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## EDITORIAL

### Philosophy in Latin America: Some Introductory Remarks

Besides presenting the contributions included in this volume, my aim here is to discuss the controversial nature of the subject it deals with; a nature providing the context, the frame of reference within which I dare say these contributions should be read, even if it would be the case that some of their authors – but this is precisely one of the sides in the controversy– would reject being ascribed to any particular context, except to that of philosophy itself. The controversy I am referring to – and this is where my discussion begins – inhabits this Dossier from its very title: “Philosophy in Latin America” (PLA). Why not “Latin-American Philosophy” (LAP)? Although I shall be arguing that this controversy is based on wrong premises, and has been superseded in the contemporary world of globalised philosophical studies to which both PLA and LAP are increasingly integrated, I deem it convenient to begin with a general account of it.

In Spanish, this dispute originates with the minimal though meaningful choice between two words, two prepositions: *Filosofía en* Latinoamérica (PLA) versus *Filosofía de* Latinoamérica (LAP). One of the proponents of the second approach (in its Philosophy of Liberation version, closely connected with the corresponding theology), the Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Horacio Cerutti Guldberg neatly synthesizes what the dispute is about:

The prepositional debate on the existence of a Philosophy in Latin America, or a Latin American Philosophy has been plentiful; on occasions, it is still re-enacted, although, till now, with insufficient perspicuity. The use of the preposition *en* usually tends to conceal a much deeper objection. Philosophy proper would not exist for lack of systematics. José Gaos had already addressed the question and, very suggestively, had proposed the notion of *thinking* to characterise, in short, expressive modes of practical philosophy<sup>1</sup>. There is no equivalence between a philosophy whatsoever conceived *in* the region and a philosophy purposively pursued starting from the demands, interests, memory and projects of Latin American subjects [*de*, or simply Latin American Philosophy]. The latter has as its non-exclusive, but preferred subject, the region itself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jose Gaos. *En torno a la filosofía mexicana*. México, Alianza (1<sup>a</sup>ed. 1952), 1980, 187; “El pensamiento hispanoamericano” (*Jornadas* 12). México. El Colegio de México, 1944, 11 (Cerutti Guldberg’s footnote). Gaos (1900–1969) was one of the brightest Spanish philosophers that came to Latin America as émigrés from the Civil War (just to name a few: José Ortega y Gasset, to whom Gaos was very close, went to Paris, and then to Buenos Aires; Wenceslao Roces, who would eventually produce very influential Spanish translations of Hegel and Marx, also chose Mexico as his place of exile). Gaos, who had been the Rector of the Universidad Central de Madrid, lived the rest of his life in Mexico, where he taught at UNAM, Mexico’s main public university. His philosophical interests evolved from phenomenology (his was the first Spanish translation of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, published in 1951) to a historicism influenced by Dilthey that, for reasons I will elaborate further in this Introduction, evolved into a “philosophy of philosophy,” a meta-philosophy for which the conditions of possibility, material-historical, as well as intellectual, of the practice of philosophy are at stake.

<sup>2</sup>“Historia de las ideas filosóficas latinoamericanas,” *Hispanismo filosófico* N°6 (2000), 4–12, 5. All quotations from Spanish sources have been translated by Eduardo Sabrovsky.

The LAP approach has sometimes been extended to Spain, under the label “Ibero-American Philosophy” (IAP), the unifying idea being that both Latin American and Spain’s philosophical production, and Spanish itself as a philosophical language, have been left out of the mainstream of contemporary philosophy (although Brazil and Portugal would fall under this label, they tend to be conspicuously absent from these considerations). The most emblematic IAP project has been the *Enciclopedia Hispánica de Filosofía*, conceived in 1987 during a Congress held in Toluca, Mexico, and later (1992) rechristened *Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Filosofía*. No small accomplishment: 32 of the 34 volumes that were originally planned have already appeared (the collection is published by Trotta, a quite prestigious publishing house in Madrid). But yet, as a swift overview of the subjects covered shows, the Encyclopaedia is just what you would expect from such a monument: universal subjects (Metaphysics, Morals, Knowledge, Aesthetics, Language; the only exception would be Volumes 1 and 22), with the only specificity that the entries are written in Spanish, although by philosophers that, almost without exception, have obtained their PhD’s in universities in France, Germany, the UK and the USA.

Assessing the results of the first decade of the project, with already 17 volumes published, Reyes Matte,<sup>3</sup> who has led the project since its inception, has recognised this fact:

If one would place attention on the literature [the authors] deal with, we still mostly read those from without than those from home. It may be inescapable if we only take quality into account, but paying more attention, in dialogue or disputation, to what we ourselves do would not be a bad idea.<sup>4</sup>

As the translator of these lines, I have done my best to convey the sharp dividing line Reyes Matte traces between “those from home” and “those from without.” But it would be a mistake to hear in it echoes of the well-known Carl-Schmittian criteria – the friend/enemy antagonism – for recognising “the political” in its radical conflictuality. If there is any relation between Matte’s words and conflict and war, it has to do with that most well-known defensive weapon, the smoke screen. The smoke screen that would prevent the reader from grasping the confusions that the IAP project harbours, and that may be summarised in three points. First, the would-be identity Spain/Hispanic/Iberic/Latin American, that not only excludes Brazil and Portugal, but also assumes the Spanish language as the neutral, non-problematic linguistic terrain common to Spain and Latin America: an assumption not only blind to the linguistic differences that exist in Spain, but that quite a few in the LAP field would reject on the ground that Spanish was imposed through conquest, and that the wound inflicted to the inhabitants of the alleged “New World” will not heal till vernacular cultures and languages are not in some way redeemed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>“Pero si uno se fija bien en la literatura manejada, seguimos leyendo más a los de afuera que a los de casa. Quizás sea inevitable si sólo valoramos la calidad, pero mayor atención y diálogo o polémica con lo que nosotros mismos hacemos no estaría mal.” Reyes Matte is a Spanish philosopher, one of the founders of the Philosophy Institute, CSIC, Madrid (the acronym stands for *Consejo Superior de Investigación Científica*, Superior Council for Scientific Research). For the sake of the reader who may not be familiar with philosophy written in Spanish, I deem it not inappropriate to add that Reyes Matte is well known as a scholar specializing in the Frankfurt School and in the thought of Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin.

<sup>4</sup>“Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Filosofía. Diez años de historia.” *Isegoría* N° 19 (1998), 145–149, 149.

<sup>5</sup>This is not an abstract possibility. The prospect of developing a genuine “Indigenous Philosophy,” an ontology based on the primal experience of the world of the ab-original peoples of America, is one of the trends that converge into the LAP community. The writings of Rodolfo Kusch Gunther (1922–79), an Argentinian philosopher, are nowadays its main referent. But, if philosophy is essentially Greek – as Edmund Husserl thought, and as, for instance, Jacques Derrida emphatically “repeats” in his criticism of Emmanuel Lévinas (“Violence and Metaphysics”) – then the attempt to redeem indigenous cultures by reading them as “philosophy” would do nothing but enclose them inside a Greek philosophical labyrinth. Carla

The second objection, related to the first, is the one Matte himself points out, though without extracting the obvious conclusion: the *Ibero-American Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* is not about the elaboration of philosophical ideas grounded in the cultures in Spain or Latin America, but only about the writing of philosophy in the Spanish language. And though that may be an objective worth pursuing, understanding it as the prosecution of the LAP project is, to say the least, confusing; a confusion that stems from, and back-feeds, the very problematic notion of the Latin American subcontinent as a “New Spain.”<sup>6</sup> The third objection pertains to the specific field of philosophy: its development in the newly independent Latin American republics, especially since the mid eighteenth century was made possible by the break with the solid tradition of Spanish Scholasticism. Later on, as we know, this break will take place within Spain itself. The outcome is that the communication between the philosophical communities in Spain and Latin America increasingly came to be, and still is, mediated by the successive trends of Modern thought coming from France (Auguste Compe’s Positivism, Bergsonism, French Existentialism, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism), Germany (German Idealism, Marxism, Neo-Kantian Philosophy, Phenomenology) or Great Britain and the USA (Pragmatism, Logical Positivism, Ordinary Language Philosophy, Analytic Philosophy). In this context, the *Ibero-American Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* can be seen as a failed effort to restore the lost unity (plus the lost hegemony of Spain). Failed, and doomed to failure, as it only scratches the surface of the problem.

The PLA/LPA divide has been the expression of a deeper ideological conflict within Latin American culture and its intellectual elite, a conflict between Nationalism and Europeanism that was particularly intense in the field of literature till the 1950s. In an essay written in those years, (“The Argentinian Writer and Tradition,” 1951) Jorge Luis Borges, then under the fire of right-wing and left-wing Nationalism unified under the leadership of Juan Domingo Perón, offered a very solid argumentation against what he understood was a false dilemma. Analysing the devotion of Nationalist writers towards *gauchesca*, a literary gender allegedly deep-rooted in first-hand experience of life in the Argentinian lowlands (*la pampa*) and in the language of its inhabitants, *gauchos*, Borges wrote:

The nationalists tell us that *Don Segundo Sombra* is the model of a national book; but if we compare it with the works of the gauchesque tradition, the first thing we note are differences. *Don Segundo Sombra* abounds in metaphors of a kind having nothing to do with country speech but a great deal to do with the metaphors of the then current literary circles of Montmartre. As for the fable, the story, it is easy to find in it the influence of Kipling’s *Kim*, whose action is set in India and which was, in turn, written under the influence of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, the epic of the Mississippi. When I make this observation, I do not wish to lessen the value of *Don Segundo Sombra*; on the contrary, I want to emphasise the fact that, in order that we might have this book, it was necessary for Güiraldes to recall the poetic technique of the French literary coteries of his time and the work of Kipling which he had read many years before; in other words, Kipling and Mark Twain and the metaphors of French poets were necessary for this Argentine book, for this book which, I repeat, is no less Argentine for having accepted such influences.<sup>7</sup>

For Borges, all literary products are hybrids, *mestizos*; more in general, for the skilled reader that Borges is and personifies in his writing, there is no first-hand experience; all experience is mediated by a sort of literary unconscious, the library that, even unwittingly, the reader/writer

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Cordua’s essay included in this volume (“History as a Phenomenological Issue”) carefully reconstructs Husserl’s ideas on philosophy’s Greek identity.

<sup>6</sup>“New Spain” used to be the generic name for the whole Spanish Empire.

<sup>7</sup>“The Argentinian Writer and Tradition,” *Labyrinths*, London, 1970, 216 (translation amended).

carries with him. And the situation of the Latin American writer – neither at Reyes Matte’s “home” nor “without”; neither settled in the *pampas* nor in Europe, but at the edge, as “a writer on the edge,” to use an expression coined by the Argentinian thinker and literary critic Beatriz Sarlo<sup>8</sup> – is understood by Borges as the privileged locus for that deep understanding of literature as such. Borges, in fact, compares this condition with the position of Irish writers towards British culture, and of Jews towards the whole of Western culture. In relation to the latter, he writes:

What is our Argentine tradition? I believe we can answer this question easily and that there is no problem here. I believe our tradition is all of Western culture, and I also believe we have a right to this tradition, greater than that which the inhabitants of one or another Western nation might have. I recall here an essay of Thorstein Veblen, the North American sociologist, on the pre-eminence of Jews in Western culture. He asks if this pre-eminence allows us to conjecture about the innate superiority of the Jews, and answers in the negative; he says that they are outstanding in Western culture because they act within that culture and, at the same time, do not feel tied to it by any special devotion.<sup>9</sup>

Although, as far as I can recall, Borges never dealt directly with the issue of colonisation – the deep issue underlying the LAP/PLA debate – I would like to add here an argument I surmise he might have agreed with. For, as Zygmunt Bauman has convincingly argued, with the legitimacy provided by its “legislators,” *les philosophes*, European Enlightenment launched a radical campaign, an *avant-la-lettre* “cultural revolution” to wipe out vernacular cultures and languages in its own soil<sup>10</sup>. In other words, the classical Latin American dilemma – “Culture or Barbarism,” in the Argentinian nineteenth-century intellectual José de Sarmiento’s famous words – was previously rehearsed in Europe, and was later to be the substance of the Enlightenment/Romanticism dispute that most Latin American debates tend to reproduce. Europe had to colonise itself before becoming the Modern, Enlightened Europe it is now supposed to be; and the effort of colonisation may be understood as the expansion of the shockwave that had already disassembled traditional European culture, giving rise to the Modern World; a world, moreover, intrinsically related to the discovery/ingestion/creation of the New World.

Writing on the edge is not equivalent to abstract cosmopolitanism; in fact, many of Borges’ fictions, essays and poems deal with his native city and country, Buenos Aires, Argentina, with its history, literature and politics; with the edge understood now in its historical and geographical sense. But, even in his most “local” pieces (for instance, when conceiving an ending to *Martin Fierro*, Argentine’s major epic poem, in a short story appropriately named “El fin” [“The End”]<sup>11</sup>), Borges never ceases self-reflectively to interrogate the conditions of possibility of his own writing and of literature in general (in this case, of re-writing as copy and original at the

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<sup>8</sup>Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, a Writer on the Edge*, London: Verso, 1993. Also available in: Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, a Writer on the Edge, Borges Studies Online*. J. L. Borges Center for Studies & Documentation. Internet: 14/04/01 (<http://www.borges.pitt.edu/bsol/bsi0.php>)

<sup>9</sup>“The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” 218.

<sup>10</sup>Bauman, Zygmunt, *Legislators and Interpreters: On modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals* Cambridge, Polity Press 1987.

<sup>11</sup>Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, London, Penguin Classics, 1998, 168–70. Many other of these “local” pieces can be found in this volume: “Man on the Pink Corner,” 45–52; “The South,” pp. 174–79; “Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden,” 208–211; “A Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1928–1874);” “The Gospel according to Mark,” 397–401, just to name a few. But, as a brief review of these stories shows, the term “local” (and the split between Borges’ “local” and “metaphysical” stories, poems and essays) is unfair to them, and to the whole of Borges’ literary project and production, aimed precisely at deconstructing it.

same time). Meta-literature, sometimes associated with post-modernism (although Borges takes care to show that it is as old as Valmiki's *Ramayana*, or Cervantes' *Don Quixote*), would rather be the natural approach to literary practice for writers on the edge. And this approach can be extended to Latin American cultural production as a whole, and especially to its philosophy.

The Mexican philosopher Guillermo Hurtado Pérez, in his "Balance and Perspectives of Latin American Philosophy"<sup>12</sup> tries to evade the LAP/PLA dilemma, substituting it, at least in a first analysis, with the antagonism between a "modernising model" and an "authenticity model." Within the first, he recognises four successive waves of modernisation (Positivism, German philosophy, Marxism, Analysis), each successively displacing the one before, and forming small, Northern Hemisphere-dependent communities with almost no communication between one another. And, Hurtado Pérez observes, "modernisers rarely read their fellow modernisers, being too busy reading foreigners ... he almost never quotes them and, if he does, he does not engage in constructive dialogue" (365). In contrast, the aim of those engaged with the "authenticity model" would be for "our philosophical thinking to be the result of a deep reflection ... in tune with our social, cultural and individual reality" (370). But is there anyone not in tune with reality, understood in such slack terms? Hurtado Pérez, in fact, is aware of the flaws in this model: in short, being in tune does not guarantee authenticity; in the name of "authenticity" anything goes – including the coarsest reductions of philosophy to sectarian politics. And, as Borges would surely have noticed, "authenticity" (*autenticidad*) translates the German – Heideggerian, Phenomenological – *Eigentlichkeit*; so that, finally, this model, conceived under the aegis, not of the French literary coteries Ricardo Güiraldes used to hang around, but of their German Phenomenological counterparts, collapses into its opposite.

Hurtado Pérez, in perhaps unintended Borgesian flair, ends by going back to Jose Gaos' idea of meta-philosophy (see note 1). And, although philosophers "on the edge" as self-conscious practitioners of a meta-philosophical approach may have an edge on this, the truth is that philosophy, in its many variegated forms, has never failed to pose the question of its own conditions of possibility. Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations (PI)* certainly did. And he came out with an answer I find suggestive and useful for the ideas I am trying to convey: "For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*" (§ 38).

Before elaborating on this suggestive metaphor, just a few words to argue that the reference to Wittgenstein in an essay dealing with Philosophy in Latin America and its "edgy" character is not unwarranted. In fact, Wittgenstein is the prototypical expatriate: torn between his Austro-Hungarian origins and Cambridge; between academic philosophy and life, and his Tolstoian escapades; between Jewishness and Christianity; last, but not least, between the book he could actually write (the *Tractatus*; the "world-book," as he will later say in his "Lecture on Ethics") and the book most important to him, but precisely the one – "a book on Ethics which really was book on ethics" – that cannot be written at all ("if a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world").<sup>13</sup> In short, nor here nor there: on the edge<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup>"Balance y perspectivas de la filosofía latinoamericana," *Endoxa: Series Filosóficas* N° 12, 2000, 359–78, UNED, Madrid.

<sup>13</sup>*The Philosophical Review*, Duke University Press Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan., 1965), 3–12, 6.

<sup>14</sup>The Argentinian writer Ricardo Piglia has neatly captured Wittgenstein's "edgy" nature. In *Respiración Artificial*, a novel originally published in Spanish in 1981 (*Artificial Respiration*, trans. Daniel Balderston, Duke University Press 1994), besides presenting in fictional form a discussion on Borges' writing that thematises its being on the edge between Europeanism and Nationalism, Piglia introduces us to his character, the Polish philosopher Tardewski. Tardewski, once a Wittgenstein disciple, lives now in exile in a forgotten town

G. E. M. Ascombe rendered the *feiert* in Wittgenstein's quotation as "to go on holiday" in her 1953 first translation, a choice that P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte in their extensively revised 2009 4th Edition have left unchanged. And correctly so, if we remember that the German verb *feiern* has "to celebrate" as its main meaning, a meaning that the English "to go on holiday" certainly retains (and also the noun "holiday," as a translation of *der Feiertag*). Although not necessarily in the same way ("holy" has a religious connotation, as *heilig* would have in German), both "to go on holiday" and *feiern* seem to indicate an exception within the normal course of time and not just idleness, lack of occupation (that would rather be a US-American "vacation"). Nonetheless, it is also worth noticing – G.P. Backer and P.M.S. Hacker, in their 1980 *Analytical Commentary* call attention to this, although without any further elaboration – that Wittgenstein himself favoured "when language idles" as a translation of *wenn die Sprache feiert*.<sup>15</sup> So, is philosophy an exception, "an important day" within the paradoxical seriousness, the work ethics of language games? Or is it just its fading away into idleness? Is it the wholeness of a holiday or the vacuum of a vacation?

Within the limits of this Introduction, I think this much can be said by way of an answer: what our "philosopher on the edge" rejects as merely idle is not philosophy itself, but the notion of there being specific "philosophical problems" towards whose solution philosophers "work." And as far as this "work" is pursued in an academic vacuum, it is correctly deemed "idle." Translated in terms of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, this is to say that philosophy is not grounded in any specific language game: if it claims one for itself, then that would not be a ground, but a vacuum. So in a world that only knows of work and idleness, of work and vacation, philosophy would constitute an exception, a sovereign exception: not the opposite of these poles and the world they encompass, but an exercise in grasping its innermost significance, its meta-physical kernel. As we know, in *PI* Wittgenstein associates his own practice of philosophy with the notion of *Übersicht*, an understanding that "sees connections": "A surveyable representation [*Die übersichtliche Darstellung*] produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'" (§122).<sup>16</sup> And, very suggestively, he immediately interrogates: "Is this a 'Weltanschauung'?" Now, "*Anschauung*" ("intuition") carries within itself the meaning of grasping an entity in its immediate presence. Related to a world (*Welt*), this is not something ordinary cognition can achieve: it rather indicates the *a priori* standpoint that makes cognition possible by remaining outside its reach. In terms of the *Tractatus* and the "Lecture on Ethics," this would be a limit, an edge from which the world as such can be seen "as a miracle": an exceptional standpoint, a holy-day.

With this brief Wittgensteinian digression, I have intended to extend the notion of the edge beyond biography and geography, to philosophy itself. If this is so, if philosophy is in itself edgy, then there is no essential difference between its practice in Latin America or elsewhere (of course, there may be enormous differences in terms of material conditions, access to libraries,

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at the North of Argentine. With no hope of getting back to Europe, he survives giving math lessons to the children of local landowners. Tardewski can be understood as a double *Doppelgänger*: Wittgenstein's, and Witold Gombrowicz', the famous Polish writer (*Ferdydurke*), who was a real exile in Argentine for almost a quarter of a century (1939–63), living almost unknown and in scanty conditions.

<sup>15</sup>*An analytical Commentary to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1980, p. 95 ("Exegesis of §38"), §132. The final statement is also significant: "The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, [*wenn die Sprache leerläuft*] not when it is doing work." And the verb *leerlaufen* is translated a "to drain," that is, to evacuate, to create a vacuum (*die Lufteleere*), a "vacation."

<sup>16</sup>He adds: "The concept of a surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterises the way we represent things, how we look at matters."



etc., but these would not be essential). In other words, even in its most Europhilic vein, philosophy in Latin America cannot avoid addressing the conditions of possibility – “material-historical, as well as intellectual,” as I wrote above in relation to José Gaos’ meta-philosophy – of its practice. And, again, though it may have an edge on this, it would not be essential: in the final analysis, meta-philosophy is nothing but philosophy itself.

So, the question goes back to philosophy and its edgy condition. Being on the edge is not a secure position at all: you can always slip; philosophy, though in no way alien to work, loses its edge when it slips and collapses into mere academic work.<sup>17</sup> And, as I announced at the beginning of this Introduction, this would be what the PLA/LAP controversy has been and is still about. It is not that philosophers on one side would have been only concerned with authors and subjects “from without,” while the others would have neglected the philosophical tradition in favour of local issues. On the contrary, on both sides the engagement with philosophy, be it Kantian or Heideggerian or Marxist or whatever, has been intertwined with various other engagements: the list would include politics, social and economic issues and theories, history, art and literature, science, *etcetera*.

Philosophy in Latin America became an autonomous discipline only in the first decades of the twentieth century; till then, its practice was not discernible from general political and cultural concerns. Philosophy began to be practiced systematically in universities that, at that time, were mainly concerned, not with being able to exhibit a quantifiable output, but with the reproduction of elites within the framework of the nation-state. Here and elsewhere, massification and globalisation have out-dated that model. As the Canadian intellectual Bill Readings, writing at the beginning of the 1990s well understood, the university of culture, with its subordination of professional training to *Bildung*, has given way to the “university of excellence” in which globalised academic communities establish their own standards of performance and excellence.<sup>18</sup> Paradoxically, philosophy, lacking any application it can directly offer to the market and display as an index of its productivity, has adapted itself maybe too well to this self-referential, even tautological model: in comparison with other disciplines, funds may be lacking but, during the last few decades, global networks dealing with specialised philosophical subjects (authors, schools, epochs) have flourished. On the one hand, that has been good news for Latin American philosophers suffering from isolation: now, at least potentially, we have almost unlimited access to colleagues, bibliographical databases and archives all the world round, and we can compete head-to-head with our colleagues from the Northern Hemisphere. But the payoff may be a different, perhaps more intense isolation: the isolation of the globalised scholar (are you a Heidegger scholar? A Benjamin scholar? A Nietzsche scholar? What is your field of specialisation? Those are the questions philosophers now address to their colleagues in the small world of academic congresses) who has read everything *his* author wrote – even the proverbial laundry lists – but who lacks the depth of experience, so that any will do: politics and war, but also music, art and literature, eroticism, even madness – in which philosophical thought is bred and through which it can be really understood and communicated.

I am not a pessimist, nor nostalgic for a lost unity. Staying on the edge has always been difficult; the conditions in which philosophical knowledge is produced and circulated in the globalised world have their specific trade-offs, and those we have to face in Latin America and elsewhere.

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<sup>17</sup>It is suggestive that Hurtado Pérez, after going through the modernisation / authenticity debate, and seeing in “meta-philosophy” it’s *Aufhebung*, focuses his attention, in the final pages of the article I have been commenting, on institutional, intra-university policies (mainly journals and editorials, syllabi). So, finally, even meta-philosophy turns to be a question of professionalisation, of work.

<sup>18</sup>Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge, Mass/London: Harvard University Press 1996.

Because, in the absence of any substantial unity among an enormous and ever-growing variety of disciplines the only way in which the philosopher's production can be accounted for is by means of quantitative indicators. In other words, the globalised university system has no other way for distributing its resources than the quantitative comparison of inputs and outputs; finally, the aggregated results of this operation are fed into international university rankings, the tools that assure that the machine will get the fuel it requires to keep running. So, finally, in this *Totale Mobilmachung*, intellectual work tends to be reduced to plain, abstract work: to an output that is measured against a certain input.<sup>19</sup>

I certainly do not mean philosophers should try to contest this epochal trend. For there is nothing inherently wrong with specialisation and work. And Martin Heidegger's advice should be listened to: "No age lets itself be done away with a negative decree. Negation only throws the negator off the path," he wrote in "The Age of the World Picture." In plain (and very Chilean terms), you had better not stand against a *tsunami*. But the tsunami metaphor suggests something else: you do not stand against a big wave, but surely you might try to surf it. Surfers manage to climb to the edge (the edge, again), and then try to stay put. In more concrete terms, the excellence model maybe global and overwhelming, but its abstractness prevents it from being totalitarian: it has a blind spot, for it is content-blind. Of course, form – specialised papers published by specialised journals read by communities of, again, specialists – somehow configures content. But again, and this is not altogether new; configuring has always been the job of the powers-that-be. But the edge as such they cannot reach.

To characterise the challenge philosophy faces in contemporary conditions, I have used the words "specialisation" and "work." Maybe "profession" would have been a better choice: philosophy as profession, *Philosophie als Beruf*, as Max Weber might have said. Because, although this sense is frequently forgotten, "profession" (in Spanish, *profesión*) is close to "vocation" (*vocación*). In both cases, what we have is the sense of a calling (*Ruf*, as in the German *Beruf*). And, as Max Weber taught in his famous January 1919 conferences in Munich, science or politics *als Beruf* demand a commitment to responsibility (accountability, we would say today), even if the tasks demanded may seem merely instrumental, devoid of finality and signification; but, in the final analysis, such a commitment can only be sustained if it rests upon a conviction, a vocation, a calling.

There is a certain skill involved in staying on the edge, in keeping an eye on work while the other remains fixed on vocation. It may be hard, but no one said it would be otherwise. And again, this is emphatically not a Latin American domestic issue, in the same way in which, as I hope to have shown, the question of the edge, and even the question of colonisation, cross the dividing lines between Europe and America, between North and South.

With these ideas in mind, I am presenting here a collection, a sample of essays written by Latin American philosophers (Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Chile) who, from my point of view, each in her or his own peculiar way, manage to stay on the edge, in the over-determined sense this term has acquired in this Introduction (philosophy is inherently "edgy"; Latin American philosophers and writers are prone to be self-reflective about this condition). So that, although they may not be writing about any specific Latin American issue (only one of the essays in fact does), their edgy condition somehow "shows" through whatever they choose to say.

**Carla Cordua's** essay, to begin with, offers us a thorough reconstruction of Husserl's phenomenological approach to "the history of the idea of philosophy." A reconstruction that aims to dispel misunderstandings that have persisted even after the Supplements that complete

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<sup>19</sup>"Die Totale Mobilmachung" is the expression coined by Ernst Jünger in 1931, and later used by Heidegger in his 1938 essay "The Age of the World Picture" (Appendix 1).

Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences* have been made available, and that shows that the concern with such a history was already present, *in nuce*, in the phenomenology of 1910–11. And yet, in the 1930s, this concern became “the very thing”: “from being just a circumstance external to philosophy, history becomes the very thing that philosophy needs in order to transform itself into a lucid activity,” writes Cordua. In 2011 Carla Cordua was awarded the National Prize for the Humanities by the Republic of Chile, for intellectual accomplishments that combine a rigorous approach to philosophy with a rich array of interests, comprising art and literature, as well as history and politics. In the 1930s philosophy's edge had turned problematic, to say the least; perhaps going back to Husserl's *Crisis*, as Carla Cordua does here, should be read as a statement.

**Jorge Dotti** has been one of the key players in the revival of Carl Schmitt's political theology in the last few decades. His essays on Schmitt have been presented in many international seminars and symposia that have themselves furthered this revival, and they have been published in the most prestigious journals and anthologies (the English-speaking community may remember the pioneer *Cardozo Law Review* issue dedicated to discuss Carl Schmitt's “Legacy and Prospects” (Volume 21 May 2000, Number 5–6), that includes Dotti's “Schmitt reads Marx”). Although his interest in Schmitt may be understood within the general trend to recover Schmitt's concept of the political for the left, Dotti's work clearly stands-out, because of his refusal to play down Schmitt's metaphysical and theological commitments and to produce a neutralized, post-modern version of “the political.” His essay “Space and World as Keys to Political Existence in Schmitt and Heidegger” is a good proof of this. Starting with Schmitt's approving reference, in *Land and Sea*, to Heidegger's consideration of space and world in *Being and Time* (the statement that space is in the world, and not *vice versa*), Dotti digs deeply into both thinkers' understanding of these notions; an understanding he relates to fundamental historic-existential positions: while, in oceanic terms, Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-sein* would be grounded in the enclosed experience of the Mediterranean, Schmitt's metaphysics would be tied to the infinite will mobilising modern Ur-entrepreneurs – buccaneers, privateers and adventurers of all kinds – in their determination to leave *terra firma* in search of the open seas and the New World.

**Kathia Hanza's** essay engages in depth with the contribution to the understanding of contemporary art made by the French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman. Relying on previous work by Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin, and also on Nietzsche and Freud, Didi-Huberman teaches us, Hanza contends, “to find how images [ ... ] are constructed through their confinement in an epistemological order. It is necessary, according to Didi-Huberman, to criticise the reduction of the image to the visible, that is, to the closure of the image in favour of a certain knowledge of it.” And symptoms, in their over-determination, would be a specific way for images to overflow the visible. Hanza's concern with Aesthetics, contemporary art and images may be understood not only as a philosophical contribution to those fields, but also as an instance of a trend towards visual studies that, on the one hand, is fed by the baroque visuality that Latin America has produced and through which, in a certain way, it has been produced, last but not least, in the turn to Aesthetics peculiar to the times of political violence and dictatorships that Latin America experienced in the second half of the twentieth century. For many Latin American philosophers, Aesthetics has been the vehicle for political concerns themselves off-limits; and, at the same time, this turn has produced a genuine and deep reflection on the relations between art and politics.

**Gustavo Leyva** is a prestigious social and political philosopher, whose writings deal not only with social and political theory, in the line of Jürgen Habermas, the heirs of the Frankfurt School and the advocates of deliberative democracy, but also with the issues raised by modernisation and modernity in Latin America and with the ways in which different lines of thought, from Liberalism to Marxism, have characterised and proposed to solve these. His essay, from its very title (“Democracy in Latin America: an Unfinished Project”) with its distinctive Habermasian flair,

is a nuanced, although finally quite straightforward contribution to a longstanding debate. In fact, Leyva's essay mentions Simón Bolívar and José Domingo Sarmiento, writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, and discusses the work of José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930), Latin America's most original Marxist thinker. What is at stake is, I would say, the claim contained in the essay's title: is liberal democracy in Latin America "unfinished"? Are Latin America's problems to be faced with an extension and intensification of it? That has been the traditional Liberal claim; proponents of deliberative democracy would like to dispose of its authoritarian, state-centred features, putting democratic deliberation in their place. The other side of the debate, represented here by Mariátegui, is rather sceptical: for them, what we have had, and still have, is the full expression of liberal democracy understood within a world-wide division of labour, that is, in conditions of economic and political dependency. Leyva's article includes an Epilogue, written in Brazil in the heat of the extended wave of anti-government protests initiated in June 2013; one of the many recent episodes that have actualized the debate on the projections and limits of democracy in the region, and to whose understanding Gustavo Leyva's essay is an important contribution.

**Márcio Seligmann-Silva** teaches Literary Theory at University of Campinas, one of the most outstanding universities in the region, located in the Brazilian State of Sao Paulo. In Brazil and elsewhere, Literary Theory serves as an umbrella for interdisciplinary studies that frequently have a very strong philosophical component. That is also the case with Márcio Seligmann-Silva. His essay, although not addressing specific political issues, may be understood in the line of the thinkers of the "first" Frankfurt School and their Dialectics of Enlightenment; that is, taking a critical stance towards the possibilities of enlightened liberal democracy discussed above. In fact, the appeal to compassion that characterises most ethical approaches to politics is submitted by Seligmann-Silva to a rigorous examination, concluding that it may lead to a "bureaucratisation and juridical and criminal codification of life." In his essay, animals in modern philosophy and thought – in the works of Descartes, Leibniz, Bayle, Rousseau and Bentham, among others – are the carriers of deep questions concerning human life and politics. Pity towards them, extended to fellow human beings, becomes suspect; Seligmann-Silva closes his essay quoting Hannah Arendt ("Pity, taken as a spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself") and concludes: "It is a drug [...] and like any drug, it must be used very carefully and only in case of extreme necessity, for the sake of both animals and human animals."

