the ontology of category theory is extrinsic, since an object is determined exclusively by relations or movements, of which it is the source or objective, since they involve the mathematical universe of which it is part. In our non-philosophical scheme, it will be important to keep objects as isomorphic and determined by the One, postulating identity over the conservation of differences. As Rocco Gangle indicates in *Diagrammatic Immanence*, one of the most important philosophical aspects of category theory is that through the isomorphism of its elements, the degrees of identity and difference in an abstract domain can be estimated. Isomorphism is, in this sense, a generalization of a strict identity in the 'pragmatic' context where relationships count more than objects. Economically speaking, this means that the relationship between use value and exchange value can be idempotent, but only in relation to the universe of which they are a part. It is with this form of programming that the price calibration, given, thanks to the immanent logic of the market, could be carried out, avoiding the havoc that financial speculation can cause. In contrast to the metaphysics that capitalism implies, where the accumulation of capital is taken as a transcendent and absolute good, an immanent economy would imply thinking without utilitarian residues in relationships, such as surplus value.

The monetary and technological theory of non-standard socialism that we propose is a way in which it seeks to transform social relations, in such a way that its futureability is to make the forms of

production more just, despite the fact that the phenomenon of economic exchange is not still a phenomenon of a material nature. To enable this, we must pursue a unilateral superposition of the forces of production and forms of exchange. As we see in Laruelle's *Marx with Planck*<sup>3</sup>, to rethink a socialist economy it is necessary to think in terms of non-commutativity, which means that between the modes of production and the forms of exchange there is no hierarchical relationship in their importance and becoming: both the exchange relations and their material conditions are linked, and one has the power to transform the other, in such a way that if there is a more egalitarian mode of exchange it will also lead to more egalitarian forms of production. In Marx, the concepts of modes of production and forms of exchange are fused. Our task is to rethink them as unilateral concepts, that is, they can be independent and at the same time have a change effect on one another. This means, in economic terms, that if we manage to make the modes of exchange fairer, reciprocally, the modes of production will also be able to obey the immanent rules of non-standard socialism.

The main impediment to the social *tekhné* that Kolozova invites us to conceptualize is the tautology with which money generates money. That is why our *tekhné* has to go through new monetary practices, where exploitation through surplus value is minimized. By calling for a defense of the lived without life, Kolozova invokes a revolution similar to the divine violence of which Walter Benjamin speaks, since it would mean a sovereign and non-negotiable right to life. A monetary practice is still immaterial although it still has material consequences, a reciprocal currency can be the beginning of subsequent forms of *tekhné* that ignite a new form of social pact that stops the suffering caused by the logic of our world, offering as a first step a way to redistribute wealth; but if it does not have the defense of the lived without life as one of its main purposes it will be a vain effort. Conversely, if it is possible to conceptualize a *tekhné*, where the defense of the lived without life is postulated as a basic axiom, other extremely important struggles such as the well-being of the environment will be decisively benefited.

## Conclusion

Katerina Kolozova's work is one of the strongest ethical guides for anti-capitalist struggles. She leaves us, to her readers, the task of thinking of a social *tekhné* that respects the syntax of the Real, and therefore gives respect to the material reality that sustains the exchanges of value. The generic sciences that Laruelle proposes can open a new horizon to formulate more ethical modes of exchange, through the production of a new algorithmic logic that respects the syntax of the Real. For the moment, thinking about the horizon that opens *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals* gives us a correct guideline as to where the anti-capitalist struggles for militant thinkers should be directed, especially those inspired by the gnosis that opens up non-philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> François Laruelle, Superposition: *Laruelle and the Humanities*, eds, Rocco Gangle and Julius Greve (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 157-177.



