

# Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

## Reading Philosophy Through Archives and Manuscripts

*edited by*

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## What can we learn from philosophical manuscripts and archives?

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Manuscripts became more accessible items only in very recent times, after having been handled as for-specialists-only relics along decades if not centuries. Nonetheless, it is still usually the case that only researchers working on the critical edition of a writer's work, or archivists in charge of related collections, develop specific knowledge on the author's manuscripts and archival materials. Work on autographs requires time, it does not easily match the pace imposed on contemporary research and intellectual production in general. Archivists, editors, scholars working on manuscripts know the complexity of the information transmitted by such papers, as the irreducible idiosyncrasy of each writer's archive.

Philosophical manuscripts are an even less known kind of object. Some of the "initiations" which one must undergo, if she's stubborn enough to will to deal with such enigmatic documents, are similar to those experienced by colleagues handling literary papers: the first one required consists, naturally, in getting acquainted with someone else's handwriting. But that's just the beginning. Following steps include challenging tasks, such as becoming familiar with strategies in composition, techniques for storage *ad usum sui* of notes and quotes, recurrent abbreviations, codes used in drafts or while scribbling *marginalia*, ways of synthesizing when sketching for a speech or a lesson... Not only are these materials richer in layers of qualitative information when compared to the printed page (the aspect of the handwriting, the kind and quality of the paper, the symbols and drawings used to implement the text, all convey contents that can be methodically analyzed, but are often grasped more intuitively): they require different skills and a different methodology in analysis and interpretation.

Since manuscripts of an author are the only surviving traces of a living process of elaborating, wording and sharing thought, it doesn't seem absurd to compare the complexity of such "*corpora*" to an organism whose specialized parts work together as organs relating in turn to other portions as to the whole *in time*. Such interrelated topologies within the collections or streams in the evolutive transformation of a project; symmetries and kinships within sets of manuscripts; the shift in meaning appearing by repositioning parts of a *corpus* after reconsidering their classification; the peculiar logics in reading and composing appearing through the study of the material in support of the writing; the strategies in criticizing and self-censorship in editing displayed by underlined and erased words... all these phenomena appear to the reader almost like specters after long exposition to one author's manuscripts: they are effects of stratification in time, they require acquaintance to be perceived.

Of such "aesthetic" cognition of philosophical texts, distilled in the form of a long-term trained knowledge of archives, the reader often becomes aware only when she dares moving to the study of a different author. Such landing in a new continent feels similar to the experience of a journey abroad: possibly a different language, surely new maps to discover and draw, as-yet-unknown customs and a tangible shift in the surrounding atmosphere. At the same time, investigation on a new *corpus*, often reveals *ex post* the methodology that had been previously and more or less consciously built to travel across our first writer's papers. As writing methods display the idiosyncrasy of an author, the researcher approaching a different field of inquiry in the form of a new set of collections becomes aware of the specificity of the methods she had empirically crafted before, as she has to adjust them and have them fit the requirements of the new object of study.

When we come to tracking the genesis of some conceptual constellation across philosophical manuscripts, the matter is even more delicate. First, on a very empirical level, as mentioned above, it is mainly for the sake of scholarly editing or highly specialized exegesis that researchers

that are not trained philologists recur to manuscripts. This means that it is even rarer for a specialist in philosophy to acquire skills and experience on more than a single archive. Beside such *subjective* obstacle, on the way of the building of a specific approach to and a shared methodology for the study and the edition of philosophical manuscripts, several features of the objects stand as obstacles themselves.

All writing is an attempt to translate an inner experience (usually self-represented as pre-verbal) into words, an attempt to make thoughts fit the mold of a language. Nevertheless, conceptual writing is not only a battle with oneself as the author often struggles in building bridges between different speculative traditions and established theories. In the elaboration of their texts, philosophers constantly produce and recreate the image of the cultural and theoretical heritage they address, either to embrace or to confute it. In this measure, what we call philosophy is not only a creative act of thinking rooted in a living experience and grounded in an existential perspective, but also a textual production involving an often-explicit dialogue with one's own culture. A dialogue that appears, moreover, structured around epistemic paradigms and specific intellectual goals, dealing with determined criteria of validity as with procedures, forms and styles supposed to better fit such epistemological ambitions. Despite claiming to universality, philosophical statements are the result of negotiations between individual expression and shared vocabularies. Precisely the thick medium of expression – the whole set of literary dynamics implicitly involved in the writing of philosophy, for instance – is easily forgotten, the discipline itself being traditionally focused on the theoretical contents assessed rather than on her own ways of expressing them, as is the case for literature.

Indeed, the study and edition of philosophical manuscripts delivers a vast array of information in this regard, well exceeding the limits of the texts themselves. The archive allows the scholar to study the emergence of concepts and to trace the production of abstract vocabulary beyond the

static representations offered by the printed book. It reveals how abstract thought originates from working with the multi-layered fabric of language.

In this measure, manuscripts and archives uncover, for instance, the heterogeneous range of sources that inspired the formulation of ideas. Archival work also helps us observe how each thinker creates for herself an eclectic landscape of references, a galaxy of conceptual networks which hardly ever belong to a single language or national tradition. Although we like to think that theory is universal, the perspective offered by archives, personal libraries and manuscripts shows us that abstraction is also a matter of languages and codes, and reveals the work of the thinker/writer as a cultural mediator between all such codes. This suggests a different paradigm for the analysis of conceptual productions, one that focuses less on values of neutrality and universality and more on those of integration and synthesis.

Through the study of archives, one can consider the evolution of theoretical thought as an embodied adventure, experienced firsthand, and the history of the discipline as a dynamic and collective process. In a relatively recent book, French philosopher Pierre Macherey criticized the notion of «national philosophies»<sup>1</sup> and contested its heuristic value in understanding the history of philosophy. He showed that theory should be seen as the history of successive “hybridizations”, such as illustrated by Victor Cousin “importing” Hegel to France, or by the reception of Kant relayed by Jules Barni. The concept of “nationality” itself, rooted in the Romantic idea of one land, one people, one language, seems more and more out of date when confronted with categories such as postmodernity, creolisation and globalisation. In this regard the work of thinkers, when seen through the lens of their manuscripts and archives, offers us models for cultural mediation: archival research reveals that the language of theory is the result of a conceptual syncretism between

various codes and traditions and contributes to the disclosure and reconfiguration of heterogeneous world-conceptions, sedimented in the verbal matter of the papers.

Having been scarcely used in the study of philosophy so far (neither in the writing of its history, nor in the exegesis of its published texts), philosophical manuscripts can indeed help unfolding a different understanding of the discipline, helping reveal the underlying *practices* related to the *writing* of texts: the multiple layers and various versions of texts; the continuity of the struggle with some theoretical problems; the interactions with peers and students; the hesitations, doubts, uncertainty lying behind so many universal statements; the role played by circumstances, travel, meetings and so much more we do not necessarily tend to associate with abstract discourse. While genetic criticism has developed since the 1970s an important set of tools and a philological methodology<sup>2</sup> specific to the study of authors’ manuscripts, little has been done to elaborate guidelines when dealing with philosophical or theoretical archives<sup>3</sup>.

Theoretical manuscripts are odd objects that have only recently started to receive proper atten-

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<sup>2</sup> In Italy, philologists such as F. Moroncini and S. Debenedetti took into consideration variants witnessed by author’s manuscripts since the late 1920s, but mainly in the purpose of scholarly editions. Aiming at substantiating a perspective on literary texts competitive to the dominant aesthetic paradigm proposed by B. Croce, G. Contini went even further in his essay “*Come lavorava l’Ariosto*” (in *Esercizi di lettura*, Firenze, Parenti, 1939). Nonetheless, such researches could hardly be considered as anticipating genetic criticism because of their different scope. Partially in response to French structuralism, J. Levaillant’s pioneering work opened the way to an understanding of autographs as traces witnessing more dynamic writing processes than texts. Such perspective on manuscripts opened the way to a further appreciation of their non-verbal contents, as to various attempts to rethink notions such as work and authorship later developed by contemporary genetic criticism. However, a certain affinity can be observed, probably due to the influence of Paul Valéry’s work on both philological schools.

<sup>3</sup> The issue “*Philosophie*” (P. D’Iorio and O. Ponton ed.) of the journal *Genesis* (22, 2003) can be mentioned as possibly the only specific reference in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Macherey, *Etudes de philosophie française. De Sieyes à Barni*, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2013, 400p.

tion. In France, for instance, an important set of manuscripts by Michel Foucault has been declared of national interest (“trésor national”) in 2012 and bought by the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* for such a high price that even national daily press ended up covering the news. Less than a decade before, in 2004, much less attention had been paid to Derrida leaving his archives to IMEC<sup>4</sup>. It is also worth noting that in Europe the creation of archive centers holding philosophical manuscripts has allowed the gathering and preservation of important data. These centers have enabled the survival of the memory of abstract writing and conceptual thought and allowed those materials to survive. Furthermore, thanks to the contemporary development of digital humanities, such documents are becoming more and more accessible and achieving a well-deserved attention.

Nonetheless, the creativity expressed by researchers and archivists through their coming up with *ad hoc* tools so as to edit, publish or interpret entire sets of manuscripts has not reached a common methodological standard yet. As poetry drafts differ, for instance, from sketches for a novel in their intrinsic logic and so far in the strategy their interpretation requires, the writing of philosophy and its documental traces entail a specific understanding. Moreover, in regard of literary papers, research in genetic criticism has already come up with a shift in its ontology underlining the charm and bias hidden in any “teleological approach” to manuscripts<sup>5</sup>: drafts are to be approached as interpretable documents *per se* rather than as sheer traces of the preparation of a work to come. In this perspective, it is the process and not the final product to be considered the “*ergon*” of literature.

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<sup>4</sup> I had developed some considerations on the very recent history of philosophical archives in the article “*L’écriture de la philosophie*”, in *Littérature*, 178, June 2015, p. 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Grésillon, *Éléments de critique génétique*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 1994, p. 164-168 ; P. M. De Biasi, *Génétique des Textes*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2011, p. 184-189 and D. Ferrer, « La toque de Clementis. Réroaction et rémanence dans les processus génétiques », *Genesis*, 6, 1994, « Enjeux critiques ».

Such methodological advancement naturally enabled materials unrelated to a published (or even to an unpublished) project to be given proper attention and promoted the edition of new kinds of posthumously published texts. And what about philosophical papers? Together with the contemporary development of digital editions, such perspective seems to have had an impact also on the edition of unpublished philosophical manuscripts. An example might be the publication of notes for lectures and classes, which became almost a “literary genre” in the last two decades. But what can such renovated sensibility to such materials teach us about what the *work* of philosophy, its *ergon*, is?

Seen from the perspective of a thinker’s manuscripts, philosophy seems to be more a matter of production of an abstract vocabulary along a continuous process of reformulation, than a series of published works. From such a standpoint, the study of the *writing* of philosophy through its archives appears to be a field of research that differs both from the analysis of literary manuscripts and from the study of theories on the grounds of printed books or history of ideas.

As we sit in front of a handwritten page, language, that is the *medium* of philosophy and of abstract thinking, becomes tangible in the form of erased words and blank spaces. As these signs tell better than anything else, there is no conceptual creation without a painstaking work on language’s limits and structures. Moreover, hesitations, rewriting, erased passages and corrections show that the work of philosophy is not only a negotiation with the ineffable borders of the verbal expression, but also a constant dialogue with the vocabulary shared with peers, students and sources. Philosophy appears from such perspective on its *medium* a continuous one-to-her-cultural-horizon dialogue. The dynamics of self-censorship or censorship *tout court* let appear quite intuitively the interaction between the author and her cultural surroundings. The archive is a theater of forgotten books and become-too-implicit *querelles*. At the core of what seems to be the most intimate and abstract – the cabinet of the thinker alone with her game of flashes and ideas – lie the most

evident traces of the interaction with consciousness *in time and history*.

Manuscripts are *multidimensional objects* in a *multidimensional space*. Their being *one corpus* takes the form of a documental network, that could virtually be browsed in infinite ways, according to possible classifications, criteria, supports, representations. From the standpoint of manuscripts and archives, the verbal medium of theory is part of a device of higher complexity compared to the linearity of the reading of a book, where information unfolds across multidirectional paths, being these objects at the same time text carriers and documents “*en chair et os*”. From the reader’s standpoint, beside a conceptual understanding of the texts, an ability to grasp the complexity of such multilayered displays of the wording of thought is thus required.

A third element I would like to mention when raising the question about the *ergon* of philosophy in the light of its archives, is the *peculiar dynamic ontology* – different from that of the printed books – manuscripts confront us to. The researcher who chooses to work on the ground of the philosophical archive is more likely to be sensitive to the *continuity* in the life and story of an author’s work. A sort of line of evolution seems to appear across different attempts to *express* what is witnessed by the manuscripts. Such act might follow non-linear paths and get lost in unfinished essays, revolve around unsolved dilemmas and resurface in orally shared texts. Drafts, reading notes, diagrams and sketches are the *continuum* through which we come to know or by which we are invited to represent the specificity of an approach to philosophical problems. They let emerge the daily confrontation of a thinker and writer with her own questions as with the answers provided by tradition. From such perspective, the production of theory appears rather “stream”-based than object-based, and the observation of what lies behind the curtains of the philosophical scene, reveals the *performing* features of such discipline. In other terms, philosophy appears as an *exercise and a constant interpellation*, a *dialogical practice* related to specific and concrete contexts. The study of correspondences

as of unpublished discourses and teaching materials discloses a history of philosophy much more rooted in sharing modes. *Marginalia* can give us a portrait of the writer as a reader. The notes taken for courses and seminars give life to the professional philosopher, most of the time earning her life teaching, and most of the time nourishing her own discourse with the interactions with peers and students.

Genetic criticism has certainly explored the different logics corresponding to different *scales of observation* on manuscripts: from the complex genesis of major works to the dissection of a single *folio*. In this regard, the work on philosophical archives can be understood as the exploration of different hermeneutic amplitudes. The choice of a single word can be already revelatory of a perspective on philosophy itself, as witnessed for instance by the late Maurice Merleau-Ponty borrowing all his key concepts from literature instead of using a theoretically encoded language: a criticism of western philosophy in a nutshell. At odds, we could imagine a study dealt not on one single corpus but on a whole network of philosophers. However, this latter would be the aim for a *collective* work, as that of the present volume.

As mentioned above, research on philosophical manuscripts is being done mostly by highly specialized researchers, teams and institutions, in scattered places and settings all around the world. The work on manuscripts is akin to hunting, in terms of finding and using techniques to be adjusted on the specificity of the prey. The downside is such scattered competences make it even harder to establish a shared methodology in the analysis and edition of such materials. Collecting twelve articles on philosophical manuscripts, the present volume aims at providing the reader with a mosaic of samples taken *in vivo*, so to speak, from the work on the field. This is how such “anthology” aims at revealing different aspects and recurrent issues, a whole spectrum of topics and a variety of approaches. It is easy to observe that most of the articles refer to a single corpus: the volume itself grants the reader an opportunity to go through the richness of such prism in an expe-



rience that, in this regard, is similar to the exploration of the collections of an archive. It is up to the reader to draw lines of continuity and underline similarities in the presented readings of European and non-European authors' manuscripts, belonging to thinkers from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dealing with interpretations or critical editions, with more theoretical or rather pragmatic issues characterizing the work on philosophical archives.

Several papers discuss the transition from manuscripts to a critical edition of texts or the impact of the history of editions on the reception of philosophical works and authors. Others deal with the history of archives and the latter's role as mediators in an implicit dialogue with the reader's horizon, as shapers of the borders of the work of an author, or with the scientific or even political responsibility of such institutions. Some describe up close peculiar strategies in writing as aspects revealing ways of thinking. Others let us understand fragments of the personal trajectory of a thinker behind the apparently unshaped materials of some unpublished drafts, revealing his struggles in the often-difficult interaction with colleagues and across the sometimes dramatical contingencies of history. All provide the reader with insights in the work of major thinkers belonging to the history of European, Afro-Caribbean and Indian philosophy that certainly will surprise those acquainted with approaching such body of thought from printed books only. They all face philosophy as a *process* through the lens of its writing. The reader may be surprised by how such dynamic understanding of the discipline allows a deeper appreciation of the awareness shown by thinkers of the literary aspects of their work when observed in the making of their texts. This also enables a better understanding of the relationship between abstraction and *time*: that of individual existences, cultural moments, seasons of debates and historical phases, but also that of the making of the archives along with the shaping of the public image of an author.

The present volume features texts by scholars and archivists who have long been working on

some of the most important philosophical *corpora* preserved in the *global* history of the discipline. After several years spent on philosophical archives, it became clear to me that only gathering voices and fostering debate amongst such actors could possibly contribute to a perspective on philosophy, its history and its expression as a dynamic, transcultural and interactive process. In order to sustain this direction, first I organized, in collaboration with Thomas C. Mercier, a conference entitled «The Wording of Thoughts: philosophy from the standpoint of its manuscripts and archives», hosted and financed by C.E.F.R.E.S. (*Centre Français d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, Prague, U.S.R. 3138, C.N.R.S./M.E.A.E.) with the contribution of several international partners. Published with the support of C.E.F.R.E.S. and the University of Florence, the present issue of *Aisthesis* moves a step further along this path presenting readers, possibly for the first time, with a rich collection of observations grounded on the work dealt in first person on philosophical papers spanning across three continents and three centuries. In our hopes, this will be a first invitation to a further dialogue yet to come.

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Besides a set of papers specifically addressing the topic "Archives" from a variety of perspectives, authored by Fabrizio Desideri, Marina Montanelli, Thomas Clément Mercier, Francesco Vitale, Daniela Helbig, Emanuele Caminada, Jean Khalfa, Ondřej Švec, Alois Pichler, Arianna Sforzini, Richard Hartz and Peter Heehs, this issue of «Aisthesis» also includes a selection of articles on other themes (section «Varia») by Maja Jerrentrup, Nigel Mapp, Tommaso Morawski.

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## The Autographic Stance. Benjamin, Wittgenstein and the Re-Shaping of the Philosophical Opus. About Manuscripts, Fragments, Schemes, Sketches and Annotations<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Starting from the peculiar tension between figure and writing in Walter Benjamin's philosophical thought, my contribution aims to define the relevance of manuscripts, schemes, fragments and annotations for the definition of philosophical textuality. Analyzing Benjamin's writings belonging to this genre (for example, the preparatory works for the essay dedicated to Goethe's *Elective Affinities* or for the essay on Kafka), as well as the fragmentary observations belonging to Novalis' *Allgemeines Brouillon* and Nietzsche's *Posthumous Fragments*, the processual dimension of philosophical thinking will be emphasized. In this theoretical context the processual moment of textuality can be put in tension with the moment defined by the work in its insular completeness. Finally, one wonders if the most appropriate form of philosophical thought in our era of digital production and transmission of knowledge does not really lie in the flow dynamics of textuality. In conclusion, it will remain to be clarified how the autographic moment of philosophy can be thought of in the digital age of knowledge. To this last extent, a good example would be eventually given by Walter Benjamin's archive in Berlin that contains in fully digitalized form both edited texts and manuscripts.

**Keywords.** Autographic stance, autographicity, Walter Benjamin, Jean Starobinski, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, textuality & unity of thought, Romantic fragments, schemes, opus philosophicum.

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Can we speak of an autographic dimension in philosophy, similar to the application of this concept to works of art as suggested by Nelson Goodman in the famous *Languages of Art*? If we do not intend

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this essay was published in Italian with the title, *La dimensione autografica in filosofia. Prima e dopo l'opera*, in Nizzo, Pizzo (2018): 177-185. I express my gratefulness to Ursula Marx and the Walter Benjamin Archiv (Akademie der Künste, Berlin) for the kind permission to use the pictures of Figures number 1, 2 and 3.

to make a vaguely metaphorical or ingenuously speculative use of the notion of autography for philosophical writings, we must define the conditions and predict the consequences. The first condition is more general and as such it precedes the direct specific consideration of the philosophical discourse, of philosophy in its linguistic expression. It is a condition that directly concerns the iconic nature of writing as handwriting. In the famous pages of the crucial book *Origin of the German Baroque Drama*, Walter Benjamin addresses this issue, namely the relationship between image and writing, introducing the figure of Johann Wilhelm Ritter, the author of the *Fragments from the Notebook of a Young Physicist*, where the theme of the relationship between writing and image is considered starting from the so-called “Chladni figures” («those lines that form various patterns on a sand-covered glass plate as various tones are sounded») (Benjamin [1926]: 231).

The Ritterian conclusion that Benjamin values is primarily about the fact that writing is an image of the sonority of the word: icon of the word *verbum* in its utterance. Through the writing is iconically revealed the original relationship between idea and language, that is the co-belonging of thought and word. Therefore, not only does thinking coalesce (it co-evolves) with language, knowing its own articulations through its means, but of this mutual development, of such a co-implication of thought and word (of the discursiveness itself of thinking) writing becomes an expressive image. In Benjamin’s reflection this is signified by the hieroglyphic instance that pertains to the scriptural graph, to its being a sign that has the indicative value of a trace. Here Benjamin agrees with Ritter’s proto-romantic thesis about the origin of language, consisting first in underlining that «word and writing are originally one». By an “electric” way Ritter is therefore in search of the natural foundation of an “original writing” where every word is anchored to the matter of the sign and is formed by it.

To this scriptural dimension consisting in a virtuous circularity of cross-references between word-thought, sign-letter and image, Ritter brings

back not only verbal language, but every artistic language: «In such inscription and transcription belong preeminently all plastic arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, and so forth» (Ritter [1810]: 146, quoted by Benjamin [1926]: 232)<sup>2</sup>. As if Ritter accessed through a paradoxically literal route to the question of a more radical autographic stance at the origin of art, an instance that precedes the same Goodmanian partition between autographic and allographic arts. This partition, as we know, is based on the fact that what distinguishes the former (the autographic ones), where it matters in an ontological and archaeological sense – also in the sense of implying a hierarchical filiation – the distinction between original and copy, from the latter (those allographic) is that the latter makes use of a symbolic system on a notational basis. In a notational system, in fact, each character is valid as the replica of a type based on certain sign characteristics (marks) that differentiate it from other characters. The autographic dimension of writing stands in evident tension with this notational dimension of the symbolic system specific to the verbal language on an alphabetic basis (grounded on the compositional nature of disjoint letters and on their finite differentiation as types or classes of inscriptions), as if it came to an image in it – as Benjamin specifies in a letter to Scholem of March 5, 1924 – the grain of the voice, its unmistakable timbre.

Following this thread of thought we can also argue that by the autographic instance inherent in the philosophical writing, the latter (especially as considered from the point of view of the corpus of manuscripts of a philosopher) attests and testifies that dimension of the living word from which the philosophical discourse draws its own birth. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Colli, to whom we owe, together with his pupil Mazzino Montinari, the critical edition of Nietzsche’s works, insisted on this origin of philosophy from the power of the living word as a sometimes violent expression of

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<sup>2</sup> As translator Howard Eiland notes, «Inscription and transcription» translates here «Schrift und Nachschrift, Abschrift».

thought. The same Platonic *Dialogues*, we might add, are an expression of this origin, a tendency to keep its relevance alive. Here, however, the autographic tension, the tension that the matter of writing is tracing, is still all in the literary form, in the *theatrum* of that discursive intertwining that the Platonic *eironeia*, reminiscent of that heard by Socrates, puts on stage. Nor, on the other hand, perhaps resorting to the Plato of the *Letters*, we can limit ourselves to declining this tension as that existing between the doctrine that finds a written formulation and that which refuses the public and allographic dimension of writing. Of this one as well there could be some resonant image that consigns it to the expressive trace of the letter. But this is not the problem we intend to investigate. Rather, it is a matter of understanding to what extent the autographic instance can involve and mark in some way the identity of a philosophical thought, assuming that an autographic stance marks the origin of every philosophy. For this reason, it is necessary to adopt an extensive concept of autographicity, to include in it not only the subject of writing that feeds the corpus of the manuscripts, but also those peculiar textual forms that are usually considered as a preparation or a thematic prelude to the true works of an author: from the essay, to the article, to the book, to the treatise. We mean, that is, those textual forms that consist of the note, the margin annotation, the fragment, the study, the outline, the sketch. If we include these textual forms, usually not intended for publication while the author is alive, as full expression of the autographic stance, this can no longer be limited to a consideration of the variants or paths attempted and then set aside by the philosopher in the drafting of a Work. What we propose, in short, is to assume a different point of view in considering the overall philosophical work of an author as a document and expression of his thought, both in its unity and in its development (regardless of the fact that this unit and/or development are traversed by fractures and defined by periods and turning points). Usually, unity, coherence and development of a philosopher's thought are punctuated by the reference to his works in

the traditional sense of the term, starting from the sequence of the texts delivered to the prints. These are ultimately the comparison meter, the chance to make comparisons *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

However, we can assume a different point of view, if we apply to philosophers what the eminent critic Jean Starobinski claims about authors in the literary field in an essay, published in 1997 in the journal "Conférence" (5, pp. 167 -197), with the emblematic title *La perfection, le chemin, l'origine* (*Perfection, Way, origin*):

*The loss of the primacy of the Work and the importance attributed to the preparatory states are therefore correlated phenomena: one implies the other. Today we like to see the succession of a series of different moments, an adventurous journey where each leg is as legitimate as the previous one, so that these different moments are ultimately indifferent.* (Starobinski [1997]: 184)<sup>3</sup>

In his acute diagnosis, Starobinski proposes to go back to the infancy of the work, to that initial stuttering that is configured as pre-text, down to «stretching and fragmenting the moment of the Work» as if it were composed of «a succession of provisional totalities». To privilege the series as formed by fragments and attempts rather than the compactness and completeness of the Work could invite, in the case of a philosopher, to assume even more radically the point of view of the origin of his thought, not only as an initial move or a still stuttering genesis, but as the essential opening of an order of the philosophical discourse characterized by a timbre of its own and punctuated internally by Ideas or Thought-Monads rather than by Works. The origin, therefore, of an ideal continuum that can be configured in the synchronic and tendentially systematic figure of a Unity of Thought.

It is in light of this conceptual continuum that we can speak of the Unity of Thought or of the peculiar philosophy of an author, while preserving the intimate problematic and the possibility for

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<sup>3</sup> This text by Starobinski was also published as an addendum to a Portfolio by Winters (2001).

it to be crossed by fracture lines, internal jumps, hiatus, unresolved aporias. Without the presupposition of this possibility, the understanding of a philosophy as an understanding of the thought of an author who gives it its own name (so that we can speak of Kantian or Hegelian Thought, even knowing how many differences, transformations or oppositions, similar wordings may imply) would risk dissolving itself by a historicistic way in the various moments of its becoming, to the point of tarnishing its own identity. On the other hand, such an approach might sound rather idealistic. To the prevention from this risk stands, precisely, the need to assume as a constitutive correlative of this ideal and problematic continuum, in which the identity of every philosophical author is recognizable, the textual continuum: the textuality that configures in the form of writing a philosophical thought. By the framing of this original connection overloaded with tensions between the conceptual continuum of thought and the textual continuum, it is necessary to rethink the very relationship between philology and philosophy. Every single moment of a philosopher's textual continuum, the autographic stance of his thought, is no longer considered and studied as a function of the Work he prepares or of which it constitutes the variation, but acquires a value in itself; a value that relates, even in the form of a short circuit, with those constellations of ideas, with those conceptual monads, which structure the philosophy of an author from the inside. In this context, it is not only the manuscript that demonstrates with plastic evidence the autographic stance in philosophy. This process is also performed by textual units with their own autonomous physiognomy - textual units such as fragments, schemes, sketches, annotations, glosses - that in the corpus of the writings of a philosophical author come to give expression to the attempt and to the experimental character of his thought.

Rather than the figure of completeness, such as the Work in its insularity could still indicate, these textual forms of an insuppressibly autographic nature, precisely because they are decisive for the tension between the original and its replicas (its

reformulations and repositions), testify for the experimental and intrinsically fluid and dynamic nature of Thinking. Here, by virtue of the autographic instance at the origin of these textual units, the unity of thought tends towards the icastic character of the figure and becomes a Thought-Image: *Denkbild*. Some Benjaminian schemes, for example the one dedicated to Anthropology (Fig. 1: Walter Benjamin, Scheme on *Anthropologie*, AdK, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archiv 1200. Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur), probably composed in the summer of 1918 and in any case extremely significant for the first theological-metaphysical phase of Benjamin's thought but also for some constants that go through all of his reflection (from the link between corporeity and

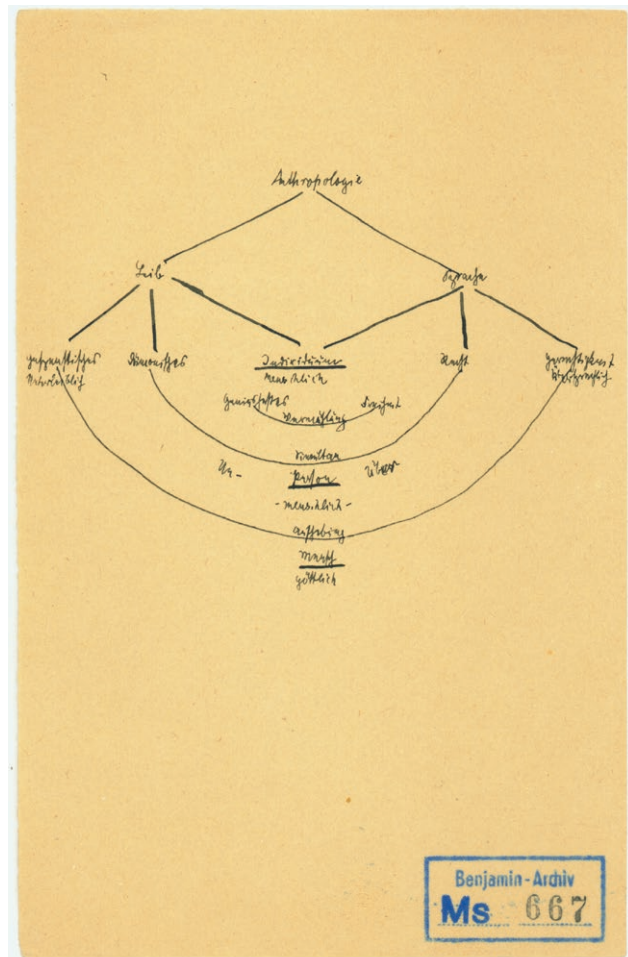


Fig. 1



manuscripts kept in the Archives and published only posthumously (in the necessarily long time required by the transcription and philological care necessary for their scientific use) is constitutive for the understanding of a large part of twentieth-century philosophy. With a clarification: already for its character and its quantitative dimension itself (in most cases overwhelming compared to the amount of texts published during life) the autographic complex of the manuscripts challenges to a reconsideration of the thought of an author, inviting not only to adopt the point of view of textuality as a continuum, but also that of the peculiar forms that such textuality assumes. Each of them (from the fragment to the scheme, to give an example) shows itself able to offer a new image of the thought of a philosopher. In this regard, Benjamin's example is certainly one of the most eloquent and persuasive, because in many cases the tension of his writing becomes pictorially evident, almost to the extent of drawing itself, of composing itself in an image: in the figure-of-thought. The case of Wittgenstein's *Nachlaß*, published and accessible to scholars' consultation in the so-called WAB (Wittgenstein's Archive of the University of Berg) directed by Alois Pichler, reinforces this thesis. To the Berg's Archive we can add, as we know, that of Cambridge, directed by Michael Nedo at the origin of the Wiener Ausgabe (Vienna Edition) of Wittgenstein's manuscripts (now published by the Springer Editor in Vienna and New York and presented as "the most important editorial project of our time" of Wittgenstein's Work). And it was always in Cambridge, that was discovered - about sixty years after the death of the Austrian philosopher - a Wittgenstein Archive of the so-called intermediate period (from November 1932 to July 1936), entrusted for the publication to the care of Professor Arthur Gibson. This discovery sounds as a confirmation to the fact that between the *Tractatus* (the only book published in life, as well as very few other writings) and the posthumous and in any case incomplete *Philosophical Researches* the enormous complex of manuscripts, composed of the various notebooks and books, some of Wittgenstein's hand and others

dictated to his pupils, does not simply represent a parenthesis or, at most, a plurality of philosophical paths undertaken and then abandoned. To support such thesis would mean to misunderstand the very meaning of Wittgenstein's philosophical work after the *Tractatus*: the dialectic and the dialogue that comes along both with the form of the *Tractatus* and the problems related to the relationship between language, logic and the world from which it arises; problems with respect to which the *Philosophical Researches*, according to the words of Wittgenstein himself, are nothing more than a set of sketches. But the sketch has precisely an autographic character, it is the expression of the autographic stance.

Neither what we have exemplified by the names of Benjamin and Wittgenstein and that we could extend to other emblematic figures of the philosophical '900 (from Husserl to Heidegger, to Simone Weil as well as the Valéry of the *Cahiers*) can be limited to the last century. Let us think, for example, to the emblematic case of Novalis, where the fragment-form as an intentional form of his thought is limited to short complete texts such as *Pollen* or *Faith and Love*, composed in an intermediate literary form between the aphorism and the fragment, the most part of the Novalis' corpus is made of studies, transcriptions, marginal notes and the extraordinary collection of numbered annotations that goes by the name of *Allgemeines Brouillon* and testifies to the desire to give shape to a Romantic Encyclopedia as a pendant to the Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.

More generally and conclusively, assuming the point of view of philosophical work as a continuum, a continuum that has a determined origin (an original opening in the philosopher's peculiar style of thought) and the textual continuum as its necessary correlated, where each element assumes an autonomous force (inviting us to radically reconsider the relationship between philology and philosophy) we not only have the possibility of glancing at what is philosophically preceding the work, but also at what lies after and beyond it. Consequently, we can grasp an autonomous dimension of Benjamin's philosophical reflection in the

so-called *Paralipomena* for his memorable essay on *Franz Kafka* published in 1934 in the “Jüdische Rundschau”, a complex of annotated manuscripts, diary notes, schemes or, even more clearly, in the texts prepared for the essay *On the Image of Proust*, published in 1929 on the “Literarische Welt”, including a very relevant scheme dedicated to the theme of the Eleatic philosophy of happiness in the author of the *Recherche*. Schemes and annotations, in this case, contain philosophically more than the works they prepare, inviting the reader to continue by himself what they just suggest. And it is extremely significant that this dimension of autographic stance of thinking is preserved in the digitalization of the manuscripts offered to the visitors of Benjamin Archive in Berlin: a further attestation of a new sense of the aura that is transmitted in the age of the digital reproduction of autographic writing.

Summing up, in the autographic stance the distinctive timbre of every philosophy resounds as a research and a struggle (an Agon of thinking) about a few questions and the problem of representing the words that can give them the force of expressiveness. Of this timbre, of the resounding in it of something belonging to the living word or, at least, the memory or the desire of it, the philosophical writing offers autographically a trace. As writing (autography), philosophy still attests the difference between the origin of Thinking and the attempts to give it back in forms of representation. An origin, that attested by the autographic stance, which escapes the Human, All Too Human dimension of the biography.

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## Baudelaire Laboratory. Brief History of a Project by Walter Benjamin

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**Abstract.** The article intends to retrace, from a historical-philological point of view, the main steps of Walter Benjamin's unfinished research and works, conducted during his later years, dedicated to Charles Baudelaire. Setting Benjamin's translation of the *Tableaux parisiens* as the first result of his interest for the poet, the text delves into the composition process of *The Arcades Project*, from which the idea of a book on Baudelaire then takes shape. The article examines the crucial stages of this second project's development through the correspondence between Benjamin and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer especially: from the 1935 *exposé* for *The Arcades Project* to *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, to the 1939 essay *On some Motifs in Baudelaire*. The focus is set, in particular, on the dialectical-constructive method that guides Benjamin in the composition both of the *Passagen-Werk* as of the *Baudelaire-Buch* and the essays. Finally, the article looks back over the transmission history of the project on Baudelaire, intimately bound to the one of the *Passagenarbeit*: the vicissitudes and findings of various manuscripts, of which the complete restitution of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* is soon expected. Therefore, the peculiar relationship between philology and philosophy of Benjamin's experimental method is then examined further in depth; the configuration of the research object's *monadic structure* according to a *historical perspective*, albeit in the context of a work that remained unfinished.

**Keywords.** Benjamin, Baudelaire, arcades, dialectics, archive

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*If I might use one image to express what I am planning, it is to show Baudelaire as he is embedded in the nineteenth century. The impression he left behind there must emerge as clearly untouched as that of a stone that one day is rolled away from the spot on which it has rested for decades.*

Walter Benjamin to Max Horkheimer, April 16, 1938

### 1. PRELIMINARY STEPS

It's during his time at university, between 1914 and 1915, that Walter Benjamin shows his first interest for Charles Baudelaire and,

therefore, decides to start working on the translation of the *Tableaux parisiens*. The volume, enriched by the essay used as a programmatic premise on *The Task of the Translator* (1921), shall then be published only in 1923, with the title *Charles Baudelaire. Deutsche Übertragungen mit einem Vorwort über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers von Walter Benjamin* (Benjamin [1921]; Benjamin [1923]).

Four years later, a brief two months trip to Paris marks the start of *The Arcades Project* and, along with it, a return to the study of Baudelaire: in fact, Benjamin intends to write an article on the Parisian arcades, together with Franz Hessel. However, once he has returned to Berlin, he continues his work autonomously, gathering notes and materials: planning an essay that should be called *Pariser Passagen. Eine dialektische Feerie [Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland]*, but then noticing that the project is starting to gain the substance of a book. *Pariser Passagen II [The Arcades of Paris]*, written between 1928 and 1929, is the first draft of the new and more consistent project (Benjamin [1927-1940a]: 930-932; 919-925; 871-884). Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer probably find out about it in September or October 1929 (maybe Adorno already in 1928), assisting the lecture of some of its parts during the course of their meetings with Benjamin at Frankfurt and Königstein. Shortly after, in 1930, the research comes to a halt, to then start again in 1934, when Benjamin is already in exile in Paris (on the other hand, the only place where he could carry out his study and work on documentation is the Bibliothèque nationale de France). So, in May 1935 the first *exposé* with the title *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century* is ready (see Wohlfarth [2011]: 255-260). It is a particularly important moment: in fact, on one hand, with the 1935 *exposé* *The Arcades Project* is accepted in the program of works sponsored by the Institute for Social Research (with the title: *The Social History of the City of Paris in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*), on the other, it marks the start of the crucial theoretical debate with Adorno. An epistolary correspondence, around which the work for the project on

the *Arcades* develops, undergoing continuous changes and rewordings (see Eiland, Jennings [2014]: 483-575). On this account, the letters exchanged by the two philosophers between 1928 and 1940 are of fundamental value: they are not only a historical testimony, a «paratextual document», key for understanding the development of the project, but, in their peculiarity, they acquire the status of a literary work, one of the «most important ones of 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy», as it has already been pointed out (Desideri [2002]: 76-77; Wohlfarth [2011]: 261-269).

In the 1935 *exposé*, the fifth chapter goes under the title *Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris*: the main topics regarding Benjamin's interpretation of the lyric poet are already stated. The allegorical genius, the *flâneur*, the crowd, the *bohème* and the conspiracy, the modernity, the *spleen* and the *idéal*, the ever-selfsame and the new, *l'art pour l'art* and the art market (Benjamin [1927-1940a]: 10-11). Adorno's opinion of the text, however, is extremely critical. It's the so called *Hornberger Brief* of August 2, 1935, in which Adorno disputes Benjamin's formulation of the concept of *dialektisches Bild*, precisely, as exposed in the chapter on Baudelaire: the fetish character of the commodity as dialectical image internal to consciousness and intimately ambiguous is the main problem. For Adorno, thinking the *dialektisches Bild* as being contained in a collective consciousness means to risk in proximity of Carl Gustav Jung and Ludwig Klages' theories, of archaic-archetypal images, immanent to a supposed and timeless «collective ego». Benjamin's *exposé* would still be lacking a theory that is able to dialectize both the ambiguity of the dialectical image and the relationship between society and the alienated individual. In other terms, the text, unlike the previous sketch of *The Arcades of Paris* that had found Adorno's strong approval, insists excessively on the oneiric-mythical dimension rather than on the critical-dialectical one, taking the risk of becoming embroiled in the enchantments of the 19th century (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 104-114).

In his first brief reply to this letter, Benjamin clarifies that the first draft of *The Arcades of Paris*,

has not at all been set aside, rather, in the overall project of the book, it provides the *thesis* and the *exposé* is the *antithesis*. The planned structure is already triadic and dialectic. Benjamin has «the two ends of the bow in hand», but what is still missing is the strength to arc it and shoot the arrow of the synthesis: the critical interpretation of the materials, that is to say of the 19th-century dreams. He is already basing his method on the constructive principle: «what the constructive moment means for this book must be compared with what the philosophers' stone means for alchemy». It is within the construction that Benjamin seeks his very particular dialectics between image and awakening (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 117-119).

As a result of the intense debate with Adorno, Benjamin is convinced of the importance of carrying out a critical confrontation with Jung and Klages' «mythology», in order to make the weapons of their «Fascist armature» less effective (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 542). However, Horkheimer doesn't agree. On March 28, 1937 Benjamin tries to persuade him one last time: the problems encountered in the 1935 *exposé* would be faced and solved by making the plan of the book result from two preliminary «fundamental methodological analysis». First of all, from a materialist critique of pragmatic history and of the history of ideas; secondly, from an enquiry on what psychoanalysis means – and what role it plays – for the subject of materialist historiography (and therefore, also from a confrontation with Jung and Klages' conceptions). Finally, in case of denial, Benjamin introduces another possibility: to penetrate *in medias res*, by anticipating the draft of the chapter of the *Arcades* on Baudelaire. Horkheimer is in favour of this last proposal: in fact, in his view, the first methodological analysis would have ended coinciding in many aspects with the essay on Eduard Fuchs; the second, would deal with a matter that is both decisive and delicate for the Institute, that could only be faced after in-depth and shared discussions (Benjamin [1935-1937]: 489-490; Benjamin [1927-1940b]: 1158-1159). The text on Baudelaire

should have then been published on the “Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung”.

Therefore, Benjamin starts to write a central chapter of the book while its plan isn't yet clear, his overall “construction” (methodological thoughts necessarily have a metatextual nature at this stage, redefining the order of materials, thus the structure of the book, many times). A year's work later, he writes back to Horkheimer to bring him up to date on the evolution of the text: the dimension of the article has exceeded the limits stated for publishing on the journal (apart from the specific materials on Baudelaire collected in convolute J, other materials have merged into the work)<sup>1</sup>. This, Benjamin writes, might be as easily attributed «to the subject as to the fact that the section that had been planned as central to the book is being written first». After all, he had already anticipated to Adorno, during their discussions, that the “subject Baudelaire” was taking the shape of a «miniature (*Miniaturmodell*)» of the work. Benjamin then exposes the structure of the essay to Horkheimer. It is once again triadic: the first part, under the title *Idea and Image*, shall address the issue of «how the allegorical vision in Baudelaire is constructed [...], the fundamental paradox of his theory of art», that is animated by the «contradiction between the theory of natural correspondences and the rejection of nature»; the second, *Antiquity and Modernity*, antiquity surfacing into modernity and vice-versa through the allegorical vision; here the figures of the mass and the *flâneur* shall cover a key role; the third and last part, *The New and the Ever-Selfsame*<sup>2</sup>, shall deal with the topic of «the commodity as the fulfilment of Baudelaire's allegorical vision», the aura of the commodity as the experience of the ever-selfsame that leaks through the new (here Louis-Auguste Blanqui's *Eternité par les astres* and Friedrich Nietzsche's eternal return shall come into

<sup>1</sup> By February 1938, Benjamin has collected almost two-hundred pages of materials in section J on Baudelaire, including notes, quotations, comments, and extracts (Schmider, Werner [2011]: 567).

<sup>2</sup> T/n. Translation modified [The New and the Immutable].

play)<sup>3</sup>. In Benjamin's eyes, Baudelaire is by now the *exemplum* of modernity: his «unique importance consists in having been the first one, and the most unswerving, to have apprehended [...] the productive energy of the individual alienated from himself—agnosticized and heightened through reification»<sup>4</sup> (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 555-558; see also Bernardi [2001]; Sauter [2019]).

## 2. FROM THE MINIATURMODELL TO THE BAUDELAIRE-BUCH

On September 28, 1938 Benjamin sends Max Horkheimer the essay under the title *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*. Again, something has changed: he has come to «realize as the summer went on that a Baudelaire essay more modest in length that did not repudiate its responsibility to the *Arcades* draft could be produced only as a part of a Baudelaire *book*» (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 573). Therefore, the essay-chapter would no longer be part of *The Arcades Project* (specifically it should have been the penultimate one), but it would form part of a new book project dedicated to Baudelaire: *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* [*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism*] (Benjamin [1938-1940]: 159; see also Eiland, Jennings [2014]: 575-646). The 19<sup>th</sup>-century allegorical poet has provided such «optimal opportunities for the basic conceptions of the *Arcades*» that, «for this reason, the orientation of important material and constructive elements of the *Arcades* to this subject occurred on its own». The three sections of the essay – *The Bohème*, *The Flâneur*, *Modernity* – are «relatively independent of each other», but, together, they converge into what shall become the second part of the *Baudelaire-Buch*. A second part, Benjamin points out, that doesn't at all set «the

philosophical bases of the *whole book*». Its function, in fact, returning to the triadic-dialectical structure, is that of the antithesis: it «provides the requisite data», whereas the first part – *Baudelaire as Allegorist* – presents the thesis, that is to say the problem, and the third – *The Commodity as Poetic Object* – should solve it, fulfilling the purpose of the synthesis. The scheme presented in the letter written on April 16 is confirmed, although with different titles. Therefore, *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, «undertakes a sociocritical interpretation of the poet»: as antithesis, this is where «criticism in its narrower sense, namely Baudelaire criticism, has its place», that of the «limits of his achievement». Therefore, Benjamin further specifies, this part of the book only offers «a prerequisite of Marxist interpretation, but does not on its own fulfill its conception». The interpretation of Baudelaire, related to «the basic theme of the old *Arcades* project, the new and the ever-same»<sup>5</sup>, shall only be covered in the third part of the book (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 573-574).

In spite of these preliminary explanations, the essay is strongly criticized by the Institute for Social Research with Adorno's famous letter of November 10, 1938. Benjamin's research methodology, elaboration and presentation is attacked in an even harder and more drastic way in 1935: the one shown in the *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire* is an «immediate», almost «romantic», materialism that leaves out the moment of dialectical mediation. For Adorno, the words Benjamin uses to accompany the essay in the letter to Max Horkheimer make no difference: it is the «wide-eyed presentation of the mere facts» to guide the work that, therefore, places itself at the unique «crossroads of magic and positivism». In order to pay «tributes to Marxism», Benjamin would have harmed Marxism as well as his essay: the phantasmagoria – panorama and “traces”, *flâneur* and arcades, modernity and ever-same –, end up, once again, tangling the text in their spell rather than being understood in an objective way

<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is between the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938 that Benjamin discovers Blanqui's unique text that shall deeply influence his considerations on eternal return and modernity (see Benjamin [1910-1940]: 549; see also Schmider, Werner [2011]: 567).

<sup>4</sup> T/n. Translation modified [concretization].

<sup>5</sup> T/n. Translation modified [The New and the Immutability].

with the use of critique, through the examination of the commodity form in Baudelaire's epoch. The «ascetic discipline», that, once more, has lead Benjamin to silence the theoretical interpretation of the essay, makes it something quite different from a «model» of *The Arcades Project*, at the most it is its «prelude»: a collection of undeveloped reasons, of cultural facts arbitrarily put into direct relation – not mediated «through the *total social process*» –, even causal, with spheres of economic structure (the example of Baudelaire's poem *L'âme du Vin* about the duty on wine) (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 280-287).

*I believe that speculation can only begin its inevitably audacious flight with some prospect of success if, instead of donning the waxen wings of esotericism, it seeks its source of strength in construction alone. It is the needs of construction which dictated that the second part of my book should consist primarily of philological material.* (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 291)

This is what Benjamin writes in his long and precise answer to Adorno, a month later. The dispute is based on a different understanding of the relationship between philology and philosophy: if «the philological interpretation [...] should be [...] overcome in the Hegelian manner by the dialectical materialist», on the other hand, according to Benjamin, this is possible only if the object of research «is construed from a historical perspective»; therefore, only if it is constructed as a *monad* that is able to make the «given text» that «formerly lay mythically petrified» come to life (291-292). Concerning the matter of his methodological procedure, in a draft of the introduction to *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, Benjamin writes: «Sundering truth from falsehood is the goal of the materialist method, not its point of departure. In other words, its point of departure is the object riddled with error, with *doxa*» (Benjamin [1938a]: 63). Appearance, ambivalent mixture of true and false, only starting from here philology can turn into philosophy. Baudelaire's figure, therefore, is once more emblematic: it is itself, in its ambiguity, a model of the Benjaminian

critical-materialistic method. After all, Benjamin is well aware of the Marxian difference between *Forschungsweise* and *Darstellungsweise*, quoted and written down in fact in convolute N:

*Research has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze its various forms of development, to trace out their inner connection. Only after this work is done can the actual movement be presented in corresponding fashion. If this is done successfully, if the life of material is reflected back as ideal, then it may appear as if we had before us an a priori construction.* (Benjamin [1927-1940a]: 465)

The constructive-dialectical principle – that also answers to the method of montage (460) – is immanent to the material itself, that is not at all still but alive, and the object of the research derives from its very movement according to «historical perspective».

The documentation of *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, its material, therefore, moved across three levels of *doxastic ambivalence* towards the critical-constructive view: the first concerned Baudelaire's *physiology*, the social outline of his profile, in the intersections and differences with the figures of the conspirator, the ragpicker, the *flâneur*; it observed Baudelaire as a somehow unaware representative of the *bohème*, the fragile foundations of his political position that make him cheer once for the revolution and once for its repression, his compliant behaviour with the new context of the literature market (Benjamin [1938a]: 4, 16-17). The second level concerned Baudelaire's rather particular relationship with the *flâneur*, with the crowd, with the commodity: differently from the *flâneur*, he sees the «horrible social reality» reified, he doesn't transfigure it with the «veil» of the mass; however, that same horrible reality becomes enchantment to his eyes – it's the hero that moves away from the crowd – that doesn't allow him to criticize the social appearance (34, 39). The third level concerned the relationship between antiquity and the new in Baudelaire's allegorical vision of modernity: a relationship that is not yet dialectical – the modern hero-poet, «Hercules with no labors», seizes antiquity in the

decrepitude of modern times and phenomena (60, 50) –, but that, nevertheless, indicates the character of appearance of each novelty that wishes to be autonomous from the past. *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire* aimed to grasp Baudelaire's outline in the *medium* of French 19<sup>th</sup>-century society, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the *medium* of Baudelaire's *physiology*.

### 3. ON SOME MOTIFS IN BAUDELAIRE: A MORE PRECISE ARTICULATION OF THE THEORETICAL STRUCTURE

It is precisely Adorno to ask Benjamin not to follow through with the publication of the essay, whereas other members of the Institute had suggested publishing the second chapter and part of the third (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 285). As a consequence, Benjamin restarts to work on the text: the result shall be *On some Motifs in Baudelaire*. The intermediate steps are the French translation of the 1935 *exposé* and the *Notes sur les Tableaux parisiens de Baudelaire*. The first work is requested by Horkheimer in February 1939: a New York banker, Frank Altschul, is interested in funding high quality studies, preferably in French; *The Arcades Project* might be of his interest, also because the Institute is facing poor economic conditions and may not be able to guarantee Benjamin's grant much longer (Benjamin [1927-1940a]: 957; Benjamin [1927-1940b]: 1168-1169; 1172-1173).

While translating the *exposé*, Benjamin makes significant modifications, reworking on Adorno's critiques and introducing further theoretical novelties based on their most recent debates. He includes an *Introduction* and a *Conclusion* as theoretical summary for the text – «the comparison between appearance and reality predominates all the way» (Benjamin [1938-1940]: 233); in the chapter dedicated to Baudelaire, the passage on the dialectical image that had been so strongly criticized by Adorno in 1935, is removed. The polarities between *spleen* and *idéal*, between “type”, ever-selfsame and novelty come forth as canons of modernity (Benjamin [1927-1940a]: 14-26).

The category of self-same (*Gleichheit*) and its phantasmagoric distortion into the form of the eternal return related to a commodity economy are at the heart of the discussion with Adorno at the moment. In addition: they are at the centre of the new essay on Baudelaire. Commodity that *empathizes* with price – this is the secret of its ever-selfsame trait – becomes a model, not merely of the condition of pure «saleability» in which the *flâneur* «makes himself [...] at home», but also of Baudelaire's poetic experience. It is the experience of the ever-selfsame that surfaces from the new, the experience of the mass, of the commodity as allegory (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 308-312). Benjamin presents the first results of his reworking in May 1939 on the occasion of the *Notes sur les Tableaux parisiens de Baudelaire* conference held at Pontigny (Benjamin [1939a]: 740-748). He isn't reviewing the whole essay, but only the central section about *The Flâneur*. On June 24, he writes to Horkheimer about the structure that the new essay should have followed, it is again triadic: the first chapter should have been about the *arcades*; the second about the mass, with a part dedicated to gambling; the third about the «decipherment of *flânerie* as the ecstasy produced by the structure of the commodity market» (Benjamin [1938-1940]: 303-304). Shortly after, he realizes that, once again, he shall not be able to deal with all the topics planned within the limited number of pages allowed by the Institute's journal: the article shall develop the part on the crowd exposed in the previous letter, therefore leaving out the topic of *flânerie*. It corresponds to a third of the second chapter on *The Flâneur*, referring to *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*. However, this time the «theoretical structure» is developed throughout the whole text (Benjamin [1938-1940]: 312-313). This is a great novelty. Benjamin even shares the news with Adorno on August 6, 1939 (five days after having sent the manuscript to Horkheimer), highlighting the key role their correspondence has played for the achievement (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 316-317). In order to complete the work Benjamin forced himself to a «strict

seclusion» (therefore postponing the attempt to sell Paul Klee's aquarelle meant to pay his eventual trip to America), but in the end, satisfied, he tells Stephan Lackner [Ernst Morgenroth]: «it has truly become *what* I had in mind» (Benjamin [1938-1940]: 323). With «a more precise articulation of [...] [the] basic theoretical structure (*theoretische Armatuur*)» (Adorno, Benjamin [1928-1940]: 316), the studies conducted over the last ten years converge: the ones on the work of art, on the aura and the technological reproducibility (1935-1936), on the issue of the experience and its radical modification (in particular the essays *Experience and Poverty* (1933) and *The storyteller: Observation on the Works of Nikolai Leskov* (1936)) (see Benjamin [1910-1940]: 609)<sup>6</sup>.

A crystal of Benjamin's latest production is *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*. The social-historical reflection is rearranged on the base of a very refined theory on modern subjectivity (see Schmider, Werner [2011]: 574). At the heart of this theory there is the scheme of the perceptive shock, the atrophy of experience: that is to say, the difference between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*; the prevalence of the first on the second with the advent of modernity, of factory work in large-scale industry, of radical technological change, with the first (and by now almost the second) world war. Baudelaire is the poet of modern times, because he made shock, experiential catastrophe his poetic object. He hasn't removed history, unlike Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy of life, or of Bergson's, both in the quest for a supposed pure experience; nor as the soul in Klages' philosophy or the archetypal images in Jung's. Unlike Proust, he hasn't limited the contact with what can still be (involuntarily) grasped of the *Erfahrung* to «the inventory of the individual who is isolated in various ways»

(Benjamin [1939b]: 313-316). The lyrical gesture of Baudelaire is configured as a daily «fencing» with the metropolitan shocks – as he chants in the first stanza of *Le Soleil* –, a permanent «duel» in which, while he defends himself against the hits, he can glimpse the «blank spaces», the conditions that could make «the emancipation from isolated experiences (*Erlebnisse*)» possible (322, 321, 319, 318). This is where, according to Benjamin, the intimately dialectical trait of Baudelaire's poetry emerges: the descent into the world of commodities – to the extent of thinking poetic originality itself as «market-oriented» (Benjamin [1938b]: 168) – coincides in Baudelaire with the «distortion» of this same world «into an allegory» (173)<sup>7</sup>. Like the baroque allegorist, he steps into the equivocality of the signifiers, that is to say among the price tags of the products, but unlike him, he cannot solve their enigma. No redemption surfaces from a playful overturning. Nor do we assist an *Aufhebung*. On the contrary, the contradiction remains. Although he isn't caught in the spell, like the *flâneur* is, by the transfiguring veil of the crowd or by other phantasmagoria of capitalist modernity, although he comes close to the truth, to history, Baudelaire is missing the final act of critical awakening. Time remains broken, stretched between the two extremes of *spleen* and *idéal*. To «the multitude of the seconds», to the unstoppable rhythm of «production on a conveyor belt» and of metropolitan life, to the melancholic metronome that beats the litany of sameness exposing «the isolated experience in all its nakedness» with no aura (Benjamin [1939b]: 335, 328, 336), Baudelaire opposes «the power of recollection» dispensed by *idéal*, «data of prehistory», of an «earlier and bygone life» (335, 334). In fact, the theory of the *correspondances*, as it has already been pointed out, represents the «strategic climax» of Benjamin's essay (Schloß-

<sup>6</sup> In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* we also find the reformulation of the concept of aura, related to the gaze and the ability to look back (Benjamin [1939b]: 338-339); redefinition, exposed in the famous note *Was ist Aura?* and in other brief notes now collected in the critical edition in volume 16, among the materials to continue *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (Benjamin [1935-1936]: 303-306, 363-365).

<sup>7</sup> The quotation is from *Central Park*, a collection of notes that are likely to have been first composed in the spring/summer of 1938, while Benjamin is working on *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, even though it is probable that he then continued adding more notes and observations to it (see Benjamin [1974]: 1217; Espagne [1996]).



mann [1992]: 550). Baudelaire wants to wrest the new – a new that lives of the past – from the ever-selfsame, but he remains still with «in his hands the scattered fragments of a genuine historical experience» (Benjamin [1939b]: 336).

Even though he anticipates the theoretical-interpretative structure, here Benjamin doesn't offer the materialistic solution to the problem of the awakening from the dream, from the myth. Only the conclusion of the project could have fulfilled this purpose (see also Kaulen [2000]: 645-653). However, it can reasonably be stated that the thesis *On the Concept of History*, just like section N of *The Arcades Project*, left us an adequate tool in this sense.

*On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* is received with great enthusiasm by Theodor and Gretel Adorno and by Max Horkheimer – the reaction reaches Benjamin by telegram while he is shut in the “Centre des travailleurs volontaires” at Nevers –, so in January 1940, the essay is published on the “Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung”.

#### 4. THE ARCHIVE OR THE SOURCE OF CONSTRUCTION

In 1940 Benjamin has to leave Paris due to the advance of the German troops in France. He entrusts his papers to Georges Bataille, that, dur-

MAIN STAGES OF THE BAUDELAIRE PROJECT	
April-October 1927	Beginning of the work on <i>The Arcades Project</i>
May 1935	First <i>exposé</i> , <i>Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century</i> . The fifth chapter is on <i>Baudelaire, or The Streets of Paris</i> . In the work's project the <i>exposé</i> should be the <i>antithesis</i> and the first draft of <i>The Arcades of Paris</i> (1928/1929) the <i>thesis</i> .
April 1937	Benjamin starts to work on the chapter of <i>The Arcades Project</i> on Baudelaire, to be later published on the “Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung”.
April 16, 1938	Benjamin writes to Horkheimer: the essay-chapter on Baudelaire is taking the shape of a <i>Miniaturmodell</i> of <i>The Arcades Project</i> . Triadic structure of the planned essay: 1. <i>Idea and Image</i> 2. <i>Antiquity and Modernity</i> 3. <i>The New and the Ever-Selfsame</i> .
September 28, 1938	Benjamin sends Horkheimer <i>The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire</i> , made up of three sections: <i>The Bohème</i> , <i>The Flâneur</i> , <i>Modernity</i> . However, this is no longer the chapter of <i>The Arcades Project</i> but of a book on Baudelaire. Triadic structure of the planned book: 1. <i>Baudelaire as Allegorist</i> (thesis) 2. <i>The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire</i> (antithesis) 3. <i>The Commodity as Poetic Object</i> (synthesis).
November 10, 1938	Adorno asks Benjamin to withdraw his essay to rework it. New phase of revision of the text.
February-March 1939	French translation of the <i>exposé</i> of 1935 (requested by Horkheimer, for a possible new sponsor for <i>The Arcades Project</i> ). Important changes to the chapter on Baudelaire.
May 1939	Benjamin anticipates his new work on Baudelaire with the conference <i>Notes sur les Tableaux parisiens de Baudelaire</i> held at Pontigny.
April-August 1939	Benjamin only reworks the central part on <i>The Flâneur of The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire</i> . He announces the new triadic structure he has imagined to Horkheimer: 1. theme of <i>passages</i> 2. the mass 3. <i>flânerie</i> and the commodity market. The article shall then only develop the part on the mass. On the 1 <sup>st</sup> of August he sends Horkheimer <i>On Some Motifs in Baudelaire</i> . With a great novelty: the essay anticipates the whole dialectical-interpretative structure.
January 1940	<i>On Some Motifs in Baudelaire</i> is published on the “Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung”.

ing the Nazi occupation, hides them in the Bibliothèque nationale, and later hands them to Pierre Missac in 1945. Through Missac, following the author's will, they have to reach Adorno. This happens in 1947. However, in 1981 the material handed over will reveal itself incomplete: it is only the one of the *Aufzeichnungen und Materialien* of *The Arcades Project* (the future fifth volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* edited by Rolf Tiedemann), part of the thesis *On the Concept of History*, and (unprinted) parts of the work on *Baudelaire*. Furthermore, Benjamin had left some of his works in his Parisian apartment on *rue Dombasle*.

When Adorno returns from his American exile (1950), having been nominated administrator of Benjamin's legacy, the works and materials that are in his hands are collected in the "Benjamin-Archiv" in Frankfurt. The ones that had been left in the Paris apartment, first confiscated by the Gestapo and then brought by the Red Army to Moscow, are later handed over by the Soviet Union to the "Deutsches Zentralarchiv" in Potsdam in 1957. From here, they are transferred first to the "Akademie der Künste der DDR" in East Berlin in 1972, then, in 1996, to the "Theodor W. Adorno Archiv" in Frankfurt (Marx [2011]). Among these, there is also a manuscript of *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*.

In 1981, as it is known, Giorgio Agamben, finds a letter dated August 1945 in the Manuscript Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, where Georges Bataille wrote to his friend Jean Bruno that Walter Benjamin's manuscripts, along with the ones belonging to Alexandre Kojève, were in the Bibliothèque. The letter came with a note, at the side, in which Bruno had written: «Les papiers de Kojève et de Benjamin sont (en novembre 1964) au Dépôt des Manuscrits» (see Agamben [1982]: 4). The five envelopes, found after a long search, contained the materials of Benjamin's last five years of work: the ones concerning *The Arcades Project* and the *Baudelaire-Buch*, the comments to Brecht's poems, a version of *Berlin Childhood around 1900* with its drafts attached, a copy of the *Storyteller*,

the sonnets dedicated to his friend Heinle, typescripts with the transcription of dreams, a series of notes referred to *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, letters exchanged with Adorno between 1935 and 1938, the *Hand-exemplar* of the thesis *On the Concept of History*, and newspaper clippings and copies of various articles (by P. Missac, P. Valéry, S. Kracauer, J. Cassou) (5-6).

The Paris manuscripts mark a key advancement in the reception of *The Arcades Project* and of the book on Baudelaire, making the connection between the two projects clear (see Espagne, Werner [1984]; Espagne, Werner [1986]; Espagne, Werner [1987]; Bolle [1999]; Bolle [2000]). Thanks to these it is in fact possible to state that *The Arcades Project* as we have known it in the reproduction of the convolutes of the fifth volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (that was then due in 1982) is only a part of the initial phase of Benjamin's research: the one where he copies all the passages that are useful for his work from the many texts he consults in the Bibliothèque nationale, keeping his theoretical-methodological reflections for section N, that then should have been included in a genealogical premise. All this divided into the 36 thematic units we know. The Paris findings show that Benjamin continued his documentary research and work on the convolutes between 1937 and 1940; that the materials, the texts consulted for *The Arcades Project* and for the book on Baudelaire are even more than the ones identified by the editors of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (see Espagne, Werner [1984]; Espagne, Werner [1986]). Most importantly, the further phases of revision and reordering of the documentation come to light. The so called *fiches* – lists that group together notes, texts, quotes extracted from *The Arcades Project* under broader concepts –, located by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner in the *Baudelaire corpus*, reveal the access to the plan of definition and *construction* of the texts and the book that were to be dedicated to the lyric poet of the age of high capitalism.

While he starts his work on *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, Benjamin decides

on a scheme made up of 30 categories – no longer thematic, but dialectical –, each one marked with a coloured geometrical signet, under which some of the *Aufzeichnungen und Materialien* for the *Arcades* are included. As it has been said, these signets aren't barely marks that are necessary to point out transfers, but, in their pictographic nature, they allow us to enter (even though not at all easily) Benjamin's laboratory (Bolle [2000]: 425-440). They are in themselves symbols of the «paradigm of a constellative aesthetics and historiography» (427; see also Bolle [1999]). *Denkbilder* of Benjamin's philosophical method – along with many other manuscripts, notes, diagrams, and fragments, presently collected in the Archive –, they are the testimony of the *autographic trait* of his thought<sup>8</sup>, of his experimental procedure, starting from philology and documentary research as originating source (Desideri [2018a]: 189).

In the midst of his summer work on *The Paris of the Second Empire*, when the essay is turning into a part of a book on Baudelaire, Benjamin reviews the dialectical scheme he prepared shortly before, the «structure (*Schematisierung*) of the project» (see Benjamin [1910-1940]: 569-572), deleting some categories, though moving their themes under others. Finally, in the third and last phase, he deletes other categories and reorders the materials in the so-called Blue Papers (sixteen).

Following the work of who analysed and studied the manuscripts (Espagne, Werner [1984]; Espagne, Werner [1986]; Espagne, Werner [1987]), and waiting for the volumes 17 and 18 of the new critical edition<sup>9</sup>, what is certainly clear from these

<sup>8</sup> Here, the graphyc icon is intended as the trace of thought and language intimately belonging to one another, it is what Benjamin discusses also in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* when he reflects on the hieroglyph and the relationship between orality and writing (see Benjamin [1928]: 159-215); for the “autographic trait” the reference is also to Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (1968) and to the difference between autographic arts and allographic ones (see Desideri [2018a]: 186-187).

<sup>9</sup> The *Pariser Passagen / Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts* shall be volume 17 of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, while volume 18 shall be *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*. As we know, as at the moment the Paris manuscripts were found the first volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* – that contained the works on Baudelaire known at that time – had already been finished (1974), the editors then published in volume 7, tome II (1991), some of the Paris manuscripts in the form of extracts. In 2012 in Italy and in 2013 in France, Giorgio Agamben, Barbara Chitussi and Clemens-Carl Härle proposed an edition of *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism*. It's a «historical-genetic edition», the editors pointed out, certainly not a «historical-critical» one, being a translation. However, it has the ambition of laying out the plan of the work on Baudelaire as that Benjamin had traced, reordering the materials based on the lists and the indexes found in the Bibliothèque nationale. Furthermore, the basis of the interpretation of the edition – that is here considered to be unlikely – is that the *Baudelaire-Buch* operated in time as a «disruptive principle», «of erosion and progressive emptying of the overall work» on the *Arcades*, finally coming to substitute it (see Benjamin [2012]: 12, 10, 8; see also Benjamin [2013]).

three phases of revision is the *constructive principle* that guides Benjamin, the one that Pierre Mis-sac (1986) defined the dialectical-Benjaminian *dispositio* (see also Buck-Morss [1991]). The triadic structure exposed to Horkheimer in the letter dated April 16, 1938 (even though at the time Benjamin was still referring to the chapter form) is confirmed. The first part of the schemes (the *thesis*) is always dedicated to Baudelaire's character, considered in his «monographic isolation» (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 557) – to his *Sensitive Anlage*, to his sensitive disposition, aesthetic and allegorical passion, and melancholy. The second part (the *antithesis*) deals with the subjects and categories developed in *The Paris of the Second Empire* with a critical-social objective – the *flâneur*, the mass, the literature market etc. The third part – a very peculiar *synthesis* – exposes the contradiction that lived and remained unsolved in Baudelaire and his poetry: commodity as allegory of modernity, loss, or, better still, modification of aura, a swinging movement between two ends – *nouveauté* and eternal return, *spleen* and *idéal* – that Baudelaire cannot break. Emblem of modernity itself, even when coming close to the truth of his times, Baudelaire fails in the search for a differential repetition that

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*laire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*. As we know, as at the moment the Paris manuscripts were found the first volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* – that contained the works on Baudelaire known at that time – had already been finished (1974), the editors then published in volume 7, tome II (1991), some of the Paris manuscripts in the form of extracts. In 2012 in Italy and in 2013 in France, Giorgio Agamben, Barbara Chitussi and Clemens-Carl Härle proposed an edition of *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism*. It's a «historical-genetic edition», the editors pointed out, certainly not a «historical-critical» one, being a translation. However, it has the ambition of laying out the plan of the work on Baudelaire as that Benjamin had traced, reordering the materials based on the lists and the indexes found in the Bibliothèque nationale. Furthermore, the basis of the interpretation of the edition – that is here considered to be unlikely – is that the *Baudelaire-Buch* operated in time as a «disruptive principle», «of erosion and progressive emptying of the overall work» on the *Arcades*, finally coming to substitute it (see Benjamin [2012]: 12, 10, 8; see also Benjamin [2013]).

is able to grasp the new from the ever-selfsame, to produce the critical awakening<sup>10</sup>.