**Diego Tatián** teaches Political Philosophy at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (Argentina). The last few decades have seen a revival of Spinoza that may be traced back to French philosophers such as Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, and that has been promoted more recently by the likes of Toni Negri, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt. Diego Tatián is a key figure in this revival. The essay included in this volume is a good example of his erudition as a Spinoza scholar, as well as an exercise in observing cross-culture influences; or better, in observing how constructions of radical otherness – in this case, Chinese otherness, as observed by early modern authors like Pierre Bayle, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and later the writers of the *Encyclopédie* – operate in order to name what is perceived as alien within the bounds of one's own cultural milieu: in this case, to name "the internal threat to Europe itself constituted by Spinozism and the various forms of libertinism that it inspired [...] Spinoza and China designate a same threat to Revelation — internal and external respectively — hovering over Europe, but also a corroboration of the universality shrouding human reason," writes Tatián. Tatián published in 2009 a remarkable collection of essays on Jorge Luis Borges (*La Conjura de los Justos. Borges y la Ciudad de los Hombres*. Buenos Aires: Las Cuarenta, 2009). One is tempted to think that, in the same way the Argentinian *gauchesca* literature was, Borges sayeth, the creation of French nineteenth-century literary coteries,

“China” was required for Radical Enlightenment friends and foes to identify the controversial subject they were dealing with.

Quite a few people have contributed to this project and deserve acknowledgement and gratitude. First of all, the authors themselves, who have provided the English-speaking public with an excellent sample of what is being done in philosophy in this part of the world. Then, the translators, who have done excellent work on this edition. Roberto Torretti, who translated Carla Cordua’s essay, is himself one of the most outstanding philosophers in Latin America, awarded with the National Prize for the Humanities by the Republic of Chile (he is also Carla’s lifetime companion and husband). Jorge Dotti’s essay was translated by Nora Sieverding PhD candidate, University of Frankfurt and Giorgia Marman, MA in Social Anthropology and International Development, University of Guelph. Carl Fischer, who translated Gustavo Leyva’s work, is Assistant Professor of Spanish at the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Fordham University, New York. James Martell translated Kathia Hanza and Diego Tatián’s essays. He is pursuing a PhD in Literature at the University of Notre Dame. María Fernanda Negrete translated Márcio Seligmann-Silva. She is a Visiting Assistant Professor of French at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Héctor Hevia, who is a graduate student at my home institution, the Instituto de Humanidades, Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago de Chile, and a native English speaker, was very helpful in going through the translations, completing details and aligning them with the editorial guidelines.

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## History as a Phenomenological Issue

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“Ziele, Aufgaben haben nur Personen, die sich  
Aufgaben stellen”

Edmund Husserl<sup>2,3</sup>

Husserl said that the main subject (*die Sache*) of his latter writings is the history of the idea of philosophy. This history concerns European humanity, and, in virtue of the universal aims of European rationality, it also concerns the whole of humankind. What role can history play in Husserl’s phenomenology? Do *The Crisis of European Sciences* and other writings of the period from 1934 to 1938 provide some justification for including history in the field of phenomenology? We know that both the published and unpublished writings of this unhappy period of Husserl’s life refer to historical questions that the philosopher thought urgent, constrained as he was to publish outside Germany, because he was a Jew. In spite of his age and fragile state of health, Husserl worked during this time intensely, feverishly correcting the writings intended for publication in Belgrade, carrying with him his manuscripts to the health resorts where he went to rest, so as to polish them further. Nevertheless, he was unable to finish the third part of his book about the European crisis. He died before fully revising what he planned to publish and before writing some parts of the whole that were still pending. His assistant Eugen Fink, who worked with him to the end, and the book’s editor Walter Biemel have written some pages that clarify Husserl’s latest plans. But this final part of Husserl’s legacy leaves questions open, which cause misunderstandings. One of them concerns history as a phenomenological issue.

That Husserl’s philosophical reflections in the *Crisis* should turn around a historical process does not stand in need of explanation. For the author had already, early on, historically located phenomenology through references to the past. In 1911 he regrets that the ideal of a scientific

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<sup>1</sup>I thank Roberto Torretti for his assistance with the translation of my Spanish manuscript into English.

<sup>2</sup>“Aims, tasks are only had by persons who set themselves tasks.” (KEB, p. 373)

<sup>3</sup>Husserl, E., *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (hereafter: C), trans., with an Introduction, by David Carr (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Husserl, E., *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie, Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (hereafter: K), herausgegeben von Walter Biemel (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954) (Husserliana VI). Husserl, E., *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie, Ergänzungsband, Texte aus dem Nachlass 1934–1937* (hereafter: KEB), herausgegeben von Reinhold N. Smid (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993) (Husserliana XIX). I have translated most quotations from the German or French myself. Quotations from the *Crisis* are taken from Carr’s translation (Husserl, C.), but I have occasionally retouched them to restore the meaning of the original German.

philosophy had not come to fruition in the series of philosophies between Aristotle and himself. The current philosophical landscape cried for relief. Both the phenomenology of 1911 and that of the *Crisis* seek to correct a historical situation that is dangerous for reason. There is indeed a big difference between these approaches, but this does not depend upon the latter Husserl's reflections on history. The difference between both positions, separated by over 20 years devoted to phenomenology, consists in this: from being just a circumstance external to philosophy, history becomes the very thing that philosophy needs in order to transform itself into a lucid activity. The *Crisis* is therefore once more called, like the main works that preceded it, an "Introduction to Phenomenology." Towards the end of his life Husserl is convinced that European history is both the cradle and the goal of philosophy. History's status is radically changed by its promotion from tacit context of thought to essential content that gathers what is thought together with the activity of thinking it. In the *Crisis*, history becomes the consummate fusion of method with its main subject matter. This revolution – to use Husserl's term for historical turnabouts of truth<sup>4</sup> – may not be sufficiently justified by the later Husserl, but it is well exemplified in the book that installs it in the process of Europe.

The presence of history as the book's main issue is obvious for everyone who reads its unfinished text. Two important early reactions have influenced later commentators. Merleau-Ponty warns us that Husserl, when analysing certain forms of non-thetic consciousness in *Experience and Judgment*, uses flowing concepts (*fließende Begriffe*),<sup>5</sup> because non-thetic consciousness refers to objects that are not fully determined. "In his last period, Husserl became fully aware of what it means to go back to phenomena and silently gave up the philosophy of essences,"<sup>6</sup> says Merleau-Ponty. If flowing concepts are incompatible with essentialist phenomenology, what ought we to say of history, which is neither a phenomenon, nor an essence, nor the correlate of an intention? Husserl's last work would be inconsistent with the program to which he devoted his life. Merleau-Ponty's remark, though casual, draws a conclusion of ample scope: Husserl has abandoned the phenomenology of essences.

In 1949 Ricœur published a detailed study of Husserl's ideas about history.<sup>7</sup> He ascribes to Husserl the intention of formulating a philosophy of history in the *Crisis* and in other writings of that time. He says: "Nothing in Husserl's earlier work would seem to prepare a tilt of phenomenology towards a philosophy of history. One rather finds in it reasons for never encountering the philosophy of history again."<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding the French philosopher's careful analysis of these Husserlian ideas, he does not achieve, in my view, a proper understanding of the chief purpose inspiring them or of the scope of this problem. Ricœur concludes that transcendental phenomenological idealism is incompatible with a philosophy of history. For it is impossible to reconcile the transcendental ego that constitutes every thinkable contents with the externality of historical realities that are undeniably capable of forming the subjectivities of individuals established within a particular culture. Ricœur asks: "Did Husserl succeed in holding that history is real at the same

<sup>4</sup>Husserl, KEB, pp. 389, 391; cf. Husserl, K., pp. 209, 212, 214, 247, 259, 261, 325.

<sup>5</sup>Husserl distinguishes between the mathematical method of essential thinking (*Wesensdenken*), which is idealizing, and the method of essential intuition (*Wesensanschauung*), which is applicable to other fields, in a not exactly graspable "Typik" (Husserl, E., *Erfahrung und Urteil, Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, redigiert und herausgegeben von Ludwig Landgrebe, Hamburg: Claassen 1954 (1st ed., 1948), p. 428n). Husserl never expected phenomenological descriptions to attain mathematical exactness; their achievement, rather than ideal exactness, is to produce the full intuition of the intended object.

<sup>6</sup>Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 61n.

<sup>7</sup>It is likely that when Ricœur wrote this essay he did not yet know the whole contents of *Husserliana* volume VI, which was edited later by Biemel (this is the book I cite as K), and includes the important *Beilagen* (Supplements) that complete Parts I and II of *Crisis*.

<sup>8</sup>Ricœur, P., "Husserl et le sens de l'histoire", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 54, p. 282.

time as he held the self to be the sole foundation? [His] concept of intentionality ultimately allows us to ground man on history and history on my consciousness; his final ambition is to justify a true transcendence of history upon the foundation of a transcendental idealism.”<sup>9</sup>

Had Husserl, as Ricœur believes, actually formulated a speculative theory of world history, we would obviously have to choose one of these alternatives: *either* a productive subjectivity that constitutes the past, *or* an independently existing past, the course of which can be organized as history. There is no way of joining together the idealism of constitutive consciousness with the independent objectivity of facts. Ricœur’s alternative is valid, but it does not apply to Husserl’s work, which is not guilty of the inconsistency attributed to it by Ricœur. Ricœur mistakenly takes for granted that Husserl is proposing a philosophy of empirical history, in which case, indeed, we would face the glaring incompatibility of transcendental idealism with the philosophy of history.

Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur only had in view the first two parts of Husserl’s incomplete book. Their criticisms would not be worth mentioning if the misunderstandings of Husserl’s notion of history that sprung from them had not survived until today, half a century after Biemel’s edition of the *Crisis* in three parts plus Supplements,<sup>10</sup> and 20 since the publication of Husserl’s posthumous papers of 1934–1937 in *Husserliana* XXIX (here quoted as KEB). A fine sample of such misunderstandings can be gathered from *The new Husserl*, edited by Donn Welton in 2003. In this book, several authors maintain that the “new Husserl” they believe to have discovered, embraces history in his philosophy thanks to a variant of genetic phenomenology, which would license reference to human society and its transformations as time goes by.<sup>11</sup> We know that original generativity is grounded on human experience of life and the world. Each “Humanity” has, according to Husserl, “a specific spiritual (*geistige*) and indeed personal generativity, besides the physically organic one.”<sup>12</sup> We are aware of belonging to a community of subjects. In the shared human world, “I know myself to be factually within a generative framework, in the unitary flow of a historical development in which this present is mankind’s present with a historical past and a historical future.”<sup>13</sup> Husserlian generativity based on the shared experience of the world is a transcendental structure that constitutes historical time. To think that Husserl externally joins the dimension of factual history to the subject of experience is another misunderstanding about phenomenology and history. The persistence of this stubborn error sufficiently justifies the enterprise of elucidating history as a phenomenological issue.

Every statement with which Husserl explains phenomenology says or implies that this philosophy greatly differs from the philosophies of the past. Instead of erecting a theory or a system associated with its inventor, he will investigate an inexhaustible field of interlinked matters that can only become known through the labour of many generations of researchers who, applying the same method, formulate lasting and combinable truths that will yield definitive knowledge. Philosophy depends on its future. As a collective undertaking, it is best seen as an infinite task of cooperation among actors none of whom intend to complete it. Philosophical truth is an ideal

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>10</sup>These Supplements are contemporary texts that develop themes incompletely dealt with in the *Crisis*. They are 29 in all (Husserl, K., pp. 349–516). Carr’s translation of the *Crisis* includes only six of them (Husserl, C., pp. 343–400).

<sup>11</sup>“The breakthrough to a genetic method brought a significant expansion of the scope of Husserl’s phenomenology and, with it, of the kinds of issues that it was able to cover. Everything from the tacit features of perception to the historical transformations of cultural horizons was open to view” (Welton, D., (ed.), *The New Husserl, A Critical Reader*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003, p. xiv). See also Steinbock, A. J., “Generativity and the Scope of Generative Phenomenology,” in Welton, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 289–325.

<sup>12</sup>Husserl, Nachlass K III 3, p. 60, as quoted by M. Riedel in Ritter et al., 1971–2007, vol. 3, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup>Husserl, K., p. 256; C, p. 253.



goal guiding a continuous work that will never reach its endpoint. A spiritual community of successive generations will be formed with the purpose of serving truth conceived as a ceaseless collective activity. This idea of philosophy first arose among the Greeks and was thought out in its main features by Aristotle. For 23 centuries philosophy was carried on by heirs who failed to understand this original idea. Already in 1910, Husserl volunteers to cure the factual history of philosophy from its infidelity to its historical origin.

Why was the essay “Philosophy as strict science” never regarded as a violation of the phenomenological method? Could the very idea of a scientific philosophy conceived as an infinite task be anything else than a historical approach to this discipline? The history of European rationality presented in the *Crisis* differs from the sketch of 1910 only in the density of details displayed in the book’s treatment of the idea of philosophy. In both versions, Husserl links through the idea of philosophy the discipline’s remote origin with its present and its future. As an infinite task on whose behalf many battles were fought for centuries to save it from vanishing altogether,<sup>14</sup> philosophy demands the postulation of a future open to the progressive foundation of truth. The ideal of the initial project – the *Crisis* adds – stems from the self-reflection<sup>15</sup> of whoever has been philosophizing. “Every project (*Vorhabe*), especially the one that intentionally implies the multiplicity of mediations requires repeated reflection (*wiederholende Besinnung*), [i.e.] repetition as renewal of originality (*Ursprünglichkeit*), renewal of the evidence of its authentic sense.”<sup>16</sup> Reflection about his or her own task, and the personal responsibility of whoever performs it by “establishing truths” are the philosopher’s guides and foundations.

In the interpretations and criticisms that we exercise upon history, we ascertain truths, not casual opinions. It is only *as such* that they can later give us new practical guidance. What sort of historical scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) is this? Obviously not that which is usually called history of philosophy and which rather presupposes it. History of philosophy in its first and usual sense is a branch of general history, the universal science of historical facts.<sup>17</sup>

Husserl contrasts his use of “history” in both volumes of the *Crisis* and explicitly separates it from other more common uses of this term.<sup>18</sup>

The historical reflection we must have in mind here concerns our existence as philosophers and, correlative, the existence of philosophy, which, for its part, issues from our philosophical existence (*ist aus unserer philosophischen Existenz*).<sup>19</sup>

He is interested in going back to the origin of the current activity of philosophically thinking and inquiring, in accordance with the way Husserl understands his own job and his personal

<sup>14</sup>“More and more, history of philosophy, seen from within, takes on the character of a struggle for existence, i.e., a struggle between the philosophy which lives in the straightforward pursuit of its task – the philosophy of naive faith in reason – and the scepticism which negates it and repudiates it in empiricist fashion” (Husserl, K., p. 11; Husserl, C., p. 13). Cf. KEB N° 33, pp. 421–3: *Die Unterscheidung zwischen absoluter und relativer Urstiftung* (Sommer 1934).

<sup>15</sup>Husserl distinguishes between “a broader and a narrower concept of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*): pure ego-reflection (*Ichreflexion*) and reflection upon the whole life of the ego as ego; and reflection (*Besinnung*) in the pregnant sense of inquiring back into the sense or teleological essence of the ego” (Husserl, K., pp. 510s, no. 1; Husserl, C., p. 392n).

<sup>16</sup>Husserl, K., p. 485s; not in C. In the note appended to this passage, Husserl explains “existential self-reflection (*die existenziale Selbstbesinnung*)” as “a higher-level critical activity in which every act and achievement of my ego critically lays bare its lower and its higher, its good and its bad sense” (Husserl, K., p.486, no. 1).

<sup>17</sup>Husserl, KEB, p. 230.

<sup>18</sup>Husserl, K., pp. 325, 347–48; KEB, pp. 229, 234–35, 280–92, 396s.

<sup>19</sup>Husserl, K., p. 510; C, p. 392.

responsibility regarding the origin and destination of human reason. The phenomenologist can recover the peculiar and exclusive sense of philosophy only if he or she pays attention to its origin and refrains from protracting its mistaken subsequent trajectory. Husserl does not intend to offer “a speculative interpretation of our historicity” but to express “a live presentiment arising from unprejudiced reflection.”<sup>20</sup>

Spiritual Europe has a birthplace. [ . . . ] It is the ancient Greek nation in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Here there arises a *new sort of attitude of individuals* toward their surrounding world. And its consequence is the breakthrough of a completely new sort of spiritual structure, rapidly growing into a systematically self-enclosed cultural form; the Greeks called it *philosophy*. Correctly translated, in its original sense, that means nothing other than universal science, science of the universe (*Weltall*), of the all-encompassing unity (*Alleinheit*) of all that is. Soon the interest in the All, and thus the question of the all-encompassing becoming and being in becoming, begins to particularize itself according to the general forms and regions of being, and thus philosophy, the one science, branches out into many particular sciences. In the breakthrough of philosophy in this sense, in which all sciences are thus contained, I see [ . . . ] the primal phenomenon of spiritual Europe.<sup>21</sup>

We are dealing here with the discovery of universal reason or ideality. According to Husserl, every science and every human enterprise that goes beyond merely rendering service to life here and now depends on the faculty of idealization (*Vermögen der Idealisierung*).<sup>22</sup>

Philosophy, science, is the title for a special class of cultural structures. The historical movement that has been taken on by the style-form of European supranationality aims at an infinitely distant normative shape, but not one that could be simply read off the changing succession of shapes by a morphological observation from the outside. The constant directedness toward a norm inhabits the intentional life of individual persons, and thence the nations with their particular social units, and finally the organism of the nations bound together as Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Husserl acknowledges that the spread of European spirituality never embraces all persons, but only some, which, though limited in number, succeed in grounding societies of people with a like disposition, who transmit the tradition of rational thought. “With the first conception of ideas, man gradually becomes a new man. [Thus] there grows a new sort of humanity, one which, living in finitude, lives toward poles of infinity.”<sup>24</sup>

[Let us] pursue the historical origin of philosophical and scientific humanity and, proceeding from there, clarify the sense of Europe and its new sort of historicity, which, through its type of development distinguishes itself from history in general. Let us illuminate, first of all, the remarkable peculiar character of philosophy, unfolding in ever new special sciences. Let us contrast it with other cultural forms . . . [that] have a passing existence in the surrounding world. Scientific acquisitions . . . , after their method of assured successful production has been attained, have quite another manner of being, quite another temporality. They are not used up, they are not perishable. . . . In a word, what is acquired through scientific activity is not something real but something ideal. But what is more,

<sup>20</sup>Husserl, K., p. 321; C, p. 275.

<sup>21</sup>Husserl, K., p. 321; C, p. 276.

<sup>22</sup>“The life-world that philosophy faces motivated the irruption of science, the discovery of ideality. It awoke in human beings [ . . . ] the faculty of idealization. It woke up reason, which up to then was hidden reason. In other words, it awoke the actual possibility of transforming national-traditional ‘reason’ (reason in finitude, in relativity) into ‘pure’ reason, the *ratio* of the non-relative unconditional (*des irrelativ Unbedingten*), through which alone the pure and absolutely objective world can be discovered, and the objects are there as objects in themselves (*als Objekte an sich*) for us human beings” (Husserl, KEB, p. 347).

<sup>23</sup>Husserl, K., p. 322; C, p. 276.

<sup>24</sup>Husserl, K., p. 322; C, p. 277.

that which is so acquired as valid, as truth, is serviceable as material for the possible production of idealities on a higher level, and so on again and again. ... Science, then, signifies the idea of an infinity of tasks, of which at any time a finite number have been disposed of and are retained as persisting validities.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, to emphasize the unique character of history's presence in phenomenology, let us recall that *it consists exclusively in the generation of unconditional truths*. The philosophies that in fact arose after the idea – which put an end to the mythical stage of humanity – irrupted<sup>26</sup> *do not count*; according to Husserl, no genuine philosopher uses the word 'philosophy' in the plural.<sup>27</sup> "A new philosophy is a new attempt to actually build *the* philosophy; its creator is convinced that all earlier philosophies were only failed attempts."<sup>28</sup> The sole factual historical multiplicity admitted by Husserl in connection with the original idea of philosophy consists in the variety of special sciences that branch off philosophical reason.<sup>29</sup> The scientific truths inspired by the original idea carry its seal: they are truths in connection with an infinite horizon in which there would reside, at an infinite distance, what one might call "truth in itself," that is, a truth that is no longer a mere approximation and therefore does not require factual verification. It refers to what is scientifically considered as genuine reality (*das wirklich Seiende*); and its universal and final validity refers back to the thinking subject that constitutes its justification.<sup>30</sup> The ideal norms that govern the search for scientific truths and their formulation link these human activities with infinite demands and standards. Such infinite norms are called *ideas* by Husserl, who speaks of the philosophico-scientific sphere as a "culture of ideas." The ideas that possess this infinite linkage are of several kinds. Husserl lists "infinite tasks, goals, confirmations, truths, 'true values', 'genuine goods', 'absolutely' valid norms."<sup>31</sup> "Scientific culture under the guidance of ideas of infinity means, then, a revolutionization (*Revolutionierung*) of a whole culture, a complete revolutionization of mankind as a creator of culture."<sup>32</sup>

Is this a philosophy of history? Obviously not, and this for two reasons. It does not refer to the whole ensemble of events and does not organize and unify in a single fabric the information we possess about the past. The genesis of the idea, recovered by Husserl, has nothing to do with causally related events, or with the general course of events. It isolates an ideal element, which is presupposed by concrete histories. Nor is it a theoretical construction in the style of traditional philosophies of history. This is clearly shown in a passage in which Husserl denies that the philosophical idea might thoroughly transform human beings, their culture and their manner of living. It would be a mistake to think that his inquiry into the origin of philosophy wishes to repeat "the fateful error" of the Enlightenment (Husserl says *Aufklärerei!*) and its abstract rationalism, namely, to believe "that science makes men wise, that its vocation is to create a genuine humanity that can stand above the ups and downs of fate and find satisfaction. Who would take such notions seriously today?"<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Husserl, K., p. 323; C, pp. 277–8.

<sup>26</sup>See the essay entitled "Transzendentalphilosophie als Kritik der mythischen Denkweisen", in Husserl, KEB, N° 20, pp. 222–6.

<sup>27</sup>Husserl, KEB, pp. 281, 370, 406–12.

<sup>28</sup>Husserl, KEB, p. 281.

<sup>29</sup>Husserl, KEB, p. 242

<sup>30</sup>Husserl, K., p. 324

<sup>31</sup>Husserl, K., p. 325; C, p. 279.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Husserl, K., p. 337. Carr's translation of this passage can be found in Husserl, C., p. 290; though I have substantially altered it here.

Due to its narrowness and its limited validity, *history* in Husserl's sense cannot be interpreted as a philosophy of history. Might it not be, instead, a history of philosophy? We saw already that this form of history is not the one proposed in the *Crisis*. Husserl explicitly denies this:

We must certainly distinguish between philosophy as a historical fact at a given time and philosophy as idea, as the idea of an infinite task. Any philosophy that exists at a given historical time is a more or less successful attempt to realize the guiding idea of the infinity and, with it, even the totality of truths. [ ... ] One can also say: it belongs to the essence of reason that philosophers at first understand their task and work on it with an absolutely necessary one-sidedness. [ ... ] The road of philosophy goes through naïveté.<sup>34</sup>

Husserl adds other reasons why history as a phenomenological content cannot be the same as the factual history of philosophy: the variety of extant systems of philosophy, their mutual exclusion, the inner ambiguities of their discourse, the arbitrary bias and resultant one-sidedness of each system, its groundless claim to be a self-sufficient whole. The philosophy whose history matters is the true one, adjusted to the universalist ideal, not those who have tried to realize it without achieving it.

To meet the first requirement for being productive, a true philosophy, such as Europe needs in times of crisis, would form a community of philosophers.

If the general idea of truth in itself becomes the universal norm of all the relative truths that arise in human life, ... a new and intimate community – we could call it the community of purely ideal interests – develops among men, men who live for philosophy, bound together in their devotion to ideas, which not only are useful to all but identically belong to all. Necessarily there develops a communal activity of a particular sort, that of working with one another and for one another, offering one another helpful criticism, through which there arises a pure and unconditioned validity of truth (*Wahrheitsgeltung*) as a common property.<sup>35</sup>

Husserl regards the history of the philosophical idea and the practice of philosophical phenomenology as complementary parts of his work. According to him, the essential legacy that the twentieth century received from ancient Greece is the idea of philosophical existence, which consists in “freely giving oneself, one’s whole life, its rule, through pure reason or through philosophy,” and in which “theoretical philosophy is primary.”<sup>36</sup> § 5 of the *Crisis* is entitled: *The ideal of universal philosophy and the process of its inner dissolution*. The issue here is no longer the history of the idea, but the external fate of its going astray and getting lost during the past centuries. Husserl said it already in 1910: up to now, scientific philosophy has not become a reality. He repeats it in the *Crisis*. It is time to dismiss the aberrant forms that dominate the landscape of contemporary philosophy and to pursue the fulfilment of the ideal formulated by Aristotle. As he wrote his book in the 1930s, when he already had produced a lot of work in the spirit of transcendental phenomenology, Husserl was still active explaining the road that will carry philosophy away from its long history of failed attempts. He also volunteered to demonstrate to exact sciences to what extent they are linked to a philosophy capable of elucidating the foundations upon which their methods and their knowledge rests. Without this philosophical connection, which modern natural sciences ignore or deny, they are turning into mere technologies, blind to their origin and their final destination.

<sup>34</sup>Husserl, K., pp. 338–9; C, pp. 291–2.

<sup>35</sup>Husserl, K., p. 334; C, p. 287.

<sup>36</sup>Husserl, K., p. 5; C, p. 8.

Husserl proposes in the *Crisis* the method of retro-question (*Rückfrage*<sup>37</sup>), which makes it possible for reflective thought to go back to the starting point of an experience, an act, a discovery or an idea. This regress to the origin will liberate in its primeval clarity the genuine initial shape that we wish to know in depth according to its true sense. In the *Crisis*, what generates history as a return to the very idea of philosophy is the exercise of retroquestion. This kind of inquiry first attempts to grasp the remote past, i.e., that with which we have already lost direct contact, that from which we are separated by the relics and sedimentations of intermediate time. A genesis that starts from some presently disquieting circumstance will give us back the present that recognizes itself in the origin. Phenomenological history that goes back to the origin and returns from it possesses the certainty of the current validity of the idea discovered at the beginning. This retrogressive history culminates with a twofold assertion: The current state of things needs the idea of philosophy to come out of the darkness and confusion in which it finds itself, and this idea, notwithstanding all that has kept it astray and inefficient, is again with us and turns out to be stronger than every obstacle that could oppose it.

The recovery of its origin is the birth right of philosophy, and the philosopher does not set himself a job that needs justification when he invents a method that allows him to strengthen self-reflexion by going back to the time when the possibility of philosophical thought was originally discovered. However, in the *Crisis* Husserl goes beyond the operation of recovering the origin of philosophy. Once he has ascertained that transcendental phenomenology coincides with the idea of philosophy, he proceeds to examine the factual history of philosophy in order to verify what has happened between the origin and the present. A part of the *Crisis* is devoted to sketching out the fate of philosophy in factual history. But Husserl does not, to this effect, put forward a new version of the history of philosophy. He adheres to the familiar story, highlighting the critical points in which philosophy was essentially changed. He is interested in the invention of theoretical geometry; in the growing separation of the individual sciences from their philosophical stem; in the mathematization of the natural sciences by Galileo, who founded a universal science of nature; in the discovery of subjectivity as the foundation of experience by Descartes; in Hume's scepticism, and in the work of Kant, in which he sees merit due to its nearness to the phenomenological project, but which failed to follow its better intuitions.

This Husserlian collection of moments of empirical history, decisive as they may have been for phenomenology, does not make up a history of any sort. It does not describe the progressive achievements of a philosophical science but rather the successive failures of the idea to impose itself on actual history. The alleged independence of the individual sciences, which, due to their success in the investigation of nature, have come to believe that they owe nothing to philosophy, is plunging scientific thought into an increasing state of naïveté. The independence of the sciences shatters the unity of knowledge, ignores the necessity of providing a foundation for every part of it, does not reckon the work of the scientific subject to be a condition for and a decisive contribution to the results of inquiry, etc. What Husserl calls "The Crisis of European Sciences" is directly related to the incapacity of the chief modern sciences to reflect critically on themselves, their methods and the reach of their results. What above all matters to transcendental phenomenology is the influence of scientific objectivism, propagated by a psychology that, ignoring human subjectivity, deals with human beings as if they were just one more part of nature. Through these

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<sup>37</sup>Carr avoids coining an English word for this Husserlian notion. At C, p. 17, line 2 from below, he renders "durch Rückfrage nach dem" (K, p. 16, line 13) as "we must inquire back into"; this makes good sense in the context, but masks the operation at play. Cf. two lines earlier, Carr's periphrasis for "historische und kritische Rückbesinnungen," viz., "that we reflect back in a thorough historical and critical fashion." And yet the prefix *retro-* is well entrenched in English.

developments, the European spirit has reached a state where it does not merely disown itself, but where it carries its self-denial to the point of jeopardizing the civilization created by it, and thereby endangering the very humanity of man.

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## Space and World as Concepts key to Political Existence in the Work of Schmitt and Heidegger<sup>1</sup>

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### 1.

The premise of Carl Schmitt's *Land and Sea*, published in 1942, is that the force of rupture and innovation that characterizes the *subject* – this actor peculiar to modernity – is based on his self-anointment as an absolute foundation. Consequently, the subject appoints him- or herself, the capacity, as a form of *will*, to make decisions and take legitimate actions to topple unjust and irrational regimes and to establish a just and rational order.

In relation to the political and juridical realm, all occidental regimes since the ancient Greek era have incorporated a superior power with the authority to issue final decisions. However, in modernity, this schema takes on a new and exclusive form as the regime is conferred the identity of *state sovereignty*. The modern form of coexistence is one of free and equal citizens in a nation state understood as a *spatially delimited* order, with the sovereign power occupying the highest echelon of this order. As such, it is guaranteed that a *singular* and normative will rules through coercive power. Conversely, the same rationality invariably implies that *beyond the limits marking the periphery* of the State as an individual entity, there is a plurality of equivalent state regimes that are all analogously free and equal. This means that these multitudinous regimes are not ruled by – nor could there legally exist – a sovereign authority, supranational, with the power to decree decisions and coerce every single Leviathan to comply with the rules peculiar to an *unbounded* spatial dimension. According to the classic ideas on modern statehood, this kind of power would inevitably be considered as despotic and – to put it in relatively anachronistic terms – *totalitarian*.

In other words: the fact that the logic of command/obedience is structured as *sovereignty* means that the foundational decision literally spatializes a territory that is public, pacified and normativized in terms of its verticality, with an absolute decision-making entity at the apex: the sovereign representative. Thus, the political configuration specific to modernity is the nation state with a single core generating and regulating judicial legality within its territory. But this form of governing based on borders also designates an *exterior*, an exteriority where

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<sup>1</sup>Compared with its previous version, “Mundo y espacio en Schmitt y Heidegger. Una aproximación”, in F. Birulés, A. Gómez Ramos y C. Roldán (eds.), *Vivir para pensar. Ensayos en homenaje a Manuel Cruz* (Barcelona: Herder, 2012), pp. 23–42, this work presents more than a few modifications and incorporates some unpublished paragraphs.

there is simultaneously a decisionist will in existence. However, this will functions in accordance with a symmetrically inverted schema, namely: in this area of externality or in terms of international relations, nation states are located on a horizontal plane characterized by judicial equality that nullifies the idea of a coercive power with legitimate superiority over all regimes (a so-called planetary sovereign). This other spatiality external to the state, this space of inter-state relations, answers to the same premises of rationality which are used to justify the internal dimension of sovereignty. The sovereign state and the pluralism of states are only two sides of the same phenomenon that has been formative of modern juridification in the classic period (from approximately the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century).

In summary: intra-state normativity and extra-state normativity are analogous to the extent that they are based on the same metaphysics of the subject and are a natural extension of the same politico-philosophical and juridical principles. They diverge, however, in their respective structures and sources of dynamism. The interior normativity of the finite (the *delimited* realm of the civil) and the exterior normativity of the infinite (the *unbounded natural* space) are mirror images of each other, they are symmetrically inverse – two sides of the same rationality.