Naum Trajanovski

## A Review of the Partisan Counter-Archive: Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle by Gal Kirn

Gal Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive: Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle* (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

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The publishing of Gal Kirn's *The Partisan Counter-Archive*<sup>1</sup> in mid-2020 can be read in two particular keys: as the kernel of its author's decade-long investigation of "partisan, anticolonial and emancipatory memory/history of the past"<sup>2</sup> — with a particular emphasis on the Yugoslav Partisan legacy in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav spaces — and one of the best critical archival scholarly takes on the impossibility of equating the opposing ideological positionings during wartime Yugoslavia, as well as equating the memory discourses stemming from these very positions; one of those everlasting debates in the region. Commencing with the latter, Kirn's

second monograph arrives in a moment when the memory studies scholarship on Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav states is unarguably more open to criticizing the ambivalence of various transnational actors (one such study is the recently edited volume on the Europeanisation and memory politics nexus in the Western Balkans<sup>3</sup>), as well as the roles and agendas of nationalist and populist agencies in the memory struggles of the day.<sup>4</sup> Here, Kirn's study not only provides an overview of the Yugoslav, and a detailed account of the Slovene developments, but also equips the reader with a solid theoretical and methodological arsenal for identifying the divergent set of claims, discourses and actors that antagonize the domains of public memory in the region and beyond. A scholar of cultural studies, philosophy and contemporary political theory himself, Kirn wrote significant scholarly pieces on the Yugoslav cinema, the Yugoslav Partisan memory sites and the market reforms in Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav states over the last years. His most recent work was recognized and received positive feedback relatively fast: so far, for instance, a symposium on the topic of "Counter Archive" was organized by the Institute for Cultural Inquiry Berlin in April this year, dedicated to Kirn's book and the German translation of Davor Konjukušić's *Red Light: Yugoslav Partisan Photography and Social Movement* (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2020), and a seminar on his book was organized by the Working Group on Post-Socialist and Comparative Memory Studies at the Memory Studies Organization in August, 2021.

The focal point of Kirn's analysis is the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a process which unarguably shattered not only the political, economic and social, but also the symbolic realms of the states and citizens of former Yugoslavia. The new constellation of powers in the post-Yugoslav contexts thus paved the way for, what Kirn calls the, "ethnically cleansed point of view" over the national pasts and histories: a development pushed both by the emerging political elites in the former Yugoslav states and

<sup>3</sup> Ana Milošević and Tamara Trošt eds., *Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Vjeran Pavlaković and Davor Pauković, eds., *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia* (London – New York: Routledge, 2019); Jelena Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory of the Second World in Contemporary Serbia: Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution* (London – New York: Routledge, 2020); and Jody Jensen, *Memory Politics and Populism in Southeastern Europe* (London – New York: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>1</sup> Gal Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive: Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle* (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Gal Kirn, "Iconoclastic Ruptures: Black Lives Matter and the Cleansing of Colonial Memory," *Pluto Press* (June 2020), online.

certain transnational actors.<sup>5</sup> A particular target of these two agencies was, and still is, the Yugoslav Partisan legacy and the legacy of the People's Liberation Struggle (PLS). Kirn depicts this process as a "primitive accumulation of memory," that is, an operation of establishing new national canons via symbolic and even physical violence to the Partisan-related memory and memory sites, while simultaneously looking for what the historian Balázs Trencsényi observes as different "reservoirs"<sup>6</sup> for feeding the national ideologies: expanding to the pre-WWII state formations, via the medieval kingdoms to the ancient empires in the region. At this point, Kirn mentions, *en passant*, the case of the "antiquization"<sup>7</sup> or "primordialization"<sup>8</sup> in North Macedonia as a "climactic" among the other post-Yugoslav revisionisms of the socialist past (although, arguably enough, the rereading of the Macedonian socialist past over the previous decade best reflects the aggressiveness of the rightist political and memory actors in the state). Kirn sees these memory transitions as more important than the economic transitions in the region and beyond, and traces the origins of these revisionist discourses back to the initial conservative and neoliberal attacks on the welfare state model and the subsequent attempts to position the historical memory of the "two totalitarianisms" as a dominant framework for interpreting the European 20<sup>th</sup> century history.