The *Baudelaire laboratory* – the whole of his finished and unfinished works, the manuscripts, the documents, the notes, the fragments, his intimate relationship with the *Arcades Project* – can be therefore considered the highest example of the constructive procedure that Benjamin's materialist method is based on. The model of a construction in which philology and philosophy act together, they run parallel then leaving the material and the theory to intervene on each other (see Espagne, Werner [1984]: 602). Better still: allowing the *theoretical structure* to surface from the movement within the actual material – and here we can hear the echo of the concept of *Ursprung* of the *Epistemo-critical Prologue on The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (Benjamin [1928]: 45-46; see also Desideri [2018b]: 18-28). The constellative figuration as another methodological key, therefore, also expresses a peculiar way of representing the density and the multiple articulation of an author's thought, even more so if the author in question is Walter Benjamin and the work is an unfinished project as the one on Baudelaire or on the *Arcades*: it is not so much a case of reclaiming the structurally fragmented and unfinished charter of the thought, it is rather, to manage to grasp the *continuum* in the discontinuity, in the diversity of form, statute and nature of the materials, precisely by following the constructive principle that drives them; to successfully seize, as far as possible, the *monadic structure* of the research object according to a *historical perspective*, through the fragments, the letters, the sketches and patterns. Therefore, with the new critical edition, we expect to soon be able to fully move through the constellations of the *Arcades Project* and the *Baudelaire-Buch*.

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<sup>10</sup> On the repetition in Benjamin see Montanelli 2018.

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## Silence, in the Archives: Derrida's Other Marx(s)

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**Abstract.** The idea that Derrida kept silent on Marx before the publication of *Spectres de Marx*, in 1993, has become a commonplace in Derrida studies and in the history of Marxism and French 20<sup>th</sup> century political thought. This idea has often been accompanied by a certain representation of the relationship (or absence thereof) between deconstruction and dialectical materialism, and fed the legend of deconstruction's «apoliticism» – at least before what some have called Derrida's «ethicopolitical turn», usually dated in the early 1990s. Against this narrative, this essay analyzes Derrida's notorious «silence on Marx» before *Specters of Marx* from the perspective of the archives. Archival research transforms the narrative: Derrida's «silence on Marx» was only «relative». Beyond the scene of publications, archives reveal *another scene*: multiple engagements with Marx and Marxist thought, marked and remarked in many archival documents – more particularly in a series of early seminar notes from the 1960s and 1970s. How does this archival scene transform our interpretation of Derrida's «silence»?

**Keywords.** Deconstruction, Marxism, Archives, Althusser, dialectical materialism.

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*Concerning that about which one cannot speak,  
isn't it best to remain silent?  
I let you answer this question.  
It is always entrusted to the other.  
Derrida [1987]: 53*

This essay speaks about a certain silence: Jacques Derrida's apparent silence on Marx and Marxist thought before 1993 – that is, before he gave his famous lectures «Specters of Marx» during the conference «Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective» (April 1993, University of California). These lectures were published in French in the same year, and in Peggy Kamuf's English translation the following year (Derrida [1993c]).

The word «silence» was frequently used to describe Derrida's attitude towards Marxist theory before 1993. As we will see, the word



was adopted by a multiplicity of actors on the multilayered scene I will describe in this essay, including by Derrida himself. On this scene, the word «silence» runs like a rumor from one actor to the other – to such extent that the word itself seems to act as one of the actors in that configuration. The question of «silence» overdetermines many of the questions I want to address today with regard to Derrida's scene of writing – a scene which, as we will see, is also a scene of *teaching*. Said «silence» is usually mentioned by Derrida's interlocutors as an implicit critique, as an attack, or as a sort of friendly challenge, meant to offer him the opportunity to respond, to explain himself about his «silence on Marx». In several occasions, then, Derrida was led to acknowledge this silence, sometimes attempting to justify it with a certain impatience, sometimes exhibiting it with irony, even pride, going to suggest that this silence could be read as a strategic weapon or as a theoretical statement in its own right. For that matter, Derrida's silence and his tardiness in writing about Marx were made very explicit in *Specters of Marx*, in which the motifs of *contretemps* and untimeliness were connected to an important theme of the book – namely, «messianicity without messianism», the disadjusted-disadjusting promise of justice:

*If one interprets the gesture we are risking here as a belated-rallying-to-Marxism, then one would have to have misunderstood quite badly. It is true, however, that I would be today, here, now, less insensitive than ever to the appeal of the contretemps or of being out-of-step, as well as to the style of an untimeliness that is more manifest and more urgent than ever. Already I hear people saying: «You picked a good time to salute Marx!» Or else: «It's about time!» «Why so late?» I believe in the political virtue of the contretemps. And if a contretemps does not have the good luck, a more or less calculated luck, to come just in time, then the inopportuneness of a strategy (political or other) may still bear witness, precisely [justement], to justice, bear witness, at least, to the justice which is demanded and about which we were saying a moment ago that it must be disadjusted, irreducible to exactness [justesse] and to law. (Derrida [1993c]: 109-110)*

«Why so late?», Derrida asks, humorously mimicking the other's speech. «Pourquoi si tard?» When *Spectres de Marx* was published in 1993, it was indeed received as Derrida's first proper engagement with Marxist thought. At the time, Derrida did nothing to dispel this common preconception, quite the opposite: in the book, Derrida's belatedness came front and center, and in fact provided Derrida with one of his main arguments: «The time is out of joint». In that book, Derrida praised the political virtues of *contretemps*, and made of untimeliness a decisive philosophical and political concept. According to Derrida, «out-of-jointness» is the condition for a justice that cannot *present* itself, that can never be «right on time». The force of a certain *contretemps* is conceived as what propels the deconstruction of law, signaling its inadequateness and perfectibility and enjoining its transformation. In this way, Derrida wrote *Specters of Marx* also as a self-performance, as a staging, a *mise en scène* of his own belatedness, here understood as a political force of inquiry against the linearity of historical time, and as a potential strategic asset in some struggle, present or to come. In 1993, after the collapse of the USSR, and in the ideological context of neoliberal consolidation, Derrida depicted a global geopolitical and philosophical scene in which Marxist thought had perhaps become so *passé* that it might have retrieved some of its theoretical, political, and strategic power of subversion and transformation. In arguing for the political efficacy of afterwardsness, of Marxism's afterlife, Derrida somewhat justified his own tardiness: it was now time to break the «silence» he supposedly kept on Marx up until that point.

What I have just described constitutes, at least, the «official» narrative, one which Derrida did nothing to dissipate within *Specters of Marx*. Any casual reader would be entirely justified in believing that the book was indeed Derrida's first public incursion into Marx's philosophy and Marxist thought more generally. However, outside of the book itself, one can find signs that the self-narrative offered by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* was not quite accurate. The scene was somewhat staged.

For example, in the 1993 interview «La déconstruction de l'actualité», whose publication closely followed the publication of *Spectres de Marx*, Derrida explained that his so-called «silence» on Marx was only «relative». Answering a remark from the journal *Passages*, he mentions *another scene* – that of the seminar, a scene of teaching:

*Passages: You spoke about Marx in a course at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the seventies, but only allusively.*

*Derrida: They were more than allusions, if I may say so, and it was in more than one course. But apart from such references, my book [Specters of Marx] is an attempt to explain that situation, that relative silence, and the difficult but, I believe, intimate connections between deconstruction and a certain «spirit» of marxism. (Derrida [1993d]: 38)*

As a matter of fact, Derrida's discussions of Marx and Marxist theory in those early seminars were much, much more than mere «allusions». As we will see in the course of this essay, Derrida offered very lengthy and detailed readings of Marx and Marxist texts as early as some twenty-five years before 1993 and *Specters of Marx*. During the late 1960s and (perhaps more significantly) the early 1970s – a crucial and prolific period for French and international Marxist thought – Derrida wrote and taught extensively about Marx and Marxist authors (including Engels, Gramsci, Lenin, Benjamin, Kojève, Althusser, Balibar, Buci-Glucksmann, and many others), but none of this work was ever published during Derrida's life. It is a massive fact, one that any scholar conducting archival research cannot ignore: as Derrida explains in the above quotation, his «silence» was merely «relative». What remains to be done, then, is to rewrite the history of this «silence» from the perspective of the archives.

But is it possible to write the history of a silence? Not of any silence, not of silence *in general*, but of a particular, singular silence? How does one interpret a certain silence? Can this silence be simply circumscribed, delimited, localized, exhibited and perhaps explained according to an archaeological or genealogical narrative?

These questions cannot be avoided by anyone undertaking archival research, be they scholars or archivists. The archive always has to do with a certain silence, and this for at least two reasons. *First*, quite simply because the archive seems to speak to us. It tells us something. If there is interest in conducting archival research, this is certainly because archives are a source of information: they provide us with something that was not general knowledge, something that was left unsaid by documents heretofore available to the public. Archival research discloses something that was kept hidden, silent. It doesn't matter, here, whether this silence was the result of intentional decisions or unintentional structures. Whatever the case, archival research has a revelatory function. In the context of philosophical and theoretical archives, it allows us to bring out new elements in order to better understand the history or genealogy of a work, of a concept or a text. Archival research brings out new knowledge from old «things»: it illuminates the biographical, interpersonal, institutional, socio-political contexts in which such or such philosophical or theoretical work was produced. As such, archival research always crosses limits and breaches a certain silence: it allows new discoveries by transgressing and sometimes redefining the limits or frontiers between silence and non-silence, between the private and the public – for instance between the privacy of drafting, note-taking, writing, and the stage of publication.

However, and *secondly*, these limits or borders are never simple and natural; they are always somewhat artificial, fabricated, and therefore deconstructible. As Derrida explains in his many theoretical works on archives, the process of archivization always supposes a number of exclusions, selections, repressions, in brief, a certain silencing violence which cannot and should not be ignored<sup>1</sup>. This aspect is perhaps significant when

<sup>1</sup> See notably Derrida (1995; 1998). Derrida summarizes this law of archivization in the recently published seminar *Le parjure et le pardon* (1997-1998): «la loi terrible de la machine à archiver, qui sélectionne, filtre, commande et oublie, réprime, refoule, détruit autant qu'elle garde» (Derrida [2019b] : 342).

it comes to Derrida's seminar notes, which constitute an important portion of his archives. Most of his teaching notes are properly written down or typed. Derrida was reading out loud his texts during his seminars – for example at École Normale Supérieure (ENS) from 1964 to 1984. These texts are now available to the reader in the archives (at Irvine, California, or at IMEC, Normandy). However, if we simply read these seminar notes as regular texts, if we read them as if they were just more books to be added to Derrida's already impressive bibliography, we risk losing sight of the specificity of these objects *as seminar notes*: we miss the singularity, the material inscription, the situation of the archive. We risk forgetting that we miss all that which exceeds the written medium, the cuts and exclusions that made their archiving possible – the orality and aurality of the teaching scene, Derrida's voice, potential ad-libs or improvisations, the physical performance that goes with the text, his body language, etc. But we also miss broader contextual delimitations, Derrida's professional environment and correlated friendships, rivalries, or hostilities, the socio-political circumstances of such teaching (which is particularly significant when someone teaches Marx), but also various institutional constraints, the fact that Derrida had to teach specific notions, each year, that were part of the programme of the *agrégation* of philosophy, the discussions with students, students' exposés, their grading, and so on and so forth<sup>2</sup>. The list is virtually unlimited. Certainly, we can always find *traces* of all this in the archives. Traces mark the archive *in absentia*. But there must always be some inarchivable remainder – a certain silence on which the process of archiving depends, one which can never be fully exhausted by archival research, however patient or sophisticated.

The question of what exceeds the archive is part of the archival question: it supposes a num-

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<sup>2</sup> See Mercier (2020c; 2021) for a discussion of the institutional inscription of the seminars, and of Derrida's interrogation of these borders and limitations within the frame of his own teaching practice.

ber of lines and borders between the archivable and the inarchivable, between the archived and its other. For the archive to exist, for it to become available to interpretation, it must be instituted, which implies a series of exclusions and incorporations, and therefore a certain «archival violence» (Derrida [1995]: 19), and perhaps a certain politics of the archive, one which affects the work of interpretation in sometimes unpredictable ways. If one wants to write the history of a silence, such as Derrida's «silence on Marx», one must always run the risk of *marking* and *re-marking* this archival violence and the silencing effects of the archive's institution. This risk is that of *interpretation*. Through its institutionalization the archive keeps in itself, incorporates the silence of what it excludes. How can we *speak* about this silence? How do we *make* it speak, or perhaps *let* it speak? This silence, seemingly pre-originary and irreducible, is a fact that archival research must deal with, one which it must *interpret* – «interpret» either in the sense of an active hermeneutic practice, or in the sense of a musical performance: silence must be reprised, repeated otherwise.

Yet, this silence is always specific. It is what makes each archival document absolutely unique and singular. There is a silence of the archive because the archive preserves in itself the secret of its own institution, of its own production *as archive*. Archival research cannot ignore this silence. This is why one should be careful not to look in the archive for the final truth of a writer, of a thought, of a corpus, or even of a historical context, a «period» or an «age», an *épistèmè* – even though, if it is what one is looking for, the archive is not the worst place to start.

#### THE LAWS OF SILENCE: ECONOMIES AND STRATEGIES

Before I can show how archival research complicates Derrida's so-called «silence on Marx», let me describe briefly the historical context in which this silence «appeared», and how it might have been justified by Derrida and interpret-

ed by his contemporaries. In a 1989 interview, Michael Sprinker asked Derrida about his «reticence» about Marx and more generally about his relationship to Althusser. There, Derrida tried to explain the circumstances of his «silence on Marx» – first when he was studying at ENS in the 1950s, and later, when he returned to teach at the same school with Althusser's support, notably during what Derrida calls «the big Althusserian moment», from the mid-1960s to after 1968: «I thus found myself walled in by a sort of tormented silence. Furthermore, all that I am describing was coupled, naturally, with what others have called an intellectual, if not personal, terrorism. I always had very good personal relations with Althusser, Balibar, and others. But there was, let's say, a sort of theoretical intimidation [...]» (Derrida [1993b]: 188). The 1989 interview is also the occasion for Derrida to offer a striking description of the broader conjuncture, hegemonic mechanisms and interpersonal relationships eliciting a certain silence – a warlike scene characterized by implicitness and avoidance:

*Implicitly, underhandedly, there was such a war, so many maneuvers of intimidation, such a struggle for «hegemony» that one found oneself easily discouraged. Moreover, everyone was inevitably a party to it. There were camps, strategic alliances, maneuvers of encirclement and exclusion. Some forces in this merciless Kampfplatz grouped around Lacan, others around Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze. When it had any, that period's diplomacy (war by other means) was that of avoidance: silence, one doesn't cite or name, everyone distinguishes himself and everything forms a sort of archipelago of discourse without earthly communication, without visible passageway. (Derrida [1993b]: 194)*

In the same interview, Derrida multiplies the justifications for his silence, stressing strategic and political implications. Besides intimidation, he explains that he feared that deconstructive critiques of the Marxist discourse be reappropriated by anti-Marxist (conservative) forces or actors: «What was called my paralysis a while ago was also a political gesture: I didn't want to raise

objections that would have appeared anti-Marxist. [...] And, right or wrong, giving in both to political conviction and probably also to intimidation, I always abstained from criticizing Marxism head on. And I stress «head on»» (192)<sup>3</sup>.

Derrida thus emphasizes the *circumstantial* character of his silence: «The silence was conjunctural. The fact of not speaking, of not lending, more precisely, *a certain public form* was both a conjunctural and a political gesture» (197). Derrida even goes to speculate about the positive impact of his silence *as silence*, on the possibility that his silence might have had concrete effects on the contemporary scene:

*In fact, I think my texts and my behavior «spoke», expressing what was necessary to have understood for those who were interested and knew how to decipher it. For all that, I don't say that silence was right or in general the only possibility. It was the one that I believed right and the only one of which I myself at that place and time was capable. On the French scene I didn't wish to attack, in a conventionally coded, utilizable, and manipulable way, a Marxist discourse [Althusser's] that seemed, rightly or wrongly, positive inside the Party, more intelligent and refined than what one usually heard. Furthermore, as I've said, I felt intimidated. It wasn't easy. It seemed that maybe silence would be more effective. I believe it was not without effect. (197-198)*

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<sup>3</sup> See also p. 197: «Since I couldn't formulate such questions without appearing to join the chorus of adversaries, I remained silent.» This justification, given in hindsight in 1989, is confirmed by a long letter sent by Derrida to his friend Gérard Granel in February 1971. There, Derrida explains that criticizing Marxism could be considered «a reactionary gesture in the present conjuncture», and adds: «I'll never fall into anti-communism, so I shut up [*je la ferme*]. And I know this annoys everyone [...]» (IMEC, 219DRR 47.1, my translation). This letter, marked by a certain irritated impatience, also includes several elements of self-analysis, as well as a long theoretical-political reflection on the post-May 1968 conjuncture in relation to Marxism, and to what could be interpreted as a philosophical «Cold War». I'll analyze the correspondence with Granel in more detail in future publications.

Of course, it is very difficult to evaluate the impact of Derrida's silence, and the effects it might have had – the effects which Derrida *believes* it had. How does one even begin to assess the *effects of silence*? In any case, and as a matter of fact, it is true that Derrida did not publish any text or book focused on Marx or Marxism before 1993. One can find passing references to Marx and Marxist thought in his published texts, but these references are rare and spare<sup>4</sup>. This apparent silence is particularly striking for at least two reasons: first, Derrida's writings during the same period covered a wide array of authors pertaining to the Western canon, from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel, Heidegger, Artaud and Foucault, from Husserl, Freud, Nietzsche and Benjamin to Austin, Valéry and Blanchot, and so on and so forth. Marx's absence was thus all the more striking. Second, the absence of any theoretical or political engagement with Marxist thought on Derrida's part was all the more significant because engaging with the Marxist tradition was then perceived as essential and decisive – particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and especially on the French intellectual scene, both for political and theoretical reasons.

In that context, Derrida's «silence» could only be considered as problematic, and was deemed disturbing by many. Here, already, the matter of «silence» becomes inseparable from that of interpretation – of an interpretative gesture which can produce contradictory and often incompatible effects: *on the one hand*, Derrida's «silence» could be interpreted by his friends, colleagues or interlocutors (notably fellow members of the Tel Quel group) as a tacit recognition of their own theoretical-political positions. For example, the collected volume *Théorie d'ensemble*, published by Tel Quel in 1968, includes not only Derrida's famous text «La différence», but also multiple contributions

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<sup>4</sup> See *De la grammatologie* (Derrida [1967]); *La dissémination* (Derrida [1972a], notably «Hors livre, préfaces»), but the book also includes passing references to Lenin, Mao, and Althusser); *Marges – de la philosophie* (Derrida [1972b], notably «La mythologie blanche» and «Les fins de l'homme»); and *Glas* (Derrida [1974]: 225-231). See Mercier (2020b: 2) for more details.

by Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Pleyne, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Jean-Louis Houdebine in which they explicitly attempt to articulate several of Derrida's notions (arche-writing, text, or *différance*) with dialectical materialism – notably through a general theory of textuality grafted on Althusser's structuralist Marxist-scientific Theory. In this perspective, Sollers and Tel Quel felt justified in interpreting «deconstruction» as an anti-idealist weapon, as a revolutionary device in the service of a Marxist-materialist politics of the proletariat. One can imagine that contemporary observers could feel equally justified in interpreting Derrida's *de facto* alliance with Sollers and Tel Quel, from 1965 until their split in 1971-72, as an objective agreement with their theoretical-political stances. But, *on the other hand*, Derrida's silence on Marx and Marxism could also be interpreted as a proof of the essentially *apolitical* character of deconstruction. The so-called deconstructive «method» was thus perceived by some as a pure textualism, as a purely academic practice uninterested in extratextual and economic-material matters. In this perspective, some could interpret deconstruction as the epitome of bourgeois idealism and ideology, as a conservative «pedagogy» without any grasp on political and material urgencies: a «counterrevolutionary» or «revisionist» weapon. This type of interpretation fueled critiques of Derrida coming from Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault in 1972, but also from members of the Tel Quel group, including Sollers and Pleyne, after the 1971-72 split – that is, after Tel Quel definitely broke from the French Communist Party to embrace Maoism and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, it is an understatement to say that Derrida's «silence» did not go unnoticed. This «silence» was not kept silent: it is often mentioned and thematized as such, as «silence», by Derrida's interlocutors, notably in private correspondence and in the course of interviews. This might explain why, besides the passing references I mentioned above, one may find relatively

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<sup>5</sup> On these polemical questions, see Forest (1995) and Peeters (2010: 230-255).

longer engagements with Marxism and dialectical materialism before 1993 in interviews, usually because Derrida is pressed for answers and justifications by the interviewers<sup>6</sup>. For example, in the June 1971 interview «Positions», Houdebine asks Derrida about the necessity of an «encounter» between deconstruction and «the materialist text», before mentioning «the passage of “*La différance*” where you speak of putting into question “the self-assured certitude of consciousness” and refer to Nietzsche and Freud, leaving in suspense (but this suspense itself is perfectly legible) any reference to Marx, and along with Marx to the text of dialectical materialism» (Derrida [1972c]: 61-62). To which Derrida responds:

*You can imagine that I have not been completely unconscious of it. That being said, I persist in believing that there is no theoretical or political benefit to be derived from precipitating contacts or articulations, as long as their conditions have not been rigorously elucidated. Eventually such precipitation will have the effect only of dogmatism, confusion, or opportunism. To impose this prudence upon oneself is to take seriously the difficulty, and also the heterogeneity, of the Marxist text, the decisive importance of its historical stakes. [...] Do me the credit of believing that the «lacunae» to which you alluded are explicitly calculated to mark the sites of a theoretical elaboration which remains, for me, at least, still to come.* (Derrida [1972c]: 62)

As usual, there is a great deal of preterition, not to say prestidigitation, in Derrida's answers, as he then proceeds to present a number of preliminary remarks as to what the «encounter» between deconstruction and Marxist materialism could look like. I cannot analyze those remarks here, but let me note for now that they chiefly concern the question of a non-metaphysical «concept of matter» and of its relationship to what is called «ideology» in Marxist language. One can imagine that, in the French post-68 intellectual and socio-politi-

cal context, the stakes were very high. In any case, one could easily infer from Derrida's above statement that the work of «theoretical elaboration» which is «*still to come*» would eventually result in *Spectres de Marx*, published in 1993, more than twenty years after this interview. In terms of publications, this is certainly the case. But it is without counting on another scene.

#### ANOTHER SCENE: THE SEMINARS

Indeed, one thing that Derrida does not mention in his answer to Houdebine is that a version of the «encounter» between deconstruction and the materialist text, and of the work of clarification this encounter requires, had in fact already started to take place in the context of Derrida's seminars at ENS<sup>7</sup>. Already in the years 1969-1970, in the seminar «Théorie du discours philosophique: la métaphore dans le texte philosophique», Derrida had offered a series of reflections on the status of metaphor in the philosophical text, which included long analyses of Marx's theory of use-value and of his critiques of metaphoricality. These reflections were later included in much shorter form in the published version of «White Mythology» (Derrida [1972b]). In the same seminar, Derrida also discussed the use

<sup>7</sup> A footnote to the interview (p. 106) mentions a seminar on Plato's «*chora*», but does not say that the seminar actually begins with a long analysis of the status of «matter» and «materiality» in Hegelianism and Marxism – an analysis which infuses all subsequent discussions, in the same seminar, of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger on the topic of *chora* and materiality. This seminar was given in the years 1970-1971, that is, shortly before the interview took place. I'll say a few words about it in a moment. Let's also note that, in the late text «Corona Vitae» dedicated to Gérard Granel, Derrida (2001) mentions a «seminar on Marx» given «in 1968, after May». Unfortunately, I haven't found (yet) any trace of this seminar in the archives – another reminder that archival research is always a work-in-progress, perhaps an endless task. Archives have so far remained silent on that front. All other unpublished seminars I will discuss in this section can be consulted at IMEC (fonds Derrida, 219DRR).

<sup>6</sup> See notably *Positions* (Derrida [1972c]), and the 1975 interview «*Ja, ou le faux-bond*» (Derrida [1977]), which I discuss in Mercier (2021).

of metaphors in Marx's texts, notably in relation to the Marxian opposition between «theory» and «praxis», and included a quick reference to Althusser's work on the topic.

The following year, in 1970-1971, Derrida continued and expanded this reflection from another angle. The (protracted) title of this year's seminar was: «Théorie du discours philosophique 2. La forme du texte philosophique: les conditions d'inscription du texte de philosophie politique (l'exemple du matérialisme)». While the notion of «materialism» appears in the subtitle of the seminar, it would be an overstatement to say that it is a seminar *on* Marx or Marxism. Nonetheless, the seminar's first two sessions include a long analysis of the presuppositions of Marx's self-proclaimed «materialism» and interrogate the conditions of possibility for producing a *concept* of «matter» in a non-idealist way. Through readings of Hegel and Marx, Derrida demonstrates that the (Marxist-materialist) *reversal* of idealism should require not the replacement of «idealism» with «materialism» (both attitudes being described as equally metaphysical) but, rather, a *deconstructive* analysis of the *conditions of inscription* of the philosophical discourse – that is to say: a thinking of the trace, of general text and writing. Derrida explains that what we call «materialist philosophy» risks being complicit with idealism by erasing its own dependency on the marks, on text, and on the trace-structure. Materialism can always resemble a logocentric discourse of the Idea, an idealism of the concept – starting with the *concept* of «matter». Derrida claims that despite their differences, Hegelian idealism and Marxist materialism tend to share «the same ignorance of the conditions of textual inscription of their own discourse» (Session 1, p. 4; my translation).

In this way, Derrida raises the stakes for the refutation of idealism (including in the form of materialist philosophy), and proposes to conceive deconstruction as a thinking of non-substantial materiality, one which would not share materialism's persisting reliance on the concept of matter (for example, inasmuch as it is indebted to classical oppositions such as ideality/matter or theory/

praxis). Derrida leaves the door open for interpreting deconstruction as a form of «materialist», non-idealist thought, and perhaps as *even more* «materialist» than doctrines that bear the name «materialism», precisely because deconstruction aims to reinscribe the logocentric (or idealist) concept of matter within the trace-structure – through which concepts of «matter» and «ideality» find themselves radically dislocated<sup>8</sup>. In the same seminar, Derrida pursues this deconstructive thinking of ideality-materiality through a long reading of Plato's concept of *chora* (in *Timaeus*) and of its interpretations by Aristotle and Heidegger. This reading aims to interrogate the theoretical inscription of «matter» and of «the political» – a textual inscription through which they are both made the docile objects of the philosophical discourse. In deconstructing this forceful gesture of inscription, Derrida enjoins his students to think of a politics and materiality emancipated from the authority of idealism and philosophy – or, to be more precise, from what remains irreducibly idealist in the logocentric gesture of philosophy, even in «materialist» form.

Taken together, these two seminars – which belong to the same «ensemble», that of a «theory of the philosophical discourse» – gesture towards a novel interpretation of the articulation between deconstruction and Marxist-materialism. In these seminars, Derrida signals that the concepts of materialism, of politics and political engagement dominating the contemporary scene remain in fact traditionally metaphysical in their form (and possibly in their results), specifically because they are predicated on classical philosophical oppositions such as ideality/matter or theory/praxis. Derrida thus suggests that the work of deconstruction started in previous years, while it might have seemed to be focused on «text» and «writ-

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<sup>8</sup> This gesture could be interpreted as prefiguring Derrida's future reflections on «materiality without matter». See for instance his discussion of Paul de Man's singular «materialism» in «Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)» (Derrida [2002]).

ing», had in fact more to say about questions of political engagement and resistance than many contemporary discourses that present themselves as overtly «political» or «materialist». It is the case because deconstruction targets the forceful gestures of inscription, delimitation, exclusion and appropriation on which the philosophical discourse relies – all that through which philosophy enforces its totalizing authority over other «regional» fields and hampers the political by restricting its scope and prerogatives.

In the seminars of the following years, the references to Marxist thought became more and more frequent and frontal. In the 1972-1973 and 1974-1975 seminars, Derrida offered lengthy readings of Marxist authors: Marx and Engels (in 1972-1973), but also Lenin, Gramsci, Althusser, Balibar, Buci-Glucksmann and others (in 1974-1975). In these two seminars, Derrida pursued his critical exploration of Marxist thought by focusing on the concept of ideology, analyzing its underlying metaphysical presuppositions<sup>9</sup>. The first session of the 1972-1973 seminar, «Religion et philosophie», offers a long analysis of Marx and Engels's critique of Feuerbach and deconstructs the relationship between ideology and religion in *The German Ideology*. In the second session, Derrida continues this reflection through a deconstructive reading of the logic of commodity fetishism exposed by Marx in *Capital*. There, Derrida tries to identify something in the Marxian text that exceeds the strict opposition between concept and metaphor<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, Derrida refutes the possibility of rigorously dissociating «science» from «ideology», and challenges the notion of a strict scientificity of the Marxist discourse that could be a priori immune to the effects of ideology, be it

in religious or philosophical (metaphysical) form. The 1972-1973 seminar testifies to Derrida's suspicion against the strict opposition between ideology and science, which was a structuring dichotomy in the Marxist theoretical-political landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. Derrida does not mention Althusser by name in this seminar, but he raises a number of objections against the notion of «epistemological break» – a codename directly referring to the type of investigation conducted by Althusser and the Althusserians in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Even though Derrida does not refer explicitly to Althusser in the 1972-1973 seminar, he will offer many discussions of Althusser's texts, some of them long and detailed, in the following years: in the 1974-1975 seminar «GREPH, le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français», in the seminar «Walter Benjamin» (the exact date of which is uncertain, but which was probably given sometime between 1973 and 1975)<sup>11</sup>, and in the 1976-1977 seminar «Théorie et pratique», which is entirely structured around a discussion of Marx, Gramsci, Althusser and Heidegger on the subject of theory, praxis, and technique – this discussion

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of these two seminars, see Mercier (2020b).

<sup>10</sup> This is also done in the seminar «Walter Benjamin», which took place around the same years. There, Derrida justifies Benjamin's interest in allegory, in literature and in the metaphoric powers of language and ideology, against «rationalist» critics – notably Arendt and Adorno – who criticized Benjamin's «mystical» or «poetic» appropriation of Marxism.

<sup>11</sup> I must say a few more words about this rather brief seminar (only three sessions). Although it prefigures some later texts by Derrida on Benjamin, the seminar is very singular in its form and in its orientation, and most of it remains unpublished. There, Derrida explains that his readings of Benjamin are meant to interrogate «a Marxist theory of culture» (session 3, p. 2). In addition to readings of Benjamin, the seminar discusses Brecht, Arendt, Adorno, Althusser, and Sam Weber, and concludes with a reflection on the theme of the «messianic», drawing on Benjamin's «The Task of the Translator» (1923). Given the overall «Marxist» orientation of the seminar, it is difficult not to think that, in addition to providing the background for Derrida's «Des tours de Babel» (Derrida [1985]), the seminar was also the occasion for Derrida to experimentally interrogate a certain figure of Marxist messianicity, thus anticipating the promissory structure of «messianicity without messianism» that will become so important in *Specters of Marx* and beyond. Let me recall that this structure was elaborated by Derrida with reference (and in contrast) to Benjamin's «weak messianic force» (see Derrida [1993c]: 68-69 and 227-228; [1999]: 248-253).



being triggered, notably, by a deconstructive reading of the Theses on Feuerbach<sup>12</sup>.

Taken together, all these seminars comprise hundreds and hundreds of pages of material specifically dedicated to Marx, Marxist thought, Althusser and dialectical materialism. But Derrida did not publish any of this material – while a lot of the work done in the same years on other authors (Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, and so on), sometimes in the same seminars<sup>13</sup>, was later revised and published, often with little change, in such or such publications.

The question of Derrida's friendship with Althusser certainly deserves a few more words, here. This friendship – intense, complex, multi-layered – started in 1952 and lasted until Althusser's death, in October 1990. I cannot reconstitute all the biographical, interpersonal and historical implications of this relationship within the limits of this essay. Derrida tried to expose a number of those implications in his 1989 interview with Sprinker, but they should be complemented with a study of their correspondence, which testifies to their unconditional friendship (they often read like love letters) while showing signs of potential disagreements in theoretical and political terms. For example, as early as 1964, Derrida wrote to Althusser to give him a few comments about his essay «Marxism and Humanism», which will become the last chapter of *Pour Marx* (1965). After praising the text's originality and radicality, Derrida raises a few objections which concern, precisely, the concept of ideology:

*I found the text that you sent to me excellent. I feel as close as one possibly could to that «theoretical anti-humanism» that you set out [...]. I was less convinced by everything that links these propositions*

<sup>12</sup> The seminar was recently published in David Wills's translation (Derrida [2019c]). In a recent article, Michael Naas (2020) offers a powerful analysis of the seminar, very much related to our topic.

<sup>13</sup> Take for example the four sessions on Hegel from the seminar «Religion et philosophie» (1972-1973), the bulk of which was later reproduced in *Glas* (Derrida [1974]). See Mercier (2020b: 8-16) for more details.

*to Karl Marx himself. There is probably a great deal of ignorance in my mistrust and in my feeling that other – non-Marxist – premises could lie behind the same anti-humanism. [...] And, even though everything you say about over-determination and about the «instrumental» conception of ideology satisfies me completely – about the conscious-unconscious too, although ... – the very notion of ideology bothers me, for philosophical reasons that are, as you know, far from «reactionary». Quite the opposite, in fact. The notion strikes me as still imprisoned by a metaphysics and by a certain «reversed idealism» that you know better than anyone in the world. Sometimes, I even have the impression that the notion of ideology hampers you yourself.... We'll have to talk again about all this, with Marx's texts in hands... and you'll have to make me read.<sup>14</sup>*

The result of this promise – «We'll have to talk again» – is not archived, as far as I know. But in 1989, Derrida told Sprinker:

*At every step, I would have liked to have had a long discussion with [Althusser] and his friends and ask them to respond to questions I felt necessary. The fact is, as strange as it might seem, this discussion never took place. And yet we lived in the same «house» where we were colleagues for twenty years and his students and friends were often, in another context, mine. Everything took place underground, in the said of the unsaid. It's part of the French scene and is not simply anecdotal. An intellectual sociology of this dimension of French intellectual or academic life remains to be undertaken and notably of that normalien milieu in which the practice of avoidance is stupefying. (Derrida [1993b]: 193)*

In any case – and without being able to undertake, here, this «intellectual sociology» – one could raise the hypothesis that Derrida's reluctance to frontally engage with Marx and Marxism in publications was partly due to his friendship with Althusser. This hypothesis was formulated as such by Gérard Granel in a letter written to Derrida in September 1967. In that letter, Granel

<sup>14</sup> Derrida's letter to Althusser, September 1st 1964 (IMEC, 20 ALT/72/68 [ALT2.C2-03]). My translation.

praises Derrida for his deconstructive analyses of the Western philosophical canon (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) but also for his willingness to critically discuss works in humanities and structuralism pertaining to anthropology, history, linguistics, or psychoanalysis (notably Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Saussure, or Freud). But Granel immediately adds: «I note in passing that the works inspired by Marx are missing from this list: is it because you want to leave Althusser in peace?»<sup>15</sup>. Granel's question is interesting not only because it indicates that Derrida's friends and interlocutors were well aware of Derrida's more or less calculated silence on Marx and Marxism, but also because it demonstrates that some of them were not shy in offering interpretations of said silence. Unfortunately, I could not find Derrida's response to Granel in the archives. In any case, it is hard to ignore the fact that Derrida's first publication on Marx and Marxist thought, *Specters of Marx*, postdates Althusser's death in 1990, which more or less coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union – a double «coincidence» that can only be left to interpretations.

At the current stage of my archival research, the first substantial discussion of Althusser by Derrida I could find, besides passing references in the 1969-1970 seminar, intervenes in the fifth session of the 1974-1975 seminar «GREPH, le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français». The session offers a close reading of Althusser's famous essay «Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (Notes pour une recherche)», first published in 1970 in the journal *La Pensée*. There, Derrida patiently deconstructs a number of oppositions structuring Althusser's argument: science/ideology, physical violence/ideological violence, family/society, and so on. Later in the same seminar, in sessions 8 and 9, Derrida pursues this reflection on ideology through extensive readings of Marx and Engels, and proceeds to analyze the Hegelian provenance of several Marxian concepts, such as dialectics, effectivity (*Wirklichkeit*), labor (*Arbeit*), production/reproduction, and so forth. Derrida draws

a series of theoretical and political consequences from the persistence of Hegelian metaphysics in the Marxian text. In particular, Derrida gestures towards a deconstructive thinking of labor (and division of labor) that would precede and exceed the Hegelian and Marxian dialectical-ontological systems and their underlying humanistic teleology of reappropriation. As is often the case with Derrida's deconstructive gesture, this is done by accounting for a number of motifs overly neglected by those systems – motifs such as sexual difference, animality, and metaphoricity, which, while being largely ignored by Hegel and Marx, remain silently at work within their systems, effecting from within their deconstruction, or self-deconstruction<sup>16</sup>.

The 1974-1975 seminar is important for another reason. As indicated in the title, the seminar was given in the context of the political-institutional engagements of GREPH (*Groupe de Recherches sur l'Enseignement Philosophique*), that was officially founded in January 1975. The group aimed to interrogate the ways in which the philosophical institution, the teaching of philosophy, and the forms taken by the school system and the university are articulated to power, to the general structures of society and the state, and to the forces that make up their socio-political and economic field of inscription – notably the articulation between education and the division of labor. In the wake of the May 1968 events, the members of GREPH aimed to interrogate the apparent objectivity and neutrality – in axiological and socio-political terms – of the French philosophical institution, starting with the institutional conditions of the teaching of philosophy<sup>17</sup>. Although GREPH did not have any official leadership, Derrida was the main animator of the group. And it is per-

<sup>16</sup> For detailed analyses of economic, psychoanalytic and political implications of Derrida's readings of Althusser and Marx in this unpublished seminar, see Mercier (2020a; 2020b: 16-50; and 2021).

<sup>17</sup> For more information about GREPH see Derrida (1990) and Orchard (2010). For a detailed analysis of Derrida's attitude towards his own teaching practice in seminars, especially in relation to Marxism and Althusserianism, see Naas (2020) and Mercier (2020c; 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Granel's letter to Derrida, September 8<sup>th</sup> 1967 (IMEC, 219DRR 47.1). My translation.

haps important to note that it is in the context of a GREPH seminar that Derrida seriously amped up his work on Marx and Marxist theory. There, Derrida tried to demonstrate that the Marxist critique of ideology, either in Marxian or Althusserian form, is not enough to analyze the multiplicity of forces at work in the functioning of philosophy and to understand its influence on the reproduction of the socio-political and economic structures of society. To put it schematically, Derrida considers that the Marxist critique of ideology tends to reproduce metaphysical schemes which hamper the deconstruction of philosophical hegemony and remain overly conservative in their elaboration and their results. By providing deconstructive readings of Marx and Althusser in the seminar, Derrida thus proceeds to interrogate from within the forces and powers at work in the teaching of philosophy and in education in general. Derrida's deconstructive practice is thus put to work *in* the classroom, through the deconstruction of the seminar-form: the (deconstructive) seminar is a way, for Derrida, to *put deconstruction in practice* or, in other words, to exhibit the practical implications of deconstructing discourses and practices that make up what we call «philosophy», and to do so from within the institution of philosophy, in the very practice of *teaching philosophy*.

This deconstruction of the teaching of philosophy from within the seminar was pursued in the following years in «La vie la mort» (1975-1976)<sup>18</sup>, «GREPH, séminaire sur Gramsci» (1976), and «Théorie et pratique» (1976-1977). In these three courses, very different in form and in content, Derrida systematically recurs to readings of Marx and Marxist texts in order to challenge preconceptions underlying the teaching of philosophy, the program of *agrégation* and the seminar-form, and more generally the various resources of hegemony, cultural production and reproduction. This tells us

something about the role of Derrida's critical readings of Marx and Marxist thoughts in the shaping of his socio-political engagements and deconstructive practices, starting with his own relationship to teaching and to philosophy as an *institution*.

#### LETTING/MAKING THE ARCHIVES SPEAK

By way of conclusion, I would like to describe three ways in which archival research helps to reconsider the work of a philosopher – here, concerning more specifically Derrida's relationship to Marxist thought before *Specters of Marx*.

1. First, archival research reveals that Derrida's «silence on Marx» was in fact relative, multiple, pluralistic, penetrated by different voices, registers, modalities of writing and teaching. While Derrida refrained to engage with Marxism on the public scene, partly to avoid participating in public polemics and fueling anti-Marxist discourses, the study of archival materials helps to bring out another scene, an alternative corpus in which Derrida engaged in depth with Marx and Marxist authors much earlier than is commonly considered. Given that these engagements all have theoretico-political implications – concerning notably the metaphysical presuppositions of political economy, the division of labor, gender politics, and more generally the deconstruction of socio-political institutions – this other corpus also contributes to challenge the notion of an «ethicopolitical turn» of deconstruction, which some claimed took place in the early 1990s<sup>19</sup>. By giving us a glimpse into another (non-public) scene of writing-teaching, archival research thus allows to complicate the public persona of the philosopher «Jacques Derrida» – one which Derrida himself contributed to establish, for better or worse, through his publications and public interventions.

<sup>18</sup> This seminar, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Pascale-Anne Brault, was recently published (Derrida [2019a]). An English translation by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas is now out (Derrida [2020]). For an illuminating analysis of this seminar, see Vitale (2018).

<sup>19</sup> In a retrospective interview given in 2003, Derrida offered a critical reflection on this so-called «turn», notably in relation to his reading of Marx (see Derrida [2004]: 10-13).

2. However, one should not forget that archival documents (here, seminar notes), are not publications: they are teaching documents, and they must be read according to protocols that differ from the exegesis of a published book. Certainly, the two scenes I have described in this essay – one public, the other confined to the semi-public, semi-private pedagogical stage of the seminar – are inseparable and communicate in various ways. But they remain heterogeneous. Taken together, they allow us to grasp the internal conflicts and strategic compromises which shaped Derrida's corpus and the constitution of a certain body of work – a body that is internally divided and heterogeneous, however cohesive it might appear in hindsight.

This is why archival research supposes an attention to contexts of emergence and a constant recontextualization of archival documents. It is a matter of reinscribing the philosophical work in the historical, intellectual, and socio-political landscape of its elaboration, made of biographical intersections, interpersonal relationships, and institutional crossings. The «alternative scene» I have described in this essay demonstrates the importance of a certain *medium*: notably, Derrida used the seminar stage as a platform to approach topics that were perhaps too «touchy» for publications. As a teacher, Derrida could address questions and problems that were immediately relevant on the contemporary intellectual or philosophical scene, without however giving them the fixity, the gravity, or the weight of a publication. The seminars I have discussed in this essay testify to Derrida's desire to insert deconstructive reflections into contemporary debates that could hardly be ignored – concerning, for example, the Marxist and Althusserian critiques of dominant ideology, the theoretical-political influence of Marxist thought, the sexual and political economy of the division of labor, and so forth. Perhaps the seminar stage was the venue Derrida chose to acknowledge such contemporary polemics on the French-Parisian intellectual scene, without falling into polemical discussions by giving them the importance, dignity, or longevity of a «proper» publication – also probably not to engage in a cri-

tique of his friend and colleague Althusser on a public platform. In any case, it is, I believe, crucial that Derrida's perhaps most pragmatic, most practical deconstructive analyses of the institution of philosophy and of the socio-political violence of power structures in which teaching is inscribed first intervened *within his seminar*, and on the background of a reflection on Marx and Marxist theory. Let's not forget that the ENS seminars were the occasion for Derrida to teach to bright and privileged students, bound to become future teachers and professors; one can imagine that Derrida also wanted to train his students in the theoretical and practical deconstruction of philosophy, and to share with them his politico-institutional engagements in favor of a radical transformation of the educational system.

3. But the seminar stage also provided Derrida with the opportunity to satisfy one of the demands of deconstruction – namely, the necessity to reformulate questions *otherwise*, to interrogate existing presuppositions, to transform a certain theoretical-political heritage, and perhaps to radicalize Marxist questions by transforming the coordinates of the debate, without however opposing Marxist thought frontally and publicly. The scene of Derrida's public «silence on Marx» and the work he accomplished, laterally, on the seminar stage can and should thus be read together, as two different aspects of one same strategy. This can be inferred from the following passage from the 1989 interview:

*But, again, I didn't wish to formulate these political objections and risk having them confused with conservative reticence. I didn't want that. I realize that others (few, in truth) found a clear way to take that risk which I didn't take. But I would say also that they did so in a code and according to an axiomatic with which I wanted nothing to do, which were not in tune with the discourse that I was elaborating. That is the deepest reason for my silence rather than shyness or intimidation. I never let myself be intimidated when I can say what I want with the desired rigor. Basically some of my silences or abstentions still today may be explained thus: the code in which I am asked*

*to express myself seems laden with unacceptable presuppositions. It seems already deconstructed, already deconstructible to me, in any case too inadequate (for there is no adequation possible or that holds here) with respect to the code I seek to elaborate and which I know to be both indispensable and yet impossible, not to be found.* (Derrida [1993b]: 198)

Therefore, from the perspective of a quasi-genealogical critique, the seminars can be approached as a sort of laboratory for deconstructive interrogation, in which Derrida attempted to analyze, displace and deconstruct the stakes of contemporary debates, testing notions and ideas that would *later* contribute to a reformulation of Marxist questions on the public stage. For that matter, it is interesting to note that Derrida's reflections on *khôra*, on materiality without matter, on the animal question, but also on messianicity without messianism – all notions that would become decisive in later texts – were in part developed in seminars, and in the context of readings of Marx and Marxist thought. It is easy to see how these notions complicate and radicalize a certain Marxist line of questioning, without being strictly speaking «non-Marxist» or «anti-Marxist». Since the seminar notes on Marx and Marxism I have discussed in this essay were not turned into books or published during Derrida's life, they cannot simply be read as drafts or manuscripts (for example following the methodological protocols of genetic criticism); however, they do tell us something about Derrida's practice of teaching-writing, understood as a scene of (self-) exposure and experimentation in which Derrida took perhaps a number of theoretical or performative risks that could not be taken in his publications. Archival research thus gives us a glimpse into Derrida's deconstructive work in its phase of elaboration – an elaboration that incorporates a certain relationship (complicated, differential) to Marx and Marxist thought. Derrida seemed to say as much to Sprinker in the 1989 interview:

*[My work] integrates to a certain extent motifs that could be considered Marxist, which in any case owe something essential to that heritage, to a passing from*

*Marxism, through Marxism. Inasmuch, for example, as my discourse is freed from certain idealistic naïvetés. But that's not enough to call it a Marxist discourse, don't you think? It's not a discourse dominated by the Marxist reference. It's not a discourse foreign to Marxism or anti-Marxist either. Moreover, I will always wonder if the idea of Marxism – the self-identity of a Marxist discourse or system or even a science or philosophy – is not in principle incompatible with the event-Marx.* (Derrida [1993b]: 221)

In this passage – which anticipates *Specters of Marx* in many ways – Derrida gestures towards the idea that, in the same manner that the presence of *explicit* references to Marx is not enough to make a discourse Marxist per se, the *absence* of any such references does not suffice to draw the conclusion that such discourse is non-Marxist or anti-Marxist, not already affected by «the event-Marx». The implications are massive, and very difficult to fully master<sup>20</sup>. Because it is structurally heterogeneous and self-contradictory, the «event-Marx» which Derrida has in mind is impossible to fully delimit and circumscribe: it may even «speak» through «relative» or «virtual» silences which thus remain to be interpreted. This supposes that what we call «silence» can never carry one and only meaning, quite simply because «silence», just like the archive, remains to be read and interpreted.

The implications of all this become virtually limitless if one takes as seriously as one should what Derrida says in *Specters of Marx* about «this attempted radicalization of Marxism called deconstruction»: «deconstruction would have been impossible and unthinkable in a pre-Marxist space» (1993c: 115). If we accept that what we call «deconstruction» incorporates in a non-reducible way this relationship to Marxism, to the theoretical and practical space opened by a certain Marx, and to the intellectual and political scene which was made possible by the «event-Marx», and of which the «event-Derrida» is also

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of effects of silent haunting, spectrality, and nonlinear inheritance between Marx and Derrida in the Marxist and post-Marxist «fields» and beyond, see Mercier (2020a).

a part, an actor and an effect, then we must *also* admit the possibility that a certain reference to Marx and to Marxism was perhaps silently at work in every one of Derrida's writings, somewhat haunting the scene of what has come to be called «deconstruction»<sup>21</sup>. In this way, Derrida's «silence» on Marx could always be interpreted as a silent repetition, a silence perhaps always-already ventriloquized, parasitized by the «event-Marx» – thus repeating, reprising, interpreting otherwise and transforming the Marxist gesture, perhaps even before the name «Marx» was ever pronounced or written by Derrida.

But this analysis could very well be reversed, if one considers that the «event-Marx» was and remains structurally heterogeneous, itself deconstructible and deconstructive, self-deconstructive, thus effecting its own transformation, its self-deconstruction in absolutely unpredictable ways, in which case one could argue that something like «deconstruction», save the name, was silently at work in and through the «event-Marx» – linear time be damned. There, one silence haunts another, although, or because, silence remains to be interpreted: it becomes a resource for transformative interpretation, and as such remains, as Derrida says, «entrusted to the other». Beyond determinate silences, beyond the circumscription of such or such silence, deconstruction compels us to reconsider the very notion of silence, the constitutive otherness of a text or of a corpus, for example a body of work that finds itself reconfigured in and through archival research. A certain otherness always communicates through what may first appear as a certain silence. Far from being insignificant,

such silence can speak volume; it can *let* or *make* the other speak, for instance by promising the proliferation of interpretations to come:

*Even if I decide to be silent, even if I decide to promise nothing, not to commit myself to saying something that would confirm once again the destination of speech, and the destination toward speech, this silence yet remains a modality of speech: a memory of promise and a promise of memory.* (Derrida [1987]: 15)

A memory of promise and a promise of memory – in other words: the gift, the chance of an archive.

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<sup>21</sup> How to ignore the fact that «deconstruction», which was from the outset conceived as an anti-imperialist and anti-binarist thought, with philosophical, political, and cultural implications, was conceptualized and elaborated in the context of the Cold War, and probably carries within itself the traces of this historical context, marked by both Marxism and anti-Marxism, but also by diverse strategies of non-alignment, anti-imperialist and decolonial struggles, and so on. For an analysis of this philosophical «Cold War», of its binarism and uncanny specularity, see Derrida (1993a).

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## Interminable readings. Jacques Derrida between archive and dissemination

### Lecture interminabili. Jacques Derrida tra archivio e disseminazione

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**Abstract.** The paper seeks to outline the relationship between *Geschlecht III* and Derrida's published texts devoted to the mark «Geschlecht» in order to detect the general strategy followed by Jacques Derrida into the construction of his archive during his lifetime. Indeed, we suppose that his archive has to be build in accordance with his deconstructive statements about the classical conception of the archive: a totalizing closure of a textual production able to trace it back to the unity of an ideal identity. In particular, the paper aims to focus on a passage at the end of Jacques Derrida's *Geschlecht III*, where the question of the animal in Heidegger comes in the foreground and in a way that is slightly different from what we already know through Derrida's published Works and could impose a re-reading of its «entire» work.

**Keywords.** Deconstruction, archive, animal, memory, trace.

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L'équipe guidata da Geoffrey Bennington, responsabile dell'edizione dei testi contenuti nel Derrida-Archive, conservato presso l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine di Caen, ha pubblicato nel 2018 un volume dallo statuto particolare: *Geschlecht III. Sexe, race, nation, humanité* (Derrida [2018]). I curatori, sulla base di un'accurata ricerca filologica, ritengono di aver individuato all'interno del seminario inedito *Nationalité et nationalisme philosophiques. Le Fantômes de l'autre* (1984-1985), un testo che Derrida ha più volte annunciato come *Geschlecht III* ma mai pubblicato. Si tratterebbe dunque del terzo intervento di una serie di quattro dedicati da Derrida all'interpretazione di Heidegger seguendo la traccia del termine «Geschlecht» all'interno dell'opera del filosofo tedesco. L'unico rimasto inedito, gli altri infatti sono stati pubblicati nell'ordine seguente: *Geschlecht : différence sexuelle, différence ontologique* (Derrida [1987a]), *La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)* (Derrida



[1987b]), *L'oreille de Heidegger. Philopolémologie (Geschlecht IV)* (Derrida [1994]). La serie dunque sarebbe finalmente completa. Il testo pubblicato come *Geschlecht III*, secondo l'edizione stabilita da Geoffrey Bennington, Katie Chenoweth e Rodrigo Therezo, presenta nella prima parte il testo di una trentina di pagine dattiloscritte che Derrida aveva distribuito al pubblico della conferenza tenuta alla Loyola University di Chicago nel marzo del 1985 che verrà pubblicata come *La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)*. Nel corso della conferenza, Derrida aveva indicato in queste pagine dattiloscritte la base di un testo più ampio – un altro centinaio di pagine – che avrebbe pubblicato come *Geschlecht III*. I curatori di *Geschlecht III*, seguendo le indicazioni dello stesso Derrida, hanno ritenuto di poter identificare questo centinaio di pagine nelle ultime cinque sessioni (dalla 9a alla 13a) del seminario *Nationalité et nationalisme philosophiques. Le Fantômes de l'autre*<sup>1</sup>.

1. Concentrerò la mia lettura sulla composizione del testo *Geschlecht III* in relazione ai testi pubblicati dedicati all'interpretazione dell'uso del termine «Geschlecht» nell'opera di Heidegger. In primo luogo, mi propongo di formulare alcune ipotesi generali sul rapporto tra testi inediti e pubblicati, cioè sulla costruzione e decostruzione del suo archivio da parte di Derrida. Perché suppongo che, avendo preparato il suo archivio per tutta la sua vita, Derrida non possa non aver elaborato una strategia per sfuggire alla cattura della sua scrittura in un archivio, una strategia per costruire un archivio decostruendo la sua concezione e funzione classica: la chiusura totalizzante di una produzione testuale in grado di ricondurla all'unità di un'identità ideale, come sottolinea lo stesso Derrida in *Mal d'archive*:

*Questa funzione arcontica non è soltanto topo-nomologica. Essa non richiede soltanto che l'archivio sia deposto da qualche parte, su di un supporto stabile e a disposizione di un'autorità ermeneutica legittima.*

*È necessario che il potere arcontico, che comprende anche le funzioni di unificazione, di identificazione, di classificazione, vada di pari passo con ciò che chiameremo il potere di consegna [consignation]. Per consegna non intendiamo soltanto, nel senso corrente di questa parola, il fatto di assegnare una residenza o di affidare per mettere in riserva, in un luogo e su di un supporto, ma qui l'atto di consegnare radunando i segni [rassemblant les signes]. Non si tratta soltanto della consignation tradizionale, e cioè la prova scritta, ma di ciò che qualsiasi consignatio suppone. La consegna tende a coordinare in un solo corpus, in un sistema o una sincronia nella quale tutti gli elementi articolano l'unità di una configurazione ideale. In un archivio, non deve esserci dissociazione assoluta, eterogeneità o segreto, che verrebbe a separare (secernerre), dividere, in modo assoluto. Il principio arcontico dell'archivio è anche un principio di consegna, cioè di raccoglimento [c'est-à-dire de rassemblement]. (Derrida [1995]: 3)*

In questo orizzonte, formulerò alcune ipotesi sulla strategia messa in opera da Derrida nei confronti dell'archivio in generale e quindi della costruzione del suo archivio, essendo evidente che essa ha qualcosa a che fare con la strategia elaborata da Derrida per sfuggire alla cattura da parte del paradigma heideggeriano della *Versammlung*. Infatti, non è difficile cogliere, nel passo citato, il riferimento a Heidegger, in particolare nell'enfasi sul «luogo» e sul «raccoglimento», traduzione di «ressemblant», la parola francese che Derrida usa ovunque per tradurre «Versammlung» in Heidegger.

Quindi, quale relazione possiamo tracciare tra *Geschlecht III* e i testi pubblicati in cui il termine «Geschlecht» è in qualche modo in gioco? Leggendo *Geschlecht III*, è possibile notare qualcosa di familiare per uno studioso di Derrida, in particolare nella sua prima parte, corrispondente al dattiloscritto distribuito ai partecipanti alla conferenza tenutasi a Chicago nel 1985. Come è noto, il testo della conferenza di Chicago sarà pubblicato in *Psyché. Invention de l'autre* nel 1987 con il titolo *La main de Heidegger. (Geschlecht II)*. Nella seconda parte della conferenza Derrida riassume, almeno apparentemente, il dattiloscritto e le

<sup>1</sup> Per la ricostruzione del testo cfr. Therezo (2018): 7-10.

rimanenti cento pagine che non ha avuto il tempo di trascrivere, indicando la lista dei temi che vi sarebbero trattati. Torneremo più avanti su questa lista. Bisogna infatti innanzitutto rilevare che in *Geschlecht III* sono presenti molte tracce di un altro libro pubblicato da Derrida nello stesso anno di *Psyché*, vale a dire, *De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question*. In particolare e in modo significativo nel capitolo IX e nel capitolo X che sono anche gli ultimi del libro. Osservando con attenzione, è possibile vedere che nel capitolo IX di *De l'esprit* ritroviamo una lettura di *Die Sprache im Gedicht*, il testo di Heidegger, al quale è dedicato anche *Geschlecht III*. Più precisamente, il capitolo IX di *De l'esprit*, sembra corrispondere alla prima parte di *Geschlecht III*. In particolare, l'interpretazione delle pagine heideggeriane dedicate al poema di Trakl, *Frühling der Seele*, è molto simile. In *De l'esprit*, questa lettura è più breve e organizzata in modo diverso, ma segue lo stesso percorso tracciato da Heidegger: il viaggio dell'anima verso un mattino più originario, che è anche un viaggio verso «Das Ort der Versammlung», il luogo del raccoglimento spirituale:

*Questo percorso spirituale permetterebbe di interpretare la decomposizione e la corruzione (Verwesen) della forma umana di cui parla Siebengesang des Todes (O des Menschen verweste Gestalt). (...) Non si tratta qui di una storia dello spirito in senso hegeliano o neo-hegeliano, ma di una spiritualità dell'anno: ciò che va (geht, gehen, ienai, Jahr) ma va ritornando piuttosto verso il mattino, verso il più presto. Precipitandomi in modo indecente verso una certa formalizzazione, possiamo dire che, in fin dei conti, il proposito di Heidegger consisterebbe nel mostrare che il mattino e la notte di questa spiritualità sono più originari, nel Gedicht di Trakl così inteso, del levarsi e tramontare del sole, l'Oriente e l'Occidente, l'origine e la decadenza che hanno corso nell'interpretazione dominante, cioè metafisico-cristiana. Questo mattino e questa notte sarebbero più originari di qualsiasi storia onto-teologica, di qualsiasi storia e di qualsiasi spiritualità apprese in un mondo metafisico-platonico o cristiano. (Derrida [1987c]: 140)<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Derrida (2018): 82-83.

All'inizio della seconda parte di *Geschlecht III*, cioè della nona sessione del seminario, Derrida mette in discussione la possibilità di distinguere questa mattina più originario da un'interpretazione metafisico-cristiana, proprio come in *De l'esprit*, discutendo cioè la precaria ma decisiva distinzione posta da Heidegger tra «geistig» e «geistlich» nella poesia di Trakl. Non solo, troviamo in entrambi i testi anche la stessa messa in scena di un dialogo immaginario tra Heidegger e un teologo cristiano:

*I primi, dunque, quelli che chiamavo i teologi e tutti quelli che potrebbero rappresentarli, direbbero a Heidegger: "Ma ciò che voi chiamate lo spirito archi-originario, pretendendo che sia estraneo al cristianesimo, è proprio l'aspetto più essenziale del cristianesimo. Come voi, è ciò che vorremmo risvegliare sotto teologemi, filosofemi, rappresentazioni correnti. Vi ringraziamo di ciò che dite, avete diritto a tutta la nostra riconoscenza per ciò che ci fate intendere e pensare – e che in effetti riconosciamo". (Derrida [1987c]: 179)<sup>3</sup>*

A questo punto, un buon genealogista potrebbe dire che *Geschlecht III* costituisce il materiale da cui proviene l'ultima parte di *De l'esprit*, o, ancora più pretenziosamente, che mostra il luogo originario da cui proviene *De l'esprit*, per concludere che *De l'esprit* è il luogo a cui ricondurre l'interpretazione derridiana del «Geschlecht» in quanto tale, nella sua unità originaria finalmente ritrovata. E così si spiegherebbe anche la mancata pubblicazione di *Geschlecht III*, quale testo autonomo all'interno della serie «Geschlecht». Derrida stesso sembra in qualche modo giustificare questa posizione. Infatti, alla fine del testo con il quale Derrida inaugura la serie, *Geschlecht. Différence sexuelle, différence ontologique* (che risale al 1983), in una nota a piè di pagina, aggiunta alla versione pubblicata su *Psyché* nel 1987, Derrida si riferisce alla seconda parte di *La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)* – il riassunto già menzionato – e alle pagine di *De l'esprit* corrispondenti ai capitoli IX e X<sup>4</sup>. Non solo, in questo riassunto, elencando i temi principali del futuro *Geschlecht III*, Derrida cita «l'oppo-

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Derrida (2018): 108-10.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Derrida (1987a): 414.

sizione idiomatica e intraducibile tra *geistig* e *geistlich*, che gioca un ruolo determinante», rinviando in nota proprio a *De l'esprit* (Derrida [1987b]: 450), dimostrando così che la questione dello spirito sarebbe stata considerata determinante già nel 1985, cioè durante il seminario *Le fantôme de l'autre*, orientando così la questione del «Geschlecht» in quanto tale. Tuttavia, una tale ricostruzione, per quanto possa spiegare la mancata pubblicazione di *Geschlecht III*, confluito in *De l'esprit*, non pare del tutto esauriente. Innanzitutto perché, a questo punto, resterebbe da spiegare l'esistenza di un altro testo di Derrida dedicato al «Geschlecht», numerato come il quarto della serie, «L'oreille de Heidegger. Philopolémologie (*Geschlecht IV*)» e risalente al 1989. In questo testo non si parla mai di Spirito. Fatto sorprendente visto che Derrida vi rilegge alcuni dei testi di Heidegger che erano già al centro di *De l'esprit*, in particolare la *Rektorats Rede*. Soprattutto perché, a ben vedere, nel riassunto contenuto in *La main de Heidegger*, Derrida cita l'opposizione «geistig/geistlich» in un sottoelenco di cinque temi che fanno tutti parte del quarto punto della lista principale dei cinque temi attraverso i quali Derrida intendeva sviluppare la questione del «Geschlecht». Il quarto punto della lista principale riguarda le risorse idiomatiche alle quali Heidegger ricorre nei momenti decisivi. Derrida menziona «Geschlecht», «Fremd», «geistig/Geistlich» e «Whansinn». Quindi, è solo in questa sotto-lista, redatta nel momento in cui Derrida stava preparando il testo della conferenza di Chicago (1985), che l'opposizione «geistig/Geistlich» gioca un ruolo determinante. Infatti, nella lista principale, ci sono due temi di cui Derrida darà un primo sviluppo solo in *Geschlecht III*. Due temi molto importanti, in quanto diventeranno centrali molto tempo dopo, e cioè nell'opera più recente del filosofo franco-algerino: il primo è «L'uomo e l'animalità», il secondo «Polisemia e disseminazione». Quest'ultimo è completamente assente in *De l'esprit* dove, al contrario, possiamo trovare un primo sviluppo del tema «L'uomo e l'animalità» e anche l'apertura del percorso che Derrida proseguirà con *Apories* fino a *L'animal que donc je suis* pubblicato postumo. Ma, come mostrerò, la trat-

tazione di questo tema in *Geschlecht III* presenta una leggera differenza rispetto a *De l'esprit*. Una differenza leggera ma significativa perché potrebbe permetterci di inscrivere la genealogia della trattazione derridiana del tema «Uomo e animalità» in Heidegger oltre i limiti temporali e le indicazioni testuali offerte dallo stesso Derrida in *L'animal que donc je suis*. Potrebbe addirittura permetterci di riconoscere la «presenza» di questo tema così importante nell'ultima fase dell'opera di Derrida già all'inizio della decostruzione. Infatti, in *L'animal que donc je suis*, Derrida offre una genealogia che inizierebbe ancora prima dell'apertura del dossier «Geschlecht» e che risale a *Les fins de l'homme*, risalente al 1968 e pubblicato in *Marges. De la philosophie* nel 1972:

*Certo, come sapete, la cosa che mi interessa di più in questo seminario del 1929–30 [Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik], in queste proposizioni nucleari riguardanti la pietra, l'animale e l'uomo, ed in particolare l'animale «weltarm», «povero di mondo», in un certo modo, mi occupa già da molto tempo. Quel che vorrei dire qui, in fondo, l'ho già detto in Les fins de l'homme, in Geschlecht e La main de Heidegger, in De l'esprit, in cui ho effettivamente parlato di questo testo e delle sue proposizioni, in L'oreille de Heidegger, in Apories. (Derrida [2006]: 196)*

Mostrerò che il passaggio su o dell'animale in *Geschlecht III* apre questa genealogia in altre direzioni, che risalgono a testi anche precedenti *Les fins de l'homme*, rendendo strutturalmente impossibile determinare non solo la sua chiusura ma anche la sua presunta origine.

2. Innanzitutto bisogna prestare attenzione al luogo in cui occorre questo passaggio su o dell'animale. Si trova alla fine di *Geschlecht III*, cioè all'inizio dell'ultima sessione del seminario tenuta prima di lasciare la Francia per recarsi a Chicago per la conferenza in cui leggerà *La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)*, e farà circolare il dattiloscritto corrispondente alla prima parte di *Geschlecht III*. Derrida apre quest'ultima sessione invitando il pubblico a prestare attenzione al suo modo di leggere Heidegger, concentrandosi non

solo sui vari temi e contenuti che tratta, ma anche e forse più in generale su ciò che fa Heidegger, sul suo modo di lavorare sui testi. Infatti, già nella prima parte di *Geschlecht III* Derrida aveva detto che, leggendo Trakl, Heidegger sta tracciando il suo personale percorso verso il più originario, la patria (*Heimat*) promessa o la promessa della patria; In definitiva, Derrida afferma che attraverso le parole di Trakl, Heidegger sta parlando di se stesso:

*In verità, pongo in questo excursus la cosa che mi interessa di più, forse, nella lettura di questo testo. Che fa Heidegger? Quale movimento, quale cammino, quale follia, quale senso o altro senso describe, di cosa e di chi parla in questa pretesa situazione del Gedicht di Trakl. Guardate con attenzione. Qui Heidegger legge e scrive, sulla traccia del luogo di Trakl, come qualcuno che i critici letterari, gli studiosi di poesia o i filologi o i filosofi, uomini del sapere, giudicherebbero folle, egli sembra errare, saltare da un poema all'altro, egli peregrina, solo, straniero o sulla traccia dell'altro, egli è allo stesso tempo il morto e lo straniero, gioca nella sua tomba, ecc. Dunque egli parla di se stesso parlando dell'altro, parla del suo luogo parlando del luogo dell'altro, o piuttosto è alla ricerca del suo luogo seguendo i passi dell'altro, ecc. Tuttavia, e si può proseguire questa analisi anche in questo senso, intendo l'analisi di un testo di Heidegger che in definitiva non è altro che la firma o l'impronta o il colpo di Heidegger, si può proseguire dicendo, come lo dice egli stesso dello straniero (fram, fremd) che è in cammino, sulla strada, in peregrinazione ma che il suo cammino ha una destinazione (una Bestimmung), come lo diceva egli stesso dello straniero in cammino, egli non va da nessuna parte, egli non legge e non scrive come capita, non erra quando salta da un poema o da un verso all'altro. Non dirò che sa dove va, giacché questa destinazione, questa determinazione nella destinazione, questa Bestimmung, non è dell'ordine del sapere, ma in definitiva, egli segue un'orientazione e un cammino, un Sinn che pre-orienta o magnetizza o attrae il suo incedere, come il suo intrattenersi con Trakl. (Derrida [2018]: 86)*

Nell'ultima parte di *Geschlecht III*, Derrida ritorna sul suo modo di leggere Heidegger, prestando attenzione al modo in cui Heidegger stesso,

leggendo Trakl, parla di sé, ma anche al modo in cui le lecture di Heidegger hanno subito trasformazioni nel corso del tempo e stanno ancora cambiando a causa del mutamento dei relativi contesti, del tempo e del luogo, possiamo dire, in cui tali lecture sono emerse e continuano a emergere ma anche a causa di nuovi testi che provengono dall'archivio heideggeriano, ma anche a causa di nuove traduzioni di testi già noti. Derrida arriva in qualche modo a generalizzare questa situazione e a formalizzare, attraverso Heidegger, una sorta di regola generale della lettura e dell'interpretazione. Una regola di lettura che è anche una regola per l'assunzione dell'eredità di cui ci facciamo carico attraverso la lettura e l'interpretazione, di conseguenza, una regola che possiamo estendere al rapporto che un interprete dovrebbe intrattenere con il materiale proveniente da un archivio e che dovrebbe quindi valere anche per l'archivio derridiano. Si potrebbe infatti dire che qui, Derrida, parlando di Heidegger, sta parlando di se stesso, del suo modo di leggere un testo e forse di come avrebbe voluto essere letto:

*Questione di memoria, di tecnica e di animalità, siamo ancora a questo. La «forza» o la «debolezza» di un pensiero si commisura alla capacità del colpo (Schlag) e del doppio colpo, cioè alla sua capacità di iscriversi in più luoghi in una volta, di occupare molteplici superfici d'iscrizione che sono altrettante memorie. Non dirò memoria oggettiva per parlare di queste memorie che sono i libri, i calcolatori, la cultura, l'università, la tradizione, ciò che anche Heidegger avrebbe chiamato lo Spirito oggettivo, non parlerò di memoria oggettiva perché è proprio questo valore di oggettività ad essere messo in questione attraverso ciò che stiamo pensando a partire da ciò che Heidegger ci ha lasciato in eredità, a partire dalle memorie di cui il suo testo occupa la superficie d'iscrizione. Ogni volta che dopo un'eclisse qualcosa del suo testo si impone alla lettura, si richiama a noi, ad altri, agli altri, nell'assenza stessa del soggetto Heidegger (a breve incontreremo le nozioni di soggetto e oggetto, di soggetto come oggetto), ciò significa che un'altra superficie d'iscrizione, un'altra potenza testuale è stata occupata in anticipo. Questa questione della memoria, dell'archivio, del lascito e delle superfici d'iscrizione,*

*non sono io ad imporla al testo che stiamo leggendo. Sto infatti parlando della capacità di memoria, di iscriverne e conservare allo stesso tempo nella memoria. Ogni volta che dopo una notte, la notte di un'eclisse, la memoria ritorna in qualche modo con un nuovo testo, quando per esempio ci si accorge che nello stesso volume (un libro, una pagina), erano iscritti molteplici testi e dunque molteplici letture, molteplici traduzioni, e mentre una appare affaticata, esausta, la risorsa di un'altra ne prende il posto (ed è da questo che si riconosce la forza o il potere di un testo, da questa accumulazione di tracce nello stesso volume, nella stessa piega en grammatica, da questa economia ellittica o ecliptica), allora è proprio di una tecnica della memoria che si tratta.* (Derrida [2018]: 162)

Questo significa che una lettura – di Heidegger, di Derrida o di altri autori – può cambiare a causa di nuovi testi, eventualmente provenienti da un archivio, come nel caso di *Geschlecht III*, imponendoci di riconfigurare o ricostruire il *corpus* dell'autore. Tuttavia, una lettura, anche la lettura del testo già noto può cambiare, o meglio, cambia necessariamente, a causa del cambiamento dei contesti della lettura e questo vale anche per lo stesso lettore che legge lo stesso testo in contesti differenti e differiti. Lo stesso testo, un libro o anche una pagina, può essere letto in modi diversi a seconda del cambiamento di prospettiva della lettura anche da parte dello stesso lettore. Allora un testo presunto noto è anche e sempre un testo nuovo, sempre aperto a nuove riletture. Quindi, d'accordo con Geoffrey Bennington che in *Not Half, not Half, not End* descrive il rapporto di Derrida con le sue opere come una riletura incessante<sup>5</sup>, bisogna riconoscere che anche le genealogie,

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Bennington (2010): 117: «Note conclusive, per ritornare su ciò che ho detto in precedenza a proposito della lettura di Derrida. Ricordando quanto si dice in *Force et signification* a proposito della reciprocità differita di lettura e scrittura, a proposito del primo lettore che detta e dell'autore che legge, non si potrebbe dire che Derrida, sicuramente un grande lettore, sia anche un grande lettore di se stesso, che egli non abbia mai smesso di scrivere, costantemente e continuamente, un'interpretazione di questa intuizione iniziale che lo ha gettato fin dall'inizio in questa lettura-scrittura, e

i riassunti, i programmi e gli annunci riguardanti le sue opere, che Derrida dissemina nei suoi testi, cambiano secondo i cambiamenti di contesto della sua stessa rilettura del proprio lavoro, vanificando senza rimedio la pretesa genealogista di consegnare quest'opera a un'origine, a un luogo unico, un luogo capace di racchiuderla in un *corpus* identificabile. Ed è anche così che Derrida sfugge alla trappola della *Versammlung* Heideggeriana, e cioè non solo attraverso la semplice nozione di «disseminazione», ma mettendola in pratica nella sua stessa scrittura. Infatti, se è possibile rilevare in *Geschlecht III* l'interesse del passaggio sull'animalità che mi avvio finalmente a citare, se suppongo di poter collegare questo passaggio con altre opere di Derrida, anche e soprattutto con opere che non sono menzionate da Derrida nella sua ultima genealogia su questo tema, è solo perché la questione dell'animalità, divenuta centrale nell'opera più recente del filosofo franco-algerino, permette e induce una rilettura della sua opera alla luce di questo tema.