Both dimensions in which the sovereign will prevail and becomes consolidated complement each other in regards to their tensions and differences, but in both cases *space is organized*. This is Schmitt's conceptualization of the political as a determining decision between friendship and enmity in a spatial realm where one "*element*" predominates. The term "*element*" evokes or revisits the classic doctrine of the *elements* which informs occidental thinking (although not exclusively), namely: earth, water, air, fire as conceived and symbolized based on distinct types of knowledge. However, Schmitt injects this doctrine with political and social meaning to the extent that it addresses the type of order which is established through accepting the pre-eminence of a configuration of one or more of these elements as a space of coexistence. Thus, from this point of view and regarding the inter-state realm, Schmitt understands this form of action by the modern will in its condition as source of sovereign decisions as a *decision for the finitude*, for the earth as a politically ordered territory. With respect to the external realm, it is the source of a *decision for the infinite* – water as a politically unbounded spatiality (the model of the concept of *desert* space – uncivilized, not subject to rationality), especially in America. This line of thought can be interwoven with Schmitt's ideas regarding the sequence of central fields as a process of "neutralization and secularization" that forms the context of meaning for the term *das Politische*. It then becomes evident that the passage of time can also be understood as the submission of the element *earth* as a physical-anthropological realm to the element *water*, to the extent that with the pre-eminence of the central economico-technical realm [*Zentralgebiet*], fluidity takes precedence over stability, the indefinite over the definite, the international over the national, the *total* and unlimited confrontation over the contained war or war *en forme*.<sup>2</sup>

The modern conquest of this infinite spatiality is the subject of *Land and Sea*, a beautiful essay that contains the first of Schmitt's explicit references to Heidegger. Even though Schmitt does not name Heidegger, there is no doubt to whom he is referring: "A manner of thinking, which was impossible in previous times, is now becoming possible. A contemporary German philosopher

<sup>2</sup>Carl Schmitt, "Die europäische Kultur im Zwischenstadium der Neutralisierung", *Europäische Revue* 8 (1929), pp. 517–30; with certain modifications later published in Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen. Mit einer Rede über das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen und Entpolitiserungen* (München, Leipzig: Duncker u. Humblot, 1932); Schmitt does not retain it in the edition of 1933, but it reappears, so to speak, in the new edition which correlates to and complements the one from 1932: *Der Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker u. Humblot, 1963); and following editions.



has defined it as follows: it is not the world that is in space, but rather it is the space that is in the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Hence, Schmitt seems to indicate that within the treatment of “world” and “space” in *Being and Time*, there is a (possible) philosophical correlate to his theory of the historical role of the existential decision made by modern actors when they embark upon the conquest of the infinite territories of water and earth, the oceans and America, thereby generating an *order* (i.e. a comprehensive vision of spatiality, a corresponding normative system and, consequently, a legitimization of the conduct of the states in their reciprocal relations) *which for the first time in history is actually global*.

Let us begin by stating that, based on our understanding, Schmitt’s reference to Heidegger highlights an affinity outlined in highly vague terms, with the result that there is a blurring of the incompatibilities between the nomothetic decision, the basis for Schmitt’s reflections, and the existential apriority of the world with respect to space in Heidegger. Fundamentally, Schmitt’s reference to Heidegger ignores the fact that *Being and Time* emphasizes a primary ontological dimension that is *a priori*, both in relation to the scientific conceptualization and comprehension of space (as a product of an objectifying, calculating and scientific rationality), as well as the subjectivism of the political will which constitutes the normative system, as is the decisionist will of Schmitt.

Regarding Schmitt’s notion of the decisionist will, which was the subject of his “world-historical reflections” referenced in the title of the essay of 1942, the crux is the gesture of rupture and innovation of planetary proportions performed by the modern will. For Schmitt, this is an authentic existential *fiat* of a limitless and expansive movement initiated by these whale hunters, pirates and adventurers as they searched for new oceanic and geographic spaces that were formerly unknown to European experience.

Among these actors who were unaware of the historical magnitude of their feats, Schmitt finds those who unleashed the passage from the stable substantiality of the telluric, to the fluidity of the aqueous, the transposition from existence based on the element of earth to existence, based on the element of water (the variety of the mythical, literary, ethical-juridical and utilitarian connotations Schmitt brings together when he uses the term “*Element*” need to be underlined). The result of this turn to the sea was the new and revolutionary *nomos* of the Earth, which theoretically and practically dissolved former schemata and determined future developments within the historical period that both thinkers deliberate about – which, in a way, is still valid today.

The core of the legitimization and putting into action of the new *nomos* of the Earth, that of modernity, is that in both peace and war inter-state relationships are rationally and by nature subject to rules that are not questioned as long as they use occidental Europe as a spatial referent. However, these relationships are re-semanticized as absolute natural liberty (that is, freed from their obligatory character) whenever they are situated in realms that are *natural, uncivilized* – spaces of irrationality, fruits of the delay in the civilizing process and/or of the despotic violation of the enlightened *ratio*. In the genesis of this process, there is a transcendental change in the “image of space,” which takes place in the sixteenth and seventeenth century – a disruptive transfiguration with precisely “spatial revolution” as its “specific core,” the production of a new

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<sup>3</sup>Carl Schmitt, *Land und Meer: Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam Junior, 1942), p.75; engl.: *Land and Sea*, trans. by Simona Draghici (Washington: Plutarch Press, 1997), p. 58. He refers to Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit. Fünfzehnte, an Hand der Gesamtausgabe durchgesehene Auflage mit den Randbemerkungen aus dem Handexemplar des Autors in Anhang* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1979); engl.: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001). Hereafter this work will be cited as BT. The pages indicated in the text refer to first the German edition and second the English translation.

“*Raumordnung*.” The beginning of all historically significant eras derives from this decision to capture territory, but the particularity of the modern event is the decision in support of the *real* infinitude (*free* waters and territories) – a decision that is existentially *a priori* in relation to modern *scientific* views (physics and the empty infinitude of space; the legal realm and international law). In turn, the fact that this decision persists in contemporary times becomes apparent in the image of space – more contemporary and more politicized, proper to the era of totalization – as a “force field of human energies.”<sup>4</sup>

## 2.

It is now possible to present a broad outline of the aspects of *Being and Time* which we consider to be most important in light of Schmitt’s reference, that is, those aspects containing signs of what we call the *aspect of decisiveness or resoluteness* intrinsic to the form of existence known as *Dasein* in the context of spatiality.

At the starting point, there is obviously the idea that the “essence” [*Wesen*] of *Dasein* lies in “its existence” as a “to-be.” The latter becomes more concrete with the decision that brings about a given “determination of being,” “as to the way in which it is in each case mine [*je meines*].” If the “fundamental structure” of this “entity,” to which the “Being which is an *issue* for [it] in its very Being, is in each case [its own],” consists in an openness to possible modes of “being in the world,” this Being is “characterized by mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*].” Consequently, the absolute distinctiveness of its most personal existence has its roots in the fact that it already “has always made some sort of decision [*schon immer irgendwie entschieden*] as to the way in which it [*Dasein*] is in each case mine [*je meines*].” That is, by deciding for its most proper Being, that is for the how of its most personal level of existence: “it can, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself” by means of its own choice [BT 42/68].<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of what we may call the constitutive drama of human existence, Heidegger completes his conception of the existential situation of humankind. Following this, Heidegger highlights the distinctive spatial spatiality of *Dasein* – the full originality of its “Being-in-the-world” as a “unitary phenomenon” (which could be phrased as the inseparability of the world and human beings). In this sense, the *world* is *where* the decision takes place, by virtue of which *Dasein* opens itself to other entities present-at-hand. Correspondingly, its “images of the world” only take shape based on this “*existentiale*” of *Dasein*. While the entities present-at-hand are simply located in a certain place and maintain a “definite location-relationship,” as a result of their ontological-existential constitution, human beings, on the other hand, inhabit an existential space; they reside or are situated within a space that is familiar to them, as they are accustomed to it. Thus, I reside in a space that is my own. The *Being-in* of *Dasein* in its existence “*has Being-in-the-world as its essential state*” [BT 52/78]. In a nutshell, the world is a kind of spatiality based only on the distinctive existence that human beings have in relation to all other entities present-at-hand (which are connected according to differing degrees of physical contiguity), the existential *there* (*Da*) as

<sup>4</sup>These considerations enliven *Land and Sea*, the story Schmitt “tells” his daughter Anima (“Meiner Tochter Anima erzählt” [“As told to my daughter Anima”]); but they also constitute the common theme of Schmitt’s considerations in *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Köln: Greven Verlag, 1950); engl: *The Nomos of the Earth in The International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2003).

<sup>5</sup>The human being as *Dasein* chooses or loses itself according to its own choice: “But only so far as it is essentially something which can be *authentic* – that is, something of its own”. It follows, then, that the “modes of Being, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* (these expressions have been chosen terminologically in a strict sense) are both grounded in the fact that any *Dasein* whatsoever is characterized by mineness” [BT 42/68].

the phenomenological essence of *Dasein*; this is the condition of possibility of all subsequent localization. That is, having “a ‘Being-in-space’ of [one’s] own” [BT 56/82], this “*existential spatiality*” [BT 56/83] is the original realm where *Dasein* establishes relationships with others and with other entities present-at-hand.<sup>6</sup>

The strongest connection to our subject takes shape when Heidegger presents four interpretations of the meaning of the *world* where existence takes place. The first two concern the ontic without considering the existential moment that is of interest.<sup>7</sup> The remaining two, on the other hand, are more directly connected to the constitutive worldhood of existence. The third demonstrates that, from the ontic dimension, *world* signals “that ‘*wherein*’ a factual *Dasein* as such can be said to ‘live’.” In this sense, it does not have the ontological characteristic of the *existentials* [*Existenzialien*] and its meaning is merely “pre-ontological existentiell [*existenziell*].” This perspective marks a sort of exclusivity of the experience of the world as belonging to the *I-myself as Dasein*, given the world may be understood here as “the ‘public’ we-world, or one’s ‘own’ closest (domestic) environment.” The fourth interpretation explains the phenomenological connotation of this constitutive basic instance: the “ontologico-existential concept of *worldhood*” alludes to the structural sense of “Being-in” each world, that is “the a priori character of worldhood in general.” This enables the modifications proper to the respective “structural wholes [*Strukturganzen*]” that “any special ‘worlds’ may have at a time” [BT 63–65/91–93].

Worldhood is intrinsically connected to the usability of “equipment”: it is the ontological condition of possibility of a plurality of worlds, which, for their part, show the corresponding diverse modes of concern with which *Dasein* treats the entities within its reach, that is how it deals with the tools that are ready-to-hand for it in various *wordly spatialities*. In turn, this variety of worlds correlates to the different ways in which *Dasein* cares for these entities, how it deals concernfully with them while it is attentively observing the surrounding world in general – a type of treatment which is proper to worldly existence. This concernful dealing has particular modes of realization, diverse forms of manipulating and making use of the ready-to-hand. This means that this original pragmatism and the connective skill in dealing with the entities present-at-hand coalesce diversely according to the variety of worldly situations (the “*Strukturganzen*”). We emphasize these aspects because they account for the diversity of situations whose particularities seem to be essentially defined within the *environmental* contexts in which human existence develops according to the peculiarity of each individual – as is the case regarding Schmitt’s theological–political perspective, his conception of terrestrial and maritime existence. To be sure, this initial correlation between both approaches is all too vague. Nonetheless, it allows us, already at this point, to establish an, albeit *very general*, theoretical proximity between the decisiveness and the worldhood of *Dasein*.

### 3.

Heidegger highlights the relational character of the entities “within-the-environment [*inner-umweltlich*]” with which *Dasein* has “*dealings*” – the contact with entities which it has ready-to-hand as “equipment” within a certain “environment [*Umwelt*]” [BT 66–68/95–97].

<sup>6</sup>“Not until we understand Being-in-the-world as an existential structure of *Dasein* can we have any insight into *Dasein*’s *existential spatiality*” [BT 56/83].

<sup>7</sup>The initial interpretations indicate, firstly, that the world, ontically considered, may indicate “the totality [*das All*] of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world”, that is the totality of entities, that are only present [BT 64/93]. Secondly, that *world*, as an “ontological term”, alludes to a field or realm comprising a series of objects, which are addressed, studied or treated according to some kind of discipline or knowledge: that which is proper to exactly this “realm [*Region*]” [BT 64–64/93]. In both cases, he refers to entities which are not *Dasein*, but merely environmental.

The dealings with tools manifest in manifold ways of concern, but their original structural condition (their “prephenomenal basis” [BT 67/96]) is the “in-order-to” which characterizes it, that is, that equipment is “something in-order-to’.” They carry an “assignment or reference of something to something,” to a term – another useful thing or another conduct – in which they achieve the fulfilment of the usefulness of the equipment used. This referential term is located within the same ontic universe, given that it is by virtue of this connection that equipment accomplishes its pragmatic signification. In this way, the “usability” that characterizes them is defined ontologically. Heidegger emphasizes the interrelation of reciprocal references sustaining the usability of that which is useful: “there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment,” as an isolated entity, because this *being-in-reference-to* constitutes it as a “totality of equipment.” The dealings with these entities as tools signifies that *Dasein* is presented with a “totality of equipment” and that it is only in this context of a “manifold of [ ... ] assignments” that these entities serve a purpose and are usable [BT 68f/96f]. Strictly speaking, the spatial metaphor of the primary ontology of the entity, in so far as it is useful (the “basis [*Boden*]” of the equipment), is comprehensible because what *Dasein* is faced with is an ontologically original environmental context and not isolated entities within an *empty and indistinct space*.

These considerations start to reveal the existential decisiveness of *Dasein* in its originality with respect to that which, in modern metaphysics, will later become the subjective decisionist will. However, this apriority is not equivalent to passivity, quiet expectation regarding what one has in front of oneself. This ontological precedence signifies that the worldhood of existence is a *decision to let* the entity show itself in its immediate pragmatic relation within the world, a making it show itself. We understand this transcendental “*lassen*” as a unique disposition *to decide that chooses to act originally before acting as a subject*. *Dasein* in the world is open to the entity, it has dealings with the ontic, it is concerned with the usable ready-to-hand. And behind this concern there is an *operational* decisiveness: its *pre-occupation* with the configuration of the equipment is based *on* and *in* the “work” (to be produced). And it is by *working* that *Dasein* makes recourse to “materials” and discovers “nature” as power and potential as well as material source.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, Heidegger makes an important distinction. The appearance of nature (without rationalist or voluntaristic mediations) before the gaze and concern of *Dasein* forms part of this phenomenological state which is prior to any theoretical knowledge or technical usage of the power of nature or of natural elements and which is proper to existential analysis. Heidegger, however, also gives examples and epochal evidence indicating that this originality only lasts until the emergence of modern industry [BT 70 f/100ff]. *The level of historical concretion which he*

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<sup>8</sup>It is only as a function of this pre-conceptual dimension (that is, previous to all geometric order) that the equipment receives its pragmatic meaning. Heidegger calls it “what we encounter closest to us [*Nächstbe-gnende*]” [BT 68/98] where the totality of equipment originally resides: that which is prior to all subsequent cognitive-theoretical approaches is the pragmatic realm starting from which “the ‘arrangement’” of every context “emerges, and it is in this that any ‘individual’ item of equipment shows itself” in the particular usability which characterizes it, in its particular involvement. But the totality of equipment is, as it were, “*before*” the discovery of each utensil [BT 68f/96–99]. The variety of usages of the tools associated with the original pragmatic view of *Dasein*, thus respond to the manifold references which all utensils establish between themselves within the regional immediate environment of the encounter with *Dasein*, which, in turn, includes them with circumspection and applies them according to their respective aptitude and consequential “‘manipulability’ [*Handlichkeit*]” within the environment [BT 69/98]. Within the dealings of *Dasein* with the ontic for production, nature forms part of the world, it is located in it like something which submits itself to the productive work; the latter being the expression of the immediate pragmatism of human existence. Likewise, the operator (the one who produces) and the recipient of the work product, “the person who is to use it or wear it,” also enter into an assignment-context [BT 69–70/99–100].

achieves in his arguments is important, as it helps us to evaluate the Schmittian reference to Being and Time.

Thus, if the phenomenological approach is transposed to the historical–political dimension, it becomes evident that its situational context is the transition to the Industrial Age or the prolegomenon to modernity. In this era, *working* still consisted in artisanal production and was meant to satisfy the personal features of consumption (the two existential moments inherent to “work”). The type of work that Heidegger explicitly refers to (“simple craft conditions” [BT 70/100], “the domestic world of the workshop” [BT 71/100] in no way violates the ontological primordially of *Dasein* in its two extremes: as producer and as consumer. In a still reliable world, a person who works is acutely aware of the recipient of his/her product, because both are within the same world: “The work is cut to his figure; he ‘is’ there along with it as the work emerges” [BT 70–71/100]. The concern for entities ready-to-hand and the intertwined familiarity with equipment has not changed. Of course, productive expansion is a reality, since the process does not stay restricted to the late medieval or preindustrial workshop. Instead, the figure of the “*public world*” emerges and, as such, “the *environing Nature* [*die Umweltnatur*] is discovered and accessible to everyone” [BT 71/100]. Yet we have still not arrived at the stage of developed technology and the increasingly unlimited circulation of products distinctive to the era of mass production, where progressively technologized large-scale production and continuously overstimulated consumption determine the rhythm, customs and worldviews of standard participants.

#### 4.

A slight connection between this situation and the *main* (not exclusive) context of Schmitt’s essay may be found in the fact that the new global order had not yet been consolidated in the moment that triggered the analysed process (the decision for water: the conquest of the ocean and the American lands, the *infinite spaces*). The *nomos of the Earth* of modernity was gestating, but obviously its physiognomy was not yet mature.

However, even this same heroic phase of the pioneers of this unrestricted expansion (*i.e.* those for whom the element water became their existential condition) constitutes, in our understanding, a more advanced and qualitatively more diverse stage of modernity than Heidegger’s – regardless of how imprecise it might be in its distinctive forms. That is, its epochal character is indeed still valid in relation to modern mass society.

The persistence of *handicraft*-type features in maritime operations (including on the *Pequod* as a factory-ship, to recall a literary testimony that was fundamental for Schmitt) presupposes that the ancient skills of navigation had already changed and adapted to the new requirements and/or that they had been substituted by those skills proven to be apt in responding to the vicissitudes of the great ocean crossings and, therefore, had become an ordinary and familiar practice. That is, they had transformed (they were *naturalized*, so to speak) to phenomenologically immediate and original modes of conduct. And, in correlation, the same occurred with the totality of necessary equipment for work in oceanic spaces. If the generative instance of the new planetary order was a revolutionary foundational decision, without a doubt this decision occurs in a context where the mediations proper to the utilitarian rationality associated with the accelerated development are already consolidated within the logic of production and consumption, where the uncontrollable increase of the technologization of production appears and, in short, where the neutralization of the same epic will responsible for initiating this process is activated – that is, the normativization of what was originally considered to be the *heroic* rupture which announced the new era.

In our estimation, this does not seem to be the historic situation referred to in *Being and Time*. Heidegger addresses an immediate normality, prior to all subjective intellectualization. Schmitt

addresses the exceptional, the normalizing pre-mediate decision, i.e. the condition of the normal normative mediation. This subjectivity which existentially seeks out the sea is, indeed, analogous to the sovereign decision regarding the exception, and if this similarity is not absolute, it is because statehood does not emerge in the infinite. In this sense, *Land and Sea* confirms the core of Schmittian thinking of the 1920s: the reaffirmation of the primacy of the political in relation to the polemic regarding the diverse immanentist neutralizations.

In any case, the incompatibility between the two approaches is more profound than what can be inferred from the contexts in question. Certainly, the decisionist will is *a priori* in nature and this aspect maintains a generic affinity with the decisiveness of *Dasein* and the Heideggerian existentials. In Schmitt, however, the normativizing function of the (intra- and inter-state) spatial order which this decision fulfills does not rely on an enlightened ontological transcendentalism based on an analysis of existence, but rather, on theological-political conceptualization and on the state theology of *Dezisionismus* as an intrinsic modern view. Moreover, the inherent conflictual nature of the Schmittian approach (the contraposition and antithesis of the political against immanentism which regulates precisely the dimension in which it should take priority over foundational decision) is absent in the treatment of spatiality in *Being and Time*, because the respective actors (*Dasein* and the deciding sovereign in the state of exception) are configured on the basis of different metaphysics. To summarize, Schmitt's approach to the matter is only somewhat related, but positively identifiable in relation to the position of Heidegger.

Let us broaden our interpretation. Undoubtedly, both thinkers share a position that questions the ontological and epistemological, as well as ethical premises of liberal rationalism, which both consider to be outdated on the doctrinal level (while they view Marxism as its dynamic theoretical offshoot and a practical threat). From this perspective, the historical referent of both approaches, in broad strokes, is the period of occidental culture extending from the end of premodern conditions (the Heideggerian context) to the ordering of spaces all over the world, to the unfolding and predominance of technological development and capitalist production. That is, this period includes the beginning of the demise of the first colonizing power of the New World, the collapse of the pontifical authority as international judge as well as the zenith and hegemony of English rule over the oceans and politics (the context Schmitt privileges). However, defining this joint point of historical reference so broadly, such that it encompasses the whole period from Genesis to the consolidated imposition of the modern *nomos* of the Earth, still in force until the conflict of 1939–1945, is equivalent to obfuscating that which is specifically epochal in each of these approaches. Yet, on the other hand, if we subscribe to more precise characteristics, the immediate phenomenological conduct of *Dasein* is spatialized in realms where an artisanal kind of work and restricted consumption endure. The original worldhood maintains a trace of premodernity. In turn, the world to which Schmitt refers while ruminating on the *secularizing transubstantiation* from land to sea (the conquest of the oceanic waters and access to new lands with the typically modern impetus celebrating occupation and domination) has already ceased to be (at least in the north Atlantic nations that initiated the process) the one work of handicraft. Instead, it is in the process of irreversibly configuring the space of industrial development, which is irrepressible, and the forms of communal life that are consistent with the new vision of things.

## 5.

We have reached a crucial point in the philosophic evaluation of the meaning of the Schmittian reference to Heidegger, since the moment of spatiality now intersects more profoundly with decisiveness as a constitutive feature of *Dasein*.

This issue is developed in paragraph 18: “*Involvement and Significance; the Worldhood of the World [Bewandtnis and Bedeutsamkeit; die Weltlichkeit der Welt]*” [BT 83–89/114–123]. Before initiating a more detailed investigation of some aspects of this paragraph, we reiterate that, at this point, it is crucial to understand that the attitude of *Dasein* is an activity that consists in a letting be (*lassen*), so that the ready-to-hand can show its pragmatic aptitude, its “involvement.” The will of the one who uses it is not the enthusiastic will to power of modern subjectivity. Let us rather say that the intervening decisiveness Heidegger refers to is not subjectivizing or dominating, but rather, respectful of the immediate phenomenological state of the entities it encounters within the world. Regardless, we believe that this Heideggerian decisiveness maintains a kind of family resemblance (neither more or less than that) with the Schmittian decision, despite the constructivism of the latter, in the sense that it is a challenge to the claims of the practical reason of liberal-enlightenment, made from the standpoint of modern political subjectivity – the one of the sovereign actor and those who it represents, the citizenry.

Hence, it is due to this original “letting it be involved” that equipment obtains its specific pragmatic character, its *aptitude* to yield usability. It is about, therefore, the reference to, or this *turning to the other* (the “*wenden*” which is at the roots of “*Bewandtnis*”) as a characteristic feature of the relation between the entities within the world, in the sense that these are spatially configured in accordance with what we may call (not without inaccuracy) a structure of teleological adaptation, the one of the “in-order-to,” in a context that depends on intentionality to define its meaning. In this sense, this pragmatic spatiality is phenomenologically indebted to the decisiveness of human existence, since it is *Dasein* that establishes the spatial assignment or reference which gives meaning to the pragmatic idiosyncrasy of ready-to-hand equipment.

In summary, at this point Heidegger deepens the meaning of the “in-order-to,” the usability or the “serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*],” which “is a reference [*Verweisung*]” to equipment, by analyzing the relation between the original existential openness of *Dasein* to the ontic and the relational structure of the mutual assignments of present-at-hand entities, by virtue of which they are apt for the usage that *Dasein* assigns to them. It is a matter of elucidating the pragmatic character of all entities present-at-hand and available to be used, that is the free “availability” of entities so that *Dasein*, while making use of them, makes it possible for them to show their specific “usability” for the chosen work. We already know the point of departure: “In anything ready-to-hand the world is always ‘there’” [BT 83/114].

As observed, the original Being-in-the-world of *Dasein* and its pragmatic work are existentially prior to the worldhood of the entities ready-to-hand. There is, therefore, a problem that takes shape here: “How can the world let the ready-to-hand be encountered?” [BT 83/114]. The key to answer this question may be found in the fact that *Dasein*, while dealing with the entities in different situational contexts which are proper to them, *decides to let them be involved* as they are to it; and this “*letting be involved*” (“*lassen*”) is the transcendental condition of phenomenological, pre-geometric and pre-conceptual spatialization. This original spatializing understanding inherent to Being-in-the-world lets the condition of the “for which” – proper to each equipment in its “usability” for a specific service or for it to be employed in one way and not in another – be “disclosed.” The terms that structure the existential analysis of world and space, “*Bewendenlassen*” (letting something be involved) and “*Bewandtnis*” (involvement), contain in their semantic core the ontological decisiveness that is inherent to the openness to or turning towards the entities ready-to-hand of *Dasein*, this peculiar pre-theoretical and pre-voluntaristic decision to let the entity show itself, to *permit* that relations of “referentiality” are established between the different pieces of equipment, by virtue of which the latter – within the diverse spaces in which worldhood articulates itself – can be encountered by *Dasein* with

their respective pragmatic usability – that is, the assignments which are determined as “serviceability-for-, detrimentality [*Abträglichkeit*], usability and the like.”<sup>9</sup>

To be usable implies *referential referentiality*: a device is useful because it refers to another as a referent which completes the meaning of its constitutive pragmatic usability. *Dasein* decides on the type of “concernful circumspection,” of “taking account” of the entity, and so it lets the entity be involved, it lets it show itself as useful. That is, it decides the how and the towards – which to apply it. While effectuating the “towards-which” of a “structure of assignment or reference” which obviously brings along a “for-the-sake-of,” as it can be derived from the ontic nexuses to the effect that each equipment is something “in-order-to,” it provides a utility to it in view of which it can be employed. We emphasize here what was already anticipated: this decisiveness of *Dasein* (the immediate *deciding-to-let-be-disclosed*) cannot be assimilated with any figure of absolute constructivism inherent to the modern subject; it is not mediated by the subjective will. In relation to *Dasein* and by virtue of its decisiveness, different pieces of equipment are turned towards each other, involved with each other in a structure of mutual assignments and form a kind of harmonic web in a spatial “region” within the world. In a nutshell, this immediateness of the worldhood of *Dasein* precedes and conditions the subsequent cognitive objectification and similar activities of the *cogito*, and it is also *a priori* with respect to the pragmatic subjective will of the modern, the *Wille zur Macht*. Ultimately, the incompatibility of the two thinkers is rooted in their differences regarding the decisiveness outlined by the decisionist will, which is the modern and state component of the Schmittian position.

In a way, space is a key notion for both thinkers in the immediate political projection of their ideas, in the case of Schmitt, as well as in the more complex translation of the existential analysis to politics in the case of Heidegger. Their views differ. Schmitt is coherent with the territory of the *state* on which the political is based. This is not the same foundation on which Heidegger builds his populist communitarianism.

According to our interpretation of these steps of *Being and Time*, the idea of the “for-the-sake-of” turns out to be symptomatic. This idea is used simultaneously as a circumstantial complement and as a noun, because Heidegger wants to give a special phenomenological nuance to the underlying *will* present in it. The aptitude of equipment *has behind itself an existential will* that, and here we insist, is not the will of subjective *action*, but a kind of pre-subjective *abstention* which allows equipment to be ready-to-hand in its distinctive utility and, therefore, also allows *Dasein* to make adequate usage of it (e.g. use a “hammer” for “hammering”). By doing so, it concretizes one of the possibilities of existence. The useful entity, like for example the protection against bad weather, “is’ for the sake of [*um-willen*] providing shelter for *Dasein* – that is to say, for the sake of a possibility of *Dasein’s* Being.” [BT 84/116] That is, a utensil does not have an ontic “property” that would be available to the I-user, but it shows itself in its specific aptitude when *Dasein*, confronted with the open possibilities inherent to its existence, uses it while respecting its idiosyncrasy – when it decides that the entity should manifest itself in a harmonic totality of worldly tools within a spatiality which also is due to original decisiveness [BT 84/116]. What is at stake here, is what we may call the teleological feature inherent to the pragmatism of the entity rooted in the phenomenological dynamic of deciding – letting the

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<sup>9</sup>“The Being of the ready-to-hand has the structure of assignment or reference” [BT 83, 83–84/115]. *Dasein* ensures that the entity with its immediate and pre-theoretical “aptitude” will be encountered. *Spatializing* the equipment according to the vicissitudes of its existence allows for the *ad-aptation* of a totality of the latter in function of the “for which” that categorizes them ontically. Precisely, the “towards this” shows its “aptitude”, the entity is determined as the “towards which” of the “serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*]” provided and as the “for-the-sake-of” of its “usability [*Verwendbarkeit*]” [BT 84/115–116].



entity be involved, letting it be useful. In so doing, *Dasein* realizes one of its ontological-existential possibilities; i.e. as we have seen, “it *can* [ ... ] ‘choose’ itself” [BT 42/68]. This decisiveness demonstrates the ontological peculiarity of *Dasein* itself:

The primary ‘towards-which’ is a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’. But the ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*. [ ... ] Ontically, ‘letting something be involved’ signifies that within our factual concern we let something ready-to-hand *be so-and-so as* it is already and *in order that* it be such. [BT 84/116–117]

## 6.

We will now address the sections of *Being and Time* that are dedicated to “C. The Aroundness of Environment and *Dasein*’s Spatiality [Das Umhafte der Umwelt und die Räumlichkeit des Daseins].” These passages define “in what sense space is a constituent for [the] world” and, as well, – *prima facie* – there are some points of support developed for the Schmittian reference, in that the spatializing existential decisiveness conceptualized in relation to Heidegger is made explicit. Thus, in terms of a spatialization inherent to the immediate worldhood of *Dasein*, the first of the texts reads as follows:

In particular we must show how the aroundness of the environment, the specific spatiality of entities encountered in the environment, is founded upon the worldhood of the world, while contrariwise the world, on its part, is not present-at-hand in space.” [BT 101–102/134–135]

The entities with which *Dasein* has “dealings,” the entities ready-to-hand, are within an existential “closeness,” a proximity that is not demonstrated by a geometrical-topological measurement, but by a habituality and familiarity of everyday dealings. The pragmatic web now responds to a greater deciding activity, to “circumspective ‘calculative’ manipulating and using [umsichtig ‘berechnenden’ Hantieren und Gebrauchen]” [BT 102/135]. This spatiality of the entity ready-to-hand configures the accessibility of the same (to the point that if a tool is not in its place, its absence draws attention) and implies that the entities and their respective aptitudes or involvements are at “one place out of a whole totality of places directionally lined up with each other and belonging to the context of equipment that is environmentally ready-to-hand [Das Umhafte der Umwelt und die Räumlichkeit des Daseins]” [BT 102/136]. *Dasein* decides for this localization *within* the world, consistently preparing and arranging equipment *in relation* to their pragmatic performance. Thanks to this, the ready-to-hand settles in its “region [Gegend].” In combination, the concerned dealings of *Dasein* with ready-to-hand entities and its localizing gaze, which arranges them at a place close to *Dasein* express, so to speak, the decisiveness we just emphasized: “*Dasein*, in its very Being, has this Being as an issue; and its concern discovers beforehand those regions in which some involvement is decisive.” [BT 104/137]<sup>10</sup> This peculiar existential apriority signifies that the empty space, simple all-encompassing container (studied by

<sup>10</sup>It is worth reiterating: this decisiveness is an *a priori* condition of conceptualizing discursiveness and action determined by the will of a *subject*. The “circumspection” now entails locating or installing the entities by giving them an “arrangement” in accordance with their “character of equipment”; we may phrase it this way: locating them such that they are arranged in a certain existential “closeness” and, at the same time, in a certain “place” that will be *their* own. As such, each of them is “within the range” and not merely in any given place. By virtue of this spatialization, the different pieces of equipment demonstrate their respective involvement proper to the pragmatic equipmental totality close to *Dasein* which finds itself in a spatialized “region” – becoming, for it, its closest environment [BT 102–104/135–138].

science and the basis for the metaphysics of subjectivity), is not original (this “mere space still stays undiscovered”); but this world and its particular places or spatializations are.

As such, the degree to which Schmitt’s observations approximate Heidegger’s approach becomes more perceptible:

The ‘environment’ does not arrange itself in a space which has been given in advance; but its specific worldhood, in its significance, articulates the context of involvements which belongs to some current totality of circumspectively allotted places. The world at such a time always reveals the spatiality of the space which belongs to it. The encounter of the ready-to-hand in its environmental space remains ontically possible only because Dasein itself is ‘spatial’ with regard to its Being-in-the-world.” [BT 104/138] That is, because its decisiveness is spatializing.<sup>11</sup>

The profound meaning of the ontological structure proper to existence, that is, the correlation *Dasein*/world, lies in the particular and distinctive decision of the first, which, with its concerned circumspection, localizes the most immediate entities within the second, with determined locations and arrangements in its encounter with the world. In so doing, a totality of regions is formed whose respective idiosyncrasies maintain relationships with the diverse aptitudes of the equipment localized in them. *Worldhood is the shared ontology of all of them.* The plurality of particular spaces is the result of the spatialization which *Dasein* decisively performs, because this localization, by means of a process of deseverance [*Entfernung*] and the arrangement within an environment, is intrinsic to its existence, it is a way to have its Being as an issue: the concern for the ready-to-hand.

Thus, *Dasein* deepens its perspective, which is all-embracing of the environment and concerned of the entities arranged in a certain region, by means of a “de-severing that gives directionality” [BT 108/143]. To do so, it depends on “signs” that facilitate the indication of direction. In sum: the act of addressing entities spatially expresses the (in a certain sense passive) spatializing decisiveness of its specific Being-in which cannot be identified with that of any other Being.