As a critical-theory-driven answer to the abovementioned, Kirn proposes a work on articulating, systematizing and nurturing a "Partisan counter-archive" – an all-Yugoslav, transnational depository of the revolutionary arts and politics which dwells well beyond the traditional frameworks of national and centralized archives;<sup>9</sup> or a "construction site" which is to weaponize the fragments of the Partisan legacy and transfer them into the present and the future.<sup>10</sup> The latter argument, as such, resonates both with the recent ap-

propriation of Chantal Mouffe's *agonism* by memory scholars— in light of the proposed weaponization of certain episodes from the past in the present— as well as, to a lesser extent – the notion of "progressive nostalgia" from the Critical Heritage Studies.<sup>11</sup> The Partisan counter-archive evolves around the other critical construct of Kirn's analysis: that of the "Partisan surplus." Inspired by the Derridian *supplement* and the "structuralist appropriation of the notion of surplus,"<sup>12</sup> as well as Marx's notion of "surplus value" and Lacanian "surplus enjoyment," the Partisan surplus refers to the histories of the "revolutionary people" and the emancipatory programs for the future stemming from these very histories, while, simultaneously, its records resist political endorsements into official memory practices and politics. The book's structure thus mirrors the public reconsiderations of PLS — or what he observes, at another occasion, as the first of the three "Partisan ruptures"<sup>13</sup> — in a diachrony of several decades. Chapter II starts with the WWII and PLS (1941-1945). Here, Kirn discusses the early Partisan artwork as means of cultural empowerment, symbolic armament and mobilization, as well as the most emblematic Partisan images and gestures of resistance. Swiping through the "curated selection" of the wartime poetry of Matej Bor, Karel Kajuh and Ivan Goran Kovačić, the iconic gestures of Stjepan Filipović and Lepa Radić, and Partisan posters, anthems, films and graphic arts, among the other records, Kirn argues that the Partisan artistic production is inseparable from the wartime struggle. Moreover, the wartime artwork showcases that this strive for freedom not only crossed out the ethnic boundaries of the Yugoslav Partisans, but also contributed to women's empowerment and emancipation, while avoiding to solidify as a centralized pattern or model, being mostly anonymous and collective, and even expanding the limits of the certain pre-war artistic genres.

Chapter III deals with the attempts to materialize the wartime Partisan rupture in the post-WWII Yugoslavia of the 1960s and 1970s. Kirn,

<sup>5</sup> Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Balázs Trencsényi, "Beyond Liminality? The Kulturkampf of the Early 2000s in East Central Europe," *boundary*, 2:41 (2014), 137.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the argument, see: Anastas Vangelis, "Nation-building ancient Macedonian style: the origins and the effects of the so-called antiquization in Macedonia," *Nationalities Papers*, 39:1 (2011), 13-32.

<sup>8</sup> More in: Ognjen Vangelov, "The Primordialisation of Ethnic Nationalism in Macedonia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71:2 (2019), 203-224.

<sup>9</sup> Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive*, 2-57.

<sup>10</sup> Gal Kirn, "Dissonance of Yugoslav Partisan Past in the Recent Revisionist Methodologies," in *Researching Yugoslavia and its Aftermath: Sources, Prejudices and Alternative Solutions*, ed. by Branislav Radeljić and Carlos González-Villa (Cham: Springer, 2021), 42.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hanse, "On Agonistic Memory," *Memory Studies*, 9:4 (2016), 390-404; and Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, "Nostalgia for the future': memory, nostalgia and the politics of class," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23:7 (2017), 612-627.

<sup>12</sup> As depicted in the summary of his ICI research project "Suplement and Supplus as Reduction(ism): Partisan Art and Archive" (2020-2021).