Per procedere nella dimostrazione, devo prima di tutto sottolineare nel passaggio sopra citato, tratto da *Geschlecht III*, il riferimento di Derrida all'intimo rapporto tra «memoria», «tecnica» e «animalità» e più in generale tra «memoria», «archivio», «eredità» e «superfici o supporti di iscrizione». Ricordo che quest'ultimo rapporto era già in gioco in questi stessi termini nel passaggio citato in apertura, tratto da *Mal d'archive*. In *Geschlecht III*, subito dopo il testo citato sopra, Derrida presta attenzione alla distinzione tra animale ed essere umano posta da Heidegger attraverso Trakl: secondo Heidegger la scimmia blu a cui si riferisce Trakl, è l'animale che diventa umano attraverso il ricordo e la commemorazione. Ciò che distingue l'essere umano dall'animale è la sua capacità di memoria, Heidegger infatti sostiene che la scimmia, l'animale in quanto tale, non ha

una reinterpretazione delle precedenti interpretazioni di questo stesso momento "originario"? E questo sarebbe il motivo per cui, tra le altre cose, egli sarebbe giustificato nello scrivere qualche volta, nell'ammettere o confessare che tutto ciò che scrive sia autobiografico, che sia una confessione, incapace di chiudersi in un'autosufficienza o un'autarchia».

memoria<sup>6</sup>. In *Geschlecht III* Derrida contesta questa affermazione in un orizzonte argomentativo che sembra già quello molto più tardo di *L'animal que donc je suis*, ma che può anche essere ricondotto a quello molto più precoce e più generale di *De la grammatologie* :

*Naturalmente, è questo limite tra due memorie, quale limite tra l'animale e l'uomo, che viene costantemente messo in questione in questo seminario, ed è il motivo per cui ho insistito molto sulla questione dell'animalità prima di affrontare questo testo.\* Tale questione è anche quella della tecnica. Ma l'avrete compreso, per me non si tratta di cancellare qualsiasi limite o qualsiasi distinzione tra ciò che chiamiamo la bestia e ciò che chiamiamo l'uomo, ma di contestare l'unità di questo limite quale opposizione da una parte e dall'altra di una frontiera che sarebbe quella che separa la memoria e la non-memoria, il dare e il prendere – e la memoria è anche un modo di prendere, conservare, di afferrare [saisir], come si dice oggi, curiosamente, nel codice dei computer e dei words processors: si afferra un testo, si dice afferrare un testo per dire che lo si registra, lo si mette in una memoria oggettiva, nella macchina o sulla superficie d'iscrizione – la memoria pensante e la memoria biologica, la memoria pensante e la memoria tecnologica. La differenza tra le specie dette animali, compreso l'uomo, sono numerose (molto più di una) e sto parlando di differenze strutturali nella capacità diciamo engrammatica e nell'economia dell'iscrizione, nel potere e nella struttura mnemoniche. E dunque nell'esperienza del territorio. E del territorio sessuale. E del ritorno, e della «patria». (Derrida [2018]: 164)*

Questo testo richiederebbe una lunga analisi, qui posso solo seguire le tracce di un'altra genealogia, orientata dalla questione della memoria e dell'animalità: infatti, a mia conoscenza, questo è l'unico luogo in cui Derrida affronta la questione dell'opposizione tra uomo e animale in Heidegger dal punto di vista della memoria, cioè dal punto di vista della traccia, come avverrà in *L'animal que donc je suis*, ma non nella parte dedicata ad Heidegger<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Derrida (2018): 163.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Derrida (2006): 193-219.

In primo luogo, notiamo che la contestazione dell'unità del limite nell'opposizione tra uomo e animale era già posta nel programma del 1985, e quindi molto prima del suo esplicito sviluppo in *L'animal que donc je suis*. L'asterisco che ho inserito nella citazione segnala una nota a piè di pagina dove Derrida si riferisce a la *La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)*. Questo riferimento ci aiuterà a comprendere il passo tratto da *Geschlecht III*. In *La main de Heidegger* troviamo la stessa contestazione, negli stessi termini, che definisce il programma che Derrida svilupperà in *L'animal que donc je suis* ma solo dopo essere passato per *De l'esprit* e *Apories*. In particolare, questo programma emerge proprio lì dove Derrida contesta l'opposizione tra uomo e animale posta da Heidegger in *Che cosa significa pensare?*

*Qui in effetti occorre una frase che mi pare allo stesso tempo sintomatica e dogmatica. Dogmatica, cioè metafisica, provenendo da una di queste «rappresentazioni correnti» che rischiano di compromettere la forza e la necessità del discorso in questo luogo. (...) Non più di altri, classici o moderni, non mi pare che Heidegger sfugga alla regola quando scrive: «La scimmia, per esempio [corsivo di J. D.], possiede degli organi di prensione ma non possiede mani (Greiforgane besitzt z.B. der Affe, aber er hat keine Hand)» (WD 51; 16). Dogmatico nella sua forma, questo enunciato tradizionale presuppone un sapere empirico o positivo i cui titoli, le prove e i segni non sono mostrati. (...) Questo non-sapere eretto a sapere assodato, poi esposto quale proposizione essenziale a proposito dell'essenza degli organi prensili della scimmia che non avrebbe mani, non è soltanto, nella forma, una specie di apax empirico-dogmatico smarrito o fuorviante nel mezzo di un discorso che si tiene all'altezza del pensiero più esigente, al di là della filosofia e della scienza. Nel suo stesso contenuto, è una proposizione che marchia la scena essenziale del testo. Essa la marchia di un umanismo che certo si vuole non metafisico, Heidegger lo sottolinea nel paragrafo successivo, ma di un umanismo che, tra un *Geschlecht* umano che si vuole sottrarre alla determinazione biologista e un'animalità rinchiusa nei suoi programmi organico-biologici, iscrive non delle differenze ma un limite opposizionale assoluto del quale altrove ho tentato di mostrare che, come fa sempre l'opposizio-*

*ne, cancella le differenze e riconduce all'omogeneo, seguendo la più resistente tradizione metafisico-dialettica. Ciò che Heidegger dice della scimmia priva di mani – e dunque, lo vedremo, priva di pensiero, del linguaggio, del dono – non è soltanto dogmatico nella forma perché Heidegger non ne sa niente e non ne vuole sapere niente. È grave perché tutto ciò traccia un sistema di limiti entro i quali tutto ciò che dice della mano dell'uomo assume senso e valore. Dal momento in cui una tale limitazione appare problematica, il nome dell'uomo, il suo Geschlecht, diventa esso stesso problematico.* (Derrida [1987b]: 428)

Anche qui quindi la scimmia è al centro della scena come animale esemplare per l'opposizione tra uomo e animale ma in questo caso per le sue mani e non per la sua memoria che non viene mai menzionata nel saggio. Tuttavia, dato che, secondo Derrida, Heidegger stabilisce l'opposizione tra l'uomo e l'animale quale opposizione tra il «dare/donare [donner]» umano e l'«afferrare [saisir]» animale, dato che questi valori funzionano anche, nello stesso contesto, per contrapporre il lavoro manuale alla produzione tecnica, qui è possibile riconoscere la determinazione semantica che permette a Derrida di inscrivere la «memoria» in un'articolazione strutturale con l'«animalità» e la «tecnica» in *Geschlecht III*. Il termine «afferrare [saisir]» permette questa articolazione:

*Il nervo dell'argomentazione mi pare riducibile, in primo luogo e in prima approssimazione, all'opposizione garantita del dare/donare [donner] e del prendere: la mano dell'uomo dà e si dà, come il pensiero e come ciò che si dà da pensare e che noi non pensiamo ancora, mentre l'organo della scimmia o dell'uomo quale semplice animale, perfino come animale razionale, può soltanto prendere, afferrare [saisir], impadronirsi della cosa.* (Derrida [1987b]: 431)

Ora, dopo averne chiarito il contesto all'interno della lettura Derridiana di Heidegger, possiamo tornare al passaggio su o dell'animale in *Geschlecht III* per iscriverlo in una genealogia diversa da quella indicata dallo stesso Derrida. In primo luogo, sottolineo il riferimento alla «superficie o supporto dell'iscrizione» quale condizione dell'ar-

ticolazione tra «memoria pensante», «memoria biologica» e «memoria tecnica», anche se renderò conto di questa articolazione solo alla fine di questo diverso percorso genealogico. In secondo luogo, ciò che qui è degno di nota è il riferimento alla «patria» [*Heimat*], soprattutto se lo si iscrive nell'orizzonte della contestazione dell'opposizione tra uomo e animale, cioè della contestazione dell'unità del limite che dovrebbe separare i presunti opposti. Infatti, se pensiamo che, contestando questo limite, Derrida non ne pretende la semplice cancellazione, ma la reinterpretazione nei termini di un rapporto differenziale, allora potremmo ipotizzare che qui Derrida stia dando a pensare che il senso umano della patria debba essere in qualche modo l'effetto di un movimento differenziale radicato nella sua costituzione animale, biologica. Per il momento, mi concentro sul riferimento all'esperienza animale del territorio, cioè del suo *habitat* come «territorio sessuale» e «patria». In effetti, in questo testo, Derrida sembra contestare le affermazioni di Heidegger, relative all'assenza di memoria nell'animale, riferendosi alla capacità degli animali di lasciare e seguire tracce quale prova della loro capacità mnemonica, un argomento utilizzato anche in altri testi pubblicati nello stesso periodo. Il primo risale al 1984, quindi tra *Geschlecht. Différence sexuelle, différence ontologique* e *La main de Heidegger (Geschlecht II)*. Si tratta di un'intervista rilasciata a Eva Mayer, *Labyrinthe et Archi/Texture* in cui Derrida sostiene esplicitamente che l'animale ha un luogo, un territorio, che sperimenta e costituisce il suo *habitat* attraverso le sue tracce; tracce che ci spingono fuori da uno spazio heideggeriano:

*Non parlo volentieri di essere parlante, perché si è facilmente inclini a tradurlo come soggetto che parla, l'uomo o anche il dio che parla. E da ciò sarebbe escluso l'animale. Ma l'animale c'è, ci sono le strade dell'animale, tracce, percorsi, e un labirinto di tracce, e per questo motivo non ci troviamo più in uno spazio heideggeriano. Che cosa differenzia l'animale, che non parla e che quindi non ha a disposizione un labirinto di parole, e l'uomo, l'animale parlante che ne è provvisto? Se si osservano, per esempio, le strade, le tracce degli animali nel deserto, si vede molto bene*

*che essi possiedono dei luoghi, che fanno collegamenti, curve, deviazioni, la traccia in generale. Esiste un «essere in cammino» anche degli animali, ed è labirintico, e se si vuole parlare di traccia, marca, pista, invece che di discorso, si apre l'interrogazione sulla spazialità e la si libera dai suoi limiti antropologici, antropomorfi e teologici.* (Derrida [2015]: 32)

La seconda occorrenza si trova in *Du droit à la philosophie*, in un testo che risale ancora al 1984. Anche in questo caso la traccia dell'animale è legata alla costituzione dell'*habitat* dell'animale quale territorio in cui l'animale può trovare cibo e partner riproduttivi:

*Non ritornerò sulla «facilitazione» [frayage], la presunta «metafora» del metodo quale figura del cammino o della strada (via rupta), come lingua e non necessariamente lingua umana, ma anche come lingua, traccia, testo, marca di ciò che si chiama l'animalità: piste, guerre per i territori sessuali ed economici.* (Derrida [1990]: 294)<sup>8</sup>

L'animale è quindi dotato di memoria, può iscriverne e riconoscere le sue tracce e le tracce di altri animali in un territorio che possiamo considerare come superficie naturale o supporto di iscrizione, come dirà Derrida in *L'animal que donc je suis*. Non dobbiamo stupirci, questa infatti è una conseguenza della dinamica strutturale di ciò che Derrida definisce «archi-traccia» o «archi-scrittura» in *De la grammatologie*. I termini «frayage» e «via rupta» ci conducono a questo testo e precisamente lì dove Derrida afferma che «l'archi-scrittura», quale condizione strutturale della costituzione della traccia e di conseguenza della memoria, deve essere pensata prima dell'opposizione tra l'essere umano e l'animale:

*Se la traccia, archi-fenomeno della «memoria», che bisogna pensare prima dell'opposizione tra natura e cultura, animalità e umanità, ecc., appartiene al movimento stesso della significazione, è a priori scrit-*

*ta, che la si iscriva o meno, in una forma o in un'altra, in un elemento «sensibile» e «spaziale» che viene chiamato «esterno». Archi-scrittura, prima possibilità della parola, poi della «grafia» in senso stretto, luogo naturale dell'usurpazione denunciata da Platone fino a Saussure, questa traccia è l'apertura della prima exteriorità in generale, dell'enigmatico rapporto del vivente al suo altro e di un dentro a un fuori: spazialità.* (Derrida [1967]: 103)

Non solo, in *De la grammatologie* Derrida descrive la «storia della vita» come l'evoluzione differenziale della traccia, dalle forme di vita più elementari fino alle tecniche della memoria elaborate dagli esseri umani, e più precisamente fino alle macchine elettroniche come i calcolatori:

*A partire dall'«iscrizione genetica» e dalle «brevi catene programmatiche» che regolano il comportamento dell'ameba e dell'anellide fino al passaggio al di là della scrittura alfabetica agli ordini del logos e di un certo homo sapiens, la possibilità del gramma struttura il movimento della sua storia secondo dei livelli, dei tipi, dei ritmi rigorosamente originali. Ma non li si può pensare senza il concetto più generale di gramma. Questo è irriducibile e inafferrabile. Se si accettasse l'espressione arrischiata da Leroi-Gourhan, si potrebbe parlare di una «liberazione della memoria», di una esteriorizzazione sempre già cominciata ma sempre più grande della traccia che, a partire dai programmi elementari dei comportamenti detti «istintivi» fino alla costituzione delle schede elettroniche e dei programmi di lettura, allarga la différence e la possibilità della messa in riserva: questa costituisce e cancella, allo stesso tempo, nello stesso movimento, la soggettività detta cosciente, il suo logos e i suoi attributi teologici.*

Questo è quindi il luogo in cui troviamo la matrice dell'articolazione tra «memoria biologica», «memoria animale», «memoria umana» e «memoria tecnica» che abbiamo incontrato in *Geschlecht III*.

3. Nel contesto della nostra lettura è essenziale riconoscere il ruolo decisivo di André Leroi-Gourhan per l'elaborazione delle argomentazioni derridiane, in particolare per la definizione del-

<sup>8</sup> Con il termine «frayage» Derrida traduce la «Bahnung» freudiana, termine che in italiano è reso con «facilitazione». In Derrida è sempre associato a «via rupta». Cfr. Derrida (1967a): 317; Derrida (1967b): 158, 407.



la memoria quale «archi-scrittura». Infatti in *Le geste et la parole* di Léroï-Gourhan è possibile riconoscere una definizione della memoria molto vicina a quella di Derrida, all'opera tanto in *De la grammatologie* quanto in *Geschlecht III*. Infatti, in *Le geste et la parole*, il testo a cui Derrida fa esplicito riferimento nel passo di *De la grammatologie* citato sopra, Léroï-Gourhan definisce la memoria come un substrato di iscrizione che funziona allo stesso modo per gli animali, le società umane e le macchine come i calcolatori elettronici:

*In quest'opera, la memoria è intesa in un senso molto largo. Non è una proprietà dell'intelligenza ma, quale che sia, il supporto sul quale si scrivono le catene di atti operatori. Si può parlare a questo titolo di una «memoria specifica» per definire la fissazione dei comportamenti delle specie animali, di una memoria «etnica» che assicura la riproduzione dei comportamenti nelle società umane e, allo stesso titolo, di una memoria «artificiale», elettronica nella sua forma più recente, che assicura, senza ricorrere all'istinto o alla riflessione, la riproduzione di atti meccanici concatenati. (Léroï-Gourhan [1965]: 268)*

Quindi, *Geschlecht III* induce una rilettura di *De la grammatologie*, e soprattutto di *Le geste et la parole*, ma questa volta da un punto di vista leggermente diverso: cioè alla ricerca della patria, della genesi animale della costituzione della patria umana a cui Derrida allude in *Geschlecht III*. In questa differente prospettiva è possibile cogliere l'implicito riferimento di Derrida ad un passo di *Le geste et la parole* in cui Léroï-Gourhan descrive il rapporto che il primo gruppo umano avrebbe stabilito con il proprio territorio:

*Il rapporto cibo-territorio-densità umana corrisponde, in tutti gli stadi dell'evoluzione tecno-economica, ad un'equazione dai valori variabili ma correlativi. (...) Il nutrimento è legato alla conoscenza approfondita degli habitat animali e vegetali e la vecchia immagine dell'errante «orda» primitiva è certamente falsa: un certo mutamento progressivo del gruppo è possibile, l'emigrazione accidentale e brutale è altrettanto possibile, ma la situazione normale è la fre-*

*quentazione prolungata di un territorio conosciuto fin nelle sue minime possibilità alimentari. L'aspetto normale del territorio primitivo, del territorio degli Australantropi o degli Arcantropi, sarà senza dubbio difficile da definire, ma a partire dai Paleoantropiani, l'esistenza attestata delle capanne o delle tende rende i termini comparabili con quelli dei primitivi attuali. D'altra parte, se si applicano agli Australantropi e agli Arcantropi le norme tratte dal mondo animale, si perviene a termini molto prossimi: il territorio dei primati o dei carnivori, può essere vasto, ma esso offre dei punti di fissazione alimentare e di rifugio che non ne fanno una superficie senza rilievi e senza limiti. La frequentazione del territorio implica l'esistenza di tragitti periodicamente percorsi. Il gruppo primitivo è normalmente nomade, si sposta cioè secondo il ritmo di apparizione delle risorse, sfruttando il proprio territorio in un ciclo che più frequentemente è stagionale. C'è dunque un rapporto complesso tra la densità delle risorse alimentari, la superficie quotidiana degli spostamenti di acquisizione intorno a punti di fissazione temporanea, la superficie totale del territorio che è funzione della conoscenza sufficiente dei punti alimentari stagionali, equilibrio tra il cibo, il sentimento di sicurezza nell'habitat, le frontiere di contatto con i territori degli altri gruppi. (...) Di conseguenza, la trama delle relazioni sociali, all'origine, è strettamente controllata dal rapporto territorio-cibo. (Léroï-Gourhan [1964]: 213)*

Allora, questa potrebbe essere la traccia decisiva, la traccia seguita da Derrida per dislocare la questione heideggeriana dell'*Heimat*, del luogo del raccoglimento spirituale (*Versammlung*), non solo in *Geschlecht III* ma anche rispetto alla nostra concezione tradizionale dell'archivio: seguendo di testo in testo le tracce disseminate e disseminanti della scrittura di Derrida, appare infatti impossibile poterla ricondurre e rinchiudere in un archivio quale luogo di raccoglimento stabile e definitivo del *corpus* derridiano.

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## *Gebäude auf Abbruch?* The digital archive of Kant's *Opus postumum*

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**Abstract.** Over two hundred years after Immanuel Kant's death, the first full, critical, and digital edition of his last manuscript is currently being completed by the *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften*. This edition stands in institutional continuity with Wilhelm Dilthey's monumental *Akademieausgabe* of Kant's writings that was grounded in Dilthey's lastingly influential concept of the national, literary-philosophical archive. The new edition showcases Kant's dynamic writing process as a matter of investigation in its own right. As I argue here, it brings into view the constitutive role of the archive for both texts and interpretative practices. A historical perspective that links the legacy of the *Akademieausgabe* with the digital edition of the *Opus postumum* highlights the changing role of the archive in emphasising or de-emphasising the manuscript's resistance to certain appropriations and stylisations of Kant as a thinker.

**Keywords.** Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, Wilhelm Dilthey, digital edition, philosophical archive.

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The shock is palpable when Julius von Pflugk-Harttung, a historian known above all as an expert on medieval papal documents, has before him the manuscript on which Immanuel Kant was working during the last years of his life. The papers were in a state of disarray, but this much was to be expected when von Pflugk-Harttung visited Pastor Albrecht Krause in Hamburg to inspect the autograph that Krause had purchased in 1884, eighty years after Kant's death. The thirteen bundles of mostly folio-size sheets and some octavo inlays that had covered Kant's desk in 1804 disappeared initially, were found again in the 1840s and went through many different hands before they ended up with Krause – hands that ordered and reordered them, removed some pages and misplaced others. The paleographer von Pflugk-Harttung was trained to restore order to papers that had been assembled and reassembled, or fallen apart through the centuries. But when he analyses Kant's autograph in 1887, the trouble isn't just that he finds a draft rather than a complete

manuscript in these these disorderly pages. Rather, the clearly «unfinished manuscript» is testimony of an «overwhelming» process of being worked and reworked all over again. Instead of «carrying his thoughts to maturity in his head», Kant wrote them down in preliminary fashion. And this «written record, the first text, gradually took the shape of a building in the process of demolition [*Gebäude auf Abbruch*], a building he reconsidered later to tear down some pieces, and leave others standing» (Pflugk-Harttung [1889]: 37)<sup>1</sup>.

It was a striking metaphor to reach as the result of this early investigation of Kant's working process. In von Pflugk-Harttung's paleographic analysis, Kant's writing appears as a perpetual construction site, constantly being built and rebuilt. If the metaphor were to slide from the description of Kant's autograph to that of his philosophical endeavour, it might suggest the potential for destruction within the architectural imagery that is so central to his work in the *Critiques*, and that corresponds to his pivotal notion of systematicity. While some present-day readings of Kant's architectural metaphors stress precisely this dynamic aspect of strain, demolition or collapse, and reconstruction (see Purdy [2011]: 65)<sup>2</sup>, a rather different public image of Kant's philosophical system had come to dominate by the late nineteenth century, and through yet another slide of architectural metaphors. To the extent that his critical system could be portrayed as a building, it took on the shape of a national monument, culminating in the complete edition of Kant's works by the Prussian Royal Academy of the Sciences begun in 1894 as both research resource and monument, *Denkmal*. And accordingly, von Pflugk-Harttung takes great care to keep separate the image that emerged from his analysis of Kant's writing process from his published works. Throughout this first textual-material analysis of what has come to be known as Kant's *Opus postumum*, von Pflugk-Harttung emphasises the autograph's draft charac-

ter<sup>3</sup>. As markers of a process of genesis of thought, he clearly distinguishes the folio sheets covered in handwriting from an imagined end result that Kant did not live to complete and sanction – thereby leaving intact, reassuringly, the image of Kant's systematic oeuvre as a building meant to last, be it understood as foundational or as a document to a system overcome by subsequent ones.

And yet, the sheets von Pflugk-Harttung analysed in the late nineteenth century are among the few surviving manuscripts of Kant's, and the most extensive among those (see Förster [1993]: XXV; Stark [1988]: 13). The *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (BBAW), successor institution to the Prussian Academy of Sciences, has been working on a digital edition of the manuscript of the *Opus postumum*, or O.p., since 2001. Part of a major revision of the entire *Akademieausgabe* initiated a century earlier by Wilhelm Dilthey, the digital reproduction and transcription of Kant's last manuscript invites us to return, with regard to one of the archetypical «great white men», to some of the long-standing questions connecting manuscripts and archives: questions regarding the status of the handwritten text between both carrier of semantic meaning and graphic material trace, the stability of the boundary between the genesis of a work and its final status, and the institutional role of the archive in the «transform[ation] of documents into monuments» (Weigel [2005]: 5).

The new, digital edition opens up access to Kant's working manuscript to those unfamiliar with his hand, and without the time, skills, and patience to decipher multiple layers of writing often crossed out or overwritten, wrapped around page corners and connected by a complex hierarchy of symbols and markers. As far as digital edi-

<sup>1</sup> All translations are the author's.

<sup>2</sup> See also Eichberger (1999), Brodsky (1988), Morgan (2000).

<sup>3</sup> The title choice is problematic but it has stuck, brief and memorable as it is. Further confusion has arisen from the fact that the papers in Krause's possession also contain notes that are unrelated to the drafts of what has come to be known as the *Opus postumum*, and from a frequent lack of distinction between the term's referent of either manuscript or the «work» it is taken to contain (see Brandt [1991]: 5, 9).

tions go, it is very much a conservative project in the sense that it uses the digital medium to display the results of traditional philological research rather than aiming for new research methods associated with the digital humanities such as corpus building and data mining. But this conservative digital approach nevertheless provokes new reflections on Kant's work, and on the interpretative practices associated with editorial and archival practices. As Jacqueline Karl, head of the BBAW's *Kant-Arbeitsstelle* in Potsdam, has demonstrated, the edition gives unique insights into Kant's working procedure (Karl [2007]). These insights have produced new perspectives also on Kant's earlier work, such as Stephen Howard's compelling observation that the formal differences between a completed canonical work like the *First Critique*, and the preliminary character of the *Opus postumum* mask previously underappreciated similarities in their dynamic material form and open-ended «process of philosophising» (Howard [2018]: 86).

And as I argue in what follows, the BBAW edition's showcasing of Kant's material working processes marks these processes as a matter worthy of investigation in their own right. The decision to highlight them as such, rather than merely as a resource to refine hermeneutical tools, is in resonance with a recent emphasis in edition philology to present and analyse manuscripts not merely as forerunners to imagined final products but as «testimony *sui generis*» (Giuriato, Kammer [2006]: 18). The dynamic, constantly deconstructing and reconstructing character of Kant's material working process brings into focus the ambivalence of the architectonic metaphors used to refer to his autographs, to his systematic philosophy, and to his legacy as a thinker portrayed as both national figure and of universal significance. Despite its emphasis on the institutional continuity with its Royal Prussian predecessor, the BBAW edition places under some strain the monumental picture of the thinker Kant. What is digitally reproduced here is the «search for text» (to borrow this expression from Reuß [1999]: 16), wrapped by the bundle in newspaper pages and announcements of prizes and deaths.

In contrast to the extensive problematisation of the archival constitution of historical «sources», or of the museal constitution of «cultural heritage» both arising largely out of the investigation of colonial disciplinary pasts, much of academic philosophy has not followed the push by Derrida and others to question the «exteriority» of the sign to the signified (Giuriato, Kammer [2006]: 9)<sup>4</sup>. The default working assumption is that of the disembodied idea «that is an idea, even if no writing tool succeeds in gouging the skull it is born in»; consequently, the material text is taken to reflect such ideality more or less unproblematically (Stingelin [2004]: 14)<sup>5</sup>. The philosophical archive is associated more firmly with the philological tradition of restoring such ideal content where required than with the constitutive role that the process of collecting itself, and the process of selecting and editing material for publication have for philosophical texts. In the case of Kant's O.p., its publication in the *Akademieausgabe* (AA) is very much part of an edition project that is, in turn, «intricately connected with the political developments of the German state» (Stark [1993]: 4).

At the outset of my argument below, I return to the well-known history of the editorial debacle of the O.p.'s initial publication within the AA so as to stress its subsumption under Dilthey's approach of portraying Kant's intellectual development towards the system of the *Critiques*, and his association of that system with an imagery of secure foundations. In contrast, the BBAW's foregrounding of Kant's writing process aligns the O.p. manuscript with different readings of Kant's architectural metaphors, readings that emphasise the limits of knowledge, and the architectonics as the result of working and reworking. The editorial choice of making as tangible as (digitally) possible the autograph's «constellation character» (Reuß [1999]: 19) marks its difference from a «text» associated with some degree of finality. It brings into view the

<sup>4</sup> See Thiel (1990) for an extended reflection on the problem of the genesis and editorial status of philosophical texts.

<sup>5</sup> A prominent philosophical counterexample to the default position of keeping material carrier and ideal content apart is Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolical forms; see Schubbach (2008).

constitutive role of archival and editorial decisions for both texts themselves, and for the interpretative practices that structure academic disciplines. Therefore I suggest in my concluding section that the BBAW's edition of the O.p. amounts to a desacralisation of the thinker Kant in the archive – despite the seemingly pious detailed reproduction of the result of each and every movement of his pen on the page, and despite the institutional continuity with the Royal Prussian Academy that played an important role in stabilising that very sacralisation at the turn of the twentieth century.

### 1. PIETY: THE O.P. MANUSCRIPT IN DILTHEY'S AKADEMIEAUSGABE

In one crucial respect, the O.p. manuscript's history was fortuitous. The manuscript remained largely intact, while the bulk of Kant's autographs ended up in a state of *Verzettelung* (Stark [1991]: 286) after his death: of being separated into many single, short pieces and distributed among friends, acquaintances and publishers<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, even after the manuscript's – by now legendary – geographical and legal odyssey that started on Kant's desk in Königsberg in 1804, there *was* something substantial enough to be published as part of the AA, the critical edition of Kant's complete writings begun under Dilthey's direction at the Royal Prussian Academy of the Sciences in 1894<sup>7</sup>. The O.p. eventually appeared as volumes 21 and 22 in 1936 and 1938. Despite manifest editorial problems, these volumes have been the textual basis for interpretations of the O.p. and the assessment of its place within Kant's work more broadly<sup>8</sup>, and

<sup>6</sup> Some parts of the manuscript nevertheless are lost (see Förster [1993]: XXIV).

<sup>7</sup> On the questions regarding the publication of the manuscripts after Kant's death, see Brandt (1991: 1-2). For detailed accounts of the manuscript's history, see Förster (1993: XVI-XXIII), and Basile (2013: 459-498). On the AA, see Stark (2000).

<sup>8</sup> The edition was both internally inconsistent, and guided by editorial principles that conflicted with those used in other volumes of the *Nachlass*; more details below. See Förster (1993: XXIII).

also for Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen's 1993 English translation of selected parts of the texts that is widely acknowledged as the best edition currently available<sup>9</sup>.

Kant's manuscript bears the initial title *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics*, and most of its philosophical reception history has focussed on questions related to this transition – a transition required, if we are to believe Kant in a famous 1798 letter, to complete his philosophical system, «or else a gap will remain in the critical philosophy»<sup>10</sup>. So while the manuscript is unfinished, the philosophical stakes are high. Does the *Transition* achieve its goal of completing the critical philosophy, and how so? Or does Kant's attempt to bridge transcendental philosophy and empirical science result in abandoning the critical project altogether? It is not my goal here to weigh in on these ongoing discussions<sup>11</sup>; rather, I seek to highlight the changing role of the archive in emphasising or de-emphasising the manuscript's resistance to certain appropriations and stylisations of Kant as a thinker. My focus in this section is on the AA of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the following two sections turn to the BBAW digital edition currently in the process of completion.

For Wilhelm Dilthey, who succeeded in convincing the Royal Prussian Academy of taking on the «honourable duty» of publishing Kant's complete works (Dilthey [1889a]: 569), the «shipwreck» (Dilthey [1889b]: 11) that were to him Kant's scattered papers, «some of them ending up at a grocer's to be used for wrapping coffee and herrings» (Dilthey [1889a]: 568) had been the prime example of the documents that should be kept in the new kind of institution he lobbied

<sup>9</sup> On Kant (1993), see Sturm (1999: 101).

<sup>10</sup> This announcement comes eight years after Kant had declared his «critical undertaking» complete with the *Critique of Judgment*, Förster (1993: XVI). The title changes over the course of the years Kant was working on the manuscript.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the extensive literature on the O.p. see Basile (2013); another recent book-length intervention in the debate is Hall (2015).

for from late 1890s onward: the literary archive. Dilthey's definition of literature was broad, and it was framed in nationalistic terms. Literature was to be understood as comprising «all of a people's [Volk] lastingly valuable expressions that reach beyond the demands of practical life», including «poetry and philosophy, history and science» (555). And in retrospect, this project was extraordinarily effective both in producing demarcations of what counts as such "literature", and in pre-figuring interpretative approaches to it – hence the need to historicise the practice of philosophy through its archives<sup>12</sup>. Dilthey's twofold rationale for such literary archives guided the AA, based as it was on a massive effort of at least approximating the idea of an archive of all of Kant's extant writings by gathering those that could be brought to Berlin, and establishing access to those that couldn't<sup>13</sup>.

Why such archives? In a pair of speeches in 1889 now often cited to mark the *Ur*-scene of the history of the modern archive, Dilthey outlined the «political» and the «archive-theoretical» (Kopp-Oberstebrink [2018]: 121) need he saw for literary archives, to borrow these terms to distinguish Dilthey's methodological aims from his nationalistic rhetoric. To begin with the latter, Dilthey places the need for literary archives in the historical context of the unification of the German states into an empire in 1871. Though some of Dilthey's nationalistic pathos is surely owed to his lobbying efforts to gain political and financial support for his practical goal of establishing such archives, his gesture at a historical argument to justify his portrayal of literature as «the prime expression of the German spirit» seems as sincere as it is troubling at least in hindsight. For Dilthey, there is a «spiritual continuity» between Greco-

Roman antiquity and the modern sciences that accounts for the «peculiar universality of the German spirit», acting as the unifying element during centuries of political, economical and military disunity and «misery» (Dilthey [1889b]: 1-2). Therefore, collections of «our great writers' autographs, above them their busts and portraits» would be «places to cultivate the German ethos [Gesinnung]», an «alternative Westminster, gathering not the mortal bodies but the immortal ideal content of our great writers» (16)<sup>14</sup>.

Not just national monuments, however, these autograph collections are to serve a specific methodological function, which is to trace the developmental history of «great thinkers» in order to «illuminate their systems» (Dilthey [1910]: VIII; a looser usage of the word than Kant's specific notion of a system). As far as philosophical writers are concerned, Dilthey leaves no doubt that their «systems» are what makes them immortal. But although, for example, the *Critique of Pure Reason* contains «Kant's genius without residues» (Dilthey [1889b]: 3), although a «history of systems» could conceivably be written from the well-known books alone, this approach misses the person behind the book and therefore makes it impossible to understand philosophy as an «active force in human life [Lebensmacht]» rather than just a sequence of perhaps impressive, but otherwise ineffective thought constructs (Dilthey [1889a]: 561; see Jacobs [2006]: 135). The archive's role is to avoid the – misguided – stork's approach to the history of philosophy, to use Dilthey's vivid imagery. Rather than picking out «with a stork's beak» only the systems from the many surrounding material remnants of a writer's life, we must consult the «plans, sketches and drafts, letters» that preserve the traces of the system's making. Gathering these materials makes it possible to «go back from the book to the *person*» (Dilthey [1889a]: 562), and from there again to the books that

<sup>12</sup> In Michel Espagne's words, the question "What is literature?" ceases to be a rhetorical one for French and German literature in the nineteenth century, as processes of archival canonisations set in (Espagne [1996]: 102).

<sup>13</sup> In the context of 19th-century historicism, the Royal Libraries in Berlin and Königsberg were expected to collect Kant's autographs even before Dilthey's edition initiative (Stark [1991]: 287).

<sup>14</sup> Fridthjof Rodi argues that Dilthey uses this nationalistic appeal strategically, but that it should be read in the context of Dilthey's broader, and ultimately anthropological research interests (Rodi [1996]: 110).



shaped this person in turn – an infinite hermeneutical circle made of «Paper and more paper!», as Dilthey conceded but justified as the escape from «sterility» (Dilthey [1889b]: 15)<sup>15</sup>.

In his 1902 preface to the AA, Dilthey reiterates the function of his developmental-historical approach to illuminate the «unfolding of genius» (Dilthey [1910]: VIII)<sup>16</sup>. He both inscribes Kant into his specifically German historical arc connecting ancient philosophy with the modern empirical sciences, and he associates Kant's systematic philosophy with an imagery of secure foundations and universality:

*Kant's developmental history is an example of the kind [where, once gathered, a rich Nachlass of autographs makes it possible to illuminate his systematic achievements], and at the same time it is of utmost human and historical importance. In a highly intricate process, Kant's mighty genius dissolves the long-standing German tradition of metaphysics, establishes the critical position, and finds in the acting, pure "I" the unshakable foundations for the validity of the empirical sciences, and unconditional validity of the moral laws. (VIII-IX)*

Accordingly, the AA is structured around the goal of «illuminating» Kant's system of the *Critiques* via his developmental history – by «resurrect[ing] the Kant of his middle years», as its secretary Paul Menzer recalls Dilthey's aim (Menzer [1957]: 337). The edition's first part, *Works*, reproduces the «pre-critical writings» followed by the critical «main work [*Hauptwerk*]», with the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* presented as its crowning achievement in volume 3 and followed by the first edition in volume 4. Part II is devoted to Kant's correspondence, Part III to the other so far unpublished autographs, and Part IV to his lectures<sup>17</sup>. But, and for

<sup>15</sup> On this move beyond the individual, see Kopp-Oberstebink (2018: 134), and on the wider context of the temporal concept of generation, Parnes, Vedder, Willer (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Dilthey's preface is dated 1902; the first volume is dated 1910.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of Part III, where the O.p.

telling reasons, it remained unclear for years if the O.p. manuscript was to be included in the AA.

To begin with, the content of the O.p. manuscript was not well understood during the years when the AA was conceived, and it was controversial whether this late manuscript was importantly related to the critical philosophy, or rather an embarrassing departure from it. An initial attempt to secure the manuscript from its (then) owner, Pastor Krause in Hamburg, ended in a protracted lawsuit over Krause's demand to be involved in the choice of editors, and consequently in the failure to include the O.p. in Part III of the planned edition (see Basile [2013]: 473-474). When the manuscript became accessible in 1916, the neo-Kantian Benno Erdmann, chairman of the Academy's *Kant Commission*, argued against its inclusion: «I can only see the expression of piety run amok in the suggestion to print in its entirety a work that bears the traces of senility of thought» (477)<sup>18</sup>. Piety and senility: in the absence of a clear understanding of the manuscript's philosophical content, much of the discussion of the manuscript's fate hinged upon these notions. Erich Adickes had made a thorough case against the charge of senility by reconstructing the chronological order of the manuscript's fascicles, and arguing that much of it was written during a period in which Kant's cognitive abilities were not to be doubted – but his subsequent attempt to convince the Academy to include the manuscript did not make it past Erdmann's hostility<sup>19</sup>.

«Piety» was not just used as a dismissive charge by those who, like Erdmann, were opposed to further engagement with a manuscript that seemed to contribute little to the neo-Kantian reception of Kant's works. Rather, there was a precarious balance between the Academy's goals of including all material that would «illu-

manuscript was published eventually, see Stark (1993: 90-188).

<sup>18</sup> On the long history of tensions between Erdmann and Adickes, see Stark (1993: 96-102).

<sup>19</sup> The results of Adickes's initial, four-week attempt to determine the manuscript's chronological order are considered largely valid to this date (Basile [2013]: 476; Förster [1993]: xxvii).

minate» Kant's development, and the pious desire on behalf of some collectors of Kant's scattered writings for the edition to include whatever Kant had written. Traces of exasperation are evident in Paul Menzer's recollection of his negotiations with the Königsberg-based researcher Rudolf Reicke, even though he rightly credited Reicke with saving the O.p. manuscript from oblivion<sup>20</sup>. «Filled with love for his greatest compatriot» Kant, Reicke fought hard against the Academy's selective approach to some of Kant's correspondence and papers. For example, Dilthey and Menzer had reservations about including a letter sent to Kant by his acquaintance Plessing. Plessing's letter contained «peculiar descriptions of his intimate relations» with a «woman willing to be of service». But Reicke – «characteristically», as Menzer drily comments – insisted it must be included, since it made Kant appear «saint-like in his support for a miserable man» (Menzer [1957]: 341-342). In this case, Reicke prevailed; with regard to the question whether it was permissible to print only one of the fifteen identical Latin ancestry book dedications that Kant used for as many different occasions rather than print the same text fifteen times in a row, Dilthey and Menzer did. Little wonder Dilthey likened his task of editing «holy Kant» to that of a stage director in charge of a troupe of unruly actors each being after the main role (340-341).

Certainly not for reasons of piety, Erich Adickes was foremost among those who wanted the O.p. published as part of the AA. To his mind, there was no doubt that Kant's last writings merited serious philosophical attention, as he demonstrated in a 1920 monograph on Kant's *Nachlass* (Adickes [1920]). But on the basis of his extensive work with the manuscript, Adickes argued that its interpretation hinged upon the reconstruction of its different phases of writing – particularly since, as he had emphasised in his remarks

on his chronological arrangement, the manuscript consists of a series of drafts, and any interpretation will have to make choices regarding their relations of complementing or superseding each other. While, doubtlessly, Adickes's chronology removed much unnecessary confusion, his argument nevertheless anticipates a problematic, but persistent editorial attitude towards the manuscript that leans toward the teleological, and assumes that a combination of thorough textual-genetic analysis and interpretative work can construct an approximation of the «text» that was not completed. For the sake of enabling interpretation of such an approximate text, Adickes insists on the necessity of a fine-grained study of the drafts that comprise the O.p. manuscript, and for their publication in chronological order as a prerequisite for relating its contents to Kant's broader developmental history.

This broader developmental history had been a long-standing concern for Adickes, who was both convinced of the lasting philosophical importance of Kant's «system», in particular his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and dismayed by the «spectacle» its reception history had become: «Thousands of books, hundreds of thousands of pages have been written about this work, this system – but in the end no one even knows what its author's intentions were, and where this system's centre of gravity is to be found» (Adickes [1897]: 9). The difficulty of Kant's thought is only partly to blame for this state of affairs. Adickes is adamant that it could be overcome were it not for Kant's

*[...] contemptuous neglect for the outer appearance of his writings, for the fact that he avoids—with unequalled recklessness—to define his terms or to stick with them once defined, were it finally not for the fact that his own remarks about the purpose of his philosophy diverge wildly. (9)*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> On this stage of the manuscript's odyssey and the politicised debates between Reicke, Emil Arnoldt, and Krause, see Basile (2013: 465-471), and Förster (1993: XX).

<sup>21</sup> Dilthey opens his introduction to the AA with a similar claim (Dilthey [1910]: V). Although by now a staple of «Kant philology», the claim that Kant showed little interest in the printed editions of his work is not unproblematic and must be placed in the context of 18th-century publishing practices (Stark [1988]: 7, 25).

Unsatisfying as these material appearances were to him, the Kant scholar Adickes remained on the search for the ideal “system” itself they must contain. The remedy to the difficulties in understanding Kant’s work that result from his «neglect» lies in connecting the «study of the completed system with the study of its developmental history» so as to establish the internal consistency of final results and intermittent strivings despite their careless presentation (Adickes [1897]: 9). Just like he demanded such studies on the larger scale of Kant’s critical system, he called for a small-scale genetic approach to the O.p. manuscript as the basis for its interpretation, and its eventual integration into the Kantian system more broadly.

But when the manuscript eventually ended up in the possession of De Gruyter, the press that published the AA, piety prevailed not with respect to the figure of Kant, but with respect to the manuscript’s history. The AA edition reproduced not the chronological order of Kant’s drafts, but the order they acquired in «the hazards of drawers and cupboards in [Kant’s heirs residence in] Mitau» (Brandt [1991]: 14). This was despite the fact that Erich Adickes was the editor in charge of Part III, and therefore responsible for the editorial approach to Kant’s unpublished autographs. But because of De Gruyter’s demand that the valuable manuscript remain in Berlin rather than join the remainder of Kant’s *Nachlass* papers, and Adickes himself, in Tübingen, the editorial role for the O.p. manuscript was effectively split between Adickes and Artur Buchenau, the press’s Berlin-based consultant. The ensuing tensions culminated in Adickes’s resignation from his role as «superintendent» for the O.p. when he learned of Buchenau’s decision to publish the manuscript largely in the order in which the fascicles (and pages within them) had been received rather than following the chronological order Adickes had established, and that he considered crucial as the basis for the text’s philosophical interpretation<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> This decision also meant a break with the editorial guidelines for Part III; see Förster (1993: XXIII) and Stark (1993: 152-188). For a thorough documentation

Instead, this diplomatic edition sanctified in print the random order imposed on the manuscript during its journeys. This editorial approach to the handwritings’ order both on the large scale of the manuscript as a whole, and on the smaller scale of the arrangement of the words on specific pages led to a «text collage» that in fact amounted to a now embarrassing *lack* of piety for Kant, as Reinhardt Brandt has described the debacle: «By blindly reproducing his notes, the editors create the impression that the ageing philosopher was no longer capable of distinguishing between an aether deduction and his bottles of red wine» (8). The words that fill Kant’s last manuscript had at last become accessible in their entirety in print, but the autograph’s transformation into the material resemblance of a text relegated it to a precarious place in Dilthey’s editorial monumentalisation of Kant. Framed by Dilthey’s emphasis on Kant’s «system» understood as foundational and complete with the *Critiques*, his last manuscript appears irrelevant to readings of the systematic endeavour; the problem of the proper editorial and philosophical approach to the «search for text» of Kant’s final years remained.

## 2. THINKER PEN IN HAND: THE BBAW EDITION OF THE OPUS POSTUMUM

At a conference in 2000 that marked the beginning of the AA’s major and long overdue revision, Brandt compared the edition initiated by Dilthey to a «windy, dilapidated palace badly in need of restoration» (Brandt [2000]: VI). The architectural metaphor is aimed at the monumental, editorially created entirety of Kant’s works than his philosophy itself; after all, the grand palace doomed to crumble was one of Kant’s images for the old and derelict metaphysics to be overcome by the more modest, but «stable dwell-

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of the dissent between Adickes and Buchenau, see Stark (1993: 109-115); on the decline in editorial standards particularly from 1933 onwards that «bears distinctive traces of the political system in which [the relevant volumes] were produced», see Stark (1993: 5, 166-169).

ing» of his critical philosophy (Purdy [2011]: 59). But the palatial aspirations have certainly been endorsed by the BBAW itself. Tanja Gloyna, coordinator of the new edition of Kant's three *Critiques*, takes up Brandt's image as a structuring metaphor for describing the Academy's editorial approach of «restoring the palace»: «partially» in the case of the three *Critiques*, «from the ground up» for the O.p. (Gloyne [2007]: 109-110).

And the BBAW doesn't shy away from a lobbying rhetoric in direct historical and institutional continuation of Dilthey's. «Completing a Great Work» is the title of a 2014 article outlining the goals and achievements so far of the new edition, and it opens with a description of the busts occupying the five upper floors of Shanghai's Fudan University's philosophy department. Kant's is located on the fourth floor, right underneath Plato's – an illustration of his «international significance», and a reminder of the BBAW's «privilege and responsibility to oversee the world-leading edition of the works of its member Immanuel Kant» (Gerhardt, Karl, Essen [2014]: 28). The vocabulary of national monuments is replaced with that of «cultural heritage» to justify the considerable monetary and professional efforts required to restore the AA to its former status of being the «international reference edition for scientific research». In continuation of Dilthey's editorial aim of including all autographs that document Kant's intellectual development, the new edition can only be considered complete and «leading» once texts found in the last five decades have been included. Should funding difficulties prevent this from happening, «Kant research in German would have recklessly given away the aim of securing, making accessible for research, and rendering visible in the present [*Vergegenwärtigung*, no longer quite Dilthey's «resurrection»] important cultural heritage» (30).

But the new edition of the O.p. within this newly restored «palace» marks one important difference between Dilthey's early monumentalisation, and the BBAW's ongoing project. Where Dilthey's edition was concerned with Kant's developmental intellectual history leading towards

what it portrayed as a complete, foundational system, the new edition of the O.p. subordinates the detailed, and unprecedentedly fine-grained documentation of the chronological genesis of the O.p. manuscript to its showcasing as a working site rather than «text» or «work». In this section and the following, my point is that the O.p.'s new edition therefore offers more than merely a hermeneutical tool. Rather, the manuscript's detailed reproduction draws attention to its character as a series of «autographic drafts» that are positively distinguished rather than marked as defective by their ever recurring «indecisiveness» of crossing out and rewriting, adding and deleting and starting all over again (Reuß [1999]: 16). Despite the monumental rhetoric of «completing a great work», and in productive tension with the interpretative focus on the question of the O.p. filling a «gap» in the critical system, the sheer amount of page facsimiles that document an intricate writing process in full detail suggests different ways to approach this new edition. In keeping with recent critiques in literary theory and edition philology of the teleological «understanding of the labour of writing as an approximation of an ideal work», and of the corresponding notion of authorship coupled to the subjectivity of the «genius» (Kammer [2003]: 17), the newly constructed, digital O.p. highlights the extent to which these ideals are themselves products of Dilthey's archival project.

Borrowing Roland Reuß's technical, and narrow, notion of a text, I'll describe the O.p. as *not* a text, at least in its entirety – and as an object worthy of investigation as something other than just «not yet a text»<sup>23</sup>. The new edition foregrounds the complex material constellation of Kant's writing process, and through the contrast with this constel-

<sup>23</sup> Informed by editorial practice, the notion of a text as linear and delimited (Reuß [1999]) opposes broader notions of the «text» that include different stages of drafts. A sharp distinction between text and non-text has been the subject of much debate (for brief overviews, see Kammer [2003]: 18-19, and Thiel [1990]: 72 ff.); however, I find the clarity of Reuß's distinction helpful for my argumentative purpose of foregrounding the writing process in itself rather than a real or imagined final product.

lation brings into view the interconnected processes of archival collection and editorial process that are constitutive for the texts that do end up on desks and library shelves. I begin with the tensions that the O.p. edition's reconstruction of Kant's writing process consequentially places on the architectural metaphors to describe Kant's work and its status; the following section returns to the constitutive role of the archive for both texts themselves, and for the interpretative practices established in using them.

Jacqueline Karl, head of the *Kant-Arbeitsstelle's* editorial team in charge of the O.p., has described in detail how an understanding of the minutiae of Kant's working process has guided the new editorial approach, and how in turn the manuscript's online readers can retrace the dynamic and iterative production process reflected in its pages. Based on other extant autographs from the 1780s and 1790s, Werner Stark had already characterised Kant's elaborate, multi-stage writing process. The text on any given page holding drafts rather than clean copies, usually on a folded folio sheet, is clearly separated into a main block of text surrounded by external margins to be filled with notes later. There are at least three distinct phases of writing. First, Kant fills the main part of the page with text leaving the margins blank. In a second step, he adds stylistic corrections both between lines and in the margins (from bottom to top, as it happens), using long vertical lines to indicate references. In a third phase, the content is revised by adding reflections and alternatives, crossing out parts of the text and adding a wide range of other symbols and graphical elements (Kant had «unlimited imagination» for coming up with such symbols (Karl [2007]: 131)<sup>24</sup>.

The O.p. manuscript, as the rare instance of having escaped the *Verzettelung* of Kant's papers, confirms these preliminary observations in more detail. The result of the editorial «geology» work of reconstructing the different strata of Kant's text is publicly accessible on the BBAW's O. p. website<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> My description of Kant's working process follows Karl (2007: 129); see also Stark (1988: 25-26).

<sup>25</sup> Adickes's metaphor as quoted in Karl (2007: 130).

Have a look to get a sense of the complexity of the editorial task<sup>26</sup>: many of the manuscript pages are densely covered in text, due to Kant's habit of aligning the material unit of a sheet of paper with one «thought» as far as possible, often crowding in smaller and smaller letters the fourth and last page of the folded folio sheets he used (this might have served the purpose of comparing different drafts more easily)<sup>27</sup>. Increasingly smaller and denser lines as well as wrap-arounds offer further cues regarding the chronological sequence of the text written. For example, third-phase revisions have to wrap around second-phase stylistic corrections. Based on this editorially inferred chronological order, the edition also distinguishes between the different status of Kant's marginal comments. Such distinctions are «indispensable for understanding Kant's text», as Karl points out. At the very least, there are «continuations or complements to the main text, replacements, alternatives, remarks on the main text, and independent reflections» (Karl [2007]: 132). A colour code reflects these distinctions as made by the editors, highlighting different layers of writing as you hover over them on the screen. As Karl sums up the character of the manuscript, and as is exemplified by the edition's facsimile reproductions of its pages, Kant's «working manuscript contains clean copies but also keeps starting all over again. Filled as it is with edits and deletions, insertions of texts on other topics and notes, it expresses even in its linguistic attitude the movement of Kant's thought» (128).

Parts of the manuscript, then, fulfil what was Kant's usual criterion for a text to be sanctioned as ready for publication: there are clean copies by his own hand, or by amanuenses<sup>28</sup>. These parts of the manuscript also fulfil the criteria that literary

<sup>26</sup> See <http://kant.bbaw.de/online-editionen/opus-postumum>.

<sup>27</sup> Vittorio Matthieu has drawn attention to this «cell-like» structure as a distinctive feature of Kant's manuscripts rather than the result of «miserliness» as von Pflugk-Hartung had surmised in his initial investigation (Karl [2007]: 134).

<sup>28</sup> I am following Stark (1988) here. See Kammer (2017).

theorist Roland Reuß puts forward as demarcating a “text”, namely strict linearity of all symbol and letter sequences, and the existence of a distinct beginning, middle, and end; as such, «text» is transferrable between different media (and can e.g. be printed in different colours without losing its status as text)<sup>29</sup>. Most of the O.p.'s pages, however – and this is apparent as you click through, and hover over the many different layers of writing and their complex arrangement on the page – display the contrasting features of an autograph as distinct from text, and in which,

*on the search for a text, the law of linear succession [...] is suspended. In it, there is writing higgledy-piggledy, inserting, overwriting, multiple underlining and crossing out. [...] Words jotted down far apart in time on autograph paper enter constellations of syntagmatic succession and paradigmatic synchronicity that call for being perceived as such. This unique constellation of symbols on paper [...] is not detachable from its materiality, because it cannot be transformed without the loss of information.* (Reuß [1999]: 16-17)

What is gained by such a distinction between «text», set apart by its linear successiveness and openness to transfer from one medium to the other, and the materially bound constellation of the autograph is an escape route from the teleological temptation to see layers of drafts as nothing but preliminaries to a work that happens, in the case of the O.p., to remain unfinished.

There is a hint of such teleology in Erich Adickes's characterisation of Kant as a «thinker writing his way towards the right expression». As he observed on the basis of his extensive studies of Kant's autographs, rather than conceiving of both content and form of representation mentally first, Kant would work out the broad strokes

in his head but subsequently «thinks the details through pen in hand» (Karl [2007]: 127)<sup>30</sup>. Jacqueline Karl borrows the image of the thinker pen in hand, but her concluding remarks in her 2007 exposition of the new edition place the emphasis not on the imagined final text to be produced in writing [*erschrieben*], but on the dynamic process of Kant's writing, overwriting and rewriting. Pflugk-Harttung had stopped short of drawing conclusions regarding Kant's published texts from his investigation of the O.p. autograph as a document of rebuilding and demolition. In contrast, Karl, as a result of her own extensive work with the same autograph, suggests that «even [Kant's] printed works are, strictly speaking, not complete works but stages of a thinking that remained philosophically in motion [*unterwegs*]» (135). The O.p. as the document of Kant's dynamic writing process invites a reading of those texts Kant had sanctioned for publication as more «in motion», and less in keeping with a notion of completeness that corresponds to the monumental image of stable foundations<sup>31</sup>.

The emphasis on such a reading as it results from a material encounter with the constellation of the autograph resonates with other recent approaches to Kant's work. As Daniel Purdy argues, Kant borrowed much of his architectural vocabulary more directly from contemporaneous architectural theory than has previously been recognised. Purdy's study is based entirely on Kant's published works, and yet, the resonances with the dynamic image presented by Kant's O.p. manuscript are striking. In Purdy's analysis of Kant's wide range of architectural metaphors in the context of eighteenth-century architectural theory, these metaphors' guiding associations are emphatically not

<sup>29</sup> Reuß [1999]: 14, 16. As Reuß emphasises, clean copies are an exception among autographs in that they fulfil the criteria of a text. Reuß is after the characteristics of poetic text, but the distinction between a linear text sequence sanctioned to some degree by authorial decision, and a draft's constellation character lends itself to Kant's texts as I discuss them here.

<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the O.p. manuscript has been characterised as a «thorough documentation of the genesis of a Kantian work (that was nevertheless never completed)» (Tuschling [1971]: 13).

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Howard, drawing on Jacqueline Karl's work, spells out this suggestion in a reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that foregrounds material continuities with the O.p. manuscript, and therefore appreciates it «as a more open, dynamic text» (Howard [2018]: 67).

those of stable foundations and completeness. Rather, many of them stress the *limits* placed on «the weight [a] foundation could bear», and «collapse and reconstruction» as the «temporal aspects of any construction» (Purdy [2011]: 60, 65):

*Buildings are not permanently complete, nor are philosophical systems. [...] Construction is ongoing throughout the Critique; if there is anything lasting in Kant's opinion, he would claim it is the overall layout, yet a more modernist position would state that Kant's legacy lies in his insistence on always tearing down and rebuilding. He does not emphasise the laying of permanent foundations so much as the examination of what are purported to be secure foundations, in order to find the inevitable flaws and limits. (71)*

Against alignments such as Adorno's of Kant with a philosophical tradition suffering from «foundational delusion [*Fundierungswahn*]», Purdy argues that Kant «incorporates just this process of change into the supposedly stable image of philosophy as a foundation and an edifice» (Purdy [2011]: 80, 65). The architectonics metaphor in the *Critique of Pure Reason* differs from most of Kant's architectural imagery, e.g. that of the crumbling palace of metaphysics, in that it serves a specific philosophical function, and is indeed supposed to represent secure knowledge. Purdy argues for a different emphasis in reading this «security» as well. He shows that «classical architectural theory, most importantly Vitruvius, provides Kant with a model for describing the integration of knowledge towards human ends», thereby offering a reading that understands security in terms related to human ends rather than standing in the legacy of searching for the cosmologically given (Purdy [2011]: 66-67). And in the tradition of commentators from Pflugk-Harttung to Howard Caygill<sup>32</sup>, Purdy too straddles the line between architectural metaphors within Kant's philosophy, and the description of his writerly

process: «Kant's critical philosophy is the distillation of lifelong revisions. The house metaphor displays this writerly process. Far from presenting an eternal statement on foundations of knowledge, the philosophical house represents thought as it rethinks itself» (70).

### 3. DE-SACRALIZING THINKERS IN THE ARCHIVE

Musing on one of the many of the new edition's web pages that display illegible words crossed out multiple times, or transcriptions of cryptic abbreviations connected by a litany of different symbols, there is the odd whiff of Reicke's fifteen identical Latin ancestry book dedications. Isn't this hyper-detailed reproduction of each and every wiggle of Kant's pen a continuation of the pious approach to the thinker as monumental genius that Dilthey's editorial project had not solely produced, but stabilised on a national scale? Is there a need for this amount of detailed documentation of written traces of Kant's «ideas», or are we looking at a digital re-enactment of the AA's initial, historicist take on the «call to order: *ad fontes!*», as Hans Blumenberg has characterised tongue in cheek philosophy's long tradition of demanding returns to the alleged authority of sources, or of things (*ad res!*) (Blumenberg [2012]: 9)?

But accessing this digital edition on a web browser is not as easily romanticised as the archival moment of material encounter. It's not just that there isn't the distinctive smell of the paper, or its curious hue that may never quite make it onto the pages of the facsimile. Rather, the very obvious constructedness of the digital interface stands in the way of the fetishisation of the autograph as bodily relic (see Kammer [2006]: 138). The digital interface does produce an archival encounter of sorts, but one that foregrounds not the still moment of physical proximity, but the dynamic and generative work of the archive, its active role in selecting, maintaining, and to some extent constituting the objects of encounter. This role is not new; the digital mode of archival interaction sim-

<sup>32</sup> «The [O.p.'s] own rhapsodical assemblage – even if it fell into ruin before its completion – announced the season of systematic philosophy in Germany» (Caygill [2005]: 41).

ply makes it harder to ignore practically. Whether intentionally or not, these practical difficulties invite reflection on the ways in which «storage devices and archives [...] dictate and perpetuate the narrative from which they derive» (Brusius [2015]: 575), a reflection that is overdue not only for archaeological collections that are obvious examples of European imperial visions, but also for the Western philosophical canon preserved in archives such as the BBAW's.

The digital interface does not stage an object such as the manuscript to be handled with gloves. Instead, every step of interacting with the new edition very obviously and sometimes tediously depends on this object's constructedness: e.g. the colour-coding of the editors' conclusions regarding the status of a marginal comment, or the choice of multiple modes of juxtaposing different parts of the facsimile. Working with this object challenges the unproblematic idea of a «text that is simply there» (Reuß [2002]: 585) and awaits philosophical interpretation; instead, it is a reminder that the manuscript's very existence now in the possession of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin is the result of specific historical constellations, as much as the linear and coherent sequence of «text» in its published form is the result of specific editorial decisions, and indeed constructions<sup>33</sup>. In keeping with this representational foregrounding of the constructedness of this new *Opus postumum*, I would like to suggest that this edition opens up the possibility of de-sacralising the monumental stylisation «Kant» that is, ironically, partly itself the effect of the archive. The question at stake is how the digital publication of the O.p., heralded on its website as a «unique document that cannot be overestimated in its significance for the history of philosophy», can offer ways of reframing the relations to a philosophical tradition that is invested in, and built upon the cultural prestige

to which it still owes at the very least its funding – but that also seeks to problematise its own history.

The new edition presents a writing constellation rather than «text» or «work». It sustains both moments, the temporal and dynamic aspect of the writing process as much as the constellation that is now frozen on the page – the new synchronicities produced by the specific arrangement on the page that emerged in the process. Taking seriously these constellations as such, rather than presenting them as mere forerunners to a finished product that alone is considered worthy of philosophical attention, invites new interpretative practices and questions. As literary theorists and edition philologists have pointed out for some decades now, «in congruence with the effects of recent methodological innovations in literary and cultural studies, such textual-critical modes of inquiry are more interested in the making [*Faktur*] of aesthetic objects than their monadic, as it were, existence» (Kammer [2003]: 19). At the very least, these approaches highlight the dependency of the hermeneutic practices that have dominated much of modern European history of philosophy certainly with respect to Kant, but also beyond him on specific archival traditions, and on the corresponding notions of texts.

Let me outline a sketch of such an approach focussed on the manuscript's constellation character in the case of the O.p. Among the many fine-grained details of Kant's writing process that have only become accessible to non-specialists thanks to this edition's juxtaposition of full-page facsimile and transcription is the wandering process of his words from margins and edges to the centre of his pages – such as «key words as reminders for a later, lengthier treatment» that would either drop away not to return, or be interwoven into the drafts' arguments (Förster [1993]: XXV). Especially in a work like the O.p., concerned as it is with the transition from the empirical sciences, tracing the journey of specific notions across the pages offers a research angle that complements the recent focus on Kant's simultaneously systematic and strategic concern with the demarcation of, and relation between, distinct areas of

<sup>33</sup> As Alois Pichler has put it with respect to the problem of producing machine-readable texts on the basis of Wittgenstein's papers, «Texts are not objectively existing entities which just need to be discovered and presented, but entities which have to be constructed», quoted in Robinson (2009: 45).



knowledge<sup>34</sup>. How does the writing process on the page reflect or prefigure disciplinary divisions or transitions as Kant articulates them in his writings? Integrating in this way the history of ideas – understood both as individual intellectual development and diachronic reception histories – with material histories of paper practices builds bridges between the «practical» concerns Dilthey had once deemed beneath the articulations worth preserving in an archive, and the ideal constructs he stylised into national heritage.

I'll choose a suggestive example that is both tantalising in the richness of its connotations, and frustrating because in fact the word in question doesn't travel across Kant's text: it is stuck, so to speak, on the wrapper of his last fascicle, written possibly as late as 1803 (and the only fascicle that is not yet publicly available on the BBAW website in late 2020). *Schädellehre in Wien*, Kant jots down, «doctrine of skulls in Vienna» (see the facsimile of the entire page on figure 1, and reproduced in detail in figure 2). It refers to Franz Josef Gall's phrenology, a major departure from the «sciences of the soul» that Kant's generation had grappled with. As is well known, Gall's approach was based on the assumption that different «faculties» – mental properties, sentiments, and inclinations – correspond to organs localised in different cortical areas, and shape the skull according to the degree of these faculties' expression in an individual<sup>35</sup>. Incidentally, Kant's own head was subjected to phrenological analysis after his death in February 1804; among the findings was the observation that the organ of «metaphysical ingenuity» had merged with that for factual memory into a particularly impressive bump, whereas the organ for sexual drive was entirely missing. The plaster bust

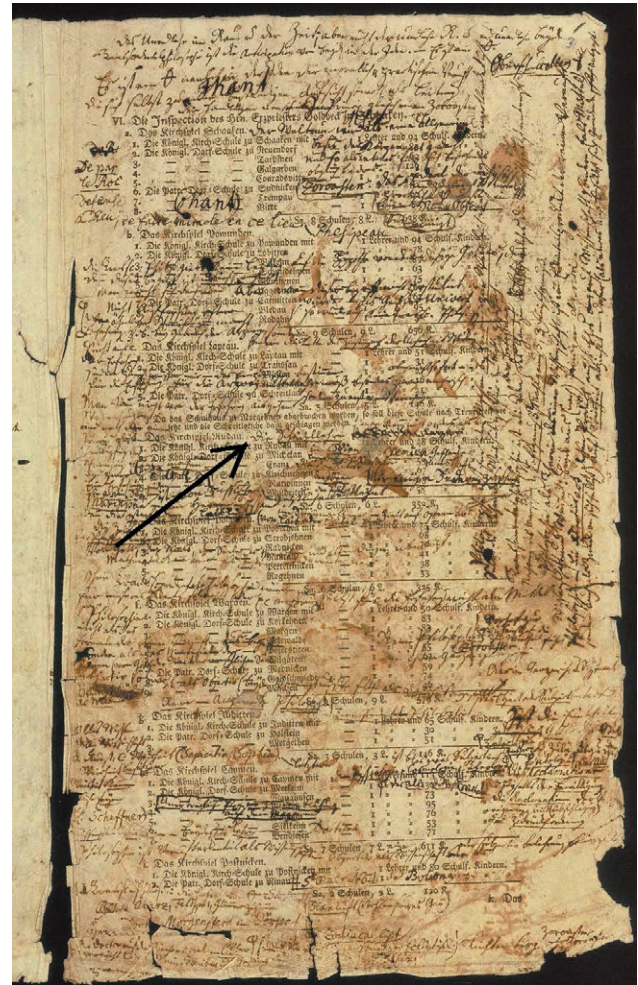


Figure 1. Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, Ms.germ. fol. 1702, Conv. I, S.3. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung BBAW / Kant-Arbeitsstelle. My arrow insertion. Reproduced with permission.

of Kant's head that was made in the process was sent to Gall himself as both relic and object of science, and served Gall to confirm the diagnosis of Kant's extraordinary «metaphysical profundity» (Hagner [2004]: 64-68).

The fate of the phrase «doctrine of skulls» illustrates the inevitable editorial choices that have to be made in any attempt to turn this page into a printed «text». In Artur Buchenau's diplomatic rendering in the 1936 AA volume, the phrase appears alongside all other words on the page, and it does so in a manner that is reminiscent of Brandt's worries about the editorial distinctions between wine bottles and aether deduc-

<sup>34</sup> An early example relevant in the context of the «organ of the soul» and Kant's famous postscript to *Sommerring* is McLaughlin (1985). More recently, see Helbig, Nassar (2016), Goldstein (2018). On the broader context of Kant's strategic «separat[ion of] the cognitive orders science and religion through a peculiar third order, philosophy», see Bianco (2018: 13), Collins (1998: 650-654).

<sup>35</sup> As a starting point to the extensive literature see Wyhe (2002).