This is the reason why, in the following paragraph 24, there is a reference to “‘giving space’ [*Raum-geben*]” or “‘making room [*Einräumen*].” This way, by being localized in regions, the entities ready-to-hand are utilized with confidence and familiarity and cease to attract attention (the “inconspicuousness of the ready-to-hand things”). It is only on the “basis of the spatiality thus discovered, [that] space itself becomes accessible for cognition” [BT 111/146]. The authentic apriority of space is that of the phenomenological originality of the *spatializing letting-show* which characterizes the concern of *Dasein* for ready-to-hand entities, its *pre-occupation* with them. It is only based on this apriority that space is subsequently subjected to an objectifying neutralization, typical of modern metaphysics, which treats it as an empty container, an object of “calculation and measurement” by the cognitive-epistemological subject. The premise of this subjectification of *Dasein* and this objectifying of the entities ready-to-hand is the rupture with, and the concealment of, the correlation *Dasein*/world, which Heidegger thinks of as an

<sup>11</sup>The *circumspective* concern devoted to the entities loosely arranged so they can be spatialized in a *localizing* sense has a twofold orientating dynamic: that of “*de-severance* [*Ent-fernen*]” and that of “*directionality*” by means of which *Dasein* exercises its “*essential tendency towards closeness*”: it makes them accessible in an existentially close place and, in this way, the spatial adaptation of all pieces of equipment is highlighted in the place where they accomplish their idiosyncratic belonging in accordance with their respective aptitudes [BT 105/139–140]. Bringing the entities close to oneself and arranging them is the decisive spatialization that is distinctive to existence, this Being-in-the-world is concerned with the ontic: “Circumspective concern [*umsichtige(s) Besorgen*] decides as to the closeness and farness [*Nähe und Ferne*] of what is proximally ready-to-hand environmentally. Whatever this concern dwells alongside beforehand is what is closest, and this is what regulates our de-severances” [BT 107/142].

abbreviation of spatialization. This occurs as a passage to an era which is distinguishable as a result of what Heidegger characterizes as the phenomenon that “the worldly character of the ready-to-hand gets specifically *deprived of its worldhood* [*Entweltlichung der Weltmäßigkeit des Zuhandenen*]” [BT 112/147]. Consequently, the “world loses its specific aroundness” and the “environment” becomes (is thematized and treated like) geometric space and objective nature (“the world of Nature”), a homogenous and indistinct space within which the places and the totality of aptitudes of equipment are *neutralized* in regard to their originality (their being involved-with within a familiar space) and they are degraded to mere sites for extensive things, objects, phenomena, etc. This new epochal characteristic closes this going-back to the world. Rendering the originality of the world and the decisiveness of *Dasein*, which *is in it*, visible once again. ... this is the task of the analytic of *Dasein* [BT 113/148].

At this point, having already examined (in very broad strokes) the philosophical background of the Schmittian reference in *Land and Sea* (“it is not the world that is in space, but rather it is the space that is in the world”), we can recall the part of paragraph 24 which has generally been considered to indicate his textual referent:

*Space is not in the subject, nor is the world in space. Space is rather ‘in’ the world in so far as space has been disclosed by that Being-in-the-world which is constitutive for Dasein. Space is not to be found in the subject, nor does the subject observe the world ‘as if’ that world were in a space; but the ‘subject’ (Dasein), if well understood ontologically, is spatial. And because Dasein is spatial in the way we have described, space shows itself as a priori.”* [BT 111/146]

## 7.

We have tried to emphasize some moments of Heidegger’s analytic where this decisiveness of *Dasein* marks a somewhat shared territory with Schmittian decisionism. But in *what way* does it do so?

Above all, regarding an attitude of thinking that is sufficiently common to both of them, one can visualize a familiarity of the critiques which both of them make in regard to liberal individualism. But it is a similarity that is feeble and not very productive intellectually speaking. Regardless, it can be observed that in Heidegger there is a philosophical critique which reaches out to the heart of subjectivist ontology and, more generally, its deduced metaphysics. Schmitt, for his part, assumes subjectivism and concentrates on the denunciation of liberal and pluralist neutralization which he ultimately ascribes to irresponsibility in face of the problem which mobilizes the political: the state of exception; with the aggravation of the inevitable effect: confronted with the collapse of spontaneous and systemic harmonization, liberalism, like the revolutionaries, proceeds to take over power and to maintain itself for the sake of redemption: both resort to indiscriminate, unlimited and inhuman violence in the name of reason, humanity, freedom, etc.

Secondly, the more precise issue is that of space and *nomos*. Schmitt outlines a genealogy of the modern spatialization of the globe, emphasizing the heroism of the oceanic adventurers, pirates and whale hunters as the initial actors and first advocates of the effective conditions for a new planetary order. The heroic feat told in *Land and Sea* takes place in the dawn of this loss of original worldhood referred to by Heidegger, because the era in which the modern *nomos* of the Earth is instituted is that of the collapse of the limitations linked to a stable, unmediated existence moderated by traditional patterns. This process of the expansion of subjectivity is the vehicle for a peculiar transubstantiation: from the fixed telluric to the mobile aquatic; from handicraft and proto-industrial work to technified mass production; from the displacement within limited spatialities to the unrestricted mobility around the terrestrial globe; from the circulation of production and consumption of commodities and ideas within territorialized markets, in

correspondence with the figure of the nation state, to the dynamics of a market with international dimensions.

In this sense, it might seem appropriate to link – perhaps too weakly as is the case when they are treated as common instances to understand the era at the same cultural moment – the Schmittian “secularizations and neutralization” and Heidegger’s characterization of the ready-to-hand as “*deprived of its worldhood*” [BT 112/147]. Yet they would constitute nothing more than expressions stemming from an epochal sensibility that are only shared in a very general way and that, according to one thinker, are channelled in political–juridical terms and, according to the other, in motives and developments specific to his existential ontology. In any case, certain aspects of the Heideggerian *Entweltlichung* might signal proximity with the subjects brought up by Lukács (in *History and Class Consciousness*) in reference to the anticapitalist critique of the young Marx, as a critique of objectification, reification and, more general, of alienation *sensu lato* – a critique that does not include, nor does it develop, any of the fundamental components of Schmitt’s conceptual universe.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, if we take the previous observations into account, the hypothesis of the most secure interpretation is almost precluded. The process of secularization and technicalization specific to modernity seems to be considered by one of them from the vantage point of his political theology and, by the other, from that of the ontology of existence. But both launch an attack against the metaphysics of subjectivism, with rationalism as constituting the philosophical theorization of its universalism, and liberalism the political–juridical and economic projection or transposition of the latter.

So if we accept that the two thinkers share a moderate mutual empathy based on a relatively similar diagnosis of the era, we may establish a parallel between the dependency which, in Heidegger, science and the conceptualization of space as an objective entity have with respect to original ontology (the decisiveness of *Dasein* in its existential openness towards the ontic ready-to-hand). In Schmitt, the liberal (economistic and normativistic) neutralization has a dependency analogous to the political (exceptional decision about the exceptional, foundation of the juridical state order). That is, in face of the oblivion of origins, of the neutralization of the genealogy in terms of neutral rationality in science and in liberalism (an inherent requirement for the claim of the auto-foundation and self-sufficiency of the absolute individual-subject), both thinkers rehabilitate the apriority of the existential: *original* in phenomenological terms in Heidegger; political-juridically *foundational of the sovereign order* in Schmitt. The common feature of both approaches lies in the existential apriority of the *pre-subjective decisiveness* in the first and of the *decisionism of the actor-subject in relation to the logos of sovereignty* despite the decline of classic modern statehood in the latter.

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<sup>12</sup>The fact that “Being-in-the-world as state of *Dasein*” is disregarded and remains unobserved is concomitant to being “*passed over* [*Überspringen*]”, which is constitutive for existence. Hence, starting with this passing over, the world is interpreted in terms of the Being of the entities present-at-hand. There is a “*break* [Bruch] in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers”: *Dasein* is faced with emptiness because it does not capture the assignments or references of the equipment which is the very ready-to-hand, arranged for the pragmatic work of humans. The entities just stay disclosed, in the state of “*disclosedness* [*Erschlossenheit*]”, have the “character of having been laid open [*Aufgeschossenheit*]”, and the attention that *Dasein* pays to them by dealing with the others is one of concern for the entities which need it (“*Besorgen*”) and not the one of “*solicitude* [*Fürsorge*]” in view of an authentic life. In these situations, the *Dasein* that deals with the entities loses itself in them; it stays dazed or fascinated by them (“*benommen*”). With the figure of the world being “*deprived of its worldhood*” exposed in this way, we seek to visualize the relative proximity of what is most habitually understood as Marxist alienation [Cf. BT 65, 75, 112f, 121].

## 8.

In spite of the perspective just mentioned, we also understand that Schmitt's decisionist subjectivity and its force of juridical-political conformation of spatiality in the figure of the national territory of the state, and also of the totality of the Earth as a space of interstate relationships in the course of a process which has led to the transformation and deformation of both (inner- and interstate) spatial orders, is hardly compatible – if not completely incompatible – with the phenomenological-existential pre-political *decisiveness* of Heideggerian *Dasein*. We insist that the familiarity which characterizes this point (as opposed to the difference in relation to the problem of *values*) concerns certain general features.

In relation to Schmitt, the *Jurist* highlights the theological-political interrelation between what he refers to as the existential fundamental “elements” (both in their mythical formulation as well as in the historical confirmation of the latter, so to speak, explained in Schmitt's political, constitutional categories and categories of international law). In this way, he sheds light on the effect of revolutionary rupture, the radical change of the horizon of meaning arising with the advent of modernity, in general, and with the act to capture the infinite waters and lands, in particular, thereby triggering the heroic feat of the expansion and assurance of this new (meta-physical, political-juridical, socio-economical, cultural) *view* of the world. These are not the premises of the existential analytic. Consequently, the allusion to Heidegger in *Land and Sea* could be due to many motivations (among which one should not exclude a minor concern for the penetration of the hermeneutic difficulties and the philosophical suggestions of *Being and Time*).

We conclude by questioning to what point Heidegger can offer a kind of philosophical support or correlate necessary and appropriate for the Schmittian view to the effect that the reference in *Land and Sea* would constitute a theoretical support less vague than one of family resemblance. If the existential genealogical moment of modernity lies in the decision for (oceanic and American) infinitude that shatters the traditional bond with territorial finitude proper to the classic *nomos*, is the Heideggerian analytic capable of accounting for the specific revolutionary dynamics of the modern *nomos*?

*Prima facie*, the figures of the Heideggerian phenomenology of spatiality might give an account of the natural, telluric existence, as well as for the linked pre- and/or proto-modern attitude towards work, consumption etc. But even this undetermined correlation is disputable, because the territorial *nemein*, in which Schmitt sees the foundation of the classical organization of space, presupposes a greater activism than the original activity of *Dasein*. In modernity, a similar activism has increased incommensurably, becoming a catalyst for the disintegration of the traditional schema (the *Landnahme* as a sedentary and fixed ordering institution justified by the idea of natural limitations), to the extent that – once it has configured itself as the voluntarism of modern subjectivity – it generates statehood and, therefore, not only internal order, but external relations *between states*. The first aspect is the one of a schema which articulates – in an absolutely novel way with respect to the whole former political dispositive – the *horizontality* of societal coexistence between free and equal citizens (based on the *exchange* of ideas and products) with the foundational *verticality* which characterizes state power as *sovereignty*.

The second aspect is precisely that of interstate relationships and projections of sovereignty to the exterior of its territorial jurisdiction. On this level, the decision and subsequent actions which dynamize the new organization of the world in modernity (this inversion and adaptation of human existence from the natural element, earth, to an antithetic element, water) points to the will of an actor-subject which establishes normativity in a space articulated in a novel way as the duality inside/outside, interior/exterior, peace/war. Its pre-eminence in regard to all systemic normality is that of the political as a constructive-constituting decision based on its capacity to define

amity and enmity, as well as to normativize space as a result, as also occurs on the planetary level (topic of *Land and Sea*).

Thus, the uniqueness of modernity derives from the fact that the foundation of the state as a leviathanic system (in Schmitt's reading of Hobbes) is a double movement: on the one hand, the intra-state organization of the finite territoriality, precisely that of the nation state; on the other, a movement of infinite extra-state expansion which accompanies and completes the first. In the face of these dimensions of secularization and political reformulation of public law, the decisiveness of Heideggerian *Dasein* (the *orientation towards the entity ready-to-hand letting it show itself be involved within the realm of everyday work in its aptitude for ...*) does not maintain specific connections with the decisive will portrayed by Schmitt, it maintains neither categorical nor situational resemblances with the modern decision for infinitude which Schmitt theorizes and with which he completes his decisionist political and judicial approach.

Hence, conceptually speaking, Schmitt does not owe anything to *Being and Time*. Likewise, Heideggerian thought prior to the *Kehre* does not demonstrate any significant or essential points of contact with Schmitt's basic ideas on this subject. Simply put, the allusion of 1942 seems to be limited to an earnest recognition of a position which he finds close and akin to his own. But this is only the case if one interprets Heidegger's analytic in very general terms and as a function of a shared polemic against the fundamental dogma of modern rationalism and liberalism. At the most, we might consider that Schmitt has found in the ontological primacy of the "world" with respect to "space" an apriority which is *not completely alien or remote* to the decision for infinitude and the consequential swing towards the infinite waters of the pioneers of the new planetary order, the "children of the seas." Perhaps, one might very boldly take up (with Schmitt) the immediate familiarity with which the crews of the Leviathans, which animate the modern Epos on the oceans of the planet, deal with their everyday tasks. Then, the task would be to confirm (with Heidegger) what could be considered as the concerned dealings they have with the equipment ready-to-hand in the region of the ship – this everyday management and usage of the tools proper to maritime work which seem natural to these crews.

But this would not change the incompatibility between the decisionist voluntarism and the element of original *decisiveness* of *Dasein* which may exist in relation to "worldhood" and "spatiality." To associate the maritime vicissitudes of the centuries in which modernity – already sure of itself – expanded around the whole world with an adequate concretization of Heideggerian existentials would result from a superficial and inaccurate interpretation which would not guarantee the validity of the phenomenological analysis used to explain the *revolutionary and foundational* significance of the overturning or displacement of one existential "element" by another: from earth to water. Therefore, what weakens the rigour of Schmitt's reference to Heidegger is that the analytic of world and space does not offer any *specific* elements (conceptually and situationally) for the comprehension of the epochal rupture provoked by the existential decision of the modern age.

Certainly, the activism of the founders of the new *nomos* in the unlimited spaces and according to the logic of fluidity of the aqueous principle, presents a pre-thematic and pre-cognitive aspect (apriority of the decision for the oceanic waters and its initial *heroic* concretion in regard to the subsequent *post-heroic* systematization and stabilization). Yet this aspect is rooted in a *decision* which Schmitt understands and explains on the basis of his political theology and his concept of the political; and it is precisely by virtue of these premises and connotations of his ideas that the decisionism Schmitt ascribes to these pioneers cannot be assimilated to the figures of the "ontological analytic." What is more, the modern epics of the turn to the sea are sustained within the limits of this impenetrable core which Heidegger seeks to neutralize with his ontological view: the will of the *subject*.

Our conclusion is as follows. If the categories inherent to the worldly and spatializing existence of *Dasein* are too vague and generic to illuminate this specific situation, which for Schmitt is central

to illuminating the political and juridical meaning of the inaugural heroic feat of modern revolutionarism, then the question one has to ask in regards to Schmitt's reference to *Being and Time* in *Land and Sea*, is whether Heidegger's conceptual apparatus confirms, from obviousness; or denies, from incompatibility; or perhaps ignores, from the perspective of a post-subjective ontology, these key differences, which include the *specific political* meaning of certain epochal features.

The question, then, could be expressed in the following manner: Up to what point does Heidegger contribute to differentiating between the eternal marine fishing of sand smelts and the oceanic whale hunt which, for Schmitt, is the foundational heroic feat of a modernity that is truly planetary in scope; or between the limited spatiality of the pirate as an enemy of humankind in the Mediterranean sea of the Romans, and piracy as a force propelling liberty and capitalism which was undertaken by the "dregs of the seas," the buccaneers, freebooters, privateers, and adventurers of the oceanic waters, particularly on those which surround the New World? All of them are *Dasein* which are-in-the-world and work pragmatically by utilizing the ready-to-hand.

## 9.

In conclusion, it could be said that the affinity between Heidegger and Schmitt only seems to be based on the context of the era in which both participate; but this does not dissolve the philosophical divergence between them.

Therefore, the Heideggerian understanding of space is not susceptible to entering into specific significant correlations and analogies with Schmitt's decision. Moreover, Being-in-the-world and the existential disclosure of the things ready-to-hand to *Dasein* cannot be connected in anything but a general way to this force of rupture of the established normativity, which is proper to the will faced with the exceptional, as it manifests itself in the conquest of the seas and desert lands – that is, of uncivilized spaces. If we were to do so, we would be forcing a juxtaposition which, far from enriching this vague familiar relationship, would weaken it.

This being the case, Schmitt's reference to Heidegger only indicates – we repeat – a genuine recognition of the grandeur of the philosopher, but based on a coincidence, that is either superficial or even directly misleading in its vagueness: it simply indicates that both belong to the same epochal climate, rather than a theoretic proximity between two similar ways of conceptualizing the relation between humans and space. One of them does this in terms of phenomenological originality, the other in terms of the primacy of the political in all normative foundations, both within states, as well as in terms of external extra-state normativity.

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## Images and Symptoms: Georges Didi-Huberman's Studies on Art

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When in the eighteenth century the independence of feeling over reason, be it theoretical or practical, was recognized, Aesthetics was established as an autonomous discipline. Baeumler does not hesitate in calling its emergence “an event of profound historical significance,”<sup>1</sup> and recognizes in its founder, Baumgarten, that “new love for what is individual,” which is “one of the most important requirements for the development of historical meaning.”<sup>2</sup> As a relation based on a worldly experience, in “aesthetics” converge feeling and, at least *in nuce*, historical judgment.

Facing this epochal background, it is worth considering for a moment the conclusion at which Mario Perniola arrives in the last pages of *20<sup>th</sup> Century Aesthetics*. He unequivocally calls the situation we are facing paradoxical. On the one hand, almost all thinking that calls or recognizes itself as aesthetic does not seem to be particularly interested in feeling. On the other, those who unequivocally deal with feeling do not usually establish a relation with aesthetics. One asks not without reason why it is that contemporary aesthetics is incapable of giving a theoretical interpretation of contemporary feeling? Or to put it in its own terms, defined by aesthetics' great thinkers:

why do the theoretical instruments provided by Kant and Hegel, judgement and dialectics, reveal themselves to be inappropriate to withstand the impact of an experience that cannot be understood either as the subsumption of the particular to the universal nor as the overcoming of contradiction?<sup>3</sup>

Before answering the question, he makes an observation that hinders that big “event,” the emergence of aesthetics as described by Baeumler, from having a full or clear validity for us. The notion of aesthetics includes the possibility of – or may we say the confidence in – an end of the struggle, a peace to be attained, a stage where conflicts are, at least for a while, alleviated or contained. According to Perniola, feeling in the twentieth century has gone in a different direction, that of a conflict even more significant than dialectical opposition, since it does not support itself through the opposition of symmetrical terms. It is in the notion of *difference*, “understood as non-identity, as a dissimilarity greater than the logical concept of diversity and the dialectical

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<sup>1</sup>Baeumler, A., *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Darmstadt: WbG, 1981), p. 1. Translator's note (hereafter: TN): all translations are mine, except for when English published texts are used.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. X.

<sup>3</sup>Perniola, M., *20<sup>th</sup> Century Aesthetics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 109.



concept of distinction,”<sup>4</sup> where Perniola sees the original trait of the twentieth century. Therefore, the answer to the question as to why neither Kant nor Hegel can give us the adequate conceptual instruments for aesthetics, is that our experience is radically different. With this in mind, we can clarify the aforementioned paradox. The supposed indifference of contemporary aesthetic theories to the question of feeling is deceitful. Contemporary theorists of aesthetics start rather from the study of feeling, and this is why post-Kantian or post-Hegelian aesthetics seem epigonic to them.<sup>5</sup> Perniola counts among these theoreticians, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Bataille, Derrida, Deleuze, among others.

Is feeling really the starting point in such a variegated juxtaposition of thinkers? Can a common origin be actually found for the developments of their reflexions on art? Are we not entitled, after Nietzsche, to challenge any original or originary trait, especially when we are dealing with the brittle territory of feeling?

The proof offered by Perniola is certainly debatable. Nevertheless, I believe that it is worth to dwell on the reasons for his diagnosis of aesthetic contemporary thinking, as a thinking that is based on an experience incompatible with the one that supports the big systems of Kant or Hegel. According to Perniola, we find these reasons in the work of Freud.

The psyche becomes the theoretical model of a struggle that exceeds by far the agonistic schema which is based on the comparison between two symmetrical opposites. No correspondence, though, can be established between the unconscious system and the preconscious-conscious one, because the first never appears directly on the scene of the conflict. It is the scene of *difference*.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that neither the difference brought by what is unconscious with respect to what is conscious, nor the struggle between the two, is something decided. Between them arises a kind of interstitial space: its dynamics are recognized in the formation of compromises, satisfactions of the Unconscious, and defences of consciousness, as Freud will go on to demonstrate. The epochal change that Bäumler marked with the emergence of aesthetics refers also to Freud's research on our situation. In the same way as aesthetics is not just a discipline that delimits a parcel of reality, psychoanalysis is not defined by its mere object of study. The fact that their founders, Baumgarten and Freud, felt constrained to call them “sciences,” says something about their strategies, but especially about the systems of knowledge in front of which both of them are trying to legitimize the rights of their findings. Apart from the modern anxiety for scientificity, these last ones have in common the elucidation of certain specific forms of human experience marked by historicity. A mental experiment could help to illustrate this: for example, to transfer the interests and expectations that moved the artists and spectators of Rococo to the people who lived through the construction of the cathedrals. Or: to assimilate the diagnosis and cure of the Viennese in the twentieth century to Greek soothsaying. Anachronisms are indexes of historicity.

These opening remarks have as a goal to set up the frame in which I will examine the works of the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman. Too “historical” for philosophers, and too “philosophical” for historians, these works seem to exist in an uncertain “between” the two disciplines, a kind of interstitial zone. Matthew Rambley considers them more as an attempt to objectivise Didi-Huberman's aesthetic attitude, than as investigations into art history.<sup>7</sup> However, the term *Aesthetics* barely appears in the titles of the published works of Didi-Huberman. We find it in

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>7</sup>Rambley, M., “Poetics of the Image: Art History and the Rhetoric of Interpretation”, *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 35 (2008), p. 25.

a few articles (“Esthétique et expérimentation chez Charcot,” 1985; “D’un ressentiment en mal d’esthétique,” 1993; “L’immanence esthétique,” 2003). Now, the use of the term is not an unquestionable sign of a significant contribution to the subject we are interested in, to the thinking of art and our contemporary experience. We almost have to suspect that, precisely by using this expression we impede access to it; since we run the risk of falling into hermetic categories, or into the no less dangerous ingenuousness of hoping that, because we use certain terms, we are in fact coming to the point. The important point here is that Didi-Huberman does not care about aesthetics.

On the other hand, the connection with history is fundamental in the works of Didi-Huberman. Although with an antiquated rhetoric for our times (the “love for what is individual”), Bäumler affirmed that in Aesthetics a meaning for History is somehow articulated. However, as Didi-Huberman shows, History brings along epistemological models enlightened by criticism and revision, for the simple reason that they hinder the possibility of knowing and enjoying art. To put it in general terms, the way our author separates the history of art from the epistemic field of knowledge and representation, opens up a fruitful landscape for the reflection on art.<sup>8</sup>

My investigation will go through the following steps: first, I will focus on the criticisms that Didi-Huberman makes of the discourses on art and aesthetic experience that refuse to take into account contemporary artistic expressions. Next I will briefly develop some of Freud’s ideas on the symptom in order, in a third moment, to bring to the fore a few cases of the heuristic value that the notion of symptom has in the work of Didi-Huberman. To finish, I will try to elucidate the critical (not clinical) and enlightening function that the notion of symptom has in his studies on the image.

## 1

Regarding a series of articles published by *Esprit* in 1991 and 1992, dealing with the question of contemporary aesthetic criteria, Didi-Huberman criticized strongly what he calls the discourses of abomination, whose attitude is, according to him, uncritical par excellence. Their rhetoric, he points out, has accompanied every moment of modern art. Although the articles pretended to tell a genealogy of modern art, Didi-Huberman shows that it is “brutal, simplistic – non historical – just by the fact that it focuses, first of all, on a proper name alone, on a single name of a ‘bad father’”. Everything starts, everything begins to ‘end’, we are told, with Marcel Duchamp.<sup>9</sup> Well, enough, Didi-Huberman will administer his medicine, and provide a genealogy of these discourses, but this time it will be critical and differentiating.

In a style that resembles Nietzsche’s, recognizing resentment in the tone of the discourses that abhor modern art, Didi-Huberman will break down the reasons at work in their simplifying and aggressive reductions. To begin with, the resentful man is always late. In relation to art, the writers of these essays never deal with young artists, our contemporaries, but rather with authors whose work goes back several decades. In order to depict the next trait, a reference to Nietzsche is essential: the resentful man is defined by his “inability to admire, respect or love,”<sup>10</sup> to which Didi-Huberman adds an inability to know. Essentially, if what above all defines the resentful man is his desire for vengeance, in his impotence he can only accuse. He can neither really look,

<sup>8</sup>According to Gabriel Cabello the works of Hans Belting go also in that direction. See Cabello, G., “Malestar en la historia del arte: sobre la antropología de las imágenes de Hans Belting y Georges Didi-Huberman”, *Imago crítica* 2 (2010), pp. 29–52.

<sup>9</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., “D’un ressentiment en mal d’esthétique,” *Les Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne* 43 (1993), p. 104.

<sup>10</sup>Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 109.

come to know, nor respect that which he is supposed to criticize. Because a third trait of resentment is, precisely, that it must contrive the object that it abhors. It must project that which it hates, up to the point where it deforms and misrepresents the target of its criticism. One further step in this Nietzschean analysis of discourses that deform their object is given with the introduction of the ascetic ideal and its mechanisms. Didi-Huberman wonders how resentment can be sanctioned. The means are simple: one has to “remove a recent past – ‘contemporary art’ – in order to go back to an ancient past, disguised under the mask of an ineluctably mythological and archaic atemporality.”<sup>11</sup> In a practical sense, it is about re-establishing hierarchies anchored to a normative, punitive, and accusing pseudo-knowledge. In this way one demands from all artists a love for the trade, and taste from the spectator. Not in a Kantian sense, though, since he had in mind a power of judgment, of discernment, and not at all a hierarchical standard based on the expert eye or the taste of “educated” people who sanction or impose aesthetic qualities.<sup>12</sup>

What Didi-Huberman shows is that in many cases, in debates on “contemporary art,” what is in question is not Aesthetics, but rather moralizing attitudes.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the message for contemporary artists, characteristic of the simplistic genealogy that Didi-Huberman finds in the essays of *Esprit*, seems an argument *ad baculum*. Either they are the cursed sons of a “bad father” (clearly Duchamp), or simple strayed sons who must kill the father and return to the fold of fine art.<sup>14</sup>

We can read Didi-Huberman’s article in terms of a diagnosis of the uneasiness that certain authors feel regarding contemporary art. Thus, with a clinical eye he diagnoses a sickness that, on account of Nietzsche, he identifies as “resentment.” The fact that we could furthermore tie such a feeling with Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* is not random. However, Didi-Huberman does not plan to use the Freudian instruments (or in this case, Nietzschean) in clinical but rather in critical terms.<sup>15</sup> In no way is his goal to draw a kind of social psychology, as that arising from Freud’s long essay. Rather, let us see Didi-Huberman’s reasons for using Freud in terms of a critical and not clinical paradigm:

there are, incontestably, in the Freudian field all the elements of a critique of knowledge fit to recast the very foundations of what are often called the human sciences. It is because he reopened in dazzling fashion the question of the *subject* — a subject henceforth thought as split or rent, not closed, a subject

<sup>11</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., “D’un ressentiment en mal d’esthétique”, p. 113.

<sup>12</sup>The paradigmatic case of a questionable interpretation of Kant is Clement Greenberg (see Domínguez, J., “La autonomía del arte y sus realidades. Purismo estético moderno y pluralismo artístico contemporáneo”, *Cultura del juicio y experiencia del arte. Ensayos* (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2003), pp. 236–9. Let us remember his invectives against *kitsch* for not being a “genuine culture,” and his obtuseness in front of *pop art*. Hence, he claims: “all values are human values, relative values, in art as well as elsewhere. Yet there does seem to have been more or less of a general agreement among the cultivated of mankind over the ages as to what is good art and what bad. Taste has varied, but not beyond certain limits ( . . . ). There has been agreement then, and this agreement rests, I believe, on a fairly constant distinction made between those values only to be found in art and the values which can be found elsewhere. Kitsch, by virtue of a rationalized technique that draws on science and industry, has erased this distinction in practice”. Greenberg, C., *Art and Culture. Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p.13). The following judgement summarizes his attitude: “[a]rt is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles, and what counts first and last in art is quality; all other things are secondary” (p. 133). A more subtle way to face the “bad father” is to remember the ludic tone of Duchamp, as Thierry de Duve does in *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997). Duve explains that it was Greenberg who taught him the most about art criticism and aesthetic experience, but detects the Kantian antinomy on taste under Duchamp’s rules of the game: what is and what is not art?

<sup>13</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., “D’un ressentiment en mal d’esthétique”, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 7.

inept at synthesis, be it transcendental — that Freud was also able to throw open, and just as decisively, the question of *knowledge*.<sup>16</sup>

If I have lingered in my presentation of the thread of Didi-Huberman's genealogy of a group of authors we need not to identify here, it is because he here directly and indirectly clarifies what matters for him in the history of art. The idea is to offer "a new domain, new objects, new problems of knowledge."<sup>17</sup> A device is necessary that will not deform the objects to be considered. In order to do criticism in a worthy sense, it is necessary to analyse, know, conceptualize. The idea is therefore not to impose certain criteria, but to create thought. Furthermore, authentic analyses are founded on a humble attitude towards the object to be considered, since the ability to admire does not simply mean reverence nor veneration. One has rather there a respectful attitude that inspires us to admire the patient effort of discernment.

It is clear to see that Didi-Huberman would not have provided such a critical and destructive genealogy of some approaches to contemporary art, if he had not tried out his own ability to admire, invent, and offer new problems of knowledge. A good example of this is *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, published one year before the genealogical criticism I have briefly reconstructed. The book deals with American minimalist sculpture of the sixties and seventies, and proposes from its beginning what it calls "the unavoidable scission of seeing":

What we see is appreciated — it lives — in front of our eyes only through that which looks back at us. The scission that splits in us that which we see from that which looks back at us is nevertheless unavoidable. It would be necessary to start again from this paradox, where the act of seeing unfolds only by splitting itself in two.<sup>18</sup>

To see is not always a simple accounting for some traits of the world or objects. It cannot be invariably assimilated with perceiving. What we see, even though these be mere "objects," gazes back at us. Didi-Huberman starts from this paradox: what we see can become what sees us; in seeing a scission, a fracture, a break can take place. He takes this paradox as a condition against which we cannot fight. The paradox of vision is for Didi-Huberman the heuristic engine in his research on the history of art.

It is also important to recognize his criticism of the epistemological and ontological presuppositions that obstruct our experience of seeing. Hence, in *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Didi-Huberman traces two binary, mutually exclusive thoughts, two attitudes of the dilemma of being in front of a grave:

there is in this attitude (...) [a] will to focus, at all costs, only on what we see, to ignore that this volume there is not indifferent (...) This attitude (...) consists (...) in making the experience of seeing an *exercise of tautology*: an apathetic truth ("this grave that I see is nothing but what I am seeing there: a parallelepiped, more or less one meter, ninety centimetres long...") (...) A maniac and miserable victory of language over sight, in the static affirmation, impenetrable as a stockade, that there is *nothing there but volume*, and that that volume is nothing other than itself, for example: a parallelepiped, more or less one meter, ninety centimetres long. ...<sup>19</sup>

This second attitude consists thus in making of the experience of seeing an *exercise of belief*: a kind of truth that is neither apathetic nor deep, but which gives itself as superlative and summoning, ethereal

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>17</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., "D'un ressentiment en mal d'esthétique", p. 105.

<sup>18</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

yet with authority. It is an obsessional victory — also miserable, but in an indirect way — of language over gaze. It is the affirmation, solidified into a dogma, that what is there is neither only a volume, nor obviously a pure process, but “something Other” that gives life, as well as a teleological and meta-physical meaning, to all of that.<sup>20</sup>

Both attitudes are nothing but ways of mitigating an *angst*. But this psychological explanation overlooks the essential: to show, through a language that can account for our experiences, how we obstruct our gaze in front of artistic objects, specifically of the minimalist sculptures of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Tony Smith, whose volumes created their own specific spatiality, and expected to refer to nothing but themselves, without any games of meaning.

