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Is Souriau Also Among the Sophists?

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Abstract. Whether viewed as unduly complex or necessarily ornate, Étienne Souriau's written style accents the importance of placing artistic form in conversation with intellectual content. In seeking to better understand Souriau's advocacy for a philosophy of instauration – the process through which an existence gains in existential formality – this essay examines how aesthetic tropes and devices order ontological meaning. First, it links Barbara Cassin's case for sophistical practice to Souriau's advocacy for ontological multiplicity. The essay then reads the 1956 essay "Of the Mode of Existence of the Work To-Be-Made" and Souriau's adjacent work as consciously rhetorical and profoundly aesthetic attempts to recruit others to his philosophical commitments. This account further discerns an array of rhetorical devices (e.g. chiasmus) in Souriau's work that function not merely to adorn description but rather to order an experience of the work-to-be-made. Attending to turns of language as contributing to reality necessarily raises questions of responsibility, so the essay's then reconsiders philosophy's long-standing charge of sophistic irresponsibility alongside Souriau's skewing of agency and choice through instauration. The essay concludes by considering the implications of Souriau's central concepts as filtered through sophistical practice as not incidental to philosophical aesthetics but a charge to philosophy to be responsible for promoting lesser existences in and across multiple modes.

Keywords: aesthetic responsibility, rhetoric, sophists, Souriau.

«Life proceeds by insinuation».
H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*

I. INTRODUCTION: SOMETIMES A BRIEF FLASH OF LIGHT

What is beauty? Typical to discussions of aesthetics, this question assumes that something like a unitary set of principles can be revealed with just the *right* kind of reasoning. That is, any one answer would necessarily seem to exclude – or at least not invite – multiple versions of beauty in favor of a single category against which beauty can be referenced and judged. Gilles Deleuze, in

Nietzsche and Philosophy, prefers an alternate avenue of questioning suggested by the Sophist Hippias, who instead of «what» asked «which one?» (Deleuze [2006]: 76). Not merely prevarication, this inflection speaks to the productive lines of inquiry pursued by a cadre of itinerant thinkers who dared to sift systematically amongst multiplicity instead of resorting to representative forms. «Asking which one is beautiful, which one is just and not what beauty is» Deleuze explains, «was therefore the result of a worked-out method, implying an original conception of essence and a whole sophistic art which was opposed to the dialectic» (Deleuze [2006]: 76). Platonic philosophy was hardly hospitable to these interlopers, yet «[s]ometimes a brief flash of light in the dialogues gives us a momentary indication of what the sophist idea was» (Deleuze [2006]: 76): a means to see multiple instances of beauty, multiple modes of becoming.

If the light of an «empirical and pluralist art» (Deleuze [2006]: 76) is but a flash in the dialogues, then it is fully ablaze in the aesthetic work of Étienne Souriau. Working against the grain of a discipline he charged as being «tendentious» (Souriau [2016]: 97) in its traditional adherences, Souriau over his career pursued a worked-out method for a pluralistic art attentive to multiple modes of existence. Given the Sophistic resonance of this ontology, we may find it interesting that the revival of Souriau is inclined to another concern of the sophists, dwelling on his discursive style – his *rhetoric* – with frequent allegations of excess. Introducing *The Different Modes of Existence*, Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour describe this «forgotten text of a forgotten philosopher» as «a constricted book, concentrated, almost jumbled together, in which it is easy to lose oneself, so dense are the movements of thought and the vertiginous perspectives which ceaselessly threaten to derail a reader» (Stengers, Latour [2016]: 4). Catherine Noske connects Souriau's «radical» obscurity to the fact that his «language is ornate and complex, his writing prone to detours of thought» (Noske [2015]: 36), while Steven Muecke finds that his vision of world «brimming with possible

becomings» is clouded by writing that is «pompous in style and with a haughty display of erudition» (Muecke [2016]). Yet if some find that his elaborations obscure his ontological light, others mark them as essential to his expression – e.g. Peter Pál Pelbart, who sees Souriau's «lofty language» giving necessary dimension «to a sort of metaphysics» that admits beings whose existences «that can neither be affirmed nor denied with precision» (Pelbart [2014]: 250).