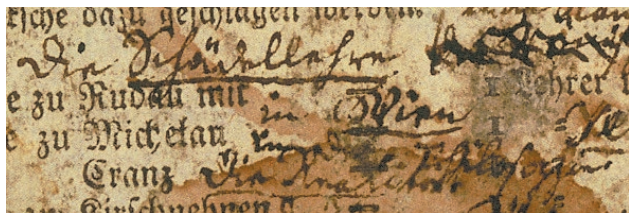


Figure 2. Detail from Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, Ms.germ. fol. 1702, Conv. I, S.3. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung BBAW / Kant-Arbeitsstelle. Reproduced with permission.

tions (figure 3): «the doctrine of skulls» (omitting Kant's underlining) appears right next to «Xenien, host gifts» (and a series of poems by Goethe and Schiller), and above the words «a philosophy», followed by «the reality\of ideas\in philoso-

phy», and then: «marzipan borrowed from Russian priests – gentlemen's food – [...] – gingerbread days» (Kant [1936]: 5). In the Cambridge edition, the textual basis of most current O. p. scholarship and itself an example of coherent editorial guidelines, the doctrine of skulls has vanished from the printed text along with marzipan and gingerbread. In this case, the so far definitive edition has made the choice that Gall's phrenology is unrelated to the contents of Kant's *Transition* work, that at this stage has morphed into a different project altogether. One of his last title variations in the manuscript's final fascicle links «The Highest Standpoint of Transcendental Philosophy» with «The Thinking Being in the World» (Kant [1993]: 237).

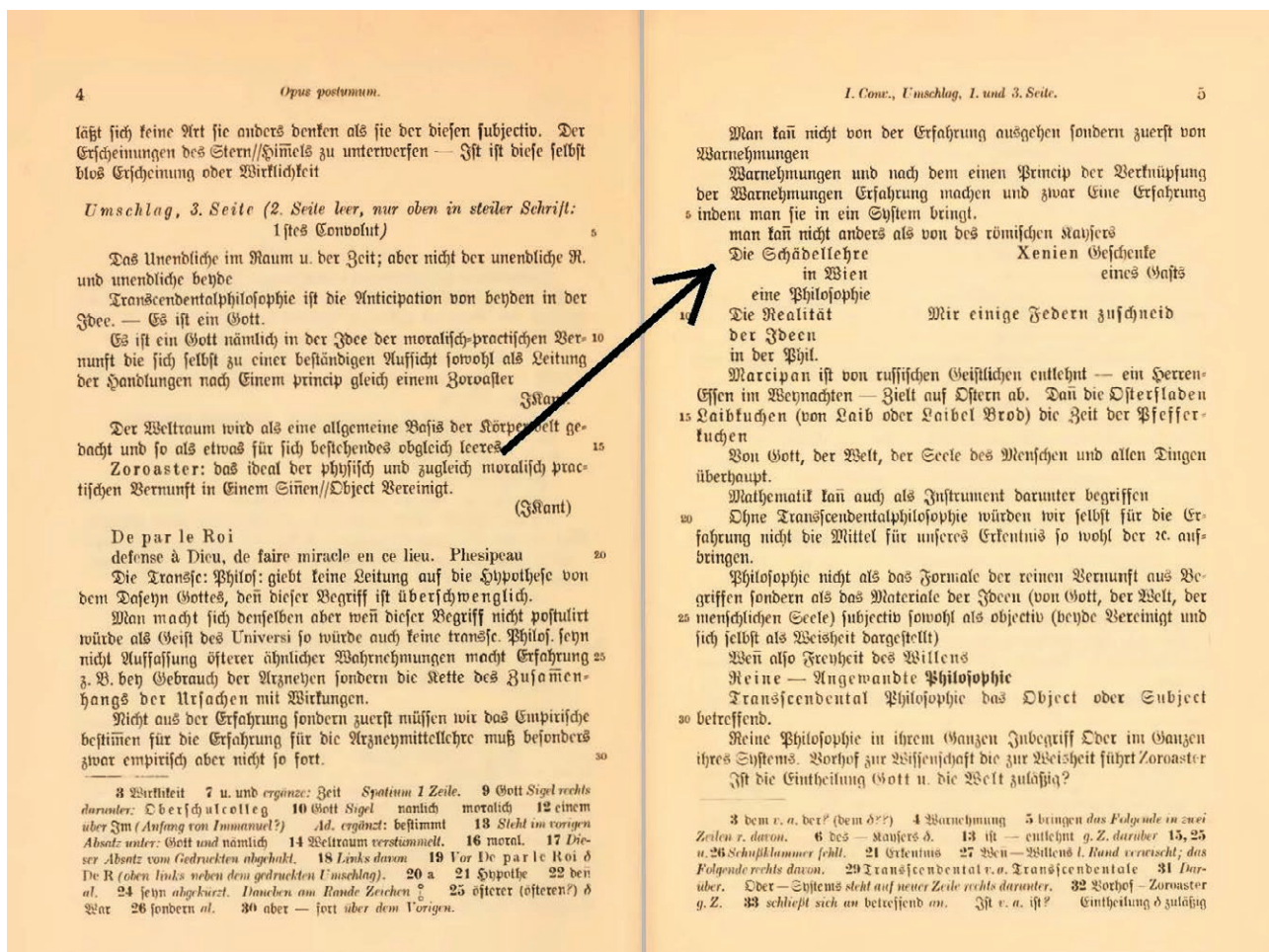


Figure 3: Kant's *Opus postumum*, *Erste Hälfte* (Convolut I bis VI), ed. by A. Buchenau and G. Lehmann, Berlin und Leipzig, 1936 (=Akademie-Ausgabe vol. XXI), 4-5; my arrow insertion.

It is worth asking whether the «doctrine of skulls» might have stood a chance to make the journey from the wrapper remarks into an imagined future text's contents (or what resonances it might have with Kant's earlier marginal notes). On the one hand, Gall's phrenology is part of a shift in the human sciences away from the introspective methods of the earlier sciences of the soul, and towards new objectifying practices that constitute these sciences' objects of study (e. g. skulls). Kant's interest in the human sciences was keen and lasting, and he developed his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* – completed in 1798 just before he embarked on the O.p. – as an alternative to both introspective methods, and to physiological anthropology studying the correlated action of body and soul<sup>36</sup>. On the other hand, we find an objectifying gesture in Kant's O.p. itself, in which the transcendental subject constitutes itself as an empirical object: in the doctrine of self-positing that is seen as its key part by most recent commentators, and which O.p. editor Eckart Förster interprets as the «progressive *empirical embodiment* of the pure a priori subject» (as summarised by Friedman [2010]: 219).

It amounts to «wild hypothesising», to borrow AA secretary Paul Menzer's worst fears for future research based on the edition he devoted most of his career to (Menzer [1957]: 350), to speculate whether Kant might have started his O.p. all over again yet another time to extend the transition from the a priori principles of physical nature to physics to an explicit transition from the transcendental foundations of subjectivity to the psychological subject – although such a move might have satisfied Dilthey, who not only described Kant's «I» of the first *Critique*, the synthetic unity of apperception, as providing «unshakable foundations» for the sciences, but who also complained that «there is no real blood flowing in the veins of the knowing subjects fabricated by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but only the diluted lymph of reason as mere intellectual activity» (Dilthey [1988]: 73). We

will not know what status Gall's doctrine of skulls, a scientific practice that rapidly became invested in stabilising notions of European racial superiority – some of them informed by Kant's anthropology – over the course of the nineteenth century, might have taken in Kant's system and its connections to thinking beings in the world. But the point of my example of the word *Schädellehre* in Kant's manuscript is just to draw attention to editorial choices (themselves inevitably informed to some extent by an interpretation of the text that they constitute) as markers of what is made to count as philosophical content and what isn't in the published “text”. The O.p.'s new edition enables its readers to see such editorial choices more clearly, but also to embark on the investigation of the manuscript's constellations, thereby tracing Kant's own, authorial such demarcation choices in the travels of his marginal notes into his arguments and occasionally back out again.

Between the editorial construction of text and its authorial prefiguration sits the archive, always already involved in an evaluative exercise by virtue of its function, as Michel Espagne has observed for the case of literary archives:

*Literary archives factually take on the immense responsibility of determining what is of literary relevance and what isn't. The inevitable process of drawing a boundary between literary and generally historical archival pieces, the duty to exclude irrelevant material, are continuously at work in spreading an implicit definition of literature.* (Espagne [1996]: 83-84)

The BBAW continues to fulfil this institutional function of sanctioning a philosophical corpus, but in its choice to produce and publish the O.p. as constellation rather than text the BBAW also places a question mark over the archive's second constitutive function: its generation of interpretative practices. Tempting as it may be to portray Dilthey's approach to the archive as a product of the nineteenth century and squarely left behind by now, its legacy has proved more lasting than we may wish to admit. As far as Kant scholarship is concerned, countless careers have been built on

<sup>36</sup> See Sturm (2009); for Kant's take on the scientific status of psychology, see Sturm (2011).

assessing consistencies and inconsistencies across Kant's work, or tracing continuities and breaks over the course of his career – precisely the type of inquiry that is predicated upon Dilthey's idea of the archive as a document of individual development. If the new edition of the O.p. showcases Kant as a thinker in motion, it also invites motion on the part of his readers.

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## Developing Digital Technology at the Husserl Archives. A Report

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**Abstract.** After a brief introduction to the history of the Husserl Archives I focus on the methodological specificities in studying Husserl's work on the basis of his manuscripts and of his archives. In a second step I expound on the effects that the current shift from an analogous to a hybrid analogous and digital archives is producing in the self-understanding of the practices of our institution. Particularly, developing digital technology means that the Husserl Archives are entering a new phase in respect to how archival and editorial impulses will affect the presentation of Husserl's writings. Finally, I offer some perspectives about how the planned virtual platform («digital-Husserl»), which will give direct access to his manuscripts, is designed to promote a new understanding of Husserl's specific process of philosophical writing, of his unique *wording of thoughts*<sup>1</sup>.

**Keywords.** Archives, digital edition, phenomenology, Husserl.

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*I am really grateful to speak at this university where people at the right time had the right instinct, support, the courage and the generosity to provide safe-harbor for the archives of one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th-century [...] I for the first time had the privilege of visiting this archive and it is very moving.*

Jürgen Habermas (public lecture *Democracy, Solidarity and the European Union*, held in Leuven on April 26, 2013, after visiting the Husserl Archives)

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the entire team of the digitalHusserl: the director of the Husserl Archives and promotor of digitalHusserl, Julia Jansen, the co-promotor Fred Truyen, the senior editor Thomas Vongehr, our innovation manager Roxanne Wyns and business consultant Michiel De Clerck from LIBIS, as well as the head archivist of the KU Leuven Archives, Marc Nelissen.



## 1. SHORT INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHIVES

The Husserl Archives was established in 1938 at KU Leuven with the purpose of preserving and publishing the writings of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, whose 40.000 pages of manuscripts were saved from Nazi Germany, and whose phenomenological thinking is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant philosophical endeavours of the 20th-century. Since it was founded, the Husserl Archives has supervised the transcription and edition of more than 50 volumes of Husserl's writings. In the so far eight decades of its existence, the Husserl Archives published not only Husserl's writings, but also several auxiliary tools for historical and theoretical research in phenomenology as well as more than 230 volumes of scholarly work in phenomenology in the book series "Phaenomenologica".

Geographically situated between Germany and France, the Husserl Archives in Leuven (Belgium), acquired a pivotal role in the European philosophical dialogue already in the 1940s, when Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Alfred Schütz, Aron Gurwitsch, Paul Ricoeur, Emanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and many others came to the Archives as young visiting scholars and profited from the study of Husserl's texts. More recently, internationally renowned scholars, such as Anthony Steinbock and Dan Zahavi (to name a few), have done extensive research here. Furthermore, the Archives are also a small philosophical attraction for scholars and students from various academic disciplines as well as the interested public. Recently, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, and Carlo Ginzburg paid a visit to the Husserl Archives. Although we are aware of the risks of "heritagization", we are very glad to welcome guests in the *Husserlkamer*, a small, representative seminar room where we exhibit Husserl's philosophical library, a small picture gallery, and his private desk. However, the core mission of the Archives is the preservation and advancement of Husserl's philosophical project and ideas. Since

1938 it has made available manuscripts and their transcriptions for every interested international researcher. In this respect, the Belgian Franciscan, philosopher and founder of the Husserl Archives, Pater Herman Leo Van Breda, was proud of keeping an open-door policy: it has always been the case that scholars were given full access upon request.

Umberto Eco, fascinated by the history of the Husserl Archives (as a student he attended Enzo Paci's phenomenological seminars in Milan), confessed in 2007 during his last visit to the Husserl Archives that he dreamed to write a novel on its history. Former visiting scholar Bruce Bégout just published such a novel: *Le sauvatage* (2019) narrates the rescue of the Husserl Archives and speculates about a *Gestapo* agent who *malgré lui* would have been commissioned to arrest Van Breda, the manuscript smuggler, who was trying to take away from German control the illegible – and therefore highly suspicious – writings of a non-Aryan philosopher. As we know from the details of his biography (Horsten [2018]), he brought the manuscripts to Leuven against the more prudent advice of his supervisors, who were concerned about the financial sustainability of Van Breda's vision of founding an international research center in Phenomenology. Nevertheless, in part no doubt won over by the diplomacy and charm of the young Franciscan, they endorsed his efforts and supported his projects.

As a crowning of his endeavours, we can consider the grant that Van Breda was able to obtain from the UNESCO. After intensive networking during the war, in 1949 he prepared an application to the UNESCO with support letters by reknowned philosophers such as Jean Wahl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Lévinas, Helmuth Plessner, Paul Ricoeur, Alfred Schütz and Frederic J. J. Buytendijk. In contrast with Nazi ideology, they stressed Husserl's relevance for a global humanism, and for Germany's re-education and democratization. The application's success enabled the begin of the *Husserliana* and put phenomenology at the center of post-war intellectual life.

## 2. ON HUSSERL'S WORDING OF THOUGHTS

Considering the specificities of Husserl's working method on the basis of his manuscripts and archives, one quickly realizes that his philosophy cannot be studied without taking into account his research manuscripts or, as one of the most prominent editors of Husserl's manuscripts, Rudolf Boehm, called them, his «research reports or protocols» (*Forschungsaufzeichnungen*). The handling of Husserl's own manuscript pages is essential for gaining insights into his philosophical style, in respect to method, content, and medium of his philosophy.

The phenomenological *method* is devoted to the careful description of the differentiating structures of the acts as well as objects of experience with the help of so-called «phenomenological reductions» and thought experiments. This experimental character of phenomenological reflection is visible in Husserl's prolific writings: continuous attempts to record his mental experiments, conducted, proofed, and varied repeatedly in order to get ever clearer insights into both invariant and variable structures of experience. Husserl reported his experiments with a particular fast writing script, called *Gabelsberger* shorthand, which was at the time of his youth a common German shorthand system for about 4 millions writers. The same or similar systems were employed also by other scholars (e.g., Stumpf, Wundt, Schrödinger, Gödel and Schmitt, to name a few). Due to this long out-dated script of Husserl's writings, the main task of the Husserl Archives was, and still is, the transcription of these texts into Latin characters in order to make them accessible to a wider community of scholars.

The combination of these characteristics in *content* and *medium* distinguish the ontology and the materiality of Husserl's writing. In fact, this unique combination reflects the style and form of his thinking and shows that Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is primarily a project of research that did not have finished publications as its main vehicle of communication and visibility. Writing recorded the practice of thinking for

Husserl, and this form of writing served as an experimental laboratory of his phenomenological research. Therefore, the relevance of the archival practice for the making and for the assessment of Husserl's philosophy cannot be overstated: it is an integral part of his way of thinking.

He wrote on loose leaf papers which he collected in folders and often moved and reassembled from folders, to folders, assigning them page numbers, sometimes cryptic signatures and often adding new page numbers and new signatures. The Husserl Archives in Leuven preserves the original manuscripts in the order that Van Breda and his assistants found them when he moved the Archives from Freiburg to Leuven in 1938. After 1933, it was Husserl himself who, with the help of his personal assistants, prepared his own archives having as a model the Brentano Archives that his old friend Masaryk founded, and desperately dreaming of an international research center dedicated to the philosophical project of phenomenology (Luft 2004).

However, despite of its name and explicit mission, the focus of the Husserl Archives lay more on editing Husserl's writings than on, strictly speaking, «archiving» them. The manuscripts were usually handled carefully, but were considered more as research tools rather than as precious historical documents. From a philosophical perspective, their value consists in their ideal content, and their keepers and users at the Husserl Archives were (and still are) trained philosophers, not archivists. Hence, priority was given to editing and publishing Husserl's «plain text», with a stress on his intended meaning. Furthermore, the editors' own philosophical interests have often reached beyond Husserl's research program. For instance, the aforementioned Rudolf Boehm was leading the edition of the Husserliana as Van Breda's closest collaborator<sup>2</sup> while he also worked on the French translation of the first part of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Heidegger [1927]) and on the

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<sup>2</sup> Boehm edited volumes VII, VIII and X of the Husserliana series (Husserl [1923-1924a]; Husserl [1923-1924b]; Husserl [1893-1917]).

German translation of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of perception* (Merleau-Ponty [1945]). Karl Schuhmann was working on the transcription of several manuscripts and on the collection of Husserl's biographical chronicle (Schumann [1977]; Husserl [1994]) while he also published extensively on the critical role of other, at that time mostly ignored members of the phenomenological movement (Schumann [1973]; Reinach [1989]) as well as on Hobbes' political philosophy (Hobbes [1655a]; Hobbes [1655b]; Hobbes [1651]).

### 3. HOW GOING DIGITAL IS AFFECTING THE WORKFLOW OF THE HUSSERL ARCHIVES

In 2020 we can now finally say that the Husserl Archives is entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and catching up on the pace of the advancement of scholarly editing in the Digital Humanities. In this respect it is important to note that it was not solely the introduction of new technology that marked the beginning of the ongoing shift from an analogous to a hybrid analogous *and* digital archives, but rather a change of mind-set in conceiving of the work-flow of archival and editorial practices. What Patrick Sahle has said of digitization clearly holds here: «the current transformation of media is not so much a transformation of media, but rather a process of transmedialisation» (Sahle [2013]: 161; see Dillen [2019]). For many decades the Husserl Archives basically kept doing the same transcription and editorial work while gradually adopting new technologies: computers replaced type-writers, but the tasks largely remained the same, and the workflow did not change dramatically. In 2007 a first digitization project was carried on: in a big effort, JPEG scans of all the original manuscripts were created and saved both on CD-roms and on the KU Leuven server as well as printed in high-quality facsimile, which were stored and kept for research and conservation purposes at the Husserl Archives in the same way as micro-fiches were created in the fifties.

It was only when the Husserl Archives, after some initial hesitation, chose to go digital, that

new digital technologies have been having a significant impact on our workflow. More than ten years after their creation, those JPEG images are now the focus of our attention, while we are ingesting them in IIIF-compliant format in the long-term repository system of our university. Keeping to the spirit of Van Breda's original open-door policy, the Husserl Archives is now planning and gradually implementing a digital platform that will provide virtual access to Husserl's writings. In the following, I will not delve into the theoretical and technical issues related to such an endeavour from a technical and editorial perspective. Instead, I will focus on the impact that this implementation is having to the changing archival and editorial tasks at the Husserl Archives.

Generally, we can distinguish, in the history of the Husserl Archives, three different phases of thinking and practicing the relation between archival and editorial tasks: 1. The years of collaboration between Husserl and his personal assistants Edith Stein, Ludwig Landgrebe, and Eugen Fink (1916-1938); 2. the decades devoted primarily to the edition of the print version of the *Husserliana* (1950-ongoing); and finally, 3. the horizon that we can imagine now for the decades to come thanks to the upcoming launch of the digitalHusserl.

In their close collaboration with Husserl, his assistants Stein, Landgrebe and Fink transcribed, compiled, and re-arranged texts for Husserl according to clear assignments. Their editorial suggestions were then, in a second step, proofread and re-arranged by Husserl, and often re-assigned to his assistants for further revisions. Some of these collaborations ended in publications during Husserl's lifetime (e.g. *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*<sup>3</sup>) or post-humous (e.g. Stein drafted the corpus of *Ideas II*<sup>4</sup>, Landgrebe *Experience and Judgement*<sup>5</sup>). Because of their

<sup>3</sup> Published by Martin Heidegger in 1928 without mentioning Edith Stein's editorial work in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, critically re-edited in 1966 by Rudolph Boehm.

<sup>4</sup> Published by Marly Biemel in 1952 as *Husserliana* IV and V.

<sup>5</sup> Published by Ludwig Landgrebe in 1939, now available as Husserl (1976).

unclear authorship, these posthumous works have often been critically assessed by scholars and thus in fact manifest different grades of fidelity to Husserl's intention according both to the actual condition of the collaboration and on the temperament of his assistants.

A second phase began when the Husserl Archives agreed in the fifties on a set of transcription and edition guidelines, according to which transcribers and editors were mainly devoted to the publication of already clear circumscribed texts and to the production of the largest possible number of transcriptions. Note that, the Husserl Archives in Leuven had in the fifties and sixties neither the competence nor the recognized authority to dare a *critical* edition. Starting from the seventies, the Husserl Archives began to edit also research manuscripts, the publication of which had not been planned by Husserl himself and thus received particular editorial intention by the respective editors instead. These later editions faced the additional task of the assessment of the philosophical quality and nature of the texts, which, according to the editorial guidelines, should be collected in groups of "main" texts and "lesser" appendices. Regardless of these difficulties and thanks to the enormous effort that had gone into producing transcriptions, this was also the time when editors were able to decide to make available texts on topics that were not yet covered by the published volumes and that were highly controversial in phenomenological debates. To name one for all: the problem of intersubjectivity, i.e., the question of how we are able to relate to other human beings and how our sociality co-constitutes our subjectivity. The three volumes of the *Husserliana* on intersubjectivity edited by Iso Kern in the seventies (Hua XIII-XV) changed completely the picture we had on Husserl's philosophy and, more radically, paved the way for new phenomenological research in phenomenology of sociality (Kjosavik, Beyer [2019]).

The protocols for transcription and editions fixed in the sixties by Iso Kern and Rudolf Boehm reflect the methodological reflections of the team of transcribers and editors in respect to the una-

voidable degree of philosophical interpretation that is needed in the editorial process. Accordingly, until the nineties, a sharp line was kept between archival tasks and edition work, between praxis of transcribing and of editing. Starting from 2001, the Archives opted for the edition of a new series of texts without a critical apparatus, the *Husserliana Materialien*, in order to finally publish texts that were already accessible to researchers in the Husserl Archives and highly valued by the scholar community but that were too demanding from a philological, editorial, and financial point of view for a critical edition.

Currently, with the planning of the digital-Husserl (i.e., the platform that will provide access to Husserl's texts), archival and editorial practices become even more entangled than they were before. It is therefore not exaggerated to see in this shift from the analogue to the digital workflow the delineation of a new phase in the methodological self-understanding of the archival and editorial practices of the Husserl Archives.

The digitalHusserl project was planned in 2015 to accomplish the transition of the Husserl Archives into the age of Digital Humanities. The vision behind this project is to make available Husserl's writings – the original stenograph manuscripts (40.000 pages) and corresponding transcriptions in an online and open access digital environment that facilitates collaboration and discussion on Husserl's work. The overall goals of the project is to preserve, organise, and present the *total archive of Husserl*, including his personal and unique philosophic research library of books and off-prints, correspondence and photographic material.

The long-term goal is to make available the following tripartite architecture:

- *The Digital Archive*: Transcriptions and stenographic manuscripts side by side (two panel presentation) organised in a fully searchable database.
- *The Library*: Dynamic bibliographical and biographical database with access to Husserl's digitised philosophical research library.

- *The Translation Room*: platform to support translation and transcriptions of Husserl's work into different languages, with establishments of lexicons for comparative translation studies in phenomenology thanks to a dynamic annotation environment.

The unique character of this project resides in its disaggregated archival format. Rather than the *linear* and highly edited print format of Husserl's writings, the digitalHusserl is planned to preserve, organize, and present to the scholar community Husserl's writings in *non-linear* manifold of searchable texts: scholars will be able to develop their own research strategies, each thus creating a virtual edition of Husserl's writings.

Since Husserl wrote in a special form of stenography, the simultaneous availability of the transcriptions in a digital and searchable form is crucial to fulfil this open access commitment. Therefore, the archival impetus of offering a complete as possible textual documentary basis of transcription is from the very beginning entangled with the interpretation of the stenographs. For these reason it is not possible to offer a transcription neutral from the editorial choices of the transcriber (note that, from a technical point of view, this excludes the possibility to work with stand-off markup).

Thus, the ambition to offer (at least exemplarily) diplomatic transcriptions of the original manuscript in a accountable and amendable manner, can in principle help also non-expert readers of Gabelsberger shorthand to follow the originals by means of reading the transcription side by side. In a further step, it will be possible to offer some tutorials and help-tools to learn and improve the reading of Husserl's shorthand. If this becomes possible, by involving an international community of researchers in this process, the knowledge on how to read Husserl's original manuscripts can be secured for future generations and will contribute to the progressive understanding of Husserl's thinking.

Further research will decide whether some sort of automated matching of the OCR results

on the original manuscript is indeed possible or, if not, what alternative options are available. It is plausible to imagine that, once we will have a good corpus of reliable digital and encoded transcription it will be possible to experiment forms of OCR recognition for Husserl's most recurrent stenographs in analogy with existent tools for the recognition of Chinese characters.

However, we do not expect a big impact from the crowdsourcing tools for the digital transcription of the originals. It is more realistic to expect collaborations from scholars in the improvement of digital transcription of not-yet textually digitized transcriptions or – more interesting from an academic point of view – in the sharing and discussion of translations. These different levels of possible collaboration will be mirrored in different users profiles that will be developed in the near future.

Honestly, the concrete work on the implementation of the first modules of this project make us aware of the enormous amount of work that would be needed to realize – even partially – the vision of a such a *total Archives*. At this stage we are more humbly concentrating on three interconnected levels: the ingest of the images of the original manuscripts in the long repository, the setting of a collection management system through a relational ontology based on the open source software Collective Access, and the realization of a public webpage to provide access to a first material pilot project that offers the first digital born edition of an unpublished lecture by Husserl (*Einleitung in die Phänomenologie*, 1912 edited by Thomas Vongehr) that will be published also in printed version in the *Husserliana Materialien* series.

The preparation of this platform over the last four years has forced us to rethink at the same time both archival and editorial practices. We are now in the very challenging phase in which the protocols that were established in the sixties must be enhanced and partially amended. I will give two examples for this: first, the new digital architecture will make possible multiple readings, by means of rearranging the pages of the manuscript according to different orders (what we call “manu-

script collection”). As we saw before, this way of reading, which is not possible in a linear printed edition, actually approximates more faithfully the way in which Husserl himself wrote, read and organized his thoughts. Second, a diplomatic edition of Husserl’s manuscript was unthinkable in print form. This will become possible by means of a TEI-encoding of the transcriptions. In a diplomatic transcription both archival and editorial impulses converge and interlock; it aims at providing a faithful documentation of the original while it also makes transparent the various editorial decisions (Dillen 2019). Furthermore, information that in a printed critical edition (due to its linearity) can be only provided in a *text critical apparatus* at the end of the respective book, can in a diplomatic transcription be shown on screen within the text, and thus used with much more efficacy.

Philosophers usually tend to focus on the content, not on the medium of their thoughts. This tendency can make these editorial advancement seem, at first glance, superficial. However, what we have been learning is that the print medium in fact distracted the readers from the way Husserl actually performed his phenomenological research. We have taken on the task of making public available, in the near future, the wording of Husserl’s thoughts and working method as he put them on paper.

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## Rereading Frantz Fanon in the light of his unpublished texts

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**Abstract.** Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is principally known as a great theoretician of race relations and decolonization, in particular through the two main books he published during his lifetime *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). What is less known is that he was in parallel a pioneering psychiatrist and an early and recognized theoretician of ethnopsychiatry. A volume of about a thousand pages of texts either difficult to access or presumed lost was recently published, following more than a decade of research in archives located in different parts of the world. It reveals first the importance and originality of his thought as a scientist, and secondly the importance of this dimension of his work for the understanding of his political texts. This is shown on two points: 1) the role of violence in the decolonization process, when compared with Fanon's texts on psychiatric internment, the phenomenon of agitation and the alternative model of social therapy and 2) the use of «identity» as cultural foundation for newly decolonized states, which he strongly criticised, when compared with Fanon's systematic questioning of any personal «constitution» in his psychiatric and ethnopsychiatric work.

**Keywords.** Decolonisation, Social Therapy, Ethnopsychiatry, Algerian War, Frantz Fanon.

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Exploring archives and searching for lost works can be essential to the understanding of a writer but is also fraught with the seductions and risks of a comfortable fetishism, that of reaching the complete meaning of a work through the patient and exhaustive inventory and analysis of its corpus. When setting out to work on an edition of Frantz Fanon's unpublished or inaccessible writings my aim was rather to reveal the complexity of a body of thought of which the astonishing creativity, its freedom and its uncertainties, had been progressively masked under proliferating interpretations linked to various agendas. The point was to recreate its genesis in relation to the debates and historical events it responded to, and then evaluate its relevance to our time, which is now determined by the consciousness of a history Fanon was one of the first to conceptualise, that of decolonisation.



In his political texts, he essentially tried to imagine and defend processes of dis-alienation which entailed dispelling the mystifications linked to the idea of identity, whether this identity had been imposed as a justification for oppression or was now claimed as a ground and tool for liberation. Looking at his archives shows that this direction had in fact first inspired his psychiatric work, which focused on neurological pathologies that fixed the individual into a psychiatric syndrome and aimed to show that the gap between the neurological and the psychiatric allowed for the inventions of therapies of dis-alienation. Coherently, this work started with a reflection on the temporality and historicity at the heart of all scientific constructions of concepts, including its own. This background research shed interesting light on Fanon's well-known books, but it also revealed that this thinker of mobility and permanent *vigilance* against all reifications was astonished by the canonisation of some of his texts, which he saw as historically determined interventions. In 2015, this archival work which I led jointly with Robert JC Young resulted in the publication by Éditions La Découverte, which took over from Fanon's historical publisher, Éditions Maspero, of *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, a large volume of texts by Fanon which had been thought lost or were almost impossible to access. This volume contained literary, scientific, political and journalistic texts and has become in effect the second volume of his *Œuvres*, the single-volume publication in 2011 by La Découverte of the four books published in Fanon's lifetime or shortly after his death: *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959), *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961) and, posthumously, *Pour la révolution africaine* (1964). In 2018 Bloomsbury published an English translation, *Alienation and Freedom*. In 2019 a revised paperback edition appeared in French, and we published in 2020 a revised and expanded edition of the English version. During the six years following our first publication, new documents and details had appeared, which confirmed some of our initial hypotheses, and the English translation required some revi-

sion, which made these new editions necessary. It also turned out that if the publication of these texts was initially aimed at deepening the understanding of Fanon's books, now widely read by a new generation, his literary and psychiatric work gave the reflexions on alienation and freedom a relevance to our historical context we could not have anticipated.

A large proportion of the archives we used (which are kept at the Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine, in Caen) reflect the astonishing twists of their author's life. Fanon, who was born in the French Caribbean island of Martinique in 1925 and died from leukaemia at the age of 36 at the end of 1961, and who fought in the Free French Forces during the second World War, produced all his work in the span of a decade, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-six. He did so while pursuing continuously the career of a clinician and researcher in psychiatry and, from 1954, the semi-clandestine life of a militant engaged by chance and choice in a cruel war of independence. He only suspended his psychiatric work when he became in February 1960 the ambassador at large for sub-Saharan Africa of a country, Algeria, yet to be created. In this capacity he survived several assassination attempts as well as the inner conflicts of a revolutionary movement. In such a frantically active life, writing was for him a *praxis*, a reflection on the action that was radically transforming him at the same time as an intervention that aimed at transforming the reality he was writing from, whether the matter was a complete reorganisation of psychiatric care or the transformation of a national liberation movement into a revolutionary one. The three books he published in his lifetime focused on three different transformative lived experiences, that of the black man from the Antilles when faced with the racist gaze in the *métropole*, that of a people engaged in a war of liberation, and that of a continent, Africa, forced to define its future in radically new terms. No typescript has survived of these works, which were themselves often composed of separate studies, some already published in journals, and some incorporating documents

such as Fanon's own psychiatric case notes. Nevertheless, a substantial and heterogeneous archive survived. It comprises the typescripts of two of the three plays he is known to have written during his medical studies in Lyon, between 1946 and 1951; an important PhD dissertation in psychiatry defended in 1951; a significant number of editorials in the ward journals of two psychiatric hospitals, in France – Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole where he worked under a pioneer of social therapy, François Tosquelles – and, in Algeria – Blida-Joinville (now Hôpital Frantz-Fanon), where he ran two wards; scientific papers published in professional psychiatric journals and in proceedings of congresses; a few scientific notes, for instance on epistemology or on ethnopsychiatry, and notes for congress papers which became articles but where the typescript or manuscript differs from the published text; unsigned articles in clandestine journals or in group publications such as the journal of the Algerian Liberation Front, *El Moudjahid*; and a sustained correspondence in particular with his publishers.

Important also is the correspondence between his publishers that immediately followed his early death and bears on the possible publication of the surviving material: it gives precious indications as to what unpublished material was available and considered then to be undoubtedly his work. One interesting aspect of this correspondence, which helped us editorially but also philosophically, is that when Fanon answers questions on republication or translation into foreign languages, he appears not to consider his own published books as definitely set but rather as toolboxes containing chapters which could be assembled with others from previous or future volumes, as he envisaged with his Italian publisher Giovanni Pirelli, while others could be abandoned because the situation had changed and they were no longer meaningful for action as well as thought. Finally, Fanon was an avid reader and often marked or annotated his books. What remains of his library is kept at the Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques (CNRPAH) in Algiers where I copied his marginalia, which

are reproduced and commented in our edition. These *marginalia* widen his known intellectual lineage (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Sartre for instance, among many others) as well as some violent rejections – of Jung, for instance – and this gave sometimes a new dimension to some of his analyses or allowed us at least to elucidate allusions or influences in his published work.

In order to establish a meaningful edition of the work of a writer who was so engaged with the remarkable scientific transformations and historical events of his time we had to research and present in extensive introductions and notes some indispensable contextual material. That included of course the psychiatry of the period, in particular the debates between psychiatrists like Henri Ey, Jacques Lacan and François Tosquelles on the relationship between neurology and psychiatry, or between institutional psychotherapy and dis-alienation. Finding and reproducing the blueprint that presided over the construction of the Blida hospital where Fanon was to write some of his most perceptive texts on the relationships between the physical structure of internment and its alienating impact, was also enlightening. These debates and contextual information determined both Fanon's psychiatric thought and his political texts. The same background research was necessary to understand his literary work, through which we can often understand what is at stake in his descriptions of the revolutionary process and their tone. Documenting all the plays that Fanon was able to see in Lyon during his studies, from 1948 to 1951, thus revealed the influence of Claudel in addition to those of Camus, Césaire or Sartre. For the later period of his life I found diplomatic telegrams which indicated that his position had been at times quite precarious with some high ranking members of the FLN, which in turn sheds some light on remarks in his final books on the perils faced by the revolutionary process. So do lecture notes from students who attended his lectures in the same period. In the end, all this material, original documents, contextual information and scholarly apparatus, produced a volume which was considerably larger than what had been initially

anticipated, about seven hundred pages in the first edition and finally a thousand pages in the three volumes of the 2020 English edition.

It turned out that in making all this material public and understandable through a scholarly work of restitution we were not just (hopefully) dispelling some misunderstandings but also contributing to present debates. For instance Fanon had been interpreted as an advocate of political violence as a form of purification, or as a thinker of identity. Yet his texts showed that his point of view was different from such conceptions.

Since the publication of *Alienation and freedom* a wide readership has realised that Fanon, as a psychiatrist, wrote some original and significant theoretical texts in the field, which were recognised as such at the time and this in itself has led to a renewal of interest in the questions he tackled, especially when dealing with ethnopsychiatry. But when reading his psychiatric texts as a whole it is also striking how much the concepts in these texts inform his political thought and question not just the idea of a politics based on identity, but also the role of violence within a liberation struggle and more generally historical teleologies, which in turn explains Fanon's warnings about the risks of neo-colonialism.

Fanon's psychiatric thought unfolds on three levels: it is first a criticism of the taxonomic essentialism of psychiatric theory so far, which projects organic categories onto mental illnesses, an organicist or a constitutionalist point of view which he refuses early on and which he will adamantly critique when dealing with colonial ethnopsychiatry. He set out to debunk it by studying a set of neurodegenerative diseases which coincide with very different mental (psychiatric) syndromes. The second level is the clinical therapeutical theory made possible by the experimental demonstration of this organo-psychiatric gap. A desirable link between the exploration of this gap and a more general theory of history was announced very early on, in Fanon's PhD:

*I do not believe that a neurological trouble [...] can give rise to a determinate psychiatric syndrome clus-*

*ter. Instead, my aim is to show that all neurological impairment damages the personality in some way. And that this open crack within the ego becomes all the more perceptible as the neurological disorder takes the form of a rigorous and irreversible semiology. [...] We think in terms of organs and focal lesions when we ought to be thinking in terms of functions and disintegration. Our medical view is spatial, where it ought to become more and more temporal. [...] The occasion will arise, in a work that I have been undertaking for a long time, to tackle the problem of history from a psychoanalytic and ontological angle. In it, I will show that history is only the systematic valorization of collective complexes.* (Fanon [2018]: 215-216, 262; [2020b]: 50-51, 94).

This gap and this new therapeutical theory, which will later on fall under the appellation of «antipsychiatry» or «institutional psychiatry» is what both his psychiatry and his politics were to be grounded on.

For Fanon a mental illness is a faulty reconstruction of personality often following an initial organic disturbance which has led to a *dissolution* of personality. Psychiatric internment only serves to solidify these faulty reconstructions, artificially «producing» its object of study, fixed categories of mental illnesses (a theme Foucault later developed in the final chapter of his *History of Madness*; see Foucault [1961]: 512-538, *The Anthropological circle*). In subsequent clinical psychiatry articles, which he wrote jointly with the revolutionary psychiatrist François Tosquelles, Fanon proposed new therapeutical methods they had developed. He also defended them in the editorials he wrote for the ward journals which were themselves written and published as part of the therapeutical treatment. The faulty reconstructions of personality needed to be dissolved by a new shock (Fanon and Tosquelles advocated shock therapies such as electro-shocks, insulin-induced comas as well as sleep cures), on the one hand, and the asylum needed to be reorganised on the other in such a way that it became through psychotherapies and social therapy what could be called a vigilant society, in that each participants, medical staff, nurses and patients were to learn to *take responsibility* at

each instant, for each of their acts, and to continuously produce their present. This implied a complete reform of the institution, in its physical and temporal organisation. Thus Fanon's editorial in the ward journal of Saint Alban, dated 27 mars 1953, was titled *Therapeutical role of commitment [engagement]* (Fanon [2018]: 290-292; [2020b]: 122-123). This is where he first defined the crucial concept of «vigilance». The terms *psychiatrie institutionnelle*, and social therapy designated such a transformation of the institution and its methods.

Now, if we reread the political texts, we realise that Fanon transposed this model to the theory of colonialism almost *verbatim* and described colonisation as producing a dissolution of the «personality» of a particular society, which then reconstructs itself in socially alienated forms similar to compulsions of repetition, deliria and the «agitation» (violence) produced by the traditional asylum. These forms are particularly visible in *religion* and associated phantasms (abundantly described in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*); *crime* and *violence* (also described in this chapter, but commented on in lectures Fanon gave in Tunis, where he spoke on Chester Himes crime fictions (Fanon [2018]: 544; [2020b]: 376-377); *imitation* of the coloniser, as in the case of his native Martinique analysed in *Black Skin, White Masks*; and its response, *negritude*. Some of these are often combined.

As for political dis-alienation and liberation, Fanon also defines it along the lines of psychiatric social therapy, and this has crucial consequences regarding his conception of the revolutionary process, in particular the largely misunderstood role of violence, a much more complex notion in his work than is usually assumed. Violence is for him an effect of madness, which he classically defined, following Gunther Anders and Henri Ey as a «pathology of freedom». It is in fact the fight for liberation, *lutte* or *combat*, of a people, which can be therapeutical when it is part of a real revolutionary process. The reason is that in its very material constraints the collective struggle reinvents the revolutionary group's social structure and recreates an authentic social bond. This work

of re-instituting a social bond is described in the terms of the dis-alienating process of social therapy. Fanon also writes that it *detoxifies*, which does not mean «cleanses» as the current English editions translate it, as if cleansing was an inner virtue of violence. Fanon specifies that what it detoxifies from is subservience to leaders, in particular in newly decolonised countries where the local elites rush to take the place of the colonisers<sup>1</sup>. Among the newly published texts is a pamphlet written by Fanon when he was in post in Ghana, titled *The Stoges of Imperialism*, which stresses precisely that. Looking at the *Wretched of the Earth* from the angle of the historical process and the future it harboured, which was the only perspective of interest for Fanon, the book appears as much as an indictment of colonialism as a warning about what could go wrong in the revolutionary process, how the theories of subversion proposed could turn into instruments of oppression.

Comparing a few passages from the previously published books with some of the archive reveals many echoes and analogies.

For instance, in the *Wretched of the Earth* the colonial world is described through the categories of confinement:

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<sup>1</sup> Homi Bhabha, in his subtle preface to Richard Philcox's translation of the *Wretched of the Earth* notes that Hannah Arendt's fundamental objection to Fanon regarded not so much his supposed celebration of violence (that she sees as Sartre's interpretation of Fanon), but the idea that collective violence could engender close *political* kinship. «No body politic I know was ever founded on equality before death and its actualisation in violence», she writes (see Fanon [2004]: XXXV). This is clearly an important point, however Arendt's thought on Fanon's position might have been more nuanced had she had access to his psychiatric writings where it is clear that socialtherapy is a long and complex process and that the shocks necessary to dissolve the pathological personality inherited from the neurological trouble are just one of its preconditions. This is why Fanon devotes the majority of *The Wretched of the Earth* to the complexities of what is to follow the anticolonial struggle and the dissolution of the social «personality» inherited from the colonial system.

*A world compartmentalized, Manichean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge. A world cock-sure of itself, crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip. That is the colonial world. The colonial subject is a man penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world. The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning. (Fanon [2011]: 463; [2004]: 15)*

In a 1959 text which illustrated and defended the alternative clinical model Fanon had instituted in Tunis, that of a psychiatric day care centre, this is how classical internment is described:

*In any phenomenology in which the major alterations of consciousness are left aside, mental illness is presented as a veritable pathology of freedom. Illness situates the patient in a world in which his or her freedom, will and desires are constantly broken by obsessions, inhibitions, countermands, anxieties. Classical hospitalization considerably limits the patient's field of activity, prohibits all compensations, all movement, restrains him within the closed field of the hospital and condemns him to exercise his freedom in the unreal world of fantasy. So it is not surprising that the patient feels free only in his opposition to the doctor who has withheld him. (Fanon [2018]: 516; [2020b]: 349)*

In the *Wretched of the Earth* colonisation produces pathologies that are described in the same terms:

*The colonized's way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channelled, transformed, and spirited away. The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers. [...] Every-*

*thing is permitted in the dance circle. [...] Everything is permitted, for in fact the sole purpose of the gathering is to let the supercharged libido and the stifled aggressiveness spew out volcanically. Symbolic killings, figurative cavalcades, and imagined multiple murders, everything has to come out, the ill humours seep out, tumultuous as lava flows.*

*One step further and we find ourselves in deep possession, in actual fact, these are organized seances of possession and dispossession: vampirism, possession by djinns, by zombies, and by Legba, the illustrious god of voodoo. Such a disintegration dissolution or splitting of the personality, plays a key regulating role in ensuring the stability of the colonized world. On the way there these men and women were stamping impatiently, their nerves «on edge». On the way back, the village returns to serenity, peace, and stillness. During the struggle for liberation there is a singular loss of interest in these rituals. (Fanon [2011]: 468; [2004]: 20)*

As for dis-alienation, the same terms recur in both contexts:

*In fact, [in the asylum] the service itself is sadistic, repressive, rigid, non-socialized, and has castrative aspects. Consequently, the issue is less to advocate or command the suppression of straightjackets or isolation units, than to foster in the milieu the circulation of productive, de-alienating, and functional lines of force with a strong potential for differentiated demands. (Fanon [2018]: 458; [2020b]: 292)*

*Within the newly established society just set up, we see a mutation of the old symptomatology in its pure, desocialized state [...]. On the contrary, the patient has a need to verbalize, to explain, to explain himself, to take a position. He maintains an investment in an objectal world, which acquires a new density. Social therapy wrests patients from their fantasies and obliges them to confront reality on a new register. (Fanon [2018]: 518; [2020b]: 351)*

The war of liberation was described as follows in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

*In the liberation struggle, however, these people who were once relegated to the realm of the imagination, victims of unspeakable terrors, but content to*

*lose themselves in hallucinatory dreams, are thrown into disarray, reform, and amid blood and tears give birth to very real and urgent issues. Giving food to the mujahideen, stationing lookouts, helping deprived families and taking over from the slain or imprisoned husband – such are the practical tasks the people are asked to undertake in the liberation struggle. (Fanon [2011]: 467; [2004]: 19)*

*At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force [la violence désintoxique]. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilized by rapid decolonization, the people have time to realize that the liberation was the achievement of each and every one and no special merit should go to the leader. Violence hoists the people up to the level of the leader. Hence their aggressive tendency to distrust the system of protocol that young governments are quick to establish. When they have used violence to achieve national liberation, the masses allow nobody to come forward as «liberator». [...] Any attempt at mystification in the long term becomes virtually impossible. (Fanon [2011]: 496; [2004]: 51)*

This process of dis-alienation that effective revolutions carry through is the object of an empirical study by Fanon, *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne*, also known as *Sociologie d'une révolution* and strangely translated as *A Dying Colonialism*, while it is clear that Fanon was interested in what was in germs in this revolution, rather than in the colonial past. What *Year V of the Algerian Revolution* does is to show that even though independence is still far away, the revolution has already done its psychotherapeutical work, and this can be seen through the people's transformation in their relationship to material culture. Whatever was inert before has become alive now (each chapter concerns a change of attitude towards material and social culture: veil, transistor radio, organisation of family life, medical care). In each case, what had been solidified into an inert block of culture takes on a new meaning. Those who were spectators of their own objecthood and

lived in separation, like patients in the old asylums, have now become actors as Fanon went on to write in the opening of the *Wretched of the Earth*.

*Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it bears on being and fundamentally alters being, it transforms spectators crushed by their inessentiality into privileged actors, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It brings a natural rhythm into being, introduced by new men, a new language, a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the «thing» which has been colonized becomes a man through the very process by which it frees itself. (Fanon [2011]: 452; [2004]: 2)*

Such a critique of this society of the spectacle that the alienated colonial society is – not just a society of fascination for objects and images, or phantasms (Fanon wrote on religion and on cinema in this context), but one where human beings are separated from the products of their creation as well as the creative process, and see their cultures and themselves as things –, this is a conception that inhabits Sartre's rereading of Marx in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which Fanon read as soon as it was published. From this point of view, dis-alienation can never come from some authority (a leader) or some historical teleological necessity behind the event (the supposedly cleansing virtue of violence), it must be a process of self-creation, which by its nature will contradict oppression. For Fanon it is not an easy process. Changing structures is not enough, an extreme vigilance must be maintained at all times if these structures are not to become empty shells and the independence process another form of alienation. The whole purpose of the *Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1960-1961 when it was clear that the decolonisation process was unstoppable could be read as such a warning.

Fanon's theatre, written in 1948, anticipated this dilemma of a promethean revolutionary process producing its opposite. One of his plays *Parallel Hands*, is a tragedy which portrays the

moment when the negation of the past and the subjugation of the present to a projected future leads to the destruction of an island society. In a premonitory text on violence the hero of the play, Épithalos, said to his beloved:

*Audaline on reaching the volcanic extremes speech makes itself act!  
A language haunted by exhilarating perception!  
To look at the sun head-on  
To integrate the world's beat into my existence  
To take the breathing of cursorial clouds with tireless feet in my hands...  
Perpendicularly I make my way!  
A rhythm of rupture bathes my thoughts  
Abruptly I compose incendiary scales  
On a single theme I want to develop  
The streaming chords of my ascent.  
A language haunted by exhilarating perception!<sup>2</sup>  
(Fanon [2018]: 133; [2020a]: 131-132)*

Fanon is still in dialogue here with Césaire, who described poetry as volcanic, but the conclusion of the play is catastrophic violence and a return to alienation.

Another debated notion in Fanon's work is that of identity. From his first published book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon doubted that political action or ethical obligation could be grounded on any sense of identity, be it based on race, ethnicity or even rationality:

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<sup>2</sup> Audaline la parole parvenue aux extrêmes volcaniques  
s'érige en acte!  
Un langage hanté d'exaltante perception!  
Le soleil à regarder en face  
La pulsation du monde à intégrer à mon existence  
La respiration des nuages coureurs à pieds infatigables  
à prendre dans mes mains...  
C'est perpendiculairement que je m'achemine!  
Un rythme de rupture baigne mes pensées  
Abruptement je compose des gammes incendiaires  
C'est sur un thème unique que je veux développer  
Les ruiselants accords de mon ascension.  
Un langage hanté d'exaltante perception!

*If the question once arose for me about showing effective solidarity with a given past, it was only to the extent that I have committed, to myself and my fellow man, to fight with all my life and all my strength so that never again would a people on the earth be enslaved.*

*It is not the black world that governs my behaviour. My black skin is not a repository for specific values. The starry sky that left Kant in awe has long revealed its secrets to us. And moral law has doubts about itself. (Fanon [2011]: 248; [2008]: 202)*

In that too Fanon was Sartrean. Values can only derive from an act, not the act from values, that would thus have been inherited:

*Sartre has shown that the past, along the lines of an inauthentic mode of being, «takes» en masse [congeals], and, once solidly structured, then gives form to the individual. This is the past turned into value. But, I can also revise my past, valorise it, or condemn it through my successive choices. [...]*

*One duty alone. That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices.*

*I do not want to be the victim of the Ruse of a black world.*

*My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values. (Fanon [2011]: 248, 250; [2008]: 202, 204)*

Even though he abundantly quoted anti-colonial passages in Césaire's writings, Fanon derided the metaphysics of negritude. Much later on, in the famous travel diary he kept in Mali while exploring the routes an African legion could take to support the Algerian struggle, he advocated spreading Algeria to Africa, that is revolution to nationalisms, and Africa to Algeria, that is diversity to the revolution. Strikingly, he showed no interest for some cultural or metaphysical African identity. The continent was to be assembled or created, not inherited (Khalifa [2017]: 262-263). In *The Wretched of the Earth* all the remarks on national culture essentially refused the idea that national culture could derive from an identity, a view he had described as the essence of colonial anthropology.

Compared to his description of colonialism and the alienation induced by the racist gaze,

or his analyses of the Algerian war of independence or the conditions for an effective decolonisation after independence, these anti-essentialist positions, especially on the idea of *negritude* have often been neglected or perceived as a puzzle. But when looking at Fanon's ethnopsychiatric texts, which fundamentally question all psychiatric «constitutionalism» equating racial and cultural differences, it is clear that Fanon could only be suspicious of such an idea<sup>3</sup>. Debates on his position can now be settled simply by looking at the correspondence between Fanon and his main publisher, François Maspero. In a letter to Maspero of 27 July 1960, Fanon described the content of *The Wretched of the Earth* in these terms:

*Subject: starting from an armed revolution in the Maghreb, the development of a consciousness and a national struggle in the rest of Africa.*

*Titre: Algiers – Cape town.* (Fanon [2018]: 683; [2020c]: 152)<sup>4</sup>

This is followed by the draft of a table of content where the final chapter is entitled *Negritude and negro-african civilisations – a mystification*. Fanon did not have the time to write this chapter as a separate text, and by then its content probably only made sense for him within the more general framework of a criticism of the new nationalism which he developed in what became the chapter on national culture. But in Fanon's vocabulary «mystification» is an important word. He often describes religions as mystifications, the fascination of the powerless for an imaginary power they could master or which might protect them<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular *Social therapy in a ward of Muslim men: Methodological difficulties and Ethnopsychiatric considerations* (Fanon [2018]: 366 ff., 422 ff.; [2020b]: 195 ff., 251 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> In a letter of 20 July 1960, Fanon asked Maspero to convey to Sartre his enthusiasm for his latest book – *Critique de la raison dialectique. Théorie des ensembles pratiques, précédé de Questions de méthode* (1960) – which, he says, found in him an «exceptional echo».

<sup>5</sup> This is why in a letter on Islam sent to the Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati, Fanon seriously doubts the capacity of any religion to foster a revolutionary transfor-

Colonialism creates a world of phantasms where alienation is grounded on a mystification about one's identity and that of the other, and produces the fetishism of an essence or a mask. In his late work Fanon, who knew he had little time left, was rushing to leave a legacy for the future decolonised world (some of the correspondence with Maspero reveals that he had considered switching publisher to *Présence Africaine* in the hope of reaching a wider public in Africa). Had he survived and lived after independence, he might have just gone back to his work as a revolutionary clinician and experimental researcher and focus, as he had announced in his PhD, on a philosophical reflexion on the relation between history and psychopathology. He might also have been murdered or forced into exile again. But it is clear now that when they are read together all his texts, literary, psychiatric, or political, share a unique vigilance towards the essentialisation produced not just through the alienation process but also through attempts at fighting it. From this perspective the work of Fanon's editors must lie in our own vigilance in dispelling the mystifications that have haunted his legacy.

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mation towards an «ideal future» (see Fanon [2018]: 666-668; [2020c]: 133-135).



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## In the name of the Author: The artificial unity of Jan Patočka's scattered works

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**Abstract.** At the time of his sudden death in 1977, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka left a large philosophical legacy with no will and testament. For the last 43 years, the editors of his *Collected Works* have been reconstructing a unified and thematically articulated *oeuvre* from the more than 10,000 pages found in his drawers and boxes. It should in the end include not only the texts published during Patočka's lifetime but also his many unpublished manuscripts, fragments, variations, drafts of unfinished philosophical projects, notebooks and letters. After demonstrating in which sense the death of the *author* coincides in Patočka's case with the birth of his *oeuvre*, the article aims to show that the unity of Patočka's work is not something given, but rather something to be artificially reconstructed, in an always disputable fashion, since the internal coherence of its various thematic divisions is necessarily itself a matter of ongoing interpretation.

**Keywords.** Jan Patočka, Author function, Body of work, Complete Works, Editorial practice.

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### INTRODUCTION

During my six years' experience as co-editor of Jan Patočka's *Collected Works*, I personally witnessed the series of uncomfortable choices and questions that the chief editors, Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba, experienced when faced with the puzzling mass of texts and manuscripts that the Czech philosopher left to posterity. How can such a scattered bundle be transformed into a single *body of work*? The general questions that every editor of a "*Complete Works*" has to ask are well-known: how to delineate the body of work of an author? Where to situate the limits of this strange unit, better rendered by the French term *oeuvre*? Is everything the author left to posterity in his or her drawers and boxes worthy of publication? Should one reorganize the texts left behind according to their chronological order or their thematic affinities? Should the editors take their literary and philosophical qualities into consideration as well when

trying to discern the centre and the periphery of the *oeuvre*; should they differentiate the unpublished manuscripts according to their state of completeness, thus dividing the body of work into main sources and marginalia (drafts, fragments, occasional texts)? Difficulties arise on all sides if we raise the question of the unity of work of any prolific author, but in the case of Patočka they are exacerbated because of the particular circumstances under which he wrote.

In his country of origin, Patočka enjoyed the status of an “acknowledged author” only intermittently: for a large part of his life, he was prevented from publishing officially because of the censorship practiced first under the German occupation (from 1939 to 1945) and then under the Communist regime (from 1948 to 1965 and again from 1969 until 1977). From the perspective of the institutions of the time, the textual legacy left by Patočka at the time of his sudden death in 1977, after strenuous interrogations by the State Police, was considered to be either the dangerous fantasies of an anti-Marxist and bourgeois spirit, or political pamphlets that could be used as forensic evidence for further defamation. In this sense, Patočka was less of an author than a pernicious mastermind, and his textual legacy did not constitute so much a summary of his life-long *oeuvre*, as a collection of various pieces of evidence about his misguided political stance. At the same time however, Patočka’s collaborators, friends, “pupils” and exiled Czech thinkers assumed – unlike the state apparatus – that a major *author* died that day and that it was their responsibility to take as much care as possible of the texts left behind in order both to make them accessible to the interested public and to preserve them for posterity<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, the first editors of the samizdat collection of Patočka’s texts were immediately confronted with the famous

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<sup>1</sup> A certain taste for thrill and adventure emerges behind Ivan Chvatík’s story (2007) about his decision, in the aftermath of Patočka’s death and prior to their probable sequestration by the police, to carry away all his papers, first to a safe place and subsequently to Vienna where the first provisional Patočka Archive was improvised.

Foucauldian question: «is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work?» (Foucault [1969]: 118).

It has to be stressed that the first editors of the samizdat collection dealt with this thorny issue in 1977 according to the practical concerns of that time; from the intimidating amounts of papers left in Patočka’s boxes and drawers, they selected those that were deemed to be of interest to the public and were not available in print at the time. In a sense, the first publication project of Patočka’s body of work was oriented by the needs of the hour and without the ambition to be exhaustive. But the question of the boundaries of Patočka’s work arose again as early as 1987 when the project and the composition of Patočka’s *Complete Works* became hotly debated among Czech dissidents, exiled editors, and translators. All of them regretted that Patočka’s legacy was unavailable to those wishing to study his texts in their completeness and agreed in 1987 to prepare a collected edition in exile, but various proposals competed. The matter of dispute concerned the thematic divisions as well as the extent of the pieces to be published<sup>2</sup>. The project *Sebrané spisy* [Collected Works] was reevaluated in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution in 1989 under the newly restored conditions of liberal democracy and the new possibility of having a complete edition backed by the Czech Academy of Sciences. While the political dimension of editing Patočka’s work became less important, the difficult editorial choices became all the more explicit: the parsing between the centre and the periphery of Patočka’s body of work had to be reconsidered several times during the slow and painful publication process that was initiated in 1996 and, after 19 volumes already issued, is not yet finished. My present contribution aims not only to highlight the manifold difficulties and aporias met by the editors, but above all to analyze the peculiar relationship that holds between

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<sup>2</sup> The debate around three different conceptions of the scope and the composition of new edition of *Patočka’s Works* in exile is faultlessly summarized and its main proposals reprinted in Petruželková [2017].

Patočka's name as an author and the oeuvre organized *post hoc* around it. More precisely, I will ask how various aspects of Patočka's philosophical figure affected the unsettled and competing criteria according to which his works were to be classified, organized and redistributed into a seemingly coherent body of work. While Patočka's *name* is supposed to guarantee the unity of the work posthumously published under it, one should not neglect the fact that "Jan Patočka" refers not only to a singular person or his biography, but also to the thoughts, stances and gestures attributed to him by editors, as well as to the expectations, appraisals and symbolic projections associated with such a name within the public space.

#### THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR, THE BIRTH OF THE WORK

Let us begin with the most basic editorial question. If one is supposed to publish the *Collected Works* of Patočka, where does one draw the line? If "collected" is intended in the sense of "complete", then *everything* must be published, but can we easily agree on what *everything* means? Since the beginning of the newly conceived project after 1989, the editors were sure to include everything that Patočka himself had actually published during his lifetime. However, his published texts constitute the smaller part of what this prolific author left behind, for the reasons mentioned above. Between 1996 and 1999, the editors revised the extent of the manuscripts to be incorporated in *Sebrané spisy* several times, until they decided to include almost all the drafts of his unpublished works, assuming that only the circumstances prevented Patočka from giving his ideas a complete form worthy of being divulged. New doubts arouse nevertheless, since Patočka's private correspondence and personal diaries are replete with philosophical ideas, criticisms of his phenomenological predecessors, reviews of his recent lectures, and self-referential notes about his ongoing projects. Several of Patočka's sketches also merge into excerpts from his concomitant reading. Unlike the first samiz-

dat edition, the post-revolution *Collected Works* are supposed to include Patočka's correspondence and notebooks in the final volumes. Does it mean that it would be consequent to publish *all* his private letters, marginal annotations, occasional notes, and private diaries? Where shall we stop? Should one include even a laundry bill, as Foucault hyperbolically asked in his lecture *What Is an Author* (1969)? Or, less hyperbolically, should one publish Patočka's annotated *excerpta* from other authors that served him as preparatory notes for his own papers? To paraphrase Foucault, such hesitations are endless once we consider how a body of work should be extracted from the millions of traces left by Patočka after his death (Foucault [1969]: 119).

It is worthy of note that Patočka's case is in this regard contrary to Heidegger's. Unlike Patočka, whose life ended abruptly and unexpectedly, Heidegger took great care, in the final years of his life, to think through the details of his personally organized *Gesamtausgabe*. Thus, Heidegger succeeded in imposing his sovereignty not only on the arrangement, but also on the chronological order in which his work should be progressively made available to the public long after his own death. In Patočka's almost reverse case, it might be said that *the death of the Author coincides with the birth of the Oeuvre*.

Such a provocative statement might be intended in at least two interconnected meanings. First of all, it points to a temporal coincidence between the two events: by the end of the year of his death, Patočka's pupils had published the first volume of his *works* that would ultimately include in what is known as the "Archive Collection" the 22 volumes published between 1977 and 1989 (28 volumes were originally planned). Secondly, Patočka might have been considered to be an author without an oeuvre in the sense of *Hauptwerk*. While writing copiously and without interruption, he did not publish the sort of fully integrated, autonomous kind of text that one could call his *opus magnum*. To be sure, he succeeded in finishing three major books during his lifetime. However, *The Natural World as Philosophical Problem*, Patočka's *Habilitations-Schrift* from 1936, was later considered by

the author himself to be too indebted to Husserlian subjectivism<sup>3</sup>. Patočka's second book *Aristotle, his Predecessors and his Successors* (1964) certainly represents an original analysis of the Aristotelian concept of movement and space, its subsequent abandonment in Early Modern philosophy and its contemporary relevance; however, it cannot be considered an original expression of Patočka's personal philosophy, but rather a prerequisite of his own phenomenology of the movement. Finally, his most quoted and widely translated *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* include six various lectures about historicity, Life-world, the movement of human existence, the essence of technology and the lessons that we can learn from the atrocities of the twentieth century. It is debatable, however, if these essays constitute the fully-blown and definitive expression of the abovementioned topics in the integrated structure of an autonomous book. Furthermore, a study of Patočka's manuscripts and the many working drafts and revisions clearly demonstrate Patočka's repeated dissatisfaction while editing his autograph texts for publication. When comparing the texts that were simply meant to be translated, one can note that Patočka systematically preferred to reformulate instead of simply translating his thoughts: after three or four pages of minor editing (reformulations, additions), he progressively deviated more and more from his original text, often tackling the same problems from a new angle or introducing new concepts missing from the original "text to be translated". These constant re-writings, dissatisfactions and addenda make Patočka an author "immer unterwegs" whose oeuvre exists in such a manner that its "not yet" belongs to it, if we paraphrase Heidegger's notion of Dasein (Heidegger [1929]: 79). The tendency to provide Patočka's reader with a *Denkweg* is thus an understandable, even though problematical temptation for the editors<sup>4</sup>. This

is the deeper meaning of seeing in Patočka an almost exemplary case of an *Oeuvre* born at the time of death of his author.

#### THE COMPOSITION AND THE COHERENCE OF PATOČKA'S OEUVRE

With regard to the composition of Jan Patočka's *Collected Works*, the editors' primary choice was thematic. The planned 28 volumes are divided into twelve thematic ensembles. Several volumes are secondarily divided between published and unpublished texts (but also between major and minor pieces), while the chronological order comes into play only within these smaller groups, as a third criterion to be taken into consideration. Published, more or less finished, and completely unfinished fragments dating from all the different periods of Patočka's life are thus reassembled around the following "core" themes: *Care of the Soul, Art and Time, the Czechs, Phenomenology, Writings about Comenius, Lectures on Ancient Philosophy* and others, concluding the whole body of work with *Notebooks and Correspondence*.

The resulting impression of Patočka being an author of such large thematic units is the first sense in which we can understand the artificiality of Patočka's *oeuvre* to which I referred in my title. Even the students of philosophy at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague are sometimes led astray by the impression of this post-hoc unity, as demonstrated by several misguided attributions appearing in their essays: "In his work entitled *Care of the Soul*, Patočka writes..." However, Patočka has never written such a book, not even an essay bearing such a title. It was chosen after Patočka's death by the editors of the samizdat collection especially because of the recurring occurrence of this Platonic notion in sev-

<sup>3</sup> This is evident from Patočka's extensive self-criticism in his two afterwords written in 1970 and 1976 (Patočka [2009]: 265-334; 367-378).

<sup>4</sup> The intention to re-establish the coherence of Patočka's legacy under the auspices of a single, albeit poly-thematic path, is clearly acknowledged in the

paper "Struktura 'Sebraných spisů' Jana Patočky jako interpretační problém" [*The Structure of Jan Patočka's 'Collected Works' as a problem of interpretation*], written in 1991 by Ivan Chvatík, Pavel Kouba and Miroslav Petříček, the chief editors of the *Collected Works* at that time.

eral of Patočka's published and unpublished texts and lectures. In this samizdat edition, *Care of the Soul* provided an umbrella title for essays, lectures and unpublished drafts and fragments dating from 1929 until 1977 and revolving around themes as various as the critique of metaphysics, the destiny of Europe, the philosophy of history and the relation between politics and philosophy in the contemporary world. The post-revolutionary edition, unlike the samizdat edition, placing the six volumes of *Care of the Soul* after the first two volumes dedicated to *Art and Philosophy*, was inaugurated precisely with the *Care of the Soul I* in 1996 and placed the three volumes published under this heading at the beginning of Patočka's body of work. To establish *Care of the Soul I, II and III* as the starting point of *Collected works* is not an innocent editorial choice, insofar as it emphasizes the ethical dimension of Patočka's thought. The paradox is even more striking if one considers that Patočka never published a text that could be unequivocally identified as a piece of ethics. My aim, however, is not to question such an editorial choice or to point out its arbitrariness. What I want to stress instead is that in the eyes of the participants at his underground lectures it was the *figure* of Patočka that served as the main principle of organization. It is because of the ethical appeal that Patočka had on his pupils and later editors of his work that different kinds of papers were unified under such a heading. Those who study the coherence of the texts unified under the title *Care of the Soul* from a more philological perspective cannot but notice that most of Patočka's meditations revolve around the topic of the *philosophy of history* (see Karfík [1997]: 21-29).

Similar attempts to restore a unity behind the mass of scattered texts written in different contexts are manifest in the thematic wholes entitled *Umění a čas* [Art and Time] and *Češi* [the Czechs]. What strikes us from the outset in these two ensembles are the lengthy "Editorial comments" (in the former) and "Foreword" (in the latter) that reveal the editors' willingness to justify the coherence of the thematically varied texts included in these volumes and to defend the *ratio*

behind their composition into meaningful wholes. It betrays the intention to «clarify the criteria according to which [the editor] has assembled the volume with respect to Patočka's work as a whole» (Vojtěch [1999]). In 2004, Daniel Vojtech, who is Patočka's grandson, assumed the task of main editor of the two volumes entitled *Umění a čas*; the first volume includes all the texts published during Patočka's lifetime, and the second reassembles all the fragments, variations, preparatory notes, and even German originals, on the grounds that these texts were not included in the five volumes of the German edition of Patočka's *Selected Works*. Thus, the second volume departs from the original intention of publishing only Czech texts or translations in the name of exhaustiveness. Moreover, while in the earlier volumes edited by Chvatík and Kouba the editorial commentary was restricted to indications about the origin of the published texts, its variations and the circumstances of their release (in the case of previously published texts), the editorial commentary in *Art and Time* expanded considerably in comparison with the previous (and subsequent) volumes. Daniel Vojtěch, whose research interests focus on comparative literature, transformed the scope and meaning of editorial commentary into a paper and a personal interpretation of a special kind, whose goal is to present Patočka as a researcher *sui generis* in the field of literature<sup>5</sup>. To my understanding, the exuberance of this "editorial commentary" is not so much a reply to some specific requirements of the texts gathered in this volume, as it is a very visible symptom of the editor's will to reappropriate Patočka's legacy.

An analogous case of editorial self-justification might be seen in the two volumes entitled *Češi* [The Czechs], introduced by a lengthy "Foreword" by Karel Palek. This seven-page-long foreword, in which the editor defends the thematic coherence of the volumes, contrasts strikingly with the brevity of the forewords in *Phenomenologi-*

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that the editorial commentary, for the first time in the *Collected Works*, includes its own footnotes.

*cal Writings (Collected Works VI, VII and VIII)*, where the editors did not feel any need to justify the indisputable fact that Patočka was a phenomenological philosopher. What we are witnessing in *The Czechs* is a disputable choice for thematic unity that requires the editor to rationalize his decisions to include or exclude various texts left by Patočka without a testament. And it is undeniable that some of the writings included in *The Czechs* could have been attributed to completely different thematic wholes: Patočka's textual contributions to Charter 77 seem thematically closer to the essays included in *Care for the Soul*, while other writings about literature might be coherently integrated into *Art and Time*, especially when they are not limited to the study of particular Czech author(s), but revolve around the social function of literature *tout court* (see Patočka [1968]). However, such embarrassing choices are almost inevitable when the *Collected Works* are divided according to thematic, rather than chronological criteria, since it is only natural that a single piece of work can deal with questions belonging to various study areas. The only unproblematic core of the volume entitled *The Czechs* is constituted by a collection of letters addressed by Patočka to his German friend Hildegard Ballauff, which became an occasion for a larger meditation about the place and the role of his small nation in Europe's intellectual history and global politics. In 1982 one hundred and ten pages of these letters were gathered by Ivan Chvatík into an independent essay and published under the title "Was sind die Tschechen? Kleiner Tatsachenbericht und Erklärungsversuch". It is true that such an attempt has its internal coherence and contributes to a reconsideration of Patočka not only as a phenomenologist, but also as a meticulous and insightful scholar in the field of Czech intellectual history. At the same time, this epistolary exchange apart, one is obliged to question the inner thematic coherence of this collection, where one can find side by side essays comparing Masaryk's and Husserl's respective stances with regard to the crisis of European rationality; papers and transcripts of talks about literary theory and the philosophy of literature;

reviews written by Patočka about different Czech authors (philosophers, writers, politicians and historians); the abovementioned essays by Patočka about Charter 77 in which he expressed in the most explicit way his politico-ethical commitments. Only Patočka's name and the tacit assumption that everything he left has its conceptual coherence justifies such a compilation, where the author functions as a «principle of unity» (Foucault [1969]: 128.).