Didi-Huberman reads again the statements of these artists in order to show that their tautological sentences fall apart. Morris, for example, stated that the minimalist object existed as the term of a relation, that is to say, in a differential sense, or also that the idea was to give a presence to forms.<sup>21</sup> Didi-Huberman lingers on the sentence imposed by one of his critics, Michael Fried, who stated, with the confidence of one who knows what is and what is not art, that the minimalist venture was an “ideological” question, to wit, a matter of words.<sup>22</sup> Didi-Huberman notes also how the differential relation and the sense of presence that minimalist objects bring forward, are understood by Fried as a “theatricality” that “negates” art.<sup>23</sup> And even more interestingly: Fried slips disastrously into a gap opened by Morris:

the contradiction between ‘specificity’ and ‘presence’, the contradiction between the semiotic transparency of a tautological conception of vision (*what you see is what you see*), and the inevitable opacity of an intra- or intersubjective experience called forth by the very exhibition of minimalist objects.<sup>24</sup>

It would be necessary to recognize in this contradiction the paradox of minimalist sculpture: its stress towards formal *specificity* (the “literality” of unequivocal volumes), and the proclivity towards a *presence* (achieved through an equivocal play with the spectator).

What is it that, ultimately, we can grasp through the tautological and the belief models? What can be instructive about the decades old debate on minimalist sculpture? Didi-Huberman’s answer is simply that we gain nothing by putting ourselves into such dilemma or into binary thinking. Tautology and belief paralyse the object to be seen, the act of seeing, and the subject who sees. We do not have to choose between what we see (which leads us to immobilize the object, at the risk of falling into a tautology), and what sees us (here we immobilize the object too, but we do it through our beliefs). “It happens, one must trouble oneself with the *between*.”<sup>25</sup> Instead of having binary and mutually exclusive thoughts, we should “dialecticize”; to try to find the point where contraries reverse. Where what we see turns into what looks at us. Neither more cynicism, because of a lack of meaning, nor reverence for the plenitude of meaning.

The psychoanalytical paradigm is useful in order to counteract the danger of this immobility, of this sterile, cynic, or reverent attachment. This does not mean that we must apply its concepts to the analyses of works or artists. This was obviously the clinical path trodden by Freud, with some

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 19–21.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 40f.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 44–5.

<sup>23</sup>Fried, Michael, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 153.

<sup>24</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

or little success, in his essays on art. In as much as they can account for the dynamics operating in the act of seeing, the use of psychoanalytical categories is pertinent.

The hypothesis that Didi-Huberman will put forward with regard to images in art, and even in the extreme case of “minimalism,” is that they manage to present the “visual dialectics” of that play in which our sight “troubles” itself.<sup>26</sup> “To give to see, is always to trouble sight, in its act, in its subject. To see is always an act of the subject, thus a split, troubled, disturbed, open act.”<sup>27</sup>

In order not to miss what Didi-Huberman is proposing to us with regard to the heuristic value of the symptom, it is necessary to stress the “to give to see,” and to bring up the general framework that he is formulating. He does this in the appendix to his book *Confronting Images. Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*. The appendix is called “The Detail and the *Pan*” (a notion upon which we will return):

The methodological interest of expressing this pictorial notion of the *pan* in terms of the symptom resides above all in the fact that the concept of symptom is two-faced, being situated precisely on the boundary between two theoretical fields: a *phenomenological* field and a *semiological* field. The whole problem of a theory of art lies in the articulation of these two fields.<sup>28</sup>

If adopting the phenomenological perspective in order to look at artistic works brings the risk of speaking in “affective tones,”<sup>29</sup> or of losing ourselves in the immanence of experience, in its immediacy, the danger of the semiological approach is exactly the opposite one: to go astray in the model of a transcendence, whose “universal abstracted from sense” permits the enunciation of meanings that the works might have. Rather:

it is necessary to propose a phenomenology, not only of the relation to the visible world as emphatic milieu, but of the relation to meaning as structure and specific work (which presupposes a semiology). And thus be able to propose a semiology, not only of symbolic configurations, but also of events, or accidents, or singularities of the pictorial image (which presupposes a phenomenology). That is what an aesthetic of the symptom, in other words, an aesthetic of the sovereign accidents in painting, would tend toward.<sup>30</sup>

Didi-Huberman uses the notion of “symptom,” in terms of a “movement” that can account for the alternations of meaning operating surreptitiously in works of art. The idea is “to engage in a translation of the visible into a symptom.”<sup>31</sup> To appeal to the “symptom” is, in this way, to find the way to split from the factual (the phenomenological aspect of images) as well as from the iconographic (what is meant in the images) point of view.<sup>32</sup> “*Symptom* speaks to us of the infernal scansion, the *anadyomene* movement of the visual in the visible and of presence in representation.”<sup>33</sup>

## 2

In order to understand the heuristic value of the “symptom” in the studies of Didi-Huberman, it is necessary to review briefly what this term means for Freud. As we know, for medicine, in

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 68–9.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>28</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, p. 263.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 263–4.

<sup>31</sup>Cabello, G., “Malestar en la historia del arte: sobre la antropología de las imágenes de Hans Belting y Georges Didi-Huberman”, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, p. 166.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

Freud's age, hysteria had to have somatic disorders as a cause, its symptoms had to be understood as signs or consequences of bodily functions. At a point of inflection in the treatment of certain mental diseases, the foundation stone for the emergence of psychoanalysis becomes how to understand the symptoms of these affections. Freud contended that the symptoms of hysteria (as well as of other sicknesses) must be regarded as products of the Unconscious, in the sense of a "physical mechanism of (unconscious) *defence*." They originate, he says, "in an attempt to repress an incompatible idea which had come into distressing opposition to the patient's ego."<sup>34</sup> A long time later, after a strenuous and patient work of research and the final formation of his ideas, it was established – for example, in his 1926 work "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," – that a symptom is a production of the unconscious that "denotes the presence of some pathological process," since it is an "unusual change" in a particular function of the ego.<sup>35</sup> Freud explains that

a symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance; it is a consequence of the process of repression. Repression proceeds from the *ego* when the latter — it may be at the behest of the super-*ego* — refuses to associate itself with an instinctual cathexis which has been aroused in the *id*. The *ego* is able, by means of repression, to keep the idea which is the vehicle of the reprehensible impulse from becoming conscious.<sup>36</sup>

The instinct that was resisted, repressed by the super-*ego* censorship, manages, by means of a transformation, to reach consciousness and manifest as a symptom. But the symptom, then, as he explains in the "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," has a "double-sidedness" or "polarity." It acts simultaneously on two terrains; a subterranean one, unconscious, and a conscious one, visible, which belongs to the sphere of the ego. Symptoms "are the products of a compromise and arise from the mutual interference between two opposing currents; they represent not only the repressed but also the repressing force which had a share in their origin."<sup>37</sup> The symptom is the product of a conflict that is in some way reconciled through a compromise, which is precisely the formation of the symptom. It cannot, thus, have an univocal sense. Freud maintains that it is "overdetermined."

if it was my task to put before you [in *The Aetiology of Hysteria*] the rules that govern the formation of hysterical symptoms, I should have to include as one of them that the idea which is selected for the production of a symptom is one which has been called up by a combination of several factors and which has been aroused from various directions simultaneously. I have elsewhere tried to express this in the formula: *hysterical symptoms are overdetermined*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup>"Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud. Volume III (1893–1899) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 162.

<sup>35</sup>"Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud. Vol. XX (1925–1926) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 87.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup>"Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Part III. General Theory of the Neuroses. XIX Resistance and Repression", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud. Vol. XVI (1916–1917) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 301.

<sup>38</sup>"The Aetiology of Hysteria", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud. Vol. III (1893–1899) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 216.

The overdetermination of symptoms can be explained by the exceptional circumstance that they are, so to speak, organized by “several factors” and from “various directions,” exposed and open to them. Such an organization is active. In it the repressed drives, withdrawn in the unconscious, continue working. They can resurface at any moment. The symptom connects with what has been repressed, but also with the ego.

## 3

Didi-Huberman is interested in the overdetermination of images, in order to ponder on the works of the history of art, as well as to bring to light the strategies with which art historians negate the equivocal and evasive ways of art’s figurability.

Symptoms and dreams are overdetermined. Both are operations with a “double-sidedness,” a “polarity.” They combine two fields that would be incomparable under a logic of identity, but that assemble dynamically in terms of transactions, solutions that do not work in a linear way, but rather through condensations or displacements. Using Freud’s categories, Maud Hagelstein has reconstructed what constitutes “an aesthetics of the symptom” in the work of Didi-Huberman. Her goal is to show the complex ways in which significations can gather in an image. I would like to bring up two examples in which such an aesthetic of the symptom is at work, as critical modes of what we tend to consider as images. In both cases we will face operations that coerce images under the form of knowledge. In an indirect way, we will be able to distinguish what Didi-Huberman recommends in order to counterbalance this tendency.

In an early work, *Invention of Hysteria, Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, Didi-Huberman showed the body of the hysteric as an image bestowed with meaning, albeit unfixed. Her body is, in the words of Didi-Huberman, a “prodigious body,”<sup>39</sup> which forces thought to assume the paradox of what lays in front of our eyes:

Its extreme visibility retained a secret in its possession, an invisibility and a changeability, the freedom of absolutely untreatable manifestations: an irreducible unpredictability. Hysteria obliged paradoxical thinking, here the integral porosity of the body, there a dynamic of vapours and sympathies, elsewhere the obscure course of “nervousness.”<sup>40</sup>

The changeability of the “prodigious body” of the hysteric, its “extreme visibility” and, simultaneously, its “invisibility,” the “irreducible unpredictability” of its contortions and gestures; all of this contrasts strongly with the photographs of sick women set up as iconographical documents at the Salpêtrière. In them, “a neutral distance” is created.<sup>41</sup> The physician makes the passionate attitudes of “his” hysteric into a masterpiece, the living image of her body into a nosological concept, and glorifies it as an image.<sup>42</sup> Here we found one of the important clues to the work of Didi-Huberman: to find how images (in this case photographic) are constructed through their confinement in an epistemological order. It is necessary, according to Didi-Huberman, to criticize the reduction of the image to the visible, that is, to the closure of the image in favour of a certain knowledge of it. He suggests, rather, that the gestures and contortions of the body of the hysteric can be approached in terms of symptoms of the image, since their extreme visibility retains also an invisibility.

<sup>39</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 175.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 175.



The image compels an opening, not the obtuseness demanded by an epistemological design.<sup>43</sup> Didi-Huberman will try a different approach in order to avoid the imposition of a meaning to the images, and not to confuse *seeing* with *knowing*. The power of images lays exactly in their capacity to destabilize sight and meaning. Thus, he will go back to the possibilities disclosed within the question of the symptom by the notion of “pan.” This is not a simple and univocal concept. In order to approach it, it is advisable to look at the first words of the appendix to *Confronting images*:

It is a fact of experience endlessly repeated, inexhaustible, piercing: painting, which has no offstage, which shows everything, all at once and on a single surface — painting is endowed with a strange and formidable capacity for dissimulation. It will never stop being there, before us, like a distance or a power, never altogether like an act.<sup>44</sup>

Instead of concentrating on a detail in Johannes Vermeer’s painting *The Lacemaker*, Didi-Huberman focuses on an accident, an area standing out in this painting: an explosion of red in the foreground, like an outburst that exemplifies visual and meaning indetermination. We are in front of a “pictorial moment,” an intrusion of colour, a stain, a radiance of red thrown in blindly, shown in the painting frontally, insistently. This is, says Didi-Huberman, a “pan” of the painting,<sup>45</sup> a certain burst. Or also “*a symptom of paint within the picture.*”<sup>46</sup> Since the paradigm of Vermeer’s painting is mimetic, the stain leads us to an *aporia*. On the one hand, the stroke is precise; on the other, we have the irruption of this stain. The example wants to show that we are not in front of a flat and visible surface keeping us at a distance, in front of an accomplished act, of the simple presentation of something visible, but that, rather, we are facing a kind of deepness in which we sink. We are facing the “visual”:

a form of gaze that binds, in a symptomatic way, two opposites, the visible and the invisible. The visual is a concept that translates the way how the invisible *works* at the centre of the visible. The symptoms-colours do not attempt to explain an invisible or mystery. But they suggest it on the surface of the picture. Colour proofs that it has always been able to “trouble” the representations.”<sup>47</sup>

#### 4

We could keep analysing the heuristic and critical value of the notion of symptom in Didi-Huberman’s research, especially in those of his books that deal mainly with the history of art. Let us consider *Devant le temps: Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images*, where the relation between time and image is at stake. Against temporal models of art history that proceed in a linear sequence and put art history under the tutelage of a narrative, Didi-Huberman highlights the works of Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and Carl Einstein. These are works where, through the use of anachronisms, the relation between time and image appears as an arrangement of heterogeneous and discontinuous times. *L’image survivante. Histoire de l’art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* follows the same path, and traces the sources and coincidences of this

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<sup>43</sup>The link between knowledge and image seems to be the unspoken background of philosophical reflexion. The studies of a group of researchers gathered in the volume *L’image* (2007), edited by Alexander Schnell, are a good example.

<sup>44</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, p. 229.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 252–5.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 261. The italics are Didi-Huberman’s.

<sup>47</sup>Hagelstein, M., “Georges Didi-Huberman: une esthétique du symptôme”, *Daimon: Revista de Filosofia* 34 (2005), p. 89.

historian: at work there too is the Freudian Unconscious. Because it is figured in the dimension of the equivocal, what interests Didi-Huberman in this book is the double destiny of the symptom. It grants access, he asserts, only to the “*organization of its inaccessibility*.” This limitation is structural: it is not solved by any supplementary “iconographic key.” It only signals that the “doors” to be open within it are many, and that their entry and organization must be thought in terms of movements, displacements. These are the “migrations” in which Warburg thought he recognized the destiny of the “*Pathosformeln*,” in whose atlas Mnemosyne tried to reconstruct the geographical movements, and historical survivals.<sup>48</sup>

As we have seen, Didi-Huberman tries above all, in his studies on the image, to avoid the obstruction of the experience of looking operated by epistemological categories. Be it the case of the historian or of someone who just observes artistic phenomena, what is imperative is to get rid of categories and attitudes that shackle what we see, hindering our sight from being troubled. The fact that his works fall under the rubric of aesthetics, or art history, is at the end irrelevant. What is more important is the display of his resources in order to give another twist and fruitful perspectives to our reflections on art.

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<sup>48</sup>Didi-Huberman, G., *L’image survivante: Histoire de l’art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002), p. 304.

## Animal Compassion

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In his 1697 *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, Pierre Bayle argues against Cartesians, for whom animals were mere machines, or soulless, mindless automata. Not only does he note that animals are capable of learning, and, therefore, must discern and compare the present to the past, but also “that beasts [*les bêtes*] compare the ends with the means and that on some occasions they prefer what is honest to what is profitable; in short, that they are guided by the rules of equality and gratitude.”<sup>2</sup>

Unsatisfied with this long praise of animal capability that closely relates the animal and the human from the perspective of our morality, Bayle brings an example that I find surprising, to say the least: it concerns a paroxysm of the identification of the animal with the human. It recalls a passage by Luther’s assistant Georg Rörer (known as Rorarius), who unarguably proved such animal honesty:

Rorarius relates that some horses have refused to leap the mares they sprung from; or having done this unknowingly, deceived by the artifices of a groom, threw themselves down a precipice, after they knew what they had done.<sup>3</sup>

Yes, horses also have their Oedipus, one would think today with a smile. But beyond its anecdotal aspect, that story is only one of many versions of the attempt to solve the question of the difference between the animal and the human, which appears here through the lens of the former’s subjugation to our universe. This identification between the animal and the human is, nonetheless, a fundamental step in the process of expansion of what our compassionate and moral horizon ought

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<sup>1</sup>Translated by Maria Fernanda Negrete. This text was originally presented at the international colloquium “Animais, Animalidade e os Limites do Humano” [Animals, Animality, and the Limits of the Human], which took place between May 4–6, 2011, at the UFMG [Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais]. It draws from my research related to the project “Literary inscriptions of science. Interdiscursive realms, conceptual transferences, and semiotic processes (ILICIA)”, which I undertake in collaboration with the University of Salamanca.

<sup>2</sup>Bayle, P., *An Historical and Critical Dictionary, Selected and Abridged from the Great Work*, vol. I., (London: Printed by C. Richards, 1826), pp. 213–4.

<sup>3</sup>Bayle, P., *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*: in which a new and accurate translation of that of the celebrated Mr. Bayle, with the corrections and observations printed in the late edition at Paris, is included; and interspersed with several thousand lives never before published. The whole containing the history of the most illustrious persons of all ages and nations particularly those of Great Britain and Ireland, distinguished by their rank, actions, learning and other accomplishments. With reflections on such passages of Bayle, as seem to favor scepticism and the Manichee system, vol. 8 (London: Printed by J. Bettenham 1739), p. 758.

to cover. When Bayle humanizes animals, he is also indicating that we have a moral obligation to identify with them empathically. Admittedly, this is not his main concern in the passage I cite, which is a reflection on human and animal life. I nonetheless highlight this movement of empathy here, which will be the topic of this essay. I seek to show how and what the role of compassion performs in outlining the border between the animal and the human. If we need a bond of empathy in order to have compassion, then passages such as the one from Bayle are of the utmost importance to us. Taking as my point of departure the study of compassion (which is projected onto the animal world, and would operate among them as well as in human animals' relation to them), I conclude with an attempt to propose that there is no opposition between compassion and violence, that is to say, that one does not necessarily exclude the other.

If today *animal studies* experience a special moment of expansion, we must also attribute that fact to a crisis in our view of what the human itself might be. Since at least Dr. Frankenstein's monster, invented by Mary Shelley at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we are stunned in a new way by the question of life and its meaning. Religion ceased to provide the sense of our existence, and science does not worry about anchoring it in any full meaning; conversely, in following its principle of analysis, dissection, and reformatting of the real, science throws identities into perpetual crisis. Today, in the presence of hybrid and synthetic biological beings, we no longer know how to distinguish between the world of things and the world of life. But in truth, such a state of things dates back to Bacon and Descartes: for these authors it was no longer a matter of viewing *ars* as imitation and supplement of *natura*; instead, nature itself came to be viewed as transformable and disposed to being remodelled by knowledge.<sup>4</sup> For Descartes,

there is no difference between the machines built by artisans and the diverse celestial bodies that nature alone builds, except this: the effects of machines depend only on the action of tubes or springs and other instruments that, necessarily having some relationship to the hands of their builders, are always large enough to make their shapes and movements visible, whereas the tubes and springs that produce natural effects are generally too small to be perceived by our senses.<sup>5</sup>

Nature comes to be seen with Descartes as a "natural effect." As far as the occlusion of machines' mechanisms is concerned, his quest corresponds to the principle of technical evolution, in the sense of always diminishing the size of equipment and parts. The human body is also described by Descartes as a machine, which he compares to clocks, artificial fountains, mills, and other machines: "I suppose the body to be but a statue, a (...) machine," he wrote in his *Treatise of Man*.<sup>6</sup> The only difference would lie in the fact of such a human bodies being made by God and also possessing an immaterial substance, its soul.

As we know, Descartes divided nature into two opposing domains: that of mind or spirit (*res cogitans*), the "thinking thing," and that of matter (*res extensa*), the "extended thing." The *res extensa*, among which the animal world is also included, appears deprived of any metaphysical depth. This transcendence of the divine presents itself as the very metaphysical foundation that makes a mechanist view of nature possible and establishes the belief in a purely rational science capable of deciphering the operation of things. Descartes differentiates humans from animals to the extent that the latter would not possess language or reason. Animals would thus be closer to machines: "it is nature that acts in them, according to the disposition of their

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<sup>4</sup>Rossi, P., *Os filósofos e as máquinas, 1400–1700* (hereafter: OFM), trans. F. Carotti (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Principia Philosophiae in Rossi, OFM, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup>Descartes, R., *Treatise of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 1–2.

organs. Similarly, we with all our skill cannot count the hours and measure time as accurately as a clock, consisting only of wheels and springs!"<sup>7</sup> In his 1748 treatise, *L'homme machine*, Julien Offray de la Mettrie undoes all distinctions by placing the human body on the same level as the bodies of animals, plants, and machines. For him "the body is merely a clock."<sup>8</sup>

We must not forget that in Descartes' age Europe was fascinated by the machines then invented: chimes, music players, dancing dolls, etc. By the eighteenth century, the scientific world was attracted to experiments that displayed the movements of the body's parts independently from their relationship to the central nervous system. The impact of the discovery of galvanism also left its traces in various writers, as is clear in the previously referred 1818 work of Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein. The Modern Prometheus*. Today, after Darwin, Freud, in the age of biopolitics and under the regime of bio-logics, we have more reason than ever to confirm this impossibility of establishing a divide between the animal world and the world of human animals.

Within this debate, the topic of compassion can serve as a path and an efficient guide to attempt to establish some order. Aristotle defined man as "the only animal that laughs,"<sup>9</sup> which suggests that we could develop the history of the difference between the animal and the human based on a history of laughter (which, undeniably, would also be possible and desirable). But even so, it is through the subject of compassion and the theory of the feeling of pain linked to it that this question of the border of the human can be most rigorously confronted. To deal with compassion, one must inevitably revisit two passages from Aristotle. Compassion, we read in the minimal, most essential definition of the *Poetics*, "is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear of the misfortune of a man like ourselves."<sup>10</sup> This "man like ourselves" constitutes an essential element of the argument: the tragic framework, as Aristotle presents it, reveals itself with this notion as a means of *self-construction and formation*. A mechanism of creation of *types*, which includes "equals" as well as it allows the *exclusion of what is "different,"* emerges at the core of the tragic process.

Let us now cite a passage from the *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle develops his theory of *éleós*:

Compassion [*éleós*] may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon. In order to feel compassion, we must obviously be capable of supposing that some evil may happen to us or some friend of ours, and moreover some such evil as is stated in our definition or is more or less of that kind.<sup>11</sup>

This passage shows how the concepts of fear and compassion are intimately linked for Aristotle. "Fear of the misfortune of a man like ourselves," as defined in the *Poetics*, is also a fear related to ourselves, as potential sufferers. *Éleós* is the self-reflexive moment of horror: it

<sup>7</sup>Descartes, R., *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting one's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*, trans. J. Bennett, in [www.earlymoderntexts.com](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com), 2007, p. 23. Last accessed October 3, 2013.

<sup>8</sup>See his phrase: "Thus 'the soul' is and empty term, with no idea associated with it; a good mind should only use to refer to *the part of us that thinks*. Given the minimal principle of movement, animate bodies will have everything they need to move, feel, think, repent, and (in brief) to conduct themselves appropriately [ ... ]". De La Mettrie, J. O., *Man-Machine*, trans. J. Bennett, in [www.earlymoderntexts.com](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com), 2009, p. 22. Last accessed October 3, 2013.

<sup>9</sup>Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, Book III, trans. W. Ogle, The Internet Classics Archive ([classics.mit.edu](http://classics.mit.edu)), part 10. Last accessed October 3, 2013.

<sup>10</sup>Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher, presented in The Internet Classics Archive ([classics.mit.edu](http://classics.mit.edu)), 1453a 1. Last accessed October 3, 2013.

<sup>11</sup>Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, in The Internet Classics Archive ([classics.mit.edu](http://classics.mit.edu)), 1386a. Translation slightly modified to reflect the terms employed by this article's author (Rhys Roberts proposes "pity" rather than "compassion" for the Greek term *éleós*).

reveals the tragic commotion as a fear of an evil attaining *us*. This *us* includes not only the individual witnessing the tragic spectacle, but also its relatives or the circle of its closest friends. In order for compassion to take place, we first have to have empathy, in the sense of identification with the other.

With this concept of compassion in hand, we can now return to the modern debates on the limits between the human and the animal. Leibniz, who also opposes Descartes and his vision, which he deemed excessively materialistic and contrary to pity, restores a force of superior origin as efficient cause of physical actions. For Leibniz:

God simply acts as author and master with the creatures that do not possess reason, but he acts as father and leader with souls who can recognize and love him. The intellectual World (which is nothing else than the Republic of the universe or the city of God) is not subjected to the inferior laws of the order of bodies; and the whole system of bodies seems to have only been made for the intellectual World.<sup>12</sup>

After this theological restoration of the creation and of the meaning of life and the world, Leibniz completes his argument by adding:

that it seems that the sensitivity and pain of beasts [*bêtes*] is of an entirely different nature than ours, and it could not make them unhappy, due to their lack of reflection. This is to respond to those who imagine that, if they had souls, God's justice would be offended by them.<sup>13</sup>

Animals are included in God's kingdom, but unlike Bayle in his article Rorarius, here they are clearly separated from humans. They do not possess reflection, which as seen with Aristotle, is an essential quality for compassion.

In the eighteenth century this debate on the origin of man and his difference regarding animals resonated in theology, philosophy, history, and also among naturalists. Buffon deserves emphasis among the latter. His *Histoire naturelle des animaux* (1753) also features an impressive theory of compassion. What Buffon wrote about that emotion clarifies its mode of operation, which for this naturalist was more corporeal and "animal" than cultural. With Buffon we glimpse a natural pity, somatic, pre-cultural, unlike Aristotelian compassion. But once again we encounter here a dialectic of proximity and distance, which determines empathy and our degree of compassion:

It is (...) a cruel insensibility to sacrifice, without necessity, those [animals] who approach and live with us, and whose feelings are reflected by the signs of pain; for by those, whose nature is very different to ours, we can be but little affected. Natural pity is grounded on the relations we have with the object that suffers, and it is more or less lively as the resemblance and conformity of the structure is more or less great; we suffer in watching our peers suffer. The word compassion indicates that we suffer, that we are acted upon. However, it is not so much man as it is his own nature that suffers — mechanically revolting and placing itself in unison with pain. The mind partakes less of this pity than the body; and animals are susceptible of it as well as man; the voice of pain moves them, they run to the assistance of each other, and they shrink from the dead carcass of one of their own species. Thus, horror and pity are less passions of the mind than natural affections, which depend on the sensibility of the body, and on the similitude of its conformation; therefore this sentiment must diminish in proportion as the nature of one animal differs from that of another. When we

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<sup>12</sup>Leibniz, G. W., *Système nouveau de la nature* (hereafter: TA), 1695, in E. B. de Condillac, *Traité des animaux*, p. 211. [Translator's Note: Direct translation from French to English].

<sup>13</sup>Leibniz, T. A., p. 211.

strike a dog, or kill a lamb, it excites some pity; but none do we feel in cutting down a tree or swallowing an oyster.<sup>14</sup>

Today, trees and oysters are included under the aegis of our compassion. The history of the Enlightenment is that of the expansion of this circle of empathy – which, as I propose, is parallel and not opposed to the expansion of violence. But let us highlight the way in which the tragic apparatus imprinted in the passions of fear and compassion is herein naturalized: “horror and pity are less the passions of the mind than natural affections.”<sup>15</sup> If for Bayle our empathy and compassion with animals derived from a complication of the animal world, with Buffon we see a theory of natural pity, which brings humans close to animals. Compassion would be something somatic, like fear. Animals would possess a sensibility related to the animals of their species, which would also manifest in that merciful attitude before a carcass of the same species. We must not forget that our relation to corpses is a cornerstone both in the theory of compassion and in morbid attraction to violence since Plato and Aristotle. Here the corpse is seen as repugnant because it hits the raw nerve of our compassion, whether in animals or in the human animal. Buffon describes man as *homo duplex*, a being in conflict between, on the one hand, his animal and material side, and on the other, his more elevated aspect, his soul as a spiritual principle linked to knowledge. Condillac will modify that essentialist distinction by placing man and animal in a merely gradational scale of difference.<sup>16</sup> Animal instinct would be merely incorporated habit for Condillac. His theory of instinct as something constructed and inherited precedes future theories that, up to Freud, will try to establish the idea of a phylogenetic heritage – not only for animals, but also for humans. Not to mention that the duplicity between the cultural and the animal Buffon had detected in the human would also constitute a central idea in the Freudian vision of the world, in view of his essay *Civilization and its Discontents*. It is also important to remember that for Condillac, unlike Buffon on this point, animals would not shrink from carcasses of the same species, since they would not possess awareness of death. Animals affect each other only through the signs of pain and pleasure they produce. He contended that beasts “possess no idea of death [ . . . ]; they die without foreseeing that they could cease to be, and when they work for their survival, they only take care to escape from pain.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, among animals the compassionate reaction would be restricted to pain and would leave death aside. Let us continue in the eighteenth century to better understand Buffon’s concept of a natural mercy.

Nothing is more suitable in that regard than the work of the grandfather of environmentalism, Rousseau. For him, pity is the moral principle *par excellence*, insofar as it is an *immediate* feeling, prior to reflection. Thanks to pity we can *put ourselves in the place of the one who suffers* and *identify* with them. In quite a Christian way, we read in this author that pity is the first feeling of relation. The merciful being has within itself “the sad picture of humanity,” for all of humanity suffers. In his *Discours sur les origines de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, he argues for a natural law, grounded on the notion of *pity*:

<sup>14</sup>Buffon, G. L. L., Barr’s Buffon. Buffon’s Natural history, containing a theory of the earth, a general history of man, of the brute creation, and of vegetables, minerals, &c. &c. &c. From the French. With notes by the translator. In ten volumes (hereafter: BNH). London: Printed for the proprietor and sold by H. D. Symonds, Paternoster-Row, 1797. Translation modified to include passages cited by the author of the present essay from *Histoire Naturelle in Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), which are missing in the English translation.

<sup>15</sup>It is interesting to note what Buffon writes about “Negroes”. He somewhat approaches them to animals in describing them as beings who are in between the domesticated docility and the resentful fierceness. See Buffon, BNH, p. 368.

<sup>16</sup>Leibniz, T. A., p. 71.

<sup>17</sup>Leibniz, T. A., p. 184.

I think I need not fear contradiction in holding man to be possessed of the only natural virtue, which could not be denied him by the most violent detractor of human virtue. I am speaking of compassion, which is a disposition suitable to creatures so weak and subject to so many evils as we certainly are: by so much the more universal and useful to mankind, as it comes before any kind of reflection; and at the same time so natural, that the very beasts themselves sometimes give evident proofs of it.<sup>18</sup>

As proved by the naturalness of pity and its anteriority in relation to any reflection, Rousseau recalls that in theatrical performances, even the one who would not hesitate to increase the torment of his enemies if he were a tyrant, can be moved and cry – an idea Diderot used, in an almost opposite sense, in his “Paradox on the Comedian,” to prove the absence of any moral, virtuous effect in theatre. Rousseau uses it to prove our natural pity. All social virtues come from pity and man furnished only with reason and without pity would be a monster. Among the by-products of pity he recalls friendship, mercy, and generosity. Commiseration would be “a feeling that puts us in the place of the one who suffers,” but it would have weakened in civilized man. The ground of commiseration, like that of pity, is identification: “Compassion must, in fact, be the stronger, the more the animal beholding any kind of distress identifies himself with the animal that suffers.”<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that precisely in this passage Rousseau twice uses the term “animal”: he is developing a theory of natural pity. Giving rise to self-love, reason, which strengthens reflection, allows us no longer to identify with the person who suffers. As Hannah Arendt sums it up, for Rousseau “where passion, the capacity for suffering, and compassion, the capacity to suffer with others, ended, vice began.”<sup>20</sup> Unlike thinkers of the tragic and the sublime, who were more in tune with Christian writers, for Rousseau compassion was linked with a generalized repugnance related to seeing death and suffering. Eighteenth-century moral theory also speaks in a general way (opposed to Burke) of a discomfort regarding the vision of another’s suffering. One notices in Rousseau a merciful rereading of the history of humanity. To prevent pity from slipping into weakness, he claims that pity must be generalized and extended to humankind; if there is pity for the species, pity becomes a source of justice.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Rousseau, J. J., *On the Origin of Inequality* (hereafter: OI), trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York, NY: Cosimo Inc., 2005), p. 51. Cole’s translation of the French ‘bêtes’ modified. On the relevance of pity in the construction of society, see also the preface of Rousseau’s *Discours* (Rousseau, J. J., *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III. Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 125s.). It’s true that in the *Essai sur l’origine des langues* Rousseau presents himself in closer proximity to Hobbes’ ideas. He argues that, in truth, pity requires a reflexive movement that could not exist in the natural state. But even so, he also insists in the basic element of pity as something natural: «[ ... ] pity is native to the human heart [ ... ]” (Rousseau, J. J., *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, in *Two Essays on the Origin of Language: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johan Gottfried Herder*, trans. J. H. Moran, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 32.) On the paradoxical unity of the doctrine of pity in these two works by Rousseau, see Derrida, J., *De la grammatologie* (hereafter: DG) (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 243–72.

<sup>19</sup>Rousseau, O. I., p. 52.

<sup>20</sup>Arendt, H., *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (hereafter: PHA), ed. P. Baehr (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 261.