From a classical standpoint, Deleuze's turn to the sophists' experiential aesthetics to propose a generative philosophical method is thoroughly subversive. After all, the sophist, as Barbara Cassin writes, has long been «the other of the philosopher, whom philosophy never ceases to expel from its domain and even from humanity itself» (Cassin [2014]: 30). Cassin would echo Deleuze, though, in suggesting that if applying a unilateral «standard of being and truth in order to judge the teaching of the sophist» requires it to be «condemned as pseudophilosophy» (Cassin [2014]: 30), then one must discard the normative metric. Against pervasive ontological and aesthetic degradation, she recovers sophistic practice as «a good tool, maybe even the best of the available tools» to enable us to «glimpse how artificial the border between the rational and the irrational is and perhaps reorganize the cosmos of philosopher» (Cassin [2014]: 28). In the notion of a sophistic practice that promotes alterity, this essay finds a starting point for its reading of Souriau. Whether viewed as unduly complex or necessarily ornate, the philosopher's aesthetics accent the importance of placing artistic *form* in conversation with intellectual *content*, a connective act for which Souriau indeed presses hard in his own work. We follow Souriau himself, then, in seeking to understand his advocacy for a philosophy of *instauration* – the process through which an existence gains in existential formality – by asking not «what» but «which» aesthetic tropes and devices order ontological meaning.

To unfold this argument, this essay proceeds in three interrelated movements. First, it links the fundamentally plural investments of what Cas-

sin calls sophistical practice to Souriau's case for ontological multiplicity, itself based in a reimagining of aesthetics as the inseparable companion of philosophy. Building on the link between sophistical practice and Souriau's aesthetics, the second movement reads the 1956 essay *Of the Mode of Existence of the Work To-Be-Made*¹ and Souriau's adjacent work as consciously rhetorical and profoundly aesthetic attempts to recruit others to his philosophical commitments – that is, to instaurate instauration itself. Upholding the generativity of sophistical practice, this account further discerns an array of rhetorical devices (e.g. chiasmus) that function not merely to adorn description but rather to order an experience of the work-to-be-made. Key to the essay is this section's recognition that sophistical practice along with instauration perform the creative repetition and repetitive creation by which modes of existence gain reality. Attending to turns of language as contributing to reality necessarily raises questions of responsibility, so the essay's third movement reconsiders philosophy's long-standing charge of sophistic irresponsibility alongside Souriau's skewing of agency and choice through instauration. Responsibility, mutually informed by Souriau and sophistical practice, refigures aesthetics as no mere surface concern but instead as the constitutive actions that make existences make sense and thus gain reality. Finally, the essay concludes by considering the implications of Souriau's central concepts as filtered through sophistical practice as not incidental to philosophical aesthetics but a charge to philosophy to be responsible for promoting lesser existences in and across multiple modes.

II. THE STORY FROM THE PROSTITUTE'S VIEWPOINT

So endemic is philosophy's allergy to sophistics, Cassin suggests, that «there are no philosophers who do not define themselves as opponents of the sophists (every definition of philoso-

phy must distinguish it from sophistics)» (Cassin [2014]: 44). Against this xenophobic reflex, her consciously disruptive project warrants re-admittance of this intellectual tradition with a radical reversal: «There is no philosophy without sophistics» (Cassin [2014]: 44). Following Walter Benjamin's imperative to retell the story from the viewpoint of the prostitute, «the bad “other”... whom one has not only the right but also the duty to shun» (Cassin [2014]: 12), her narrative inversion rewrites a sophistic history of philosophy, surfacing the rhetoric of the sophists as an engine for the «abundant and unstable inventiveness» (Cassin [2014]: 92) that unfolds in the historical emergence of literary forms so novel that they outmode genre itself. In doing, she coalesces *sophistical practice* as a fruitful means of «reproblematizing what is inside and outside, interior and exterior» (Cassin [2014]: 12). Under this auspice, the kind of practice that marked the sophist as deviant – promiscuous engagement with cosmology; theatrical discourse that served human triumphs over universal truths – is refigured as a spatially, temporally increasing «practice improving on chance» (Cassin [2014]: 28). Relaxing the tense binary of rhetoric and philosophy (the former becomes «a philosophical invention» the latter «the very first “rhetorical turn”» (Cassin [2014]: 72), a sophistic conception, according to Cassin, also differentiates *intention* to expand artistic domain. That is, «When one responds to the question of intention with the effect», as the sophists did, «one has shifted the grounds of the ethical problematic, the definitional shield of philosophy, onto another terrain, that of aesthetics» (Cassin [2014]: 43). Such a shift may be mobilized as additional evidence against the sophists but, when reconsidered through the work of Souriau, the shift to emphasize aesthetics as an ontological concern instead moves much of sophistical practice to become available resources for encouraging existence otherwise.