It can be universally acknowledged that chronological order emphasizes the persona of the author, allowing the reader to witness his or her intellectual maturation, while thematic division gives priority to the *oeuvre* (see Petruželková [2017]: 130). However, in the peculiar case of Patočka's thematically divided body of work, it is necessary to add that his name as an author visibly functions as a principle both of the work's unity and of its internal division, allowing the editors to regroup his sometimes heterogeneous texts into more or less coherent ensembles. When Patočka died as a person, he was reborn as an author, as a «particular source of expression who, in more or less finished forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in a text, in letters, fragments, drafts, and so forth.» (Foucault [1969]: 128-129). Such a resurrection presupposes, however, a considerable amount of editorial and interpretative endeavour that has necessitated – for more than forty years! – the postulation and justification of new continuities, the neutralization of contradictions and the operation of some exclusions. This is because the unity of Patočka's work is not something given, but rather something to be reconstructed, in an always disputable fashion, from various manuscripts, notes, letters, drafts and other sources. Removed from Patočka's drawers and boxes, these are then redistributed in newly constructed wholes. In other words, the editors repeated scholarship's habit of using the author's name to impose consistency on a body of writing and speeches that often responded to different situations and therefore scattered in various directions.

## MAJOR AND MINOR WRITINGS

If we leave for now the thorny questions concerning the reallocation of texts according to their themes, we can focus on the issue raised by the composition of Appendices. However negligible it might seem, the issue of Appendices is no less challenging than the thematic division itself. The composition of Appendices constitutes not only a practical problem for editors, but also a theoretical problem of differentiation between what we should consider as a minor text and what belongs unmistakably to the main body of the author's work. An analysis of the Appendices, their purpose and the principles of their composition, will allow me to raise some doubts about the possibility of any coherent and indisputable distinction between the central and the marginal texts of an author.

First of all, what is the function of the Appendices in Jan Patočka's *Collected Works*? The main reason for including Appendices corresponds to the editors' task of making available to the public the *whole* body of work. Simultaneously, the collection of variants, drafts and preparatory notes, when cross-referenced with the finalized texts, should allow the readership and scholarship to locate with ease alternative versions of the same text and to trace the genealogy of the author's thought. In conformity with such an aim, Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba first justified their decision to include the fragments in the appendices of the first samizdat edition in the following way: «In the Appendices section, we publish sketches and fragments (...) that can contribute to a better delineation of the author's horizon of thought and enhance the intelligibility of the published texts» (Chvatík and Kouba [1988]: 334). A similar idea is expressed by the same editors in the "Foreword" to *Care of the Soul III* in 2002, where Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba decided to include all the more or less consistent fragments, drafts and variations in the *Collected Works*<sup>6</sup>, since they

constitute «an important tool for tracing the evolution of the author's thought» (Patočka [2002]: 9). To my understanding, the possibility of reading an author anew is the most convincing *raison-d'être* for including *almost everything* in the *Collected Works* and letting the scholars decide what they are able to take out of it. When challenging previously established readings, the most suitable method might be to search within the supposedly minor texts buried deeply in the *Appendices*. We could consider these as Archives *sui generis*, since for any serious researcher interested in understanding and developing the thought of his author, it is not only the result that counts, but also the tortuous route that had to be undertaken before its final formulation.

At the same time, the editors of Patočka's collected works are constantly seduced by the desire to establish hierarchies between the texts and to re-orient the reader according to their own standards of what is philosophically important and what is not. This axiological division between the main corpus and its margins is suggested in the "Foreword" to the *Care of the Soul I*, where the editors characterize the status of the texts published in the appendices in mostly negative terms: «we publish in the appendices the finalized texts and lectures that are merely echoing the problems addressed by the texts included in the main division» (Patočka [1996]: 8). The hierarchical distribution of texts into major and minor prevails here, as is confirmed by another quotation from the editor's comments: «a minor article that does not bring any new motifs and that appears as a mere variation of the previous papers» (Ibid.). As Adéla Petruželková rightly states in her thorough analysis of the editorial issues raised by Patočka's *Collected Works*: «The appendices arbitrar-

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included in the *Collected Works* and would be available only in the *Archive Collection*; in other words, accessible only to scholars visiting Jan Patočka's Archives. Filip Karfík's philologically oriented criticism (1997) of this original conception has had considerable weight in this turnaround in editorial strategy. For a detailed analysis of the composition of the Appendices and their role within the *Collected Works* of Jan Patočka, see Petruželková [2017].

<sup>6</sup> This is contrary to their initial announcement in the "Foreword" to *Care of the Soul I* (1996), i.e. the first volume of the whole *oeuvre*, according to which the variations, fragments and drafts were not supposed to be



ily divide the work into ‘centre’ and ‘periphery.’» (Petruželková [2017]: 188). The assessment of the relative importance of a particular text within the whole body of Patočka’s work is surely the most dubious criterion for deciding if it deserves to be included in the main division or relegated to the appendices. Even though it does not constitute the only criterion used by the editors, it is arguably the one having the most profound effect on the way in which we access Patočka’s legacy. What other perspectives and criteria have the editors adopted when establishing the division line between the major texts and appendices?

In several volumes, the function of the Appendices consists of reassembling the sketches, fragments and rejected variations, insofar as these pieces are incomplete. The criterion of completeness was adopted mostly in *Care of the Soul III*, *The Czechs II* and, to a certain measure, in *Art and Time II*. However, it could not be applied generally for the whole *Collected Works* because of the extent and importance of the unfinished works in which Patočka ventured even more daringly into unchartered territories than in his published and polished texts. This explains why several volumes of the *Complete Works* are dedicated entirely to unfinished projects that rightly deserve to be read on their own. These consist of: (1) what are described as the “war manuscripts” published under the title *Interiority and the World*, that, according to Filip Karfík’s attempt at reconstruction (2000/2001), constitute Patočka’s unfinished “opus grande”; (2) the important mass of unpublished and mostly unfinished phenomenological papers from 1950 to the 1970s that were gathered under the title *On Appearing as Such* and that constitute Patočka’s most daring departure from the teachings of Husserl and Heidegger; (3) as well as one thousand pages dedicated to Comenius published in the form of articles during Patočka’s lifetime, two larger works concerning the Czech philosopher and pedagogue which were intended to constitute monographs of their own: the almost finalized manuscript *Didactics and Pansophia. Studies on Comenius’ philosophy of education*, and a collection of comparative analysis and prepara-

tory drafts also intended to compose a monograph about *Comenius – Cusanus – Descartes*. All these larger publication projects, however unfinished, rightly deserved their place in the “central” part of Patočka’s legacy and were appropriately published in separate volumes or as their main divisions.

Adjacent to the criterion of completeness is that of authorization, since the unfinished texts were never explicitly accompanied by their author’s *imprimatur*. However, Patočka’s attitude towards his unpublished-unfinished texts and fragments was far less incendiary than that of Kafka or Foucault, since we have at least one proof of his willingness to leave his textual legacy to posterity. In 1971 Patočka, without informing his closest pupils, brought a large collection of his manuscripts to Strahov Museum of Czech Literature. These dated from 1929 to 1963 and included, apart from the abovementioned “war manuscripts” revolving around the theme of *Interiority and World*, large fragments of a monumental project about the history of early-modern philosophy, metaphysical diaries and many other materials<sup>7</sup>. Preserved in eleven boxes in Strahov Museum and without any accompanying explanation about their destiny, these thousands of pages were surely not condemned to be burnt or buried, even though they constitute, like all the other manuscripts left in Patočka’s apartment, a legacy without a testimony. The authorization issue also concerns the tape recordings of Patočka’s public lectures, private seminars and even the discussions that followed Patočka’s presentation. Although none of these were authorized for publication, they constitute an important part of Patočka’s oeuvre, even though they are sometimes relegated to the Appendices, probably with regard to the lesser degree of their authorial factor. Thus, in *Care of the Soul III*, Appendices II comprises 150 pages of highly edited transcripts of Patočka’s lectures and seminars, based on tape recordings. With the inclusion of discussions in these semi-private, underground seminars, the voice of sever-

<sup>7</sup> For the composition and the importance of the “Strahov legacy”, see Karfík [2001/2002].

al of Patočka's pupils became a part of their master's *oeuvre* (see Patočka [2001]: 424-431).

Another criterion, often used by the editors, establishes the difference between the central and the marginal part of the *Completed Works* according to genre and content. If the text is considered to have been written for an occasion and concerns nothing else, as might be the case with reviews, recommendations or eulogies, it is relegated to the Appendices (in most volumes) or to the section entitled "Essays on philosophers and occasional texts" (Patočka [2009]: 527-635). Writings where Patočka approached his theme or question systematically or historically are thus contrasted with texts written for a particular circumstance. Even in these cases, the name of the author functions, although surreptitiously, as a principle of differentiation: while the first group of "major" writings supposedly manifests author's own intentions, expresses his own thought and results from his particular intellectual endeavor, the second group is downgraded to "minor", as if the occasion alone (the one hundred and tenth anniversary of Husserl's birth, Heidegger's death or that of Van Breda, a new publication or translation to be reviewed etc.) was sufficient in itself to trigger Patočka's writing and exhausted its value.

If one surveys the role of the Appendices in the *Collected Works* as a whole, it is easy to see that the editors more than once adopted the criterion of *value* when deciding to relegate a text or a portion of it to the Appendices rather than include it in the main section of writings, considered to be the most representative. Thus, the appendices introduce a sometimes questionable axiological separation between major and minor texts. I have already mentioned the problematic inclusion of Patočka's texts concerning Charter 77 in the volume dedicated to *The Czechs*. The question of their rightful inclusion into Patočka's oeuvre concerns not only the choice of the appropriate volume, but also their place within it. Now, one of the astonishing aspects of the 900-page-long volume *Češi I* is the relegation of these famous Charter 77 texts to "Appendices I". These essays not only do not belong in a place where

they are almost "buried" (pages 423 – 448 of the volume), but surely do not meet either of the abovementioned criteria adopted by the editors. No one could reasonably argue that these essays are "occasional writing" in the sense that they are merely triggered by an occasion that exhausts their meaning and value. Nor is it possible to see them as "study material" for scholarship interested in further bifurcations of Patočka's main line of thought.

If one reads these short yet powerful essays, in particular "What Charter 77 is and what it is not" and "What We Can Expect from Charter 77?" (Patočka [1977a] and [1977b]), one might regret that they were not integrated in the same volume as the *Heretical Essays*, since it is possible to establish a connection between the thesis about the "solidarity of the shaken", developed in the *Sixth Heretical Essay* and the political consequences established in these late politico-ethical statements<sup>8</sup>. Published as they are side by side with some "minor texts" about Czech authors, they seem to be situated out of context and deprived of the value they deserve. However, my purpose is not to criticize Palek's editorial choice as erroneous, but rather to point out a certain aporia. If these essays were published with *Heretical Essays*, whose last chapter is filled with the undeniable pathos of self-sacrifice, and if they were given a primary place alongside Patočka's final philosophical testaments, it would only increase the myth of Patočka's heroism in the aftermath of political repression in 1977. The decision to separate *Heretical Essays* from reflections about the meaning of Charter 77 might be a plausible way of avoiding a potentially mythologized, unilateral and unhealthy reception of Patočka's legacy. Such a threat is even more imminent if we take into account the circumstances of Patočka's death, circumstances that

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<sup>8</sup> This link was followed by the first editors of the samizdat "Archive Collection" who in 1988 inserted Patočka's reflections on the significance of Charter 77 into the same volume as the *Heretical Essays*, thus reinforcing the impression that Patočka's political engagements are in line with his considerations about the meaning of history, politics and sacrifice.

further suggest their own symbolic value as the final achievement of Patočka's work and life.

### CONCLUSION

As it should be clear by now, both the thematic division and the hierarchical division of Patočka's *oeuvre* unavoidably lead to many puzzling alternatives and to the recurring requirement of choosing the lesser of two or more evils. To be sure, not all editorial choices undertaken in the composition of the *Complete Works* are fully justified and the criteria for the separation between the centre and the margins are not always applied in a coherent and substantiated manner. However, the present editorial achievement represents a hard-won and almost unfeasible balance between a critical edition, allowing scholars to browse through the genetic ties connecting Patočka's texts, and an intelligibly divided edition that allows readers to find their own path through the perplexing and daunting mass of Patočka's legacy.

For the time being, we can only express the hope that future possibilities of digital editing will allow the scholars interested in the genealogical aspects of Patočka's thought to navigate with greater ease through several variants of the same papers, to contrast their respective elisions or addenda, or to compare the preparatory drafts with the final results on a single screen. To be sure, the first and most obvious advantage of such an option is to liberate the reader from the necessity of browsing through different volumes and the intimidating amount of information about intertextual relations contained in the editorial comments. At the same time, an even more essential merit of a digital edition would consist of providing a possibility to gather various texts revolving around similar topics independently of the present thematic division that runs the risk of petrifying our conception of the unity of Patočka's *oeuvre* and its inner articulation. A set of markers and cross-references adopted for a suitable research tool would then allow the scholars to emancipate themselves from the hidden interpretative

schemes suggested by the current state of composition and to overcome the abovementioned problematic partition between central and marginal writings. Instead of being guided by an already established layout, Patočka's reader would participate in re-shaping the contours of his work and to redesign a pre-given form of its understanding in accordance with Eco's notion of *opera aperta*. In this way, we might say that not only Patočka's *oeuvre* was born the day of the author's death, but that it is and will be systematically resuscitated in new and potentially unexpected ways by each new regrouping of its inner components.

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## A Typology of the Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's Writing of Text Alternatives

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**Abstract.** The paper describes the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives as it manifests itself in his manuscripts. Decided, undecided and cancelled alternatives are distinguished. Moreover, Wittgensteinian types of marking his text alternatives are described: this includes marking by writing the alternative phrase in parallel above line; marking change of order; separation markers; explicit comment; marking the alternative phrase by putting it between brackets or, most famously, double slashes. Finally, the phenomenon of bound text alternatives in Wittgenstein's writings is discussed.

**Keywords.** Wittgenstein, manuscript, text alternative, writing, editorial philology.

In this paper, I describe the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives as it manifests itself in his manuscripts («Nachlass»; see von Wright [1969]). A principal distinction is the one between “decided” and “undecided” alternatives. This distinction has its origin in the work of the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen (WAB) which in the period 1990-2000 transcribed Wittgenstein's philosophical Nachlass into a machine-readable version<sup>1</sup>. The distinction was originally introduced by Claus Huitfeldt under the terms of «free» and «bound» alternatives: «Very often, Wittgenstein supplies several alternative expressions to a word, a phrase, or a sentence, without deleting any of them or otherwise indicating which of the alternative expressions are to be discarded and which one to be retained. [...] A bound alternative is a series of alternative expressions, whereof one or all are deleted» (Huit-

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<sup>1</sup> WAB's transcription project led to the CD-ROM *Bergen Electronic Edition* of the *Nachlass* at Oxford University Press (Wittgenstein [2000]). Today the Wittgenstein Archives offers its *Nachlass* transcriptions Open Access on the web (Wittgenstein [2016-]) while it also continues to work with Oxford University Press on a new digital edition.

feldt/Rossvær [1989]: 197). In 1991 the distinction between «free» and «bound» text alternatives was at WAB rephrased to include also those cases where *several*, but not all alternatives were deleted: «A free alternative is a series of alternative expressions, whereof none are deleted. [...] A bound alternative is a series of alternative expressions, whereof one or several, but not all are deleted» (Pichler [1994]: 92).

In the case of bound alternatives there is evidence that Wittgenstein has decided in favour of one of the alternative phrasings. Therefore, the terminology was in WAB's encoding manual for the transcription of the Wittgenstein Nachlass 1993 further revised to distinguish between «decided» and «undecided» alternatives; a third type separated was the «cancelled» alternative (Pichler [1994]: 92). An undecided alternative was defined as a case where Wittgenstein has not decided in favour of any of the alternatives; a decided alternative was defined as a case where Wittgenstein has decided in favour of one of the alternatives; and a cancelled alternative was defined as a case where Wittgenstein has decided against all of the alternatives.

In the following, I give a detailed typology of Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives in precisely this sense of decided, undecided and cancelled alternatives. In order to do this properly, however a further technical distinction is needed: The distinction between *documents* and *texts*<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that alternatives are phenomena on *text* level. If I first write

*I love cars*

and subsequently delete “cars” and insert “cats” above “cars”, then this produces on the text level two alternatives, namely “I love cars” and “I love cats”. On the document level, I may have something like the following:

<sup>2</sup> Most properly, one has to distinguish *text* and *document* additionally from a third entity, namely the *document carrier*. For a short presentation of the distinction between the three entities *document carrier*, *document* and *text* see Pichler (forthcoming).

*I love*      *cats*  
*I love*      *cars*

In our terminology here, the alternative between “I love cars” and “I love cats” was in this case decided in favour of the second, and is thus a decided alternative. But, in stead of writing out both “cars” and “cats” and deleting “cars”, I could also just have deleted the “r” in “cars” and replaced it with “t”, producing on the document level a document different from the above, namely the following:

*I love*      *t*  
*I love*      *cars*

As a consequence, we do well to distinguish the text level from the document level. The two *different documents*

*I love*      *t*  
*I love*      *cars*

and

*I love*      *cats*  
*I love*      *cars*

produce exactly the *same text*, namely “I love cats”.

My paper describes how the three alternative types decided, undecided and cancelled alternative – types of alternative on Wittgenstein Nachlass *text* level – are manifest on the Wittgenstein Nachlass *document* level, thus: how they are realised in *document* form in Wittgenstein's Nachlass. For each such manifestation of text alternative type on the document level I give examples. Further, I also describe the types of how Wittgenstein in the Nachlass *marks* that we have to do with an alternative; again, each type of markers is illustrated with examples.

Since the focus of this contribution is on the text alternatives, my citations from the Nachlass contain only those deletions, overwritings, insertions etc. which are *constitutive* for the alternative (and thus do not completely follow a diplomatic format). Let me again give an example of this dis-

inction between writing acts that are alternative constitutive on the one hand, and writing acts that are not on the other:

*I love catt~~s~~*

Deleting the “r” in “carts” can be understood to yield a different text (namely “I love cats” as alternative to “I love cars”) and is thus a writing act which is text alternative constitutive. In contrast to this, the deletion of the second “t” of “catts” (speaking of *Felis catus*) in the example above is not a writing act that is text or alternative constitutive, since it is simply an orthographic correction. Corrections such as the deletion of the second “t” in the “catts” example are not included in my citations from the Nachlass, for the sole purpose of, instead of confusing the reader with unnecessary editorial noise, keeping her focus on the alternative *constitutive* writing acts.

For the same reasons, I have in my citations from the Nachlass omitted indication of line endings and hyphenation at line endings, as also silently corrected orthographic errors that were not already corrected by Wittgenstein himself. I have also, where the passages cited contain more alternatives than the ones in focus, omitted those other ones in order to keep the reader's attention on the specific alternative and marking type to be exemplified. Finally, I have in my citations suppressed Wittgenstein's frequent wavy (in manuscripts) or broken (in typescripts) underlinings of phrases (marking doubt concerning the phrase), since it was not possible to adequately render them here, and since, again, their inclusion is not vital for showing Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives. Now, finally to my typology and the examples themselves.

## TYPES OF WITTGENSTEINIAN TEXT ALTERNATIVE CREATION

### 1. *Decided alternative*

(a) Replacement by deleting script in the line and adding script in/above/below the line/in the

margins, or by deleting script added in/above/below the line/in the margins and retaining other script<sup>3</sup>. Examples:

Ms-105,9[5] («konzentrische» is replaced by «einfärbige»)<sup>4</sup>

	<i>einfärbige</i>	
<i>Nehmen wir</i>	<i><del>konzentrische</del></i>	<i>Kreise ...</i>
<i>an sie seien</i>		

Ms-109,151[3]et152[1] («werden» is replaced by «sein»)

	<i>werden</i>	
<i>Denn eine Verbindung</i>		
<i>muß durch das logische</i>	<i><del>sein</del></i>	<i>...</i>
<i>Folgen hergestellt</i>		

(b) Replacement by deleting script in the line and subsequently adding script in the line. Examples:

Ms-106,95[5]et97[1] («bedeuten» is replaced by «sagen»)

*Es ist wie gesagt klar daß der Satz daß eine Farbe 5  
Stiche gelb enthält nicht ~~bedeuten~~ sagen kann ...*

Ms-114,104v[2] («ihm» is replaced by «dem Befehl»)

<i>Oder wie kann man</i>		
<i>denn aus <del>ihm</del> dem</i>	<i>die Handlung ableiten</i>	
<i>Befehl</i>	<i>ehe sie geschieht?</i>	

<sup>3</sup> I use “script” as a term for “the written”.

<sup>4</sup> I refer to Wittgenstein's philosophical *Nachlass* by the Wittgenstein Source (Wittgenstein [2015-] convention. Each remark («Bemerkung») referred to in this paper can be inspected on Wittgenstein Source (<http://www.wittgensteinsource.org>), upon completion of the site, by entering its URL, e.g. [http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9\[5\]\\_d](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9[5]_d) for a diplomatic version of Ms-105,9[5], [http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9\[5\]\\_n](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9[5]_n) for a normalized one, and [http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9\[5\]\\_f](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9[5]_f) for the facsimile. The transcriptions can already now be inspected on Wittgenstein 2016-.



- (c) Replacement by overwriting script with other script<sup>5</sup>. Examples:

Ms-105,43[1]et45[1] («Vierecks» is replaced by «Quadrats»)

... die rein geometrische Figur des großen **Vierecks** | **Quadrats** ...

Ms-106,130[5]et132[1] («selben» is replaced by «gleichen»)

... ich könnte ja beidemale den **selben** | **gleichen** Vorgang meinen.

- (d) Replacement by adding script in/above/below the line/in the margins. Examples:

Ms-115,155[2] («allgemein» is replaced by «ein allgemeiner»)

Der Unter-  
richt in dem  
Spiel ist

ein

allgemein<sup>er</sup>

Ms-109,28[2]et29[1]et30[1] («Natur wie jede andre» is replaced by «ein Stück Natur wie jedes andre»)

... ohne die  
Kunst aber ist  
der Gegen-  
stand

ein Stück

Natur wie  
jede<sup>s</sup> andre ...

- (e) Replacement by deleting script. Examples:

Ms-106,90[4]et92[1] («Allgemeinheitsbezeichnung» is replaced by «Allgemeinheit»)

Dann aber scheint es mir als könne man die Allgemeinheitsbezeichnung - alle etc. - in der Mathematik überhaupt nicht brauchen verwenden.

Ms-115,118[5]et119[1]et119[2] («Diesen Vorgang» is replaced by «Dies»)

~~Diesen Vorgang~~ will ich 'vorzeigendes Lehren der Wörter' nennen.

- (f) Replacement by rearranging script. Examples:

Ms-105,26[4]et28[1] («elementaren Regeln der Trigonometrie» is replaced by «Regeln der elementaren Trigonometrie»)

Kenne ich die elementaren Regeln der ↓  
Trigonometrie  
so kann ich ...

Ms-106,41[3] («in demselben Sinne von selbst» is replaced by «von selbst in demselben Sinne»)

... versteht sich ↓ in demselben Sinne von selbst ...

- (g) Replacement by separating script:

Ms-106,227[3] («derselbe» is replaced by «der selbe»)

... d.h. es entspricht ihnen der|selbe Beweis.

- (h) Combinations of (a)-(f). Examples:

Ms-105,122[2] («erweckt als» is replaced by «erwecken könnte als»)

... weil die  
gewöhnliche  
Ausdruck-  
sweise den  
Anschein

erweckt|en

als könnte als  
wäre ...

Ms-106,90[4]et92[1] («&» is replaced by «. Und»)

... weil unendlich viele da sind. &|Und weil es ...

<sup>5</sup> Overwriting is here rendered in the following way:  
overwritten part|overwriting part.

Ms-106,110[5]et113[1] («ein unsterblicher Mensch» is replaced by «die Existenz eines einäugigen Menschen»)

... *die Existenz eines einäugigen ein-unsterblicher Mensch<sup>en</sup> ...*

Ms-122,25r[3]et25v[1] («Satz» is replaced by «Erfahrungssatz»)

... *nicht als ein Erfahrungssatz ...*

Ms-105,24[4]et26[1] («weder geschrieben noch ungeschrieben» is replaced by «weder in geschriebenen noch in ungeschriebenen Symbolen»)

*Hat er aber kein System weder in geschriebenen noch in ungeschriebenen Symbolen, ...*

2. Undecided alternative

(a) Considered replacement of script in the line with script added in/above/below the line/in the margins. Examples:

Ms-105,30[5]et32[1] (alternative between «den Rest» and «das Übrige»)

... & nun *das Übrige*  
*den Rest ...*

Ms-106,285[6] (alternative between «wollte» and «würde»)

*Das ist so, wie wenn man nach den Erfahrungen eines Sinnes fragen* *würde* *wollte* *den man ...*

(b) Considered replacement of script in the line with script in the line. Examples:

Ms-109,94[5] (alternative between «der verschiedenen Arten von Linien» and «der Linien mit verschiedenen Funktionen»)

*Vergleich der verschiedenen Arten von Linien [der Linien mit verschiedenen Funktionen] auf der Landkarte ...*

Ms-115,67[3]et68[1] (alternative between «im Kalkül» and «im Laufe des Kalküls»)

*Die Funktion muß sich im Kalkül //im Laufe des Kalküls// zeigen.*

(c) Combinations of (a)-(b). Examples:

Ms-124,43[3]et44[1] (alternative between «allein», «nur» and «bloß»)

*Kennten wir allein* *bloß* *//nur//* *diese Sprache, ...*

Ms-109,46[5]et47[1] (alternative between «Kriterium», «Symptom», and «Anzeichen»)

*Im primären Sinn ist das Wiedererkennen nicht einfach das* *Symptom [Anzeichen]* *Kriterium ...*

3. Cancelled alternative

On document level, the type of cancelled alternative is realised as deletion of all alternative constitutive scripts in the case of undecided alternatives, or as deletion of the replacement constitutive script in the case of decided alternatives.

TYPES OF WITTGENSTEINIAN TEXT ALTERNATIVE MARKING

1. Writing in parallel above line

Writing the phrase, which is constitutive for the alternative, above line (see «ursprünglich» in

the example below), but in parallel to the writing in the line it is alternative to (see «eigentlich» in the example below), is Wittgenstein's most frequent way of marking alternatives. In manuscripts, the writing above line is most often the result from later addition.

Ms-111,18[3]et19[1] (alternative between «eigentlich» and «ursprünglich»)

*Ich wollte*      *ursprünglich*  
*eigentlich*      *sagen: ...*

When the manuscript passage is copied over into typescript, the parallelization above line is often retained – but, naturally, the writing above line is then no longer the product from later addition as it was in the manuscript, but entered during the flow of typing (for the above example compare Ms-111,18[3]et19[1] and Ts-211,12[3]). Occasionally, both the writing above line and the writing in the line to which it runs parallel, are additionally correlated by a (mostly curly) bracket:

Ms-106,84[3]et86[1] (alternative between «präsentiert» and «vorgeführt»)

*... in verpack-*  
*tem Zustand*      {      *vorgeführt*  
*präsentiert ...*

Moreover, one or some or all alternatives can be marked with wavy underlining (in manuscripts) or broken underlining (in typescripts), indicating doubt or undecidedness regarding the expression, as the «t» was in «heißt» in the following example:

Ms-176,54v[1] (alternative between «heißt» and «heiße»)

*... ich wisse, wie diese Farbe auf Deutsch heißt?*

## 2. Marking change of order

Sometimes an alternative arises from change of order; the most frequently used marks are

wave signs (embracing, where they immediately follow each other, the two parts that may / shall switch position), combined with lines around the parts to be relocated plus arrows for marking the position(s) they are to be moved to. E.g.:

Ms-105,26[4]et28[1] (alternative between «elementaren Regeln der Trigonometrie» and «Regeln der elementaren Trigonometrie»)

*Kenne ich die*      elementaren      *Regeln der ↓*  
*Trigonometrie*  
*so kann ich ...*

## 3. Separation markers

Another way used to bring about alternatives is to separate a word into two or more, e.g.:

Ms-106,227[3] (alternative between «derselbe» and «der selbe»)

*der|selbe*

## 4. Explicit comment

Finally we have also those cases, where Wittgenstein explicitly (verbally) declares a phrase as alternative, for example by commenting it as «besser» ('better') or «andere Fassung» ('other version'). E.g.:

Ms-106,188[4]et190[1], Ms-106,189[1] (alternative between «was beim Beweise nicht herauskommt!» and «was der Beweis nicht ergibt!»)

*... was beim Beweise nicht herauskommt!*  
*besser: Was der Beweis nicht ergibt*

Ms-106,281[5]et283[1], Ms-106,281[5]et283[1] (alternative between «oder sie müssen für ihn relevant sein» and «oder muß sich aus ihnen ableiten oder entkräften lassen»)

*(Denn er gehört entweder selber zu den Grundlagen oder sie müssen für ihn relevant sein)*

[oder muß sich aus ihnen ableiten oder entkräften lassen] *Andere Fassung.*

5. Brackets, double slashes and reuse of script already written

(a) Marking alternatives inline

In those cases, where the alternative is *not* the result from later revision, but produced in the flow of writing, it is in handwriting put right after the script it is an alternative to, *inline*. Up to the first part of Ms-114 (1932), the added alternative phrasing is, in handwriting, typically put in brackets “[...]”. Examples:

Ms-107,55[4] (alternative between «Ja es ist mir als wäre das ganz gleich wie die Ersetzung der 7 durch ... » and «Ja es ist mir als könnte man ganz ebenso die 7 durch ... ersetzen»)

*Ja es ist mir als wäre das ganz gleich wie die Ersetzung der 7 durch ...*  
*[Ja es ist mir als könnte man ganz ebenso die 7 durch ... ersetzen]*

Ms-114,94v[1] (alternative between «Faktoren» and «Einflüsse»)

*Und die Vermutung der gleichmäßigen Verteilung der Wurfergebnisse ist eine Vermutung über das Arbeiten dieser Faktoren [Einflüsse].*

From the second part of Ms-114 (1933) onwards we find a marking with double slashes “// ... //”. Most scholars who have looked at the *Nachlass* of the later Wittgenstein will surely have noted these markers.

With regard to typescripts, the “//”-marking can be found already in Ts-210, which is allegedly of earlier date than the second part of Ms-114. Actually, it may be that the “// ... //”-marking was first introduced for typescripts (due to lack of the “[“-character on the typewriter?) and then from there subsequently also adopted for manuscripts. Examples of “//”-marking:

Ts-211,1[2] (alternative between «geschrieben hätte» and «schrieb»)

*Denken wir uns den Fall, dass einer ein Geschichtswerk in aller Form geschrieben hätte // schrieb//, es aber dennoch ...*

Ms-114,33r[5] (alternative between «; denn die Frage, was ein Satz meint, wird durch einen Satz beantwortet» and «denn was ein Satz meint, wird wieder durch einen Satz gesagt», a.o.)

*... wird dies wieder durch einen Satz gesagt. //; denn die Frage, was ein Satz meint, wird durch einen Satz beantwortet.//*  
*//denn was ein Satz meint, wird wieder durch einen Satz gesagt//*

Ms-177,9r[3]et9v[1]et10r[1] (alternative between «Wenn ich in eine Kiste gepackt würde, wäre es möglich, daß ... » and «Unter gewissen Umständen wäre es möglich, daß ....»)

*(Wenn ich in eine Kiste gepackt würde, wäre es möglich, daß ... //Unter gewissen Umständen wäre es möglich, daß ....//)*

(b) Marking reuse of the already written

Frequently Wittgenstein, instead of adding a new alternative, simply reuses the scripts already existent and extracts from them – by deleting and bracketing – the new alternative reading(s). The economy with which this task is carried out is in many cases impressive. Examples:

Ms-105,30[5]et32[1] (alternative between «in geschriebenen Symbolen» and «geschrieben»)

*Der Schüler ... fände das, was er zur Bewältigung dieser Aufgabe braucht eben nicht (~~in~~<sup>2</sup>) geschrieben(~~en~~<sup>2</sup>) vor.<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein is here undecided and marks the alternative with a question mark.

Ms-112,80v[2] (alternative between «hätte» and «hatte»)<sup>7</sup>

*Diese Trennung bereitet uns dieselbe Schwierigkeit,  
die immer zur Folge hätte ...*

As already with the example from Ms-105 above, parts of the written can be marked by parentheses in order to (more clearly) define the scope of the alternative. Examples:

Ms-106,84[3]et86[1] (alternative between «setzen immer Definitionen voraus» and «haben ihre Bedeutung über Definitionen»)

*haben ihre Bedeutung über  
... aber sie (setzen immer) Definitionen (voraus) ...*

Ms-116,92[2]et93[1] (alternative between «dieses» and «dies»)

*Kannst Du dies(es) Gewicht heben?*

Ms-176,11v[3]et12r[1] (alternative between «grüne» and «grün»)

*Es könnte sein daß wir zwei Wörter für "grün" hätten:  
eines nur für grüne Oberflächen, das andre für grün(e) durchsichtige Gegenstände.*

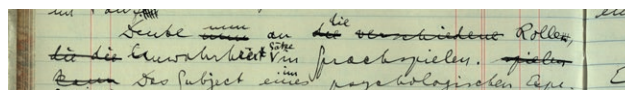
#### THE PHENOMENON OF BOUND TEXT ALTERNATIVES IN WITTGENSTEIN'S WRITING

Not surprisingly, the economy shown by Wittgenstein in his spelling out of the complete alternative very often yields a text phenomenon which in Pichler ([1994]: 91) was called «bound alternatives» («gebundene Alternativität»; please note that this usage of «bound alternative» deviates from the definition of the term originally introduced in Huitfeldt/Rossvær [1989]). A simple example of a «bound alternative» would be the following:

Carl		his
Anna	likes	her dog ...

If the message is that Anna likes her (own) dog, or, alternatively, that Carl likes his (own) dog, then “Anna” cannot be combined with “his dog” – “his dog” is bound to “Carl” as “her dog” is bound to “Anna”.

Naturally, bound alternatives lead to a great amount of and partly complex encoding in WAB's transcriptions of the Wittgenstein *Nachlass* since it should only be possible to extract the legitimate (intended) alternatives from the transcriptions. One example of Wittgensteinian bound alternatives is the following passage from Ms-115,88[3]et89[1]:



Wittgenstein Nachlass facsimile excerpt from Ms-115,89. Reproduced with the kind permission of The Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the University of Bergen, Bergen. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Already from this small fragment we can (under inclusion of the deleted parts) extract several alternatives, including the following:

*Denke nun an die verschiedene Rolle, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*  
*Denke nun an verschiedene Rollen, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*  
*Denke nun an die Rollen, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*  
*Denke nun an die Rolle, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*  
*Denke nun an die verschiedene Rolle unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*  
*Denke nun an verschiedene Rollen unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*  
*Denke nun an die Rolle unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*  
*Denke nun an Rollen unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*  
*Denke nun an die Rollen unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*

Surely, not all of them might have been intended / accepted by Wittgenstein – but all are syntactically / grammatically and semantically

<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein creates here «hatte» by simply deleting the dots above the «a» in «hätte».

possible. The following alternative would however clearly *not* be acceptable:

*Denke nun an die verschiedene Rollen, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*

«die verschiedene» is syntactically bound to «Rolle», not «Rollen».

Alternatives can be syntactically / grammatically bound as in the example above, or semantically bound. Imagine a Wittgenstein scholar writing the following, adding alternatives in Wittgensteinian ways:

*Frege distinguishes between reference // Bedeutung // meaning and sense // Sinn // meaning. The topic of meaning plays an important role also in Wittgenstein's Tractatus. Propositions can according to the Tractatus only have sense // meaning, not reference // Bedeutung // meaning.*

It makes sense to translate the Fregean "Bedeutung" with both "reference" and "meaning", and it makes equally sense to translate the Fregean "Sinn" with both "sense" and "meaning". But as soon as one picks at the first crossroad in the first sentence ("Frege distinguishes ...") the alternative "meaning", picking "meaning" at the second crossroad in the first sentence is no longer viable. And if one picks the alternative "meaning" at the second crossroad in the first sentence, one is bound *not* to pick the alternative "meaning" at the second crossroad in the third sentence. The following would thus for example not be permissible combinations of the alternatives above:

*Frege distinguishes between meaning and meaning. ...*

*Frege distinguishes between reference and meaning. ... Propositions can according to the Tractatus only have sense, not meaning.*

*Frege distinguishes between meaning and sense. ... Propositions can according to the Tractatus only have meaning, not reference.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> Bound alternatives need to be distinguished from cases where the parts of *one and the same alternative* are

The entire *Nachlass* contains around 55000 places of text alternative writing<sup>9</sup>, with still relatively few in the early (*Tractatus*) corpus and an almost steadily increasing activity in the later parts. One high peak is the second part of Ms-115 from 1936, where Wittgenstein translated (and partly also revised) part of the English *Brown Book* into German; but the search for the fitting word, word combination, rhythm, punctuation sign, emphasis, word order accompanies all his writing. Everyone who casts an eye on the later Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* must be struck by the passion and endurance with which he chisels his sentences and thoughts onto the paper.

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locally dispersed, for example in the case of German particle verbs. An example:

Stellen	uns		vor
Nehmen	wir	Folgendes	an ...

This is not a case of bound alternatives, but still not all combinations are viable. The only viable combinations are „Nehmen wir Folgendes an“ and „Stellen wir uns Folgendes vor“.

<sup>9</sup> This number results from counting the codes for places with a text alternative in WAB's transcriptions of the Wittgenstein *Nachlass*. Counting the single alternatives would give a number even higher (namely at least twice as large).

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## On archives, on an archive. The “Foucault exception”?

### Des archives, de l’archive. L’« exception Foucault » ?

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**Abstract.** Is there a specificity peculiar to the “Foucault archives” that makes them a sensitive object for philosophical and critical thought today? Can we use the “Foucault case” to reflect more broadly on the question of the philosophical archive / archives – what does the creation of archives for philosophers imply in terms of the reception and re-actualisation of their thought? In this article, we will start with a description of the multiple Foucault archives existing today and the history of their composition, as well as an initial discussion of their possible uses. We would then like to start from the concrete, material experience of the archives in order to ask a question that is more than methodological, ethico-political: would there be a “good use” (and therefore a “bad use”) of the archives of and by philosophers? More specifically, is there a “Foucaultian exception” which would require the Foucaultian, and probably philosophical, archives to be used in a broad sense, in a “different” way? We will plead for the construction of an ethic which is rather an “aesthetic” of the philosophical archives: the ability to bring out through the work on archives not something like “the good and true identity” of their author, but points of diffraction, unexpected faces, new writings.

**Keywords.** Michel Foucault, archives, critical theory, aesthetics of existence, genealogy.

Michel Foucault a une drôle d’histoire posthume, qui ne cesse depuis une vingtaine d’années au moins d’inquiéter le monde intellectuel français, de le déranger même, en dessinant une série de questions qui concernent l’existence des archives philosophiques à la fois comme objets de la mémoire culturelle collective et événements socio-politiques. Foucault nous a quitté il y a 36 ans, le 25 juin 1984: un temps décidément bref si on le compare à la temporalité longue des archives de notre héritage culturel, étalée sur plusieurs siècles, mais assez consistant pour pouvoir prendre du recul sur son importance pour la philosophie française du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. C’est un fait, Foucault est devenu aujourd’hui une masse d’archives: plusieurs milliers de feuillets manuscrits et dactylographiés inédits, ainsi que d’enre-



gistements audio et vidéo, se trouvent conservés sous son nom d'auteur dans plusieurs institutions en France et à l'étranger: la Bibliothèque nationale de France, l'IMEC (Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine) de Caen, l'INA (Institut national de l'audiovisuel), des universités américaines telles Berkeley et Yale, etc. Cette "archivisation" de Foucault ne s'est pas faite sans polémiques; il suffit de rappeler les débats autour de son classement en avril 2012 comme «trésor national» par le Ministère de la Culture français (cf. par exemple Aeschmann, Monnin [2012], ou Artières, Potte-Bonneville [2012]), et les discussions autour de nombreux chantiers actuellement ouverts de publication de textes inédits.

Existe-t-il une spécificité propre aux "archives Foucault" qui en fait un objet sensible pour la pensée philosophique et critique aujourd'hui? Peut-on, faut-il même, utiliser le "cas Foucault" pour réfléchir plus largement à la question des archives / de l'archive philosophique – de ce que la création d'archives pour les philosophes implique en termes de réception et de réactualisation de leur pensée? Nous partons dans le présent article de ce qui nous semble être encore un point incontournable : une description de multiples archives Foucault existant aujourd'hui et de l'histoire de leur composition, ainsi qu'une première discussion sur leurs usages possibles à partir de notre propre travail empirique. Nous voudrions ensuite partir de cette expérience concrète, matérielle des archives pour poser une question qui est davantage que méthodologique, éthico-politique: y aurait-il un "bon usage" (et donc un mauvais usage) des archives des et par les philosophes? Plus spécifiquement, y a-t-il une "exception foucauldienne" qui demanderait d'utiliser les archives foucauldienne, et philosophiques sans doute dans un sens large, de manière "autre"?

## 1. LES ARCHIVES D'UN ARCHIVISTE

Comme anticipé dans l'introduction, quand on parle d' "archives Foucault" aujourd'hui on se réfère à une masse imposante de documents très

hétérogènes par leurs formats, contenus, destinataires et lieux de conservation. Cette hétérogénéité s'explique, du moins en partie, par l'histoire complexe et non-linéaire de la réception de la pensée foucauldienne après sa mort. Daniel Defert a évoqué l'«indifférence» avec laquelle Foucault aurait été traité en France au lendemain de sa disparition (Defert [2012]): ce désintéressement initial de la part du monde intellectuel et académique fait sans doute partie des raisons qui ont déterminé une construction complexe et par couches successives des archives des textes et matériaux de travail foucauldien. Au lendemain de la mort de Foucault, Daniel Defert a d'un côté conservé et décidé de mettre dans un coffre-fort les milliers de feuillets laissés par son compagnon dans leur maison commune ; comme sa banquière lui aurait suggéré : «Je vois tous les charcutiers du quartier venir déposer les bijoux de leur femme, je vous ai senti paniqué : venez, je vous ai réservé deux coffres» (Defert [2012]). De l'autre côté, dans un mouvement presque spontané de rassemblement et de conservation voulu par ses amis et collaborateurs, un fonds d'archive se constitua très tôt autour de la Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, lieu d'élection et de travail où Foucault aima se rendre les dernières années de sa vie, éreinté par les lenteurs de la Bibliothèque nationale. Le 31 mai 1986 naît l'Association pour le Centre Michel Foucault, qui réunit à ses débuts une trentaine de chercheurs dans le but de rassembler les travaux et écrits du philosophe et d'encourager les recherches utilisant ses textes et poursuivant ses méthodes et intuitions conceptuelles (<https://centremichelfoucault.com>). Comme le rappelle le Frère Michel Albaric (<https://bibsaulchoir.hypotheses.org/la-bibliotheque/michel-foucault-et-la-bibliotheque-du-saulchoir>), bibliothécaire du Saulchoir de 1973 à 1999, la tâche de trouver un lieu de conservation et de communication pour ces archives foucauldienne n'a pas été aisée, à ses débuts: l'Association pour le Centre Michel Foucault, et notamment son président François Ewald, ont cherché en vain un lieu d'accueil jusqu'à ce qu'on décide, tout naturellement, de commencer par laisser ces matériaux là où ils se trouvaient, à la Bibliothèque du Saulchoir. Ce premier "Fonds

Foucault”, strictement lié à l'activité et aux réunions de l'Association, restera au Saulchoir jusqu'en 1997, date de son transfert à l'IMEC de Caen.

Parallèlement aux premiers travaux sur ce fonds, on entreprit de réfléchir à la possibilité d'éditer des travaux inédits de Foucault ou du moins de rassembler de manière cohérente et critique les textes épars déjà publiés. Devenu une archive, même mouvante et perpétuellement en construction, Michel Foucault commence – malgré lui sans doute mais d'autant plus inévitablement que les chercheurs travaillant sur ses textes ne cessent de croître dans le monde entier – à devenir une «œuvre» (Sforzini [2014]). Cette notion d'œuvre est sans doute malaisée à utiliser pour un penseur comme Foucault qui s'est méfié toute son existence de toute étiquette identificatoire ou interprétation unifiante de sa pratique de philosophe. Et pourtant un corpus foucauldien existe et continue de s'accroître depuis sa disparition: on peut même dire que c'est après sa mort que son “nom d'auteur” a été le plus utilisé. Foucault a publié dix livres de son vivant, c'est-à-dire dix textes conçus pour la publication comme essais autonomes sous son seul nom; le premier titre est *Maladie mentale et personnalité* (1954, puis corrigé et réédité en 1962 sous le titre: *Maladie mentale et psychologie*); les derniers: le deuxième et le troisième tome de *l'Histoire de la sexualité*, *L'usage des plaisirs* et *Le souci de soi*, parus en 1984, juste avant la mort soudaine du philosophe au mois de juin<sup>1</sup>. Il y a aussi des travaux collectifs comme ceux autour du cas “Pierre Rivière”, par exemple, ou des lettres de cachet, et un certain nombre d'écrits mineurs “approuvés”, pour ainsi dire, par le philosophe: les dizaines d'articles, introductions, conférences, entretiens que Foucault a lui-même accepté de rendre publics, et souvent revus et corrigés avant la publication.

Les dernières dispositions de Foucault affirmaient : «Pas de publications posthumes» (Defert

<sup>1</sup> Les autres titres sont: *Folie et déraison à l'âge classique*, (1961, puis devenue en 1972: *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*); *Raymond Roussel* (1963); *Naissance de la clinique* (1963); *Les mots et les choses* (1966); *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969); *Surveiller et punir* (1975); *La volonté de savoir* (1976).

[1994]: 64), et dans un premier temps les exécuteurs testamentaires ont refusé de publier l'immense masse des travaux foucauldien restés inédits – notamment ses cours au Collège de France, ayant constitué pourtant l'exposition publique de sa recherche pendant les quinze dernières années de sa vie. Précisément pour ce caractère public de l'enseignement de Foucault, la décision d'en interdire la publication souleva beaucoup de débats et polémiques entre spécialistes, jusqu'à ce que, en 1990, en Italie, soit publiée une première version en italien (tout à fait pirate) du cours foucauldien de 1978, *Il faut défendre la société* (Foucault [1990]). Face au péril d'une circulation “non-autorisée” et non scientifique des cours de Foucault (pour la grande majorité desquels on dispose des manuscrits de Foucault lui-même et d'enregistrements), les héritiers ont donc décidé d'entreprendre leur édition critique, qui s'est achevée avec la publication en 2015 du cours de 1972-1973: *Théories et institutions pénales* (Foucault [2015a]). Sans aucun doute, les cours font aujourd'hui partie intégrante de l'œuvre de Foucault (cf. par exemple Senellart [2011] et Gros [2011]); une réédition en poche est d'ailleurs programmée à partir de 2021 aux Éditions du Seuil, reprenant et corrigeant la première édition à la lumière des nouveaux matériaux d'archive qui ont permis en effet souvent de retrouver les manuscrits des cours et leurs travaux préparatoires et de combler donc quelques lacunes des enregistrements. Les cours ont transformé la façon de lire la philosophie foucauldienne, en l'enrichissant de thématiques, concepts et problématiques nouvelles que les livres comme tels ne permettaient pas de mettre au centre de la problématisation critique. Des thèmes comme ceux de la gouvernementalité et de la *parrèsia* par exemple, propres au dernier Foucault et au cœur de la recherche foucauldienne actuelle, restent aux marges du discours des deux derniers livres publiés, c'est-à-dire les derniers tomes de *l'Histoire de la sexualité*.

À tout cela, il faut ajouter la progressive publication en volume des textes périphériques de Foucault. Ceux qui avaient déjà fait l'objet d'une parution de vivant de leur auteur ont été pour

une grande partie recueillis dans les *Dits et Écrits*, parus en 1994. Si l'on prend pourtant en considération aussi les inédits, leur édition est loin de s'achever et elle est même devenue une question à l'ordre du jour pour la politique culturelle française. En fait, le sociologue Daniel Defert, compagnon du philosophe et légataire de son immense archive personnel – à peu près 37000 feuillets – a décidé au début des années 2010 de s'en séparer. Cette annonce a immédiatement engendré une compétition pour l'acquisition de ce qui est un véritable trésor, et pas seulement en termes culturels. Des universités américaines comme Berkeley, Yale, Chicago, auraient été prêtes à payer très cher pour s'approprier les archives Foucault. Pour en empêcher l'exportation à l'étranger, le Ministère de la Culture a donc annoncé en avril 2012 leur classement comme «trésor national», et la Bibliothèque Nationale de France a finalisé en 2013 l'opération d'achat pour la somme tout à fait exceptionnelle de 3.8 millions d'euros.

Les “archives Foucault” sont devenues ainsi depuis une petite dizaine d'années un “trésor” au sens juridique du terme et un fonds de catalogue à la BnF<sup>2</sup>. Il faut néanmoins préciser que le département des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale de France conservait déjà un ensemble de manuscrits, acquis en 1994 et comprenant les premières versions manuscrites de *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969) et de *L'Histoire de la sexualité II et III (L'Usage des plaisirs et Le Souci de soi)*. C'est à ce premier noyau qu'est venu s'ajouter l'énorme fonds, comprenant 117 boîtes, acquis auprès de Daniel Defert en 2013: des milliers de feuillets manuscrits et dactylographiés qui comprennent des notes de lecture, des conférences, des cours, des premières versions d'ouvrages, des projets de livres jamais réalisés, et même un journal intellectuel dans lequel le philosophe a annoté des idées, des réflexions, des citations tout au long de son existence. Enfin il y a un troisième noyau complétant la mosaïque des archives Foucault à la Biblio-

thèque nationale: le neveu de Michel Foucault, Henri-Paul Fruchaud, a livré en 2015 à la BnF un certain nombre de documents remontant aux années de jeunesse de Foucault (dont le mémoire de maîtrise de 1949 sur Hegel, des travaux sur la psychologie expérimentale et son histoire et des notes prises par Foucault comme élève de l'ENS rue d'Ulm), auxquels s'ajoute une série de lettres dont certaines font partie de la correspondance familiale et dont la famille Foucault elle-même souhaite qu'elles ne soient pas consultables avant 2050. Le “fonds Foucault” à la BnF se compose ainsi en fait d'archives très hétérogènes au regard de leur contenu, leur forme, leur date présumée de composition et leur mode d'entrée dans les collections de la bibliothèque, dont la richesse intellectuelle est sans doute encore à creuser. Ce fonds vient enrichir d'une façon déterminante les collections d'autres institutions patrimoniales françaises comme l'INA, par exemple, qui rassemble et préserve de son côté, comme nous l'avons déjà noté, un ensemble important d'archives foucauldienne, notamment les enregistrements des émissions à la radio et à la télévision auxquelles Michel Foucault a participé, dès 1961 à 1983<sup>3</sup>.

L'ordre de ces matériaux n'est ni évident ni anodin : pour ce qui concerne en particulier les documents provenant de son domicile personnel de la rue de Vaugirard, ils ont été recueillis par Daniel Defert et ensuite classés par les conservateurs de la BnF en suivant le classement laissé par Foucault au moment de sa mort. Ce principe de rangement peut évidemment relever du simple hasard de travail et des ultimes usages de ses propres textes par le philosophe. Il est évident, dès la première exploration des archives, que Foucault avait une manière singulière de travailler sur ses propres archives, impliquant la reprise perpétuelle de ses travaux antérieurs dans de nouvelles perspectives de recherches : des parties d'un même texte ou groupe de notes peuvent donc se retrouver à des places différentes dans les

<sup>2</sup> Nous avons travaillé en tant que chercheuse associée à la BnF pour constituer le nouvel inventaire des archives Foucault déposées en 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Un projet de publication le plus possible exhaustif de ces émissions est actuellement en discussion, en partenariat avec l'INA.

boîtes. Des renvois ponctuels au sein des archives seraient d'ailleurs décisifs à établir. Néanmoins il est impossible de décider a priori que les reprises et déplacements foucauldien ne seraient pas pertinents d'un point de vue intellectuel. Le choix a donc été fait de garder la disposition existante des documents, en faisant le pari que ce "désordre" des archives puisse être un élément fécond et créateur pour les chercheurs travaillant sur le fonds.

Les notes de lecture représentent une partie importante des archives Foucault. À partir de l'inventaire rédigé par Daniel Defert, on estime à environ 20300 les fiches de lecture manuscrites, recto seul ou recto/verso. Toujours selon l'inventaire de Daniel Defert, 41 boîtes sur 117 seraient constituées intégralement de notes de lecture. Ces notes posent des problèmes de description et de catalogage spécifiques. En fait, il ne s'agit jamais de "simples" recueils de références et de citations. Foucault travaille les sources d'archive de manière immédiatement critique et philosophique : il les organise par thèmes et notions-clés, suivant la construction des problématiques et concepts-clé de son travail, et mêle dans ce travail de création conceptuelle plusieurs sources, primaires et secondaires (textes d'auteurs, anciens modernes et contemporains, ou littérature critique). C'est un véritable travail de philosophe que Foucault entreprend à partir des archives sur lesquelles il travaillait, se dupliquant pour nous dans une masse d'archives philosophiques – les archives d'un archivist –, dont la lecture et l'analyse sont indispensables pour comprendre et reconstruire l'élaboration de sa pensée. Or il est impossible, sans transcrire intégralement chaque note de lecture, de restituer l'ordre précis dans lequel Foucault utilise ses sources par rapport à un thème de recherche spécifique. Étant donné que les notes de lecture de Foucault ne peuvent pas faire l'objet d'une publication à part entière (ce serait complètement insensé vu la nature de l'objet textuel en question), la solution la plus efficace pour rendre disponibles aux chercheurs la richesse et le développement précis des notes de travail de Foucault serait leur numérisation, accompagnée éventuellement de renvois intertextuels aux sources citées.

La BnF a posé les premiers jalons d'un tel projet de numérisation et d'indexation des fiches de lecture en partenariat avec l'École normale supérieure de Paris et de Lyon et le CNRS, dans le cadre d'un projet ANR pour 2017-2020 (*Foucault's Reading Notes*; <https://fll.hypotheses.org>). Ce projet est la poursuite d'un premier travail sur la bibliothèque foucauldienne au sein d'un autre projet ANR (2007-2012), mené par Philippe Artières et son équipe en collaboration avec l'École normale supérieure de Lyon. Un travail de numérisation des fiches de lecture du dossier préparatoire des *Mots et les choses* a été réalisé et mis en ligne (cf. <http://lbf-ehess.ens-lyon.fr/>) à la suite de ce premier projet. L'idée de départ de *Foucault Fiches de lecture* a été de reprendre ce travail en l'élargissant à d'autres boîtes (en particulier, les notes de lecture autour de la pénalité et de la prison et autour des différentes élaborations successives du projet de *Histoire de la sexualité* entre 1975 et 1984). Ces fiches de lecture ont été numérisées par la BnF et chargées sur une plateforme élaborée par Vincent Ventresque au laboratoire Triangle (UMR 5206), permettant un travail collaboratif sur ces documents (les images sont déjà en ligne pour les membres du projet et sont en train d'être mises à disposition des chercheurs sur une plateforme publique; <http://eman-archives.org/Foucault-fiches/>).

En revenant aux projets d'édition, l'événement majeur de ces dernières années, rendu aussi en partie possible grâce aux archives déposées à la BnF, a été sans doute la publication en 2018 pour Gallimard, grâce au travail éditorial de Frédéric Gros, de l'inédit majeur du corpus foucauldien: *Les aveux de la chair* – quatrième tome de *Histoire de la sexualité*. Or les choix d'édition concernant ce texte ont été controversés, on y reviendra. Il faut tout de même souligner le rôle majeur des archives du philosophe, des archives philosophiques, pour l'édition de ce texte: un des arguments forts pour qu'il soit finalement publié a été le fait que son entrée dans les archives de la BnF en rendait la consultation de fait plus facile et sans doute plus large à long terme. Autant le rendre accessible pour tout le monde dans une édition scientifiquement

fiable. Ensuite, les archives ont donné la possibilité de corriger le premier tapuscrit réalisé par Gallimard en 1982 avec la consultation du manuscrit du texte (boîtes 84-86). L'importance du travail d'archive dans la publication des inédits foucauldien avait en effet déjà été évidente avec la sortie des derniers (selon un ordre de publication qui ne suit pas la chronologie) cours au Collège de France, qui font un usage important des matériaux manuscrits laissés par Foucault dans ses archives personnelles. Il existe d'ailleurs d'autres projets d'édition en cours à partir des archives Foucault de la BnF, concernant les cours antérieurs au Collège de France (à paraître au Seuil) et des séries de conférences ou séminaires donnés par Foucault tout au long de sa carrière intellectuelle (à paraître chez Vrin ; notamment les textes politiques, littéraires, les cours américains, etc.).

Pas de publications posthumes? Pour *Les aveux de la chair*, l'argument qui a primé est que ce texte avait été confié par Foucault lui-même à son éditeur (Gallimard). Il était donc prévu pour la publication: seule la mort a empêché Foucault de donner une version définitive du texte, que l'on peut donc considérer comme achevé, quoique non totalement corrigé. Mais on ne doit pas se cacher le fait qu'on est en train de franchir une ligne: on publiera certainement de plus en plus de textes non seulement inédits mais que Foucault avait explicitement renoncé à publier et / ou qui n'ont pas été prononcés publiquement, en contrevenant cette fois-ci clairement aux dispositions testamentaires. On peut légitimement se demander si cette opération a du sens d'un point de vue aussi bien éthique que théorique. Il est tout de même indéniable que l'entrée massive de Foucault dans les archives patrimoniales françaises, depuis son acquisition par la BnF, a changé le rapport que nous entretenons avec ses textes et travaux. Pour notre bonheur ou notre malheur, lorsque le travail d'un philosophe devient une masse d'archives et que ces archives sont, comme c'est le cas pour Foucault, parmi les plus consultées du catalogue des fonds d'une bibliothèque, la question de la communication et de la gestion de ce patrimoine archivistique devient incontournable et ne peut

plus être esquivée avec la formule foucauldienne largement banalisée de la "boîte à outils". Un outil est axiologiquement neutre, mais ses usages ne le sont pas: toute décision par rapport aux archives foucauliennes est chargée de sens éthico-politique, fût-elle de laisser ces matériaux archivistiques à la pleine et libre disposition des lecteurs. Foucault est devenu aujourd'hui une figure trop importante de l'histoire de la pensée contemporaine pour envisager une entrave significative à la circulation de ses travaux, même inachevés. Cela ne veut pas dire que tout ce qui se trouve dans les archives est publiable tel quel, loin de là, mais qu'il existe certains textes inédits décisifs qu'il serait dommage de ne pas rendre disponibles au grand public, en les laissant consultables seulement à un petit cercle d'"initiés" pouvant se rendre physiquement à la Bibliothèque nationale. Sous quelle forme envisager cette circulation, aussi bien de point de vue du format que du contenu des publications, c'est une question qui demeure ouverte et n'est pas facile à démêler.

## 2. POUR UNE ÉTHIQUE PHILOSOPHIQUE DES ARCHIVES?

Dans une recension des *Aveux de la chair* parue en 2019 dans les notes de lecture des *Archives de philosophie*, Maud Pouradier regrette la publication sous la forme d'un livre achevé, à part entière, de ce qui est présenté comme le quatrième tome de l'*Histoire de la sexualité*. Faire d'un texte posthume un ouvrage dans la continuité des livres publiés par Foucault de son vivant, c'est en effet une opération qui gomme les difficultés de l'édition des manuscrits après la mort de leurs auteurs. Dans le cas des *Aveux*, cela revient à son sens à faire d'un «échec», d'un texte «manifestement incomplet» et «décevant» (Pouradier [2019]: 812), le point final sur ce long et tourmenté, plusieurs fois repris et réélaboré, projet foucauldien d'une histoire de la sexualité. Elle déplore ainsi le manque d'une véritable «éthique» (Pouradier [2019]: 811) de la part de chercheurs en philosophie et en sciences sociales, qui devrait poser de manière plus

claire et non-esquivée le problème de la publication des archives des philosophes et de la constitution d'une œuvre philosophique à partir de matériaux archivistiques inédits. Une question essentielle est tout de même soulevée: celle de l'éthique de l'«archiviste des philosophes», du chercheur qui se plonge, pour les utiliser et / ou les publier, dans les archives laissées par les philosophes. Les philosophes seraient-ils/elles moins préparés méthodologiquement que les chercheurs d'autres disciplines, notamment littéraires, au travail sur les archives? Peut-on vraiment tout publier? Ou mieux: peut-on tout publier parmi des archives philosophiques comme s'il s'agissait d'une œuvre du/de la philosophe, sans remettre radicalement en question le sens donné à ce terme d' "œuvre"? Cette remarque est d'ailleurs d'autant plus importante et pertinente que Foucault lui-même a été un grand "déconstructeur" des notions d'œuvre et d'auteur, que notre culture moderne occidentale a souvent utilisées comme centre d'unification du sens et cœur secret à découvrir, lumières détentrices de la vérité ultime d'un discours.

Il n'est donc pas anodin de se demander comment parler d'une œuvre en philosophie, surtout lorsqu'on a affaire à des archives, à savoir, le plus souvent: des premières versions non abouties d'ouvrages, des brouillons préparatoires et inachevés, en somme les matériaux de travail divers d'un philosophe. Parler naïvement d'œuvre, croire même que quelque chose comme une "œuvre" au sens non problématisé du terme puisse exister, c'est un leurre de la pensée et de l'écriture contemporaine, comme Foucault lui-même l'avait observé dans sa célèbre conférence de 1969:

*Il faut aussitôt poser un problème : "Qu'est-ce qu'une œuvre ? qu'est-ce donc que cette curieuse unité qu'on désigne du nom d'œuvre ? de quels éléments est-elle composée ? Une œuvre, n'est-ce pas ce qu'a écrit celui qui est un auteur?" On voit les difficultés surgir. Si un individu n'était pas un auteur, est-ce qu'on pourrait dire que ce qu'il a écrit, ou dit, ce qu'il a laissé dans ses papiers, ce qu'on a pu rapporter de ses propos, pourrait être appelé une "œuvre"? Tant que Sade n'a pas été un auteur, qu'étaient donc ses papiers ? Des rouleaux de papier sur lesquels, à l'infini, pendant ses*

*journées de prison, il déroulait ses fantasmes.*

*Mais supposons qu'on ait affaire à un auteur: est-ce que tout ce qu'il a écrit ou dit, tout ce qu'il a laissé derrière lui fait partie de son œuvre? Problème à la fois théorique et technique. Quand on entreprend de publier, par exemple, les œuvres de Nietzsche, où faut-il s'arrêter? Il faut tout publier, bien sûr, mais que veut dire ce "tout"? Tout ce que Nietzsche a publié lui-même, c'est entendu. Les brouillons de ses œuvres? Évidemment. Les projets d'aphorismes ? Oui. Les ratures également, les notes au bas des carnets? Oui. Mais quand, à l'intérieur d'un carnet rempli d'aphorismes, on trouve une référence, l'indication d'un rendez-vous ou d'une adresse, une note de blanchisserie: œuvre, ou pas œuvre? Mais pourquoi pas? Et cela indéfiniment. Parmi les millions de traces laissées par quelqu'un après sa mort, comment peut-on définir une œuvre? La théorie de l'œuvre n'existe pas, et ceux qui, ingénument, entreprennent d'éditer des œuvres manquent d'une telle théorie et leur travail empirique s'en trouve bien vite paralysé. (Foucault [1969]: 1262-1263)*

Trois ordres de questions théoriques et pratiques se posent alors, nous semble-t-il. Tout d'abord, cela a-t-il un sens de publier des inédits de Foucault? La réponse nous paraît être affirmative, comme d'ailleurs Foucault lui-même le disait de Nietzsche (et d'autres): «Il faut tout publier, bien sûr». Le problème des dispositions testamentaires ne concerne au fonds que les héritiers, ce n'est à aucun d'entre nous de leur dicter la loi de leur conscience. Nous pouvons tout simplement nous réjouir de pouvoir avoir accès à une série aussi vaste et diversifiée de matériaux de travail foucauldien – il revient ensuite à notre éthique de chercheurs d'en faire le "meilleur" usage possible. D'ailleurs cette notion même d'éthique peut devenir un leurre si elle est utilisée comme une sorte de "règle morale" à définir face aux archives et qui en guiderait l'exploration et l'exploitation: comme s'il existait un "bon" et un "mauvais" usage des archives. Toute "éthique" des archives est immédiatement une "politique" (Foucault *docet*), parce que toute opération de conservation, stockage, reprise et édition de manuscrits, mais tout geste d'écriture aussi, est par lui-même une pratique

non seulement individuelle mais historique et collective. Comme Daniel Defert l'a bien souligné au moment de la cession controversée du fonds à la BnF, il y avait des enjeux politiques spécifiques dans la constitution des archives Foucault, qui se tissent avec l'histoire de l'acquisition des droits pour les couples homosexuels, les deuils liés à l'explosion de l'épidémie de SIDA et restés souvent sans reconnaissance officielle, et les rigidités voire les inepties de l'administration française. Defert rappelle qu'en 1984 sa position en tant que légataire des archives Foucault n'était pas simple ; il se sentit presque obligé de mener une bataille, ne visant pas du tout la famille du philosophe mais l'État lui-même et ses politiques civiles et fiscales :

*A l'époque, les couples homosexuels n'avaient aucune sorte de droits, je devais comme tout étranger payer 65% de droits de succession, 60% sur l'appartement et 5% forfaitairement sur le contenu. Une dame est venue faire l'expertise. Elle regardait les livres dans la bibliothèque et tout ce qui n'avait pas de dédicace lui semblait sans valeur. Je me souviens qu'elle a pris un livre et dit: "Ce Barthèze (Barthes) est inconnu, aucune valeur". (Defert [2012])*

*Une deuxième question théorique plus complexe peut alors être posée à partir du cas Foucault: sous quelle forme faut-il envisager une publication des archives des philosophes? «Il faut tout publier, bien sûr, mais que veut dire ce "tout"?» (Foucault [1969]: 1263), pour reprendre encore une fois les expressions foucauldienne? Or il n'existe pas de réponse facile à cette question. L'importance des travaux collectifs a été soulignée (Bert, Lamy [2018]), ainsi que la force critique d'une édition «en ligne» «à l'heure des humanités numériques» (Pouradier [2019]: 812). Certes,*

*Il faut souhaiter que le corpus foucauldien ne soit pas condamné à cette solitude des grands auteurs qui ignore les conditions de production, efface les brouillons, minore le labeur des archives et laisse dans l'ombre les ratages et les reprises. Foucault mérite mieux que cela ; son patient travail de formation des concepts, d'élaboration des problématiques et de reconstitution des grands schèmes d'intellection aussi. (Bert, Lamy [2018])*

Mais il nous semble que les appels pour une collectivisation du travail ou même pour sa « démocratisation » par le biais des technologies digitales risquent de n'être qu'une autre manière, somme toute utopique, de gommer les contraintes matérielles, historiques et politiques liées à la mise en circulation des archives. Pourquoi par exemple une édition en ligne serait-elle moins problématique du point de vue de la mise en question de la notion « d'œuvre » ? Il est sans doute très naïf de penser que le seul espace virtuel signifierait par lui-même une plus ample liberté de circulation et d'utilisation des textes, sans que cela s'accompagne d'une problématisation poussée des « politiques du web » aujourd'hui : un questionnement sans cesse repris de la manière dont les financements sont alloués aux projets digitaux, par exemple, ainsi que des difficultés techniques et financières qui peuvent limiter l'accès aux ressources en ligne, etc. Il existe une politique des archives numériques comme il existe une politique des archives-papier, et il ne suffit pas de numériser un travail pour le rendre plus « libre » et constitutivement pluriel. Il n'est pas évident non plus que la dimension numérique soit par définition moins attachée aux individualités des auteurs. Et d'ailleurs peut-on vraiment imaginer des publications collectives lorsque l'on sait très bien que la scientificité d'un travail critique d'édition repose aussi et encore sur le « statut d'autorité » de l'éditeur lui-même (« éditeur scientifique »), et que par ailleurs ces travaux d'édition font partie intégrante de la carrière académique de leurs signataires, dans une optique d'autopromotion de l'individu-chercheur-manager de soi qui ne laisse presque aucune place possible à la dissémination des identités et à la mutualisation du travail ?

Il nous semble en fait que ces appels sans cesse relancés visent à faire de Foucault une « exception » parmi les archives philosophiques en raison de la portée critique de sa pensée. Comme Foucault a été le grand « artificier » voulant faire exploser les notions traditionnelles d'auteur et d'œuvre, on ne peut qu'approcher ses archives avec la même attitude destructrice, de « pyromane », pour ainsi dire. Une édition « classique » des inédits foucal-

diens ne respecterait pas leur force critique. Mais cela risque de nous faire oublier que justement la “mort” de l'auteur et de l'œuvre sont des processus historiques. Plutôt que de vouloir déduire des textes foucauldien les lois de leur usage, il nous paraît alors plus intéressant de continuer à mobiliser et réactiver les méthodes historiques foucauliennes pour ouvrir des espaces critiques sur la matérialité des archives philosophiques aujourd'hui. Les archives Foucault n'exigent pas un statut particulier, tout en recelant des instruments conceptuels forts pour problématiser aujourd'hui la dimension philosophique des archives.