<sup>21</sup>See the passage, extracted from his *Emile*, where he develops this idea, as well as Derrida’s comments in *DG*, p. 271. It was a common place in eighteenth-century moral philosophy to think of pity as a natural feeling and as the best guardian of just action. See, for another eloquent example, the article “pitié” in the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, by Diderot and D’Alembert, which agrees with Rousseau’s *Discourse*’s thesis on the anteriority of pity regarding reflection: “Pitié (Morale), c’est un sentiment naturel de l’âme, qu’on éprouve à la vue des personnes qui souffrent ou qui sont dans la misère. Il n’est pas vrai que la pitié doive son origine à la réflexion, que nous sommes tous sujets aux mêmes accidents, parce que c’est une passion que les enfants et que les personnes incapables de réfléchir sur leur état ou sur l’avenir, sentent avec le plus de vivacité.” Diderot et D’Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 12 (Paris: Briasson, 1757), pp. 662–3.



But Rousseau's ethics of pity is far from being able to guarantee restraint from violence. If for him, as opposed to Hobbes, man is originally good and compassionate and progress makes him corrupt and evil, we could think that the political philosophy that stems from him, and which politicians such as Robespierre follow, should be opposed to violence. Nothing is further from the truth, as Hannah Arendt already proved on different occasions. Instead, I believe it is more accurate to claim that enlightened reason and compassion form a couple that unfolds in violence. This dialectic leads to a paradoxically violent incorporation of the other, destroying differences under the guise of solidarity. Empathetic identification serves to protect the members of the group, but also to subject the "other," either through the rejection or the homogenizing incorporation of difference.

Our current crisis of the notion of the human and of nature now allows us to include the other species (plants and the Earth in a general mode) within the circle of compassion. Thus, as previously noted, if for Buffon "when we strike a dog, or kill a lamb, it excites some pity; but none do we feel in cutting down a tree or swallowing an oyster," in the recent decades we do not have the slightest pity for plants but can barely slaughter the animals whose killing, in order to feed ourselves, Buffon considered natural.<sup>22</sup> A taboo against the exploitation of the other species is increasingly rising. A generation after Buffon, the argument by Jeremy Bentham, tying compassion for slaves to the attribution of this same compassion to animals,<sup>23</sup> already showed the dialectical logic I am referring to here. Such compassion, which seeks to avoid the "objectification" of the other, does not cease to objectify and to be as violent as the practices it intends to avoid. The modern abolitionists, including Peter Singer, adopted Bentham's important utilitarian proposition. In the following passage of the *Traité de législation civile et pénale*, in the chapter "Culture de la bienveillance," Bentham claims that it is up to the legislator to prohibit anything that incites cruelty. In this sense, gladiators were pernicious to Rome:

It is proper, for the same reason, to forbid every kind of cruelty to animals, whether by way of amusement or for the gratification of gluttony. Cock-fights and bull-fights, the chase of the hare and the fox, fishing, and other amusements of the same kind, necessarily suppose a want of reflection or a want of humanity; since these sports inflict upon sensitive beings the most lively sufferings, and the most

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<sup>22</sup>"It is necessary [species] should prey upon each other; the killing of animals is, therefore, a lawful and innocent custom, since it is founded in nature, and it is upon that seemingly hard condition they are brought into existence" (Buffon, BNH, p. 118).

<sup>23</sup>Bentham derives compassion toward animals from an ethical doctrine that seeks happiness. Bentham asks himself: "What [ . . . ] agents then are there, which, at the same time that they are under the influence of man's direction, are susceptible of happiness. There are two sorts: 1. Other human beings who are styled persons. 2. Other animals, which, on account of their interests having been neglected by the insensibility of the ancient jurists, stand degraded into the class of *things*". And in a note of the same work, he continues: "The day has been, I grieve to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day *may* come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? Nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*?" Bentham, J., *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML18.html>, 1789. Last accessed October 3, 2013.

lingering and painful death that can be imagined. Men must be permitted to kill animals; but they should be forbidden to torment them. Artificial death may be rendered less painful than natural death by simple processes, well worth the trouble of being studied, and of becoming an object of police. Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being? A time will come when humanity will spread its mantle over everything that breathes. The lot of slaves has begun to excite pity; we shall end by softening the lot of the animals which labour for us and supply our wants.<sup>24</sup>

In this passage we see that Bentham's compassion (unlike many of the abolitionists today) still admits the death of animals for the purpose of nourishment, as long as it is not a violent death. He even notes the superiority of artificial death over natural death: a big topic today in debates around euthanasia. It is obviously not a matter of rejecting this line of thought as a whole, which Singer returned to in his book *Animal Liberation*. What is worth highlighting is the extent to which this principle of benevolence allows itself to be incorporated, acting on the side of nature's destruction (when gigantic environmentalist NGOs turn into international, multi-national holdings), and also of the exploitation of the other human animals (a field in which NGOs fight for territory next to international human rights organizations).

Bentham here advocates an extension of the law in the direction of *protecting* "any sensitive being." This bureaucratization and juridical and criminal codification of life has not ceased to grow, with all the perversions this implies, both in the terms of life control (recall the racist laws of Nuremberg), and, for instance, of capture of the code of life for the economic sphere (let us recall plant, fruit, and animal patents which today have multiplied). We cannot forget that Bentham is also the inventor of the panopticon and of technologies for the improvement of control over workers. When the question of "happiness" is placed at the heart of politics, the latter is reduced to a discussion on the *administration of life*, to recall Foucault's famous expression. The risk of this kind of thought and reduction of politics to the biopolitical is that, in Klaus Dörner's well-formulated expression, this climate can generate a politics of *criminal compassion*. It was this compassion (or better yet, this pity) that grounded the Nazi program of assassination of those deemed mentally restricted and whose lives were therefore considered dispensable. Dörner's worry in 1988 was how this kind of thought, which excludes the condemned as "superfluous," was being reactivated in our post-labour and post-employment societies. In 1988 he already spoke of an *Ein-Drittel-Gesellschaft*, a society of the one-third, that is, of those who actually participate in it, excluding its two thirds of elderly and (ex)workers, now considered dispensable.

The challenge that imposes itself is how to conceive of an ethics that at once guarantees a space for compassion and its critical thought, such that it does not allow violence, even in its criminal form, to forestall the ends of the one who feels compassion. In that spirit, let us conclude by recalling some philosophemes by Schopenhauer and Adorno on animal compassion. For Schopenhauer, the motor of morality is *Mitleid*, compassion. He writes:

There is another proof that the moral incentive disclosed by me is the true one. I mean the fact that animals also are included under its protecting aegis. In the other European systems of Ethics no place is found for them, strange and inexcusable as this may appear. It is asserted that beasts have no rights; the illusion is harboured that our conduct, so far as they are concerned, has no moral significance, or, as it is put in the language of these codes, that "there are no duties to be fulfilled towards animals."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Bentham, J., *Theory of Legislation*, trans. E. Dumont (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1904), pp. 428–9.

<sup>25</sup>Schopenhauer, A., *On the Basis of Morality* (hereafter: BM), trans. Arthur Brodrick Bullock (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1903), p. 218. Accessed September 29, 2013: [http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=On\\_the\\_Basis\\_of\\_Morality&oldid=3776916](http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=On_the_Basis_of_Morality&oldid=3776916)

Beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition and its impossibility of compassion before animals, Schopenhauer criticizes the Cartesian tradition and its development in Leibniz and Wolffian philosophy, whose rationalism had guaranteed an insuperable difference between humans and animals. Schopenhauer believes animals possess a consciousness and can differentiate themselves from the world. The difference between animals and humans would be quantitative, partly derived from the greater development of the human brain. A person's character can be measured by their relation to animals: if the person is capable of cruelty toward the animal, they cannot be a good person.<sup>26</sup> Schopenhauer also has some constructive anecdotes in that sense. He remembers the story of Wilhelm Harris, the hunter who found an elephant calf in despair, beside its dead mother, the day after this same English hunter had committed such a crime. This turned Harris into an opponent of hunting. Schopenhauer praises the English as the first nation to develop an awareness of the need to protect animals, creating even protection alliances, such as the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals." As we can see, despite having critically identified the compatibility between the religion of compassion and violence, Schopenhauer cannot escape a Christian compassionate rhetoric. Adorno, in his *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, all the same recognized Schopenhauer as a pioneer in moral theory who had included the subject of the treatment of animals and of "compassion toward animals," questions previously treated as merely pertaining to the private sphere.<sup>27</sup> He also finds in Schopenhauer a sensibility for the dialectic of the Enlightenment:

I believe Schopenhauer probably suspected that the establishment of total rationality as the supreme objective principle of mankind might well spell the continuation of that blind domination of nature whose most obvious and tangible expression was to be found in the exploitation and maltreatment of animals. He thereby pointed to the weak point in the transition from subjective reason concerned with self-preservation to the supreme moral principle, which has no room for animals and our treatment of animals. If this is true, we can see Schopenhauer's eccentricity as a sign of great insight.<sup>28</sup>

However, we must not forget that in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer had very well realized the limits – or even the *dialectic* – of compassion. First they criticized stoicism in phrases such as:

Stoicism — which is the bourgeois philosophy — makes it easier for the privileged to look what threatens them in the eye by dwelling on the suffering of others. It affirms the general by elevating private existence, as protection from it, to the status of a principle.<sup>29</sup>

After citing a passage from Nietzsche, in which he considers that Aristotle knew to appreciate tragic discharge as necessary to *diminish* compassion among the Greeks, they point out that if it is true that "pity has, in fact, a moment which conflicts with justice," they cannot be conflated and thrown together into the same pot, as Nietzsche did by tarring with the same brush compassion, kindness, justice and weakness.<sup>30</sup> In other words, despite the critique of stoicism, the authors highlight the limits of compassion and write that it "confirms the rule of inhumanity by the exception it makes." Furthermore: "By limiting the abolition of injustice to the fortuitous love of one's neighbour, pity accepts as unalterable the law of universal estrangement which it

<sup>26</sup>Schopenhauer, B. M., p. 223.

<sup>27</sup>Adorno, T., in Gerhardt, "The Ethics of Animals in Adorno and Kafka" (hereafter: EA), p. 170.

<sup>28</sup>Adorno, E. A., p. 171.

<sup>29</sup>Adorno, T., and Horkheimer, M., *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (hereafter: DE) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 76.

<sup>30</sup>Adorno and Horkheimer, D. E., p. 80.

would like to alleviate.”<sup>31</sup> Their conclusion is that “it is not the softness but the restrictive nature of pity that makes it questionable – it is always too little.”<sup>32</sup>

This principle of compassion’s insufficiency also justifies its critique. A critique that is all the more urgent today, when utilitarian philosophers such as Peter Singer, in enthroning an absolute relativism between the species, end up defending that the mentally disabled should be used instead of animals in scientific experiments, or justifying the murder of newborn children with profound disabilities.<sup>33</sup> And this in the name of their philosophy whose main creed holds compassion as the central figure. Once again there is the barbaric face of that compassion which was also at the centre of the Judeo-Christian tradition and of genocidal and exterminatory politics: in the end, compassionate reason always marks a difference; it expels everything that is unlike itself to the field of the *sacred* and of unprotected life. This compassionate reason is a face of the Enlightenment’s blind, instrumental reason, which can only see in the other a means to find its own ends or an impediment that must be eliminated. For Hannah Arendt “pity, taken as a spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself.”<sup>34</sup> It is a drug, that is, a *phármakon*, and like any drug, it must be, only in case of extreme necessity, used very carefully, for the sake of both animals and human animals.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>33</sup>Singer, P., *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 59–60.

<sup>34</sup>Arendt, P. H. A., p. 268.

## Democracy in Latin America: An Unfinished Project

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Political philosophy has been an important element of Latin American thought for a number of decades now. In this essay, I will only refer to some of the complex issues of this area of thought, which in my opinion are central to the conception of political philosophy in this region of the world. The first such issue is the question of how democracy and the Rule of Law have been conceived by philosophers in a region characterised by deep social and economic inequalities and large-scale cultural heterogeneity, on account of the presence of indigenous people, a large African diaspora, and multiple waves of European and Asian immigrants. From there I will focus on how the democratic project has been critiqued, reformulated, and radicalised in Latin America over the last three decades, before concluding with a set of general considerations.

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One of the recurring issues in reflections about Latin America has doubtless been that of the pertinence, meaning, reception, function, and critique of the liberal tradition. In a region where underdevelopment and inequality are prevalent, the discrepancy between ideas and the institutional systems into which they develop is all the more relevant. Latin America has alternated, politically speaking, between the adoption of models from developed societies (particularly England, the United States, and France), and a reality characterised by the absence of democratic traditions and a historical legacy of inequality. This motif is present in many manifestations of Latin American thought, since the work of Simón Bolívar (particularly in the final years of his life) and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (in *Facundo, or Civilisation and Barbarism* (1845)). This issue also appears in the work of historians analysing the supposed inability of Latin American societies to bring constitutional “new freedoms” to fruition in a basically negative political and moral tradition inherited from “Spanish despotism.” This matter was expressed particularly succinctly in Bolívar’s letter to Santander, dated the 8th of July, 1826. In fact, there are a number of tensions linked to the incompatibility and discrepancy between the ideal order of liberal principles, on the one hand, and the local culture of Latin America, on the other. These problems are articulated particularly well in a series of Latin American essays in the first half of the twentieth century. In *Radiography of the Pampas* (1933), for example, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada offers a reflection on Latin American history since the Conquest. According to his

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analysis, thinkers and politicians have sought, in different ways and at different times, to impose “civilisation” – that is, Western European economic, political, social, and cultural forms – upon “barbarism,” that is, a Latin American reality that has historically been distant to such forms. These “mechanical” impositions have made Latin American reality into an illusion, a simulacrum in which that which was exorcised or repressed returned with a kind of vengeance, breaking with preconceived structures of reality and exposing them as superficial and fictional.<sup>1</sup> Expressions of such impositions could be found in cultural production, society, the economy, and – most pertinently here – politics. The market economy, capitalism, geographical unity, the modern nation-state, class relations, and the social organisation as a whole – the value system of the European west, the result of a complex historical process lasting several centuries – were all mechanically implanted in Latin America. This was the case as soon as the Conquest was completed, despite the fact that, in Latin America, the historical dynamic that crystallised in Europe’s economic, social, and political order was not present: “Institutional frameworks are clearly delineated, but are limited by their stem from the profile of an ideal nation; they do not take on the form of true [Latin American] reality.”<sup>2</sup>

It was with thinkers such as José Carlos Mariátegui, however, that the reflection on these issues reached a rigorous analytic and systematic level that continues to be relevant today. Mariátegui’s *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1971), inspired as much by Karl Marx as by George Sorel, proposes a reflection on “some essential aspects of Peruvian reality,”<sup>3</sup> and reverberated throughout Latin America. In the first of these essays, entitled “Outline of the Economic Evolution,” Mariátegui highlights the disruptive nature of the conquest of Latin America by Spain and Portugal. His emphasis is on the destruction of the Incan economy, society, and culture – specifically, the destruction of farming communes and group settlements based on collective labour and organisational forms that differed from the principles of European individualism. For Mariátegui, the conquest destroyed – albeit haphazardly – this economic, social, political, and cultural organisational form, undermining along with it the ties of solidarity that legitimised it. It was upon this very order – which was, in fact, never fully replaced – that Spain sought to construct a feudal economy based on an ecclesiastical, military, traditional, and authoritarian order, rather than on a more modern cultural, economic, and political project.<sup>4</sup> A capitalist order was thus constructed upon a feudal base in Latin America, according to Mariátegui, contrary to the “republican emancipation” and the “bourgeois spirit” of countries like England, France, and the United States.<sup>5</sup> He thus refers to the feudalism of the *gamonales*, a

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<sup>1</sup>A similar conclusion, in the Brazilian context, was reached by the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. In his 1936 work *Raízes do Brasil* (published in 2012 as *Roots of Brazil*), he offers a brilliant analysis of the rise of an antagonism between society and politics from the colonial period onwards, impeding the spontaneous formation of the idea of the nation and a sense of nationality in the context of social relations, citizenship, and politics. Since the colonial period, Brazilian elites were strongly influenced by authoritarian traditions, moulded by the Inquisition and the absolutism of the Portuguese crown; their highest priority was to hold on to their power against the mechanisms and procedures that arose from the modern democratic tradition. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the arrival of the Portuguese court in Brazil in 1808. Buarque de Holanda stated that the excesses that resulted both blocked the consolidation of a modern national identity and opened up an abyss between the state, on one hand, and society, on the other.

<sup>2</sup>Martínez Estrada, E., *La radiografía de la Pampa* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1933), p. 185. Martínez Estrada’s text has not been published in English, and quotes cited here have been translated for this article. The page numbers cited correspond to the Spanish original.

<sup>3</sup>Mariátegui, J. M., *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, Tr. Marjory Urquidí (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. xxxiii.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7f.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

Peruvian word for large landowners commonly used in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Central America. They are the figureheads, for Mariátegui, of an economic, social, and political order based on local, seigniorial landownership:

This system, which succeeded colonial feudalism, is *gamonalismo* [ ... ]. The term *gamonalismo* designates more than just a social and economic category: that of the *latifundistas* or large landowners. It signifies a whole phenomenon. *Gamonalismo* is represented not only by the *gamonales* but by a long hierarchy of officials, intermediaries, agents, parasites, et cetera. [ ... ] The central factor of the phenomenon is the hegemony of the semi-feudal landed estate in the policy and mechanism of the government.<sup>6</sup>

This system of *gamonalismo* operates in areas where modern ideas about the Rule of Law are absent, replaced instead by forms of political domination based on kinship ties, domestic servitude and agrarian peonage, clientelism, and corruption – all contrary to the ideals of the modern liberal-democratic state order.<sup>7</sup> The most interesting, if paradoxical, aspect of Mariátegui's analysis is that the Latin American political elites who were most inspired by the ideals of modern liberalism contributed to the affirmation of *gamonalismo* rather than working to dissolve it. Latin American independence movements, meanwhile, instead of creating a modern liberal political order, allowed for the rise of authoritarian political-military leaders known as *caudillos*. These *caudillos* were unable to create an urban *demos* or a strong, modern Rule of Law, and instead contributed to the strengthening of a seigniorial, landed aristocracy, and the traditional order of domination that went along with it.<sup>8</sup>

This analysis continues a political-economic project inspired by Marxism. According to Mariátegui, the dissolution of the traditional system of power linked to *gamonalismo* can only come about through a socialist revolution, and not by means of a liberal-democratic agenda:

Therefore, it is this factor [*gamonalismo*] that should be acted upon if the evil is to be attacked at its roots [ ... ]. *Gamonalismo* or feudalism could have been eliminated by the republic within its liberal and capitalist principles. [ ... ] Revolutionary and even reformist thought can no longer be liberal; they must be Socialist.<sup>9</sup>

For Mariátegui, Latin American socialist thought, particularly in a country with as profound an indigenous legacy as Peru, must use the experience of pre-Columbian Inca communities as the historical and political basis for its transformation. It is here that Mariátegui appears more inspired by Russian populism, as well as by the ideas of Sorel, than by Marx's ideas, especially in relation to his proposal to reconstruct Incan ties of social solidarity, as well as the Incas' resolute ties to nature (the so-called *Mama Pacha*). He advocates a regimen of common landownership based on the *ayllu*, an Incan word for a clan of families linked by kinship that held common ownership of water, land, and forests.<sup>10</sup>

### A Call for Democracy

Some decades after the publication of Mariátegui's *Seven Essays*, Latin America bore witness to new considerations related to democracy and politics in general. This was the case both in Marxist

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>*Gamonalismo* is another term for the phenomenon analyzed by classical sociologists as "traditional domination" [*traditionale Herrschaft*]. See, for example, Weber's analysis in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), p. 122.

<sup>8</sup>Mariátegui, J. M., *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

thought and in the context of the liberal tradition. Among Marxist thinkers, the writings of the Mexican philosopher Carlos Pereyra are particularly significant. As a member of a generation that was profoundly influenced as much by the Cuban Revolution as by student movements in the late sixties, Pereyra sought to rethink democracy outside the limits of a dogmatic Marxism focused on dismissing the importance of representative democracy as merely “formal” or “bourgeois.”<sup>11</sup> Pereyra lived in a historical moment marked by the adoption in some countries of so-called “real socialism,” the Moscow Processes, the rise of so-called “Eurocommunism” in the mid-seventies, military dictatorships in the southern cone of South America, and the Polish Solidarity strikes in the eighties.

The theoretical and political background upon which Pereyra forged his analysis was also marked by the emergence of dependency theory in Latin American social, economic, and political thought. This was the arena in which debates about the supposed semi-feudal character of Latin America – an idea first introduced by Mariátegui – continued, along with debates about the region’s modernisation. This contributed to the reformulation of a number of ideas about economic development, nationalism and the insertion of the nation into international debates.<sup>12</sup> Despite acknowledging the importance of dependency theory, Pereyra asserts that it prevented a more careful, nuanced reflection about what was happening in some Latin American countries that started to experience some degree of economic expansion and social transformation in the fifties and sixties. This transformation included urbanisation, migration from the countryside to cities, industrialisation, and the formation and rise of middle classes, all of which changed the ways in which politics and democracy were understood in Latin America. Since the dominant current of thought in the region was so powerfully influenced by the Cuban revolution, any reflections on the meaning of democracy in Latin American philosophical and political thought did not become central until the seventies and eighties. Gradually, democracy came to be considered less a specific ideology understood within a framework of class determinism, and more as a form, mechanism, and procedure linked to the legitimisation and regulation of the exercise of political power. This meant that the election of government leaders at the federal, state, and municipal levels had to take place in the context of a peaceful struggle among political parties and groups that compete against one another based on fairly well-structured ideas, which are then submitted to citizens for popular vote.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to Mariátegui’s position, Pereyra does not link the emergence of democracy to the need for a revolution aimed at putting an end to the exploitation of one class by another. Rather, he points out how democracy came to be seen in the framework of an “arduous struggle to build a new hegemonic system.”<sup>14</sup> Politics was thus related more to “the democratic construction of a *socialist hegemony*” with a “democratic accumulation”<sup>15</sup> that moves from revolution to democracy.<sup>16</sup> This “accumulation” would also be related to the struggle for hegemony and ideological and cultural norms and values, and political and social projects around which a social and political order could be articulated at a distance from confrontation and the annihilation of the other.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Pereyra, C., *Sobre la democracia* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1990), pp. 57–63. Pereyra’s texts cited here have not been published in English, and as such what is quoted here has been translated for this article. The page numbers cited correspond to the Spanish original.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 58f.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 81.



This revaluation and re-signification of representative liberal democracy in Latin America has been emphasised and defended by thinkers situated in the context of the liberal tradition. Liberal ideas found their clearest expression in the Argentinean thinker Carlos S. Nino. Nino's position can be summarised in three basic points: fundamental civil rights, that is, "individual guarantees" like freedom of expression, worship, and gathering; democratic forms of government, including the election and oversight of state representatives, with popular participation in the construction of the laws that govern these processes; and procedures for the assignation and exchange of economic goods and resources among members of society.<sup>18</sup> For Nino, these are the three positions at the heart of the liberal position. Although each one is intertwined with the other two, they can be defended independently. Nino adds, however, that democratic forms of government are contingent upon the exercise of fundamental civil rights, and that – inversely – only democratic participation in government can guarantee the preservation of freedoms that are considered constitutive of fundamental rights.<sup>19</sup> These rights, Nino reminds us, are where "the principle of the inviolability of the human person" is expressed.<sup>20</sup> This autonomy of the individual has been clearly formulated in Kantian moral philosophy as expressed in the formulation of the categorical imperative, and it reappears in the contemporary liberal tradition in authors like John Rawls and Robert Nozick.

Concern with democracy and its value as a central institution in modern societies in general and Latin American societies in particular, is one of the basic points of the work of Ernesto Garzón Valdés, particularly in his work *Suicidal Institutions: Studies in Ethics and Politics* (2000).<sup>21</sup> There, Garzón Valdés states that

democracy and the market are two institutions that seem to be the most appropriate ones to protect and ensure the exercise of individual freedoms within the broadest possible framework of equality; for this reason, their stability has an undisputed ethical relevance.<sup>22</sup>

However, Garzón Valdés also – more clearly and perhaps more dramatically than Nino does – points out the tensions inherent to these two central institutions of modern, western societies: "left to their own devices, [democracy and the market] present clear self-destructive tendencies."<sup>23</sup> He thus calls for a greater emphasis on the importance and legitimacy of democracy and the market; an exposure of their self-destructive tendencies; and an explanation of how they can be limited and regulated. He thus seeks to offer an ethical justification, an "ethical" meaning, in this case, a focus on "the final justification of the norms that govern (or should govern) interpersonal relations."<sup>24</sup> A reflection of this nature is based on an understanding of human persons as

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<sup>18</sup>Nino's text cited here, *Derecho, moral y política. II. Fundamentos del Liberalismo político. Derechos Humanos y Democracia deliberativa*, has not been published in English, and as such has been translated for this article. The page numbers cited correspond to the Spanish original. This particular quote comes from the chapter "Las concepciones fundamentales del Liberalismo", (Buenos Aires: Gedisa), p. 19.

<sup>19</sup>It is here that the origin of the totalitarian intention – which consists of the sacrifice of individuals to benefit a particular (ethnic, class-based, or national) group – can be localised. See Carlos Nino, *Derecho, moral y política. II. Fundamentos del Liberalismo político. Derechos Humanos y Democracia deliberativa* (Buenos Aires: Gedisa, 1978), pp. 22–3.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>21</sup>Garzón Valdés' text, cited here, has not been published in English, and as such has been translated for this article. The page numbers cited correspond to the Spanish original, titled *Instituciones Suicidas. Estudios de Ética y Política*.

<sup>22</sup>Garzón Valdés, E., *Instituciones suicidas: Estudios de Ética y Política* (Mexico City, Paidós/UNAM, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

equally autonomous (meaning that they all possess the same degree of individual freedom to run their own lives). In this way, Garzón Valdés places himself within the tradition of what he calls “democratic liberalism,” inspired by Kantian thought as it appears in contemporary thinkers, like John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>25</sup> This conception must also highlight the insufficiencies and problems of the neoliberal idea of a minimal state.

It is at precisely this point that Garzón Valdés begins to point out trends with the potential to threaten democracy from within, and turn it, and the market, into what he calls “suicidal institutions.” One of these trends is the paradox of sovereignty in parliamentary democracy: the inconsistency of attempts to legitimise the existence of judicial limits on the power of sovereignty. The second trend he highlights is the persistence in democracy of parasitic behaviour and ego-driven power grabs that damage the autonomy of others without necessarily violating democratic procedures. The third trend is the schematisation and debate of some problems and conflicts in parliamentary democracy concerning the silencing of others. This leads to only a limited spectrum of alternatives being presented to voters, thereby directly or indirectly affecting their preferences. These phenomena are ways in which democracy is “suicidal,” in the sense that they directly diminish individual autonomy and equality that form the foundation of democracy itself. They comprise a series of properties of representative democracy that make for a lack of legal limits on the activity of the sovereign, as well as for certain parasitic behaviours. These properties lead it to its self-destruction, its “suicide.”

Like democracy, the market presupposes the respect for and the promotion of individual autonomy and it also carries with it a disposition towards its own self-destruction or suicide.<sup>26</sup> Citing Walter Eucken’s text *Grundsätze der Wirtschaftspolitik* (1952), Garzón Valdés contradicts Milton Friedman and states that both producers and consumers work to avoid competition and acquire monopolies. The market thus tends to run contrary to the dispersal of power and resources, instead concentrating them and annihilating individual efforts aimed at achieving greater results. This is where the market’s suicidal tendencies come in: its uncontrolled liberty and allocation end up destroying individual freedoms and impeding personal autonomy, which – as stated previously – are the very things that form the foundation of its legitimacy.<sup>27</sup>

Garzón Valdés emphasises that the self-destructive tendencies of both representative democracy and the market are “suicidal,” rather than “institutionally homicidal,”<sup>28</sup> and thus run counter to the objectives for which they were initially created.<sup>29</sup> These suicidal tendencies can be prevented using “ethics.”<sup>30</sup> He follows Robert Alexy<sup>31</sup> to place parliamentary democracy within a constitutionally imposed legal limitation on the previously unlimited actions of the sovereign. In this way, basic constitutional principles such as human rights are linked to the legislator as “general fundamental norms,” and dictate what a democratically elected legislator can and should do (and not do). This establishes a “forbidden territory [*coto vedado*]” made up of “those rights derived from the basic principle of liberty and the basic demand for the triumph over, or compensation for, inequality.”<sup>32</sup> It is through this “forbidden territory” that parliamentary and governmental decisions can be limited. Majority rule in a parliamentary democracy can thus be defended and understood without running the risk of suicide.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 18–9.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>31</sup>See Robert Alexy, *Theorie der Grundrechte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

<sup>32</sup>Garzón Valdés, E., *op. cit.*, p. 100.

### Rethinking democracy: Criticism, reformulation, and radicalisation of the democratic project

Latin American thinkers have repeatedly insisted upon the need to think about democracy in a historicised way and in the context of the particularities of Latin America. Due to the persistence there of traditional forms of thinking about and doing politics, as well as endemic corruption and extreme social inequalities, representative democracy has been limited and problematic. Many Latin American democratic institutions have lost legitimacy, many political parties have been discredited, many citizens experience apathy and de-politicisation, and there is a generalised inability to create political mechanisms to effectively remedy the region's dramatic social inequality. The eighties and nineties saw some degree of organisation within Latin American civil society, whether to put an end to military dictatorships in the southern cone<sup>33</sup> or to begin, as was the case in Mexico, the slow process of democratisation. The way politics was practised in civil society – in the context of both the state and the market – gradually changed, without any need to make use of any non-democratic revolutions of a utopian, socialist nature. This led to the need to think about democracy and its representative structure less as a mere form of government, and more as a large-scale process of societal self-organisation. This was also the way in which democracy could be linked to the rise of regional economics and politics beyond the nation-state, and to the resurgence of ethnic, regional, and gender identities as symbolic representations that change the way collective identities are formed.

In the context of these political and historical coordinates, the Brazilian thinker Roberto Mangabeira Unger has developed an ambitious scholarly undertaking aimed at bolstering a “radical democratic project” within the framework of a “constructive social theory.” He laid out his main ideas in an impressive volume entitled *Politics, A Work in Constructive Social Theory* (1987). Influenced by John Stuart Mill, Alexander Herzen, and P. J. Proudhon, as well as by the currents of Marxism that emphasised the autonomy of politics, Mangabeira Unger proposes an idea of freedom linked to the ability to resist, re-imagine, and reconstruct the social world. His critique of liberalism is thus free of any reconstructive tendencies that could distance him from the liberal tradition. *Politics, A Work in Constructive Social Theory* takes as its starting point an understanding of society as an “artefact”: not as the expression of some natural, immutable order, but rather as something that has been produced, re-imagined, modified, and reconstructed by human beings. Mangabeira Unger also offers a prominent critique of any fetishising of structures and institutions, as well as of the contexts in which human thought and action initially take place, as if they were preordained and immutable. This fetishisation understands structures as petrified entities, unable to change in response to human action and freedom. Institutional fetishisation, meanwhile, identifies modern societal institutions (such as representative democracy, the market economy, and a free civil society) with *only one possible group* of specific institutional configurations – such as those of Western Europe and the United States.<sup>34</sup> Institutional fetishism understands the economic, social, and political configurations of modern societies not as contingent phenomena subject to modification, but rather as immutable entities inscribed in a natural setting. As an example, Mangabeira Unger writes about representative democracy and the market economy as phenomena that are central to the course of modern Western history. He is not interested in negating these institutional configurations, but rather in understanding them as susceptible to revision and critique – and transformation – by

<sup>33</sup>See, in this sense, the Chilean case, as analysed in Ruiz Schneider, C., *Seis ensayos sobre teoría de la democracia* (Santiago: Editorial Universidad Nacional Andrés Bello, 1993).

<sup>34</sup>Mangabeira Unger, R., *Politics: A Work in Constructive Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 25–6.

their subjects. In this way, he highlights subjects' ability to transform their own social and institutional contexts and create new ones that are more open to critique and change. In this way, they diminish – albeit without completely eliminating – the discrepancies between structure and action, between institution and social movement, and between reform and revolution. The result of this gambit is a “democratic experimentalism” that allows for the design of new institutional arrangements at both the political and economic levels, in order to radicalise democracy and bring about an alternative to neoliberal ways of understanding politics and economics. Unger further develops this analysis in *Democracy Realised: The Progressive Alternative* (1998). From the beginning of this work onwards, he points out that neither economics nor politics can be conceived any longer in terms of traditional dichotomies such as state/privatisation or planning/market. Rather, he advocates a pluralistic understanding of the institutional forms that the market economy, civil society, and democracy can take on.<sup>35</sup> In fact, one of the central elements of Unger's analysis is an understanding of the political, economic and social institutions of industrialised Europe and the United States as simply one among many different institutional designs. He conceives of the market, democracy and other institutional configurations central to economics and politics from the perspective of the reconfigurations experienced by countries geographically and politically situated outside of the North Atlantic region, such as Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, China, and India. He points out that democratic experimentalism in these other countries can shed light not only on the inner workings of democracy, but also on the hidden potential for democratic transformations in more “developed” countries.

Over the last two decades of the twentieth century and in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>, a number of critiques have been made of the theories of justice and democracy that lie at the foundation of liberalism itself. One that is particularly pertinent here is the underestimation of the profound cultural pluralism (in particular, the religious and ethnic pluralism) of modern societies. The problems of identity, and of so-called multiculturalism, are thus extremely relevant.