In aesthetics, we find affinity among the sophist's pluralistic investments and Souriau's engagement with ontology *through* and *as* multiplicity. Far from any attempt to catalog modes of exist-

¹ Mentioned as *Of the Mode* from here onwards.

ence exhaustively, Souriau limns modes to show that they *do* exist, pulling «lesser existences» onto planes of equivalent meaning and value alongside genres of existence more traditionally recognized. In greater and lesser degrees, the shared characteristic among each mode is «something unfinished or inconclusive» as David Lapoujade puts it, such that «it requires a “principle of amplification”, in short, the sketch for something bigger or better» (Lapoujade [2017]: 42). The bid of this *work-to-be-made* to become more real is what Souriau calls *anaphor* – a metaphysical enactment of the same self-referential yet creative repetition designated by the eponymous tropological class. Thus as Peter Pál Pelbart writes, «all his thought could be a harbinger of this call for a “work in progress”» in each instance clarifying that «it is not a matter of following a given project to be fulfilled, but to open up the field for a trajectory to be followed according to the questions, problems and unforeseen challenges, each of which must be addressed individually» (Pelbart [2014]: 251). What underpins this thinking is an aesthetics that, reimagined from a contained subset of philosophy, instead transformatively reconfigures ontology. This multiple, malleable aesthetics reflects not a distanced appreciation of form but rather the experience of laboring to make, an *aesthesis* that recruits and advocates for reality.

If the «entirety of Souriau’s thought is a philosophy of art» (Lapoujade [2014]: 4), then this platform gains detail in the 1954 *Art and Philosophy*. With some specificity, Souriau demonstrates that art and philosophy are so interwoven that any attempt to discard art must leave a «partial and deformed image» of philosophy (Lapoujade [2014]: 78). Their concrete relations, he says, are manifold: texts are bound up in historical epochs; philosophical and ontological influences bear on artistic production; aesthetics inflect conscious ascesis and subconscious constraints; texts cross domains of significance, and more. In sum, aesthetics are a collision of effects spanning from multiple modes, and these collisions are the stuff of philosophical practice. This interplay comprises a «test of precisely applying, to philos-

ophemes» a critical method that lays bare *instaurative* aims. The centerpiece of Souriau’s aesthetics, *instauration* reaches for the interior processes by which a work-to-be made moves into being. «“To instaure”» Pelbart clarifies, «does not so much refer to the act of creation as it does to the “spiritual” establishing of something, ensuring it a “reality” within its own genre» (Pelbart [2014]: 250). For Luce Vitry Maubry, instauration is foremost concerned with «the dialectical process through which a work of art captures spiritual value and manifests it to us [...] as a paradigm for the constructive process» (Maubry [1985]: 326). We may also say that instauration finds *all* constructive processes artistic in that they are emergent, always, in the intricate detailing of aesthetic labor. Whether viewed «as an organic ensemble of ideas, or as the shared expression of an intuition of reality, or even as a mode of existence or a mode of action» (Souriau: [2021]: 89), philosophy’s own anaphoric inclinations confirm its existence in the aesthetic realm. «Only a noninstaurative philosophy could claim not to be an act of art» Souriau insists, even as his rhetorical aside—(but would it even be a philosophy in that case?)» (Souriau: [2021]: 89) undoes the possibility that any philosophy could be so classified.

In Souriau’s oeuvre, there is perhaps no better philosopheme to which to apply the aesthetic test than the 1956 *Of the Mode* now translated into English and appended in *The Different Modes of Existence*. Initially a talk addressed to the French Philosophy Society, this essay turns fully to the «existential urgency» that, impressing itself upon the instaurator «both as deficiency and as presence of a being to be accomplished» (Souriau [2016]: 223) ignites creative process. A richly aesthetic effort to instaur instauration itself, this discourse on the enigmatic means by which «a possible makes its insistence felt with the character of an imperative» (Savransky [2020]: 183) has invited scholars to diverse elaborations of anaphoric amplification. Thus Martin Savransky speaks of «heterogenetic intensification», Jamie Brassett of «ontogenic production» (Brassett [2021]: 3). My own angle asks what «flashes of light» appear when

considering instaurative experience in concert with Souriau's philosophical aesthetics – with his rhetoric, conceived through sophistical practice.