<sup>13</sup> Gal Kirn, *Partisan Ruptures: Self-Management, Market Reform and the Spectre of Socialist Yugoslavia* (London: Pluto Press, 2019). The other two ruptures being the self-management and the Non-Aligned Movement.

here, focuses on the Yugoslav films portraying PLS (Partisan films) — between 1945-1985, more than 200 Partisan films were produced in Yugoslavia — and the movement to create “monuments to revolution” — several thousands of them being erected over the same period. Faced with this “impossible task,”<sup>14</sup> the Yugoslav filmmakers and sculptors developed aesthetic languages which were both open to appropriation from the officials and, parallelly, left space for disagreements with the official political discourses. The analysis of the rationale behind the formation and the afterlives of Tjentište (1971) and Kozara (1972) memorial sites, two monuments to the revolution, revealed certain patterns of the Yugoslav “socialist monumental modernism”; a lack of a manifesto; bottom-up incentives for their establishments; and, finally, their authors’ common endeavor to “commemorate something that does not want to seal political power forever, something inscribed in the utopian emancipatory horizon of the future.”<sup>15</sup> A similar finding can be observed in another recent publication in Macedonian, Elena Čemerska’s *Spomenik na slobodata: Razgovornik*, which presents a set of expert interviews related to the formation and the cultural meaning of the memorial complex “Monument to freedom” (1981) in Kočani.<sup>16</sup> Čemerska’s work is one of the rare Macedonian counter-archival exercises in this regard: the focus on the memorial complex — built on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Macedonian struggle for freedom — was depicted not as a mere nostalgic move, but rather as an engaging approach to the “unfinished past” which revealed, among other things, that the Macedonian cultural policies of the 1970s and the early 1980s were much more democratic and transparent than assumed today (a point which can also be juxtaposed with the cultural and memory politics in the 2010s in Macedonia).<sup>17</sup> In this chapter, Kirn also proposes a closer look at the Yugoslav cinematic production in the 1960s and 1970s: although the authorities almost immediately incorporated the film industry as a tool for solidifying a PLS narrative and, as such, legitimizing their political generation, the Partisan film genre also presented a platform for twisting the official narratives over history and memory (Kirn discusses Želimir

Žilnik and Miodrag Popović, while one possible Macedonian case for analysis, here, might be Kiril Cenevski’s *Jad*).

Finally, Chapter IV is focused on the process of undoing the Partisan counter-archive across the post-Yugoslav space, in general, and Slovenia, in particular. Kirn writes about it in a clear and direct manner. The elite-driven attempts to revise the Partisan legacy (in Slovenia, as of the 1980s) are part of the same mnemonic maneuver that unfolds in several ways: the physical destruction of the Yugoslav memory sites and their transformation in religious memory sites, as well as via an operation of national reconciliation, epitomized in the memorial complex for the killed Home Guards at Kočevski Rog and the Monument to the Victims of All Wars in Ljubljana; an open rehabilitation of local fascism, such as the case of the Monument of the Silent Victims in Grahovo, and, finally; the promotion of the discourse of anti-totalitarianism, such as the project for the Pan-European Memorial to the Victims of Totalitarian Crimes which is to be located in Brussels. Here, Kirn argues that these memory sites present a platform for performing “commemorative revisionism” — that is, a process of shifting the mnemonic canons by watering down the ideological and political backgrounds and motives of the perpetrators. This chapter, however, is focused primarily on Slovenia, which trod a different path of post-Yugoslav state consolidation; although relevant for all the other former Yugoslav states with all of their specificities and particularities. It is immensely important, moreover, for the Macedonian public as the PLS — which was a formative event, as well, for the Macedonian state and nation-building — undergoes some of the prevailing revisionist attacks mapped by Kirn; instigated by national and international actors.<sup>18</sup> One possible counter-archival response, here, would spring from a critical rereading of the basic values of PLS in Macedonia and its implications over the social and political emancipation in the state. Kirn’s book provides a decent tool for further analyses in these regards.

<sup>14</sup> See, as well, Gal Kirn, “On the Specific (In)existence of the Partisan Film in Yugoslavia’s People’s Liberation Struggle,” in *Partisans in Yugoslavia: Literature, Film and Visual Culture*, ed. by Miranda Jakiša and Nikica Gilić (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Kirn, *The Partisan Counter-Archive*, 194.

<sup>16</sup> See: Elena Čemerska, *Spomenik na slobodata: Razgovornik* (Skopje: Privateprint, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview, see Naum Trajanovski, *Operacijata Muzej: Muzejot na makedonskata borba i makedonskata politika na sekjavanje* (Skopje: Templum, 2020).