La troisième et dernière question, à notre sens la plus importante et sérieuse à poser à propos des archives philosophiques contemporaines à partir du cas Foucault, concernerait alors non pas tant une éthique mais une “*esthétique*” des archives. La notion foucauldienne d'«*esthétique de l'existence*» est célèbre (et souvent mal interprétée): les derniers travaux foucauldien font usage du terme d'esthétique comme manière de réfléchir à la construction libre des sujets par eux / elles-mêmes dans un contexte normatif donné, tout en échappant à la dimension normalisatrice du discours philosophique moral traditionnel (Foucault [1984a]). L'esthétique est ce qui, dans la matérialité des corps, de leurs vies et de leurs manières d'agir, construit quelque chose comme une “attitude”, un style de l'existence et un sens donné aux actions, sur lequel le philosophe peut tâcher de réfléchir sans tableau axiologique préconstruit. Les archives de Foucault ne devraient donc pas aspirer à un destin “hors-norme” mais se poser comme une virtualité toujours ouverte de mise en question critique des normes existantes. La véritable “éthique du chercheur” face aux archives Foucault pourrait se présenter comme une “esthétique” de la pensée des archives: la capacité de faire surgir dans et à travers ses propres travaux sur les archives non pas quelque chose comme “la bonne et vraie œuvre” de Michel Foucault mais des points de diffraction, des visages inattendus, des écritures nouvelles.

Il n'est pas aisé d'avoir affaire aux archives d'un archiviste. Foucault a été aussi et de manière

indélébile “le” penseur de l'archive: «la masse des choses dites dans une culture, conservées, valorisées, réutilisées, répétées et transformées. Bref, toute cette masse verbale qui a été fabriquée par les hommes, investie dans leurs techniques et leurs institutions, et qui est tissée avec leur existence et leur histoire» (Foucault [1969a] : 814-815). L'archive, c'est donc l'ensemble des traces verbales conservées dans une période historique déterminée, au travers desquelles l'archéologue – le nouveau philosophe-historien dont Foucault trace le chemin – détermine ce «savoir commun» qui a rendu possibles «les pratiques, les institutions et les théories»: le «savoir constituant et historique» (Foucault [1966]: 526-527). L'archive, c'est l'ensemble des règles de constitution des archives et de leurs vérités, peut-on dire. Et Foucault a été aussi un grand penseur *des* archives, fouillant dans les matériaux les plus oubliés de notre mémoire écrite, les plus infimes aussi, pour en retrouver des virtualités de discours. Mais est-il possible de faire vaciller les repères traditionnels des discours tout en prenant la parole, pour et par soi-même? Le travail de l'archiviste, de l'archéologue, quand il empiète sur son époque, risque de creuser et de faire basculer le terrain sous ses propres pieds.

Notre pari, c'est que ce paradoxe existe bien et est inévitable et sans solution facile, mais constitue aussi une richesse du discours foucauldien: il ne s'agit pas juste de sonner la fin des notions d'auteur et d'œuvre, mais d'en faire grimacer les codes avec des formes transgressives de discours. Il faut esquiver un malentendu de fonds à propos de la mise en question foucauldienne de ces notions d'auteur et d'œuvre. «*Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur ?*», ce n'est pas forcément un appel à l'anonymat mais la recherche de principes de dispersion créatrice des discours. Un usage «*foucauldien*» des archives Foucault pourrait jouer sur les marges des formes établies de la conservation et de la publication pour faire de ses textes et de ses travaux les traces d'une imagination vivante et créatrice et non pas des consécrations mortifères. L'œuvre devient alors une puissance en acte de franchir les limites. Elle ne vaut pas par ses contenus ou son lien à l'intériorité psychologique de l'individu écrivant mais comme



forme d'une expérience de décentration et transformation. La seule chose à proscrire au fond dans les usages posthumes de Foucault, serait la prétention à découvrir son vrai visage, figé dans une effigie a-politisée et des-historicisée. Si une éthique des archives doit se déployer, elle ne doit pas devenir une « norme » d'édition, faisant la distinction entre « vrais textes » et « brouillons », « bonnes et mauvaises archives », « bons et mauvais archivistes ». Il s'agit juste d'une attention critique toujours renouvelée à ne pas faire d'un morceau de discours, fût-il de Michel Foucault, la vérité la plus profonde et authentique de sa pensée. Il faut viser une esthétique de la construction, toujours mobile, d'une philosophie et d'un philosophe.

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## The Genesis of a Philosophical Poem: Sri Aurobindo, World Literature and the Writing of *Savitri*

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**Abstract.** Philosophical poetry has had a long and distinguished history in different cultural traditions. These traditions have always interacted to some extent, but today the barriers between them have largely broken down. *Savitri*, an epic in English by the early twentieth-century Indian philosopher and poet Sri Aurobindo, is a notable outcome of the confluence of Eastern and Western civilisations. Based on a creative reworking of a legend from the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, it incorporates in its neo-Vedantic vision aspects of the worldviews represented by the great philosophical poems of ancient, medieval and modern Europe. As vast in scope as any of these works, *Savitri* took shape over much of the poet's life in a way comparable to Goethe's *Faust*. A study of the stages of its composition reveals much about the author's artistic, intellectual and spiritual development and gives insight into the poem's autobiographical dimension.

**Keywords.** Philosophical poetry, naturalism, supernaturalism, affirmation, freedom.

### 1. PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY

Philosophy and poetry have not always been unrelated pursuits. From the earliest times in different parts of the world, there were philosophers who used poetry to express their thoughts. Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles come to mind, as do the anonymous authors of several of the Upanishads. Gradually philosophy came to rely more and more on logical reasoning, leaving less and less scope for the imaginative vision and word-music of poetry. But there were still poets who dared to philosophise<sup>1</sup>. Some of them produced literary masterpieces that are also milestones in the history of thought.

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<sup>1</sup> The young Keats, as Sri Aurobindo points out, wrote «To philosophise I dare not yet», not «I am too much of a poet to philosophise» (Aurobindo [2004]: 94).

The Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952) delivered a series of lectures in 1910 that were published under the title *Three Philosophical Poets*. The philosophically minded poets he compared were Lucretius, Dante and Goethe. Each of these, according to him, «is typical of an age. Taken together, they sum up all European philosophy» (Santayana [1910]: 1). Few would deny that Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, Dante's *Commedia* and Goethe's *Faust* rank among the great works of ancient, medieval and modern literature. But Santayana went further. He found in these poems the consummate expression of the contrasting worldviews of naturalism, supernaturalism and romanticism, each of which dominated a phase of European thought. His reading of Lucretius, Dante and Goethe led him to wonder: «Can it be an accident that the most adequate and probably the most lasting exposition of these three schools of philosophy should have been made by poets? Are poets, at heart, in search of a philosophy? Or is philosophy, in the end, nothing but poetry?» (Santayana [1910]: 3).

Santayana asked these questions in a Western context, but it is not only in Europe that poetry and philosophy have converged and diverged. Similar reflections can be entertained with reference to other traditions. From this point of view, I propose to examine a philosophical epic from early twentieth-century India. Although it has attracted relatively little attention in the West, it is a work that richly deserves a place in world literature<sup>2</sup> and is as relevant to world philosophy as are the celebrated works of Lucretius, Dante and Goethe.

The philosopher, poet and mystic Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950) – known in the later part of his life as Sri Aurobindo – was a contemporary of Santayana's, though neither is likely to have heard of the other's existence. Born in India but growing up mainly in England and writing throughout his life mostly in English, in his early years he underwent intellectual influences rather similar to those

that shaped Santayana's mind. Both of them, for instance, read Lucretius in Latin, Dante in Italian and Goethe in German. But after his return to India at the age of twenty, Aurobindo consciously set about indigenising himself. His many-sided synthesis of East and West came to be rooted in the Indian tradition without losing an atmosphere of cosmopolitan humanism.

Sri Aurobindo is best known in academic circles as a political leader turned philosopher. Yet he identified himself as a poet and spent more time on the composition of his epic, *Savitri*, than on his philosophical work. He also made a substantial contribution, like Santayana, to aesthetics and the theory of poetry. As if in reply to Santayana's questions about the affinities between poetry and philosophy, Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Future Poetry*: «The first effort of philosophy is to know for the sake of pure understanding, but her greater height is to take Truth alive in the spirit and clasp and grow one with her and be consciously within ourselves all the reality we have learned to know. But that is precisely what the poet strives to do in his own way by intuition and imagination» (Aurobindo [1997b]: 233).

The fusion of philosophy and poetry suggested here was worked out largely through the writing of *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, as Sri Aurobindo eventually titled the epic that occupied him for significant periods spanning over three decades of the later part of his life, from 1916 to 1950. The stages through which this poem of almost 24,000 lines took shape can be traced in detail through some eight thousand pages of manuscripts and typescripts. But in order to understand the broad lines of its genesis, it will be useful first to situate it in the history of thought and literature by considering its relation to the three works discussed by Santayana and the views of the world to which they correspond.

## 2. GOD, MAN AND NATURE

On one of the first pages of a notebook used by Sri Aurobindo in 1916 to draft his earliest

<sup>2</sup> Goethe is credited with coining the term *Weltliteratur*, declaring the advent of the age of world literature in a conversation in January 1927 (Eckermann [1987]: 211).

known version of *Savitri*, he jotted down these thoughts: «God, Man, Nature, what are these three? Whence flow their divergences? To what ineffable union advances the ever-increasing sum of their contacts?» (Aurobindo [1997a]: 141).

These three terms – “God” or the transcendent, “Nature” or the universal, and “Man” or the individual (in *Savitri* often represented by “the Woman”) – are the basic categories of experience which Sri Aurobindo sets out to harmonise in his philosophy, in his method of spiritual practice (Yoga) and in his poetry. One consequence of this integration is the presence in *Savitri* of features reminiscent of the naturalism of Lucretius, the supernaturalism of Dante and the classical-romantic humanism of Goethe. Sri Aurobindo’s aim being the reconciliation of apparent opposites rather than the one-sided affirmation of a partial vision, each of these standpoints represents a necessary component of a larger synthesis. All three aspects are present from the first draft of *Savitri* as a narrative poem of some eight hundred lines to its final form as an epic of thirty times that length. Much of the story of the genesis and revision of *Savitri* can be understood as a gradual advance in the interpretation of these three factors in existence toward a revelation of the union of humanity with nature and the Divine.

Santayana considered his three philosophical poets, different as they are, to be nonetheless compatible «in what makes them great». He believed not only that «one may admire enthusiastically the poetry of each in turn», as many have done, but «that one may accept the essential philosophy, the positive intuition, of each, without lack of definition or system in one’s own thinking» (Santayana [1910]: 1). For Santayana, «Goethe is the poet of life; Lucretius the poet of nature; Dante the poet of salvation» (Santayana [2015]: 81). Though personally inclined toward a type of naturalism, he held each of these visions to be incomplete without elements provided by the others. He concluded that «what would constitute a truly philosophical or comprehensive poet, would be the union of the insights and gifts which our three poets have possessed». Only such a poet, he ventured, could

«reconstitute the shattered picture of the world» (Santayana [1910]: 84-85). It was just such an integration and reconstitution that Sri Aurobindo attempted in *Savitri*.

### 3. DE RERUM NATURA AND SAVITRI

Lucretius is for Santayana the unrivalled poet of naturalism, defined to include «materialism in natural science, humanism in ethics» (Santayana [1910]: 1-2). *On the Nature of Things* is a poetic presentation of the philosophy of Epicurus, an ethical thinker who taught how to achieve inner tranquillity by rejecting superstition and adopting a simple way of life. The spirit of this system was almost the reverse of the self-indulgent hedonism often associated with the modern use of the word “epicurean”.

But most of Lucretius’s poem is actually devoted not to a systematic treatment of Epicurean ethics, but to the scientific ideas put forward in that system to support its anti-supernaturalism. *De Rerum Natura* contains a detailed account of the material world according to the most advanced theories of the time. We might expect to find little resemblance between such a work and an ostensibly mystical poem. But scientifically accurate descriptions of the universe from the atomic to the cosmic scale, including its evolution from the Big Bang to the quantum revolution, are a recurrent feature of *Savitri*, especially as revised and expanded in the 1930s and 1940s. Lucretius’s declared purpose was to explain «the nature of things» and he showed how far it can be done in poetry – as well as inadvertently exposing some of the pitfalls of the attempt. A similar motive entered increasingly into *Savitri* as the narrative poem grew into a philosophical epic much larger in its plan and varied in its subject matter than originally contemplated.

Acknowledging in *The Future Poetry* the danger of putting «a dressed-up science straight into metre», Sri Aurobindo nevertheless defends the poet’s right to give us not only truth of philosophy or religion, but even «truth of science, provided

he transmutes it [...] and gives us the something more which poetic sight and expression bring» (Aurobindo [1997b]: 230-31). Like Lucretius, he found inspiring material for poetry in the scientific picture of the world. For comparison, here is a translation of a passage in *De Rerum Natura* on the origin of the universe:

*At first it was not possible to see the wheel of the sun soaring aloft with free-flowing light, nor the stars of the spacious firmament, nor sea nor sky nor earth nor air nor indeed anything resembling the things we know. There was only a newly formed, turbulent mass of primary elements of every kind [...] Then the different parts began to separate, and like elements began to unite with like, thus starting the evolution of the world.* (Lucretius [2001]: 149)<sup>3</sup>

The beginning of our world is described in a number of places in *Savitri*. These lines are a typical example:

*At first was laid a strange anomalous base,  
A void, a cipher of some secret Whole,  
Where zero held infinity in its sum [...] A slow reversal's movement then took place:  
A gas belched out from some invisible Fire,  
Of its dense rings were formed these million stars.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 100-101)

Sri Aurobindo shared Lucretius's interest in explaining the nature of things, though he did not confine himself to a naturalistic view of the "things" to be explained. This is shown clearly enough by his choice of a legend containing supernatural elements as the basis for his epic. But supernature, as he understood it, is other-nature and has subtle laws and processes of its own. Contrary to much of the spiritual tradition of India, moreover, the reality and value of physical existence are not denied or minimised in his philoso-

phy and Yoga, but heightened by the prospect of transformation and even divinisation. He often quoted the declaration in the Taittiriya Upanishad that «Matter also is the Brahman [Spirit]» (Aurobindo [2005]: 8).

Sri Aurobindo undoubtedly goes far beyond Epicurean naturalism in his spiritual vision of Nature. But a keen sense of the beauty and magnificence of the world we live in, such as has kept the poetry of Lucretius alive through the ages, is also a constant feature of *Savitri*<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4. THE COMMEDIA AND SAVITRI

When we pass from Lucretius to Dante, over-leaping more than a millennium, we find ourselves in the midst of ideas as far as possible from those of the late Roman Republic. Naturalism has been replaced by supernaturalism as the dominant worldview – indeed, the only one permitted. Lucretius has long been forgotten, though his work was tenuously preserved for the future by a single copy of *De Rerum Natura* lying in the library of a monastery in Germany, where it would be discovered a century after Dante by the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini (Greenblatt [2011]). Epicurus, whom Lucretius had revered, is consigned now to one of the circles of Dante's hell – though another pagan, Virgil, is his guide for much of his journey through the next world.

There are obvious parallels between the *Divine Comedy* and *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo's neo-Vedantic philosophy seems at first sight to have little in common with medieval Christian theology other than a general recognition that there is more to existence than the world we know through our

<sup>3</sup> In assessing Lucretius's influence on *Savitri*, it must be remembered that Sri Aurobindo read *De Rerum Natura* in Latin. The qualities he admired and emulated, the «majestic energy» behind its «splendid digressions into pure poetry» (Aurobindo [1997b]: 35), can scarcely be conveyed by even the best prose rendering.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Aurobindo's epic has been compared to the great works of Dante and Goethe more often than to that of Lucretius. But in an essay on Sri Aurobindo and Dante, Brenda Deen Schildgen remarks in passing that the «intellectual, poetic, and spiritual synthesis» of *Savitri*, besides its Miltonic blank verse and affinities with Dante's *Commedia*, has also «the philosophical and scientific grandeur of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*» (Schildgen [2002]: 93).

senses. Yet Dante undoubtedly provides a major precedent for poetry that ventures into other worlds. The longest section of *Savitri* is «The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds». Here Aswapati ascends and descends through subtle planes of existence to which we do not normally have conscious access – though in dreams perhaps we get glimpses of them. They include regions referred to as heavens and hells. These are not depicted as scenes of reward and punishment, however, but as fields of a greater intensity of experience than our embodied condition ordinarily allows.

These descriptions occur in a part of *Savitri* that took shape mainly from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. During this period the spiritual quest of Aswapati, described in a few pages in early drafts, was expanded to form Part One, the first of three parts, whose nearly 12,000 lines account for almost half of the final text of the epic. But parallels with Dante are not confined to Aswapati's climbing of the world-stair. In Part Three, Savitri follows Satyavan as he is led by the god of death through realms symbolised by night, twilight and day. Structurally the resemblance to Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* is even stronger here than in Part One – though there are few similarities in the detailed description of these domains beyond the general use of imagery of darkness and light. Passages in this part of the poem go back to the earliest manuscripts, suggesting a possible influence of the *Commedia* on the original conception of *Savitri*.

The *Divine Comedy* opens with lines in which the poet, who presents himself as the main character in the story, recalls an acute mid-life crisis:

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura  
ché la diritta via era smarrita.*

*In the middle of the journey of our life, I found myself  
in a dark wood, for the straight path was lost.* (Shaw [2014]: 3)

Sri Aurobindo's epic also begins with a critical moment in the life of the protagonist, summed up at the end of the first canto:

*This was the day when Satyavan must die.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 10)

Dante's journey is said to be that of *our* life, «*nostra vita*», making him a representative of all of us. Similarly, Savitri's state of mind as she anticipates the death of her husband is generalised to reflect upon the human condition:

*An absolute supernatural darkness falls  
On man sometimes when he draws near to God:  
An hour arrives when fail all Nature's means [...]  
That hour had fallen now on Savitri.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 11-12)

The difficult conjunction of poetry and philosophy, Sri Aurobindo pointed out, can be achieved most effectively by focusing on a moment of crisis. Referring to India's best-known philosophical poem, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he commented: «The Gita owes its poetical success to its starting from a great and critical situation in life, its constant keeping of that in view and always returning upon it» (Aurobindo [1997b]: 35). Santayana sheds further light on how such situations help to realise the highest possibilities of the union of philosophy and poetry: «As in a supreme dramatic crisis all our life seems to be focused in the present [...] so for each philosophic poet the whole world of man is gathered together; and he is never so much a poet as when, in a single cry, he summons all that has affinity to him in the universe, and salutes his ultimate destiny» (Santayana [1910]: 5).

## 5. FAUST AND SAVITRI

Half a millennium after Dante, Goethe also begins *Faust* with a crisis in the life of the central personage of the drama, who again represents in some way an aspect of humanity as well as the poet himself. In the few centuries from Dante to Goethe, the Western world has changed as much as it had in the considerably longer period between Lucretius and Dante. The modern mind has rejected the medieval worldview, though it has not found any new foundation in experience



to replace the old certainties of faith. It has been irreversibly enlarged and freed from the authority of irrational tradition and a hierarchical order. The liberated individual has begun to assert himself with a new-found self-confidence.

Momentous as these changes are, the difference between Dante and Goethe should not be exaggerated. Dante's influence is palpable at times in *Faust*, especially in the redemption scene with which it ends. Dante himself had in certain respects transcended his age. One cannot help being struck by his sympathetic portrayal of some of the strong characters he was compelled by medieval moralism to relegate to Inferno. In the early modern period, the Faust tradition grew up around just such a man, whose legendary pact with the devil destined him for damnation until Goethe decided he deserved to be saved.

But Faust is not merely an amoral forerunner of Nietzsche's Übermensch. Goethe contrasts Faust with Mephistopheles. The translator David Luke observes that the «motif of the Devil as cynic, and his dialectical relationship with Faust as romantic or idealist [...] has strong claims to be considered the unifying and integrating theme of the work as a whole» (Goethe [1831]: xx). Mephistopheles introduces himself as «the spirit who always negates» («der Geist, der stets verneint» [Goethe (1963): 47]). His role in the drama is to undermine Faust's idealism which, however faltering at times, is summed up in the latter's words: «To strive continually toward the highest existence» («Zum höchsten Dasein immerfort zu streben» [Goethe (1963): 148]).

In Sri Aurobindo's epic, the spirit of negation takes the form of Death. As the nemesis of human aspirations, Death in *Savitri* plays an analogous role to Mephistopheles in *Faust*, though he is depicted with a cosmic grandeur absent from Goethe's sometimes light-hearted portrayal of his anti-hero. Like Mephistopheles, Death is the ultimate cynic,

*With the ironic laughter of his voice  
Discouraging the labour of the stars.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 634)

Just as Mephistopheles wagers that he can make Faust «lick the dust, and with pleasure» («Staub soll er fressen, und mit Lust» [Goethe (1963): 18]), so Death scorns the hopes and dreams of humanity voiced by Savitri:

*O human face, put off mind-painted masks:  
The animal be, the worm that Nature meant.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 634)

In cantos entitled «The Gospel of Death and Vanity of the Ideal» and «The Debate of Love and Death», Savitri defends her affirmations against the nihilism of this «dark-browed sophist of the universe» (Aurobindo [1993]: 621).

For all the differences between the protagonists of Goethe's poem and Sri Aurobindo's, the two works have in common an interaction between a human individual, striving obscurely or luminously toward the heights, and a nonhuman figure who contradicts this upward effort. Moreover, this feature can be traced back to the earliest versions of both poems.

The fact that *Faust* and *Savitri* both took shape in several stages over a period of decades is perhaps the most interesting similarity between them. One can hardly imagine Goethe scholarship today without the *Urfaust*, though a copy of the manuscript survived only by sheer accident. The two parts of *Faust* itself, in its published form, contain such heterogeneous material that an intelligent reading requires familiarity with its genesis (Entstehung), about which so much has been written. This is partly because, as Sri Aurobindo remarked, Goethe's work «is always an act of reflection of the subjective changes of his personality, a history of the development of his own soul in the guise of objective creation» (Aurobindo [1997b]: 117).

This is also true to some extent of *Savitri*, of which Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1936 that he did not regard it «as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative» (Aurobindo [2004]: 272). The first draft is

dated August 1916 and the last revision was dictated in November 1950, within a month before the author's passing. Thus its composition was spread out over more than three decades. This is a good deal less than the sixty years between Goethe's first and last work on *Faust*. On the other hand, the periods when work on *Savitri* was completely suspended, mainly in the early 1920s and late 1930s, were also fewer and shorter than the interruptions in the writing of Goethe's drama. But in both cases there was time for significant differences in style and content to develop between passages written at various times, some of which coexist side by side in the final work.

Although the manuscripts of *Savitri* go back only to 1916, the legend of Savitri and Satyavan as told in Sanskrit in the *Mahābhārata* had attracted Sri Aurobindo's interest long before that, as is shown by references in essays he wrote around the turn of the century. An associate, Dinendra Kumar Roy, who stayed with Sri Aurobindo for some time in Baroda, even claimed to have seen him working on a poem on the subject during this period. The report is probably due to confusion with the narrative poem *Love and Death*, based on a similar story from the *Mahābhārata*, whose manuscript is dated 1899. But in any case, *Love and Death* has a close relationship to *Savitri*. In both poems a spouse is brought back from the dead after a sojourn in the other world, with the roles of husband and wife interchanged in the two stories. *Love and Death* proves that in his twenties Sri Aurobindo was already fascinated by the possibilities of this theme. That fascination would deepen as time went on. But at first he can hardly have had more than an inkling of where it was leading him.

## 6. THE GENESIS OF SAVITRI

In 1946, thirty years after drafting his first version of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo wrote to a correspondent who had seen passages of it in the 1930s: «You will see when you get the full typescript [*of the first three books*] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length so that it is no

longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then [...] In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem» (Aurobindo [2004]: 279).

This was written halfway through the third and last major stage of his work on the epic, a stage that covered most of the 1940s and included the revision of material that had not been touched for at least twenty-five years. From this vantage point, the poet could look back and comment on how it had started and grown in the previous stages of composition. In a letter written fifteen years earlier, during the second period which extended from around 1927 to 1938, he had already referred retrospectively to the genesis of the poem: «As to *Savitri*, there is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a magnum opus at all. Besides, it would have been only a legend and not a symbol» (Aurobindo [2004]: 261).

We learn from this letter that the present subtitle, «A Legend and a Symbol», was in Sri Aurobindo's mind by the middle of the second stage of composition. Previously it was «A Tale and a Vision». The new subtitle suggests a change of approach not altogether unlike Goethe's more allegorical and symbolic treatment of the Faust material in Part Two of his drama, most of which was written long after the publication of Part One. But Sri Aurobindo never set out merely to retell an old story. This is implied even by the original subtitle and is clear from many features of his creative reworking of the legend. The vision with which he began evidently had a deeper meaning all along.

In the midst of a schedule of serial publication of prose works on a remarkable range of topics that required him every month to turn out a chapter for each of several books, what led him to select the legend of Savitri as the subject for a poem that would eventually occupy so much of his time and energy? An answer to this question can be hazarded if we juxtapose what he chose to utilise, emphasise, omit or alter in the traditional

legend with what we know of his preoccupations at that time. An important source for the latter is his diary, the *Record of Yoga*. Unfortunately, the writing of *Savitri* began during a gap of several months in the diary. Nevertheless, the diary tells us much about Sri Aurobindo's inner life and provides certain kinds of information about his outer activities from 1912 to 1920 and again during most of 1927. Some of what we learn from this source appears directly relevant to his treatment of the Savitri legend. But to be sure of the connections, we must start by identifying the salient themes of the story as he interpreted it.

A study of the structural development of the poem in the early manuscripts yields valuable information. After two or three versions in which the continuity of the narrative is broken only by an occasional blank line, we find it divided first into two more or less equal halves: "Book I", ending with the death of Satyavan, and "Book II", where Savitri follows his soul into other worlds and wins it back. At a later stage these "Books" would become two "Parts", the first called "Earth" and the second "Beyond", each containing several books that would eventually be subdivided into cantos. Ultimately the original two parts were destined to become Parts Two and Three, after some introductory passages in "Earth" were expanded between the late 1920s and the early 1940s into a huge Part One concerned mainly with the spiritual experiences of King Aswapati, Savitri's father, preceding her birth.

But going back to the early version in just two books, we find next a division into six cantos, each with a single word as its title: Love, Fate, Death, Night, Twilight and Day. The first three cantos in this scheme – Love, Fate and Death – relate to events on earth; the others take place against the backdrop of dark, twilight or luminous realms of the beyond. Most of the first canto, Love, is about the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan. In the next canto, Fate, the divine sage Narad reveals that Satyavan is destined to die in a year. The fateful day itself is described in the third canto, Death, up to the moment when Satyavan passes away on Savitri's lap. The remaining cantos – Night, Twilight and

Day – deal, in a sense, with the same themes in reverse order, but this time from the perspective of invisible worlds. Eternal night is Death's own kingdom, where his law is unchallengeable. The twilight of the play of forces behind the veil is the domain of infinite possibilities where Fate can be changed. Finally, the triumph of Love ushers in the transformation symbolised in the last canto by the vision of everlasting day.

What is at issue throughout is the affirmation of the value of life and love against the negation represented by death. In his youthful poem, *Love and Death*, Sri Aurobindo had dealt with this question in a more romantic vein. There it was resolved by a compromise, the lover sacrificing half of his life to restore that of his beloved. In *Savitri*, on the contrary, there is an unconditional victory of the principle of affirmation. This outcome depends on the handling of the term that intervenes between Love and Death in the names of the original cantos. To conquer Death is to alter Fate. But this cannot be done lightly, for it could overturn the existing order of things.

## 7. FATE AND FREEDOM

It is especially with regard to the role of fate in *Savitri* that the *Record of Yoga* sheds light on what attracted Sri Aurobindo in this story. From the first entries in 1909 to the last in 1927, the diary shows his preoccupation with the faculty for which he usually used the Sanskrit term *trikāladṛṣṭi*. Meaning literally «the vision of the three times» or «triple time knowledge» (Aurobindo [1999]: 792, 889), *trikāladṛṣṭi* encompasses «the direct knowledge of the past, the intuitive knowledge of the present and the prophetic knowledge of the future» (Aurobindo [2001]: 1473). What especially interested Sri Aurobindo was the aspect of precognition. He believed the power of foreknowledge to be latent in us and was methodically cultivating it, but he also thought that what is foreseen can under certain circumstances be changed. Working out the implications of the latter possibility was what absorbed him most of all.

The role of *trikāladṛṣṭi* in the Savitri legend is obvious. Satyavan's death is foretold by Narad, whose only function in the story is to make this prediction. The heavenly seer's prevision is infallible and Satyavan dies exactly as foretold. But that is not the end of the matter. For the young woman calmly refuses to accept Death's right to take her husband away. She follows them into other worlds and at last brings Satyavan back.

She achieves this in an utterly different way in Sri Aurobindo's version of the story than in the *Mahābhārata*. Savitri in the ancient Sanskrit epic, for all her strength of character, essentially embodies wifely virtue or, to be more precise, the *dharma* of the *kṣatriya* woman. After Satyavan's death, she leaves her body in trance and comes face to face with Yama. In the Indian tradition, Yama is the god not only of death, but of *dharma*, the social and moral law. He rewards Savitri's learning, eloquence and constancy with boon after boon, including finally her husband's life.

In Sri Aurobindo's poem, on the other hand, the being whom Savitri opposes is «the Spirit of the Void» who claims the world «for Death and Nothingness» (Aurobindo [1993]: 717). Here, too, Death represents law, but primarily the laws of nature and cosmic order, not the moral and social law. As such, he warns her:

*Touch not the seated lines, the ancient laws,  
Respect the calm of great established things.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 651)

Savitri's reply, in a passage dating back to the first draft of 1916, breathes the defiance that, among other qualities, distinguishes Sri Aurobindo's heroine from her ancient namesake:

*I trample on thy law with living feet;  
For to arise in freedom I was born.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 652)

The tone of the utterance calls to mind Sri Aurobindo's background as a leader of an anti-colonial movement to expel foreign rulers from India. But an outward, political liberty is not overtly at issue here. Savitri's dialogue with Death

brings us back to the fundamental question of fate. For fate seems to be the ultimate contradiction of human freedom.

Free will can be denied for two types of reasons. First, the chain of causality can deprive us of all but an illusory freedom, since what we imagine to be our free will is predetermined in ways of which we are unaware. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in *Savitri*:

*All now seems Nature's massed machinery;  
An endless servitude to material rule  
And long determination's rigid chain [...] Annul the claim of man's free human will.  
He too is a machine amid machines.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 20)

Epicurus – and Lucretius following him – had seen long ago that Democritus's atomism led to a mechanistic determinism, undermining the free will required for their ethical system. In what looks like an anticipation of quantum theory, they posited therefore a random «swerve» in the movements of atoms. Whether this helps to restore freedom of the will in any meaningful sense continues to be debated. Be that as it may, it was not in the idea of the «quantum dance» as «a sprawl of chance» (Aurobindo [1993]: 254) that Sri Aurobindo found a liberating way out of the prison of causal determinism.

Besides, he had to deal with another aspect of the free will conundrum, suggested in *Savitri* by lines such as:

*Fate followed her foreseen immutable road.* (Aurobindo [1993]: 465)

Foreknowledge such as Narad's implies that the future is mapped out in advance and cannot be altered any more than the past can. In the history of thought, metaphysical naturalism has always risked swallowing up the freedom of the will in the determinism of the laws of nature, posing the problem that Lucretius's atomic swerve was meant to solve. On the other hand, the supernaturalism of medieval Christianity presented another challenge to the notion of free will

which Dante likewise found himself compelled to address.

The difficulty of what is now called theological fatalism is that divine omniscience must include the knowledge of the future, but what is so foreseen cannot be changed since that would falsify God's prescience. Where, then, is there room for individual freedom of choice? Yet such freedom seems necessary for the moral responsibility on which the justice of the vision of hell, purgatory and heaven depends. Convincingly or not, therefore, Dante does his best to reconcile divine foreknowledge with free will: «Contingent things [...] are all outlined in the eternal gaze, though pre-determination does not follow from this, no more than a boat slipping downstream is driven by the eye in which it is reflected» (Alighieri [1472]: 346).

In Indian thought, the theory of *trikāladṛṣṭi* implies an equivalent of theological fatalism in that it supposes the existence, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, of «a simultaneous eternity of Time in which past, present and future exist together for ever in the self-knowledge and self-power of the Eternal» (Aurobindo [1999]: 886). Meanwhile the influential Sankhya philosophy and the widespread Indian notion of Karma, both of which Sri Aurobindo accepts in some form, seem to entail deterministic views of nature and human action which likewise threaten to rule out free will. Theological fatalism and causal determinism are conceptually distinct, but their consequences for our freedom are similar. In Sri Aurobindo's poem, with its synthesis of naturalism and supernaturalism, the freedom asserted by Savitri has to be vindicated from both standpoints: Satyavan's fate has to be cancelled and the law of death overridden.

The key to Sri Aurobindo's solution lies in his concept of freedom or liberty. In an essay on «Self-Determination», written in 1918 while he was working on an early version of *Savitri*, he explained: «This great indefinable thing, liberty, is in its highest and ultimate sense [...] self living in itself and determining by its own energy what it shall be inwardly and, eventually, by the growth of a divine spiritual power within determining too

what it shall make of its external circumstances and environment» (Aurobindo [1997c]: 624).

This idea of freedom is not unlike the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin's concept of positive liberty, except that Berlin's «freedom as rational self-direction» (Berlin [2005]: 191) is replaced here by freedom as spiritual self-determination. True freedom in this sense, Sri Aurobindo maintains, «is only possible if we live in the infinite, live, as the Vedanta bids us, in and from our self-existent being» (Aurobindo [1997c]: 624). This is what the heroine of his poem means by the freedom for which she declares that she was born. This, perhaps even more than the power of love, is the secret of the strength she brings to her encounter with the cosmic spirit of denial who appears in the form of Death.

#### 8. THOUGHT, WORD AND VISION IN THE WRITING OF SAVITRI

Thousands of pages of manuscripts attest to the fact that Sri Aurobindo's poetic magnum opus did not come into the world fully developed like Athena springing from the head of Zeus. In 1933, halfway through his work on what was by then becoming an epic, he commented on how it had begun: «What I wrote at first was only the first raw material of the *Savitri* I am evolving now» (Aurobindo [2004]: 262). A year later, he remarked that his numerous early recasts of the poem had been made «under the old insufficient inspiration» and that now he was «altogether rewriting it [...] and working on it over and over again with the hope that every line may be of a perfect perfection» (Aurobindo [2004]: 211). The continual expansion of the scope of the poem meant that new books and cantos continued to be added up to 1947. Meanwhile, the reworking of material already written resulted sometimes in as many as fifty versions of a single passage. This constant revision was motivated by considerations of both style and substance.

Style pertains to the wording of the text, as distinct from the content it expresses, which we call

the substance. But separating style from substance is not always easy or even possible. A thought inadequately expressed loses much of its force; this subtly changes and may actually falsify the idea itself. Conversely, a simple perception can be transmuted into an inspired and veridical utterance by the magic of a perfect style. Style is of the utmost importance in poetry, but hardly less so in prose. When pressed to do so, Sri Aurobindo gave sound advice not only to aspiring poets, but also to those who asked him how to improve their prose. His recommendations, such as «avoid over-writing» and «let all your sentences be the vehicle of something worth saying and say it with a vivid precision neither defective nor excessive» (Aurobindo [2004]: 627), apply to the cultivation of what he called an adequate style. But “adequate” designates in his vocabulary only the first and lowest of five levels of style. Nothing short of the highest of these could qualify as the «perfect perfection» he was striving for in *Savitri*.

His terms for the levels surpassing mere adequacy are, in ascending order: effective, illuminative, inspired and inevitable. Sri Aurobindo considered the first three styles – adequate, effective and illuminative – to be possible in prose as well as poetry (Aurobindo [1997b]: 16-17). He reserved the last two levels, the inspired and the inevitable, for poetry on its rarest heights. It is clear from his diary that the cultivation of these intensified powers of expression was for him an integral part of his spiritual self-discipline or «Yoga of self-perfection». The notion of the poetic mind elevating itself to higher and higher levels brings to mind his statement that he «used *Savitri* as a means of ascension» (Aurobindo [2004]: 272). The process of writing the poem is thus connected with its content, since a spiritual ascension from plane to higher plane is one of its central themes.

By the second major stage of the composition of *Savitri*, in which Sri Aurobindo concentrated on Part One, he was treating it as a sort of spiritual autobiography with the Yogi Aswapati serving as a thinly disguised representation of himself. Even the inspiration and other faculties he needed to write the poem are described in a number of places, as in these lines:

*Oft inspiration with her lightning feet,  
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,  
Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind  
Bringing her rhythmic sense of hidden things.*  
(Aurobindo [1993]: 38)

Regarded by Sri Aurobindo as «a field of experimentation» rather than something «to be written and finished» (Aurobindo [2004]: 272), *Savitri* is a poem whose genesis and development are of unusual interest and are inseparable from the evolution of its author’s philosophical vision. Sri Aurobindo’s poet-disciple K.D. Sethna first drew attention to how *Savitri* «moved from its beginning to its final shape across nearly half of the poet’s life like a grander *Faust*» (Sethna [1981]: 424). Fusing this-worldly and other-worldly elements as well as Western and Eastern influences in a vision even more wide-ranging than those of Lucretius, Dante or Goethe, Sri Aurobindo’s epic seems to meet the requirements of a philosophical poem for our global age – an epic such as Santayana imagined, with the ambition to «reconstitute the shattered picture of the world» (Santayana [1910]: 85).

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## Eternal Truth and the Mutations of Time: Archival Documents and Claims of Timeless Truth

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**Abstract.** Philosophical texts regarded as «inspired» present special difficulties for textual editors and intellectual historians that can be mitigated by the study of archival documents. The works of the philosopher and *yogī* Aurobindo Ghose are considered important contributions to twentieth-century Indian literature and philosophy. Some of his followers regard them as inspired and therefore not subject to critical study. Aurobindo himself accepted the reality of inspiration but also thought that inspired texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, contain a temporal as well as an eternal element. Aurobindo's papers are preserved in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, which took shape during the 1970s. Editions of Aurobindo's books published between his death in 1950 and 1977 were issued without consulting his manuscripts, early editions, etc., and therefore contain transmission errors, subjective emendations, etc. The editors of texts issued after 1977 followed the established methodology of textual criticism and so eliminated many obvious errors. Some of Aurobindo's readers refused to accept the new editions, and agitated for the restoration of the earlier texts, going so far as to file legal cases against the editors and the administrators of his ashram or spiritual community. A nuanced approach to the editing of texts regarded by some as inspired must take the sentiments of readers into consideration while insisting on scholarly rigour.

**Keywords.** Aurobindo Ghose, archives, textual editing, biography, inspiration, Indian philosophy, manuscripts, Bhagavad Gita.

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Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is well known in India as a revolutionary politician, a *yogī*, and a spiritual leader. In academic circles in the West, he is best known as the author of books on philosophy, spirituality, and other topics. To members of his *āśram* or spiritual community, he is regarded first and foremost as a divinely inspired seer if not an incarnation of the Divine. I do not propose to examine the origin or applications of this belief. My subject is the special problems that arise when a philosophical author is regarded by his or her readers not just as a thinker and writer but as a divinely inspired sage. This attitude puts special demands on archivists



charged with preserving his manuscripts and editors who produce texts based on these documents.

### 1. REVELATION AND INSPIRATION IN THE WEST AND THE EAST

Before examining the practical problems involved in editing texts that many readers believe to be divinely inspired, I will look briefly at the ideas of revelation and inspiration in two religious traditions: the Judeo-Christian and the Hindu. Jews believe that the Torah was revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that other prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, also were spokesmen of God. Christians accept this idea and add that the apostles were divinely inspired when they wrote the Gospels and Epistles. The apostle Paul wrote to his companion Timothy that all scripture is “God-breathed” (*theopneustos*) (2 Tim 3:16). In the Vulgate this was rendered *divinitus inspirata*, which became “divinely inspired” in English. During the Renaissance the idea of inspiration crossed over from theology into secular literature. French critics Thomas Sébillot (1512–1589) and Pontus de Tyard (c.1521–1605) gave inspiration a central place in their theories of poetics (Holyoake [1972]). Some poets of the Romantic period in England conceived of inspiration as a breath of creative energy that moved the poet’s soul as the wind played upon the strings of an Aeolian harp (Abrams [1957]: 114).

Aurobindo, who was educated entirely in England, was familiar both with the Biblical idea of revelation and Romantic idea of inspiration. After returning to India in 1893, he encountered other, typically Indian, ideas of revelatory or inspired language. Orthodox Hindus believe that the hymns of the Vedas are *apauruṣeya*, «not originating from a person». The *ṛṣis* or «seers» of the hymns did not compose them but perceived them in their pre-existent perfection. All schools of classical Indian philosophy regard the Vedas as *śruti* or inspired «hearing». Philosophical statements that are founded on *śruti* cannot in principle be challenged. Other significant texts are known

as *smṛti*, «that which is remembered». *Smṛiti* comprises the epics, the myths collected in the *Purāṇas*, books of customary law, commentaries on scripture, and other works sanctioned by tradition. In philosophy such works have considerable authority but are not considered infallible.

The distinction observed in Hindu thought between *śruti* and *smṛti* is similar in some respects to the distinction in Catholic theology between scripture and tradition. In both religions the foundational texts—the Vedas, the Bible—are regarded as revelation from a superhuman source. The human recipients of these texts—the *ṛṣis*, the prophets—are looked upon as divinely inspired. In both religions, propositions based on scripture are treated as unchallengeable dogmas. This approach is at odds with that of most post-sixteenth-century European philosophy, which regards no written authority as infallible—though, if we want to be honest, we would have to admit that many followers of thinkers such as Marx and Freud regard them as unquestionable authorities and treat their teachings as dogmas.

In modern India, spiritual leaders are sometimes regarded as latter-day *ṛṣis*, and their works accorded something of the sanctity that is attached to the Vedas. Among those given this treatment are Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886) and Sri Aurobindo. To their followers their words are no less infallible than those of the Vedas. But there are two important differences between those ancient texts and the works of the two modern teachers. First, the Vedas, being unauthored, are their own authority. In contrast, the words of Ramakrishna and Aurobindo are considered authoritative because they are expressions of truths that the teachers perceived while absorbed in spiritual experience. This modern take on the idea of inspiration was popularized by Ramakrishna’s disciple Vivekananda and has become the standard explanation of inspiration among non-traditional Hindus and some Western scholars of religion. The second difference is that the Vedas were preserved by oral transmission for countless generations before being written down. The texts of the two modern teachers are preserved in

books that were published during their lifetimes. Disciples of Ramakrishna wrote down contemporaneous or near-contemporaneous accounts of his talks, which were published in Bengali and translated into other languages. Aurobindo wrote or dictated all of his important works and published many of them during his lifetime. Other works were transcribed from his manuscripts and published after his death.

## 2. AUROBINDO'S IDEAS ABOUT INSPIRATION

Aurobindo never claimed his writings were divinely inspired, but he did believe that inspiration had a role to play in the writing of poetry and prose. In an early (c. 1902) note, not published during his lifetime, he described the characteristics of inspiration:

*There is a sudden exaltation, a glow, an excitement and a fiery and rapid activity of all the faculties; every cell of the body & of the brain feeling a commotion and working in excited unison under the law of something which is not themselves; the mind itself becomes illuminated as with a rush of light and grows like a crowded and surging thoroughfare in some brilliantly lighted city, thought treading on the heels of thought faster than the tongue can express or the hand write or the memory record them.* (Aurobindo [2003]: 268)

This is similar to descriptions of inspiration in the works of Romantic writers such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley (Abrams [1957]: 116-120). Unlike those poets, the young Aurobindo resisted the temptation to ascribe inspiration to a superhuman agency: «The impression we get is that thoughts are being breathed into us, expressions dictated, the whole poured in from outside» but «such an impression is purely sensational. It is always the man's own spirit that is speaking» (Aurobindo [2003]: 269).

Over the three next decades, Aurobindo's ideas about inspiration changed. In *The Future Poetry*, a treatise on poetics first published serially between 1917 and 1920, he wrote: «What we mean by inspiration is that the impetus to poetic

creation and utterance comes to us from a super-conscious source above the ordinary mentality, so that what is written seems not to be the fabrication of the brain-mind, but something more sovereign breathed or poured in from above» (Aurobindo [1997b]: 183). He enlarged on this idea in a letter of 1931: There were, he said, «three elements in the production of poetry: there is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty ... there is, finally, the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet». The most perfect poetry came «when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital [the life-force] ... while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives» (Aurobindo [2004]: 6). This sounds rather like the Vedic idea of inspiration: something pre-existent that expresses itself without human intervention. But Aurobindo clarified that it was «not necessary to presuppose anything of the kind to explain the phenomena of inspiration». Inspired poetry comes into being through contact between «the human instrument» on the one hand and «the source of inspiration» on the other (Aurobindo [2004]: 7).

Aurobindo described the writing of philosophy in similar terms. In a note of 1942 he wrote that the first source of his philosophy was his reading of the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the Vedas. This reading was not passive: «I tried to realize what I read in my spiritual experience», he explained. The other source of his philosophy «was the knowledge that flowed from above when I sat in meditation, especially from the plane of the Higher Mind when I reached that level». The ideas from this Higher Mind «came down in a mighty flood which swelled into a sea of direct Knowledge always translating itself into experience, or they were intuitions starting from experience and leading to other intuitions and a corresponding experience» (Aurobindo [2006]: 113). Here again he made it clear that the writing was a joint production of intuitive knowledge from higher planes of consciousness and his human intellect.

### 3. PHILOSOPHICAL TRUTH AND HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY

In *Essays on the Gita* (1922), a discursive commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Aurobindo wrote that there was undoubtedly «a Truth one and eternal» that was the source of all other truth but that this Truth could not be «shut up in a single trenchant formula». Every scripture contained «two elements», one «eternal and imperishable and applicable in all ages and countries», the other «temporary, perishable, belonging to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced». And this temporal element was itself «subject to the mutations of Time»: the minds that transmitted the ideas over the course of the years were «always leaving old expression and symbol for new» or, if they used the old, they completely changed their connotations and associations and thus the contemporary understanding of the text (Aurobindo [1997a]: 4).

Few modern critics would accept the idea that there is a single eternal or universal truth. Most would, however, concede that every philosophical text is an attempt to express ideas or experiences that are valid for a group or society or even humanity as a whole. On the other hand, virtually all modern critics would accept the idea that texts are historically contingent. They are produced at a given time by a given author (or group of authors), who exist within a particular historical framework: what Edmund Husserl called the *Bewußtseinshorizont* or «consciousness horizon» (Kwan [2004]: 316-317). The mind of every author is the product of a particular upbringing in a particular region or regions; he or she speaks a particular language or languages, reads certain sorts of books, writes for certain sorts of reader, exists within a particular cultural milieu. All this, again, is evident to textual and literary critics but it may be ignored or rejected by readers in thrall to naïve ideas of inspiration.

Many of Aurobindo's readers are in thrall to such ideas. There are several reasons for this. One, alluded to above, is the tendency of readers of spiritual literature to apply ancient notions of rev-

elation and inspiration to modern figures: if the ancient ṛṣi Vashishta «saw» the hymns of the seventh book of the *Rg Veda*, then Aurobindo, a modern ṛṣi, saw the verses of the poem *Savitri*. Another reason is a misapplication of Aurobindo's ideas about inspiration and intuition as expressed in passages like those cited in the previous section. In one passage he said that his philosophical writings were expressions of «knowledge that flowed from above». If readers stopped there they might feel justified in thinking that Aurobindo claimed to be a pure channel of divine truth. But (as the full passage shows) he maintained that the «human instrument», that is, his own mind and life-energy, was needed to give verbal form to the inspirations and intuitions he received. The passage from *Essays on the Gita* cited in the present section shows that he believed that every text, even if it gave expression to eternal truths, belonged in part «to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced» and was subject to «the mutations of time».

Aurobindo never claimed that his writings constituted a «scripture» in the way the *Bhagavad Gītā* is a scripture, but he would have acknowledged that his writings, like the *Gītā*, consisted of two elements: one striving to give expression to eternal truths, the other historically contingent. This historicity is evident when we study his oeuvre as a whole. The essays he wrote as a student in England clearly belong to the late Victorian period. His final essays, written more than a half-century later, incorporate a lifetime of spiritual practice and philosophical thinking in India. The historicity of Aurobindo's writings also is evident when we compare different versions of a given text, say the version of *The Life Divine* published serially between 1914 and 1919 and the book edition of 1939-1940. But it is most evident when we study his manuscripts.

### 4. AUROBINDO'S MANUSCRIPTS AND THE QUESTION OF INSPIRATION

Aurobindo's handwritten manuscripts show he made few corrections during the first writ-

ing of his drafts. This may be taken as a sign of inspiration in the ordinary sense of the term: a free flow of ideas onto the page. But the manuscripts provide no evidence of supernatural inspiration as a naïve reader might imagine it: taking down dictation from a higher source with no sign of hesitation or need of revision. In fact they provide abundant evidence of authorial labour: correction, revision, re-revision, multiple versions of texts. Unlike the unauthored, impersonal Vedas, Aurobindo's manuscripts show signs of personality right down to the cancellation marks and ink blots.

What do these documents tell us about his writing process? First they make it clear that there *was* a process. The manuscripts of many works include first drafts, which show signs of correction while writing and revision afterwards; subsequent drafts, transcribed by Aurobindo or another, most of them revised; press materials, such as galley and page proofs, corrected by press workers and later by Aurobindo; printed texts in various editions, some of them revised by hand; and later editions produced by editors with or without the help of manuscript materials. None of this will be surprising to anyone familiar with the process of producing a book. It *has* however proved surprising to those who have a Vedic, Romantic, or naïve view of inspiration.

The second thing the manuscripts reveal is that the texts they represent exist in history. Each manuscript provides direct or indirect evidence of the date or period of its production. This allows the textual scholar establish historical relationships between it and other manuscripts and texts. These include (1) the relationship between the document in question and other documents pertaining to the same text, (2) the relationship between the document in question and documents pertaining to other texts in Aurobindo's oeuvre, and (3) the relationship between Aurobindo's texts and the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. All this is the stock-in-trade of textual criticism and historical literary studies. How does it apply to texts that are considered by their readers to be revealed or inspired and therefore outside history?

## 5. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM ARCHIVES

Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts are held by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, in Pondicherry, India. Before discussing the practices of the Archives' editors and the special problems they face in handling the texts of a writer many consider to be inspired in the Vedic, Romantic, or naïve sense, I will sketch its history.

When Sri Aurobindo died in 1950 responsibility for his manuscripts passed to his secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta and one or two others who had helped him with his literary work during his lifetime. These men looked on the manuscripts as precious artefacts, as records of Aurobindo's thought, and as possible sources of unpublished writings. They treated them with special care but did little to protect them from India's hot-wet tropical climate. An attempt to safeguard some specially prized manuscripts ended in disaster when the plastic sleeves they were encased in decomposed in the summer sun. Some attempts were made to photograph manuscripts using ordinary cameras, but this was done primarily to produce facsimiles for souvenir publications and not as part of a program of photographic documentation.

Early efforts to exploit Aurobindo's manuscripts for posthumous publication were unsystematic. Some manuscripts were consulted for current projects, such as the first edition of his epic poem *Savitri* (1950-51). Others were examined in the hope of finding a poem or essay that had not been published during Aurobindo's lifetime. These new texts were transcribed from a single manuscript version and published in ashram journals without methodical verification. Editions of Aurobindo's books published after his death were, for the most part, reproductions, with minor editorial interventions, of texts as that had appeared in journals or books during his lifetime. Between 1970 and 1973 the first collected edition of Aurobindo's works was published in 29 volumes. The texts in this edition consisted, by and large, of recomposed versions of texts that

had previously appeared in print. No systematic editing was carried out apart from the imposition of a consistent house style. The last volume to be issued, the *Supplement* (1973), comprised material from manuscripts and printed material that had not been included in the main series. This volume was edited by the staff of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, which had been established the same year.

The director of the collected edition, a long-time disciple of Aurobindo's named Jayantilal Parekh, had been trying to set up an archives for some time. Between 1971 and 1973 he recruited several people to help him with the three tasks he wished to undertake: to preserve Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts and printed texts, to get them microfilmed, and to catalogue them and publish writings that remained unpublished. In January 1973 he sent a formal proposal to Mirra Alfassa (Aurobindo's French spiritual collaborator and the head of the ashram), who approved it. Parekh then organized his existing workers in three sections, one concerned with physical preservation, one with microfilming and photography, and one with cataloguing the holdings and editing texts. I was an original member of the Archives' editorial staff, and the account that follows is based on my own experience.

Around 1975, Gupta began to release Aurobindo's manuscripts to Parekh. He passed them on to me, asking me to look through and organize them with the idea of getting them microfilmed. He also asked me to keep my eyes out for writings that had not been published. I began by placing the manuscripts in six subject groups and arranging the items in each group chronologically. Then I and others carried out a full descriptive inventory, going through each notebook and set of loose sheets to identify the contents, determine the structural and chronological relationships between texts, and find out what had and had not been published. Bowing to pressure from editors of journals connected with the Ashram, we prepared texts of a few unpublished pieces for publication; but it soon became clear that a more systematic approach was needed. Before produc-

ing an acceptable text we had to collect all pertinent material, establish a rough chronological sequence, determine the latest or the most well-developed version, transcribe it carefully, check and recheck the transcriptions, and only then send it to the press. In doing all this we relied on common sense and our knowledge of Aurobindo's writing habits. Later we broadened our outlook by studying authorities on textual criticism such as Greg [1950/1951], Brack and Barnes [1969], and Gaskell [1978]. In 1977 we launched a semi-annual journal, *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, in which we published new and corrected versions of writings by Aurobindo along with biographical documents and notes on biography, bibliography, and textual editing.

## 6. SPECIAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE ASHRAM ARCHIVES

Most of the problems faced by the Archives' staff are identical to those encountered daily by archivists in other parts of the world: finding ways to protect the papers while keeping them available for use, determining the most appropriate methods of reprography and carrying them out in a systematic way, and learning how to organize the manuscripts and prepare them for publication. Special problems arise owing to the veneration Aurobindo is held by his admirers (known locally as «devotees»), many of whom believe that everything he wrote—from philosophical texts and poems to brief notes and jottings—was supernaturally inspired. In the sections that follow I deal with such problems in four areas of archival and literary practice: editorial methods (6.1); access to archives (6.2); canon creation (6.3); and biographical writing (6.4).

### 6.1 Editorial methods

The primary responsibility of people who edit the texts of established authors is to produce editions that represent their final intentions and are free from errors that may have crept in during

the process of textual transmission. To be able to do this, the editors must know how the author worked. Aurobindo's papers reveal he wrote drafts by hand and, occasionally, by typewriter, sent copies typed by himself or others to the press where they were typeset and proof-read, and corrected author's proofs and gave his approval for final printing. All this is standard procedure for books published during the pre-computer era. Accordingly the methods developed by bibliographers and textual editors such as Greg, Brach and Barnes, and Gaskell for books of this era are generally suitable for Aurobindo's books as well.

The first thing the editors of a book that exists in various forms must do is choose a «copy-text», that is, the version on which the new edition will be based. The second step is to collate other significant versions—from early drafts to late editions—with the copy-text and note variant readings. In producing editions of works published during Aurobindo's lifetime, we generally chose as copy-text the last edition in which he played an active role. In this way we were sure to include his final revisions and to avoid errors and unauthorized changes introduced by editors who brought out posthumous editions. (Each posthumous edition was recomposed by hand from the immediately preceding edition and in each typesetters, proofreaders, and editors made unintentional and intentional changes.) We also consulted earlier versions, including handwritten manuscripts if available, to make sure that those who typed copies of Aurobindo's drafts, and typeset and proof-read his final versions, did not introduce errors he failed to notice while reading proofs. We found that each successive version contained transmission errors. In our editions we removed all such errors as well as unnecessary editorial changes.

For works that exist only in manuscript, we compared all drafts and fair copies, determining the version that best represented his final intentions and transcribing it. If the version we chose was the same as the one earlier editors had chosen, we sometimes discovered they had made transcription errors. (They were experts in reading Aurobindo's handwriting but did not think it

necessary to check and recheck their transcriptions.) If the version we chose was *not* the same as theirs—a common occurrence, since they often were unaware that there were variant versions of many items—the text we published was of course fundamentally different from theirs.

When we published our editions, we included tables of variant readings in which we pointed out the differences between our versions and earlier ones. This is where our problems began.

Most of Aurobindo's readers may be described as conservative. This means in practical terms that they are attached to the editions they first read. If a reading in a new edition differed from a reading in their favoured edition, they often assumed that someone had corrupted the master's inspired text. If we pointed out that the «new» readings were what Aurobindo had originally written as attested by his manuscripts or earlier editions and that the readings they were familiar with were transcription errors committed by others, they often raised objections. How could there be errors in an inspired text? Had not Aurobindo approved it for publication? Had not his own disciples done the transcribing and proof-reading? When such readers went through our lists of textual differences, they did not examine them in the light of textual history but insisted that the readings they were familiar with were correct or else chose one reading over another on the basis of personal preference.

These disagreements in editorial methodology soon grew into a public controversy. Some devotee-readers complained about the new editions to the Ashram's trustees and agitated against the Archives' editors, circulating leaflets filled with catchy slogans and crude drawings but no rational argumentation. Some went so far as to file court cases against the Archives' editors and Ashram's trustees. One of these cases went all the way to the Supreme Court of India, which dismissed it.

## 6.2 Access to archives

Almost every textual scholar and historian has had the experience of wanting to consult a document but not being able to get access to it. There

may be many reasons for this failure: the document may have been lost or misplaced, it may be regarded as too fragile for consultation, it may be considered sensitive or liable to be misuse, or it may be withheld by a family or institution for unstated reasons. Having had such experiences while doing research, an archivist is likely to want to provide fairly open access to documents under his or her care. But this may not always be possible or desirable.

Between 1950 (when Sri Aurobindo died) and 1973 (when the Archives took shape) Aurobindo's manuscripts were accessible to almost no one but his secretaries. If anyone else was given access it was for a specific purpose and for a limited period of time. After the majority of documents had been transferred to the Archives, the people involved in preservation, reprography and editing had almost unrestricted access to documents they were interested in. At this time the Archives did not have a purpose-built cold storage room, and the documents were kept either in locked cabinets in the Archives office (if they were considered especially important), or in cabinets in another site (if considered less important). The only record of consultation was an informal handwritten notebook. After the documents were shifted to the cold storage room the notebook was replaced by a formal log.

When the documents were being kept in the Archives office, members of the ashram and outside visitors often asked to see them out of simple curiosity or to satisfy their devotional impulses. This practice, which endangered the manuscripts and created a great deal of disturbance, was stopped as soon as possible. Access was restricted to those who had an apparently legitimate interest in the texts. Sometimes this policy opened the way to disturbances of a different sort. Admirers of older editions of Sri Aurobindo's books came to our door and asked why such and such a word had been changed. We typically replied that the earlier reading was not in accord with Aurobindo's manuscripts or revised editions. Sometimes such visitors demanded to see the original documents. Occasionally we complied but generally were sor-

ry if we did. In one case that I will not soon forget a visitor who was shown a text that Aurobindo had altered between the lines in pencil, declared: «How do I know that that is Sri Aurobindo's handwriting.» «Well,» we answered, «because it *is* his handwriting and this *is* his copy of the book...». This did not satisfy our amateur textual critic, who went away in an agitated state. Fortunately he didn't have an eraser in his hands when he was given access to the document.

### 6.3 Canon creation

During the lifetime of an author, the canon of his or her writings consists of the works he or she chose to publish. After the author's death, his or her executors are likely to discover unpublished writings that may seem worthy of publication. The author's readers will be eager to see the new material, and will press the executors to issue them as soon as possible. The executors then will have to decide which of these writings should be published immediately and which held for later consideration. Their decisions may have a considerable effect on the nature of an author's canon. One has only to think of the published corpus of Wittgenstein, which, at the time of his death consisted only of the *Tractatus* and some notes and essays circulated among his admirers, but soon included the *Philosophical Investigations* and other works that altered his place in Western philosophy.

Aurobindo's canon at the time of his death consisted of one major work of philosophy, *The Life Divine*; a number of other prose works of various lengths; a body of poems, including the epic *Savitri*; a large number of letters; and some miscellaneous writings. Between 1950 and 1970 his secretaries transcribed and issued dozens of unpublished essays, poems, plays, letters and other works, first in journals and later in books. There was little problem finding a place for these writings in Aurobindo's corpus. Longer ones were published as separate texts, shorter ones added to existing collections. But the new books were put together by people who did not have access to Aurobindo's manuscripts. As a result the versions

chosen for publication were not always the last ones Aurobindo wrote.

After 1970 the staff of the Archives found among Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts many unpublished essays and poems, some existing in multiple versions; drafts and notes related to published and unpublished works; a large number of letters; and a spiritual diary the existence of which had hitherto been known only to one or two persons. After we had completed an inventory of published and unpublished works, we had to decide which works should be published and in what form they should be issued. We conceived our semi-annual journal as a supplement of the 1970-73 collected edition, publishing new works in it with the idea of adding them later to existing volumes. But soon it became evident that we had to carry out a complete revamping of Aurobindo's collected works. All of them needed to be reedited. The collections of shorter materials had to be enlarged and rearranged.

The Archives' rearrangement of Aurobindo's works was governed by two considerations: genre and publication history. The genres or types of writing we selected included philosophical prose, literary prose, political writings, poems, plays, translations, letters, and autobiographical material. The categories created with reference to publication history were pieces published during Aurobindo's lifetime and pieces published posthumously. If a collection contained writings of both types, we placed them in separate sections and ordered the writings within each section by date. This new arrangement became the basis of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, the first volume of which was issued in 1997.

The complete works constitute a new Aurobindo canon. The main addition was his diary, *Record of Yoga*, which extends in printed form to more than 1400 pages. This is a completely different sort of writing than the works he wrote for the general public and the letters he wrote to his disciples. Before publishing it, the director of the Archives sought the advice of senior members of the Ashram, who approved its publication. This did not prevent conservative readers from complaining that

the diary should never have been published, since it showed a side of Aurobindo they were not familiar with. They argued that if Aurobindo had wanted it to be published he would have published it himself. (The same argument apparently did not apply to the dozens of poems, letters, and essays published after Aurobindo's death.) Fortunately the Ashram authorities did not believe it was their duty to shape Aurobindo's canon according to their preconceptions. With one or two exceptions, all his significant writings found a place in the *Complete Works*.

#### 6.4 Biographical writing

From the beginning, one of the archive's tasks was to gather biographical documents connected with Aurobindo's life and times. In pursuit of this goal I collected biographical material from archives and libraries in New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Vadodara, London, Paris, and other places. Our first concern was to compile an accurate chronology of his life. Later we published some biographical documents with explanatory notes in the Archives' journal. Still later I published a number of articles on his life and career in various research journals. Eventually I wrote and published a brief biography and laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive one.

Here, as with new editions of texts and additions to the canon, the reception of the work depended mainly on the way it accorded with established notions. If the documents added detail to the received account of Aurobindo's life, all was well. If they seemed to cast doubt on something Aurobindo was supposed to have said or done, the reaction was likely to be stormy.

It is a tenet of biographical research that primary documents contemporaneous with the event are considered more authoritative than secondary reports, even those produced by the subject himself. But what if the subject is considered by many to be an inspired sage? There are no contemporary documents concerning Aurobindo's birth, but it is generally agreed he was born in the house of a friend of his father's in Calcutta. In 1949, when he was seventy-seven, he told a press representative



that the house in question was located on Theatre Road in Calcutta. Contemporary documents show that Aurobindo's father's friend actually lived in a house on South Circular Road at the time of Aurobindo's birth. Since Aurobindo left the house as a babe in arms and spent his entire youth in northern Bengal and England, he could hardly be considered an expert in the matter. When I noted this in an article, conservative readers accused me of saying that I knew more about Aurobindo's life than he did. He explicitly said he was born in a house on Theatre Road, and that was the end of the matter!

Turning to a more significant example, thirty years after leaving the political arena, Aurobindo wrote that, when he was threatened with deportation in 1909, he published «a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out» (Aurobindo [2006]: 63). While researching this period in the archives of the state of West Bengal, I found that the governor of the British province of Bengal dropped the idea of deporting Aurobindo several days before Aurobindo's article was published. Aurobindo had no way of knowing this and, when no deportation order was passed, he had grounds to conclude that his article had had something to do with it. When I pointed out that archival documents showed his conclusion was unfounded, some people declared that I was saying that Aurobindo had made a false statement—something an inspired sage could never do.

Despite the obvious perils involved in writing about Aurobindo's life, I continued my biographical research. Then, after thirty years of study and writing, I published a critical biography, in the course of which I made several statements that were not in accord with the accepted version of Aurobindo's life. The biography was fairly well received in academic circles in India and abroad. Among Aurobindo's devotees it created an enormous uproar. Before long, two civil and three criminal cases had been filed against me. One of

them resulted in a «temporary injunction» against publication of the book in India that is still in force twelve years later.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS: THE POLITICS OF ARCHIVAL PRACTICE

I have touched on a number of problems the editors of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives have faced over the last 47 years. In themselves the problems are scholarly, involving matters of archival and historiographical practice, but all have «political» overtones, involving beliefs and assumptions of groups who are on opposite sides of a question. I have called a section of Aurobindo's readers conservative. The positions taken by the members of the Archives are for the most part liberal: they favour freedom of research and objective standards of editing, research and writing. But there is an irony here. The attachment of «conservative» devotees to the editions they are familiar with stands in the way of their accepting editions that restore the original readings of Aurobindo's manuscripts and printed texts. Viewed in this way the «liberal» editors of the Archives are in fact more conservative than the «conservative» devotees. It might be better to call such devotees reactionary or — when they resort to organized pressure to impose their ideas — fundamentalist.

Given the ostensible conservatism of many Ashram members, it is somewhat surprising that the Ashram authorities set up an archives with well-maintained collections that has sponsored long-term research and publication projects. This came about because the founder of the Archives had a strong, if vague, idea that an institution of this sort was needed. He convinced those in authority to sanction his proposal, managed to find young people who were willing to do the work required, and defended them when the going got rough. Opposition came from devotees who were unwilling to believe that there was any need to follow standard editorial procedures to produce printed editions of Aurobindo's works.

This belief was linked to another one: that the writings of Sri Aurobindo were inspired expressions of superhuman knowledge.

I have shown that Aurobindo himself believed that some writings are inspired but that even the greatest examples of spiritual inspiration, such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, have two sides: one that gives expression to eternal truths, the other one subject to the mutations of time. He felt that some of his writings came from a source above the mind but he also made it clear that the influx from this source had to pass through his intellect and vital force before it could take verbal form. His manuscripts show that he worked on his writing the way every serious writer does—writing, rewriting, revision, and further revision. It has been the responsibility and the privilege of the archivists of the Ashram to ensure that the fruits of this authorial labour are preserved in the best editions possible

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## Dissonances of a Modern Medium. Alienating and Integrating Aspects of Photography

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**Abstract.** Does photography in its various facets lead to alienation or integration? This article is based on a Eurasian survey among photography students from India and Europe. After working definitions of the central terms, it looks at aspects that students have mentioned in connection with alienation – including the view of photography as a barrier or intruder and the adoption of an external perspective on the own culture through photography, up to an individual escape through photography. With regard to integration, photography can open the gates to new experiences and allow growth and identity work, offer a common form of expression and go hand in hand with empathy and knowledge, which matches some aspects of Indian art theory. All in all, the answers of the Indian and European students were quite similar. It turns out that the more reflected people are about photography, the more they can benefit from it.

**Keywords.** Photography, alienation, integration, mindfulness, experience, empathy, memory, identity.

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If you have ever ambitiously taken pictures of an event, for example, a wedding ceremony, a sports competition, or a carnival procession, you will probably be familiar with a feeling of not fitting in. The camera prevents actual participation, it makes you an outsider. On the other hand, photography can help in various ways to involve the photographer in what is happening in front of his lens. In the following, I explore the role of photography as an alienating and integrating medium and thus show some of photography's individual and social risks and opportunities. Photography itself is a relatively misleading term, as it can both imply an action, as well as the product of an action, a job or a hobby. «I like photography» may mean that someone enjoys taking pictures, is into photo modelling, likes looking at photographs or appreciates photography as an artistic expression. In the following I am mostly referring to the action, the “doing photography”, both as a photographer or photographed. However, occasionally the focus is more on the product. The various sides are even more difficult to distinguish as nowadays the roles

of photographer, model, and recipient are often mixed, especially in the case of social media.

## 1. THE BASIC CONCEPTS

Even though it is impossible to give a comprehensive assessment of these terms in an article, a few aspects should be examined here. It is striking that in psychological and sociological literature the terms are often used without any previous definition. Apparently, it is often assumed that they are so commonly used in everyday language that they require no further explanation.

### *Alienation*

Alienation comes etymologically from the Latin verb “alienare” which means “to make something another’s, to take away, to remove”. It shares the root with “alius” which can be translated as “other”.

An original association of “alienare” refers to the sale of objects. A second traditional use, which also has its roots in Latin, refers to mental disorders, «in connection with the state of unconsciousness, and the paralysis or loss of one’s mental powers or senses» (Schacht [2015]: 2). The third original use sees the term in the context of interpersonal estrangement. At this point, a process component comes into play. The second and third use were taken up by the humanistic psychologist Erich Fromm, who has worked on the phenomenon. To him, alienation is a type of experience in which the person concerned experiences him/herself as a stranger: he/she has lost contact with him/herself and is isolated from other people (Fromm [1955]: 88). In philosophy, there are innumerable evaluations of the term, which are often connected with the fact that man is no longer “himself”. The term is particularly present in relation to the theory of Karl Marx, who used the German equivalent “Entfremdung”, which literally means “to make something strange” or “foreign”. Marx’s theory assumes that capitalism leads to dehumanizing conditions in connection with

the extreme division of labour typical for this economic system (see Lévy [2002]: 110). Even though Marx is not thought of as a romanticist (for connections see Mah [1986]), there is a similarity to romanticism and “Sturm und Drang”, which stress the aspect of a former wholeness that has been lost due to the industrialization and its mindset which stresses rationality. Romanticism did not only envision that human reason and emotions should be reconciled, but also that people should be comprehensively educated (see Jaeggi [2013]: 14), thus, be able to see connections between various aspects of life and thus experiences it in a holistic way. Looking at today’s differentiated educational system and the amount of knowledge gathered, holistic education is increasingly difficult. Following this line of thought, we may be all alienated: we cannot achieve a holistic perspective on the world.

Besides labour and education, we are constantly confronted with one more fundamental source of alienation: our language needs a transformation of “inner” thoughts into “outer” words. The characteristic that defines us as human beings therefore already contains alienation. However, one has to be aware of the danger of the spoken word, the threat that it puts itself in the place of living experience (see Lévy [2002]: 109). The example of language as an alienation already shows proximity to photography which occasionally has been described as a language: «Ultimately, photography is a language, and the craft is comparable to the grammar on which a language is based» (Schuchard [2005]: 7).