Given that Cassin both recovers the sophists as historical figures and traces sophistical practice as an innovative philosophical vitality, it would seem not unreasonable to ask «is Souriau a sophist»? Parallels indeed come freely. Souriau, like the sophists, invests in questions about *which* beauty rather than *what* is beauty. His appeals to discard «real or not real» in favor of «more or less real» ontology readily evoke Cassin's «Protagorean affirmation», which seeks not a «falsity to truthhood» movement but rather migration «from a lesser good to a better state» (Cassin [2014]: 28). To the sophists fell the work of cataloging tropes and schemes; not dissimilarly, Souriau traces out modes of existence and instances of aesthetics toward a «derigidified, unschooled, and revitalized» philosophical work (Cassin [2014]: 80). Then there is Souriau himself, long sidelined by tradition perhaps because, he, like the sophist, «always asks one question too many, he always derives one consequence too many» (Cassin [2014]: 34). Yet to ascribe to Souriau any singular philosophical mode is arguably to undermine his own ontology. Better to say that taking Souriau's theory of aesthetics compels us to re-think sophistical practice, and that taking sophistical practice seriously prompts a re-reading of Souriau's aesthetics. Better to ask, like the witnesses of the prophet: *is Souriau also among the sophists?*

III. AS ONE INVENTS A TREASURE

Readers of Souriau have noted that the philosopher's aesthetics, always elaborate and often vexing, reflect in *Of the Modes* certain challenges of a fraught political and personal moment. This was 1956, thirteen years after the publication of *Les Modes*, seventeen after *L'Instauration philosophique*, but the general respect for Souriau's aesthetic theories had not carried into his work on modes of existence, received as difficult by many peers (Noske [2015], Brassett [2021]). The innova-

tion of this «lonely thinker» would fail to transform intellectual landscape within his lifetime, Vitry Maubry posits, not least because his «refusal of the well-trodden path» inflected both «the radical manner in which he repositied the problematics of knowledge» and «the language he has chiseled to present (one could almost say to hide)» (Maubry [1985]: 325) that thought. Yet despite his habit of compounding unorthodox ideas with nontraditional style, Souriau is noted to have felt the lack of contemporary acclaim keenly (Maubry [1985]). Then too, pervasive global conflict could only have underscored his conviction in the urgency of multiple ontologies. Perhaps entwined concerns with the state and future of humanity and his own work is what prompted him, more resolutely here than in some other treatises, «to couch his philosophical position in relation to art» (Brassett [2021]: 3).

Delivered to contemporaries at the Sorbonne, Souriau's address takes up «the existential incompleteness of every thing» (Souriau [2016]: 220) as central problematic. The sustained query into the work-to-be-made unfolds as an extended «appeal to a certain kind of experience» (Souriau [2016]: 219) that Souriau also attempts to create for his audience. From the outset, rhetorical questions and orchestrated examples announce a conviction that hosting, rather than merely explicating, an instaurative encounter is professional obligation: «What philosopher would want to affirm that a certain kind of experience exists if he were incapable of awakening the recollection and consciousness of a like experience in another?» (Souriau [2016]: 219-20). Toward this awakening, he leverages formal recruitment at the granular level, modeling a sophistical practice that is perhaps most apparent when conjuring the iconic aberrants: «Let us follow Plato when, with the approach of a demiurge, he instaures, so as to define, the Sophist» (Souriau [2016]: 227). If Plato unwittingly made the Sophists' modes of existence more real, Souriau intimates, then surely his own work of «ceaselessly adding new determinations» (Souriau [2016]: 227) can dispose «Mankind *qua* still to be instaured» (Souriau [2016]: 221). Nota-

bly, Souriau's advocacy remains in its impassioned yet deferential attempts to his fellow philosophers faithful to his ontological convictions, which in insisting that «entities that depend upon others for their existence» also implies that the acquisition of greater reality for any mode, not least the philosopheme, will require affinity and mutual regard (Brassett [2021]: 3). Toward that end, his invocations design against a common enemy: «the memory of Ockham's famous razor», which urges philosophers «to ask ourselves up to what point we can multiply beings without necessity» (Souriau [2016]: 224). Philosophical frugality resists ontological multiplicity, so his pleas to colleagues to be «struck by the richness of a reality multiplied» strive delicately to recruit—and not alienate—his community (Souriau [2016]: 224).