To what extent is it possible – particularly in the discourse of philosophy, sociology, politics and social anthropology in Latin American countries like Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Paraguay – to reconcile individual wellbeing with the reproducibility of a culture? Every individual member of a political community has the right to maintain his or her own culture, develop him or herself within it, and perpetuate it forward. On the other hand, a number of different traditions, ethnic groups, and cultures have to coexist within the framework of a state, and comply with principles of justice and impartiality. Reflections by philosophers such as Luis Villoro concern themselves with how to rethink democracy in countries with a strong, persistent presence of indigenous cultures, such as many of those in Latin America. In *Power and Value: Fundamentals of a Political Ethics* (1997),<sup>36</sup> a volume published in the aftermath of the much-discussed 1994 uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Mexico,<sup>37</sup> Villoro takes up a singular

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<sup>35</sup>Mangabeira Unger, R., *Democracy Realised: The Progressive Alternative* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Villoro's text cited here, *El poder y el valor: fundamentos de una ética política*, has not been published in English, and as such has been translated for this article. The page numbers cited correspond to the Spanish original.

<sup>37</sup>Villoro states that his reflections on democracy and political change are based as much on the experiences of the struggle of the Zapatista National Liberation Army as they are on those of the French opposition to neoliberal economic policies and to the idea of a Europe dominated by the power of large-scale capital. Writing about the EZLN, Villoro calls it a “broad civic movement responding to the aspirations of marginalized groups, political parties of different ideological stripes, and the resistance of a number of associations, in order to ... force a transition from a disguised authoritarian regime to a democracy”. See Villoro, L., *El poder y el valor: Fundamentos de una ética política* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), p. 357, footnote 3.

paradox: the very institutions that had been designed to ensure democracy ended up restricting it. Following, on this point, the analysis of Norberto Bobbio,<sup>38</sup> Villoro discusses how people can only effectively exercise power in small communities, while popular power has to be delegated to representatives who end up replacing the wills of those they represent. The party system thus becomes key to representative democracy, while at the same time exposing a constitutive, insurmountable ambiguity: it is the only realistic medium offered by democratic institutions to represent the will of citizens, but it also constitutes a power that follows its own rules and ends up escaping from, and supplanting, the will of citizens. Villoro also addresses issues of bureaucratisation: the power of political parties ends up becoming concentrated in a bureaucracy that enacts arrangements unrelated, or even contradictory, to the will of electors. Yet another issue analysed by Villoro is that of technocratisation: what happens when the discussion of political problems comes under the purview not of political solutions, but rather of how to optimise technical efficiency and performance.<sup>39</sup> The alternative to these problems is not to destroy democratic institutions, but rather “to make them serve the function for which they were created. To overcome restrictions to democracy is to rediscover its roots, that is, to advance towards a radical democracy.”<sup>40</sup> For Villoro, the purpose of radical democracy is to return “the ability actively to participate in decision-making relative to all collective aspects that affect their lives” to the people.<sup>41</sup> However, considering the aforementioned multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of the population, as well as – in this case – the experience of so-called “indo-American” peoples, Villoro adds that

the real population is heterogeneous, made up as it is of a multiplicity of communities, towns, social organisations, groups, ethnicities, nationalities, regions, establishments, guilds, religions, sects, and federations — some opposing, others intermixed. The man of the people is not an abstract citizen, interchangeable with any other. He is affiliated with a number of different social entities, belonging to specific groups and cultures, with unique characteristics and a distinctive identity.<sup>42</sup>

Radical democracy thus has to return power not to an ideal people, but rather to *real* people, that is, to the groups, ethnicities, and nationalities that belong within the population – “from the bottom up,” so to speak:

Many nation-states are made up of a number of ethnicities or nationalities. Often as a result of colonisation, they were formed under the hegemony of a dominant nationality or ethnicity. The democratisation process must therefore acknowledge the decision-making power of the people who make up the country, its national unity notwithstanding. Each group has the right to determine its own forms of life, culture, institutions, and customs, as well as how to use its own territory. Autonomy statutes, negotiated with the central power, can establish the extent of the faculties of the people. The state would thus transition from being a homogeneous unit to being a plural association, in which different, real communities participate in power.<sup>43</sup>

Villoro makes it clear that this would not involve an annulment of the power of the modern nation-state; rather, it would mean linking it irrevocably to local and regional powers. In addition to both restraining and reinforcing the nation-state, this would have the advantage of reducing the faculties of central government to the arenas of international relations, defence, the political

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<sup>38</sup>See Bobbio, N., *El futuro de la democracia* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1985).

<sup>39</sup>Villoro, L., *op. cit.*, p. 340.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

economy at the macro level, the legal interpretation of the constitution, and arbitration.<sup>44</sup> In this way, the central government of the nation-state would maintain

the responsibility, above all, for public goods that no local interest would be able to promote, such as basic scientific research, the rational use of the country's natural resources, the use of new energy sources, environmental protection [ ... ]. The nation-state, in conjunction with other states, is better suited to manage these goods than decentralised powers.<sup>45</sup>

The radical democracy advocated by Villoro would not involve the replacement or termination of representative democracy, but rather, *complementing it* with different forms of direct democracy.

Perhaps the origin of this “discontent with democracy,” to borrow the words of Freud, lies in the inability of democratic regimes to reverse longstanding problems in Latin America, such as social and economic inequality and marginality.<sup>46</sup> This has led to the questioning of democracy and the liberal tradition from the perspective of Marxism – or, what has come to be known, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, as “Post-Marxism.” An example of this is the work of Ernesto Laclau.<sup>47</sup> In his and Chantal Mouffe's classic work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), he proposes an approach to the issue of democracy that privileges its political articulation within the category of *hegemony*. This concept shows how a *particular* social force could assume the representation of a *totality* radically incommensurate with that particularity.<sup>48</sup> Laclau and Mouffe's reflection on hegemony came out of a political moment in which the need became manifest for establishing equivalencies among different democratic struggles against oppression. In this way, struggles against sexism, racism, discrimination and the destruction of the environment could be placed side-by-side with the struggles of workers for a new hegemonic project on the left that could lead to a radicalisation of democracy.<sup>49</sup>

These problems are taken up once again in Laclau's volume *On Populist Reason* (2005), over the course of an interrogation of the logic of the formation of collective identities.<sup>50</sup> It is in this sense that the meaning Laclau gives to the term “populism” can be understood. This is not the designation of an ideology or a form of mobilisation of social groups previously constituted from, for example, economic or cultural structures. Rather, populism is expressed in the movement in which the group's unity is constituted: “‘the people’ is not something of the nature of an ideological expression, but a real relation between social agents. It is, in other terms, one way of constituting the unity of the group.”<sup>51</sup> Populism does not have a defined social base or ideological agenda. Rather, it is a “political logic,” meaning an institutionally based social schema oriented towards the articulation of demands that make it possible for a “global political subject” to emerge. This subject would combine a plurality of social demands into a central name

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>46</sup>This concern appears in the work of a number of different thinkers, from those with a background in the nationalist-revolutionary tradition to those who consider themselves Marxists, and including a number of others who identify with different currents of populism. See, for example, Dussel, E., *Política de la Liberación: Historia mundial y crítica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007).

<sup>47</sup>Laclau and Mouffe consider attempts to deconstruct the central categories of Marxism to be “post-Marxist”, in light of contemporary issues. See Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), p. ix.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. x.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. xviii.

<sup>50</sup>Laclau, E., *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

that both articulates and exceeds those demands. It is here that a democratic demand becomes a “popular” demand.<sup>52</sup> Laclau goes on to say that

populism requires the dichotomic division of society into two camps — one presenting itself as a part which claims to be the whole; that this dichotomy involves the antagonistic division of the social field; and that the popular camp presupposes, as a condition of its constitution, the construction of a global identity out of the equivalence of a plurality of social demands.<sup>53</sup>

Understood in this way, the “people” is related both to the *populous* — all citizens — and also to the *plebs* — the least privileged — in the sense of a *plebs* claiming to be the only legitimate *populus*, a differential element that represents the universality of the community.<sup>54</sup> Populism thus expresses the transition of demands from being *democratic* to being *popular*. The former, for Laclau, can be integrated into an expanding hegemonic formation; the latter represent a challenge to the hegemonic formation as such. Popular identity — the people — is constituted within this very tension, based on an empty signifier and an attempt to give a name to the whole of an absent community.<sup>55</sup>

### Final Considerations

Throughout this essay, we have seen how in recent decades a concern for the Rule of Law, democracy, justice, poverty, and social exclusion lie at the foundations of reflections on political philosophy in Latin America. A final analysis unequivocally shows the ways in which democracy has ceased to be considered a form of domination imposed by the bourgeoisie upon the subaltern classes. Rather, it is the result of a series of social processes and struggles, as well as debates and exchanges — some more successful than others — among citizens. These processes are highly complex and cannot be reduced to a simple strategy for the political domination of capital. For all its achievements and contradictions, and within the framework of occasionally violent political and social struggles, the liberal-democratic legacy in Latin America, as studied by historians in particular, has become ever more prominent, despite the contradictions and discrepancies that liberalism has experienced in the social reality of Latin America. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>, liberal thinking and practice spread throughout the region, playing a central role in constitutional debates and nation-building projects. They also left a decisive mark on the beliefs and convictions of Latin Americans, their political and institutional practices, juridical and institutional frameworks, and the workings of political and economic systems. Liberalism and democracy have also made an impact on the Latin American social imaginary, as well as practices, discourse, concepts, language and struggles there — with corresponding implications for how our political and social lives are configured, and how we generally understand ourselves.

However, the ways in which the relationship between democracy and the market should be understood — particularly the question whether the market is to be seen as a precondition for the exercise of individual autonomy, or not — are highly problematic. On one hand, effectively protecting the inviolability and autonomy of the human person, in the liberal tradition, requires the assurance that each individual can freely carry out economic activity and control a minimum of economic goods and resources, without any limits by the democratic majority to the concentration of those goods in a few hands. On the other hand, however, the absence of a

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 150–1.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

just (re)distribution of, and access to, economic resources means that certain individuals and groups are placed in an inferior position to others; this would seem to justify the need for some control over those resources, in order to guarantee access to them from an impartial standpoint, which is to be organised and preserved by fair procedures and institutions. Both representative democracy and the market are also institutions that need to be limited ethically and from a legal point of view, in accordance with the rule of law and under the auspices of a constitutional guarantee of human rights and equality. For this reason, state actions and policies that not only protect and guarantee the security of citizens, but also produce certain goods and redistribute the burdens and benefits therein among the members of society, are key. In this way, every member of society will experience the minimum material conditions to effectively exercise his or her individual autonomy.

It is increasingly clear that no political problem in Latin America today, including the ways we understand democracy, the state and even politics itself, can be resolved via a return to an idealised indigenous community belonging to a past, which most likely never existed anyway. In recent decades the social differentiation and the growing complexity of Latin American societies, their economic development, inexorable urbanisation, social history, tradition and politics have rendered the Rule of Law, democracy, and human rights – with their concepts of individual freedom and autonomy – practically unquestionable. To eliminate forms of representation in the name of some sort of direct democracy would mean, as Pereyra said, “to opt for mechanisms that can only end in *caudillo* rule, clientelism, paternalism, intolerance, etc.”<sup>56</sup> Political participation would become some sort of empty ritual – a form of blind social mobilisation – if it is not linked to processes of citizen debate, political deliberation and public argumentation. Mangabeira Unger also pointed out that, under these conditions, an authoritarianism or populism would appear, establishing a direct link among political leaders and society – identified under the idea of the “people” – which would be unrelated to, or even run counter to, modern democratic institutions.<sup>57</sup>

The radicalisation of democracy also cannot lead to a vision of radical, insoluble political extremes. Politics and democracy cannot be conceived within the logic of two antagonistic fields, as Laclau sometimes seems to suggest (placing the “people” on one side and “power” on the other). This can lead to simplifications and dualisms as philosophically unsustainable as they are politically dangerous. They can end up denying the possibility of democratic association, reasonable political conflict and dissent, public deliberation and argumentation, that allow for peaceful association among citizens who have legitimate differences. They could also lead us to an end of the very possibility for thinking and acting in the space of politics.

São Paulo.

### *Epilogue*

This article was written before the extended wave of protests initiated in June 2013 in Brazil, mainly by the *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Fare Movement), a local organisation that defended initially free public transportation. This protests quickly won a political character by fighting not only against police brutality, but also against government corruption and by strongly criticising the separation of the Brazilian party system from the demands and needs of the population. They became the largest public demonstrations that Brazil had seen in two decades. Soon, this extended social movement became a sort of complex mixture of social and political demands

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<sup>56</sup>Pereyra, C., *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>57</sup>Mangabeira Unger, R., *Democracy Realised, op. cit.*, p. 66.



for a radicalisation of Brazilian democracy and for more social justice, on the one hand, and also against the social programs (for example, *Bolsa Familia* and *Fome Zero*) which have taken place in this country since the government of Lula da Silva, on the other hand. This wave of social and political protests has shown how democratic governance in Latin America should be linked, over and over again, to the needs and demands of the people, and how this political process must be connected with programs of social reform that can reverse the longstanding and dramatic social inequalities in Latin America using the tools of democracy.

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## The Potentiality of the Archaic: Spinoza and the Chinese

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*There is something untameable that I call yore and that I oppose to the past, as the erupting lava opposes and devastates the solid and much more recent crust of old sedimented explosions. According to the ancient Japanese, the origin accumulates. The first elders are less old, less packed with yore than the most recent ones, who are more and more erudite, more and more knowledgeable, more and more focused, more and more inebriated. In 1340, Yoshida Kenkō wrote in his journal: "It is not the decline of spring that brings summer, but something stronger than the decline." There is something undecidable. There is a thrust that does not know any respite. Things that start have no end.*

Pascal Quignard, *Le passé et le jadis*

*It would be highly foolish and presumptuous on our part, having newly arrived compared with them, and scarcely out of barbarism, to want to condemn such an ancient doctrine because it does not appear to agree at first glance with our ordinary scholastic notions.*

G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*

This essay does not mainly set forth a study of the references that might exist within the Spinozian corpus to China, Chinese philosophy and the Chinese people in general (there is only one as far as we know, although very important, towards the end of Chapter III of the *Theological-Political Treatise*), nor does it focus, as its title could suggest, on the reception and circulation of Spinoza's philosophy in China and among Chinese philosophers. It has rather two different goals.

First – taking the word “Chinese” metaphorically as something exotic or exoptic, anything that falls out of sight, unknown and unfamiliar – to perform a brief survey of what is strange in Spinoza's thought: Chinese, but also Turkish and Japanese – although leaving aside the extremely strange, like the amazons mentioned on the last page of the *Political Treatise*, or the enigmatic “black and scabrous Brazilian” of the dream narrated in a letter to Pieter Balling.

Next, to look into the rich and close connection established in the philosophical debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between the syntagmata “Chinese philosophy” and “Spinoza's philosophy” (where authors like Pierre Bayle, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Wolff intervened, and later the writers of the *Encyclopédie*). These debates originated because of the reports and news arising from the Jesuit missions in China, starting with the texts of Mateo Ricci, who arrived in the Asian country in 1583 in order to do his early

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missionary work, and in particular from the texts of fathers Niccola Longobardo and Antonio de Santa María Caballero, among others.

In effect, what is under discussion in the texts of the modern philosophers on China is not only – and perhaps not even mainly – the traits of a strange culture, but also, under that name, an internal threat to Europe itself constituted by Spinozism and the various forms of libertinism that it inspired (the heterogeneous and at the same time variegated intellectual movement that Jonathan Israel called “Radical Enlightenment”). This is the threat of “atheism” and of the autonomy of reason from revealed religion aiming to establish a philosophy, a politics, and morality.<sup>1</sup> China implies not only the Other of Christianity, but also a kind of constant or recurrence within time and space of a thinking that conceives the eternity of a unique being as a philosophical principle: “One cannot sufficiently admire that so extravagant a notion, and so full of absurd contradictions, should insinuate itself into the mind of so many people so remote from one another,”<sup>2</sup> wrote Pierre Bayle in his *Dictionnaire*. Spinoza and China designate a same threat to Revelation – internal and external respectively – hovering over Europe, but also a corroboration of the universality shrouding human reason. The Chinese thought transmitted since the seventeenth century by the missionaries of the Company, ratifies Spinoza’s philosophy and, above all, prevents it from being reduced to a purely private *contra natura* delirium of an anomalous mind.

As far as I can judge of the Opinions of *Strato*, *Xenophanes*, and some other ancient Atheists, from a few Sentences of theirs which yet remain, and of the Opinions of that *Sect* called the *Literati* in *China*, from the Accounts we have in the several Voyages thither, and more particularly from Father *Gobien*’s Preface before his *Histoire de l’edit de l’Empereur de la Chine en faveur de la Religion Chretienne*, 8vo, *Par.* 1698, they seem all to me to agree with *Spinoza* (who in his *Opera Posthuma* has endeavoured to reduce Atheism into a System) that there is no other Substance in the Universe but Matter, which *Spinoza* calls *God*, and *Strato*, *Nature*.<sup>3</sup>

**One.** In an undated letter to Henry Oldenburg belatedly discovered (perhaps written early on October 1665), Spinoza noted having seen in the house of Christian Huygens Kircher’s *Underground World*, and discussed him with his illustrious host, who – he added – “praises his piety, but not his ability.”<sup>4</sup> The author in question is none other than Athanasius Kircher, extravagant and erudite Jesuit, scholar of natural phenomena and specialist also in deciphering hieroglyphics, in ancient languages as Egyptian and Chinese, author of an eminent and widely discussed work, published in Amsterdam successively in 1667, 1668, and 1670 under the title of *China Illustrata* (one of the sources of Leibniz’ writings on China – with whom he corresponded – and for a long time certainly the most important source on China in Europe). In it the author claimed that the

<sup>1</sup>“It is astonishing that among the different religions in the world, there is only one that, without any resort to revelation, rejecting equally supernatural systems and the ghosts of superstition and terror, which are supposed to be of such a great use for the behaviour of men, was established just through natural duty” says Boulainvilliers about Confucianism (“Réfutation des erreurs de Benoit de Spinosa”, *Oeuvres Philosophiques* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973], p. 206).

<sup>2</sup>Bayle, P., *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997), p. 550.

<sup>3</sup>Uzgalis, W. L. (ed.), *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707–08* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2011) (<http://www.u.arizona.edu/~scmitche/clarkecollins2.html>).

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Wolf, A., “An Addition to the Correspondence of Spinoza”, *Philosophy* 10, p. 203. *Mundus subterraneus* (written in 1660 and published in Amsterdam in 1665) is Kircher’s masterpiece. In it are described all kinds of realities hidden underground, liquids, rocks, caves ... and the neologism “Geocosmos” is coined to designate the set of natural phenomena of the planet, conceived as a vast organism traversed with channels in its interior. The conversation between Spinoza and Huygens dwells on the theory of pendulums – useless, according to Kircher and against Huygens’ position, to measure lengths.

Chinese language of the Mandarins came from the pharaonic Egyptian. Notwithstanding the reference to Kircher in the letter to Oldenburg, it is not certain that Spinoza had known this book – we cannot rule out, however, this possibility –, which was absent from his library inventory, nor are there any signs that he had news of other Jesuit missionaries in China from the end of the sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, a quote shows us that he was aware of contemporary events in the Asian country. In chapter III of his TPT, where he dismantles not the choice but the exclusivity of the choice that the Jewish people claim for themselves, he writes the following:

The sign of circumcision is, as I think, so important, that I could persuade myself that it alone would preserve the nation for ever. (...) Of such a possibility we have a very famous example in the Chinese. (107) They, too, have some distinctive mark on their heads which they most scrupulously observe, and by which they keep themselves apart from everyone else, and have thus kept themselves during so many thousand years that they far surpass all other nations in antiquity. (108) They have not always retained empire, but they have recovered it when lost, and doubtless will do so again after the spirit of the Tartars becomes relaxed through the luxury of riches and pride.<sup>5</sup>

The analogy between the Jewish and the Chinese people inscribes itself within a topic most dear for the tradition from which Spinoza comes: the recovering of the State, once owned and then lost since the destruction of the Temple. How is the identity of a nation preserved after the dispossession of its State? To this question responds the trace on the body that separates the individual from those of other nations. Circumcision and the braid are signs that grant continuity, but at the expense of the ostensible separation from other nations, their consequent hatred, and the discord that results from this sentiment.

There is a significant difference, however, between circumcision – mark of the alliance with God – and the braid, a mark demanded from the members of a nation after an occupation. In fact, the Chinese's ponytail was imposed on 1644 by the Manchus, who that same year had occupied Peking and displaced the Ming dynasty. Besides other social rulings concerning women, civil examinations, and a few economical changes, the Tartar invaders demanded that Chinese males shave their head, wear a ponytail and embrace the Manchu outfit.<sup>6</sup> The custom of the shaved head with ponytail, which at the beginning meant a mark of domination and almost humiliation of the Chinese population (*han*) by the Manchu occupiers who established the Qing dynasty, with time took roots deeply and lasted well into the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

The mention in this precise passage of the ponytail imposed to the Chinese, made in order to establish an analogy to circumcision, arises from a sinological error that nevertheless allows Spinoza to confirm the link between identity and self-exclusion of nations, be these different States or minorities and internal groups within a State to which they do not originally belong (as Jews in Holland, and beforehand in Portugal and Spain). It is exactly then that the work of

<sup>5</sup>Spinoza, B., *A Theological-Political Treatise* (hereafter: TPT), Section 1, chap. 3 (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/spinoza/treat/tpt05.htm>).

<sup>6</sup>Carrington, G. L., *A Short History of the Chinese People* (Mineola: Dover, 2002).

<sup>7</sup>The occupation of Peking by the Manchu tartars, which put an end to the Ming dynasty, was an influential historical fact, mentioned as an example of factual truth by Albert Burgh, one of the most hostiles correspondents Spinoza ever had. In this letter – which would trigger a famous answer full of explicit anticlericalism and anti-christianism – Burgh accuses Spinoza of denying Christ's divinity (taken as a *de facto* truth), in which so many myriads of holy men have believed, and he writes “[a]gain, might I not in like manner deny that the kingdom of China was occupied by the Tartars, that Constantinople is the seat of the Turkish Empire, and any number of such things?” (Spinoza, B., *The Letters*, trans. S. Shirley [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995], p. 308).

politics begins, with a view to institutionally inscribe all this difference within a horizon of universality that does not cancel it out.

In the same chapter III of TPT containing the reference to the Chinese, there is a passage where Spinoza seems to allude indirectly to the so called “Rites Controversy” that divided the Christian missionaries on the method of evangelization (particularly Jesuits and Franciscans, but it produced also differences within the Company of Jesus itself), and which lasted for more than one hundred and fifty years. In effect, the tradition started by Mateo Ricci preferred indirect preaching, the study of the Chinese language and the adoption of indigenous clothing and customs, and it allowed Chinese Christians the “adaptation” of evangelic beliefs to very antique native rituals, as well as paying tribute to Confucius and their dead ancestors. In the meantime Niccola Longobardi, successor to Mateo Ricci, contested already the adaptation and defended the purity of the dogmas. The first Franciscans who arrived in China promoted public preaching with the crucifix, and criticized the ways of their predecessors.

At the time when the TPT was written, this controversy was in full turmoil (it would end in 1773, when Benedict XIV condemned the Jesuit position and closed down the Company of Jesus). Even though there is no proof allowing us to presume that Spinoza knew about it, there is an otherwise meaningful passage where the purely political character of the ceremonies is established, and their importance for happiness is minimized.

As for the Christian rites, such as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, festivals, public prayers, and any other observances which are, and always have been, common to all Christendom, if they were instituted by Christ or His Apostles (which is open to doubt), they were instituted as external signs of the universal church, and not as having anything to do with blessedness, or possessing any sanctity in themselves. (61) Therefore, ( . . . ) those who live in a country where the Christian religion is forbidden, are bound to abstain from such rites, and can none the less live in a state of blessedness. (62) We have an example of this in Japan, where the Christian religion is forbidden, and the Dutch who live there are enjoined by their East India Company not to practise any outward rites of religion.<sup>8</sup>

The reference here is not China but Japan, and further along – in chapter XVI – the “political” reason for this adaptation is revealed, different however from the one defended by the Jesuit missionaries in China.

The rulers of Christian kingdoms do not hesitate, with a view to strengthening their dominion, to make treaties with Turks and heathen, and to give orders to their subjects who settle among such peoples not to assume more freedom, either in things secular or religious, than is set down in the treaty, or allowed by the foreign government. (117) We may see this exemplified in the Dutch treaty with the Japanese, which I have already mentioned.<sup>9</sup>

Neither the apostolate and commerce, nor evangelizing and political alliances are the same, but in both cases the externality of the religious cult can be sacrificed to the essential.

The purely political character of ceremonies – and thus also of dispensing with them – is reaffirmed by Spinoza in relation to the Turks, whose system of control puts ceremonies in close contiguity with superstition. In the page of the Preface of the TPT quoting the sentence of Quinto Curcio on the efficacy of superstition in the government of the masses, Spinoza gives as an example the Turks, who have managed to make any discussion deemed a sacrilege, and who “leave no room for sound reason, not even enough to doubt with.”<sup>10</sup> This reference to the

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<sup>8</sup>TPT, Section 1, chap. 5 (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/spinoza/treat/tpt07.htm>).

<sup>9</sup>TPT, Part 4, chap. 16 (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/spinoza/treat/tpt24.htm>).

<sup>10</sup>TPT, Section 1, Preface (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/spinoza/treat/tpt02.htm>).

Turks as emblems of political stability through superstition, resurfaces in the *Political Treatise* – where the Turkish state is presented as the antithesis of the popular democratic state, by nature full of controversies<sup>11</sup> – and indirectly in the passage in the letter to Burgh that homologates the Roman Church to the Mahometan Church as powers purely political and lucrative, whose main goal is to dupe the masses and subjugate the spirits. Even though the latter one, says Spinoza, has a considerable advantage, given that “from the time when this superstition arose, there has been no schism in its church.”<sup>12</sup>

Chinese, Japanese, and Turks – as certainly Jews, Egyptians and Persians – allow us to understand that religion and politics form a *melee*. Or, so to speak, that all religion has a political content and all politics a religious content. The anthropology of ceremonies and of religious marks adopted by nations reveals, in effect, against any pretension to exclusivity, that: “all men’s nature is one and the same.”<sup>13</sup>

**Two.** Throughout the seventeenth and – in particular – the eighteenth centuries, fondness for traveling and dealing with foreign cultures disturbs the philosophical and religious certainties transmitted and established in the West, and it deeply disrupts European cultural identity. “Some men – wrote La Bruyère in the chapter ‘Of Free Thinkers’ in *Les Caractères* (1688) – give the finishing-stroke to the spoiling of their judgment by their long travels, and thus lose the little religion which remained to them. They meet daily new forms of worships, different manners and morals, and various ceremonies.”<sup>14</sup> In this context of existential investigation on “the big book of the world,” China proposes, primarily, a philosophical problem for the European world. The first important work that introduces Confucian thinking to Europe is a manuscript by Mateo Ricci, edited posthumously in 1615 by his successor, N. Trigault, under the title *De Cristiana expeditione apud Sinas*. It is a text in which Confucius [whose work would be translated and published for the first time in 1687, as *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*] is introduced as a man wiser than any other wise heathen, including the Greeks. From then on, Confucianism appears as paradigm and possibility of a natural religion whose intellectual notions and basic moral principles allow the establishment of a harmonic form of political life that dispenses with revelation.<sup>15</sup>

Stripped of the charge of threat that had clothed Turks and Islam in general from time immemorial, China appeared as a speculative alterity to think human life, with which to confront the truths of Christianity and of rational life; to establish, in any case, a philosophical dialogue in the full sense of the word. It would not be considered as a pure object of religious conversion

<sup>11</sup>Spinoza, B., *A Treatise on Politics*, trans. William Maccall (London: Holyoake, 1854), p. 41. (<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044018713347;view=1up;seq=47>)

<sup>12</sup>Spinoza, B., “Letter LXXIV. Spinoza to Albert Burgh,” *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891) ([http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1711&chapter=199575&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1711&chapter=199575&layout=html&Itemid=27)). Nevertheless, stripped from their superstitious content, all religions that teach the minimal creed of love for the neighbour and for God – Mohamed’s included – are equivalent and true: “As regards the Turks and other non-Christian nations; if they worship God by the practice of justice and charity towards their neighbour, I believe that they have the spirit of Christ, and are in a state of salvation, whatever they may ignorantly hold with regard to Mahomet and oracles”. “Letter XLIC. Spinoza to Isaac Orobio” ([http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1711&chapter=199521&layout=html#a\\_3163242](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1711&chapter=199521&layout=html#a_3163242)).

<sup>13</sup>Spinoza, B., *Political Treatise*, chap. 7 ([http://www.constitution.org/bs/poltr\\_07.htm#027](http://www.constitution.org/bs/poltr_07.htm#027)).

<sup>14</sup>De la Bruyère, J., *The ‘Characters,’* trans. Henri Van Laun (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885), p.461 ([http://archive.org/stream/charactersofjean00labriala/charactersofjean00labriala\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/charactersofjean00labriala/charactersofjean00labriala_djvu.txt)).

<sup>15</sup>See Mungello, D. E., “European philosophical responses to non-european culture: China,” in Gerber, D. and Ayers, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 89–91.

– as the Western Indies had been two centuries before – but as a subject with which to engage in a dialogue about all things. This will be the case for authors like La Mothe le Vayer [who discusses the Chinese theory of salvation in *De la vertu des payens* – 1642 – and who lauds Confucius as the “Chinese Socrates”], Leibniz or Wolff – but not so much for Malebranche, whose text *Dialogue between a Christian Philosopher and a Chinese Philosopher on the Existence and Nature of God* presents an unmistakably apologetic tone (in spite of which it would be charged with “Spinozism” by the *Journal de Trévoux*).<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, Leibniz’ interest on the work of the Jesuit missionaries in China<sup>17</sup> was motivated by a political purpose of wide philosophical implications, as well as by a desire to intervene positively in the discussion on the conditions of the diffusion of Christianity outside of Europe. This distinguishes his “sinophilia” from the one of *philosophes* and libertines who, on the contrary, considered Chinese alterity as an ally in the struggle against revealed religion.

This Leibnizian reflection is driven by a desire for an intercultural dialogue that would confirm European superiority regarding mathematics, metaphysics, logics and Christian religion, at the same time that it recognizes, in Confucian Chinese thought, a higher development in morality, politics, and practical wisdom in general.<sup>18</sup> But, at the centre of the complex fabric formed by the political, philosophical and religious problems posed by China to European Philosophy, we find Spinoza. In effect, the *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des chinois* – written after reading Malebranche’s *Entretien d’un philosophe chrétien et d’un philosophe chinois sur l’existence et la nature de Dieu* (1708)<sup>19</sup> – has the explicit purpose of differentiating Confucian thought from Spinozism, with which it was commonly linked if not directly assimilated. This was the case, precisely, of Malebranche’s position, in whose text Spinoza’s specter is omnipresent (and from whom, after Arnauld’s accusation that there were Spinozian elements in Malebranchian philosophy, the idea was to take as much distance as possible).<sup>20</sup>

On the path opened by Bayle and just as him, the author of *Recherche de la vérité* links Chinese philosophy and Spinoza’s metaphysics, considering them forms of monist, atheist and materialist rationalism.<sup>21</sup> In effect, according to Malebranche – who, contrary to the Leibnizian

<sup>16</sup>Founded by the Jesuits at Trévoux in 1701, its main task would end up being the defence of religion and the struggle against its declared enemies, in particular the materialists of *L’Encyclopédie*. [See. *Journal de Trévoux ou Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des sciences et des arts* (1701), Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969]. The same year in which the *Entretien d’un philosophe chrétien et d’un philosophe chinois sur l’existence et la nature de Dieu* – 1708 – was printed, the *Mémoires de Trévoux* published a critical article, answered by Malebranche in an *Avis touchant l’Entretien d’un philosophe chrétien et d’un philosophe chinois*.

<sup>17</sup>Some of Leibniz’ texts dealing with China are the Prologue to the two editions of the *Novissima Sinica* (1697/1699); a letter to A. Verjus from 1700 known as *De cultu Confucii civili*; the correspondence with Father J. Buvet, which lasts for ten years, and the *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des chinois* (1716), which would have been interrupted by the death of its author on 14 November 1716.

<sup>18</sup>“But who would have believed that there is on earth a people who, though we are in our view so very advanced in every branch of behavior, still surpass us in comprehending the precepts of civil life? Yet now we find this to be so among the Chinese, as we learn to know them better. And so if we are their equals in the trial arts, and ahead of them in contemplative sciences, certainly they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adopted to the present life and use of mortals” [sect. 3, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, trans. D. J. Cook and H. Rosemont Jr., Chicago: Open court, 1994] (<http://candleforlove.com/forums/topic/22449-chinese-history-and-philosophy>).

<sup>19</sup>A copy of the *Entretien ...* (preserved with notes from the author of *La Monadologie*) was sent in April 1712 by Lelong to Leibniz, who started reading it in November 1715.

<sup>20</sup>Mungello, D. E., *op. cit.*, pp. 97–8.