Another area, in which alienation plays a role and that is associated with photography is art. Here, alienation is often assumed to be a fundamental characteristic, «“alienation” looms large in book reviews and literary criticism» (Kaufmann [2015]: xxxii f.) The artist is understood as someone who is unconsciously or intentionally distancing him/herself from society and eventually prevents him/her from feeling consistent. Kaufman mentions Goethe as a famous example who rebelled against the establishment and had his Faust proclaim «two souls, alas, are dwelling in

my breast». Beethoven's seclusion and Mozart's breaches of morals are further impressive examples that refer to alienation. But also recent artists like Jeff Koons often appear to be different from society and their sometimes radical works do not fit in, which can be understood as a clever move or as an essential characteristic. One may argue that alienation is linked to creativity, which has been identified as psychologically beneficial (see Schuster [2020]: 5). Yet, the artistic personality, occasionally associated with extreme subjectivity and isolation, is often imagined as tragic and sometimes even self-destructive (see Reitz [2000]: 33), thus, often as psychologically unstable, which leads back to Erich Fromm's work on the phenomenon.

As a result of all these aspects, the working definition for the present article is that alienation can be defined as the feeling of not being whole, not being part of something or not fitting in. Furthermore, alienation is a typical characteristic of human existence and at this point. However, it should be stressed that at this point, I do not want to evaluate it, whether it has to be understood as negative or potentially positive.

### *Integration*

The Latin term "integratio" means the restoration of a whole, as well as renewal. It is linked to "integer" and "intact" and consequently has positive connotations. Just like alienation, integration is something that can be understood both as a process and as the result of a process.

Integration refers to the relationship to a superordinate whole, a «continuous alignment» (Baiden et al [2003]: 235) of various aspects, in which collaboration and cohesion play a role. The term is often used in socio-cultural contexts: unlike "exclusion" and "separation", it refers to the process of acculturation (see Boski [2008]), of growing together, or to the result of having become one. Thus, integration fulfils an inherent human need (see Deci and Ryan [1991]). The integration of other people with other cultural backgrounds is often associated with the acquisition of similar values, languages, and economic

well-being (see Mohammad-Arif [2008]: 327). In the context of integration, empathy often plays a fundamental role, defined as the «understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and variously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another» (Merriam-Webster), thus implying a connection.

Similar to alienation, integration can be understood not only on a social level but also with regard to the individual psyche and body. According to the APA Dictionary, «the integration of personality denotes the gradual bringing together of constituent traits, behavioural patterns, motives, and so forth to form an organized whole that functions effectively and with minimal effort or without conflict» (APA) and is seen in connection with mental well-being. Especially in humanistic psychology, integration plays an important role: people are striving for self-realization, which is seen as the realization of abilities, talents or missions and as a tendency towards unity within the personality. Here, integration is understood in the sense of inner consistency, but also of mutual connectedness (see Hartman [1959]).

For Carl Gustav Jung, people are motivated to achieve greater integration by what he meant increasing the recognition of unconscious processes, increasing self-acceptance and responsibility, and becoming more compassionate (see also Young-Eisendrath [2008]: 245) — aspects that strongly remind on Fromm's concept of self-love (1955). This context also links to practices like meditation and mindfulness whose effectiveness has been scientifically confirmed: «Brain-imaging studies have shown that mindfulness meditation could alter the structure and function of the brain and produce greater blood-flow in areas associated with attention and emotional integration» (Tobert [2017]: 28). As a working definition for our context, integration means being or/and feeling connected with others, but also understanding and accepting oneself as a consistent, "whole" being.

However, alienation and integration are not necessarily opposites, especially since they can take place at different levels: physical integration, for example, does not necessarily have to go hand-

in-hand with emotional integration, but often both are related.

In the following, we will explore how both aspects of alienation and integration play a role in photography.

## 2. THE RESEARCH

This research is based on two written anonymous surveys, conducted in India and the German-speaking countries. Both surveys had identical questions. Apart from demographic data I asked whether they would experience photography as integrating or alienating and why. Further, I suggested giving an ethical evaluation, which was done by around two thirds who mostly just wrote that it would be «*alright*» or «*an interesting topic*», and in some cases, participants asked to be informed about the results. The first survey was conducted with 50 photography respectively media students from India, age 18-29, 44 of them male due to the much larger number of men studying photography in India. They were studying either at Ajeenkya DY Patil University or the Indian Institute of Photography. All of them identified themselves as “Indian”. The second survey was conducted with 32 photography or media students from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, age 20-53 (most of them 20-30), among them 17 female and 15 male, either studying at the University of Applied Sciences Trier, the German POP or the Fotoakademie Köln. They identified as “German”, “Austrian”, “Swiss”, or simply put “European”. These two geographical and cultural areas were selected as photography looks back upon different histories: it was invented in the so-called “West”, whereas in India, it at first came as a technology used by colonialists—even though it was soon adopted by Indians (see Pinney [2008]: 176), pictures by the British dominated for a while. An open survey was chosen to give the participants the chance to freely put down their thoughts and in both cases had a lot of time to do so. As already supposed, the answers given referred to different levels. However, most participants — especially from the German-

speaking countries — stressed positive aspects, which can be attributed to the fact that it would cause cognitive dissonance to specialize in a field that they consider as problematic. Some research suggests that Indians might be able to better cope with cognitive dissonance (see Jerrentrup [2011]), which might explain the difference. The answers given were clustered with the help of content analysis, «a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a dataset» (Joffe [2011]: 209). Content analysis suits the topic as it not tied to a particular theory and serves as a useful tool to highlight the process of social construction (see Joffe [2011]: 211). Various patterns of meanings could be identified by the use of similar words, expressions, and in a few cases, personal examples of the participants had to be interpreted accordingly. When drawing such categories it is undeniable that—being familiar with the photographic theory and at the same time being a participant observer (see Altheide [1987]) — there were some preconceived assumptions. Yet, there were also unexpected clusters. Thus, the method matches David Altheide’s “ethnographic content analysis”, which «consists of reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection [...] and interpretation. [...] Although categories and “variables” initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study» (Altheide [1987]: 68). In this study, content analysis is also meant to bridge qualitative respectively interpretative and quantitative data (see Neuendorf [2017]: 10). Here, however, the quantity is not of the same relevance as the meanings of the answers given, e.g. as by chance, certain aspects might or might not have been on the participants’ minds when answering the survey.

## 3. ALIENATION THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

When looking at photography, we are again dealing with a concept that can be understood on different levels: as initially mentioned, photography refers to a general activity such as a hobby or a profession, to a concrete process, but also

the result of this process or the totality of photographic images. Thus, various ways of understanding photography can be linked to various perspectives on alienation and integration. Furthermore, photography includes various subjects: The photographer, the person in front of the camera, the recipient – just to name the most widely acknowledged, but there can be also stylists and designers etc.. Thus, the perspectives on alienation and integration can differ depending on the subject, but also on the purpose, e.g. if a photograph is a self-portrait meant as a memory for the photographer himself or if a photograph should be published for a wider audience. Further, it needs to be stressed that talking about alienation and integration does not necessarily imply any evaluation. Even though alienation tends to be given negative connotations such as the loss of connection to oneself and the society, while integration tends to be positively connotated, this does not mean that regarding photography, alienation aspects always have negative consequences.

#### 4. THE CAMERA AS BARRIER AND INTRUDER

In the survey, more than one third of both the Indian and German-speaking participants wrote something like: «When taking pictures of an event I cannot really be part of it» or «I actually don't like roaming around with camera/ makes me feel like a tourist» which was clustered as “barrier” or “intruder”. This reminds on Susan Sontag's statement that the camera offers «both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others — allowing us to participate while confirming alienation» (Susan Sontag [1973]: 167). The camera serves as a social tool, it is a «buffer against the unknown» (see Thurner [1992]: 35) and marks the status of the person: as someone who does not participate in the event in the narrow sense, but instead records it, thus, as an outsider. This is particularly the case if the photograph is taken conspicuously or if it is clear that this is an ambitious or professional activity. «Having a camera in your hands – this conveys a message even before

a photo is taken. The camera is a sign of power – sometimes also of wealth – and it assigns roles and creates a barrier between the photographers and the people being photographed» (Jerrentrup [2018]: 105, see also Spitzing [1985]: 114). The assigned roles seem to be clear: there is the photographer who actively does something that turns the photographed person “into a passive”. With the picture, the photographer owns something of the person he has photographed. It may only be a virtual possession (see Odom et al. [2011]: 149) but due to the indexical nature of photography, a certain power over the person photographed can be assumed. It is not for nothing that in some cultural contexts, people are sceptical about photography and fear its power (see Strother [2013]: 177ff.): the photographer may only own the visual component of a singular moment, but due to the static nature of the photograph, in a way, he can know much more about the person photographed than the person him/herself, can look at him/her much more closely, detect his/her tiniest peculiarities, and alter, or even destroy his/her visual representation. «A photographer may easily steal what is private» (Beloff [1983]: 165) and further, «interaction in photography accepts the power of the photographer's status. That status has always an edge over that of the subject» (Beloff [1983]: 171). This may be the case in model photography or street photography, but also refers to documentary photography e.g. in situations of war or crisis. «Our society tries to avoid suffering of any sort yet creates a great deal of curiosity about suffering, which is partly satisfied by photography» (La Grange [2005]: 62). In this context, the ethical conflict that underlies documentary photography and separates the photographer from his/her subject is particularly clear. On the one hand, the photographer may be motivated by the desire for a “good”, “interesting”, or “meaningful” photo, eventually even in order to raise awareness, but on the other hand, it may also make him feel bad to invade people's privacy, to objectify their hopes and sorrows.

There is also a dichotomy on the part of the person photographed: For many people today,



being photographed may be part of everyday life, nevertheless, people feel tense, and some try to avoid the camera. Posing and interacting with the camera shows a high level of awareness of the presence of the camera, resulting in intentional presentations (see Maleyka [2019]: 9) opposed to naturalness and authenticity. This does not necessarily mean that it implies an alienation, as for some people, Goffman's front stage can be a place for longing – for articulation, presentation, appreciation, and applause (see Blank [2017]: 58), yet it is assumable that for most people, it rather leads to a feeling of “being not oneself”, and consequently to a photograph that is not giving an authentic representation.

## 5. SEEING FROM THE OUTSIDE

This aspect refers to photographing one's own, e.g. if one is taking photographs of one's own cultural context or capturing oneself and one's social environment, which creates the situation of seeing the own from a new perspective. Just like a mirror, photography transforms the subject into an image (see Brodersen [2017], 145). The person sees him/herself from the outside and in this way learns to differentiate and identify him/herself. What happens to the individual in the mirror experience can be assumed for a group or a cultural context as well: photographing one's own culture transforms the lived experience into a two-dimensional, single moment, which on the one hand cannot reflect the quality of the actual experience, but on the other hand, condenses one's own culture in a photograph that its creator considers important or interesting. In doing so, the possible audience is usually taken into account: the photographer puts him/herself in the position of these persons who will see, classify and interpret the pictures. «It is the detached look from the outside» or «we make a concept from our culture and environment», these were the statements of around one third of the students. A conceptualization, however, is usually connected to a rationalization that implies taking a step away, leaving behind the

own sentiments, and thus can be seen in terms of alienation. «Once I noticed that even when I take photographs of my friends and family members, I retouch them. What [...]? My family is perfect, but looking at photographs, I start to feel conscious and look for flaws», as one German-speaking participant put it. This idea can be even pursued on a more general level than looking at the “own”: photography illustrates «that everything is perishable, and because the evidence it collects is arbitrary, it suggests reality is basically unclassifiable [...] This has manifested itself in a general attitude of alienation from reality» (La Grange [2005]: 42). No matter what is shown in the photograph, no matter if we are recipients, photographed or photographers, the photograph's subject is detached from the way we experience reality.

## 6. ALIEN(ATING) FORM OF EXPRESSION

Photography can be experienced as a practice that was not (originally) part of one's own cultural context. The mere existence of the medium brings about a new situation that can be unfamiliar. Of course, photography is now commonplace in most places, but the power with which selfie photography and photography for social media have changed the lives of many people in recent years may still be unfamiliar to some people and may not fit into their idea of the world they live in. The basic idea that media bring about new cultural situations is associated with Marshall McLuhan famous statement «the medium is the message: the “message” of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs» (McLuhan [1964]: 24). Even though McLuhan may have heavily underestimated the creative ways to use and appropriate media (see Carey [1967]: 28) and was criticized for the speculative nature of his thoughts, yet, a new media-materialism «is already present in the way technical media transmits and processes “culture”» (Parikka [2012]: 95). In Vilém Flusser's work (Flusser [1983], see also Marchessault and Guldin [2008]: 2), the focus is already on photog-

raphy. Flusser even believes that photography heralds a new epoch, a break in history. This fits in with the fact that some of the Indian participants referred to the fact that photography is a technique brought into the country from outside. Further, India does not have a tradition of black and white drawings unlike the west. Therefore, Ragbuhir Singh, one of India's most important photographers, understands black and white — which in the beginning was the only way to take pictures — as a form of alienation:

*Singh sees "angst, alienation and guilt" as significant aspects of Western twentieth-century vision where people are alone in the universe without God, and this is best expressed in monochrome. This is alien to India's buoyant life and philosophy in which the cycle of rebirth is fundamental and colour is a "deep inner source".* (La Grange [2005]: 160)

German-speakers did not indicate anything connected to this aspect. This could be due to the fact, that, in general, photography has long been firmly anchored in the German speaking context or that "Western" traditional art such as drawings or realistic paintings is more similar to the photographic results than Indian traditional art.

## 7. ARTIFICIAL MEMORY

«You don't really see and memorize» — around one quarter of the Indian and a little more of the German participants in the survey wrote something that can be interpreted in the context of "artificial memories": «Artificial memories not only supported, relieved and occasionally replaced the natural memory, but also gave form to our ideas about remembering and forgetting» (Douwe [1999]: 10) — and not without criticism: in the famous Phaidros Dialogue, which took place between Socrates and his friend Phaidros, the philosopher explains that writing is rather a means against memory than a support for it. Moreover, it does not create any new information and insights, which can only ever be achieved through dialogue. Admittedly, the dialogue could

only be handed down because his student Plato wrote it down. More than 2000 years later, the media philosopher Siegfried Kracauer dealt with memory and photography: in photography, a specific moment is picked out of the flow of time and then is preserved with visual precision. Human memory, on the other hand, is fragmentary and imprecise, but follows a logic that goes beyond capturing what has been there by emphasising its meaning (see Kracauer [1977]: 25). Accordingly, photography attempts to replace the interior — memory — with something external — a photograph. Compared to memory, the photographs can be perceived as weird, foreign, or alien. However, as will be shown later, photograph's connection to memory may also be related to integration.

## 8. INDIVIDUAL ESCAPE

Photography is «a way to get myself away from the normal world, it gives me a way to escape» — this is how an Indian students expressed his experiences with photography. Statements related to an "individual escape" were written by nearly half of the Indians and German speakers. None of them clearly said whether they would rather refer to the act of taking pictures or looking at them, however, both options are conceivable. With regard to the perception, it reminds on Terence Wright statement that one can look at a photograph as if it was a window (Wright [1999]: 6) — it does not only enable to *see* something that is not present in this moment, but also to *immerse* oneself into it. In this context, the "individual escape" can be understood as a refuge that offers relief and positive experiences, detaches from everyday life, and enables new, creative perspectives.

For both the photographer and the recipient it can also mean an escape from everyday perception towards mindfulness — which by alienating, by overcoming the own, judgmental perspective helps to achieve an inner peace. Understood this way, it even includes therapeutic aspects (see Anderssen-Reuster [2016]: 1): «Mindfulness is essentially about waking up to what the present

moment offers» (Brown et al. [2007]: 272). In this context, one can also observe the phenomenon of “flow” that can be associated with photography as an action (see Eberle [2016]: 99) both for the photographer and his team.

	Indian Sample: N=44	German-speaking Sample: N=32
ALIENATION		
Camera as barrier or intruder	24	20
Seeing from the outside	15	9
Alien(ating) form of expression	6	-
Artificial Memory	11	9
Individual escape	20	12
INTEGRATION		
Access – The camera as a ticket	25	24
Possession, appropriation and representation	12	9
Shared form of expression	8	5
Memory and Identity	23	19
Empathy and knowledge	18	13

## 9. INTEGRATION THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

Even though “mindfulness” was mentioned as an alienation from everyday perception, it can be linked to the chance of an ultimate integration offered by photography: the intentional separation from everyday life can apparently pave the way to a deeper understanding and thus to more integration (see Kabat-Zinn [2012]: 1f.). As it seems, integration and alienation cannot be clearly separated.

## 10. ACCESS – THE CAMERA AS A TICKET

«The camera is an excuse to be someplace you otherwise don't belong. It gives me both a point of connection and a point of separation» — this quote by Susan Meiselas (in Boucher [2018]: 202) illustrates how the camera serves as an admission ticket: it assigns a certain role to the person, which allows him/her to enter social contexts he/she otherwise would not be admitted to. In this way, the photographer is e.g. given the chance

to enter certain private spheres — typically in the field of wedding photography. Entering such social contexts enables the gain of knowledge and understanding, from the first insights up to a more in-depth examination.

«I experience new things through photography» — similar statements were written by around two thirds of the Indian and even more of the German-speaking participants. In this context, the experience of new things may mean, on the one hand, to access situations that would otherwise have been closed to the person concerned. On the other hand, it also refers to situations that are not socially inaccessible but that the person would have not taken into consideration for him/herself, e.g. climbing on a tree for the sake of a good perspective, visiting a Gothic festival to take pictures of strangely dressed people, or — as a model — learning some dance or stunt poses. «You wouldn't be standing in the middle of a horde of children, holding one on each hand if you weren't going to be photographed. You would not put your arm around two completely unknown, photogenic dressed people who work as full-time or part-time photo motifs» (Turner [1992]: 31). Ingrid Thurner ironically reflects this aspect — but looking at the alternative, it would probably mean ignoring the children or not getting in touch with people. Photography is seen as a kind of higher value and in its service one is willing to open up to new things.

## 11. POSSESSION, APPROPRIATION AND REPRESENTATION

«To collect photographs is to collect the world» (Sontag [1973]: 1, quoted by a student) and, one could add, a particularly easy way to appropriate it. This has a long tradition and at first sight, mostly reminds of travel photos. Postcards have long ceased to be a souvenir for most tourists, whereas in the 19th century, they were bound in special albums. At least since the 1950s, self-recorded photos had to be added (see Turner [1992]: 24). What remained, however, is the focus on possession. In the context of photography and

possession, Susan Sontag famously wrote: «One can't possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images» (Sontag [1973]: 126). This brings photography close to the field of virtual possessions: virtual possessions are considered «to include artefacts that are increasingly becoming immaterial (e.g. books, photos, music, movies) and things that have never traditionally had a lasting material form (e.g. SMS archives, social networking profiles)» (Odom et al. [2011]: 1491). To acquire something and to own it is the opposite of “alienation” in its original meaning—all the more this refers to virtual possessions, which are to be located quasi within ourselves. But Sontag does not only emphasize possession but also obsession. The art educator Karl-Josef Pazzini explains this connection: «We become obsessed with images [...]. These images design us and make us design others. They are the ones who are always ready whenever we become disoriented. With them, we modulate our bodies and the bodies of others» (Pazzini [2005]: 26). How we appropriate the world through photography influences our perception, creates and strengthens archetypes and stereotypes, for which Katharina Schleicher (2009) provides a memorable example.

Cultural appropriation also comes into play in this context: by owning the photograph, one can reinterpret what is shown and place it in new contexts, such as regarding the photograph of a ritual as an artistic object and putting it in an exhibition. But also the own culture can be “appropriated” and re-interpreted: «Photography helps to showcase my culture» was a very typical answer in the Indian sample, and it was put in context with integration. Those who take photographs and/or stand in front of the camera thus also have the opportunity to present their own culture in the way they consider appropriate and consequently help to shape their own image. Representing oneself instead of being represented is experienced as empowerment and can facilitate identity work (see Schönhuth and Jerrentrup [2019]: 203). Of course, re-appropriations are also conceivable: Carmen Brosig (2019) explains how American Indians in the American Indian Movement have re-appropri-

ated stereotypical representations of themselves in order to question power relations (Schönhuth and Jerrentrup).

## 12. SHARED FORM OF EXPRESSION

«Photography is a world-wide activity – we all take and look at pictures, so it is integrating», as one German-speaking student put it: enjoying photography is a cultural universal (whereas the aesthetics might, except for some very general aspects like the golden ratio, differ depending on the person's character, experiences, culture etc., see Hogan [2015]). Further, photography tells us what is socially considered to be photographable respectively depictable and what is undepictable (see Jäger [2009]: 93).

Within one culture, it is also noticeable how certain photographic forms of expression are repeated and intensified, e.g. certain motifs as well as certain aesthetic aspects (see Manovich [2015f.]: 73). Through the use of social media, subcultures or scenes emerge that share their own modes of expression and need not be tied to a specific location. The individual is free to choose his or her own affiliations accordingly — and is able to integrate him/herself through his preference regarding visual aspects and photo content.

A «shared form of expression» also relates to photography's functions «as a means for communication» (Van Dijck [2008]: 58). This does not only refer to the time after the photoshoot when discussing its results but also to the shooting itself: many shootings are teamwork which means that contents, styles etc. have to be negotiated with the other team members. As most teamwork, this requires skills such as the willingness to compromise, which can serve one's personal development and ultimately facilitate one's social life, thus pave the way for feeling socially integrated. Furthermore, creativity can help the development of an inner core of the individual against external resistance (see Reckwitz [2012]: 218), which can be understood in relation to the feeling of inner strength and being at peace with oneself.

### 13. MEMORY AND IDENTITY

In the survey, around two thirds of both Indian and German speakers wrote statements referring to memory and/or identity, however, both aspects were often connected, e.g.: «Photography helps me to remember things that matter to me», «it makes me connect to my past», or «(it is) a tool that helps to define what I have been and what I am». Identity can be understood as the constant work on the image of who we want to be (see Abels [2017]: 4) — this, on the one hand, includes how we present ourselves in photographs and on the other, what we photograph. Looking at the first case, there is obviously a strong focus on bodily existence. Seeing ourselves in photographs, we say «this is me», even though it only depicts our physical appearance and merely shows a tiny, past moment of our lives.

The increasing emphasis on the body is often explained with the fact that because of disintegrating social boundaries and the disappearance of traditional social classes, [...] it has become necessary to position and differentiate oneself through deliberately developing an individual style. An active self-marketing through performative strategies of image cultivation and staging of the self, in which the body plays a central role, has gained importance (Leimgruber [2005]: 213-14).

Following this line of thought, it also makes sense to identify with a past-time moment, as it adds consistency to the individual: identifying ourselves in a photograph, then, means to recognize it as a moment in the coherent path that is nothing else than *us*. The connection to the own past through photographs is so strong, that it seems to be easy to manipulate it by manipulating photographs: Elizabeth Loftus ([1998]: 61f.) and other memory researchers have shown in numerous experiments that subjects invented stories to fit childhood photographs that were processed without their knowledge — we strive for consistency and identify one way of achieving it in our personal chronicle kept by photographs. Further, «all photographs that a person takes, remembers, imagines, or even just decides to keep or show

someone, are all “self-portraits”, even if no person appears in them directly» (Weiser [2010]: 16, see also Hannah [2013]: 10). Photography offers a way of picking out individual items from the wide spectrum of visual perception. Besides, one can view, edit, change, destroy or re-view images (see Mechler-Schönach [2005]: 16) and thus work on one’s identity. Here, the term of integration fits in a very obvious way: people integrate certain images—or leave them out.

### 14. EMPATHY AND KNOWLEDGE

Even though photography has been criticized for being aggressive on the part of the photographer (see Beloff [1983]: 171) and promoting narcissism on the part of the photographed (Thurner [1992]: 29), it can also lead to greater empathy and knowledge: if one wants to take a good, i.e. representative, aesthetic, spectacular, beautiful etc. photograph, one usually needs to know something about the subject, e.g. when taking a photograph of an event, it is useful to know which moments are crucial. This may require not only factual knowledge but also empathy. However, factual knowledge and empathy are important not only in documentary but also in staged people photography: this way, one can stage topics appropriately and at the same time work cooperatively with one’s team. Gisèle Freund already noted that the photographer can only take a good photo of his/her model if both have a connection (see Jäger [2009]: 26). «I learn something about my subjects», «I learn to understand what I record», or «I feel it» — about half of the participants put it this way or similarly. Empathy also becomes relevant when looking at photographs: It «involves paying attention to its subject, and any attention, no matter how feeble, is usually preferable to ignorance and apathy» (Ow Yeong [2014]: 9) — even if the sheer number and the pace of images can stand in the way of empathy.

In this context, the Indian theory of art is particularly interesting. The original use of its central term *rasa* includes a variety of interconnected meanings:

*a fluid that quickly tends to spill, a taste such as sour, sweet or salty, the soul or essence of something, a desire, a power, a chemical agent used in changing one metal to another, the life-giving sap in plants and even poison. Almost all these distinct meanings are exploited at different junctures of the complex aesthetic phenomenology centering the concept of rasa* (Chakrabarti [2016]: 8).

In classical Indian thought, «affective states received as much philosophical attention as cognitive or intellectual states [...]. All that moves in front of our consciousness was taken as alive with breath (prāṇa) and capable of subjective feelings (cinmaya). To be is to feel or be felt» (Chakrabarti [2016]: 5). Ultimately, the boundaries between artists and recipients can be dissolved: «A taster of a sweet recipe or similar is rightly so designated only because he enjoys chiefly the aspect of his own inmost self-delight while judging the given recipe in the form, “this tastes exactly this way”, a form totally other than that of a tasteless glutton. Even in the case of plays, poetry, and such like the separate identity [of the perceiver and the perceived] is totally superseded», cites Neerja Gupta ([2017]: 110) the classical Indian philosopher Abhinavagupta.

Here, integration means not just taking over another perspective, but dissolving the distinction between different perspectives: becoming connected to everyone else through the emotion transmitted by a work of art such as a photograph. Admittedly, the *rasa* theory was rarely mentioned by the survey participants and if, only in the Indian sample. But it is possible that the *rasa* art theory was internalized by the Indian students, being socialized in a cultural context that builds on it.

## 15. RESUME

Integration or alienation — both Indian and German-speaking students found various arguments on both sides and it is striking that (except for the aspect of photography as an alienating form of expression, which was only mentioned by Indians) the students from both cultural and

geographical contexts tend to answer very similarly. This can be interpreted as a sign of photography's integrative potential or of the fundamental human aspects addressed by the medium, but at the same time, it also stands for the homogenizing tendency of photography, which through similar use and aesthetics ultimately abolishes cultural identity. From all these considerations and the recognition of photography's potential, a very practical question arises: How should we deal with photography? First of all, we have to acknowledge that photography is part of our lives, and probably almost regardless of where we have been socialized and live, whether we are rather photographers, if we enjoy posing for photographs or if we regard ourselves mostly as recipients. Photography is omnipresent, and now it is up to us to find ways to make the most of it. Media education and reflection on the medium play a central role here — understanding what opportunities and risks arise. This must be assessed on a situation-specific and individual basis: there are, for example, situations in which photography functions more as an admission ticket and others in which the camera is more of a barrier. For some people, the escape that photography can offer is a welcome retreat, while others see it as an unnecessary barrier. In any case, it is important to promote knowledge about photography and to pay more attention to its implications.

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## Early Modern Aesthetics: *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Afterlife of Domination

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**Abstract.** This essay argues that *Antony and Cleopatra*'s pitting of Egypt against Rome is a cipher of aesthetic resistance to modern rationality. The coordinates are Adornian. Antony's and Cleopatra's complex identities elude the disenchanting, nominalist machinery in which diffuse indeterminacy necessitates conceptual imposition. Here, the individuals are essentially dramatized: sensate, embodied selves composed and expressed in relations of passionate recognition. The lovers' deaths, and especially Cleopatra's self-conscious theatre, rewrite the ascetic, dominative, and pseudo-theatrical rationality of Octavian Rome. The protest, the passion and singularity, lives mainly through its expressive emphases – such as hyperbole – and the re-functioning of the very dominative roles and norms being opposed. This reflects the restricted but critical – aesthetic – status of early modern drama, and specifies its opposition to the deepening attack on sensate knowing in its world.

**Keywords.** Shakespeare, Adorno, aesthetics, modernity, nominalism.

1. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* envisions a life redeemed from domination<sup>1</sup>. Recent work by Hugh Grady (2013) and William Junker (2015) has affirmed Cleopatra's faltering but finally clear-eyed opposition to Octavius Caesar's eternalist idea of sovereignty and spectacle. The argument that follows pushes further towards establishing the aesthetic import of this opposition and the drama that brings it forth. Theodor Adorno's work offers pointers, but the play is no illustration of any pre-form philosophy. Resistance to such a fate is key to its aesthetic character<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare (1606). References are given by act, scene, and line numbers in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno develops no reading of Shakespeare, but there are many local comments. For his relation to *Hamlet*, see Oppitz-Trotman (2016). On Shakespeare and this tradition in aesthetics, see Grady (2009). For reservations about its application to «pre-autonomous» art, cf. Hammermeister ([2002]: 210).

This lens shows how *Antony and Cleopatra* expresses some problematic aspects of «modernity»<sup>3</sup>. Aesthetics resists some defining rationalizing procedures and the stifled social experience that is their correlate. It attends to two areas of damage: the human body and its sensate, material world. Both have been evacuated of authority and meaningfulness. Aesthetics pushes back on both fronts, opposing or problematizing the identifying concept and physical or moral law, as well as the separation of ethical and objective domains (Bernstein [1992]). Just what is early *modern* about Shakespeare's world in these terms is, no doubt, controversial terrain. The full paraphernalia of modern reason, perhaps most critically economic «rationality» and commodification, is clearly not yet pervasive at this time. Nevertheless, some fateful stress-points, such as abstraction and self-mastery, are apparent, as will be argued here<sup>4</sup>.

*Antony and Cleopatra's* pitting of Rome against Egypt has long been elaborated and complicated in the criticism. Its significance is layered with various world-historical themes and allusions in the play, as heroism yields to procedure, republic to empire – and Christianity is anticipated («The time of universal peace is near», Octavius proclaims, with historical irony [4.6.5])<sup>5</sup>. In the following, the tensions between Roman norms and

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of «modernity» is vexed – as to its content, chronological application, and normative-cum-descriptive character. This is its interest, and no overall definition is assumed here. The analysis behind this essay's approach to modern *rationality* is Horkheimer and Adorno (1944), who find disenchantment in pre-historical myth, a myth to which contemporary reason reverts. They argue, of course, for more reason, not less. Likewise, this essay defends the «critical, utopian» elements of the modern aesthetic, against modernity (Grady [2013]: 173-174).

<sup>4</sup> On the larger ascetic and conceptual problematic, see Weber (1905) and Gauchet (1985). For the increased, proto-economic, severity of the distinction of gift from exchange, interest from disinterest, in early modern culture, and the resistance offered by an early modern devotional poet, see Mapp (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5.3.

the experiences associated with Cleopatra and Egypt are considered anew, from the standpoint of the aesthetic resistance to domination outlined above. Cleopatra seems destined for stuffing and mounting in Caesar's imperial display-case, as law and measure master beauty and sublimity, the sensate body, the expansive individual. Yet she, and the play, refuses this banishment to cognitive and political vacancy. When she sets her theatre against Octavius' version, the stakes, I suggest, are those of disenchanted modernity.

The larger view implied here sees the religious controversies of Shakespeare's age as centrally involved in rationalizing, so-called «secularizing», currents<sup>6</sup>. In particular, the developments have an anti-expressive logic that Shakespeare everywhere explores, if indirectly. Briskly put, reformed religion underlines the believer's faith at the expense of works, which are no longer seen as efficacious in salvation. Salvation is not to be earned in any way; for God is utterly free, and faith itself is his gift. This fundamental human concern is thus removed from, and only riskily traceable in, worldly appearances and actions. This tenet, and problem, is one ingredient in the developing priority of intentions over consequences in legal and moral reasoning, and in separating law from context and the agent from whatever is made of what he or she does. Equally, the larger operations of God's radical, unpredictable freedom are hard to discern. Yet it is imperative to try. Hence the persistence in the period of rival Providential interpretations of the historical and natural world alongside increasingly disenchanted explorations<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> For accounts complicating linear, progressive, and linked ideas of secularization and individual autonomy, see Cummings (2013), Gillespie (2009), Taylor (2007). On Weber's narrative and concept of «disenchantment», see Das and Davis (2017) and Crawford (2017). Mapp (2021) develops many of these themes in detail.

<sup>7</sup> On Providence, see Walsham (1999); on natural science, Funkenstein (1986) and Gaukroger (2006). These developments also feed into the spread and development of scepticism, philosophical and vernacular, that reaches an apogee in Descartes's radical, «methodological» doubt. The classic text on Shakespeare's proleptic relationship

In this culture, «idolatry» becomes a master-term of abuse, the key to the charge of «superstition». The charge bespeaks a critical suspicion: that spiritual import and agency have been wrongly ascribed to activities or objects, such as Catholic rituals or imagery. It alleges subjective projection and material fixation<sup>8</sup>. This attitude is of course central to Puritan objections to the early modern playhouse itself as a nest of sinful sensory allurements (Pollard [2004]). And not just places or artefacts or rituals, but one's affective and ideational life are all open to such iconoclastic «critique». The rationale is crucial in determining the modern ideas of matter and sensation. Purged of cognitive authority, they become data for abstract conceptual subsumption. «Idoloclasm» is thus a fateful feature of the conceptual set-up that the artwork, in aesthetic perspective, questions through its emphasis on the medium and sensate experience.

Asceticism is vital to the suspicious project of extirpating attachments to sensory objects and somatic interests, all which are increasingly deauthorized (see McGrath [2020]). Weber helps identify the ambivalence of this affirmation of the individual, which seems both autonomous and pathologically unclear to itself, always needing to check that its justifications have been picked clean of distortive motivation (Weber [1905]: 104). Self-denial cannot save your soul, but the subjection of one's entire existence to rational organization and its worldly rewards gives the best hope, overall, of being able to infer that one actually does enjoy God's blessing (Weber [1905]: 79). This is the *self-dominative* angle, the questionable secularization, and the pervasive suspicion, that Adorno's analyses draw on and develop, and which are already at work in the early modern period.

*Antony and Cleopatra* both indexes and resists these developments in its culture. Central in what

follows are the play's representations of ascetic and passionate life and the views taken of Antony's perilous involvement with Cleopatra's «magic» (3.10.18) – and the role in this of the «rationalizing» concept that would dominate the lovers. The analysis traces what is «antitheatrical» in such domination, in its assault on appearances, expression, consequence, on affective and intersubjective recognition.

Issues of singularity and identity are the specific focus here, with the topic of nominalism framing the reading. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, passionate experiences of singularity fascinate and disturb Roman rational norms. Antony is caught between a legislated identity and what is from Roman perspective a reprehensible excess (1.1.2). He nonetheless comes to promise an alternative norm. Cleopatra provokes singular identifications and is a sort of aesthetic riddle: *eros* united with knowing and ethical life. Most important is Cleopatra's dream of Antony after he is gone. She affirms «an Antony» (5.2.98): a new concept and value, not just a named person. This possibility, she insists, is no dream.

*Antony and Cleopatra* thus adumbrates a protest against imperial «peace». It does so largely negatively, through complex repetitions and explorations of the conditions under which the lovers must live. This protest also enciphers the predicament – and critical opportunities – of early modern theatre itself.

2. Theodor Adorno refers to «Shakespeare's nominalistic breakthrough into mortal and infinitely rich individuality» ([1970a]: 317; [1970b]: 213). «Nominalistic» means that characters do not instantiate concepts, do not participate in, nor fully yield up their secrets to, any given, moralized rational structures, in their world or ours. Genre norms and even the concept of character come under pressure. This is because concepts themselves are just names, not cosmic infrastructure.

Hans Blumenberg describes nominalism's theological birth and its role in modern developments. It is a corollary of God's omnipotence:

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with Cartesian scepticism is Cavell (2003); see also Hamlin (2005). Popkin (2003) relates the larger theological and philosophical development of scepticism.

<sup>8</sup> The centrality of this topic to modern critique, and especially ideas of *ideology*, is examined in Jarvis (2001).

[God's power] renders meaningless the interpretation of the individual as the repetition of the universal. [...] But these very riches of creative abundance put human reason in the embarrassing position of having to set its economy of classificatory concepts over against the authentic reality as an auxiliary construct that is just as indispensable as it is inappropriate – in the position, that is, of being unable from the very beginning to interpret its theoretical mastery of reality as anything but self-assertion. (Blumenberg [1966]: 153)

God is not constrained by the «rational» demands of creation, nor ever tied by promises or past actions. What he commands is good, just because he commands it (Pfau [2013]: 161-162). Concepts are our labels, not parts of God's mind. So human freedom is also fundamentally reconceived, for individuals do not participate in any universal or final end. The roles and hierarchies of classical rationalism are jettisoned in favour of universal equality in individuation, while the emphasis on free willing protects the conscience from the obligations of law (Siedentop [2015]: 306-320)<sup>9</sup>.

The impenetrably remote God leaves us exposed to an unbuffered death. Adorno mentions «mortal» riches in the phrase cited. With the privileging of the individual comes an obliterating death – the «absolute price of absolute value», as Adorno argues in *Minima Moralia* (Adorno [1951]: 231). There, Adorno offers a contrast with his contemporary «total» society in which death is meaningless, because individuals are meaningless as individuals. They are abstract workers and consumers, infinitely replaceable, playing out the demonic reduction of living singularity to specimen. *Antony and Cleopatra* protests such a fate. It mourns and affirms the individual against categories that are really rationalizing imposition. Just so, it refuses to boil down to a morality play of the great man lost to excess but instead transforms that schema.

Yet the play also sees how individuality must be neither autarchic nor vanishingly nominalist.

<sup>9</sup> My understanding has also been informed by Gillespie (2009) and Taylor (2007).

It must bear, and be borne up in, recognitive relations, both institutional and passionate. Antony asserts that he and Cleopatra are «peerless», and he requires the world to acknowledge it, too (1.1.41-42). The binding of uniqueness to recognition (and efforts to command it) is made repeatedly evident in the play through the exertions of characters trying to get the protagonists' measure.

Antony attracts hyperbole. He is Cleopatra's «man of men» (1.5.74); akin to «plated Mars» (1.1.4) for Philo; while Agrippa thinks «A rarer spirit never / Did steer humanity» (5.1.31-32). Cleopatra is missing her lover, while Philo talks of the former soldier he claims is now lost in «dotage» when the play starts (1.1.1); Agrippa's obituary remark might be politeness. Context matters, and the play is obviously interested in assessing forms of hyperbole. So what of the elaborate, superhuman Antony, who towers up in Cleopatra's report of her dream, a Colossus «whose legs bestrid the ocean» (5.2.81)? Antony's critics see in him a cautionary tale of extremes, «the triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet's fool» (1.1.12-13). Cleopatra, on the other hand, finds her lover's worth in a kind of amplification of his statuary magnificence, perhaps its transfiguration. But what are the elements of Antony that she must transform?

The idea that Antony is not living up to the standard of his own example recurs over and over. Philo again: «sometimes when he is not Antony / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony» (1.1.59-61)<sup>10</sup>. When he falls short, he is not himself. «Antony» is a norm – a common noun with fixed content – and an essential name, Antony's true identity.

When Antony fights Octavius, the fight is also within. His shameful defeat is read as self-attack: «Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before / Did violate so itself», Scarus proclaims (3.10.22-23; cf. 25-28). Antony concurs: «I have fled myself [...] My very hairs do mutiny [...] Friends, begone.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Cleopatra: «Antony / Will be himself» (1.1.44-45); Enobarbus: «I shall entreat him to answer like himself» (2.2.3-4).

[...] Let that be left / Which leaves itself» (3.11.7-20). He has fled himself, his body turns on itself, and his followers must depart. Identity disintegrates with, even *as*, the human bonds it has sustained and depended on. All defining traits disperse: «He's unqualified with very shame» (3.11.43). He is no longer a self at all. Antony's identity is performative in the punishing sense that it is constantly defined in terms of an external criterion. In this theatre, actors must fulfil the script, not interpret or revise it. Antony's performance vitiates his identity, this role; he is defined by his dereliction, self-deletion. Antony thus represents an acute tension between personifying a norm and being a person enmeshed in a narrative (cf. Crawford [2017]: 19ff.).

Yet self-mastery is a Roman norm, a prerequisite and justification of political command. Caesar admiringly apostrophizes the old Antony for his hardihood on campaign (1.4.62-64)<sup>11</sup>. Antony, we learn, has lived off horses' «stale» (63) and worse. He conceded the barest minimum to nature, and nothing to predilection. His foul sustenance is almost an emblem: contempt for appetite. «And all this», Caesar adds, «was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek / So much as lanked not» (1.4.69-72). In picture-book moralism, fortitude has a becoming aspect, and the lesson is total self-sufficiency.

Antony's faults must therefore be both physical blemishes and disempowering liabilities. After Actium, Octavius instructs Thidias to «Observe how Antony becomes his flaw, / And what thou thinkst his very action speaks / In every power that moves» (3.12.34-36). He wants details of how Antony is taking his disgrace. William Juncker has shown how Caesar's invitations to people to see for themselves actually stipulate what will be seen ([2015]: 174-176). Similarly, Octavius

defines the lesson here: Antony's lack of self-command will manifest in his minutest movements. Honour is command and self-command. This all reflects Octavius' larger political theatre, which is utterly anti-theatrical. Meaning is not constituted through its unfolding and the surprise of expectations, intentions or rules; what appears is simply the roll-out of the pre-established programme. Yet of course this example can only be declared in the wake of Antony's military defeat, which is what gives Octavius' moralism a free hand. Indeed, to be taken as *any* such edifying personification, whether ascetic paragon or ruined sybarite, and thus a punctual unity of essence and appearance, doing and being, is to be power's specimen. Stoic withdrawal and self-possession, in this light, and despite the values asserted, look like compensation or solace for necessary defeat by a world, a power, beyond the self's etiolated domain (cf. Grady [2013]: 175-176).

The self-control is allegedly *rational*. Enobarbus judges that Antony has made «his will / Lord of his reason» (3.13.3-4). His brainless optimism ruins effective manhood: «A diminution in our captain's brain / Restores his heart. When valour preys on reason, / It eats the sword it fights with» (3.13.202-204). Yet these absurd moments when the stricken Antony proposes single combat with Octavius (3.13.25-28) are ones where the truth of rational self-command emerges: it is an unheroic mode enabled by military force, and it is ludicrous in its absence (see Dollimore [1984]: 206-217).

Here is a man viewed as at war with himself, and one who thinks, at points, that he is running away from what he truly is. His indulgences entail self-loss, emasculation, utter defeat, even the crumbling of his mind and body. Yet Antony affirms, through his death and beyond consciousness of his shame, something worth it. The image of Antony as strewn across his disintegrating body and fleeing retainers even gives way to a more positive sense of participation – or at least a conviction of its possibility.

The play inhabits and dramatizes some Roman fixities to multidimensional effect. Take Antony's association with Hercules and Mars. The names

<sup>11</sup> Modernity's «inner worldly asceticism» has famously been emphasized by Weber ([1905]: 82). The illegibility and inalterability of the divine decision as to one's salvation issue in new demands for worldly success, from whose instrumentally rationalized form one's blessed status might be inferred. McGrath (2020) strongly reasserts the theme.

appear in the play tangled in their traditions of interpretation (Adelman [1973]). The Herculean references are particularly variegated. Hercules stands for masculine prowess, but he is also reduced to cross-dressing with Omphale and to a madness in which he slaughters his family. He represents self-attack but also triumphs over the Underworld and is taken up to heaven. In the Renaissance, he is the virtuous man who makes the difficult choice; as the serpent killer, and as man and god, he is an archetype of Christ (Bull [2005]: 86-140). The strange scene (4.3) in which Hercules is heard departing Antony's camp is thus highly overdetermined. It seems to signify Antony's loss of Roman manhood or of his men's faith. Or perhaps we witness the Christian ousting of pagan gods (cf. 3.11.58-60)<sup>12</sup>. But maybe all allegorical schemata are ditched, and if Herculean heroism is gone, so are the moralizing ancillaries.

The allusions, then, show a protagonist interpreting the mythic name, rather than vice versa. Conventions are expressed, as Walter Benjamin puts it, rather than expression conventionalized ([1925]: 184-185). This is not a drama deploying familiar codes for universal identification and edification.

The astonishing images in which Antony's fall is conceived are another challenge to the didactic notion of defaced statuary. Feeling betrayed by Cleopatra, Antony boils: «The shirt of Nessus is upon me. Teach me, / Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage. / Let me [...] with those hands that grasped the heaviest club / Subdue my worthiest self» (4.12.43-47). His hands are and are not those of Hercules. And it is his «worthiest self» that is to be quelled. David Bevington glosses the phrase: «that part of his noble nature that has striven for glory» (Shakespeare [1606]: 228). This self proves its worth by refusing to live in ignominy. The subduing returns him to coherence, «the worthiest» is confirmed, and Antony will have no facet that is not Roman, although he will be dead. Yet obviously the facets are barely his own. Alienation inheres

in the formulations, and the Herculean scene denotes madness.

A little later, Antony feels that without power and betrayed by love, he is dissolving. He «cannot hold this visible shape» (4.14.17) and, cloud-like, will morph into something else by and by: «That which is now a horse, even with a thought / The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct / As water is in water» (4.14.9-11). There is no self-conflict because there is barely a self. This is not a nominalist fantasy of limitless self-invention but an annihilated state where there is nothing to compensate for or justify the losses. But it is not quite a state of nothingness.

Mardian's false report that Cleopatra has killed herself includes the comment that «her fortunes mingled / With [his] entirely» (4.14.24-25). The lexicon of indistinction now represents a self-expanded, rather than limited, by the claim of another. His grievous loss restores Antony's love. Self-interference must end: «Now all labour / Mars what it does» (4.14.47-48). This is a new understanding of his conflict: no action in this world can realize his deepest interests. The renunciation reflects the desire to re-join his lover: «I will be / A bridegroom in my death and run into't / As to a lover's bed» (4.14.99-101). This is the identity towards which all has led, its «final cause». Note the reason he gives Eros to kill him: «Do it at once, / Or thy precedent services are all / But accidents unpurposed» (4.14.82-84). Only this conclusion will give coherence to all his, their, prior actions.

Antony botches his suicide, fittingly. And it is hard not to feel these complications in his last scene with Cleopatra, despite appearances. Antony re-packages his suicide now he has learned that Cleopatra is not dead. Dying, he reassures her: «Peace! / Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony, / But Antony's hath triumphed on itself» (4.15.14-16). His valour has not won out over something else in him, but defeated itself and perhaps, paradoxically, its self-interfering quality. Cleopatra seems to agree: «So it should be, that none but Antony / Should conquer Antony» (17-18), while, in his last words, Antony asks to

<sup>12</sup> Hercules declares disbelief in gods in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, IX, 203-204.

be remembered in his heyday and repeats that he is «a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished» (59-60). He refers to an inner drama, not the struggle with Octavius, but the ambiguity is troubling. Roman «valiancy», pertaining to both winner and loser, wins out, resolving agon into ideal – as if Antony has finally coincided with his postulated (non-)self. The replaceability of individuals, individuals only in terms of their free acquiescence in that fate, is affirmed. Yet this logic of self-domination is both reclaimed and exposed. These phrases are surely aerated by all that has preceded them, and dying for love is what he is still doing. The «Roman by a Roman» logic echoes the dissolution of «water in water», aligning the schematic, rationalized self with nominalist indeterminacy again, to complex effect.

The drawn-out dying keeps open a space that all the talk of split Romans and Antonies tries to close. The logical torsion, the self-conscious insistence, the repetition of the reflexive motif: all bespeak the sacrifice of, and for, something valuable, something validated through this death, but no longer according to the scheme in which only the inessential dies, like a failing body. The phrases betray a resistance to monadic Romanness. Cleopatra is axial here. She is not, in fact, overlooked: Antony appeals to her memory, her perception, and lays a claim on it, which he takes as their claim. This deeper demand animates this odd re-assertion of Roman honour. Without power, we know, Antony is but little. But as merely power, he was mastered, alienated.

3. Cleopatra's is a different sort of singularity. Changeable and histrionic, she attracts and resists moralizing judgment. She is often admirable, even in Roman opinion, but concepts catch up with her only as paradox or aporia.

«What manner o' thing is your crocodile?» asks Lepidus (2.7.37). Antony offers a mocking reply: «It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with it[s] own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates» (38-41). The crocodile is closed: fully

expressed by being fully withheld. The passage has rightly been taken to exemplify the otherness Egypt represents in the play (as in Klein [2016]). But there are distinctions to make. Cleopatra is no blank. Keeping Antony guessing is part of her conscious tactics (as made clear to Charmian [1.3.9-10]). But she is a being where tactics go a long way down, and so the screen is also the thing itself. Her theatricality is radical.

Antony announces a theme: «Fie, wrangling queen, / Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh, / To weep, whose every passion fully strives / To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!» (1.1.50-53). Her every passing passion aspires to beauty and reverence, like independent agents inspired by being in her. The passions, in her, are exemplary: idealized universals and unique, transformed, no longer merely themselves. She is not the mere bearer of universal predicates, but a phenomenon that completes and elevates them.

This paradoxical metaphysics comes clearest in Enobarbus' appreciations of the queen. «I saw her once», he says, «Hop forty paces through the public street, / And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted, / That she did make defect perfection / And, breathless, power breathe forth» (2.2.238-242). Again, whatever she does is perfect, because she does it. If the report does not escape misogynist framing – her «power» is a suspect charm – a living body is still celebrated. This is even a love-vision of sorts. Enobarbus can explain why Antony will never leave Cleopatra:

*Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish. (2.2.245-251)*

Here, perhaps, the male desire to possess and discard is exacerbated and thwarted. But a peculiar tension appears as «vilest things / *Become themselves* in her». This explicates the prior paradox about desire and satisfaction. Satiety is not (self-)disgust; desire persists in its fulfilment. The



ascetic idea that perception of true moral ugliness is endlessly deflected is there. But also this: the worst becomes decorous, beautiful. It reaches full expression, even as its quality is changed; the point about the priests asserts sexual allure as supreme value. Cleopatra's presentation of evils is itself good, as if she were a *representation* of them: she is «a wonderful piece of work» (1.2.148). Yet she is also the thing itself, redeeming, not stilling, the passions she inflames.

In Roman logic, a blemish is a blemish (cf. 1.4.21-23). But Cleopatra's affective and somatic expressions are retrieved from familiar taboos. Love trumps law. Contrast Agrippa's praise of Octavia, «[w]hose virtue and whose general graces speak / That which none else can utter» (2.2.138-139). Octavia's virtues are «general», her uniqueness and ineffability consisting in her proximity to the form of virtue. She is statuesque: «She shows a body rather than a life, / A statue than a breather» (3.3.19-21), according to the messenger (who tells Cleopatra what she wants to hear). Octavia, «a piece of virtue» (3.2.28), lays no claim of her own. Cleopatra is no such statue. Nor is she pure crocodilian otherness. What is singular about her is also something reproducible, or animating of other relationships. To see her is to see something of what the lovers see in each other. She can transform the beholder.

4. These figurations resist not only Octavius' dogmatic conceptual «realism» but also the concept that thinks it owes nothing to its objects and experiential situation. Nominalism, *qua* the insistence on indeterminate givenness, is domination's alibi and twin<sup>13</sup>. It serves up «unqualified» material to knock into shape. Just as Cleopatra is other, but not absolutely so, the play explores how the push-back against this model can be experienced, made dramatically available.

Singularity is linked to performance and re-performance. It finds its life in the kinds of

reports, desires and actions it inspires. Cleopatra's comment about her «becomings» (transformations, charms) «kill[ing]» her «when they do not / Eye well to [Antony]» is important (1.3.97-98). The striking functional shifts (*becoming* as noun, *eye* as verb), imply that the perceptual relationship is intricate and two-way (cf. Kermode [2000]: 219). But the main sense is of qualities turning bad unless the lover appreciates them. Antony's challenge to the world for acknowledgement, and his fantasy of drawing crowds in heaven (4.14), also appeals to an audience. Their «peerlessness» will consist, however, in its transformation of such relationships, despite any narcissistic craving for spectators. Antony's and Cleopatra's qualities are accessible through each other and must become communicable to others. Their love is generalizable to all insofar as it is possibly inclusive of all. There are layers of substitution and transference both within and beyond their relationship.

This «theatricality» reveals what gets air-brushed out of the rigid Octavian sort. Events correct your judgement or action, lay bare what they mean (see Speight [2001]). The lessons typically involve the opening up of a human connection where it had been denied or misunderstood. A small example occurs when Antony catches himself mourning Fulvia, whom he has wished dead (1.2.119-124). He does not want her back, and the moment is perhaps even «conditional upon absence», as Dollimore says ([1984]: 207). But this is not hypocrisy. Antony learns what this death means. In this play, after all, there is freedom to change sides and regret the change. The logic speaks in the steady clarification of what the lovers' love entails.

Compare how Roman agency is distributed through patterns of mistrust and emulation. Subordinates threaten their superiors through their very success in executing orders (as Ventidius knows: 3.1). Pompey wishes Menas had assassinated his rivals before consulting him, for now honour dictates that he veto the plan (2.7). This is a clue to how the Stoic, abstractive individual conives with the power to choose the actions one is associated with, irrespective of what one does.

<sup>13</sup> The terminus of nominalism is inarticulate pointing: «there, there» (Adorno [1958]: 206), as was clear to some early modern thinkers (see Popkin [2003]: 40-41).

Likewise, Cleopatra's impotence is manifested by her futile attempt to shift blame for her dishonest accountancy onto Seleucus: «We answer others' merits in our name» (5.2.177). Deniability depends on the proxy, who also threatens it.

The play anatomizes all this, and the lovers will come to defend the individual through relations other than those of competitive survival with which they are entangled. Love expands individual interests – rather than reinforcing them, or self-sacrificingly overriding them (the Roman alternatives). That point is reached, however, only after a near-total breakdown in the face of doubts and other motives. The lovers are despairing, competitive, jealous and, in Cleopatra's case, capable of manipulation to the point of playing dead. That pretence, nevertheless, and Antony's protracted death, allow them to defuse mistrust by both «dying» first: Antony realizes what is worth dying for; Cleopatra gets the best proof she can of his love. Even so, she will not leave her monument to be with Antony (4.15). And after he is gone, she still weighs the options. Clearly, this is not *Romeo and Juliet*. The lovers nonetheless stumble towards something beyond domination. This freedom is paradoxically indicated through their recasting of available dominating models and representation.

Cleopatra's theatrics are often nettling for this reason. «Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it; / Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it; / That you know well. Something it is I would – / O, my oblivion is a very Antony, / And I am all forgotten» (1.3.88-92). «Antony» is used as a byword for forgetfulness – his forgetting her – and she pretends that she cannot bring out what she wants to say. Antony's exasperated response is revealing: «But that your royalty / Holds idleness your subject, I should take you / For idleness itself» (92-94). She is not quite a personification of an essence; she *uses* frivolity as she uses him and she should stop. But she objects: «'Tis sweating labour / To bear such idleness so near the heart / As Cleopatra this» (94-96). She talks in the third person not because she is her own puppet but to insist on her candour and coherency. Her so-called idleness either expresses

pains as extreme as those of the child-bed, or is a nerve-wracking effort to shield them from view. It is not playing.

Antony's and Cleopatra's love is not necessarily totally unique, let alone ideal; nor, on the other hand, is it just another relationship like those they have known before. That idea cannot be absolutely ruled out – witness Cleopatra's violent reaction to Charmian's baiting about Julius Caesar (1.5.70-74)<sup>14</sup>. And the language the lovers attract stresses love's substitutive character. This, precisely, is its exemplary aspect. Cleopatra can see Antonies all about her, and everything in him. She considers catching fish: «as I draw them up / I'll think them every one an Antony / And say, "Aha! You're caught"» (2.5.13-15). Such play connects to the lovers' role-playing and cross-dressing (22-23). As David Hillman points out, «love-as-an-emotion and love-as-a-performance [are] inextricable from one another» (Hillman [2013]: 330). What is loved, it seems, is something re-distributable, even ludic, not some unshareable core.

Specific, singular worth might seem *only* the property of report, a function of absence (Harris [1994]; cf. Hillman [2013]: 308). Yet this does not mean that love is only projection, that its substitutions owe nothing to its objects. In this light, the play's hyperbole is not always ridiculous, despite the cynicism besieging it (as with the soldiers' pointed mockery of Lepidus' language in 3.2). While it is tangled in self-assertion, it is an emphasis expressing the lover as such. It demands that something be recognized.

The lovers' values transmit to those on whom their relationship depends, as can be seen in Enobarbus' and Charmian's deaths. A more projective phenomenon is figured, negatively, in the jealous aggression shown toward messengers. Things start promisingly: Cleopatra thinks the first messenger is «gilded» by association with Antony (1.5.39), and the messenger who brings news about Antony's remarriage is first greeted in sexual terms: «O, from Italy! / Ram thou thy fruitful

<sup>14</sup> The replaceability and treachery of husbands and wives is a theme (and source of raillery, as in 1.2).

tidings in mine ears, / That long time have been barren» (2.5.23-25). On hearing about Octavia, Cleopatra repeats the transference, only this time negatively: «Hadst thou Narcissus in thy face, to me / Thou wouldst appear most ugly» (98-99). Her physical abuse of this man, too, seems like a terrible compliment. As in Antony's treatment of Thidias, we see self-command and social hierarchy crumbling. But that this jealousy can so inform the world is a striking, inverse figure of the trust, the social and somatic fulfilment, that love promises. Their insecurities, the world against which they must kick, clarify the ideal.

When, before the final defeat, Antony is thanking his followers, he envisages a relationship unlike Roman hierarchy: «I wish I could be made so many men, / And all of you clapped up together in / An Antony, that I might do you service / So good as you have done». The novelty of the conceit is indicated in their reply: «The gods forbid!» (4.2.17-20). There is self-regard – Antony splits into a team of servants to himself. But this Antony is the epitome of these men; not exactly himself, but what they share, their noblest part (cf. 4.8.5-7). He acknowledges the relations on which Roman honour depends, and redefines it, albeit from the vantage point of impossibility, a wish. This is no mere image of disposable, indifferent persons, as is risked in his final words (discussed above); the name and value of «Antony» is reclaimed even as it is shared.

His death has a different levelling effect for Cleopatra. «Young boys and girls / Are level now with men; the odds is gone, / And there is nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon» (4.15.67-70). Differences of rank or worth, gender and generation, perhaps any meaningful distinction, are gone. Yet Cleopatra modulates this nominalist nihilism. She rejects the titles with which Iras addresses her: «No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares» (4.15.78-80). She feels solidarity and she then takes notable care to comfort her women (87-90). The comfort is suicide: «Let's do't after the high Roman fashion» (92). Like Antony, she asserts a

Roman value. Yet it is also freely adopted, adapted. As for Antony, the forced Stoic position combines with the desire to unite with, or at least affirm, what has been lost. She has «immortal longings» (5.2.275) – a desire for immortal remembrance of their love, perhaps, whatever happens to her (cf. Garrison [2019]: 66).

5. Thinking Cleopatra dead, Antony pictures the afterlife for which he is impatient: «Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand, / And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze. / Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, / And all the haunt be ours» (4.14.51-54). Aeneas cast Dido away in favour of his political destiny, but here the lovers are back together. Dido gets «her» Aeneas – her man, now true to himself. Antony, careless of whether Rome was founded or not, mends their relationship. But he and Cleopatra will transcend it. In the Elysian theatre, they will be the main attraction, albeit one otherwise undescribed here.

Cleopatra has no comparable vision of the afterlife. Nonetheless, she too re-envisioned available patterns. Her theatricalizing of the dead Antony and of her suicide distances itself from the worldly values it reclaims.

Cleopatra's suicide blocks Octavius' plan for her live exhibition in Rome. She particularly dreads seeing herself parodied: «I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore» (5.2.218-220). She heads off this humiliation. But can she control her future representation? The anxiety is exacerbated by the audacious self-reference that points to the youth playing the queen. But the moment simultaneously reveals that this (Shakespearean) theatre is not exactly the one Cleopatra fears. It deepens and ironizes her fear of the deletion of her worth, rather than actually deleting it. It even makes her, suddenly, as real as this actor – this one, who is not her. Indicating dramatic illusion does not leave nothing. Nor does theatre fail its subject if it cannot perfectly recreate it. Instead, its subject's pressures and possibilities are felt in their re-figuration. Cleopatra stands for a theatre, a memory, distinct from obliteration.

Her love vision clarifies this. It is *like* a vision of worldly sovereignty and proposes a different future through a picture of the past. It is not soliloquy, but addresses Dolabella, with a challenge:

*I dreamt there was an emperor Antony,  
O, such another sleep, that I might see  
But such another man! [...]*  
*His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck  
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted  
The little O, the earth. [...]*  
*His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm  
Crested the world; his voice was propertied  
As all the tunèd spheres, and that to friends;  
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,  
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,  
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas  
That grew the more by reaping. His delights  
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above  
The element they lived in. In his livery  
Walked crowns and crownets; realms and islands  
were  
As plates dropped from his pocket. [...]*  
*Think you there was or might be such a man  
As this I dreamt of? (5.2.75-93)*

Cleopatra's imagination is a complex optic. Perhaps it tells of a literal dream; perhaps of the dream that her past now is. The past tense feels ambivalent, too: this is her dream of how Antony *was*; this *is* Antony as he appeared in her dream. The question whether «there was or might be such a man» implies the dual perspective. Is this the Antony that was destroyed by love, or the one realized in it? Is he an open fiction?

The speech is a stunning inflation of Roman hyperbole: a colossus, but one that is alive, a phenomenon of beneficent nature, part of the cosmic framework as much as imperial imposition. He is more than ever a body, one sustaining passionate friendships and elemental anger. Cleopatra is blending in the terms of her earlier praise of Antony: «O heavenly mingle! Be'st thou sad or merry, / The violence of either thee becomes, / So does it no man else» (1.5.62-64). Antony here redeems passion as attractive rather than aversive, just as she is said to do in the reports she inspires.

No figure of pared-down self-command, in the dream he grows by reaping, being reaped, a figure with both social and natural significance: he is as carelessly magnanimous as he is life-generating. Cleopatra's passion retrieves passion as grandeur. She asserts a «dolphin-like» Antony, immersed in but never lost to the waters, his delights.

Dolabella replies with measured realism to the question whether «there was or might be such a man»: «Gentle madam, no» (5.2.93). He is fiercely rebuked. Cleopatra goes on: «But if there be nor ever were one such, / It's past the size of dreaming. Nature wants stuff / To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t' imagine / An Antony were Nature's piece against fancy, / Condemning shadows quite» (94-99). She defends the dream, even if this individual does not exist and never has existed. The phrasing is compressed. One sense is that the non-existence cannot even be imagined. The chief sense is that if there never were such a person, then he could not be imagined. Or: if there were never such a man, he is nevertheless beyond any dream. Something in reality, actual or potential, informs the image. Nature generally lacks the material to compete with fancy's productions, she says, but this fantastic Antony does not take rise in the fancy. To «imagine / An Antony» is to channel a nature with which fancy cannot compete, exposing it *as* fancy. Antony is this «piece» – a paragon, type, and person (Crystal, Crystal [2002]: 327). (Note the worldly appeal to «size», as if increase in dimension, rather than something less tangible, captures a vital, immeasurable, transformation of quality.) The element that inspires and is inspired by love is real. This is even a mimesis of what does not yet exist, a possibility attested by what has been, when taken in the light which it, in turn, has made possible (see Junker [2015]: 184).

This imagination is a conceiving power knowingly drawing on a nature it has known, as it has known it. Cleopatra says «An Antony» partly to stress her redemptive powers, partly to indicate the idea's ground in what it preserves and transfigures. She assembles him – as she pieced his armour together earlier (4.4.7) – making of Antony a kind. The reality of this love is again tied

both to the beloved and to potential transfer to a re-imagined, rather than dominated, world (cf. Hillman [2013]: 311, 332).

Cleopatra's rationale recalls Enobarbus' earlier description of her: «O'erpicturing that Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature» (2.2.210-211). She improves on the fancy which, through representations of Venus, improves on nature. But she «o'erpictures» such a Venus, doubles the artistry, because she is the real thing, and the work of fancy can now be «seen» for what it is (positively and negatively). Cleopatra both ousts Venus, and presents her, what she represents or instantiates, more closely.

Cleopatra's death replays this scene Enobarbus was speaking of: «I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony» (5.2.227-228). She dresses for the part. To this role is added an apparently antithetical one: «Now from head to foot / I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine» (238-240). She must steady herself for the «noble act» (279). This combination of values speaks again when Cleopatra identifies the pleasure to come with death itself: «The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch» (289). As Junker notes ([2015]: 180), this is no mere replica of the past, for she insists on a union she never enjoyed before: «Husband, I come! / Now to that name my courage prove my title» (5.2.281-282). The performance, right now, is «the repetition, or retrieval, of her past into a present that changes and is changed by it» (Junker [2015]: 181). His merit inspires hers and, as for Antony at the last, death is less the route to fulfilment than fulfilment itself.

Illusion or no, this sets high terms for any reconciliation with death, which are equally terms for reconciliation with the world. This *Liebestod* convicts ascetic life of deathliness. And the terms set are not a reconciliation with domination, but with the enviroing, affective nature that speaks in her vision of Antony and her fervent dying. As love, as mourning, this suicide asserts the hope of a different history.

6. There are moments in *Antony and Cleopatra* where some action is signalled through the bare

word «thus», as when Antony apparently kisses Cleopatra (1.1.39) or embraces Octavius (2.2.29), or when Eros imitates Antony's gait (3.5.14). Something is emphasized, but what it is needs to be inferred. The particular demonstrations, gestural quiddities, are wordless but they are also iterable, and of course they can be highly conventionalized. They are a clue to how claims against Roman processing elude decisive capture or literal exposition but are sustained in expressive indices, whether tiny nuances or hyperbolic rapture.

This is where Adorno's ban on images of utopia, for the sake of utopia, feels relevant. Compare his comment on *Romeo and Juliet*:

*The immanence of artworks, their apparently a priori distance from the empirical, would not exist without the prospect of a world transformed by self-conscious praxis. In Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare was not promoting love without familial guardianship; but without the longing for a situation in which love would no longer be mutilated and condemned by patriarchal or any other powers, the presence of the two lost in one another would not have the sweetness – the wordless, imageless utopia – over which, to this day, the centuries have been powerless; the taboo that prohibits knowledge of any positive utopia also reigns over artworks. (Adorno [1970a]: 366-367; [1970b]: 247)<sup>15</sup>*

From the start, Antony thinks his love apocalyptic. It requires a «new heaven, new earth» (1.1.17; cf. Revelation 21.1). Hyperbole is truth: bliss is wordless, even a mere *thus*, because it is as yet *worldless*. Likewise, Cleopatra's theatre lives chiefly in virtue of its emphases. It can seem that only the poetry saves the lovers from ridiculousness (cf. Kermode [2000]: 230). Yet the extraordinary elevations nonetheless index a critical yearning, and a demand – one borne particularly in its affective and articulatory intensities. These challenge the allegedly critical attitudes that work by suspicion, discrediting them (cf. Felski [2015]).

What, then, of the play's aesthetic character? «For 25 years», says Brian Cummings,

<sup>15</sup> On the complexities of Adorno's image ban, see, for example, Pritchard (2002).

*Shakespearean theatre has been imagined in relation to Stephen Greenblatt's idea, developed most formally in Shakespearean Negotiations (1988), that the theatre after the Reformation, like religious belief itself, is a place of mimesis and not sacrament. Shakespeare's theatre is the desacralized ritual shell of dramatic illusion left over once the kernel of belief is removed.* (Cummings [2012]: 372)

The autonomization of art from religion and indeed rational authority is underway in the early modern theatre. If drama (compulsorily) enjoys a relative freedom of self-determination it is also now restricted to a disenchanted, «emptied out», sphere (see Greenblatt [1988]: 119). It is severed from the ritual or liturgical calendar and its civic and moralizing uses and established as a largely commercial enterprise (O'Connell [2000]). In fact, it is now in competition with sermons and the newly disenchanted rituals of the church, as Cummings suggests. It has a considerable degree of formal freedom, despite censorship and the general hostility of the City authorities. In this new space, spectators are freed from communal identifications with didactic personifications – fixed character concepts and structures of identification – and able, if they so wish, to judge both plays and characters for themselves, along with any such re-worked «morality play» components (cf. Shell [2010]: 121-122). They are free because they have had to pay to enter the theatre; the new London playhouses are all interior spaces, «walled off from the outside world» (Preiss [2013]: 50-51). A rhetorical education in presenting both sides of a debate – *argumentum in ultramque partem* – further informs these playwrights' off-shore, sceptical and querying, rather than didactic mode. (Rome or Egypt?) Plays now innovate in subject-matter, in genre and manipulation of conventions, and freely argue, through ironic allusion or coat-trailing peritexts, with other plays and playwrights, their practice and norms, from the stage.

The theatre is no longer the adjunct of inclusive and authoritative social rituals and meanings. But Cummings is right to proceed, as he does, to question any straightforward separation

of ritual participation from the spectatorship of the theatre. One reason is that a broader theatricality is under «rational» siege in this culture, as scepticism eats into appearances, and agency becomes almost structurally suspicious, estranged from its expressions and its passionate life. This affects the relation of these plays to their materials. In the case of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and like the sequestered Cleopatra herself, there seems to be an insistence on disposing over its sources, the mythic and generic givens and conventions. The play even risks comedy at sensitive points, such as the winching up of the dying Antony (4.15), and metatheatrical reference. It seems ironic that it is such a self-determining, stipulative artistic power that affords the play its arraignment of the suppressive theatre of Octavius. That result, however, comes equally of immersion in and expression of its medium and materials, in the social experience that lies congealed or sedimented in them but which breathes in their specific re-configuration here; for they are of course not *raw* materials at all. They at least bear the scars of their iconoclastic or sceptical emptying. In experiencing them as such, the play itself is an image, or promise, of reconciled freedom. This aesthetic immersion relies on the reflective, distancing power.