If *Of the Modes* opens with formal movements that construct and prime an instaurative experience, then Souriau signals entrance into this enigma with another choice example. To trace the «gradual transposition by which what at first was only in the virtual is metamorphosed in an instaurative approach» (Souriau [2016]: 224), he recalls the parable of Zhuangzi:

[O]ne night, Zhuangzi dreamt that he was a butterfly, fluttering about without a care. Then he awoke and realized that he was simply poor, old Zhuangzi. «Yet we cannot know», he adds, «whether it is Zhuangzi who awoke after having dreamt he was a butterfly, or whether it is the butterfly who dreamt that he became the waking Zhuangzi. Nevertheless», adds the philosopher, «there is a demarcation between. Zhuangzi and the butterfly. That demarcation is a becoming, a passage, the act of a metamorphosis. (Souriau [2016]: 224-5)

Invoking the butterfly's Chinese philosophic symbolism of eternal life, the Daoist fable has given rise to Eastern and Western interpretative traditions that range among the meaning of dreams, the challenge of defining reality, and the nature of spiritual awakening. The crux for Souriau, though, is the last salvo, the point at which the *distinction* between man and butterfly becomes indistinguishable from the *transition* of one to the other.

«Nothing is more philosophical», he says. «And thinking about it as I must, I have in it the principle of a solution to my problem» (Souriau [2016]: 225). A means to grasp that which eludes spatial and temporal registers for transformative process, the demarcation-becoming recoups «a sort of intimate and concrete impression of what we might call the course of the internal flow of spontaneous instaurations» (Souriau [2016]: 225) generated by the making experience. This making experience, key to all of Souriau's aesthetics, is demonstrated here by the remaking of what was there. That is, the transformation both affirms but transduces that which was present to make present a new invention.

No doubt this fable's placement reflects the philosopher's explicit aesthetics, the disciplined selection Souriau calls *artistic ascesis*. Yet perhaps we find a case of implicit aesthetics in that the allegorical *key* to his existential quandary is also *chi*, a device known to literary and rhetorical study as *chiasmus*. From the Greek χ , chiasmus put simply is a crossing structure wherein items in a series are inverted. Analogically, it uses grammatical transposition, as of subject and object; structurally, it inverts narrative symmetry more fully. Of the subset *antimetabole*, this particular chiasmus holds a playful possibility: if Souriau readers often find his sophisticated map esoteric, then here at least he marks a principal passage with a χ . Those inclined to enter will find chiasmic theories interacting generatively with the «actions, conditions, and approaches» (Souriau [2016]: 226) of instaurative inscrutability. Recall, for instance, Merleau-Ponty's framing of *chiasm* as «every perception doubled with a counter-perception» Merleau-Ponty [1968]: 264). From the embodied referent of the optic chiasm come literal and figurative conditions of possibility for perception wherein seen and unseen mandate each other. Likewise, consider rhetorical theories that find chiasmic patterning inverting power relations across world rhetorical traditions. Easily dismissed as an innocuous figure «for supplying a memorable sententious note or for performing a terpsichorean pirouette of syntax and thought» (Paul, Wiseman

[2014]: 1), chiasmus as Anthony Paul and Boris Wiseman write re-orders perception as dually «a process and a process of change» (Paul, Wiseman [2014]: 4-5).

From an aesthetics of «unusual images to blur our categories» (Pelbart [2014]: 252), the chiasmus as inversion *par excellence* makes us privy to movements that enact both sophistical practice and instaurative progress. Inverting terms established in one position suggests a topological refashioning that unbinds a problematic to which existing treatments of instauration attend minutely—any presumed exclusivity between creativity and repetition. Take Savransky's notion of *heterogenesis* as «the generation of a being that is “only able to be accomplished completely through the power of another being”» (Savransky [2020]: 223). Here, the oscillation by which the work-to-be-made draws the maker into its bid for existence becomes an «ontology of intensities» involving iterative yet progressive movement. Prising another vantage onto this process, chiastic inversion does not render instaurative progress precisely, but rather surfaces a constitutive reordering from which its conditions for possibility arise. From a «rhythmic arrangement of words that binds together meanings into a new, reparative, sequence» (Salazar [2014]: 124), chiasmus extends a sophistical invitation to more fully inhabit the impasse of the demarcation-that-is-becoming. As Souriau tells us, «each new instauration» performs «a promotion [...] according to an order that is certainly not temporal but to which time must be able to acquiesce» (Souriau [2016]: 95). Lawlor too invokes temporal inversion when he corresponds the inflection that separates creation from instauration to Deleuze and Guattari's delineation of philosophical history from philosophical time. If the former indexes a succession that «includes independent points but excludes repetition» (Lawlor [2014]: 404), then the latter deals in coexistence and *superposition*, which knows that «nothing can be produced without using previous traits, functions and features [...] instauration was *not possible the first time*» (Lawlor [2011]: 405). As with chiasm, so with the becoming of the work-

to-be-made: the butterfly could not have not so philosophically dreamed, had the philosopher not dreamed in *a priori* inverse.