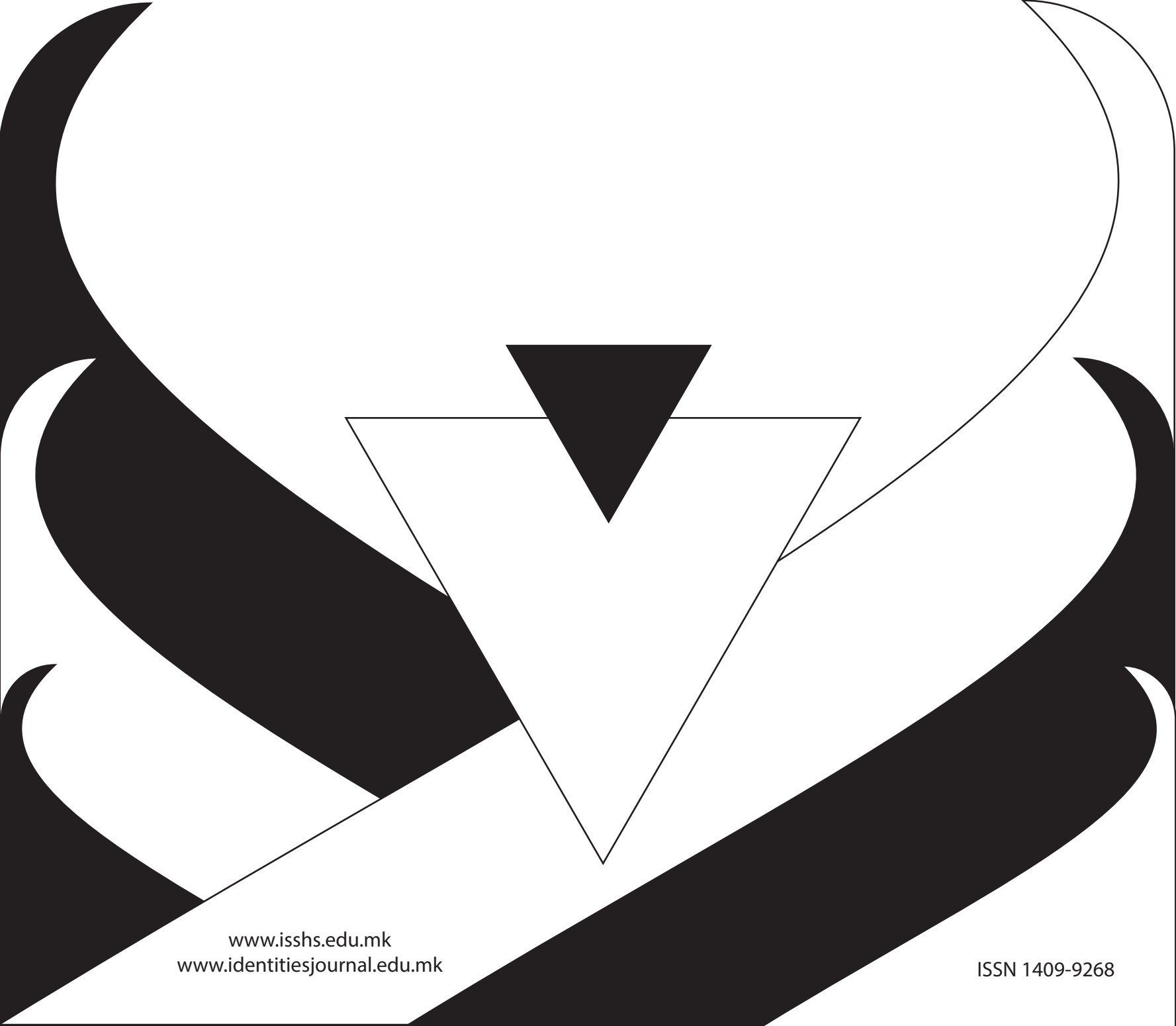


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