Adorno's full sentence on Shakespeare's nominalism can now be quoted:

*Shakespeare's nominalistic breakthrough into mortal and infinitely rich individuality – as content – is as much a function of an antitectonic, quasi-epic succession of short scenes as this episodic technique is under the control of content: a metaphysical experience that explodes the meaning-giving order of the old unities.* ([1970a]: 317; [1970b]: 213)

Nominalism manifests technically as discontinuous structure. Relationships of causality, time, and space are radically discomposed<sup>16</sup>. Scope and mood are fluid. *Antony and Cleopatra's* geographi-

<sup>16</sup> This drastically simplifies Adorno's explorations of nominalism, genre, and art. See especially the section on universal and particular in *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno [1970b]: 199-225).

cal reach and 42 scenes would seem to exemplify this point that coordination by the «old unities», and genres, is suspect. There is no single size and shape for notable actions, still less a stable third-person perspective from which to consider (or identify with) them. Distinct, yet interpenetrating and differentiated, worlds confront each other and themselves. A wealth of characters, whose mediations are many and far-flung, is presented. Messengers do not pool all relevant knowledge before us but signify absence, obtruding themselves as stand-ins. Adorno insists, then, that this dramatic technique is crucial in elaborating the irreducible variety and nuance of character – and that the technique itself shares in this idiosyncratic, subjective quality. *Antony and Cleopatra* – through its formal freedom – imitates, and suffers under, a dislocation of agency and significance, just as much as it articulates it. Only in this aesthetic character can it express and underline critical possibilities.

This is partly a drama of unfolding opinions, categories and norms. It displays their inadequacy or modification to context. Antony will not fit the conceptual grid, whatever violence he offers himself. Cleopatra, more clearly still, remains a «knot intricate» (5.2.298) in perceptions of her. And their love is never fully taken up into portably discursive significance or shared recognition; the possibility the lovers die for is available mainly in its antagonism with stultifying norms of self-determination. Antony's dying and, especially, Cleopatra's image of redeemed life, ironize, intensify, and refuse what they protest against<sup>17</sup>. Hence Adorno's resonant oxymoron: «metaphysical experience».

The lovers' compelled relinquishment is defining of a form of rationality. Torn free of the law, the past, from role, they are left, however, with more than dumb facticity or fantasy. Reconciliation means redemption from marmoreal, imperial

<sup>17</sup> This re-reads the subjective opacity that Hegel saw in Shakespeare. According to Adorno, the «individual and passion» are sites of social antagonism in *Antony and Cleopatra*, whose central passion is «disgust for power» ([1970a]: 378; [1970b]: 254-255). Antony's surviving on foul sustenance, so praised by Caesar, can thus emblemize revulsion for power, for asceticism itself.

form, not sheer difference from it, and if its imagination is gagged and helpless, it is an indictment of history. The love-work taken up by Cleopatra is not pure creation, or sheer counterfactual. It is, the play wants us to know, the height of artifice, against artifice.

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## The map: a medium of perception. Remarks on the relationship between space, imagination and map from Google Earth

### La mappa: un medium della percezione. Osservazioni medio-antropologiche sul rapporto tra spazio, immaginazione e mappa a partire da Google Earth

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**Abstract.** Starting from the concept of Digital Earth, the article questions the effects that Google's geo-spatial applications have produced on our daily relationship with information, and the way we experience the spaces around us. Its aim is twofold: on the one hand, I intend to examine the implications that bring Google's digital maps closer to the invention of the print or telescope; on the other hand, I intend to explain, through a medio-anthropological investigation, how the map, as a medium of perception, falls not only de facto, but also de jure, into the field of aesthetics.

**Keywords.** Maps, Google Earth, spatiality, cartography, perception.

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1. *The Digital Earth: Understanding our Planet in the 21st Century* è il titolo di un celebre discorso che il vicepresidente americano Al Gore pronunciò al *California Science Center* di Los Angeles nel gennaio del 1998. Un intervento che è passato alla storia – non solo della cartografia – per il ruolo d'avanguardia che ha giocato nel dibattito pubblico sulla «Digital Earth», la terra digitale: una «rappresentazione a molte risoluzioni, tridimensionale del pianeta, in cui si possono inserire enormi quantità di dati geo-referenziati» (Gore [1998]: 89). Nel suo intervento Gore auspicava la realizzazione di una «carta digitale del mondo alla risoluzione di un metro» che, a suo dire, avrebbe consentito di «catturare, memorizzare, elaborare e visualizzare una quantità senza precedenti di informazioni sul nostro pianeta e su un'ampia gamma di fenomeni culturali e ambientali» (Gore [1998]: 89). Un progetto avveniristico, a quel tempo giudicato ancora fantascientifico, ma che nel futuro avrebbe potuto trova-

re applicazione in diversi ambiti: consentire forme virtuali di diplomazia, aiutare la lotta alla criminalità, contribuire a conservare la biodiversità, a prevedere i cambiamenti climatici o a migliorare la produttività agricola. Un potenziale applicativo che Gore così illustrava alla sua platea:

*Immaginate, per esempio, una giovane bambina che si reca ad una mostra sulla Digital Earth in un museo locale. Dopo aver indossato un visore a casco, lei vede la terra per come appare dallo spazio. Con un data glove, effettua degli zoom, usando livelli di risoluzione sempre più alti, per vedere continenti, poi regioni, nazioni, città e, infine, singole case, alberi, e altri oggetti naturali o artificiali. Dopo aver trovato un'area del pianeta che le interessa esplorare, servendosi di una visualizzazione 3D del terreno, compie l'equivalente di un "viaggio su un tappeto volante". Naturalmente, il terreno è solo uno dei molti tipi di dati con cui lei può interagire. Servendosi delle capacità di riconoscimento vocale del sistema, è in grado di richiedere informazioni sulla copertura del suolo, la distribuzione delle specie vegetali e animali, sul meteo in tempo reale, sulle strade, i confini politici e la popolazione. Può anche visualizzare informazioni ambientali che lei e altri studenti di tutto il mondo hanno raccolto. (Gore [1998]: 89)*

Come aveva previsto Gore, nel corso di questi ultimi vent'anni il globo virtuale si è rapidamente imposto come il modello più adatto a imbrigliare l'immenso flusso di informazioni, per rappresentarle nel loro contesto spaziale e renderle facilmente navigabili e condivisibili. Una tecnologia *user-oriented*, che è stata perfezionata e popolarizzata dalle applicazioni geo-spaziali (una combinazione di dati geografici e software informatico) di Google, a oggi le più utilizzate al mondo. Lanciate nel 2005 con la missione di «organizzare le informazioni» per renderle «universalmente accessibili e utili» (Jones [2007]: 8), *Google Earth* e *Google Maps* hanno subito avuto una grande diffusione<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Come scrive Jeremy Brotton: «sui due miliardi di persone che si stima siano attualmente online, globalmente, oltre mezzo miliardo hanno scaricato *Google Earth*, e il loro numero continua a crescere» (Brotton [2012]: 446).

Dunque, è soprattutto grazie al successo di alcuni privati, se il sogno di disporre di un flusso di informazioni «geo-referenziate» – associate cioè a «un luogo specifico sulla superficie della terra» (Gore [1998]: 89) – si è trasformato in realtà così velocemente.

Per quanto oggi l'uso e il consumo di mappe digitali possa apparire comune o addirittura scontato, la loro rapida integrazione nelle pratiche della vita quotidiana non è priva di conseguenze. A ben guardare, si tratta di un fenomeno di portata epocale, paragonabile nelle sue implicazioni estetiche e epistemologiche all'invenzione della stampa o del cannocchiale.

2. È da quando «Gutenberg inventò la stampa 500 anni fa – hanno scritto David Vise e Mark Malseed in *The Google Story* – che un'invenzione non trasformava le potenzialità delle persone e il loro accesso alle informazioni come ha fatto Google» (Vise, Malseed [2005]: XXXIII). Se Gutenberg ha reso libri e tomi scientifici facilmente disponibili ai lettori, Google ha trasformato il modo di relazionarsi alle tecniche per classificare, elaborare e memorizzare i dati, avviando un vero e proprio processo di popolarizzazione degli strumenti cartografici. E in effetti, senza alcun addestramento formale e senza avere alcuna cognizione tecnica o scientifica, gratuitamente oggi tutti produciamo, condividiamo e consumiamo mappe di ogni genere, servendocene per gli scopi più vari (mappe che rappresentano le nostre città, conflitti in paesi lontani, crimini, tendenze politiche e di voto, effetti di calamità naturali, epidemie, ma anche itinerari di viaggi, percorsi, luoghi che fotografiamo o che vorremmo visitare ecc.). Questo per dire che, se prima le informazioni contenute sulle carte e sugli atlanti tradizionali erano prerogativa quasi esclusiva delle élites – la cosiddetta «*Sovereign Map*» (Jacob [2006]), simbolo del potere sovrano e dispositivo di sapere-potere (p. es. Harley 2001) per territorializzare, disciplinare e «geo-codificare» (Pickles [2004]) spazi, soggetti e identità – oggi le mappe appaiono più accessibili che mai. «Cartography is Dead (Thank God)», come ha scritto l'artista e teorico Denis Wood (2003) per celebrare

la fine del diritto esclusivo delle classi dominanti sulla produzione delle immagini cartografiche.

Le analogie più significative tra l'invenzione della stampa a caratteri mobili e la rivoluzione digitale di Google non si riducono però alla loro massiccia diffusione, né ai veri o presunti processi di democratizzazione della conoscenza che entrambe avrebbero avviato<sup>2</sup>. Più interessante ai fini della nostra discussione, è constatare che, per quanto differenti, ambedue sono state capaci di intervenire sulle strutture mentali, percettive ed espressive, istituendo nuove modalità della cultura e della conoscenza. Dal punto di vista teorico questo parallelo non ha nessuna particolare originalità. Già Marshall McLuhan (1964) e Walter Ong (1982) avevano spostato il focus delle loro ricerche dalla dimensione politica e sociale a quella psichica, attirando l'attenzione sui sottili meccanismi attraverso i quali la stampa e, più in generale, le tecnologie della comunicazione influenzano l'economia cognitiva e la mentalità del mondo occidentale. Se per McLuhan le tecnologie sono «estensioni dell'uomo» che alterano «le relazioni sensoriali o le forme di percezione» (McLuhan [1964]: 39), Ong insiste sul fatto che l'intelligenza umana sia sempre «autoriflessiva, per cui interiorizza anche i suoi strumenti esterni, i quali diventano parte del suo proprio processo di riflessione» (Ong [1982]: 133-134). In estrema sintesi, entrambi sono convinti che l'introduzione dell'estensione artificiale produca una riorganizzazione dell'ordine conoscitivo precedente; una trasformazione che si realizza nel momento in cui una tecnologia

diventa una parte psichica di noi stessi, così integrata nei nostri processi percettivi e cognitivi da consentire nuove possibilità per il pensiero e per l'espressione.

Ong ha illustrato questo processo in riferimento al passaggio dalla dimensione orale della parola recitata alla dimensione visiva dello spazio tipografico della stampa a caratteri mobili, ma lo stesso schema si può applicare anche alla storia della cartografia. Infatti, se il mappamondo medievale di Hereford (secoli XII-XIV), in quanto espressione di una cultura essenzialmente orale affermava ancora che «*omnia plus legenda quam pingenda*», cioè che «tutte queste cose sono più da leggere che da disegnare», nella modernità la carta geografica perde il suo ancoraggio narrativo al «*saeculum*» (Scafi [2007]) e si caratterizza per la progressiva «emancipazione del disegno dalla parola» (Quaini [1992]: 786). A favorire il passaggio dal racconto del *mundus* cristiano alla visualizzazione del *globus* (Marramao [2003]) sono le soluzioni tecniche e le possibilità pratiche offerte dal medium della stampa (impaginazione del testo, indici delle figure, ordine sequenziale delle mappe e delle relative scale). Lo conferma Abramo Ortelio, l'autore del famoso *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, il primo atlante geografico a stampa della modernità, che considera la geografia «occhio della storia» e le proprie carte «uno specchio della realtà posto dinanzi ai nostri occhi» (Neve [2018]: 42). L'utilizzo della metafora dello specchio da parte di Ortelio è un efficace esempio di quel genere di visibilità «moderna» che veniva associata alla rappresentazione cartografica, e che ha imposto, nei secoli successivi, la «forma-atlante» (Neve [2018]) come paradigma dell'obiettività scientifica:

*Non soltanto le immagini fanno l'atlante; le immagini dell'atlante fanno la scienza. Gli atlanti sono gli archivi delle immagini e delle registrazioni delle scienze osservative [...]. Per la fine del diciottesimo secolo, il termine [atlante] si era diffuso dalla geografia all'astronomia e all'anatomia [...] e, entro la fine del diciannovesimo secolo, gli atlanti erano proliferati in tutte le scienze empiriche (Daston, Galison [2007]: 22-23)*

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<sup>2</sup> Come spiega Jeremy Crampton (2010), se per un verso le tecnologie geo-spaziali di Google hanno aperto la strada a nuove forme di «geo-collaborazione», per un altro c'è chi accusa Google di usare la cartografia digitale come dispositivo di «geo-sorveglianza». Inoltre, si critica il fatto che Google imponga, con un atto di cyber-imperialismo, un'unica versione cartografica del mondo. Le mappe di Google sono criticate, inoltre, perché contengono «le tracce delle preoccupazioni e delle convenzioni della cartografia statunitense – compreso il mantenimento di immagini a bassa risoluzione o sfocate delle aree che contengono strutture militari americane» (Helmreich [2011]: 1221).

Ora, così come la stampa non ha causato la fine della comunicazione orale, e l'invenzione del telefono non ha eliminato il fatto di scrivere lettere, i servizi cartografici di Google non cancellano le forme tradizionali di cartografia (basti pensare alle mappe ancora appese nelle classi delle nostre scuole) e le pratiche di soggettivizzazione ad esse correlate. Nel contempo, ogni qualvolta in una cultura si diffonde un nuovo medium, questo contribuisce a riorganizzare la funzione, il significato e gli effetti dei media precedenti. Una riorganizzazione che, come spiegava McLuhan, investe per estensione l'intero «sistema nervoso» (McLuhan [1964]: 24) della società.

Ma allora, per determinare il significato epocale di questa nuova tecnologia cartografica, dobbiamo forse chiederci: in che misura la visione del globo virtuale di Google ridefinisce il genere di visibilità che era tradizionalmente associato alla formata atlante? Quali sono gli effetti di questo medium digitale sui nostri processi cognitivi, considerato che oggi per rappresentare lo spazio geografico non ci serviamo più, o almeno non esclusivamente, di tecnologie derivate dall'incontro tra stampa e arte della cartografia? Per provare a rispondere a questi interrogativi e ragionare più nel merito sul tipo di mediazione che caratterizza il funzionamento di servizi cartografici come *Google Earth* e *Google Maps*, possiamo ora passare al nostro secondo termine di paragone, il cannocchiale.

3. Secondo la nota ricostruzione offerta da Hans Blumenberg (1966), l'incorporazione del cannocchiale nella teoria astronomica di Galilei è una delle espressioni più pregnanti delle conquiste del copernicanesimo: testimonianza di una «nuova [...] esigenza di verità» (Blumenberg [1966]: 391) e del modo in cui la visualizzazione dell'invisibile ha ridefinito in chiave tecnico-inventiva «la posizione dell'uomo nella natura e rispetto alla natura» (Blumenberg [1966]: 400), contribuendo a istituire un nuovo insieme di relazioni percettive e conferendo alla volta celeste un tratto storico mai posseduto prima.

In sostanza, quando Galilei nel *Siderus Nuncius* (1610) presenta le innovative funzionalità del

suo «tubo prospettico» (Edgerton [2009]: 151-166) e descrive il processo con cui il messaggio delle stelle si rende manifesto ai sensi – dal telescopio all'occhio, dall'occhio alla mano e poi dalla mano al disegno, e da questo infine al lettore – non sta solo fornendo una legittimazione pratica della teoria copernicana, ma sta indicando anche (se non soprattutto) un cambio di paradigma nel modo di intendere il rapporto tra sguardo scientifico, strumento tecnico e oggetto contemplato. Secondo quanto lascia intendere Blumenberg, la visione telescopica di Galilei non può essere trattata alla stregua di un mero supplemento del senso della vista. Infatti, quando operano congiuntamente l'occhio e il cannocchiale istituiscono un secondo ordine di visione, autonomo rispetto a quello *naturale* che aveva dominato la contemplazione del cosmo in epoca classica. Un modello teorico rimasto invariato per secoli, che accordava «all'uomo in ogni direzione condizioni di visibilità uguali e costanti rispetto a tutto il cielo stellato»; e in base al quale si rappresentava l'universo come «delimitato e conchiuso dalla sfera esterna delle stelle fisse» (Blumenberg [1966]: 394-395).

Il cannocchiale, una volta associato al senso della vista, non si limita a compensare i difetti dell'occhio umano, come vorrebbe un paradigma correttivo-integrativo, ma ne riorganizza prestazioni e possibilità. Il processo descritto da Galilei culmina, infatti, con l'assemblaggio di un «*media-landscape*» (Casetti [2018]) tecnologico-naturale dotato di «valori epistemici» tali da rendere possibili nuove forme di «empirismo collettivo» (Daston, Galison [2010]). Per dirla nelle parole di uno studioso attento alle implicazioni antropologiche del tema mediale come Joseph Vogl, con Galilei il cannocchiale cessa di essere un semplice strumento ottico e diventa un «medium»: cioè una tecnologia che genera un nuovo ambito estetico-scientifico, che muta «il significato della visione e della percezione sensibile trasformando ogni fatto visibile [...] in un dato calcolabile» (Vogl [2001]: 115-116)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Come spiega Bernhard Siegert commentando il saggio di Vogl: la «storia del telescopio si trasforma in una storia dei media se viene presa come sistema di riferi-

In analogia con quanto detto a proposito dell'uso astronomico del telescopio da parte di Galilei, oggi lo sguardo cartografico su cui si modellano i sistemi di visualizzazione dei geo-media sembrerebbe imporsi come l'ambiente di assemblaggio di una nuova rivoluzione copernicana. Una rivoluzione – ricorda Stefano Catucci (2013) in *Imparare dalla Luna* – iniziata dagli astronauti delle missioni Apollo, che scattarono le prime foto della Terra dallo spazio (*Earthrise, The Blue Marble*), costituendo il pianeta «come oggetto cosmico» (Catucci [2013]: 48). Un'esperienza di «spaesamento ecumenico» (Boatto [2013]: 23) che non ha messo in discussione «il geo-centrismo come principio pragmatico» (Anders [1994]:26), ma che ha contribuito a generare nuove modalità di senso nel rapporto con la Terra, intesa come il nostro substrato esperienziale<sup>4</sup>. Lo sguardo del cosmonauta – portato alle sue estreme conseguenze dal selfie nello spazio dell'artista giapponese Aki Hoshide (2012) – apre, infatti, un ambito estetico-percettivo inedito, che segna «l'ingresso unanime della Terra nello *stadio dello specchio*» (Boatto [2013]: 25). Sebbene nessuno abbia mai direttamente goduto della prospettiva del pilota Bill Anders (*Earthrise*) o di quella dell'astronauta Harrison “Jack” Schmitt (*Blue Marble*), oggi la maggior parte di noi ha la sensazione di conoscere come sia fatta la Terra e tende a considerare la sua immagine nello spazio come qualcosa di familiare. Come spiega Alberto Boatto:

*Metaforicamente la Terra è giunta a specchiarsi, a vedersi nella sua totalità mediante la collaborazione del nostro occhio, o meglio, mediante l'intervento dell'onnivoglia di quel monoculo meccanico che l'oftalmologia tecnologica è riuscita a innestare all'occhio umano.* (Boatto [2013]: 25)

L'innesto di questo occhio meccanico è un aspetto pratico e immaginativo che merita di esse-

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mento per un'analisi della visione» (Siegert [2015]: 5).

<sup>4</sup> Considerata un «manifesto fotografico per la giustizia globale» (Poole [2008]) e presto utilizzata come immagine di copertina per il classico della controcultura *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, ad oggi *Blue Marble* è l'immagine più riprodotta di sempre (Mirzoeff [2015]: 1)

re ulteriormente approfondito, tenuto conto che il globo – icona geografica per eccellenza sin dai tempi di Tolomeo (Berggren, Jones [2000]) – è il segno in base al quale oggi si definiscono la grande maggioranza dei processi politici, economici e culturali che comunemente chiamiamo globali. Ma, soprattutto, considerato che l'immagine iconica del pianeta azzurro sospeso nello spazio è anche l'immagine con cui si apre l'home page di *Google Earth*. Uno sguardo extra-terrestre che, mimando un'operazione di «sradicamento» – termine chiave, secondo Tim Ingold, del «moderno concetto di ambiente» (Ingold [2000]: 209), cioè di un mondo che non è più la nostra casa e di cui non siamo più il centro – trasferisce il punto osservativo del soggetto fuori dallo spazio fisico, aprendo alla possibilità di inclinare il mondo, zoomare, fare una panoramica, ruotarlo.

4. *Google Earth* è un globo virtuale tridimensionale. Un archivio personale e personalizzabile che si presenta come «una rappresentazione visiva continua» (Mirzoeff [2015]: 135) sebbene – come ricorda Helmreich – condensi al suo interno diverse forme di rappresentazione: «indessicali: le immagini satellitari; iconiche: le mappe stradali; simboliche: i confini degli Stati» (Helmreich [2011]: 1222). *Google Maps*, invece, è progettata con uno scopo essenzialmente pratico: ci offre indicazioni sui percorsi stradali (è in grado di guidarci sia per iscritto sia vocalmente); fornisce dettagli sulla funzione degli edifici in ogni luogo; grazie al servizio *Street View*, che invia veicoli equipaggiati di fotocamere a fotografare tutte le strade in cui è possibile accedere, ci permette di esplorare una determinata porzione di spazio. Sia *Google Earth* sia la funzione *Street View* di *Google Maps* si servono di una tecnica nota con il nome di *stitching* (cucitura), che, grazie alla manipolazione e al montaggio di diverse tipologie di immagini, genera un effetto di continuità, che oscilla tra l'«ipermediazione» e l'«immediatezza» (Grusin, Bolter [1999]). Che si tratti solo di un'illusione, lo ha messo bene in luce l'artista Clement Valla, che nella serie *Postcards from Google Earth* trasforma i difetti di funzionamento del sistema – il cosiddetto

to *glitch* – in cartoline che ricordano le immagini dei disastri naturali realizzate grazie alla computergrafica nel cinema contemporaneo.

La simulazione di questo effetto di continuità e la mediazione situata che le applicazioni geo-spaziali di Google realizzano sullo schermo dei nostri dispositivi, rimandano comunque al principio geografico della «transcalarità», termine con cui si intende «la proprietà di uno stesso fenomeno di essere colto a più livelli scalari» (Turco [2010]: 247), cioè secondo misure e geometrie variabili. Si tratta di un aspetto inedito per le mappe e gli atlanti tradizionali che, almeno a partire dal XV secolo, presentavano misure fisse (le scale) per regolare il funzionamento del reticolo cartografico e determinare così, senza alcuna approssimazione, «il rapporto metrico esistente tra due punti rappresentati sulla mappa e la loro distanza nella realtà» (Farinelli [2008]: 158). Un modello di corrispondenza tra la realtà e la sua rappresentazione che, come hanno riconosciuto numerosi studiosi (si veda, ad esempio, Elden [2013]), è inscritto nell'ordine geometrico dello spazio politico moderno: uno spazio sistematico, isotropo e omogeneo, che presuppone un soggetto fisso e immobile che riduca la conoscenza ad una forma di razionalità calcolativa. Un modello epistemologico caratteristico della forma-atlante, che ha contribuito a conferire struttura e significato politico allo spazio, sfruttando la logica «biplanare» del libro a stampa:

*tutti gli atlanti rappresentano le idee geografiche sia nello spazio convenzionale, il disegno delle singole mappe nell'atlante, sia nel "metaspazio" strutturale del libro stesso, lo spazio contenuto nell'esperienza di sfogliare un atlante e confrontare le carte l'una con l'altra [...]. Nel metaspazio della struttura dell'atlante, il territorio politico è manipolato almeno in tre modi: nella definizione delle unità cartografiche (le sezioni di territorio che ogni mappa rappresenta); nella composizione dell'atlante (quali e quante mappe devono essere incluse); e nella disposizione delle carte (Akerman [1995]: 139-146).*

Il sistema di visualizzazione delle applicazioni geo-spaziali di Google mette in discussione l'or-

dine scalare della rappresentazione cartografica tipico della modernità, trasformando l'esperienza di sfogliare il libro in un'«immagine-movimento» (Deleuze [1983]; Conley [2007]): immersi dentro *Google Earth* gli utenti – che sono dei veri e propri *users* e non più dei semplici «spettatori disincarnati» (Farman [2010]: 780) o *viewers* – possono apticamente attraversare e ri-scoprire lo spazio della mappa, secondo una logica cinestetica tipica dei dispositivi di visualizzazione contemporanei (Bruno [2002]).

Del resto, come hanno ammesso gli stessi sviluppatori di Google, è stato un documentario di nove minuti – realizzato nel 1977 da Charles e Ray Eames e intitolato *Powers of Ten* – a fornire il modello esplorativo che ha reso i nuovi sistemi di visualizzazione di *Google Earth* facilmente fruibili e navigabili. Fu solo dopo aver guardato un *flipbook* di *Powers of Ten* – ricorda Mark Aubin – che «decidemmo che saremmo partiti dallo spazio esterno con una vista della Terra intera e poi avremmo zoomato sempre più vicino» (Aubin [2008]). Simili al cortometraggio a cui sono ispirate, le mappe digitali di Google consentono di riconfigurare e ri-territorializzare le relazioni tra scale geografiche a piacimento, dando forma a un «*milieu* tecno-geografico» (Neve [2005]: 5) che si sviluppa su diversi piani di realtà, combinando dinamicamente la scala umana e quella globale, attraverso un fitto intreccio tra il livello fisico, il livello geografico e il livello tecnologico.

5. Questo processo di «medializzazione della Terra» (Döring, Thielmann [2009]: 13), che ha progressivamente trasformato l'icona del globo in uno «space-to-your-face» (Aubin [2008]) digitale e interattivo, ha innescato una vera e propria «riconfigurazione socio-tecnologica» (Döring, Thielmann [2009]: 13) del modo di percepire e organizzare lo spazio. D'altronde, trovano qui conferma alcune delle tesi alla base della teoria di McLuhan: quella per cui «nessun medium esiste o ha significanza da solo, ma soltanto in un continuo rapporto con altri media»; quella secondo cui «il contenuto di un medium è sempre un altro medium» (McLuhan [1964]: 29); ma soprattutto,

quella secondo cui una volta che muta la condizione materiale, il medium – dalla struttura statica e biplanare del libro a stampa al montaggio e al movimento apparentemente tridimensionale del digitale – mutano anche le «proporzioni», i «ritmi», gli «schemi» e le forme «dell'associazione e dell'azione umana» (McLuhan [1964]:29) e, quindi, di conseguenza, anche il messaggio.

Sicché, in modo analogo a come la stampa e il cannocchiale di Galilei hanno contribuito a ridefinire il concetto di visione in epoca moderna, la cartografia digitale trasforma le capacità percettive e immaginative del soggetto, delegando il suo senso dell'orientamento a una forma medializzata di «a-whereeness» (Thrift [2008]: 166). Detto altrimenti, una volta associate alla nostra percezione spaziale, le mappe di Google la riorganizzano, adattando le tecniche con cui facciamo esperienza del nostro «senso del dove» alle sfide poste da uno spazio globalizzato sempre più compresso e irrapresentabile, in cui le gerarchie scalari e i concetti tradizionali di centro e periferia vengono continuamente messi in discussione. Attraverso il ricorso alla prospettiva extra-terrestre del cosmonauta, i servizi cartografici di Google sembrerebbero infatti realizzare la funzione che Fredric Jameson assegnava alle carte nautiche: coordinare «dati esistenti (la posizione empirica del soggetto) con la nozione non vissuta, astratta della totalità geografica» (Jameson [1984]: 68), cioè del globo. D'altro canto, in quanto forme digitali di «cartografia cognitiva», le mappe di Google rendono altresì «possibile al soggetto individuale una rappresentazione situazionale di quella più vasta totalità, propriamente irrapresentabile» (Jameson [1984]: 67), che è l'iperspazio della rete. Il modo in cui Google usa l'immagine del pianeta sospeso nello spazio – spiega il Chief Advocate Technologist di Google – inverte infatti «i ruoli del browser web come applicazione e della mappa come contenuto; il risultato è un'esperienza in cui il pianeta stesso è il browser» (Jones [2007]: 11).

Da ciò possiamo dedurre che la rivoluzione copernicana di Google non solo apre nuove modalità percettive e di senso, ridefinendo in chiave tecnico-culturale il modo in cui «ope-

razionalizziamo la deissi» (Siegert [2015]: 120), ma di fatto annulla la dicotomia tra spazio fisico e spazio virtuale con cui si era soliti rappresentare l'ambiente digitale del *cyberspace*. Infatti, se la mappa contestualmente all'invenzione del World Wide Web era ancora utilizzata come una metafora astratta della rete informatica – un contenitore vuoto, separato da qualunque riferimento alla materialità dello spazio fisico – nelle applicazioni geo-spaziali si trasforma in una vera e propria «piattaforma di navigazione» (Latour et al. [2010]: 583) che, libera da ogni funzione mimetica, si pretende, pragmaticamente, «identica al territorio» (Latour et al. [2010]; Siegert [2011]). Nella misura in cui la localizzazione fisica del soggetto diventa parte integrante della logica interna del web, la mappa da «rappresentazione di una rete digitale esterna» diventa «uno strumento per la navigazione interna della stessa rete» (Gordon [2009]: 238). Un aspetto, quest'ultimo, che definisce il senso meta-geografico della riorganizzazione sociale della conoscenza nel passaggio dal *Web 1.0* al *Web 2.0*. Questo mutamento, tanto veloce quanto radicale, ha spinto la critica a elaborare nuove categorie concettuali, necessarie per descrivere i continui processi di «ibridazione» (Latour [1991]) tra natura e cultura, spazio fisico e spazio virtuale, che oggi sono alla base della nostra più comune esperienza spaziale<sup>5</sup>.

Nel complesso, si tratta di una trasformazione culturale che, come sosteneva Jameson a proposito delle sfide poste dallo spazio globale del capitalismo multinazionale, richiede l'elaborazione di una «nuova estetica della cartografia cognitiva» (Jameson [1984]: 67). Un'estetica della rappresentazione spaziale che non si risolve, però, nell'ingenua sostituzione della geografia alla storia – come è stato spesso equivocato dal postmodernismo – ma che riconosce nello spazio e nelle sue rappresen-

<sup>5</sup> Sono validi esempi di questa attitudine a individuare nuove categorie e coniare nuovi termini tecnici i concetti di «net-locality» (Gordon, De Souza e Silva [2011]) o «Digi-Place», quest'ultimo adoperato per indicare «spazi interattivi progettati soggettivamente che influenzano come le persone interagiscono con il loro ambiente circostante» (Zook, Graham [2007]: 480).



tazioni il segno di una nuova storicità. Un'estetica, dunque, che scava tra le rovine della modernità per portare alla luce le stratificazioni e i processi di «rimediazione» (Bolter, Grusin [1999]) che caratterizzano le nostre condizioni (tecniche) d'esistenza attuali.

6. Una via proficua da percorrere per inquadrare il senso e la specificità storica di questo nuovo tipo di spazio (cartografico), potrebbe essere quella di adottare una prospettiva «medio-antropologica» (Glaubitz et al. [2014]). Cioè, in sostanza, di ripartire da quanto Walter Benjamin osservava già agli inizi del XX secolo riguardo al rapporto tra cinema e estetica, tema mediale e storicità dei processi percettivi: che «il modo in cui si organizza la percezione umana – il *medium* in cui essa ha luogo –, non è condizionato soltanto in senso naturale ma anche storico» (Benjamin [1936]: 21). Del resto, in una fase in cui il discorso sui media tende a concentrarsi sia sulla loro capacità di creare veri e propri «ambienti mediali» (Montani, Cecchi, Feyles [2018]) sia sulla loro capacità di compenetrare la sfera naturale, la riflessione benjaminiana sulla questione della tecnica – per la sua dimensione al tempo stesso estetica, epistemologica e politica – ritorna di grande attualità per l'«archeologia dei media» (Parrika [2012]). Lo dimostra la *Kulturtechnikforschung*<sup>6</sup> tedesca che – sulla scorta delle metodologie foucaultiane di Kittler (1985) e della teoria dell'attore-rete di Latour (2005) – con il termine *Medien* intende «l'insieme degli strumenti e delle operazioni che costituiscono le condizioni di possibilità – l'*a priori* tecnico-materiale, storicamente determinato – di ogni forma di esperienza e di conoscenza, così come di ogni processo culturale» (Pinotti, Somaini [2016]: 184).

Ora se seguiamo questa impostazione e ammettiamo che la storia della percezione spa-

ziale è indissociabile dal modo in cui una condizione tecnico-materiale agisce e orienta le nostre esperienze, non rimane che da chiedersi: quale tecnologia traccia le coordinate della nostra esperienza spaziale, trasformando i modi di vedere e praticare lo spazio? Qual è il nostro *a-priori* tecnico-materiale di riferimento? Riadattando una nota affermazione di Benjamin sul cinema, potremmo dire che in un'epoca come quella attuale, caratterizzata da una massiccia presenza di immagini cartografiche, sono le mappe il nostro terreno di analisi esemplare: tra gli oggetti «attualmente più important[i] di quella dottrina della percezione che presso i Greci aveva il nome di estetica» (Benjamin [1936]: 47). La mia ipotesi infatti è che la mappa, in quanto medium della percezione, debba essere valutata nella sua specificità storica, nella sua attualità; e, allo stesso tempo, come un tratto costitutivo e invariante dell'esperienza umana: come un «universale storico e cognitivo» (Blaut et al. [2003]) che da sempre gioca un ruolo chiave per il controllo e «l'addomesticamento simbolico» (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 364) dello spazio, fisico e mentale.

Nelle prossime pagine proverò a motivare ulteriormente questa proposta, cercando di collocarla nel suo quadro teorico di riferimento. Il mio obiettivo in questa sede è difendere le ragioni per cui la logica cartografica – che in letteratura prende il nome tecnico di *mapping* – rientra non solo di fatto, ma anche di diritto, nel campo d'interesse dell'estetica. Per estetica – secondo una tradizione critica che da Kant attraversa il pensiero di Emilio Garroni – intendo non una disciplina speciale e genitiva (per esempio una scienza dell'arte o una teoria del bello), ma una filosofia che si interessa alle condizioni estetiche dell'esperienza in genere. Cioè alle relazioni dell'*aisthesis* con la produzione di senso e la sfera dell'operatività e, dunque, anche alle forme peculiari con cui l'uomo articola creativamente e tecnicamente la sua relazione con il mondo circostante, provvedendo così alla sua autoconservazione. Sicché, a dispetto dell'atteggiamento di quasi indifferenza che la critica ha mostrato nei confronti dei problemi che da sempre avvicinano il sapere filosofico e quello geo-

<sup>6</sup> Mi riferisco in particolare alle ricerche sulle «ontologie operative» svolte nel centro di studi IKKM (Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie) fondato da Bernhard Siegert e Lorenz Engell presso la Bauhaus-Universität di Weimar.

cartografico<sup>7</sup>, la mia requisitoria sarà dedicata a rintracciare le condizioni che uniscono la percezione dello spazio, un certo impulso cartografico e la sua dislocazione tecnica. Infatti, se concediamo, come teorizzava Kant nell'*Estetica trascendentale*, che «soltanto da un punto di vista umano possiamo parlare di spazio» (Kant [1781]: 103), dobbiamo altresì ammettere che le nostre più comuni esperienze richiedono «non solo un corpo biologico, ma oltre ad esso, o addirittura al suo posto, un corpo tecnico, semiotico, e artefatto» [Siegert, Engell [2013]: 5]. E sono proprio le trasformazioni indotte su e da questo corpo – un ibrido di natura e cultura, biologia e tecnologia – che costituiscono l'oggetto principale di una riflessione medio-antropologica sullo spazio.

7. Assumere una qualsiasi prospettiva sullo spazio e le sue rappresentazioni – spiegava Emilio Garroni (1981) – comporta ammettere «la liceità di un problema metateorico della spazialità». Dove per spazialità Garroni intende «non tanto la designazione di una qualità comune e più generica di tutti gli spazi possibili, quanto la messa in rilievo della loro condizione di possibilità», cioè propriamente l'esser «spazio dello spazio comunque definito, il suo essere una determinazione originaria» (Garroni [1981]: 244-245). Per primo Cassirer – che secondo Garroni, per complessità di elaborazione e ricchezza di materiali, rimane un punto di riferimento irrinunciabile per ogni riflessione sullo spazio – aveva intuito che lo spazio «non possiede una struttura assolutamente data, immutabile una volta per tutte», ma riceve il suo contenuto determinato e la sua struttura peculiare «solo dall'ordine di senso al cui interno si configura di volta in volta» (Cassirer [1931]: 103). Infatti, non vi è *uno* spazio, indipendente da chi lo sperimenta e già determinato nella sua struttura, ma *più* spazi, per quante articolazioni e punti di vista costrutti-

vi sono possibili. Nel contempo, però, ogni ordinamento dello spazio, ogni disposizione del molteplice in un tutto coordinato, è sempre soggetto a una precisa legge della forma, senza la quale la singola costruzione non sarebbe possibile. Come risolvere una simile difficoltà? Come tenere insieme, analiticamente, la determinazione originaria dello spazio e la storia delle sue molteplici rappresentazioni? Secondo Cassirer è possibile seguire il modo in cui la «semplice spazialità» si «converte in spazio», solo esaminando l'«evoluzione dell'ordine dello spazio» a partire da quella particolare «forza dell'immaginazione creatrice» (Cassirer [1931]: 103-104) e quel «particolare schematismo della rappresentazione» (Cassirer [1929]: 199) da cui dipendono la diversità e l'eterogeneità delle sue configurazioni.

In linea con la proposta di Bernhard Siegert di sostituire la «critica della cultura» di Cassirer – per il quale lo spazio estetico coincide con la «sfera della pura figurazione» (Cassirer [1931]: 107) – con la «critica dei media» (Siegert [2015]: 1), la mia tesi è che il modo in cui questa legge della forma opera schematicamente, articolando una molteplicità di sintesi e costituendo diverse rappresentazioni spaziali, debba essere esaminato a partire da un'originale fusione intercategoriale tra *aisthesis* e *techne* (Simondon [2014])<sup>8</sup>. Infatti, se vogliamo analizzare i processi trasformativi che investono la nostra capacità di produrre sintesi spaziali – e cioè seguire l'evoluzione dell'ordine dello spazio attraverso le sue figurazioni – dobbiamo tenere in maggiore considerazione la predisposizione *naturale*, radicata nel processo stesso di ominizzazione, a interagire e dominare creativamente il mondo-ambiente attraverso il dislocamento e il prolungamento spontaneo della nostra sensibilità in qualcosa di esterno e inorganico: un artefatto. Come ribadisce lo stesso Siegert: «gli umani *in quanto tali* non esistono indipendente-

<sup>7</sup> Il fatto che dall'*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* di Joachim Ritter siano state escluse sia la voce *Karte* sia la voce *Kartographie* è un indizio significativo degli effetti di questo processo di rimozione sul canone della filosofia occidentale (Morawski, Sferrazza, Papa [2018]: 7)

<sup>8</sup> Come ha teorizzato Gilbert Simondon, ciò significa ripensare l'estetica come una tecno-estetica, dal momento che il «sentimento tecno-estetico» è più «originario rispetto al solo sentimento estetico o all'aspetto tecnico considerato semplicemente sotto l'angolazione della sua funzionalità» (Simondon [2014]: 330).

mente dalle tecniche culturali di ominizzazione [...] e lo spazio *in quanto tale* non esiste indipendentemente dalle tecniche culturali di controllo dello spazio» (Siegert [2015]: 9).

Quindi, ricapitolando, anche per determinare gli effetti indotti dall'avvento dei servizi cartografici di Google, sarà necessario riferire la loro capacità trasformativa alla tendenza tipicamente umana ad estendere e potenziare i tratti performativi della nostra immaginazione associando la proiezione del nostro «schema corporeo» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 151) a un «registro grafico di corrispondenza tra due spazi, il cui esplicito risultato è uno spazio di rappresentazione» (Cosgrove [1999]: 1): la mappa. Da questa «modalità specificatamente tecno-estetica dello schematismo» (Montani [2017]: 36), e in generale dalla tendenza dell'immaginazione ad esternalizzarsi e incarnarsi nelle tecniche esistenti, dipende, infatti, ogni nostro «impulso cartografico» cioè la capacità di trasformare strutture grafiche in spazi di attività intellettuale e concepire la conoscenza come un «movimento orientato» dei pensieri (Krämer [2016]: 19-20)<sup>9</sup>. Del resto, che la mappa rappresenti il sistema di riferimento privilegiato di una storia mediale dello spazio, è stata la migliore geografia culturale degli ultimi anni a insegnarcelo – penso soprattutto alle «genealogie cartografiche» di Denis Cosgrove (2001) e al lavoro di Franco Farinelli (2009) sulla «crisi della ragione cartografica». Come spiega Cosgrove, fino alle prime foto scattate dallo spazio l'unità del globo terrestre non era percepibile dalla sua superficie e per rappresentarla si richiedeva un «atto d'immaginazione» (Cosgrove [2001]), che traducesse, selezionando e schematizzando alcuni tratti salienti, l'invisibile in visibile. Uno sforzo immaginativo che doveva essere necessariamente incorporato in una tecnologia per conferire una veste grafica leggibile

a quello «spazio olistico» (Woodward [1989]: 3) che rimaneva per definizione inaccessibile ai sensi umani. Quindi, è la necessità antropologica di tale mediazione a fare della rappresentazione cartografica il sistema grafico-materiale di riferimento del nostro «spazio mitico» (Tuan [1977]: 86-87), il documento della nostra immaginazione spaziale: una «matrice mentale» (Edgerton [1987]) e «immaginativa» (Italiano [2018]) che incarna e fissa le schematizzazioni storicamente determinate della nostra coscienza spaziale.

8. Un modo vantaggioso per concludere le nostre considerazioni sul complesso rapporto che unisce la logica del *mapping* alla determinazione originaria dello spazio, potrebbe essere quello di riformulare una domanda che si era posta il geografo e fenomenologo Yi-Fu Tuan – anche lui come Garroni influenzato dal pensiero di Cassirer. Se lo «spazio geometrico è un costrutto concettuale relativamente tardo e sofisticato, qual è – domandava Yi-Fu Tuan – la natura dell'originale patto dell'uomo con il suo mondo, il suo originario spazio?» (Tuan [1974]: 215).

La presa di coscienza del mondo che ci circonda, spiegava il paleoantropologo francese Leroi-Gourhan (1965), si attua essenzialmente per due vie: una dinamica e l'altra statica. Simili ad altri animali, i primi *Homo sapiens* erano essenzialmente mobili. La loro percezione del mondo era quindi legata agli spostamenti e alla capacità di percorrere lo spazio prendendone coscienza. Sopravvivere e adattarsi in questo «spazio *itinerante*» (Leroi-Gourhan [1965]: 379) significava saper individuare con facili sequenze rappresentative una diversa varietà di percorsi, oggetti e luoghi, per profilarsi, attraverso la selezione schematica di dati sperimentali e unità discrete, una realtà complessa non direttamente sperimentabile. Ad accomunare la nascita di queste prime forme di mappatura cognitiva, considerate dagli etologi «l'aspetto più primitivo della coscienza» umana (Crook [1980]: 35) – è il modello diagrammatico e topologico con cui sono ordinate. Quest'ultimo si differenzia dai modelli topografici della geometria euclidea – tipici secondo Leroi-Gourhan dei pro-

<sup>9</sup> Come spiega Montani (2017), la nozione di «dipendenza tecnica» non va intesa come un fatto accessorio o una condizione semplicemente passiva del comportamento umano. Essa si riferisce piuttosto alla capacità di riplasmare e riconfigurare il tratto performativo dell'immaginazione istruendo e guidando la qualità delle sue prestazioni in una direzione non programmata biologicamente.

cessi di sedentarizzazione e urbanizzazione – per il fatto di considerare prevalentemente «relazioni che non sono in sé stesse spaziali (nel senso dell'estensione e della materialità)» (Günzel [2008]: 222), e di riferirsi ad uno spazio disomogeneo e qualitativamente differenziato che ha origine in esperienze visive del tutto specifiche.

L'ideazione di mappe cognitive è dunque un tratto originario della vita dell'uomo nello spazio, e non a caso ancora oggi il nostro modo di esplorarlo si basa sull'utilizzo di queste «tecniche di orientamento» (Lynch [1960]: 25), prime fra tutte quelle offerte gratuitamente da Google. Eppure, stabilire in che misura la prospettiva extraterrestre di Google abbia trasformato questa capacità originaria di addomesticare e controllare lo spazio è una questione difficile da dirimere. Si tratta infatti di una rivoluzione culturale relativamente recente e di cui solo da poco incominciamo a intuire ampiezza e conseguenze. Certo è che se vogliamo condurre la nostra analisi in profondità, oltre a indagare i pur interessanti fenomeni di controllo e automazione, dobbiamo anche ragionare sulle concrete opportunità terapeutiche e emancipative legate all'utilizzo di queste nuove piattaforme di navigazione. Tecnologie cartografiche che, in modo assolutamente inedito per gli atlanti tradizionali, consentono di sperimentare la nostra relazione con lo spazio fisico e della conoscenza in quanto soggetti essenzialmente mobili. In conclusione, quel che emerge è una nuova estetica della cartografia cognitiva che, come sapeva bene Jameson, nessuna cultura (pedagogica, artistica o politica) potrà evitare di considerare, se vorrà tornare ad afferrare «il nostro porci come soggetti individuali e collettivi» e riguadagnare quella «capacità di agire e lottare, che al presente è neutralizzata dalla nostra confusione spaziale e sociale» (Jameson [1984]: 70).

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## Review

**M. Beatrice Fazi, *Contingent Computation: Abstraction, Experience, and Indeterminacy in Computational Aesthetics*, Rowman & Littlefield International, 248 pp.**

Algorithms run our world. Their operational logic infiltrates all material, living, social and symbolic structures of contemporary world establishing automated modes of governmentality, decision-making and overall systematisation of the chaotic and unruly matter of life. The growing realisation of their ubiquitous power raises deep anxieties, hopes, speculations and fantasies in the psyche of people. Yet, what are algorithms? In 1936 Alan Turing defined the algorithm as a procedure of finite sequential steps designed to solve a problem. It is assumed that such a procedure follows preprogrammed rules in the form of iterative repetition until a designated goal is achieved. Ada Lovelace, considered the first person to have ever written a computer program, expressed this view of computation as early as 1843: «The Analytical Engine has no pretensions whatever to originate anything. It can do whatever we know how to order it to perform».

With this opening quote begins the book of M. Beatrice Fazi, only to radically and creatively challenge that deep-seated classical understanding. *Contingent Computation* embarks in an investigation of the ontological conditions of computational thought, or put otherwise, on the question of being and becoming of algorithmic logos. When we speak of algorithms we usually have in mind the executable instructions (i.e. software programmes) performed by digital computers. However, Fazi looks beyond the binary logic of digital computation to find its more fundamental nature as a method of abstraction and systematisation of reality through logico-quantitative means. Computation is before anything a discretisation of reality into abstracted entities, suitable to be arranged into quantities which can be measured, combined and manipulated in various mechanical operations. The goal of such operations is to lead to a decisive conclusion from initial premises. However, there seems to be a dimension specific only to contemporary digital computation



and that dimension is what makes it so urgent to investigate its potential agency. As Fazi notes, discretisations embedded in digital computers today go beyond the discretisations of mathematics and logic, «for they become a means through which they can be effectively functional (that is, a means through which they can take decisions efficiently and in a limited amount of time)» (pp. 48-49) And – it should be added – their *modus operandi* is becoming increasingly automated and quasi-autonomous.

For Fazi, following Deleuze, to ask about the conditions of being and becoming of computation means to explore its capacity to experience potentiality and generate novelty. Therefore, the discourse via which she pursues her quest is aesthetics. By engaging with aesthetics, she performs an innovative conceptual operation at several planes. First, she displaces the popular notion of aesthetics as a theory of taste, beauty and art drawing on a deeper etymological meaning of *aisthēsis* as the science of sensation. Next, she expands yet again the limits of this definition by advocating for computational aesthetics which would overcome the onto-epistemological fracture between logic and aesthetics as two opposing ways of systematising the multiplicity of the real.

For developing her argument, she turns first to Deleuzian philosophy, where aesthetics is the central point of access to potentiality. For Deleuze, the generative potential of being lies in the virtual plane of the sensible. Thought, in order to be productive, has to be immanent to the sensible, and as such, it has to be a non-representational thought. However, such understanding immediately excludes the digital from the production of the new. The reason is that algorithmic logic is a technique of discretisation and abstractive representation which blocks the ontogenetic deterritorialisations of becoming with its fixated significations. Here, logic is taken in its traditional Aristotelian sense as a «rationalist discipline that codifies the inferential principles of valid reasoning into preset norms for prediction and validation» (p. 32). Thus, at the heart of digital media studies Fazi identifies a deadlock between continuity (aesthet-

ics) and discreteness (logics), which she recognises as an expression of an even longer-standing philosophical divide between rationalism and empiricism. The discourses of digital aesthetics, centred around Deleuzian philosophy, have tried to overcome this deadlock by inducing computational formalisations with the affective dynamic of living bodies and material intensities. However, Fazi finds such an approach insufficient as far as it subsumes the quantitative nature of computation to the qualitative plane of the virtual. She decides, instead, to look directly at the heart of the algorithmic procedure to see if she could find there a dimension that while logically formal could be expressive beyond representation. While doing so, however, she distances her position also from the type of computational aesthetics characteristic for mathematical idealism, which puts logic at the heart of aesthetics and regards axiomatic truths as ontologically superior to contingent empirical events.

In her search for the potentiality of computation she investigates the limits of computability as they are outlined by Gödel's incompleteness theorems and Turing's theory of incomputability. According to her ingenious reading of their findings, it follows that formal axiomatic systems are not entirely closed and predetermined, but rather open-ended. Moreover, not only are they open to empirical input from external agencies, but even more so internally, towards their own infinity and indeterminacy. This open-endedness of axiomatics suggests that computational procedures could not be considered as fully preprogrammed, and thus fixated in advance, but are instead actualised in a process of becoming. As a result, «logic steps out of its representational and reductionist role and opens to its own inexhaustibility» (p. 136) and in this way aesthetics enters the heart of computational logos in the form of its own experience and self-actualisation.

In order to explicate how computation experiences its own actualisation Fazi draws on Whitehead's idea of *prehension*. Prehension is a non-cognitive grasping of potentiality, which unlike Deleuzian affect, could be both a sensation appre-

hending physical data and a thought apprehending abstract ideas. Thus, as a self-actualising event computation is initiated by sensible relations between actualities and accomplished by a conceptual determination. This dipolar nature of the experience of actualisation allows algorithmic procedures to «logically think, and not just to affectively feel, the unknown» (p. 135). The conclusion is that axiomatic systematisation of multiplicity is far from a simple reduction of complexity. On the contrary, it creates a complexity of its own, which leads Fazi to conceive of «another aesthetics of the intelligible» (p. 136) and, hence, of «another modality of thought altogether: one that is processual yet impersonal, non-existential and extra-empirical» (p. 135). Therefore, thus elaborated onto-aesthetic perspective of computation allows Fazi to look for the conceptual capacity proper to algorithms.

*Contingent Computation* challenges the core assumption about digital computation as a mechanical extension of human cognitive capacities. It urges us to reflect on the possibility of fundamentally different modes of *aisthesis*, conceptualisation, and reasoning. The necessity to assess computation in its own terms is pressing in light of the growing determination and automation of technical systems, fuelled by artificial intelligence, machine learning, and various technologies of surveillance. A philosophical study of computational logos will challenge the mainstream technocratic and transhumanist ideologies from inside their systemic discourses so that alternative futures and multiple “cosmotechnics” (to use the term coined by Yuk Hui) could be imagined. One of the advantages of this book is the way it transgresses disciplinary boundaries without losing grip of its rigorously developed conceptual apparatus and argumentative framework while at the same time demonstrating deeply engaged reading of its diverse sources. Fazi’s inventive approach rethinks the problematics of the analytical tradition via the intuitions of the Continental philosophy and this speculative operation radically rewrites established concepts and interpretations. *Contingent Computation* is a valuable contribution to an emerging par-

adigmatic shift in philosophy of technology, performed by other young philosophers such as Yuk Hui. Acknowledging the necessity of contingency in the process of computation both Fazi and Hui, albeit in different directions and scopes, challenge the anthropocentric understanding of rational thinking as well as the classical divide between subject and object and, hence, point towards alternative regimes of reasoning and ontological production.

Contents: Acknowledgements. Introduction: Novelty in Computation; Part 1: Aesthetics. 1. Continuity versus Discreteness; 2. Computation; 3. Processes; Part 2: Abstraction. 4 Computational Idealism; 5. Axiomatics; 6. Limits and Potential; Part 3: Experience. 7. Computational Empiricism; 8. Factuality; 9. Actuality; Conclusion: Computational Actual Occasions; Bibliography; Index

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[by Nevena Ivanova]

### **Averting Enlightenment’s History: Octopuses as Societal Challenge**

*As often when it comes to nonhuman animals in the humanities, interest in octopuses has focused mainly on their role as symbols, to give access to the human mind and its inner conflicts, or as metaphor, to think the human mind. Comparative psychologists bring octopuses and their complex behaviour into focus –*

but still produce more questions than explanations. Thus, octopuses are an epistemological enigma. Okto-Lab. Laboratory for Octopus Aesthetics, a collaborative project which currently receives funding from the DAAD and is supported by the University of Kassel (Germany) and the University of Tasmania (<https://www.okto-lab.org>), addresses this enigma. It picks up on Theodor W. Adorno's idea that societal conditions, such as enlightenment's tendency to dominate nature, are psychologically reproducing against signs of their failure. We argue, that the specific enigma the octopus presents might disrupt this reproduction cycle. By approaching octopuses aesthetically, Okto-Lab avoids translating them in definite terms and categories and thus intends to prevent the reduction of their otherness, that is, their cognitive taming and appropriation. Thereby, it aims at appreciating them for-themselves and more importantly, in their difference to humans.

In 1956, Jacques Schnier – at one-time architect, engineer, then finally artist – wrote extensively in *American Imago* that the range of sources, from Victor Hugo to Mycenaean pottery, reminds us that the monstrous cephalopod in literature and visual culture retains a dualism and ambiguity that is ripe for symbolic functions of the octopus. Schnier's eclectic interpretation:

Like the vampire, the sex of the octopus is also overdetermined, but in most instances it is obviously feminine. A young lady who had used an octopus motif in an art design, when questioned by a child as to the sex of the animal, answered "female", without much thought. On second consideration she was not sure why it should be so. A young man when talking about the octopus stated, "when it is moving about beautifully, I think of it as female, but when it is attacking, it is male".<sup>1</sup>

Schnier's wild and highly anecdotal psychoanalyzing of the octopus' symbolic function tended to focus on the morphology of pictorial resemblances that exchange octopus for dragon, spider, and the Medusa. Schnier summarises that though the octopus as symbol varies greatly in its inter-

pretative spread – from male castration anxiety through to female penis envy – it remains a highly "overdetermined"<sup>2</sup> symbol that underpins multiple readings of the unconscious.

Though not a psychoanalyst himself, Schnier published regularly in *American Imago* throughout the 1940s and 50s, mostly on the symbolic function of dragons, birds, and octopuses and their employment across culture. As a key disseminator of Freudian thought in the US through multiple journals of art history and psychoanalysis, his position cannot necessarily be immediately disregarded. Schnier's reading of the octopus as negative mother symbol was reinforced by multiple psychoanalysts over subsequent decades.<sup>3</sup>

If Schnier revelled in the octopus' symbolic monstrousness, for his younger French contemporary Jacques Lacan the octopus enabled a much more nuanced and engaged symbolic function. For Lacan, as recorded in his second seminar series held in 1954-55, the octopus' highly distributed neural system served as a powerful analogy for the capacities of the city to communicate its memory through a decentralised network of laneways and arrondissements:

Thanks to [Jacques] Riguet, on whose recommendation I read the work of an English neurologist, I became very interested in a certain octopus. It seems that its nervous system is sufficiently simple to have an isolated nerve which governs what is called the jet, or the propulsion of liquid, thanks to which the octopus has this delightful way of moving. You can also think of its memory apparatus being pretty much reduced to this message circulating between Paris and Paris, on tiny points of the nervous system.<sup>4</sup>

Subtitled 'The Circuit', this section of Lacan's

<sup>2</sup> Ibi, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> S. Robinson, *Oyster and Octopus: Choices, Constraints and the Couple*, in «Sexual and Marital Therapy» 11, 2 (1996), pp. 153-63.

<sup>4</sup> J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The ego in Freud's Theory and in the technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 89.

<sup>1</sup> J. Schnier, *Morphology of a Symbol: The Octopus*, in «American Imago» 13, 1 (1956), pp. 3-31, here 16.

seminar serves as the central thesis of his critique of Freud's pleasure principle, which Lacan disputed for its highly structured and anthropocentric approach to consciousness in favour of a more 'machinic' model that recognised the significance of interrelated yet independent parts. For Lacan, the industrial emergence of the 'machine' between the ages of Hegel and Freud provided a new structure for imagining the productions of the unconscious. In Lacan's cephalopodic thought, the octopus served as powerful model for rethinking the mind as an organic machine, capable of highly distributed neural movement.

It is here, where *Okto-Lab* as a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary research laboratory picks up and intervenes. However, rather than tracing the psychoanalytic thread, we turn to the psychological and epistemological challenge as which the octopus manifests through Schnier's consideration of the octopus as symbolic monstrosity on the one hand and Lacan's reflection on the creature's unconscious as a high-powered neural machine on the other. Octopuses, we argue, disturb and confound our ways of making rational sense out of the world and repressively appropriating it thereby. This statement requires explanation.

It is obvious (and largely unquestioned), that (some) humans have produced a crisis of planetary proportion, where, if not the planet itself, all life on, in and above it is threatened and affected by deep and grave changes in its ecology. While there might be some beneficiaries to these changes, some cephalopods potentially among them,<sup>5</sup> the sixth mass extinction that is currently proclaimed shows that overall the results will be dire<sup>6</sup>. It is equally unquestionable that people are differ-

<sup>5</sup> R. Rosa et al., *Global Patterns of Species Richness in Coastal Cephalopods*, in «Frontiers in Marine Science», 6, 469, 2019, doi: 10.3389/fmars.2019.00469.

<sup>6</sup> IPBES (2019): *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, ed. by E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, H. T. Ngo, IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany: <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment> (accessed 21 August 2020).

ently implicated in both the production of the crisis as well as affected by it.<sup>7</sup>

Speaking about student revolts, and with the memory of peoples' ready support for fascist, totalitarian regimes, Theodor W. Adorno argued in 1969 that «ever since the market economy was ruined and is now patched together from one provisional measure to the next, its laws alone no longer provide sufficient explanation» for the state of society. Without the additional consideration of psychology, «in which the objective constraints are continually internalized anew, it would be impossible to understand how people passively accept a state of unchanging destructive irrationality».<sup>8</sup> In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno analysed and described the development of this psychology together with Max Horkheimer in terms of the history of enlightenment. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, «enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters»<sup>9</sup>. The way in which humans have sought this mastery, at the least in the west, is by disenchanting and determining the world in order to subjugate it as an instrument for human survival. Thus, «a philosophical interpretation of world history would have to show how, despite all the detours and resistances, the systematic domination over nature has been asserted more and more decisively and has integrated all internal human characteristics».<sup>10</sup> In other words, global, capitalist human culture in late modernity is reproducing its

<sup>7</sup> For example A. Malm, A. Hornborg, *The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative*, in «The Anthropocene Review», 1, 1, 2014, pp. 62-9, doi: 10.1177/2053019613516291.

<sup>8</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*, translated by H. W. Pickford, in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, pp. 259-278, p. 271.

<sup>9</sup> M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, translated by E. Jephcott and edited by G. Schmid Noerr, Stanford University Press Stanford, CA, 2002, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibi, p. 185.

drive to dominate nature psychologically through being subjected to this very culture.

The cultural history of octopuses (or cephalopodic creatures) as monstrosities, we want to suggest<sup>11</sup>, represents a rupture in this cycle by pointing us to the limitation in our subjugation of the other. Even in *Moby-Dick*, Melville's masterful exploration of that other mystical creature, the whale, the chapter on the squid sits like an open, unutterable wound, an impenetrable barrier in his attempt to decipher the whale.<sup>12</sup> In the more recent fascination with octopuses, finally, they remain equally enigmatic, but we see them as creatures with deep, unfathomable souls with which we can interact and connect with.<sup>13</sup>

Two things connect here, where *Okto-Lab* turns to octopuses as potentially rupturing the reproduction of the psychology of enlightenment as a force of dominating nature through its disenchantment: the challenge to disenchant something that manifests in both the history of the cephalopodic monstrosity and the creatures' mental unfathomability and the increasing recognition of this challenge in their cognitive idiosyncrasy, or soulfulness. As space does not permit us to go into much detail here, we hope that a number of octopus features that challenge our epistemological appropriation of the creatures will exemplify and substantiate our guiding assumption.

Almost all octopus species have an outstanding ability to change the colour of their skin and imitate their surroundings in a way that makes them almost invisible. What coordinates the change is still unclear – whether the cells in the skin themselves respond to their surrounding or whether the change is an action centrally orchestrated by the

brain. Scientists find themselves in a similar situation when trying to examine to what extent the actions of octopus arms are centrally monitored. Part of the difficulty is that the nervous system of octopuses is not as centralized as in humans. While they do have a brain, three fifth of their neurons are not in the brain but in the body of the octopus. The question about coordination is further complicated by the fact that octopuses do not rely as much on vision as humans and are more chemo-tactile oriented.<sup>14</sup> Hence the uncertainty about the need for a central brain to coordinate between arm-movements, skin-display and vision.

Although such a description might invite a machine-like Cartesian explanation, the recognition of distinct personalities challenges such a solution to the octopus enigma. While studying juvenile common octopus in Bermuda in the early 1990s, the foremost expert on octopus psychology Jennifer Mather recognized certain consistent differences in behaviour over time among the individual octopuses she was observing. Around the same time biologist Roland Anderson noted that the zookeepers in the Seattle Aquarium gave names to the three octopuses living there, based on the behaviour they were displaying. Giving names to octopuses in aquariums was rather unusual around that time. Inspired by these circumstances, Anderson and Mather started to study individual differences in octopuses scientifically.<sup>15</sup> They exposed small red octopuses in an aquarium tank to three situations: alerting them by opening the tank lid and looking at them; threatening them by touching them with a brush; and feeding them with a crab. Every octopus was seven times exposed to each situation and all reactions were noted. In 44 tested octopuses 19 different behaviours were recorded, which resulted in three different personality dimensions for the octopuses: avoidance (avoiding-bold), reactivity (anxious and

<sup>11</sup> H. Tiffin, *What Lies Below: Cephalopods and Humans*, in *Captured: The Animal Within Culture*, ed. by M. Boyde, Palgrave MacMillan, London 2014, pp. 152-174.

<sup>12</sup> H. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, edited and with an introduction by C. C. Walcutt, Bantam Classic, New York 2003.

<sup>13</sup> For example S. Montgomery, *The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness*, Simon & Schuster, London 2016.

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Mather, *What is in an Octopus's Mind?*, in «Animal Sentience», 26, 1, 2019, pp. 2-10.

<sup>15</sup> J. A. Mather, R. C. Anderson, J. B. Wood, *Octopus: The Ocean's Intelligent Invertebrate*, Timber Press, Portland 2010, pp. 113-4.

calm) and activity (active-inactive). Mather and Anderson concluded that octopuses possess “personalities,” by which they mean that they found consistent patterns in the behaviours of the octopuses that distinguished each one from the other octopuses over time.<sup>16</sup> The study was one of the first that brought the question of personalities into the realm of invertebrates.<sup>17</sup>

Further psychological studies such as on play, exploration and habituation in octopuses<sup>18</sup> as well as studies on their capacity to distinguish between humans<sup>19</sup> eventually let Mather conclude that cephalopods have a form of primary consciousness; that their neuronal structures are linked to their behaviour, that they are depending on learning from their environment, and that they are choosing their actions based on an evaluation of their environment, further supports this conclusion.<sup>20</sup> Part of Mather’s argument on primary consciousness in cephalopods is the fact that octopuses sleep. With reference to Papineau and Selina<sup>21</sup> she highlights that «sleep is an indication that an

animal has primary consciousness, since there is a time when it is aware and a time when it is not».<sup>22</sup> Indeed, there are a number of other octopus researchers that equally support this perspective. David Scheel from Alaska Pacific University, for example, kept the internet busy with a video of an octopus called Heidi.<sup>23</sup> In the video, Heidi is obviously sleeping but is changing the colour of her skin at the same time. This behaviour led to the question whether Heidi was dreaming.<sup>24</sup> Scheel himself said it could also be «(...) nothing more than the twitching of muscles that control her color-changing organs», but Heidi was not the first octopus who raised the possibility of dreaming in cephalopods. Philosopher Peter Godfrey-Smith describes a cuttlefish, a close relative of octopuses, changing colour while apparently being asleep.<sup>25</sup> That some animals such as rats, birds and cuttlefish dream can be concluded from scientific studies.<sup>26</sup> How this idea of dreaming in nonhuman animals is related to a nonhuman unconscious remains an open question.<sup>27</sup> From his research into octopuses, however, Godfrey-Smith draws the conclusion that octopuses represent an alternative evolutionary path to that of humans in the development of higher consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. A. Mather, R. C. Anderson, *Personalities of Octopuses* (*Octopus rubescens*), in «Journal of Comparative Psychology», 107, 1, 1993, pp. 336-40.

<sup>17</sup> For subsequent studies with a focus on temperament, see for example D. L. Sinn et al., *Early temperamental traits in an octopus* (*Octopus bimaculoides*), in «Journal of Comparative Psychology», 115, 4, 2001, pp. 351-64. The authors further develop Mather and Anderson’s test and suggest ‘active engagement,’ ‘arousal-readiness,’ ‘aggression,’ and ‘avoidance-disinterest’ as four distinct personality dimensions.

<sup>18</sup> J. A. Mather, R. C. Anderson, *Exploration, Play, and Habituation in Octopuses* (*Octopus dofleini*), in «Journal of Comparative Psychology», 113, 3, 1999, pp. 333-8; M. J. Kuba et al., *When do octopuses play? Effects of repeated testing, object type, age, and food deprivation on object play in Octopus vulgaris*, in «Journal of Comparative Psychology», 120, 3, 2006, pp. 184-90.

<sup>19</sup> R. C. Anderson et al., *Octopuses* (*Enteroctopus dofleini*) recognize individual humans, in «Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science», 13, 3, 2010, pp. 261-72.

<sup>20</sup> J. A. Mather, *Cephalopod consciousness: Behavioural evidence*, in «Consciousness and Cognition» 17, 1, 2008, pp. 37-48.

<sup>21</sup> D. Papineau, H. Selina, *Introducing Consciousness*, Totem, New York 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer A. Mather, *Cephalopod consciousness*, p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> See for example E. Preston, *Was Heidi the Octopus Really Dreaming?*, in «New York Times», 8 Oct 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/08/science/heidi-octopus-sleeping.html> (accessed 21 August 2020).

<sup>24</sup> See the documentary: A. Fitch, *The Octopus in My House*, in «Natural World», August 22, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0007snt> (accessed 21 August 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds*, pp. 133-135.

<sup>26</sup> See for cuttlefish: T. L. Iglesias et al., *Cyclic nature of the REM sleep-like state in the cuttlefish Sepia officinalis*, in «Journal of Experimental Biology», 222, 1 (2019), jeb174862, doi: 10.1242/jeb.174862.

<sup>27</sup> M. Ellmann, *Psychoanalytic Animal*, in *A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture*, ed. by L. Marcus, A. Mukherji, pp. 328-50, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex 2014, p. 332.

<sup>28</sup> P. Godfrey-Smith (2017), *Other Minds: The Octopus and the Evolution of Intelligent Life*, William Collins, London.

Here precisely then, Lacan's consideration of the octopus mind resurfaces and connects with Adorno's diagnosis of the reproduction of a status quo in our individual psychology by way of being somatically submitted to a culture and society that embodies this very status quo in its material structure. Or rather, Adorno and Lacan connect in the challenge of reshaping this psychology. The status quo that is being reproduced, we have suggested via the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is that of a need to dominate nature, to control nature through its disenchantment, rather than to acknowledge its own idiosyncrasies and desires; hence our ecological difficulty in acknowledging the very independence and spontaneity of nonhuman actors and processes. The octopus appears to us historically, psychologically and biologically as archetype of such independence. Might it then be possible to disrupt the reproduction of our psychology that is geared towards making everything definitive, by immersing ourselves into the question of the octopus's mind, as Lacan did, and even more so by trying to immerse ourselves into the other mind and consciousness of the octopus?

The octopus here becomes a blank space not to be colonized by us – something that, if we trust its depictions in culture and the recent science on its mental capacities, appears impossible to achieve anyways – but to whom we have to approximate ourselves. This requires, however, to find new ways for conceptualizing octopuses, their minds and consciousness, as well as to approximate our own processes of thinking to that of the octopus. *Okto-Lab* is a laboratory for testing these objectives. The traditional place for experiments of this kind are the arts. Thus, *Okto-Lab* seeks to establish interdisciplinary research programs that rely on the arts to immerse us into the world of octopuses.<sup>29</sup> Thereby, we suggest and explore, octopuses might give rise to a different path in

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<sup>29</sup> For example, in our first project we deployed curation as a method of interdisciplinary research to develop together with artists and scientists two exhibitions that aimed to initiate such an exploration of octopuses (see <https://okto-lab.org> for more information). The results will be published in a book.

enlightenment, one wherein we can recognize ourselves in the other without the need to make it fully determinate.

[by André Krebber, Maike Riedinger, Toby Juliff<sup>30</sup>]

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<sup>30</sup> All authors contributed equally to this paper.