The instauration of positive modes of existence is a matter of inventing, *Les Modes* relays, «as one “invents” a treasure» (Souriau [2016]: 162). This is the treasure – or the secret of its making – that Souriau marks with the χ . Zhuangzhi's chiasmatic butterfly alights in the remainder of the address, commuting the enigma of transformation to each of the schemas that further demystify instaurative process: the freedom, efficacy, and errability of the creator; the dynamic interplay among the work-to-be-made, work in concrete form, and agent; and the experiential aspects of an oscillation between «active and passive interrelations» (Souriau [2016]: 232). A detailing of the artist-to-art relationship «that could be taken in the chapter of the definitive» (Domenicali [2017]: 28), this immersive dive into instaurative experience builds from chiasmic inversion with no less a reversal than that of Kantian morality. That is, in rendering the creator as an instrument of a work that «exceeds him in sublimity», Souriau gives us to understand that «the artist is still himself this work to be done that he glimpses, as if in negative, in the mode of existence of the virtual» (Domenicali [2017]: 28). *The instaurator must be instaured*. In the next section, following Souriau's own conclusion, I will focus on the matter of the creator's *responsibility*.

IV. WHAT WE OWE THE WORLD

«What does philosophy hope to instaur?» *Art and Philosophy* defines a twofold aspiration. Initially, like art, philosophy wants «awareness of the present moment in its human totality, with all its riches, all its deficiencies, all its aporias, and all its aspirations, even when they are contradictory» (Souriau [2021]: 95). Yet the ultimate aim surpasses art: «It must assume a responsibility [...] of the total and truly anaphoric promotion, which coordinates the present moment with the future in accordance with a hierarchy» (Souriau [2021]:

95). *Responsibility* preoccupied Souriau over decades, as we are reminded by the conclusion of his Sorbonne address, which dwells at length on that «which falls to us with respect to all the incompleteness of the world» (Souriau [2016]: 238). Importantly, this usage does not subject constructive process to standard meanings of hierarchical duty or control. As discussed above, Souriau rejects the agency typically assigned to the creator, topologically inverting sculptor and sculpture, maker and made so that each impresses the other, enabling a movement that is iterative without being repetitive, progressive without being time-bound – *responsible* in its most situated and attuned sense. It does, however, urge us to consider what we owe the world with regard to that which is «only part-way along its course», especially when it applies to our capacity «to confer upon it an as yet unrecognized accomplishment» (Souriau [2016]: 239). That capacity is itself a work-to-be-made through practice, a practice we find being exercised repeatedly by the sophists.

As Cassin reminds us, philosophy has long scornfully rendered the Sophists, that infamous caste of Non-Athenian speakers and pedagogues who proselytized and monetized an adaptive rhetoric, as paradigmatic Other. There is perhaps no better known caricature artist than Plato, whose dialogues demonize the Sophists as deceivers and bad imitators. The direct derision of the *Gorgias*, the oblique ridicule of the *Phaedrus*, the ambient antagonism of the *Sophist* (or *Protagoras*) – all constitute a figure that is *irresponsible* by virtue (or vice) of being *too response-able*. That is, the Sophists loaned themselves to a multiple ethics antithetical to Platonism because it too quickly, too changeably conformed to the dictates of circumstance. Rejecting sophistry as an anti-philosophical modality, Cassin's recognition of the sophist accomplishment perceives not only the «real wealth» of «always having the logos ready to hand» (Cassin [2014]: 80) but also the attraction to change emergent from «a vast performance which, time after time, by means of praise and counsel, produces the consensus required for the social bond. This consensus is minimal, even

minimalist», Cassin explains, «because far from requiring a uniform unity, the sophisticated consensus does not even require that everyone think the same thing (homonoia) but only that everyone speak (homologia) and lend their ear (homophonia)» (Cassin [2014]: 37). Speaking and listening then echo and rehearse an array of actions inherent in instauration: promotion, advocacy, and bearing witness. From this *consequential relativism* comes a reminder: «we have to choose at every moment what it is best to propose or to answer and for whom» (Cassin [2014]: 28).