<sup>21</sup>See Lai, Y. T., “The Linking of Spinoza to Chinese Thought by Bayle and Malebranche”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23–32 (1985), p. 178.

position, denounces energetically the tolerance of Confucian traditions in the Christian rites of Chinese converts – Chinese thinking is intrinsically Spinozian (“It seems to me there are many correspondences between the impieties of Spinoza and those of the Chinese Philosopher”).<sup>22</sup> What is more, his text can be read as a dialogue between a Christian philosopher and a Spinozian philosopher: when Malebranche writes *Chinese*, this word is simply substitutable for *Spinozian*.

According to Leibniz, on the contrary, the philosophical and natural theology of the Chinese proves the unity of human reason and the absolute compatibility of Natural law with Confucius’ ideas, which hence do not contravene Christianity but are rather complemented and completed by it. The Leibnizian operation consists in removing original Chinese thinking from any materialist or atheist implication (including those promoted by “certain [contemporary] Mandarin atheists”),<sup>23</sup> as well as from libertine appropriations and from any presumed similarity between its philosophical-cultural meaning and the Spinozian ghost wandering through Europe.

What the ancient Chinese authors called *Li* or first principle produces everything necessarily, even matter (*ki*). Leibniz brings this principle – which he translates also by “Nature” – close to the *Natura Naturans* and to the old representation of the mystic sphere – of hermetic origin, perhaps more ancient – whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere.<sup>24</sup> *Li*, “the same originative Spirit (God),” produces necessarily, “naturally and involuntarily.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, “the Chinese, far from being blameworthy, merit praise for their idea of things being created by their natural propensity and by a pre-established harmony.”<sup>26</sup> However Leibniz, against the Malbranchian interpretation of the *Li* on a Spinozist code<sup>27</sup> – regarding the idea of the natural cause of all things, as well as other ideas<sup>28</sup> – tries to distinguish carefully between the meaning given to it by the ancient Chinese and the Spinozist ideas with which the missionary fathers were making an analogy.

In short, Leibniz’ China is invested with political relevance for Europe; on the other hand its atheistic threat to Christian religion is downplayed.

**Three.** In the eighteenth Century, Chinese philosophy will occupy an important place as well in the most characteristic literary genre of the time: in Pierre Bayle’s (1697–1702) *Dictionnaire historique et critique*; in the Jesuit *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1704–1771) – a publication that compiles lexicographical works of the 1700s –; in Diderot’s and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*; and in Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764: Voltaire was one of the main enemies of the Trévoux Jesuits), whose stated purpose was to be an accessible, affordable and “portable” version of the *Encyclopédie*. These were not pure reference works made to satisfy curiosity, but immense and precise interventions in the cultural and philosophical controversy of the century, a guide that would not only provide the reader with knowledge but with criteria to navigate thought.

<sup>22</sup>Malebranche, N., *Dialogue between a Christian Philosopher and a Chinese Philosopher on the Existence and Nature of God*, trans. D. A. Lorio (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>This reference to authors who deny punishment and reward after death, even without explicitly naming him, alludes obviously to Spinoza, and in particular to his TPT.

<sup>24</sup>Leibniz, G. W., *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 88, 84.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 85–6.

<sup>27</sup>It is wisdom and justice but – he puts himself in the mouth of the Chinese philosopher – it is neither wise nor fair, that is to say, it is not a subject: “it knows neither what it is nor what it does”, it does not have a will nor freedom, “acts only by the necessity of its nature” and, against the *creatio ex nihilo* idea, extension is considered “eternal, necessary, infinite” (Malebranche, N., *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 46, 100).

<sup>28</sup>For example, the Confucian dictum of “all things are one”, or the interpretation of *Li* as something close to the doctrine of the *Soul of the World* “of which the individual souls would only be modifications. This would follow the opinion of several ancients, the opinions of the Averroists, and in a certain sense, even the opinions of Spinoza” (*Ibid.*, p. 90).



The opening of the entry on “Spinoza” in Pierre Bayle’s work – a fundamental text in the diffusion of Spinozism in Europe during the eighteenth century – is eloquent in itself:

Spinoza (Benedict de) a Jew by birth, who forsook Judaism, and at last became an Atheist, was a native of Amsterdam. He was a systematical Atheist, and brought his Atheism into a new method, although the ground of his doctrine was the same with that of several ancient and modern philosophers, both in Europe and the Eastern countries, (A) As for the latter, one needs only read what I have said in the remark (D) of the article JAPAN, and what I finally say below concerning the Theology of a sect of the Chinese (B).<sup>29</sup>

In this note B, Bayle writes that this is the *Foe Kiao* sect, adopted by the Chinese in 65 AD.<sup>30</sup> With regard to the Japanese, in the *Japan* entry we can read: “it is very certain ( . . . ) that [Spinoza] has taught as well as these Japanese priests, that the first principle of all things, and of all beings, which compose the universe, are but one and the same substance; that all things are God, and that God is all things in such a manner, that God and all things that exist, make but one and the same being.”<sup>31</sup>

At the same time that he reviled Spinozism as an execrable atheism, Bayle presented it as a doctrine disseminated since time immemorial all around the Earth: “It has been believed long ago – says note A of the previously quoted passage –, that the whole universe is but one substance, and that GOD and the world are but one being.”<sup>32</sup> Here are mentioned also all those who embrace the doctrine of the “Soul of the World”; two Mahometan sects [the so-called “men of truth” (*Ehl Eltakkik*), and the Zindikites], the Christian heretic David de Dinant, one Alexander Epicurus – mentioned by Albertus Magnus –, the Stoics, Hindu pantheists from the Pendet sect, Sufis, Persians, Peripatetics, and even Peter Abelard. Spinozism, in short, would be ubiquitous and as old as humanity.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, this chain of equivalences is transmitted and reproduced frequently throughout the eighteenth century – for example in Jean Levesque de Burigny’s influential *Histoire de la philosophie payenne* (The Hague, 1724) that, following Bayle, claims that Egyptians, Persians, Cabalists and Stoics are Spinoza’s forerunners.

This thesis is connected with another of libertine origins, that denies the universality of religion and the acquiescence to the idea of God by all nations on Earth, as it was maintained by the Christian apologists – and in particular by the writers of the *Journal de Trévoux*. In the *Continuation des Pensées diverses sur la Comète* (1704), section LXXXV is titled “There have been found savages in Canada, who did not have any religion,” and in the *Réponse aux questions d’un Provincial* (1704–5) the argument of “les Journalistes de Trévoux” is challenged, whereby they pretend to prove the inexistence of atheists by the fact that common sense itself decrees the existence of a First Cause. Bayle argues against this by pointing to the existence of philosophers who, even though they recognize the existence of an eternal, necessary Being, a First Cause of all effects in Nature, still remain atheists. That is to say, they deny that that Being knows and guides human actions, or that it is free or know what it does. What is even more, he adds, “there are still similar Eastern philosophers as we learn by the reports from the

<sup>29</sup>*The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, vol. 5 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997), p. 198.

<sup>30</sup>These are the Chán Buddhists, called *Foe Kiao* (No-man) by the Jesuit missionaries – whose reports are Bayle’s source here (see P. Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, New York: New York University Press, 1979).

<sup>31</sup>Bayle, P., *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, vol. 3, p. 550.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 199.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 199–202.

Jesuits. Not to mention Spinoza and his followers.”<sup>34</sup> But they should not be considered immoral, because they are atheists – this is the core of the most famous and most attacked of Bayle’s positions –, since “Spinozists and men of letters of China discriminate among the different kinds of good as well as the most pious of all men.”<sup>35</sup>

In a work on the Vossius/Hornius polemic on China, Thijs Weststeijn<sup>36</sup> pointed out that this link between Spinozism and Eastern thought in Bayle’s article points to an important dimension of the “Radical Enlightenment,” one that has been neglected by scholars.<sup>37</sup> Weststeijn notices, in effect, a close relation between Sinophilia and radicalism (the expression “virtuous atheist” refers both to Spinoza and to Confucius), with a particular explicitness in the writings of Isaac Vossius.<sup>38</sup>

Under the inspiration of Bayle’s text, the entry on “Spinoza” written by Denis Diderot – a “radical” philosopher according to J. Israel – for the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et de métiers* (1751–1780)<sup>39</sup> interprets Spinozism as an expression of a very old experience of the world, linked as much to the Stoics’ doctrine of the “Soul of the World,” as to many other Western and Eastern philosophies. For starters, the name Spinoza appears in the *Encyclopédie* in the entry “Chinese Philosophy,” where Diderot writes:

If that system is as ancient as it is claimed, one cannot be too surprised of the amazing multitude of abstract and general expressions through which it is conceived. We must agree that those expressions, which have made Spinoza’s work unintelligible to us for such a long time, would not have deterred the Chinese six or seven hundred years ago: the frightening language of our modern atheist is precisely the same one that they used to speak in their schools.<sup>40</sup>

In the entry “de la Chine” of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire mentions a dispute between Christian Wolff and Joachim Lange, who had accused the former of “Spinozism,” on account of the text known as *Oratio de Sinarum*. In effect, in 1721, Christian Wolff was appointed rector of the University of Halle, and his inaugural speech, the *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica* [*On the Practical Philosophy of the Chinese*],<sup>41</sup> would trigger a violent polemic with

<sup>34</sup>Bayle, P., *Oeuvres diverses de Mr. Pierre Bayle*, vol. 4 (La Haye: Par la Compagnie de libraires, 1737), p. 728 (<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=6cjcwppac4C&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA728>).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 983 (<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=6cjcwppac4C&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA983>).

<sup>36</sup>Weststeijn, T., “Spinoza sinicus: An Asian Paragraph in the History of the Radical Enlightenment”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (2007), p. 538.

<sup>37</sup>In effect, in *Radical Enlightenment* Jonathan Israel attributes to Bayle the purpose of transmitting radical ideas – stealthily covered behind the insult of “systemic Atheist” – but without mentioning the coincidence between Spinoza’s ideas and ancient Chinese thought that figures on the long note on the Amsterdam philosopher in the *Dictionnaire*. Instead, Israel highlights the Greek and Renaissance’s premises that Bayle cites as proof that Spinozism would be a kind of constant of human thought (Israel, J., *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 136–7).

<sup>38</sup>Old friend of Menasseah Ben Israel and Huygens, Isaac Vossius (1618–89) had dealings with Spinoza because of a shared interest in problems of optics and chemistry.

<sup>39</sup>The entries “Spinosa” and “Spinosiste” were written by Diderot in 1759 and are listed in volume XV of the *Encyclopédie*, published in 1765. Even though this is the most relevant explicit reference to him, the presence of the Amsterdam philosopher is disseminated through various entries, starting with volume I where his name is mentioned in entries “Soul”, “Atheist” or “Atheism”.

<sup>40</sup>Diderot, D., *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, The ARTFL Project, University of Chicago, (<http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?p.2:362.encyclopedie0513>).

<sup>41</sup>M. Albrecht edited a bilingual edition of this work: Christian Wolff, *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica/ Rede über die praktische Philosophie der Chinesen* (Meiner, Hamburg, 1985).

theologians and academics – particularly with Lange (1670–1744), who accused him publicly of atheism and *Spinozism*. Invoking the example of Chinese Confucians, the purpose of the *Prorektorsrede* was to show that ethical principles are independent of religious belief. There Wolff maintains that Chinese morals are based on knowledge – achieved through reason – of the notions of Good and Evil, and that hence the exercise of virtue depends on the rational investigation of Nature. Independent of any revelation, morals are founded solely on reason. Human beings are therefore capable of acting virtuously through their own skills, without any need of an exterior rule that would provide them with a criterion to judge goodness. According to Wolff, the Chinese are the perfect example of atheists, since they do not know the Creator of the Universe and yet are virtuous, given that their virtue is worldwide recognized. Thus, morals are possible even without revealed religion – an argument that had been foreshadowed by Pierre Bayle in *Continuation des Pensées diverses sur la Comète*, where he maintained, in fact, that the admirable political and moral order of the Chinese dispenses with religion.

Referring back to this story, Voltaire wrote:

The celebrated Wolf, professor of mathematics in the University of Halle, once delivered an excellent discourse in praise of the Chinese philosophy. He praised that ancient species of the human race, differing, as it does, in respect to the beard, the eyes, the nose, the ears, and even the reasoning powers themselves; he praised the Chinese, I say, for their adoration of a supreme God, and their love of virtue. He did that justice to the emperors of China, to the tribunals, and to the literati. The justice done to the bonzes was of a different kind.<sup>42</sup>

While Wolff, Arouet continues, attracted thousands of students from all the nations to Halle, “in the same university there was also a professor of theology [Lange], who attracted no one. This man, maddened at the thought of freezing to death in his own deserted hall, formed the design, which undoubtedly was only right and reasonable, of destroying the mathematical professor. He scrupled not, according to the practice of persons like himself, to accuse him of not believing in God. Some European writers, who had never been in China, had pretended that the government of Peking was atheistic. Wolf had praised the philosophers of Peking; therefore Wolf was an atheist. Envy and hatred seldom construct the best syllogisms.”

This argument of Lange, supported by a party and by a protector, was considered conclusive by the sovereign of the country, who despatched a formal dilemma to the mathematician. This dilemma gave him the option of quitting Halle in 24 hours, or of being hanged; and as Wolff was a very accurate reasoner, he did not fail to quit.<sup>43</sup>

Voltaire mobilizes his irony against the European writers who, without ever having been to Peking, accuse the Chinese government of atheism. He concludes with an explicit affirmation of the religious superiority of the Chinese:

I must again repeat, the religion of their learned is admirable, and free from superstitions, from absurd legends, from dogmas insulting both to reason and nature (...). The most simple worship has appeared to them the best, for a series of forty centuries. (...) they are contented to adore one God in communion with the sages of the world, while Europe is divided between Thomas and Bonaventure, between Calvin and Luther, between Jansenius and Molina.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Fleming, W. F. (trans.), *The Project Gutenberg Ebook of A Philosophical Dictionary*, vol. 3 (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35623/35623-h/35623-h.html>).

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

**Four.** The first *Spinoza-Renaissance* with the *Pantheismusstreit* considers the term “Spinozism” as an equivalent of “philosophy.” The history of Western philosophy is conceived – for example by Jacobi – as a prehistory of Spinozism, where reason reaches its last form and assumes finally its ultimate potency of world explanation. There is no other philosophy but Spinoza’s, and he or she who would decide to philosophize, has to begin by being a Spinozian. The power of reason begins here the development of its own plenitude, independently of the implications that such a statement might have.

Nevertheless, at the same time the reception of Spinoza in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recognizes something that transcends the power of rational explanation, of which Spinoza’s system is considered the emblem (of course this is not Kant’s case, who describes it as a philosophy of mysticism, dogmatic and incomprehensible); something that transcends philosophical and mathematical reason; something even non-philosophical that breaks with the representation of Spinozism as an arrival point of a history that would have been left behind for good; something that rather makes it possible to relate it to the most antique ways of conceiving the world, belonging to very different and very distant cultures. An archaic dimension in Spinoza’s philosophy that allows its connection with ancient forms of wisdom, as it was noticed – we have seen – by Leibniz, Malebranche, Bayle, Wolff, Diderot, Voltaire, as well as by Herder (who imagines Spinozism as an expression of principles disseminated among the most distant cultures), Schopenhauer [for whom Spinoza is like a “tropical plant in Europe” and for whom the “banks of Ganges were (his) spiritual home”] and Hegel himself (who in the *Logic* and in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* links him with Hindu pantheism).

This archaic element that Spinoza’s thought harbors in its depth, and which it sets loose when the moment arrives, is the most dangerous element in it for a political order founded on *revelatio*. Notwithstanding all the technical difficulties of a philosophy written not precisely *ad captum vulgi*, it carries with it something simple and elemental, very old, liable to be understood by *anyone* and to open the possibility of a popular Spinozism that has shaken religious structures and political hierarchies. Because “atheism,” and there stand the Chinese to prove it, is older than revelation – and maybe also a constant of human experience that bursts over and again onto cultures, and regenerates itself in the most various philosophies, regardless of time lags and geographical distances.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Jean-Luc Nancy**, by Marie-Eve Morin, Cambridge, Polity Press, £15.99 (paperback), pp. 188, ISBN 978-0-7456-5241-2

Nancy is well known for both the diversity of his corpus and his insistence that meaning (sense) arises, as Morin puts it, from moving across sentences rather than from the internal signification of a single sentence. Morin's response to this challenge is to discuss four trajectories of Nancy's thought, named in the chapter headings as Christianity, Community, Politics and Body to Art, through their relation to what is probably Nancy's most well-known ontological concept 'being singular plural'. Morin advises that these four chapters can be read in any order following an initial reading of the first chapter entitled Ontology. In this review I will, therefore, look first at the Ontology chapter before discussing the remaining four and finally evaluating the success of Morin's approach.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Ontology is to sketch Nancy's ontological project and its divergence from that of Heidegger. Nancy's problem with Heidegger's ontology is that being-with remains on the side of the average, everyday, common existence in a false dichotomy with common existence on one side and *Dasein*, on the other. For Morin, what is significant in Nancy's thought of being singular plural is that being-with is essential to existence; *Dasein* is in and only in, its being-with. Importantly, finitude for Nancy will not be the delimitation of a particular being against infinite common being (this he calls finiteness) but will describe instead a being that exists at its limit, at the exact point at which its interior singularity is exposed or opened to exterior plurality. The product or creation of this event is sense or meaning, with world as a totality of sense; a thought at odds with the conception of a pre-existing world in which particular instances of *Dasein* find themselves thrown alongside one another.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Christianity is to show how Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity makes possible an ontology of finitude. According to Morin, Nancy holds that Christianity is essentially self-deconstructing, containing within it thoughts and concepts which unsettle theism. The resulting and unavoidable atheism inherent within Christianity has the paradoxical character of being without God but still monotheistic, what Nancy calls absentheistic or nihilism. However, for Nancy nihilism is to be seen not as a ground and abandonment to the immanent but an opening between transcendence and immanence. This opening is the same in which the singular being is exposed to exterior plurality in the thought of being singular plural.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Community is to show how Nancy's ontology arises from the thinking of community which chronologically precedes it. For Morin, Nancy shows that community has thus far been thought of as pure unobstructed communion between the members of the community and has been tinted always with nostalgia for a lost community. However, for Nancy true communion would be a black hole of immanence. For Nancy, community is what happens in the inevitable failure of attempted communion, when the community experiences its own absence. Community therefore is the exposure of immanence to transcendence and the limit point between the two. It is also the exposing of the limit point between the singular being and the exterior plurality, the exposing of human beings as essentially in relation.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Politics is to examine the relation between Nancy's ontology and his thinking on politics. For Nancy, the essence of the political is relation, and thus far, classical philosophical conceptions of the political have not allowed this view. Social contract type theories suppose a relation-less natural human state prior to the inception of the social contract whilst Hegel's State, as realization of ethical life, absorbs the relations between citizens into a pure subjectivity. For Nancy these conceptions are not surprising, however, for just as philosophy has missed the being-with of being singular plural, then philosophy's own coexistence with politics has caused politics to miss the relation as the essential nature of the political. For Nancy what makes us human, namely that our being is necessarily being-with, or being singular plural, makes us political in the same stroke.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Body to Art is to show the relation of Nancy's ontology to his thinking of the traditional dichotomy of mind and body. For Nancy this dichotomy is broken down in the thought of exscription. For Nancy, sense is an event between two bodies, a statue therefore is not an imprisoned incarnated Idea made intelligible in physical form, it does not refer to or signify anything, but its meaning or sense occurs in the encounter (via the statue) between the body that made the statue and the body that views it. Sense, then, is a material embodied event in which sense and body are each at their limit in the same way as the singular being and the exterior plurality it is exposed to, are, in the thought of being singular plural.

What Morin has done in this book is give a series of meditations on what is for her Nancy's central ontological concept, being singular plural. In this book, we are introduced to the extraordinary range of Nancy's thinking and despite the necessary condensing, are not spared the complexities of the problematic at play. We are, however, given a useful touchstone to return to when we are overwhelmed; this approach makes the book an extremely useful and remarkably clear introduction to Nancy's thinking. The great success of this approach is that even if on first reading we do not grasp each aspect of the various Nancean projects discussed, we do at least gain an increasingly strong sense of the central concept of being singular plural, allowing greater insight each time we return to Nancy's thought in this text or any other.

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**Gadamer and the Limits of the Modern Techno-Scientific Civilization**, by Stefano Marino, Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles-Frankfurt a. M.-New York-Oxford-Wien, Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 295, € 61,10 (paperback), ISBN.

Although Gadamer certainly belongs to what we could define as the great chain of the twentieth-century critics of techno-scientific modernity, and although he has sometimes expressed his opinion on this topic in quite a radical or drastic way, he has nevertheless not gone so far as to conceive science and technology as omnipotent and perhaps even monstrous forces (145).

This statement captures the key thesis at stake in this book, and in its balanced formulation it also embodies one of the strongest points of Marino's work. The author successfully distances Gadamer's position from all possible forms of 'demonization' of science and technology, and moreover shows how, in Gadamer's estimation, these issues are deeply connected with a kind of uneasiness within modern civilization.

The text evolves as an overview of Gadamer's oeuvre: To provide an expansive and clear portrayal of Gadamer's entire thought, Marino takes into account not only the main works, but also many pertinent shorter writings. The kind of hermeneutical reflection that emerges from this portrayal captures Gadamer's deep concern with modernity, as expressed in his basic 'idea or feeling that we are witnessing a particularly critical phase in the history of civilization', a phase which is most of all characterized 'by the preponderance and diffusion of the techno-scientific culture' (11). Already in *Truth and Method* the task was 'to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method',<sup>1</sup> but it is most notably in the later works that something like 'the ethical-political dimension of his philosophy' (16) actually emerges.

Science and technology represent for Gadamer the 'real roots of modernity (23) and this precisely because of the role played by scientific method from the seventeenth century onwards (26). Marino goes deeply into this problem through a wide examination of the secondary literature; but it is in going beyond the main, published works that Marino's book displays its real novelty, for example by tracing back Gadamer's reflection on modern society to a few fundamental concerns, such as the dominance of economic processes (51), self-alienation in the 'idolatry of work and production' (54), the wide proliferation of atomic weapons (75 ff.), and ecological and medical questions (79 ff.). Marino investigates the role hermeneutics can play in a cosmopolitan age, and by doing so develops a kind of political thought that goes beyond the mere alternative between uncritical apologies for our own civilization and its world-view, on the one side, and a 'hateful caricature [...] of Western modernity'<sup>2</sup> on the other. Marino instead stresses the importance of trying to establish a 'dialogue between different religions' and world-views, which would help us in 'paving the way for the establishing of a sort of world *ethos* and international justice' (72f). Gadamer himself states that 'philosophy is preparing the ground for a global conversation'.<sup>3</sup>

Marino's attempts to discuss this 'ground for a global conversation' begin by elucidating the 'problematic character' of ethical, religious and aesthetic experiences 'in the age of science' (95 ff., 113 ff.). For example, he elucidates Gadamer's interpretation of the typical 'museal' treatment of art, with visitors only looking forward to having some kind of 'aesthetic experience', as guided by the domination of the scientific mode of epistemology.<sup>4</sup> An analogous problematic character can also be detected in ethical and religious experiences. In Marino's interpretation, these issues reveal that Gadamer 'also saw nihilism as one of the key problems of our time' (116).

However, Marino's book does not only focus on this *pars destruens* (177) of Gadamer's diagnosis of modernity. As a matter of fact, Gadamer wanted to rehabilitate positively 'all those kind of experiences and knowledge that seem to elude the control of scientific-methodical pattern' (177). In order to do this, Gadamer focuses most of all on Aristotle: 'What he has in mind', says Marino, 'must be a concept of hermeneutic understanding and experience as practical knowledge'. This happens through an accentuation of the role of *praxis* and *phronesis* as 'concepts indicating an all-encompassing dimension of human experience' (203). Hence *phronesis* is conceived as an analogous concept to hermeneutical experience. Yet Gadamer's moral thinking is by no means an attempt to ground an ethical system, but rather to 'understand ethics as practical knowledge' (222), i.e. as the capacity 'to reasonably judge in practical situations' (225). This point

<sup>1</sup>*Truth and Method*, Gadamer H.-G., second, revisited edition, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, London-New York: Continuum 2004, XXI.

<sup>2</sup>*Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, Buruma I. and Margalit A., New York: Penguin Press 2004, 5, quoted in Marino, 70.

<sup>3</sup>*A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, Gadamer H.-G., trans. R. Coltman S. Koepke, London-New York: Continuum 2003, 74, quoted in Marino's book at 73.

<sup>4</sup>*Truth and Method*, Gadamer H.-G., 73, quoted in Marino's book at 105.



mostly characterizes Gadamer's late work, and here Marino believes he can find a new rational tendency that, on a political level, leads in a democratic direction (232f); this reading also militates against the idea of Gadamer's philosophy as 'traditionalist, conservative, and prejudicially contrary to the values of modern Enlightenment' (17).

Ultimately, by treating these issues in such wide scope, the book occasionally – and probably unavoidably – fails to discuss the relevant problems on a deep level. This critical point arises most notably on the question of the actual tenability of Gadamer's diagnosis.<sup>5</sup> But obviously this assessment was not the task which Marino set out to accomplish, as he wanted rather to give a comprehensive account of Gadamer's position on a topic that tends not to be foregrounded in Gadamer's works nor in the research about it. When viewed from this perspective, *Gadamer and the Limits of the Modern Techno-Scientific Civilization* reveals itself as a compelling volume for researchers and scholars of twentieth-century thought.

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**Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger**, by Lee Braver, MIT Press, 2012, 354 pp., £26.95 (hbk), ISBN 978-0262016896

With his recent work on Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Lee Braver has accomplished something remarkable: he has given us an account of two of the past century's most challenging thinkers that is as insightful and provocative as it is eminently readable. The achievement is all the more laudable given that Wittgenstein and Heidegger have generally been claimed by opposing factions in the fateful analytic-continental schism. In his *A Thing of this World: A Brief History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Northwestern, 2007), Braver delineated a history of continental Anti-Realism from Kant through to Derrida that presented the insights of that tradition's central figures in an idiom accessible to an Anglo-American audience better versed in analytic philosophy, thereby showing that themes, motives, and positions that once seemed incommensurable could indeed be brought into dialogue. *Groundless Grounds* continues that project, but whereas *A Thing of this World* surveyed over two centuries of philosophical history, this book narrows in on two figures contemporaneous with each other in order to stage a more penetrating and sustained exchange.

The book's main text focuses on an exposition of Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's central ideas and will be accessible to readers waging their first encounter with either philosopher, while the copious footnotes and references (over 80 pages) help locate Braver's interpretations within the vast secondary literature and insure that even seasoned readers of Wittgenstein or Heidegger

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<sup>5</sup>See for example at p. 47, where Marino concedes that Gadamer's view of science could be not 'fully appropriated', since Gadamer was no philosopher of science, and Marino does not inquire any further into this issue. Yet if we want to understand Gadamer's diagnosis from a systematic and not only historical point of view, we must also know to what extent his comprehension of science is really adequate to the present situation – otherwise the account would remain quite sterile.

will find something new. (There are no references to the German editions of Heidegger's works, a forgivable omission given the sheer volume of citations.) Each of the book's five chapters is structured similarly, beginning with a presentation of the position held by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* on a set of related issues (9). The views of the later Wittgenstein and early Heidegger are then developed as responses to and critiques of the *Tractarian* view, which to a certain extent is taken as emblematic of the metaphysical tradition generally in the sections discussing Heidegger. This arrangement of the material is consistent with Wittgenstein's own wishes for how his later thought ought to be presented, and is didactically very effective, given that Braver is not only dealing with two philosophers but two philosophers each of whom, the conventional view maintains, experienced an appreciable *Kehre* in their philosophical trajectory. The approach does, however, occasionally have the drawback of setting later Wittgenstein and early Heidegger side by side rather than face to face, allies against a common enemy rather than participants in direct confrontation with one another.

For the sake of containing an encounter that could easily get out of hand (one wonders how Wittgenstein would have received Heidegger at Cambridge if he did indeed once wield a glowing fire-poker against Popper), the discussions of Heidegger generally focus on the early Heidegger (9), specifically the first division of *Being and Time*. It is a very Dreyfusian Heidegger who emerges from these pages, the Heidegger of Heidegger's hammer fame, a vaguely pragmatic and communitarian Heidegger who, admittedly, makes a very compatible conversation partner for the later Wittgenstein. Where Braver does occasionally attempt comparisons between the second division of *Being and Time* and Wittgenstein's thought, the material resists and the connections become more tenuous (e.g. 109). The absence of a discussion of later Heidegger, understandable given the already considerable scope of the book, is something of a shame given that Braver has elsewhere demonstrated his facility with Heidegger's later philosophy. There is, however, one prolonged discussion of the thought of later Heidegger and Wittgenstein building on the preceding expositions (chapter five), and it offers up the most enticing reading of the book.

The two most important ideas that Braver articulates throughout the book, especially in the final chapter and conclusion, are named 'groundless grounds' and 'original finitude'. With his discussion of 'groundless grounds', Braver draws attention to the fact that for both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, we eventually reach a 'spade-turning' level of explanation. But what turns our spade at the end of explanation is not an indubitable, self-grounding ground, as the foundationalist aspirations of philosophy past would have it; rather, it is a ground which, though it allows of no further grounding, neither from without nor within, provides finite creatures like us with all the ground that we require and all the ground that we can rationally comprehend. As Heidegger sought to reveal in his texts on Leibniz, there is no sufficient reason that supports the principle of sufficient reason itself, while Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox forces us to concede that once our justifications of our actions have dried up, we 'obey a rule *blindly*'. The groundless ground is neither rational nor irrational, but non-rational. 'Original finitude' designates the ontological, epistemic and existential condition of creatures such as us who dwell upon these groundless grounds. This finitude is original because it has no counterpart. Whereas Kant's account of human finitude is a finitude that takes its measure from the immeasurable, defining itself in contrast to the unattainable ideal of infinitude, for Heideggerian-Wittgensteinian original finitude, the 'God's eye view' is not unattainable, it is incomprehensible, and not just incomprehensible 'for us', but as such. The metaphysical urge, as represented by the voice of temptation in Wittgenstein's *Investigations* and the tendency toward philosophical *Uneigentlichkeit* in *Being and Time*, has led us to falsify this basic, baseless condition since the dawn of philosophy. Wittgenstein and Heidegger return us to ourselves by espousing a finitude that is not second best, one that is not 'demarcated by a shared boundary with the infinite' (226). Braver sees in these concerns an 'ethics of

explanatory restraint' (209ff.), and his discussions of the ethical import of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's thought throughout the book constitute a valuable interpretive contribution to a topic that both philosophers more often than not passed over in silence.

One concern might be that in his enthusiasm to convince his audience of the viability and value of discussing Wittgenstein *and* Heidegger, Braver may occasionally (and by no means always) understate or blur the important and considerable differences that separate these two thinkers. I certainly agree with Braver's overarching claim that for both Wittgenstein and Heidegger explanation eventually forces us back to *a* groundless ground, but I am less certain that both thinkers tread the *same* groundless ground. To choose one instance, the claim that 'we can accept the grounding afforded by human nature and cultural norms as both all that is possible and all that is needed' (174) does not, I think, hold equally for both thinkers, as Braver seems to maintain. Similarly, if Wittgenstein might have found much to agree with in the first division of *Being and Time*, it is hard to imagine him following Heidegger one step deeper into the temporal grounding of care elaborated in division two. In the effort to establish an intellectual friendship between Heidegger and Wittgenstein, we must preserve also the frictions and tensions that make that friendship so intriguing. But for disagreement to be meaningful there must first be a framework of agreement (to borrow an insight from *On Certainty*), and Braver has thoroughly demonstrated that there is ample common ground upon which further discussion can unfold. The book is a joy to read, brimming with Braver's colourful illustrations, metaphors and coinages, and the congenial tone of Braver's prose offers a welcome counterpoint to the terse austerity of Wittgenstein and the soporific drone of Heidegger. At its high points, the exposition shows not only that Wittgenstein and Heidegger occasionally say similar things on similar topics, but more importantly that we can understand each better with the other. An impressive feat of ambidexterity, this is an exciting and fertile work, an invaluable reference for anyone interested in the emerging dialogue between the continental and analytic tradition, and a book that warrants further scholarly attention.

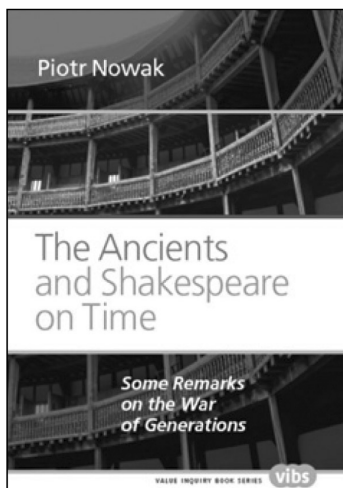
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# The Ancients and Shakespeare on Time

## *Some Remarks on the War of Generations*

Piotr Nowak



In *The Ancients and Shakespeare on Time* Piotr Nowak depicts a world where tradition — devoid of gravity, “Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything” — attempts to curb the young and new, while youth resists with all its power, vitality and characteristic insolence. The wars of generations, which Nowak explores in the works of Plato, Aristophanes and Shakespeare, pertain to the essence

and meaning of time. They make up the dramatic tensions in the transgenerational dialogue between the old and the young.

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