Extended to the sophistic of the work-to-be-made's becoming, this consequential choosing complicates responsibility in both ontological and aesthetical dimensions. Choice is a shape-shifter, perhaps, in the whole of instaurative thought. In *Art and Philosophy* Souriau suggests that the philosopher «does not choose» but that «choice is inherent in the anaphoric experience, which places the facts in an architectonic situation within the philosopheme» (Souriau [2017]: 91). *Of the Modes*, though, holds freedom of choice as essential with the ironic instance of Plato instauring the Sophists: his choice of these over other rhetorical examples, Souriau says, shows that «there is no doubt that whatever the guiding principle of this instauration may be, the instaurator is free to choose» (Souriau [2016]: 227). Choice is subject to and constrained by the dominion of that which calls to be made; yet when that unfinished work «imposes itself as an existential urgency – which is to say: both as deficiency and as presence of a being to be accomplished, and which manifests itself as such, as having a claim on us» (Souriau [2016]: 223), it is the creator's choice to succumb, to what degree and via what kind of constructive process. With Souriau's responsibility, we might say that instauration supersedes but always includes the maker's choice; with Cassin's consequential relativism, we might say that where there is choice, choice matters, guiding the nature, means, and course of what can be brought into being. A constraint, to be sure, but an *enabling constraint*.

Taken together, the conditions of perception opened by crossing sophistic practice with insatu-

ration prompt closer attunement to what we might call *aesthetic responsibility*, the ongoing participation in the anaphoric promotion of existences. That such a participation is always an act of advocacy for beings yet to come is supported by Pelbart. Echoing Lapoujade, he writes that making lesser existences more real also realizes us as «their witnesses, their advocates, their “existence-holders”» (Pelbart [2014]: 253). Creation entangles modes of existence, and this mutual dependence assuages the tensions of a fundamentally divided world. This is crucial for Pelbart, who sees our existence in an era deeply pathologized by oppression as nothing less than a «war between different modes» waged through «the daily rejection of “minor” modes of life, minority ways of living» (Pelbart [2014]: 256). These existences are «not only more fragile, precarious and vulnerable (poor, crazy, autistic), but also more hesitant, dissident, and at times more traditional than others (indigenous people); modes that are, on the contrary, still being born, tentative, even experimental (those still to come, to be discovered, to be invented)» (Pelbart [2014]: 256). Aesthetic responsibility, then, is a charge to make the weaker existence stronger.

We do not own those modes of existence we instaur, Souriau tells us; they are not our property but «rather an objective and a hope» (Souriau [2016]: 220). They do not belong to us, but we are responsible before their destinies. «The statue will not come about on its own accord; neither will future humanity. The soul of a new society does not happen by itself, we must work at it» (Souriau [2016]: 203). The labor of writing new worlds belongs to philosophical art, but it must admit the discomforting agitation of sophistical practice as an abundant *logos* that proliferates choice toward consensus for change. This composition faces no less pressing an imperative to «proceed well» (Souriau [2016]: 203) than the «war among modes» and its minoritization of existences. Some may find irony in modeling the sophistications of Souriau, given allegations of the philosopher’s own aesthetics as hindrance to his work’s advancement. But perhaps we can take a note from Daniel L. Smith, who submits that *difficult* writing «can be

seen as striving to “teach” [...] readers not only an ethics of encountering and responding to texts, but a general orientation to an ethics of encountering and responding to the multiplicity of existence» (Smith [2003]: 526). None of us owe the world less than an aesthetic responsibility committed to promoting multiplicity against totalizing singularity.

V. CONCLUSION: TO LABOR ON BEHALF OF LESSER EXISTENCES

For Deleuze, «a brief flash of light in the dialogues» (Deleuze [2006]: 76) irradiates the sophistic idea, illuminating the obscured promise of pluralistic art. Reflecting momentarily on the literal and figurative conditions of possibility for *seeing light* recalls Henri Bergson, whose theory of creative evolution dwells, like Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm, on the meanings of philosophical perception granted by optic biology. For Bergson, parsing diverse organic circumstances by which eyes adapt to receive the imprint of light addresses the ambiguity of a process that, folding instinct into intelligence, entwines «the convergence of simultaneous changes» with «the continuity of direction of successive variations» in evolutionary movement that is recurrent yet novel (Bergson [1948]: 77). Adaptive change is captured by the passive evolution of a pigment spot into a seeing eye: «[b]ut, from the fact that we pass from one thing to another by degrees, it does not follow that the two things are of the same nature» (Bergson [1948]: 79). It is also dramatized by the rhetor’s active effort to persuade: but «[f]rom the fact that an orator falls in, at first, with the passions of his audience in order to make himself master of them, it will not be concluded that to follow is the same as to lead» (Bergson [1948]: 79). Nature would appear to collapse them, but each oscillates within the vital impulse of a process driven, as instauration, by dually passive flux and active impetus in response to lived encounters.

Souriau might resist a close affiliation with creative evolution, perhaps citing the uniqueness

of chiasmatic demarcation. «This is Souriau’s anti-Bergsonism», Lapoujade explains, «he isn’t interested in duration as a long-term synthesis that gathers in upon itself [...] in the revelation that decides everything, the revelation we know will never fall back into the past because it is already establishing our eternal future» (Lapoujade [2021]: 41). In all constructive processes, the active and passive proceed in wafts and waves, swirling leading and following into rhythm. In a relevant anecdote from *L’Instauration philosophique*, translated by Lawlor, Souriau reflects again on the philosopheme (that is, philosophy as aesthetic responsibility) as more than «a simple making conscious»:

Do you know how one used to make those beautiful tissue papers that would cover capricious little glitzy ornaments? One poured into a bucket of water some buoyant colours that one moved with a reed, making the colours undulate with the movement of the water. And when the colours looked good, one collected them up with the sheet of paper, which was then dried. Even to suppose that the philosopher attracts only a reflection – the shimmering in his mind from thinking of the multiple actions of the world upon him and of him in his reactions – still it is necessary that he capture it, this reflection, and posit it separately in this microcosm of the philosopheme. The gesture that brings, that reconstitutes, that constitutes in a separate and completely spiritual world, that posits all these reflections at the end separately in being, this is the philosophical gesture par excellence. (Lawlor [2011]: 402)

Sophistical practice dilates this image, arguably, as a reminder of the philosopher’s art. It arrays, that is, gestural resources yielded up by the sophistical mode of existence, the vast discursive possibilities for rendering color or capturing “glitz” – not in the superficial sense of adding stylistic flair, but rather in answer to the profound challenge of constituting the unique radiance of the work-to-be-made. *This is aesthetic responsibility: the imperative to labor on behalf of lesser existences*. Yet again, Souriau cautions against inflating the creator’s agency. In all instances, «intuition, meditation and reflection itself are still only pre-

paratory acts. They are unleavened bread: imperfect sketch, existence that has not yet undergone the essential test of emancipation and of autonomous subsistence» (Lawlor [2011]: 402). Aesthetic responsibility is irreducible to moral correction or even creative ethics in and of itself. Sophistics has freedom in defining obligations to lesser existence, but Souriau’s “flash of light” rekindles and kindles the amalgam of active and passive engagements that constitute situational response. «The philosophical labour results in the work [œuvre], and the work, by passing the shock back, illuminates the world from which it came» (Lawlor [2011]: 401).

What does philosophy hope to instaur? Hope, it must be said, is poignant as regards this philosopheme. Through whatever twist of autotelic kairos, the dream of «a common, instaurative vocation, which would be of a total, human significance and would be like the common framework for the expressions, whether philosophical or artistic, of the human anaphor» (Souriau [2021]: 94) remained a lesser existence in Souriau’s own. Yet we are now in the moment of his recovery and within the anaphoric rise of instauration. We view the esteem of Isabel Stengers, said to have read all of Souriau’s writing; its carriage into the thought of Bruno Latour, Vinciane Despret, and on in that network of «string figures», per Donna Haraway, whose influences permeate whole worlds of criticism. Squint a bit, and we see hints of instauration in Deleuze and Guattari’s ontologies; in Gilbert Simondon’s techno-aesthetics; in the aesthetic revival associated with Jacques Ranciere, and so on. Perhaps these movements of passive absorption as well active adoption reflect the aesthetic pleasure of assent through form to content, a succession to sophistical practice not as mastery but as a shifting affinity among modes by which an existence finds passage from one degree of reality to the next. The creator instaurs existence, but existence instaured exceeds the creator. Matter adapts to circumstance even as circumstance adapts to matter. «Where it has to direct a movement, it begins by adopting it. Life proceeds by insinuation» (Bergson [1948]: 79).

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